

EVERYDAY POLITICS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE:
PUBLIC OPINION, DISSENT, AND RESISTANCE IN EARLY REPUBLICAN TURKEY
1925-1939

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2010

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Submitted to the
Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
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2010

ABSTRACT

This study examines the everyday and mostly informal forms of peasant and working class politics during the first two decades of the Turkish Republic by scrutinizing the daily protests and resistance of these groups to the social and economic policies of the single-party state and adverse economic conditions. Furthermore, this study explores the influence of the everyday politics of these groups on the political decision-making process of the state.

The Turkish single-party period was by all means an extraordinary era marked by profound changes. Historical scholarship has conventionally focused on high and formal politics, and state policies. Due to the barriers before the formal and organizational participation of peasants and workers in legal politics, both these groups have been regarded to be fully excluded from the policy-making. Accordingly, the single-party state has generally been assumed to be based on solely coercive and rigid polity isolated from society. Scholars have barely touched upon the popular discontent and the daily ways in which ordinary people reacted against the state policies, power holders, and adverse economic conditions, and consequently influenced the state decisions.

This dissertation takes on this challenging task and depicts an alternative picture in which the ordinary people participated in politics in everyday life, by uncovering the ordinary people's dissenting opinions, demanding voices, everyday struggles, diverse patterns of protest and resistance strategies. On the basis of new archival sources giving information about daily contacts between the state and society and of a re-reading "against-the-grain" of conventional sources and theoretically drawing on a broader conception of politics as an everyday struggle over the allocation of scarce economic sources, emphasizing non-institutional and mostly informal patterns of the peasant and working class politics, this study delves into the popular dynamics of the political life during the early Republican era.

Addressing wider debates about the relations between the state, society and class by focusing on the everyday and mostly informal contestation and negotiation process between the lower classes and state that compelled the state to modify its decisions, this dissertation suggests to see the relations between the state and ordinary people not as dichotomous, but as an interactive process. In this respect, the findings of this work propose a redefinition of the single-party state as "flexible authoritarian," exposed and responsive to social inputs.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma Türkiye’de tek-parti döneminde köylülüğün ve işçi sınıfının devletin ekonomi politikaları ve olumsuz ekonomik koşullar karşısındaki gündelik ve çoğunlukla enformel protesto, direniş ve hak arama mücadelelerini incelemektedir; buradan hareketle, kitlelerin gündelik yaşamdaki söz konusu eylemlerinin siyasal karar alma sürecini nasıl etkilediğine ışık tutmaktadır.

Tek parti yılları, kuşkusuz dramatik toplumsal değişimlerin yaşandığı olağanüstü bir dönem oldu. Bugüne kadar dönemi inceleyen tarihsel literatür büyük ölçüde yüksek siyasete odaklandı. Kitlelerin formel olarak ve yasal çerçevede siyasete katılmalarının önündeki engeller dolayısıyla, köylülük ve işçi sınıfı genellikle siyasi karar alma sürecinden tamamıyla dışlanmış, siyaseten etkisiz ve pasif kitleler olarak resmedildi. Kitlelerin devlet politikalarını dolaylı olarak etkileyen gündelik protesto ve direniş mekanizmaları yeterince incelenmedi. Buna paralel olarak, tek-parti devletin toplumsal taleplerden yalıtılmış, sadece baskı ve zora dayalı bir yönetim şekline sahip olduğu kabul edilegelirdi.

Bu tez, sıradan insanların kırsal ve kentsel alanlarda devlet politikaları ve ekonomik koşullar karşısında çeşitli formlardaki protesto, direniş ve mücadele stratejilerinin analizinden hareketle, kitlelerin siyasal karar alma sürecine alttan alta katıldığı alternatif bir tek-parti tarihi yorumu getirmektedir. Alt sınıfların seslerini, deneyimlerini, devletle ve üst sınıflarla ilişkilerini yansıtan yeni arşiv kaynaklarından yararlanılarak ve teorik olarak siyaseti ve toplumsal direnişi daha geniş bir biçimde, gündelik yaşamdaki sınıfsal ve ekonomik mücadeleler çerçevesinde yorumlayan sosyal teorilerden hareketle, bu tez köylü ve işçi sınıfı siyasetinin kurumsal olmayan, gündelik ve çoğunlukla enformel biçimlerini ve devletin siyasi karar alma sürecine dolaylı yollardan müdahil olma sürecini ortaya çıkarmaktadır.

Erken cumhuriyet dönemine dair devlet, toplum ve sınıf ilişkileri konusundaki tartışmalara referansla, alt sınıflar, devlet ve üst sınıflar arasında gündelik yaşamda tezahür eden ve çoğunlukla devleti ve üst sınıfları kararlarını yumuşatmaya zorlayan gayri-resmi ve dolaylı politik mücadele ve müzakere biçimlerine odaklanarak, bu tez tek-parti devleti ve toplum arasındaki ilişkinin dikotomik olmaktan ziyade, karşılıklı bir etkileşime dayandığını savunmaktadır. Bu bakımdan, çalışmanın bulguları, tek-parti devletin toplumsal talepler ve baskılar doğrultusunda politikalarında değişiklikler yapabilen, “esnek bir otoriter” devlet olarak yeniden tanımlanmasını önermektedir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the number of debts that I have incurred while researching and writing this dissertation. A number of individuals helped and supported me at various steps of this project. First, I thank my advisor, Asım Karaömerlioğlu, for his intellectual inspiration, stimulation, encouragement, and great patience. Many a time, he helped me to articulate complex thoughts and to regain my confidence. Furthermore, he supported me emotionally when I lost my cheer and hope. I would like to express my gratitude to Zafer Toprak for sharing his immense knowledge and crucial suggestions with me during my research. Şevket Pamuk has my sincere thanks for his trenchant criticisms and generous sharing of his knowledge on economic history with me. I would like to express my sincerest thanks to these three invaluable professors for giving me the opportunity to develop my research and teaching abilities as a teaching assistant at the Atatürk Institute. They both supported me materially and emotionally, nominating my book evolved from my MA thesis to two prestigious social science awards from the Ottoman Bank Archive and Research Center and the Turkish Social Science Association, which I was granted in 2007. By the way, I would like to thank to these two institutions for their encouraging awards.

Many other institutions helped to keep me and this enterprise afloat since 2004. First, I owe the innovative intellectual climate and indispensable financial support of the Atatürk Institute without which I could not have carried out this project. I express my thanks to the American Research Institute in Turkey for the ARIT Fellowship, and the Boğaziçi University Foundation for the Ayşe-Zeynep Birkan Fellowship during my research period. I thank the History Department of Ohio State University, which offered me the opportunity to carry out doctoral research in the United States. I am grateful to Carter Findley and Jane

Hathaway not only for sharing their views on my project, but also their emotional support during my first days in Columbus. Meanwhile, I express my sincere thanks to Paul Dumont for his invaluable recommendations about my projects in our warm discussions.

My thesis examiners, Çağlar Keyder and Cemil Koçak, have my deepest thanks for their extensive criticisms and stimulating suggestions on how to improve my work. Kathryn Kranzler exerted great effort to edit this long dissertation. It is pleasure for me to express my thanks to her. My thanks are due to the administrative staff of the Atatürk Institute, Nuray Özışık, Necla Turunç, and Leyla Kılınç, who made working at the Atatürk Institute easier with their friendliness and practical approach.

I feel deep gratitude to Levent Ürer, whose love for history deeply affected and led me to pursue an academic career as a historian from my undergraduate years. With his unmatched intellectual stimulus and kindness, he contributed not only to the development of my academic interests, but also stimulated my intellectual curiosity. Namık Sinan Turan, Burak Gülboy, Kaan Ökten, Murat Koraltürk and Yavuz Selim Karakışla have my deepest thanks for kindly sharing their knowledge and academic experiences with me. Ferdan Ergut guided me to gain access to the police archives. I am grateful to him not only for such help but also for his invaluable comments about my book, from which I benefitted during my doctoral research. Thanks are due to two prestigious journals, *Tarih ve Toplum* and *Toplum ve Bilim*, which provided me the opportunity to receive feedback about my arguments, and to their editorial boards, especially two intellectual, warm, and encouraging individuals, Tanıl Bora and Kerem Ünüvar.

Research for this dissertation was conducted in a number of archives and libraries with the tremendous assistance of many archivist and librarians. Kamber Yılmaz and Seyfi Berk at the Aptullah Kuran Library facilitated my research in many ways. I am grateful for their extra efforts, as well as their tolerance toward my extra requests. I want to thank the

staff at the Republican Archives, especially Mustafa Tatlısu, Atilla Aydın, and Bige Tavkul. For allowing me access to the police documents, I thank the Directory-General of Security Archive and the Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive. I would like to thanks to Ali Birinci, who helped me to work in the Archives of the Turkish Historical Society. I benefitted from the invaluable newspaper collections of the Istanbul University Library, Taksim Atatürk Library, Beyazıt Library, and National Library. I owe thanks to the staffs of these libraries.

On personal front, many people supported me emotionally and made my life easier and cheerful. I will never forget the assistance of Sevey and İsmail Atılgan while I and Elif were conducting research in Ankara. I want to express my gratitude to my doctors, Nazan Kanal, Ali Can Hatemi, and especially Tayyar Sarıoğlu for their contribution to my health. Mustafa Eroğlu, not only a bosom friend of mine but also a foul-weather friend; Yılmaz Metinsoy, Murat Çekem, Barış Özden, Alp Tater, Erhan Nacar, and Gökhan Ermiş have my sincerest thanks for their optimism, good cheer, and assistance in my difficult times. I will remember the friendly assistances of Günhan Börekçi, Emre Sencer, Vefa Erginbaş and Tugan Eritenel in Ohio.

Last, but most important, I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart my father, Halil İbrahim Metinsoy, and mother, Behiye Metinsoy. This dissertation would never have been written without their unconditional support and love. Another good person in my life, my mother-in-law, Banu Mahir, an art historian, deserves my deepest thanks for her encouragement and sharing her academic experience. And, I feel my deepest gratitude to my wife, and joy of my life, Elif Mahir Metinsoy. She did much more than put up with me; she juggled family life and her own academic studies to give time to me. I would not have completed this dissertation without her love, emotional sustenance, unfailing support, and faith in me. It goes without saying that the flaws and shortcomings that still remain are entirely my own fault.

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INTRODUCTION

The Turkish single-party state, led by the ruling Republican People's Party, embarked on an extensive program of economic, political and cultural reforms. State centralization, bureaucratic and cultural modernization, and the capitalist accumulation process gained momentum during the interwar period under the auspices of the single-party rule. Along with this process, the Republican government tightened its control over the population through a series of punitive and coercive legal arrangements and ideological tools. These are the best-known aspects of the Republican history. However, how the ordinary people, more specifically the rural and urban poor and low-income segments of the population experienced, perceived, and responded to this process, particularly to the social and economic policies, remained as a Pandora's box. This dissertation opens this Pandora's box partially, by examining the negative response and resistance to the social and economic policies and conditions during the interwar period.

This is a history from below of the Turkish socioeconomic modernization in the interwar period. This study examines the everyday politics of the ordinary people in a period when the formal and legal political domain was closed to them, with a particular focus on peasant politics and working class politics. In other words, it scrutinizes daily experiences, dissenting, critical, and nonconformist views, economic demands, and a variety of struggle and resistance forms of peasants' and low-income wage earners in the face of the social and economic change, exploitation and oppression during the early Republican period. Rather than limiting its focus to "an action-reaction analysis," this work analyzes several creative forms and patterns of the ordinary people's individual and collective struggles for more a livable world

for themselves, which was derived from their subjective, self-seeking and autonomous worldviews. Furthermore, by underlining the interplay between the everyday politics and the government, this study aims to shed light on the underpinnings of the high politics of the era.

On the basis of new evidence and data obtained from police and gendarme records, politician reports, citizen petitions and letters, wish lists of local RPP congresses, contemporary newspapers and memoirs, this dissertation draws an opposite conclusion to the conventional accounts, which left the peasantry and the working class out of history and saw them as passive and ignorant onlookers, hapless victims, cynical opponents, or brainwashed masses due to the lack of their own political organizations and movements in high politics.

Instead, substantiated with detailed evidence through the history from below approach, this study argues that the peasants and the working class did not remain passive in the face of state policies, economic conditions, and their exploiters and oppressors. On the contrary, by using all of the possible ways accessible and familiar to them and cunningly devising informal strategies, they expressed their criticisms, woes, and discontent, struggled to weather the crises and difficulties, and strived to prompt the government to redress their grievance. That is, they attempted to influence the system that had disfranchised them.

Moreover, this dissertation argues that such everyday politics of the ordinary people, notwithstanding the lack of any radical change in the short-term, forced the ruling circles to grant some concessions to the people by creating a covert negotiation process mostly occurred in everyday life. In sum, although the people abstained from high politics, they intentionally or unintentionally played a considerable role in the shaping of state decisions through their informal and indirect

mechanisms of negotiations, which generated large and small concessions from the government. In that respect, this dissertation, underscoring the everyday interplay between the state and society, proposes to see the single-party state as a flexible and responsive state to the social needs and demands rather than a rigid and unresponsive one isolated from the society.

The Existing Literature in Comparison

Since the Turkish single-party regime occupied a place on the same continuum of authoritarian regimes of the interwar era, the early Republican historiography has shared some similarities with the conventional accounts of authoritarian regimes in world history. Up to the coming of new social history studies in the last thirty years, many western scholars had been united in their appraisal of state-society relations under the authoritarian or colonial regimes in the first half of the twentieth century. For example, Colonial India, Nazi Germany, Stalinist Soviet Union, and the Iran of Shah Riza Pahlavi had been examined from the perspective of high-politics and elite thoughts and schemes for a long time. Due to the lack of influential challenge in the ideological and high-political scene to the power-holders, the scholars overemphasized the coercive and transformative features of these regimes. Some preferred to define them with the concept of “totalitarianism” or “authoritarianism.” Society was regarded as being atomized under the absolute control or suppression of the state.¹ The historiography on early Republican Turkey also took part in this

¹ For conventional approach of the “totalitarianism school” to Soviet Union, see Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (New York: Scribner, 1974); Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: Norton, 1990); Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

literature by highlighting the Republican elite, state and high politics, and ignoring the everyday developments, the ordinary people's views, activities, and historical role.

However, within the last thirty years, revisionist social history works, based on new sources and methods, have revealed the fact that the people did not remain voiceless and unresponsive in the face of stringent governments. Revisionist works on the Indian history called Subaltern Studies, for instance, inspired by the history from below approach of the British Marxist historians, linguistic turn, cultural history and anthropological studies, challenged the elitist narratives, be they colonialist, Marxist, and nationalist-modernist, which underestimated the subjectivity of the Indian peasants. Focusing on non-elite people and especially peasant, they argued that the Indian peasants had had their own agenda, subjective reasons, their own ways in their acts, and played a crucial role in the making of Indian history.²

Alltagsgeschichte historians of the Third Reich criticized the concept of totalitarianism, underlining the fragmentations inherent to the Nazi state, the working class dissent, apathy and detachment to the Nazi ideology.³ In the field of Soviet history, many revisionists social historians disparaged the totalitarianism model from

² For information regarding the main features of Subaltern Studies group see Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999). In addition see the general overview of David Ludden (ed.), *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalization of South Asia* (London: Anthem, 2002).

³ For instance, Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat focused on dissent, resistance and working class politics during the Nazi regime. For contribution of Mommsen and Broszat, especially for wider conception of resistance (*Widerstandspraxis*) proposed by Mommsen, see Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: Arnold Press, 2000), pp. 193-205. For other contributions to reinterpretation of the Nazi Germany, see Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria, 1933-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Alf Lüdtke, "What Happened to the 'Fiery Red Glow'? Workers' Experiences and German Fascism," in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. by Alf Lüdtke (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 199. See also Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer (ed.), *Resistance Against the Third Reich, 1933-1990* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1994). See another example which examines both conformity and challenging acts ranging from nonconformism to opposition to Nazi rule see Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life*, trans. by Richard Deveson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

the 1970s on. Although their individual interpretations differ, the revisionists, taking a closer look at the everyday relations between the state and society, argued that the Soviet state under Stalin was institutionally weak, that the level of terror was much exaggerated, and that society was active and resistant in the face of state policies.⁴ Likewise, new accounts of Iran under Shah Riza Pahlavi discovered the people's active resistance and public opinion during the state-building process. Revisionist scholars of the early twentieth century Iran proved that contrary to the conventional assumptions of the people's passivity, the peasants, nomad communities, and urban laborers generated different kinds of resistance and active responses to the regime's initiatives, aiming at defending themselves.⁵

Conventional Early Republican Historiography: "Transformer-Coercive State vs. Inert and Weak Society"

Despite the great progress toward a social history of the ordinary people who experienced authoritarian regimes during the interwar period, unfortunately little has been done on the Turkish history front. Indeed, despite the great upheavals in the political, social, economic and cultural realms and the most comprehensive

⁴ For a recent literature survey and analysis on revisionist Soviet historiography see Murat Metinsoy, "'Blat Stalin'den Büyüktür': Erken Dönem Sovyet Sosyal Tarihçiliğinde Revizyonizm," *Tarih ve Toplum*, No. 7 (Spring-Summer 2008), pp. 181-244. In addition see, Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory*, Vol. 46, No.3 (Dec. 2007), pp.77-91. For some examples of revisionist works, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also Jeffrey Rosman, *Worker Resistance under Stalin: Class and Revolution on the Shop Floor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵ For instance see Stephanie Cronin, "Resisting the New State: the Rural Poor, Land and Modernity in Iran, 1921-1941," in *Subalterns and Social Protest: History From Below in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. by Stephanie Cronin (New York: Routledge, 2008); Touraj Atabaki (ed.) *The State and the Subaltern: Modernization, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, in association with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 2007). By the way, as an innovative account of the poor people's everyday politics during the Late Pahlavi Period of the 1970s and the early years of Islamic Iran, see Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

modernization, secularization and industrialization attempt in the history of the Middle East, “society front” of this process has been remained untouched so far. Neither the ordinary people’s opinions and everyday responses nor the interplay between the state and society has been explored, with a few exceptions.⁶ Two different versions of this elite-state centrist historiography hold sway over the early Republican historiography.

One version of this conventional historical literature is the history writing of the nationalist-developmental modernization account. This literature emphasizes the efforts of idealist and patriotic modernist leadership to modernize the state, economy, and society. Its main distinctive feature is the abiding conviction that the Republican elites were progressive and good overall and the great part of the people were backward-looking masses that had to be awakened by the Republican leadership. Therefore, this account has seen any backlash against the state efforts as desperate backward-looking actions, doomed to fail in the face of zealous revolutionary progress.⁷

The second version, critical one, questions the Republican elite, single-party state, and nationalist ideology. However, overemphasizing the coercive, transformative, and brutal features of the state, these critical accounts also take place at the other end of same continuum of the state-and-elite centrist historiography.

⁶ See Şevket Pamuk, “War, State Economic Policies, and Resistance by Agricultural Producers in Turkey, 1939-1945,” *Peasants & Politics in The Modern Middle East*, Farhad Kazemi & John Waterbury (ed.), (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991); Murat Metinsoy, *İkinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Türkiye: Savaş ve Gündelik Yaşam* (İstanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2007); Yiğit Akın, “Reconsidering State, Party, and Society in Early Republican Turkey: Politics of Petitioning,” *IJMES* 39, 3 (2007), pp.435-457; Elif Akçetin, “Anatolian Peasants in Great Depression, 1929-1933,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 23 (Fall 2000), pp.79-102.

⁷ See Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1961); Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964); Niyazi Berkes, *Batıcılık, Ulusçuluk ve Toplumsal Devrimler* (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Kitap, 1997); Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye’nin Siyasi Hayatında Batılılaşma Hareketleri*, Vols. 1 and 2 (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet, 1999); Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Devrim Hareketleri İçinde Atatürk ve Atatürkçülük* (İstanbul: Baha Matbaası, 1964).

These critical accounts generally adopt the Marxian Asiatic Mode of Production theory and Weberian focus on the state bureaucracy, and are deeply inspired by the classical Ottoman studies, which characterized the Ottoman-Turkish state as strong, centralist, patrimonial state debarring the emergence of classes, civil society, autonomous individuals, and the plurality of views.⁸

Despite their clashing interpretations of the early Republican period, the nationalist-developmental accounts and the critical accounts in fact overlap each other with their common emphasis on both the state policies and elite ideology on one hand, and their common indifference to the society on the other. Both of these accounts, overemphasizing the state and elite, leave out the politics of the people. Preoccupation with the elite discourse, state institutions, governmental policies and the laws give the illusion that the state was able to penetrate into the all spheres of people's lives and easily transformed the society dramatically.

The politics are completely equated with the high politics, which generally was stable and without any open and organized political contests or oppositions.

⁸ For the most prominent representatives of this historiography, see Şerif Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset, Makaleler I*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), p. 24, 59; Metin Heper, *The State Tradition in Turkey*, (Walkington: The Eothen Press, 1985), p. 98; Metin Heper, "The Ottoman Legacy and Turkish Politics," *Journal of International Affairs*, LIV, No. 1 (Fall 2000), p. 63; Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A study in Capitalist Development* (London; New York: Verso, 1987); Çağlar Keyder, *Memâlik-i Osmaniye'den Avrupa Birliği'ne* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003), p. 110; Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Tek Parti Yönetiminin Kurulması, 1923-1931* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2005); Ayşe Kadioğlu, *Cumhuriyet İdaresi, Demokrasi Muhakemesi* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1999), p. 15, 34; Ahmet İnsel, *Düzen ve Kalkınma Kısacasında Türkiye* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 1996), p. 82; Levent Köker, *Modernleşme, Kemalizm ve Demokrasi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1990), p. 68.

On the contrary to these assumptions, some scholars have shown the existence of questioning individuals and of plurality of interests and accordingly the diversity of the views in the Ottoman society. See Cemal Kafadar "Self and Others: The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth-century Istanbul and First-person Narratives in Ottoman Literature," *Studia Islamica*, LXIX, 1986; Dana Sajdi, *Peripheral Visions: The Worlds and Worldviews of Commoner Chroniclers in the 18th Century Ottoman Levant* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University Department of History, 2004); Dina Rizk Khoury, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Devlet ve Taşra Toplumu: Musul, 1540-1834* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999); Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). It is possible to mention several social history studies coming out in recent years that explore the people's active role and autonomous views in the Ottoman Empire.

Thus, deprived of formal political organizations and rights under an authoritarian state, the ordinary people are portrayed as silent masses, but implacable opponents of the state and upper classes or brain washed into conformity. The conventional accounts pay no attention to the different forms of public, public spheres, politics, indirect interactions, and constant negotiation process between state and society within everyday life, which bear little resemblance to the usual formal ways and forms of the modernist history. Therefore, the social response to the state is overlooked or reduced to a limited number of episodes of collective protests or rebellions or a few intellectual and political dissidents' lives and thoughts, which was seen as the desperate acts of the victims that were flashes in the pan.

Admittedly, the conventional accounts contribute to the understanding of the elite motives, high politics, and partially oppression and exploitation. Indeed, the Republican government embarked on successive radical reforms in the political, cultural, and economic domains. However, accompanying to these was surely, as this dissertation uncovers, a rampant social discontent, and peoples' struggles to survive and to improve their living conditions despite the efforts of their exploiters and oppressors. This side of the coin, which this work inquires into and teases out, has remained out of focus until now.

The Missing Peasantry

“There is a village, far away, that village is our village, even if we do not go there, even if we do not see it, that village is our village.” (*Orada bir köy var uzakta, o köy bizim köyümüzdür, gitmesek de görmesek de, o köy bizim köyümüzdür*). These verses of Ahmet Kutsi Tecer were the Republican elite's, especially the peasantist

intellectuals' motto during the 1930s. This motto is, I think, applicable to the Turkish scholarship. That is, except for a few valuable contemporary monographic studies conducted between the 1930s and 1960s and some economic history accounts,⁹ there is no detailed research on peasants of the early Republican historiography that casts its searchlight further downward into the lower depths of Turkish peasants throughout Anatolia in this extraordinary period. Particularly, the peasant politics is underrepresented in the bulk of historiography. Although the peasantry in this period composed almost eighty-five percent of the population, the interplay between the peasants and the government, the impact of the Great Depression and the state policies, the intra communal power and economic relations during the interwar period have never been deeply explored hitherto.

Scholarly interest in the Anatolian peasantry during the early Republican Turkey has remained focused exclusively on the state economic policies, agricultural structure, and socio-economic trends. Almost no research has been carried out on the impact of such policies, economic structure and trends on the peasantry. Without any deep research, Turkish historiography has put forward "the rural passivity thesis" in the face of both economic crisis and state economic policies.

First, due to the difficulties rising before the state to monitor the rural areas and the high illiteracy rate of the peasants, peasant's voice is less audible than that of

⁹ Niyazi Berkes, *Bazı Ankara Köyleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma* (Ankara: Uzluk Basımevi, 1942); Mediha Berkes' village monographs published in *Yurt ve Dünya*; Paul Stirling, *Culture and Economy: Changes in Turkish Villages* (Huntingdon: Eothen, 1993); İbrahim Yasa, *Hasanoğlan Köyü'nün İktisadî-İktisadî Yapısı* (Ankara: Doğu Ltd. O. Matbaası for Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü, 1955); İbrahim Yasa, *Sindel Köyü'nün Toplumsal ve Ekonomik Yapısı* (Ankara: Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü, 1960); Joseph Szyliowicz, *Political Change in Rural Turkey: Erdemli* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966); Mehmet Ali Şevki, *Kurna Köyü (Kocaeli Yarımadası) Monografisinden Üç Makale*, [Articles published in *Siyasi İlimler Mecmuası*, No. 77-79 and 90], 1939; Boratav, Pertev Naili. "Mudurnu'nun Abant-Dibi Köyleri Üzerine 1940 Yılında Yapılmış Bir İncelemeden Notlar." *Sosyoloji Konferansları, On Yedinci Kitap*. İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Yayını, No. 446 (1979). In addition to these, folkloric studies by prominent folklorists such as Pertev Naili Boratav and İlhan Başgöz, and several monographs published in Folklore Society's (*Halk Bilgisi Derneği*) periodical *Halk Bilgisi Haberleri* (the People's Bulletin of Folklore) also contributed to the understanding of popular culture and details of everyday life in Anatolian villages.

the middle classes in the official documents. Second, the strict fixation on high politics and macroeconomics had led the scholars to miss the covert ways of the expression of opinion and informal and everyday forms of resistance devised by the peasants against the risk of suppression. Consequently, because of the absence of widespread organized political peasant movements, like the Bulgarian Agrarian Movement,¹⁰ massive peasant rebellions like in northern China,¹¹ and the post-World War One peasant rebellions in Russia, eastern Europe and the Balkans,¹² even critical accounts, adopting a fabricated language of modernization theory, portray the Anatolian peasants during the interwar period as submissive, unresponsive, and hapless victims miserably succumbing to the exploitation and oppression.¹³

The existing interpretations of the abolition of tithe, the state's populist discourse, and the land tenure system based on small-land holding also have underpinned the peasant passivity thesis. Some scholars overrate the abolition of tithe, the populism, and the agricultural support to the peasants by assuming a political alliance between the middle-scale farmers and the Republican elite, who were believed to have eased the peasants' conditions.¹⁴

In addition, some scholars take for granted the small land holding as a static and unchanging dominant land tenure system as if it was free from the threat of large landowners, usurers, and capitalism. This causes the underestimation of both the land

¹⁰ John D. Bell, *Peasants in Power: Alexander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899-1923* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).

¹¹ R. Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History* (New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006); Elizabeth J. Perry, *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protests and State Power in China* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), especially see pp. 3-134.

¹² Eric R. Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

¹³ Çağlar Keyder, for instance, despite his critical and analytical historical-sociology approach and focus on the relations between the state and classes, labeled the peasantry as passive and ineffective mass subservient to the economic trends and policies. Çağlar Keyder, "Türk Demokrasisinin Ekonomi Politikası," in *Geçiş Sürecinde Türkiye*, ed. by Irvin Cemil Shick and Ertuğrul Ahmet Tonak (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1998), p. 50.

¹⁴ Keyder-Birtek, for instance, have implied the existence of an alliance between the state and middle-scale farmers in the 1930s. Faruk Birtek and Çağlar Keyder, "Agriculture and the State: An Inquiry into Agricultural Differentiation and Political Alliances: The Case of Turkey," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 2, 4 (1975), pp.447-463.

hunger of the peasants, and the struggle for land by the landless peasants and smallholders who tried to continue their subsistence farming. Accordingly, leaving aside the leftist-Kemalist literature making the *ağas* scapegoat to exonerate the Republican leadership and the system, the existing accounts underestimate the intra-village community conflict and differentiation within the village community that stemmed from the struggles of the poor peasants and smallholders against the large landowners and the state to protect their existing subsistence farming or to increase their limited economic resources.¹⁵

Thus, scholars pay heed neither to the public opinion in rural areas nor to the peasants' everyday politics, anonymous and informal struggles. Perhaps one partial exception to this general treatment of the Turkish peasantry was Elif Akçetin's article on the peasant's reactions to the adverse effects of the Great Depression in 1930.¹⁶ Although hers is the first attempt to grasp the peasant politics from below, she confines the peasant politics to a limited number of economic behaviors and argues incorrectly for the lack of further, collective, and violent peasant protests, resistance and rebellions in the 1930s.

This fallacy is not peculiar to Akçetin's account, but is one of the false assumptions of the early Republican historiography. It emanates from the mainstream appraisal of the peasant uprisings and banditry as an outcome of the Kurdish nationalist resistance, or tribal or religious backlash in the face of the

¹⁵ Again, Keyder in his other studies has argued that the income differentiation within village community is not important for understanding the peasant politics and agricultural transformation. Çağlar Keyder, "Türk Tarımında Küçük Meta Üretiminin Yerleşmesi (1946-1960)," in *Türkiye'de Tarımsal Yapılar: [Bildiriler]*, ed. by Şevket Pamuk and Zafer Toprak (Ankara: Yurt Yayınevi, 1988), pp. 163-174. An important advocator of this approach is İzzetin Önder, see for his article in same collection, İzzetin Önder, "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Tarım Kesimine Uygulanan Vergi Politikası," in *Türkiye'de Tarımsal Yapılar: [Bildiriler]*, ed. by Şevket Pamuk and Zafer Toprak (Ankara: Yurt Yayınevi, 1988).

¹⁶ Akçetin writes that "Anatolia traditionally had not seen rebellions" and that during her research, she turned up no sign of rebellions in Anatolia. Akçetin, "Anatolian Peasants in the Great Depression, 1929-1933," p. 90.

modernization efforts. Therefore, except for a few Kurdish, tribal or religious uprisings, researchers have not taken into account the rural contention that appeared in the forms of rural crimes, violence, and banditry that plagued the Anatolian countryside, which were related to neither the Kurdish national cause, nor to the Islamic or tribal reaction, but to the struggle for survival and self-defense against oppression and exploitation.

The early Republican historiography is not been interested in “crimes against property,” violence, and banditry as a way of peasant politics throughout Anatolia. Rather, supposing the western countryside was free from violence and banditry, some scholars see the banditry as peculiar to eastern Anatolia. Nationalist and modernist accounts explain the peasant insurrections in the east with either religious or tribal reactions or as the separatist movements of Kurdish organizations fostered by foreign states.¹⁷ Ironically, critical or more empathetic accounts have a lot in common with the Turkish nationalist and modernist accounts by treating the Kurdish bandits and their operations so long as they were closely tied with the Kurdish nationalist causes, otherwise excluding them from the narrative of “the Kurdish awakening.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Cemşid Bender, *Genelkurmay Belgelerinde Kürt İsyanları III* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1992); Bilâl N. Şimşir, *Kürtçülük II, 1924-1999* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2009), pp. 322-323; Safiye Dünder, *Kürtler ve Azınlık Tartışmaları: Tarih, Kimlik, İsyanlar, Sosyo-Kültürel Yapı, Terör* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2009), p. 159.

¹⁸ David McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004); 202-211; Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kürdistan Üzerine Yazılar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), pp. 340; Wadie Jwaideh, *Kürt Milliyetçiliğinin Tarihi: Kökenleri ve Gelişimi*, intro. by Martin van Bruinessen (5th ed.; İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008), pp.403-433.

Perhaps one exception to this is very insightful and detailed contemporary account by Hikmet Kuvılcımlı, *Yol / İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)* (İstanbul: Yol Yayınları, 1979).

Conventional Labor History and Working Class

The social and economic change from the traditional and agricultural economic base to a more capitalistic and industrial structure, which had been underway before the Republic, gained momentum in the Republican era, especially in the 1930s. Although the industrialization drive and the modernization of the economy brought Turkish citizens certain benefits in the long-term, it created enormous social and economic hardships in the short-term. Along with the long-term benefits, the scholars partially describe the short-term adverse effects of the economic change on the working class. Recurrent themes in the literature have been the horrific conditions of the working class, the overexploitation by the capitalists, the state repression, and the organized efforts of the labor and the left, or legal and institutional developments regarding labor.

The canonized elitist, state-centrist, and institutionalist approach and modernization paradigm also captured the labor history of the era. The history of the social struggles of the period is confined only to the organized labor or leftist movements.

Therefore, the absence of the widespread political, organized, and collective working class movement is treated as a deviation from the idealized forms and movements of the working class modeled according to the experiences of the European working-class. Consequently, there is a massive literature about the causes and results of the absence or underdevelopment of working class formation, consciousness, and organized action during the early Republic. Due to the lack of organized and political struggle, the scholars generally assume that the state repression, the peasant character of the working class, and some of the social and

economic policies of the single-party government hindered an autonomous working class formation and struggle.

If we accept that the class formation occurs only when class exists at all the interconnected levels of socio-economic circumstances and exploitation (conditions), patterns of life (shared experiences), perception of the socio-economic conditions and policies, plausible and meaningful responses to the circumstances in which the workers found themselves, and perhaps the everyday actions (disposition), and collective and organized struggle (organization),¹⁹ the accounts of the early Republican working class skipped some important intermediate levels connecting to the rings of the class formation chain to each other, overemphasizing exclusively the first (conditions) and the last (organized labor and struggle) levels. That is, of these different but intertwined aspects of working class experiences, *sine qua non* mediating levels such as the workers' opinion, their class-specific behaviors, and their daily, informal and unorganized everyday and more subjective forms of struggle, which were prerequisite for the class formation and organizational structures in the long run are left out of the historical accounts.

Since the scholars perceive organized labor as a unique form of working class existence and politics, they generally divide the interwar period into two sub-periods according to the workers' capacity of organizational and formal action. The early and mid-1920s, marked by the leftist and organizational movements and strikes, is seen as an active period of the working class movement. Scholars assume that this active working class struggle came to a halt in the late 1920s and especially the 1930s with

¹⁹ See Ira Katznelson, "Working Class Formation: Constructing Class and Comparisons," in *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*, ed. by Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 21-22.

the elimination of the left and the organized labor movement.²⁰ Thus, the great part of the single-party period generally is regarded as “a part of the pre-history” of the Turkish working class.²¹

The scholarship follows the conventional bias of the modernization theory against the peasantry as an inert, passive and backward social group and commonly hold the peasant status of the workers responsible for the absence of organized movements and accordingly for their passivity. This viewpoint sees the small-land holding, inadequate dispossession of the peasants and insufficient commoditization of the peasant labor as obstacles before the progress to the formation of an industrial working class. This linear and modernist narrative, which applauds the pauperization, dispossession, and prolaterianization, disregards the peasant-workers as human and overlooked their subjective feeling, experiences, and aspirations thwarted by the industrial capitalism. Therefore, their resistance to being reduced to permanent wage labor is not appreciated as a resistance to capitalism, but generally seen as a deviation from the linear development of history with a teleological manner.²²

Some accounts argue that the government divided and pacified the working-class by creating a labor aristocracy consisting of the workers in public undertakings and the better-off state officials who earned higher wages, and enjoyed social

²⁰ Yıldırım Koç, *100 Soruda Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık Hareketi Tarihi* (İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1998), p. 37. Erdal Yavuz, “Sanayideki İşgücünün Durumu, 1923-40,” *Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sine İşçiler (1839-1950)*, ed. by Donald Quataert and Erik Jan Zürcher, trans. by Cahide Ekiz (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998), pp. 171-173.

²¹ Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye’de Çok Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1946-1963* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2002), pp. 47-50. E. Yavuz, “Sanayi’deki İşgücünün Durumu, 1923-40,” pp. 174-175. Feroz Ahmad has situated the turning point of the labor history in Turkey to the establishment of Labor Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*) in 1961. F. Ahmad, “Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sinde Sınıf Bilincinin Oluşması, 1923-1945,” *Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sine İşçiler (1839-1950)*, ed. by Donald Quataert and Erik Jan Zürcher, trans. by Cahide Ekiz (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998), p. 152.

²² Yıldırım Koç, “Türkiye’de 1923-1946 Döneminde Mülksüzleşme ve İşçi Sınıfının Oluşumu,” *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, No. 174 (Dec., 1994), pp. 14-28. In addition see Yüksel Akkaya, “İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık,” *Praksis*, No. 5 (2002), pp. 144-145. See also Erdal Yavuz, “Sanayideki İşgücünün Durumu, 1923-40,” p.176.

security and social service facilities. This approach does not take into account their perception and implementation of such limited social measures and facilities.²³

Some accounts emphasize how the government shaped and assimilated the working class through the RPP-led unions of workers and artisans.²⁴ Feroz Ahmad, for instance, argues that, “the previously autonomous worker and artisan associations and unions turned out to be protocol institutions that appeared in the corteges in the national days.”²⁵ The superficial accounts depict the professional and artisanal associations as passive puppets of the ruling circles and tools of the corporatist ideology.²⁶ Such oversimplifications bar the analysis of the conflicts and struggle between the lower class members and better-off association administrators within associations and between rival associations of employees and employers.

Furthermore, scholars have always featured the industrial and organized workers, often those with a “leftist consciousness,” at the expense of others, due to both their ready visibility in the state records, newspapers and the abiding conviction that they were the real working class.²⁷ The labor history studies on the interwar period ignore the small-scale artisans, shopkeepers, journeymen and craftspeople,

²³ Koç, *100 Soruda Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık Hareketi Tarihi*, p. 34. In addition, see M. Şehmus Güzel, “1940’larda İşgücünün (İşçilerin) Özellikleri,” *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, No. 119 (May 1940), pp. 18-22. It is possible to draw some parallels between these scholarly accounts and the Republican elite’s representation of the working class in those years. Yakup Kadri, for instance, presented the worker in his novel *Ankara* as the loyal, lucky and unexploited sons of the benevolent state. Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Ankara* (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1972), p. 144.

²⁴ M. Bülent Varlık, “İzmir İşçi-Esnaf Kurumlar Birliği Yardım Talimatnameleri (1935-1936),” *Kebikeç-İnsan Bilimleri İçin Kaynak Dergisi*, No. 4 (1996), pp. 195-201; M. Bülent Varlık, “İzmir İşçi ve Esnaf Birlikleri Genel Bürosu Nizamnamesi (1935),” *Kebikeç-İnsan Bilimleri İçin Kaynak Dergisi*, No. 5 (1997), pp. 201-205; M. Bülent Varlık, “İzmir Sanayi İşçileri Birliği-1932,” *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, No. 155 (May, 1995), pp. 35-40; Hakkı Uyar, “CHP İzmir İşçi ve Esnaf Cemiyetleri Birliği (1935) / Devletin İşçi Sınıfı ve Örgütlenme Girişimi,” *Tarih ve Toplum*, No. 160 (Apr., 1997), pp. 14-20; Yıldırım Koç, “1923-1950 Döneminde CHP’nin İşçi Sınıfı Korkusu,” *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, No. 170 (Aug., 1994), pp. 43-44.

²⁵ Ahmad, “Cumhuriyet Türkiye’sinde Sınıf Bilincinin Oluşması, 1923-1945,” p. 149.

²⁶ See Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye’de Sol Akımlar, 1925-1936* (İstanbul: BDS Yayınları, 1991), p. 115; Yavuz, “Sanayideki İşgücünün Durumu, 1923-40,” p. 171.

²⁷ See Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye’de Tek Parti Döneminde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1946* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1999). In addition see Şehmus [M.] Güzel, *Türkiye’de İşçi Hareketleri (1908-1984)* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1996); Yıldırım Koç, *100 Soruda Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık Hareketi Tarihi* (İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1998).

who were the backbone of the working class in Turkey as in other Middle Eastern countries. Their voice and active resistance to the state policies and industrialization process have not been examined yet because they are conventionally seen as declining remnants of pre-industrial society that should be swept aside by the industrial development in the long-run.²⁸ Some see the artisanal small-scale industries as hindrance to the formation of big industry and accordingly a conscious industrial working class. The small-scale artisanal industries and traders are assumed to have caused the emergence of a “lumpen proletariat.”²⁹

Another ignored working class group is lower-income state officials. They are treated as part of the “labor aristocracy” who were supposedly satisfied by the government by means of higher wages and social security systems. This approach focuses the statistical data and limited social security rights of these people regardless of their purchasing power, the implementation of such limited social security measures, and these people’s perception of the economic conditions and policies. In addition, scholars disregard the great income differential between the high status minority and low-income majority of the state officials.³⁰

Finally, the conventional accounts, assuming the working class as an ineffective mass, interpret the labor bill drafts, social security measures, and finally labor legislation of 1936 as an outcome of the state’s corporatist ideology, of the effects of the Turkey’s cooperation with International Labor Office starting in 1932, or of the state’s efforts to reproduce the unstable labor force. This approach

²⁸ For such approach in the context of the late Ottoman period, see Huri İslamoğlu-Inan (ed.), *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Charles Issawi (ed.), *The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800-1914: A Book of Readings*, intro. by Charles Issawi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); W[hitman]. Rostow, *The Process of Economic Growth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

²⁹ Yavuz, “Sanayideki İşgücünün Durumu, 1923-40,” p. 176.

³⁰ For instance see Koç, *100 Soruda Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık Hareketi Tarihi*, pp. 36-37.

completely overlooks the low-income wage earners' demands and struggle for their rights in everyday life.³¹

The Main Aim

Admittedly, this conventional literature, partly reminding us of the oppression, exploitation, and obstacles before the free political action, sheds light upon one important aspect of the ordinary people's historical experience. On the other hand, this aspect was surely an incomplete story of their lives, in which there is no room for the agency of the ordinary people. As E.P. Thompson emphasized, those writers who have written the bad stories of the ordinary people always depicted them as victims and denied their self-activity.³²

Keeping this warning of Thompson in mind, this dissertation aims to write the remaining part of this incomplete story by focusing on the peasants' and workers' responses to the social and economic change and policies and the impact of these responses on the decisions of the single-party state. On the basis of a detailed analysis, this study argues that the people were not hapless victims or passive onlookers, but active and influential actors of the early Republican period. In other words, this dissertation attempts to rehabilitate the ordinary people's self-activity,

³¹ For instance, Yıldırım Koç argues that the working people's demands and struggles did not play a role in the emergence of the social security measures taken during the single-party period. The main thrust for such policies and 1936 Labor Law was the reproduction of the labor force. In addition, the social security measures in this period was used for creation of a labor aristocracy. Koç, *100 Soruda Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık Hareketi Tarihi*, p. 34. Again Berik and Bilginsoy argue that the working class did not have any influence over the formation of social policy measures during this period because the labor movement was not active. See Günseli Berik and Cihan Bilginsoy, "The Labor Movement in Turkey: Labor Pains, Maturity, Metamorphosis," in *The Social History of Labor in the Middle East*, ed. by Ellis Jay Goldberg (Boulder; Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), p. 38, 57-58. Again, Koray Çalışkan has shallowly linked all of labor bill drafts prepared during the 1920s and the 1930s, and the Labor Law of 1936 to the corporatist ideology. See Koray Çalışkan, "'Organism and Triangle': A Short History of Labor Law in Turkey, 1920-1950," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Vol.15 (Fall 1996), pp.95-118.

³² E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: New Press, 1991), p. 460.

subjectivity and their right to be an active part of the early Republican history, by uncovering their voice and their everyday politics, i.e., their daily survival methods and everyday resistance to their exploiters and oppressors.

This work brings into question the existing appraisals of the Turkish modernization in the early Republic that have focused exclusively on the state plans and projects. Drawing on Joel Migdal's proposition about the interpretation of Turkish modernization in the context of everyday interplay between the state and society, it attempts to present this process not as a monolithic process imposed by the state or determined by the state/society dichotomy, but as an interactive process shaped by everyday and more covert forms of public opinion, contestation, resistance, and accordingly by informal negotiation process between the state and the society.³³

In this respect, the findings of this work point out that neither populace nor the single-party state were unresponsive each other. The lower class people responded in several ways to the state social and economic policies and sought redress and protection from the government. Their grievances, discontent, and resistance made the hegemony of the single-party state more fragile and vulnerable than is usually supposed. Accordingly, the single-party state, on to contrary to widely-believed assumptions, needed to respond to the social demands and pressures through revising its social and economic policies. Therefore, I propose to describe the single-party state as a flexible-authoritarian and socially embedded state, rather

³³ Joel S. Migdal, "Olgu ve Kurgunun Buluşma Zemini," in *Türkiye'de Modernleşme ve Ulusal Kimlik*, ed. by Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, Trans. Nurettin Elhüseyni (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999), pp. 207-215.

than a rigid and bureaucratic one that was isolated from society and unresponsive to the social demands.³⁴

This work does not aim to tell the heroic episodes of the lower-class individuals in a romantic manner, but to point out how the people critically perceived their oppressors and exploiters, and how they strived to reappropriate their rights and sources through everyday actions derived from a subjective consciousness rather than the priorities of the regime. Furthermore, it shows that their informal and daily thinking and actions influenced party and government debates and decisions about how to improve the people's lives. Instead of adopting a definition of state and society as dichotomous and isolated entities, it aims to grasp how the ordinary people interacted with the single-party state informally and indirectly under those circumstances that did not allow them to do that formally and legally. Briefly, the main aim of this study is to explore "the infra-politics,"³⁵ which interacted with the "high politics" indirectly. However, this challenging endeavor requires the use of new perspectives to detect and interpret what has been unseen until today.

Theoretical and Methodological Backdrop

Any attempt to shed light on the experience of the ordinary people, public opinion, and everyday struggle in the early Republic is inevitably beset both by conceptual, methodological difficulties and by theoretical and ideological obstacles. The main problem is to overcome the narrow content and the meaning of some interlocking

³⁴ See my forthcoming article, Murat Metinsoy, "Fragile Hegemony, Flexible Authoritarianism and Governing From Below: Politicians' Report in Early Republican Turkey," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (2011) (forthcoming).

³⁵ "Infra-politics" was, I think, very helpful concept devised by James C. Scott, which enables us to see the social dynamics and determinants of the high politics.

key concepts vital to this task like “politics,” “public,” “public opinion,” “class struggle,” and “resistance,” which are the main components of everyday politics.

Everyday Politics as Infra-Politics of High-Politics

A detailed exploration of the popular dynamics of early Republican political life requires expanding the conventional narrow conceptualization of politics, which confines it to high politics, administrative practices, political organizations and legal developments. Contrary to the usual definition of politics, this work considers everyday life as a “political domain.” In this regard, the concepts of “everyday politics,” “infra-politics,” and “everyday forms of resistance” are quite helpful to conceive the politics in broader terms.

Drawing on broader definitions of politics by political theorists, this work proposes that politics, in its broader meaning, is related primarily to the struggle over the allocation of scarce economic resources in everyday life.³⁶ In this regard, the main realm of politics is everyday life, in which the people compete and struggle for survival. In this sense, politics cannot be restricted to formal politics. High politics is only one aspect of the political realm, having to do with legal and institutional

³⁶ For broader definition of politics as a struggle for allocation of economic sources, see Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How?* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1958). In addition, James C. Scott conceives politics as two-dimensional phenomenon. The high-politics, the one of these dimensions, is underpinned and deeply shaped by another dimension he calls “infra-politics,” which takes place in everyday life as a struggle over scarce economic sources. See James C. Scott, *Domination and Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Inspired by Laswell and primarily by Scott, Benedict J. T. Kerkvliet also shows how the everyday politics appeared and thwarted the state plans in the context of Communist Vietnam. Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, *Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005). Additionally, the soft-state theory, especially Joel S. Migdal underscores the state and society interactions in everyday life and how the people reshape or thwart the state plans and projects through a constant and covert negotiations process. In that respect, he conceives the everyday relations between the state and society as a part of politics, see Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988).

competition. Another constituent part of politics is everyday politics, which is infra-politics underpinning and reshaping high politics.³⁷

As conceptualized and deciphered by James Scott, ordinary people, especially those living under authoritarian rules, do not deal with their problems through direct political means and forms, but through more subtle, covert, indirect and daily forms and methods. The people express themselves or resist exploitation and oppression in more mundane and workaday ways so as to avoid running the risk of repression. In other words, the lack of formal, legal, organizational, and collective actions does not mean necessarily that ordinary people are not active and ineffective in political life. Especially under authoritarian regimes, ordinary people resist the domination and participate in political life indirectly through quotidian acts of resistance and popular culture elements such as foot dragging, poaching and squatting, tax evasion, pilferage, theft, cheating, rumor, gossip, folk songs, poetry, and jokes which are indispensable components of the popular politics.³⁸

Scott has called these acts “everyday forms of resistance.” This concept can be helpful for historians to comprehend the unusual, non-institutional, unorganized and hidden forms of resistance and opposition to the power holders which occur in everyday life. Thus, it opens new perspectives on the criterion of being a politically active historical subject other than the existing standards accepted such as open, organized, ideological, programmatic movements launching political initiatives or mounting revolts. In this respect, everyday politics is the realm of the ordinary peoples’ everyday struggle for subsistence against their oppressors and exploiters. In this sphere of politics, in Scott’s words, “no public claims are made; no open

³⁷ Especially see Scott, *Domination and Arts of Resistance*, pp. 190-200. See also Kerkvliet, *Power of Everyday Politics*, p. 21-22.

³⁸ Scott, *Domination and Arts of Resistance*, pp. 191-192. In addition, see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), Chapter 7.

symbolic lines are drawn. All political action takes forms that are designed to obscure their intentions or to take cover behind an apparent meaning.”³⁹

It is these everyday acts that constitute the everyday politics of discontented people. This form of people’s politics indirectly impinges on high politics. In this respect, it is possible to view everyday politics, in Scott’s term, as “infra-politics” of the high-politics. Regardless of people’s intentions, the everyday politics of the people can affect official politics beneath the surface. It can cause macro problems for the political power ranging from restructuring the control of property or fiscal crises to the collapse of an organization or state. It can bring policy changes or trigger intra-elite conflicts that curb the state’s legitimacy and strength.⁴⁰ The cumulative effects of everyday resistance can thwart the plans of those with more power and status.⁴¹ In think, this approach provides deep insight into popular politics in daily life and into how the ordinary people played a considerable role in the shaping of policy-making during the single-party era.

The Non-Elite Counter Public Spheres and Ordinary-Public Opinion

In this regard, the concept of public sphere is quite helpful for conceiving of the domain of politics in broader terms to substantiate the concept of everyday politics. Habermas broadened the concept of politics by introducing the concept of “public sphere,” as a space of critical thinking and public opinion mediated between state

³⁹ Scott, *Domination and Arts of Resistance*, pp. 199-200.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-192.

⁴¹ For a detailed specific account of how the everyday politics of Vietnamese people deeply affected and finally reversed the agricultural collectivization process, see the above-mentioned book of Kerkvliet. For the role of the everyday resistance and popular dissent in the emergence of the social policy measures and transition from the single-party regime to the multi-party regime, see Murat Metinsoy, *İkinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Türkiye: Savaş ve Gündelik Yaşam* (İstanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2007).

and society.⁴² However, his notion of public sphere was criticized on the grounds of its institutionalism and exclusionary feature. Some critical scholars, arguing that the lower classes are excluded from this narrow public sphere dominated by the educated middle class, have suggested that other excluded groups could constitute counter or “subaltern” forms of public spheres challenging the hegemony of the bourgeois public spheres.⁴³ This critique of Habermas’ thought by critical political theorists has opened the doors of the concept of public sphere into the lower classes.

Furthermore, the scholarship has queried the conceptual dichotomies of state-society and private-public and emphasized the interconnectivity between the sides of the dichotomies. This has brought private life, in other words, everyday life and all human activities seeming not to be political into the center of political analysis.⁴⁴ Foucaultian “social control” theory also has contributed to the criticism of private-public and state-society dichotomies, by conceiving all details of human life that have come to be called the “private sphere” and all social relations as the main target of modern states, which maintain control and regulate their subjects. Such an approach requires an analysis of state and society not as isolated, but as interconnected and integrated things, which thereby brings the daily “private” acts and life of the individual into the center of politics.⁴⁵ Furthermore, some critical accounts have criticized the spatialization of the public sphere and suggested linking

⁴² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), p. 30.

⁴³ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 109-142.

⁴⁴ Seyla Benhabib, “Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 89-90.

⁴⁵ For such kind of interpretation, see Randal McGowen, “Power and Humanity, or Foucault Among Historians,” in *Reassessing Foucault: Power, Medicine, and the Body*, ed. by Colin Jones and Roy Porter (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 98-99.

the public sphere to popular forms of political communication, the circulation of ideas and news in informal spaces.⁴⁶

Finally, social and cultural historians of popular culture and the working class have used the “public” and “public sphere” to define informal worker and peasant communities, networks, and the ordinary spaces in which they come together like coffeehouses of the lower classes, pubs, streets, public gardens, market places, public baths, and homes. Instead of press and publishing activities, the ordinary people’s word of mouth communications, rumors, gossip, and jokes have been started to be envisaged as initial, ordinary, and informal forms of public opinion and informal media.⁴⁷

The literature on the early Republic has not gone beyond the classical conceptualization of public sphere. It has generally equated the “public sphere” with urban and formal forms of associational networks and the elite print culture. In parallel, “public opinion” was defined only with the communal sense of the bourgeoisie and the urban and “higher” forms of general opinion expressed via the press, publications, and public demonstrations, which are much more evident to the traditional modernist and elitist senses of conventional historians. However, this narrow meaning of public sphere and of public opinion does not accommodate investigations of popular politics. For this reason, for better research of the popular realm of politics, this study employs the concepts of public, public sphere and public opinion in their broader contents and non-elite and non-institutional forms.

⁴⁶ Harold Mah, “Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians,” *Journal of Modern History*, No. 72 (2000), pp. 158-182.

⁴⁷ Robert Darnton, “An Early Information Society: News and Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” *American Historical Review*, CV, No. 1 (Feb., 2000), pp.1-35. In addition, for the power and functions of the traditional popular culture, see E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (London: Merlin Press, 1991); Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and Culture of Peasant Resistance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.45-67; James M. Brophy, *Popular Culture and the Public Sphere in the Rhineland 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

History from Below, *Alltagsgeschichte*, and a Broader Notion of the Class Struggle

Studies aiming to grasp the everyday life experiences of the ordinary people, by and large, have been inspired from “history from below” approach and especially Thompson’s and Hobsbawm’s more nuanced conceptions of “class,” “class struggle,” and “class experience” at first. Their studies have reformulated the class analysis in favor of class struggle analysis. Their common emphasis on unorganized labor and peasant politics, poor people’s resistances and struggles has introduced the poor and low-income peasants and workers into the historical narrative as active agents of the history.⁴⁸

Particularly Thompson highlighted the important role of the everyday life, everyday experiences, popular culture and daily social relations in the formation of class-consciousness, class struggles, and resistance. He shifted the focus of historical research from the recognized means of working class politics such as political parties, trade unions, and formal strikes to a variety of non-organizational settings, incorporating behaviors previously regarded as non-political, that is, popular culture, crime, violence, riots, spontaneous protests, etc.⁴⁹

Another contribution to everyday life history which inspires this study comes from the historical anthropologic approach, called *alltagsgeschichte* (everyday life history) introduced by German social historians. This kind of historical anthropology illuminates the everyday forms of working class resistance and everyday class struggles. *Alltagsgeschichte* has not been conceptualized as isolated from the

⁴⁸ See Harvey J. Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians: An Introductory Analysis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1984), pp. 7-8. In addition, see E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1959).

⁴⁹ Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, “Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?” *Social History*, V, No. 2 (1980), p. 267.

relations of production and politics.⁵⁰ The main focus of *alltagsgeschichte* has become the forms in which people “appropriated” –while simultaneously transforming– “their” world,⁵¹ through accommodation tactics, the forms of getting by, resisting the changes imposed from top.⁵² According to this approach, workers can expand the scope of their individual income through creative and cunning efforts in everyday life.⁵³

Inspired by Hobsbawm, Thompson, and the linguistic turn in historiography, the school of Subaltern Studies has also produced the history of the ordinary people under colonial systems and post-colonial nationalist regimes in India and some South Asia countries. These studies have applied the “history from below” technique to Indian history. Emphasizing the lower classes as the active agents of political and social change, they have taken a particular interest in their use of discursive strategies, popular culture, and anonymous resistance in everyday life. As to peasant politics, for instance, Chatterjee has argued, “the domain of legal-political relations constituted by the state cannot be regarded as the exclusive, perhaps not even the principal site of peasant struggle.”⁵⁴ As Guha has shown, the struggles, resistance, and discontent of the ordinary people may appear in anonymous forms in everyday

⁵⁰ Alf Lüdtke, “Foreword,” *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. by Alf Lüdtke, trans. by William Templer (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. x.

⁵¹ Alf Lüdtke, “Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who are its Practitioners?” *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. by Alf Lüdtke, trans. by William Templer (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 24-29.

⁵³ “Such diverse forms of ‘everyday class struggle’ encompass the small economic advantages that workers were able to acquire for themselves and their families ‘underhandedly’ and in the face of the demands of capital; they include hidden practices of refusal, the re-appropriation of already ‘sold’ labor time by secret prolongation of entitled rest breaks, or carefully nursing one’s strength in the expenditure of labor power...” Harald Dehne, “Have We Come Any Closer to Alltag? Everyday Reality and Workers’ Lives as an Object of Historical Research in the German Democratic Republic,” in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. by Alf Lüdtke, trans. by William Templer (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 128.

⁵⁴ Partha Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments, Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 170.

life without any formal organization, party-politics, leadership, or ideology, which are regarded as signs of the political consciousness of the people in narrow terms.⁵⁵

Faced with a lack of sources about the subaltern classes, because illiterate peasants do not leave behind written material such as books, newspapers, diaries or memoirs, the scholars of Subaltern Studies School have created some reading strategies of the official documents giving information about them. To this goal, they have proposed a re-reading, “against-the-grain” and “reading-in-distorting mirror” of the conventional sources. Employing the deconstructive reading techniques proposed by post-structuralist philosophers, they have striven to read between the lines and sub-texts in the discourse of the military and civil elite so as to gather clues about the voices and experiences of the illiterate lower classes.⁵⁶

Popular Culture as Informal Media of the Ordinary People

Historians of ordinary people have long recognized popular culture’s palette of expression. Forms and contents of popular culture took on new functions to contest political exclusion in the history. Scholars have shown that the components of popular culture played a significant role in the formation of public opinion. In addition, they have pointed out that popular culture both expresses what the ordinary people feel and think about state affairs, policies, and economic matters and ignites popular acts of resistance.

About the role of popular culture in politics, we owe much to the revisionist historians of revolutionary France and Subaltern Studies. For instance, Eugen Weber, exploring the use of materials such as popular literature, folklore, song and oral

⁵⁵ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-17.

history, has shown that the illiterate were not in fact inarticulate and that they could and did express their feelings and opinions through popular culture.⁵⁷ Some anthropologists have emphasized the function of gossip in maintaining the group identity or manipulation of social rules.⁵⁸

Similarly, some historians have portrayed the rumor as an important component of popular politics. Indian historians such as Ranajit Guha and Arun Kumar have conceived of rumor as “a language of peasant politics” in colonial India. In a non-lettered culture, as they have pointed out, word-of-mouth becomes the only source for dissemination of news.⁵⁹ According to them, peasants deploy rumor as a device to articulate political aspirations and to create public opinion. Rumor shapes and gives vent to the peasants’ dissent when the space of open confrontation is not easily available.⁶⁰

Especially, Robert Darnton, calling popular culture, particularly rumor, folk songs and folk poems “informal media,” has convincingly showed that the popular culture elements like folk poem, popular song, joke, rumor and gossip provide a powerful means of transmitting messages as a medium for political communication in societies with low literacy rates. Darnton has emphasized the role of the popular culture in the corrosion of the legitimacy of the Ancient Regime.⁶¹ In a similar way, two revisionist French historians, Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel have convincingly

⁵⁷ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. xvi.

⁵⁸ Max Gluckman, “Gossip and Scandal,” *Current Anthropology* 4, 3, (1963) pp. 307-315; Robert Paine, “What is Gossip about? An Alternative Hypothesis,” *Man* 2, 2, (1967), pp. 272-285.

⁵⁹ See Arun Kumar, “Beyond Muffled Murmurs of Dissent? Kisan Rumour in Colonial Bihar,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, XXVII, No. 1 (Oct., 2000), pp. 100-106.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶¹ Darnton, “An Early Information Society: News and Media in Eighteenth-Century Paris,” pp.1-35.

considered rumor as a component of public opinion and of the resistance of the masses against the state on the eve of the revolution.⁶²

Alongside, the popular culture and folklore, as a set of daily practices through which those expressive genres such as music, legends, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, superstitions, rituals, and customs are shared and as a non-literate culture based on an oral tradition for propagation, may mirror the continuity and change of day-to-day and occasional practices of the people in daily life. In this regard, the perspective on folkloric studies can shed light on whether and how far the modernization attempts permeated the majority of the population.

Fighting Words: Ordinary Public Opinion and Counter-discourse

Another contribution to the everyday history and particularly history of popular culture and public opinion came from the studies inspired by the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and linguistic studies. For him, discourses are multi-vocal and may express several meanings according to the diverse contexts and the intentions of their appropriators.⁶³ That is, the words are open to several meanings and interpretations. This multivocality of words and discourses makes them contested terrains and provides room for human agency in the interpretation of meanings.⁶⁴

From this point of view, some social theorists and historians pointed out how such flexible and constructed nature of the language allows the powerless people to exploit its such nature for their own specific causes. They showed that the ordinary

⁶² Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, *The Vanishing Children of Paris: Rumor and Politics before the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁶³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 285, 401.

⁶⁴ Fred Evans, "Language and Political Agency: Derrida, Marx, and Bakhtin," *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, XXVII, No. 4 (1990), p. 515.

people can resist power-holders not by challenging to the dominant discourse but appropriating and reinterpreting it.

As Bakhtin pointed out, those who attempt to reconstruct the meanings do not aim a total change in the dominant discourse. They appropriate its components selectively for their own goals. This is a pragmatic discursive strategy based on appropriation of the words used by the hegemonic groups and ascription of different meanings to these words according to appropriators' different intentions.⁶⁵ In fact, E.P. Thompson also emphasized the discursive strategies of laboring people. He pointed out how the liberal and constitutional ideas of the ruling circles were appropriated and turned by the laboring masses into a weapon against the upper class holders of the same liberal ideas.⁶⁶

Drawing on Thompson's studies on popular culture and especially Bakhtin's dialogic theory, critical scholars have incorporated the discursive analysis into working class politics. They have showed that the ambiguity and instability of discourse provides the lower classes with a discursive weapon with which to question and subvert the hegemonic discourse indirectly.⁶⁷

As these studies revealed, there is a discursive fight between the working people and the power holders, in which the subordinated groups try to undermine the cogency and legitimacy of the discourse of the powerful group. For this aim, they question the dominant discourse's interpretations imposed by the power holders, appropriating and reinterpreting the useful components of the dominant discourse to challenge the power holders. In that respect, they proved that the use of official

⁶⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 143. See also Marc W. Steinberg, *Fighting Words: Working Class Formation, Collective Action, And Discourse in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 17.

⁶⁶ E. P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?" *Social History*, III, Issue 2 (May, 1978), p. 158.

⁶⁷ Marc W. Steinberg, *Fighting Words: Working Class Formation, Collective Action, And Discourse in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 15-18.

discourse by the lower classes does not necessarily mean that they were under full hegemony of the power holders.⁶⁸ From this point of view, the examination of the class struggle requires an analysis of the discourse of lower classes, not only their direct oppositional voices, but also their use of official discourse against the government to pressure it to live up to its commitments.

Three Reservations

Here I should present three reservations in terms of utilizing these theories and approaches. The first is the concept of “subaltern,” which many historians find problematic because it implies partially that the power holders suppress the “subaltern” all the time. Therefore, it is not used in this dissertation. Instead, this work employs the terms “ordinary people” or “lower-classes” to define the peasantry and working class. The second is that this work avoids any romanticization of the ordinary people’s critical opinions and acts of resistance by keeping in mind the fact that the people might not have only resisted but sometimes negotiated and colluded with the authorities, even to the extent of acting as the agents of political or social repression.⁶⁹

Third, the absence of systemic transformation as a consequence of popular discontent and the everyday resistance leads some scholars to question the value of everyday politics of ordinary people. However, the concept of “success” and

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17. For an important theoretical source of discursive strategies of the ordinary people, see Alan Hunt, “Rights and Social Movements: Counter-Hegemonic Strategies,” *Journal of Law and Society*, XVII, No. 3 (Autumn 1990), p. 314; and see Chantal Mouffe, “Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci,” in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, ed. by Chantal Mouffe (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 192.

⁶⁹ Driss Maghraoui has shown how Moroccans joined the French colonial army and tried to renegotiate terms within the conditions of exploitation to which they were subjected. Driss Maghraoui, “The Moroccan Colonial Soldiers: Between Selective Memory and Collective Memory,” in *Beyond Colonialism and Nationalism in the Maghrib: History, Culture and Politics*, ed. by Ali Abdullatif Ahmida (New York: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 49-70.

“transformation” is problematic. For example, success may be measured by political impact and economic impact. Moreover, short-term effects may be different from medium-term effects. Success may occur despite or right after the disintegration of resistance and opposition.⁷⁰ That is to say, some acts and opinions may result in more systematic and global consequences that were unintended by the population. Here is the best place to remember the Turkish proverb, “*damlaya damlaya göl olur*” (many a little makes a mickle).

On Sources

Since this study is about the ordinary people, who did not leave behind written records, I inevitably faced a source problem. To solve this source problem, I used several sorts of new documents, which generally have been ignored until this time, most of which I discovered myself. This work is based on data mainly drawn from the nearest points of contact between the government and the ordinary people in everyday life such as several kinds of petitions and letters, petitions lists in the National Assembly Yearbooks (*TBMM Yıllıkları*), election district and inspection region reports of RPP deputies, general situation reports of the provincial governors, general inspectorate reports, police and gendarme records, wish lists of provincial party congresses, and contemporary newspapers, journals, and memoirs giving information about the experiences and voices of the peasants and workers.

The most important category of source was undoubtedly the petitions in the Republican Archives. In a political atmosphere in which the people were not able to express their opinions freely through free press and elections, the petitions provided

⁷⁰ Chris Pickvance, “Social Movements in the Transition from State Socialism: Convergence or Divergence?”, in *Social Movements and Social Classes: The Future of Collective Action*, ed. by Louis Maheu (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1995), p. 124.

invaluable information to the government about the public opinion and bureaucratic malfunctioning. Therefore, the Republican elite welcomed petitions, which the people sent to the RPP Secretary-Generals. Both the content and the language of these petitions inform us about the people's response to the Republican reforms and policies.⁷¹

In addition to the RPP Secretary-Generals, the National Assembly, the local RPP administrations and governorships, the management offices of public and private enterprises, and the press also received several petitions. The petitions sent to the the National Assembly were evaluated by the Petition Commissions (*Arzuhâl Encümeni*). The brief summaries of these tens of thousands of petitions, listed in the the National Assembly Yearbooks every year were of great importance for understanding the general mood of the people, and they were widely used in this study. In addition, the people sent several petitions to the local party branches. These petitions generally were evaluated by the local party administrations and absorbed into the "wish lists," which were adopted by the RPP's provincial congresses and submitted to the RPP General Secretariat. These wish lists were also employed here abundantly.

The people petitioned the local authorities and their employers, too. Finally, they poured their grief to the press through letters sometimes directly, sometimes after their petitions to the authorities turned out to be abortive. These letters generally were published and commented in the newspapers. Many daily papers such as *Köroğlu*, *Son Posta*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Tan*, and others assigned special columns for these reader letters. These texts were undoubtedly quite promising in the understanding of the public opinion and of the everyday experiences of the ordinary people.

⁷¹ About a study on the petitions sent to the RPP Secretary-General see Akın, "Reconsidering State, Party, and Society in Early Republican Turkey: Politics of Petitioning."

However, as scholars studying these sources have pointed out, the petitions functioned as a “subaltern strategy” for the manipulation of the state.⁷² Therefore, the Republican leaders could not be contented with the information provided by them. Hence, they employed the report system to keep abreast of the public opinion, functioning of the local bureaucracy, social and economic trends in the country. In this system, the RPP deputies toured their election districts. In addition, if they were appointed as party inspectors (*parti müfettişi*), they also toured their inspection regions. They wrote down their observations and evaluations in regular reports to the top leaders according to a certain systematic. Like the citizens’ petitions, the government meticulously took the information in the reports into account.⁷³ Fortunately, the Republican Archives are full of such reports, which provide a great deal of information about society and the state-society relations in the localities.

This study uses another category of report of which I discovered in the Republican Archive, i.e. “general situation reports” (*ahvâl-ı umumiye raporları*) written by the provincial governors. These reports also were very informative about the social, administrative, and security matters in the remote parts of the country.

Despite all this abundance of several kinds of reports, these documents should be used with some reservations like the petitions. Due to their career motivations and ideological bias, the RPP politicians might not have recorded all of what they heard and seen. Hence, their reports may include inadequate, distorted and

⁷² Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 175; Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, p. 16. Robert Holquist, “Information is The Alpha and Omega of Our Work: Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context,” *Journal of Modern History*, LXIX, No. 3 (Sept., 1997), p. 614. In addition, see Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 10; Aryeh Unger, “Public Opinion Reports in Nazi Germany,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XXIX, No. 4 (Winter 1965-66); Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich, Bavaria, 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

⁷³ See Murat Metinsoy, “Fragile Hegemony, Flexible Authoritarianism and Governing From Below: Politicians’ Report in Early Republican Turkey,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 43 (2011) (*forthcoming*).

biased information. In addition, it is obvious that they were not able to listen to and register the off-the-record conversations and hidden practices in daily life.

At this point, the other kinds of official records such as police and gendarme reports and legal records from the nearest points of contact of the state with the people can yield the most detailed and tangible information to gauge the public discontent and popular contention more accurately.⁷⁴ As Aryeh Unger pointed out, the police and security service agents “had no vested interest in concealing manifestations of popular discontent,” because their prestige depended to a large degree on the detection of the dissenting views and resistant acts.⁷⁵

From this point of view, this work uses such kinds of reports, which have not been used so far. Indeed, there is a daunting mass of reports written by the police, which have remained unexamined in detail in any study to this date.⁷⁶ I managed to access and take notes from a limited number of “non-confidential” police records in the General Directorate of the Security Archive (*Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü Arşivi*) and Ministry of Internal Affairs Archive (*İçişleri Bakanlığı Arşivi*). Moreover, in the Turkish Historical Society Archive (*Türk Tarih Kurumu Arşivi*), I found dozens number of intelligence reports written by a secret agent, under the title of the Catalogue of Saadet Sevençan’s Intelligence Reports (*Saadet Sevençan Jurnalleri*).

These reports describe the activities and opinions of dissidents.

⁷⁴ For the use of such sources in the European history see George F. E. Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England* (New York: Wiley, 1964), pp. 3-16.

⁷⁵ Unger, “Public Opinion Reports in Nazi Germany,” p. 578.

⁷⁶ The Republican government attached a great importance to the internal and external intelligence about the anti-government activities. Nazmi Serim, a contemporary intelligence expert at the Police Institute, noted that the secret agent system (*hafiyelik*) was an old phenomenon in Turkey, developed especially during the reign of Abdülhamid II. However, with the Republic, the political police (*siyasi polis*) replaced the secret agent institution. See Nazmi Serim, *Dedektif I: Dedektif Hizmeti Hakkında Umumi Malumat* (Ankara: Recep Ulusoğlu Basımevi, 1939), pp. 16-17, 20, 22-25. In addition see Nazmi Serim, *Siyasi Polis Hizmeti, İstihbarat II: İç İstihbarat* (Ankara: Alâeddin Kırıl Basımevi, 1941). Naci Uluğır, an instructor at the Police Institute, gave more detailed information about the “political police” as an important police department entrusted with the task of providing intelligence about the persons, opinions and movements criticizing and disobeying the reforms, and leftist and religious activities and propagandas. A. Naci Uluğır, *Polisin İdari, Siyasi, Adli Görevleri ve Tatbikatı* (Ankara: Doğu Matbaası, 1950), pp. 15, 21, 231-134.

Apart from the police reports, this study was based on security and court records that give priceless information about the people's challenge to the state agents and oppressive and propertied classes. One of them is the public security reports by the gendarme (*jandarma asayiş vaziyeti raporları*). Another is the court records regarding those people who violated the revolution's laws (*inkılap kanunları*) and public security. All of these records, which are kept in the Republican Archives, provide detailed information about the popular dissent and contention especially in the rural areas.

As an important source of information as well as a means of everyday politics of the ordinary people, this work also benefitted from the popular culture. One important expressive genre of the popular culture in this regard was rumors, which were generally recorded in police reports. Again, the folkloric studies published in the People's Bulletin of Folklore (*Halk Bilgisi Haberleri*) issued by the Folklore Society (*Halk Bilgisi Derneği*) contain invaluable village and town monographs and surveys to grasp the everyday life of the people in the rural areas.

Alongside these documents, this work traces the ordinary people's lives, thoughts, and actions in a number of nation-wide and local newspapers such as *Son Posta*, *Köroğlu*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Tan*, *Erzurum*, *Aydın*, *Yeşilgireson*, *İkdam*, and *Vakit*. Despite the press censorship especially regarding high politics, and foreign policy, the second and third page news giving information about the details of events in the daily life of the ordinary people was a great value to this work on the people's everyday experiences and politics.

As Eric Hobsbawm notes, “once our questions have revealed new sources of material, these themselves raise considerable technical problems.”⁷⁷ The first problem I had to cope with was the representative power of the evidence in the police records. Indeed, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and R.C. Cobb warn historians about the use of police records and reports, which may possibly reflect the minds and worries of their writers rather than the realities.⁷⁸ Some historians of Soviet Russia who examine OGPU and NKVD reports also argue that these documents overestimate the subversive talk and activities because the agents focused exclusively on them.⁷⁹

On the other hand, some scholars approach the problem from a different standpoint, suggesting that these records do not exaggerate the undercurrents of the people’s views and activities. On the contrary, because of the fear from the police repression in authoritarian regimes, the people generally avoided the open expression of their views and open confrontations with the government agents, but preferred the underground, everyday and covert forms. Therefore, the police records reflect only the detected cases, in other words, the tip of the iceberg.⁸⁰ In the light of my work, I agree with this last view.

Yet, the analysis of this type of material faces another problem. How can one extract from these sources the voices and acts of the people who were mostly illiterate or deprived of the means to express themselves? To tackle this problem, I applied the source reading methods and strategies offered by the British Marxist historians, Subaltern Studies, post-structuralism and cultural and linguistic studies.

⁷⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, “History From Below-Some Reflections,” *History From Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology*, ed. by Frederick Krantz (Oxford; New York: Basil Blackwell, 1998), p.17

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “The Political Crisis of Social History: A Marxian Perspective,” *Journal of Social History*, X, No. 2 (1976), p. 211. In addition see Richard C. Cobb, *The Police and The People: French Popular Protest, 1789-1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

⁷⁹ Unger, “Public Opinion Reports in Nazi Germany,” p. 572; Mark B. Tauger, “Soviet Peasants and Collectivization, 1930-1939, Resistance and Adaptation,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, XXXI, No. 3 & 4 (April-July, 2004), p. 429.

⁸⁰ Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich, Bavaria, 1933-1945*, p. 6.

Using the methods of re-reading, “against-the-grain reading” and “between-the-lines reading” to analyze the official records and conventional sources, I sought to predict and grasp what the ordinary people had thought and had done in the past. In addition, another method this study proposes to fill the lacunas in these sources and to control possible distorted, biased, and exaggerated information is to make crosschecks between the different categories of sources.

Map of the Study

This study is structured thematically in two parts. The focal point of the first part is the poor and small peasants. This part examines their critical voices about socioeconomic issues, their resistance to the rural oppressors and exploiters, and the main repercussions of their active response. The second part examines the working class in urban areas, to be more specific, industrial workers, artisans, craftspeople, low-ranking civil servants, wage-laborers, and the urban poor, delving into everyday class struggle in urban areas and the impact of this everyday class struggle on the emergence of the social policies.

Part One is arranged in six chapters. The first chapter of this part, Chapter One, begins with a detailed examination of the government’s economic policies, and oppression and exploitation mechanisms of the state agents and well-off large landowners in rural areas. Underlining the uneven distribution of arable lands, the heavy direct taxes that weighed heavily upon the poor peasants, the exploitation by monopoly system, the abuses of the power holders, this chapter presents the backdrop against which the peasants resisted.

Chapter Two traces the public outcry and critical opinion regarding economic matters, the state economic policies, and abusive and cruel state agents and large landowners in rural areas. It scrutinizes the peasants' criticisms of and demands on several issues as well as the everyday forms and means they used to raise their voices.

This public outcry in rural areas was reflected in the peasants' acts. In other words, their awareness and subjective reasoning led them to take further action against the economic conditions and the agents of the system impoverishing, overexploiting, and repressing them. The peasants resorted to a series of survival methods to cope with the economic problems and to weather the economic crisis that predominated during the great part of the interwar era. Chapter Three describes and analyzes these survival methods.

The peasants took a step further in their struggles to defend themselves against the very high and unfair taxes. In this regard, Chapter Four examines the tax resistances of the peasants. Examining the forms and methods of tax resistance and tax protests in detail, this chapter discusses how the tax resistance and widespread discontent with the heavy taxes forced the government to initiate tax relief and tax amnesty programs several times.

Chapter Five deals with the peasant resistance against the public and private monopolies in the form of smuggling. This chapter examines the smuggling of contraband items of basic consumption goods that were highly taxed and priced by the state and monopoly companies, except for drugs, arms, and human trafficking. Focusing especially on small-scale smuggling activities that diffused to the grassroots as a survival strategy of small traders, producers, and low-income consumers rather than the big deals of big smuggler bands, this chapter advances the

idea that the smuggling activities were largely of a social character, which increased the bargaining power of the low-income consumers and traders against the state and private monopolies.

The final chapter of this part, Chapter Six, concentrates on the last resort of the peasantry in the face of overexploitation and harsh domination: “rural crimes,” i.e., crop and livestock theft, poor peasants’ attacks on oppressive elements and propertied classes, and banditry. On the basis of new evidence drawn from the gendarme and politicians’ reports and the news in the press, this section argues that the widespread “rural crimes against property,” violence, and banditry were manifestation of the quiet peasant rebellion in Anatolia. It also analyzes the causes and actors of rural crimes and origins of rural outlaws by taking a closer look at their experiences in their own terms. Putting the issue in the context of social and economic conflict over scarce resources, it proposes to view the great part of the rural crimes and especially the banditry even in the eastern countryside as the everyday politics of the poor peasants against their oppressors and exploiters rather than tribal and ethnic questions. Accordingly, this chapter shows not only the eastern part of Anatolia, but also other parts of Anatolia, especially those places that were hit by the economic trends and policies highlighting the class conflicts also were plagued by the rural crimes and banditry.

Part Two analyzes the everyday forms of the working class politics focusing on the experiences of low-income wage earners’ and urban poor’s, especially their critical opinions regarding economic matters, and their survival struggles, protests and resistances against the state and the capitalist classes. This part in general argues that despite the absence of working class organizations and leftist movements, the working class struggle continued in different forms and with different means, which

were adjusted to the political conditions of the time. This struggle should be taken into account for understanding the social policy measures which the ruling circles planned to take and ultimately took, albeit in a minor way, during the period.

The first chapter of this part, Chapter Seven, after giving a historical background of the working class movement, describes the working and living conditions and economic problems of the low-income wage earners, their harsh exploitation, and the repressive measures debarring them from advancing their claims in open, organized and formal forms.

Chapter Eight delves into the low-income wage earners' and urban poor's opinions about the social and economic matters pertinent to them and the daily ways they used to manifest their voices. Chapter Nine examines the everyday forms of the working class struggle and resistance. It examines how the low-income groups and urban poor employed several methods in everyday life ranging from the simple accommodation tactics and small acts of resistance to simple legal actions to pursue their rights so as to survive, to minimize their losses, or to maximize their gains.

The last chapter of this part, Chapter Ten, scrutinizes the last resorts of the working class, i.e., the individual and collective action against their exploiters, ranging from individual intimidation and violence toward foremen, company managers and entrepreneurs to collective spontaneous, unplanned and informal strikes and walkouts.

PART ONE

THE EVERYDAY DYNAMICS AND FORMS OF PEASANT POLITICS

CHAPTER ONE

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, STATE ECONOMIC POLICIES, AND THE PEASANTS IN RURAL AREAS

By the 1920s and 1930s, the greater part of Turkey was like a big village that had been devastated by the successive wars in the last decade of the Ottoman Empire. During the National Struggle, not only the occupant forces, but also those of the nationalists waging the war against the occupying states exploited the peasants to the last drop of their blood.⁸¹ That is why in the midst of the National Struggle, İsmet Pasha had said to his army officers, “Be known that the Sultan is your enemy, and the occupying nations are your enemy, and between you and me, our nation is your enemy.” This nation was overwhelmingly composed of poor and desperate Anatolian peasants.

After the long and devastating war years, the population of Turkey decreased from about 16 million to about 13 million by the outset of the Republican era. The wars profoundly changed the composition of the population. Due to the sharp decline in urban population, urban dwellers living in towns and cities of 10,000 people or more constituted only 15 percent of the population in the early 1920s. This rate was about 20 percent before the wars.⁸² That is to say, the proportion of the urban population to the peasants dramatically declined. The wars made Turkey a more rural society with a more agricultural economy. In the interwar period, peasants formed an

⁸¹ Korkut Boratav, “Anadolu Köyünde Savaş ve Yıkım: Bekir Eliçin’in Romanının Öğrettikleri ve Düşündürdükleri,” *Toplum ve Bilim*, No. 15-16 (Autumn-Winter 1982), pp. 61-75. In addition, for the social impact of the war on the ordinary men, and especially ordinary women, see the forthcoming dissertation of Elif Mahir Metinsoy, *Ottoman-Turkish Women during World War One and National Struggle: Everyday Experience and Response to the Social Impact of the War, 1914-1922* (forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Strasbourg, the Department of Cultures et Sociétés en Europe, and Bogazici University, the Ataturk Institute for Modern Turkish History).

⁸² Roger Owen and Şevket Pamuk, *A History of Middle East Economies in the Twentieth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 11.

absolute majority. Agriculture formed the basis of Turkish economy. In 1927, 81 percent, and in 1935, 76 percent of the population engaged in agriculture. The share of agriculture in the Gross Domestic Product was 49 percent in 1926 and 47 percent in 1936.⁸³

In this new configuration, one of main social bases of the new political leadership in Ankara was the large landowners, along with the bureaucratic and military elite. Therefore, it is hardly surprising to see that the economic policies pursued by the Republican state favored the large landowners. However, this did not mean that peasants were passive, ignorant and totally silenced masses; on the contrary, as this part will show, the peasant politics in different forms and motives played a significant role in the shaping of the state policies. However, before the analysis of peasant politics, an exploration of socio-economic context which gave rise to the everyday politics of the peasantry is necessary for better understanding of the dynamics of peasant politics.

Unequal Land Ownership

Since the mid 19th century, there had been a decisive trend of commercialization and recognition of private property in the Ottoman lands. The increasing integration of the Ottoman economy with the capitalist western economies via international trade had given rise to the commercialization of agriculture and lands. From the mid-19th century onward, the Ottoman rulers had also begun to recognize the legal status of the private ownership of lands by enacting a series of land laws.⁸⁴ One of the

⁸³ Yahya Sezai Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)* (5th ed.; İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2002), pp. 112-113.

⁸⁴ As a matter of fact, at first sight, the Ottoman Empire seemed to be a central state which had the possessions of entire lands. However, since the beginning, the local social and political forces, to be

common principles of the modernization attempts from the Tanzimat reforms to the constitutional era was the inviolability and security of private property as well as the security of life of all Ottoman subjects. Especially it was the National Economy policy of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) government during the Great War that gave rise to the emergence of the new and more powerful Muslim-Turkish merchants and notables in Anatolia.⁸⁵

From the first days of the National Struggle, the Anatolian notables and landowners had supported the nationalist forces for the sake of the preservation of their economic interests. They had actively taken part in the local national resistance committees called *Müdafaa-i Hukuk Cemiyetleri* (Societies for the Defense of the Rights), which constituted the nucleus of the RPP. During and at the end of the war years, the deportation of a huge amount of the non-Muslim population from Anatolia had allowed the Muslim landowners and notables to merge the evacuated lands to their own properties.

As soon as the new regime was established in 1923, it reinforced private ownership over land via a series of legislation. First, the Cadastral Code in 1924 and especially the Civil Law adopted from the Swiss Civil Law in 1926 addressed the existing chaos in land tenure in favor of private ownership. Another legislation

more specific, the notables and large estate owners had their own lands and great power in localities. The social and economic power of the local notables increased between the seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries. For the political influence and role of these local social actors, especially local landed interests and merchants see Ehud R. Toledano, "The Emergence of Ottoman-Local Elites in the Middle East and North Africa (1700-1900), in *Middle Eastern Politics and Ideas: A History from Within*, ed. by Illan Pappé and Moshe Ma'oz (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1997); Karl Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus, 1708-1758* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Jane Hathaway, *Politics of Household in Ottoman Egypt: The Rise of Qazdağlıs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Dina Rizk Khoury, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Devlet ve Taşra Toplumu: Musul, 1540-1834* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999). In addition, the nineteenth century witnessed a fast commercialization in the agriculture in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire, see Donald Quatert, "The Commercialization of Agriculture in Ottoman Turkey," *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 1 (1980), pp. 38-55.

⁸⁵ See Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de "Milli İktisat", 1908-1918* (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1982). Zafer Toprak, *İttihat-Terakki ve Cihan Harbi: Savaş Ekonomisi ve Türkiye'de Devletçilik* (İstanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2003).

recognized the property rights of those landowners who claimed certain pieces of lands that had been granted by the Ottoman government in 1929.

During the 1920s and 1930s, many landowners and local influential households, exploiting the new Civil Law, fraudulently appropriated vast arable lands or those lands that formerly had been distributed to Balkan refugees or landless poor peasants. In one of his speeches, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Şükrü Kaya, admitted how the large estate owners, some of whom were RPP deputies, had intrigued to takeover those lands that had been distributed to the refugees. The refugees had transformed those swampy, marshy, and infertile lands into arable lands with immense industry. Then, some influential people staked claims on these arable lands and drove the refugees off these lands.⁸⁶

Some influential large landowners in Anatolia intentionally damaged small dams and water gates in order to push the peasants to leave their lands.⁸⁷ Especially the adverse effects of the Great Depression on the smallholders gave the large landowners and usurers opportunity to buy the peasant's lands dirt cheap or to take the land of debtors on account.⁸⁸

During the early Republican period, despite a steady trend towards the growth of large estates, the land tenure system varied from region to region. Although smallholding and middle-sized farms were largely the common patterns, the large estates prevailed in certain regions characterized by export-oriented agriculture and monoculture. In Adana and the surrounding region, which specialized in cotton cultivation, were the largest estates that employed wage labor or sharecroppers.

⁸⁶ Speech of the Minister of Internal Affairs Şükrü Kaya in the Great National Assembly of Turkey about the Settlement Law on June 15, 1934. Suat Aksoy, *100 Soruda Türkiye'de Toprak Meselesi* (İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1971), p. 56.

⁸⁷ Falih Rıfkı [Atay], *Bizim Akdeniz* (Ankara: [Hakimiyet-i Milliye Matbaası], 1934), p. 37.

⁸⁸ Oya Silier, *Türkiye'de Tarımsal Yapının Gelişimi (1923-1938)* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, 1981), pp. 56-60.

Likely, in several western cities such as İzmir, Aydın, Denizli, Manisa and their surroundings, many large farms were producing cotton, tobacco, grape, and fig for especially external markets.

The large estates, which were more than 50 hectares, constituted a considerable portion of the total number of farms in Anatolia. According to Ömer Lütü Barkan's estimations, by the mid-1930s, the largest estates, with more than 500 hectares, constituted 0.01 of the landowners and possessed 640,000 hectares, proportionally 3.7 percent of all lands. The number of large estates between 50 and 500 hectares was about 5800. These estates constituted the 0.24 of all rural households and owned 9.96 percent of whole lands. That is to say, 0.25 percent of the large estate owners held around 14 percent of all of the privately owned lands in Turkey. The middle and small holdings with less than 50 hectares made up around 2.5 million.⁸⁹

Some other research showed that the number of large estates was greater than Barkan had estimated. Zhukovsky, a Soviet expert calculated in the mid-1920s that the only 5 percent of the landowners controlled around 65 percent of the lands.⁹⁰ Hâmit Sadi, a contemporary geographer, calculated the number of large landowners as 33,000 and their total holdings as 35 percent of the lands of Turkey.⁹¹ According to a later research of Tezel, the number of large landowners with more than 500 hectares was more than 1000 at least. By the early 1940s, less than 1 percent of the rural households owned around 20 percent of the all privately owned lands.⁹²

⁸⁹ Ömer Lütü Barkan, "'Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu' ve Türkiye'de Zirai Bir Reformun Ana Meseleleri," *Türkiye'de Toprak Meselesi: Toplu Eserler 1* (İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1980), p. 473.

⁹⁰ Peter Mihailovich Zhukovski, *Türkiye'nin Zirai Biüyesi* (Ankara: Türkiye Şeker Fabrikaları, 1951), quoted in Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, p. 359.

⁹¹ Hâmit Sadi [Selen], *İktisadi Türkiye: Tabii, Beşeri ve Mevzii Coğrafya Tetkikleri* (İstanbul: Yüksek İktisat ve Ticaret Mektebi Yayınları, 1932), p. 68.

⁹² Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, pp. 360-361.

A brief look at the land surveys conducted in 1927 and 1950 in a comparative manner can be helpful to evaluate the change of the land tenure system in the 1930s. A preliminary comparison suggests that although the small and middle size farming preserved its importance, there was a tendency to the dispossession of smallholders. Indeed, the rate of the landless peasant household was 17 percent in 1927, this increased to 20 percent in 1950.⁹³ By the end of the 1930s, Barkan calculated that 33 percent of all peasant households were both landless and very smallholders. Again, according to his calculations, of 40,300 villages, around 1500 village inhabitants possessed no land.⁹⁴

According to the 1950 land statistics, the rates of the landless rural households were 6 percent for the Mediterranean region, 8 percent for the Black Sea region, 14 percent for the Marmara region, 18 percent for the Central Anatolia region, and 21 percent for the Aegean region. The most unequal land distribution was in the eastern and southeastern parts of Anatolia. The rate of landless peasant households in the southeast was 40 percent, whereas the rate of the large landowner households was 35 percent. In the Eastern Anatolia the landless households was around 25 percent.⁹⁵

Social organization also was a determinant of land ownership. In the eastern, especially southeastern parts of Anatolia, a land tenure system resembling a feudal system, in which the peasants were supposed to be fully depended materially and ideologically on the power-block of these intercepted focuses of loyalty, i.e., tribal

⁹³ Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, p. 363.

⁹⁴ Barkan, "Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu," p. 478.

⁹⁵ Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, pp. 344-348.

chiefs, property owners and religious leaders, prevailed. These statuses sometimes converged in one person.⁹⁶

The vast unused lands, relative high number of smallholders, and low population/land ratio in Anatolian countryside did not necessarily mean that there was no land-hunger among the poor and low-income smallholders and landless peasants. Lack of irrigation, undrained swampy lands, barren soil, mountainous and rough terrains made considerable sections of the Anatolian lands unfit for cultivation. The fertile arable lands were scanty and they were in the hands of a limited number of rich farmers. That is to say, the population/fertile land ratio was not so low to argue that the land hunger was not a major problem of Anatolian peasants.⁹⁷ Briefly, the land was relatively abundant, but the fertile land ready for cultivation was not so.

State Policies: Burdensome Agricultural Taxes and Monopolies

As will be discussed below, the large landowners were one of the most important parties of the ruling coalition in early Republican Turkey. Therefore, the RPP was sensitive their interests. The economic policies pursued by the government reinforced the large landowners' private ownership of the land and their economic standing. The railway projects and industrial drive, which were funded with the agricultural taxes and the revenues of the state monopolies, weighed heavily on the poor and small-scale peasants. The strict state control and monopoly over forests deprived them of a substantial economic source. These economic policies, especially the agricultural

⁹⁶ See İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı* (İstanbul: Matbaacılık ve Neşriyat Türk Anonim Şirketi, 1934), pp. 176-187.

⁹⁷ Yusuf Saim Atasagun, *Türkiye'de İçtimai Siyaset Meseleleri/Sozialpolitische Probleme der Türkei: İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuasından Ayı Bası* (İstanbul: Güven Basımevi, 1941), p. 5, 14.

taxes and state monopolies, resulted in the pauperization of the Anatolian countryside.

Agricultural Taxes

First, contrary to the Republican presentation of the abolition of the tithe (a traditional and religious tax in the form of the submission of a one-tenth part of the crop to the government or tax farmers) in 1925 as a grant to the peasantry, the government overcompensated the losses of tithe revenues with a set of regulations concerning the direct and indirect taxes. First, the rates of the Land Tax were increased in 1925. Its share among the budget revenues rose to 6.5 percent in 1929, although its rate was lowered in the 1930s.⁹⁸

Such a tax policy forced the peasants to produce as much as possible. By increasing this tax, the government told the peasants, so to speak, “to produce for the market” or “perish.” However, the great part of the Anatolian peasants was able to produce only for their own needs or a small amount for the market. Only the large landowners and middle-scale farmers were able to produce on large scales with much more input, equipment, and agricultural labor and yield necessary cash to pay the Land Tax. In addition, many small and even middle-scale landowners were not able to cultivate all of their lands due to the lack of necessary input and labor. Therefore, this tax weighed on poor peasants and small and some part of middle plot holders. The peasants in an Ankara village with whom Niyazi Berkes talked, for instance,

⁹⁸ See İzzettin Önder, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Tarım Kesimine Uygulanan Vergi Politikası,” in *Türkiye’de Tarımsal Yapılar (1923-2000)*, ed. by Şevket Pamuk and Zafer Toprak (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1988); and Yorgaki Effimianidis, *Cihad İktisad Buhranı Önünde Türkiye* (İstanbul: Kaadçılık ve Matbaacılık Anonim Şirketi, 1935-1936), p. 278. According to Hershlag, by 1929, Land Tax constituted 13.7 percent of the annual revenue of the government. Z. Yehuda Hershlag, *Turkey: The Challenge of Growth* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), p. 51.

compared and contrasted the tithe and the Land Tax and complained of the land tax. They said that the tithe was more favorable to the current Land Tax.⁹⁹

Another problem with the Land Tax was the lack of systematic and accurate land registers. Therefore, the tax officials assessed too low taxes for very valuable and expensive lands or too high taxes for small and less valuable lands. In the second half of the 1920s, because the value of the land in terms of gold coin climbed suddenly, the Land Tax assessments according to this gold coin values caused a dramatic increase in the Land Tax. Furthermore, despite the radical decline in agricultural prices and even in the land prices with the Great Slump in 1929, the rate of the Land Tax was not reduced proportionally. In addition, during the economic crisis, the tax continued to be assessed according to the previous astronomical values of the lands. As noted by Hatipoğlu, although land at value of 20-25 TL in Adana region before the economic crisis declined dramatically to 5 TL, the tax on such kinds of land was assessed according to their previous high prices.¹⁰⁰

Incorrect tax assessments were a common problem. It was reported that even in western Anatolia, the rates of the Building Tax and Land Tax officially, which had to be 10 percent at most, reached 40 percent because of incorrect tax assessment and the abuses of the tax collectors.¹⁰¹ Given the prevalence of smallholdings throughout Anatolia, it is reasonable to think that this heavy tax must have created a financial burden for the great part of the self-sufficient small farmers rather than the large landowners who took advantage of the scale economy.

In the eastern regions, it is difficult to say that the age-old traditional taxes and dues disappeared with the new regime. Even after the abolition of the tithe, for

⁹⁹ Niyazi Berkes, *Bazı Ankara Köyleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma* (Ankara: Uzluğ Basımevi, 1942), p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ Şevket Raşit Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ziraat Buhranı* (Ankara: Yüksek Ziraat Enstitüsü, 1936), p. 77.

¹⁰¹ See the report of Bursa Deputy Şefik Lütfi, 09.02.1931, Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/729.478.1], 16.03.1931.

instance, many tribal leaders and landowners insisted on continuing to collect it in the way it had been.¹⁰²

Another financial burden for the peasantry which resulted in their pauperization was the Livestock Tax. There had been an increasing trend in the rates of the Livestock Tax since the establishment of the new National Assembly on 23 April 1920. The Livestock Tax was the first source of revenue that the new National Assembly in Ankara claimed the right to collect so as to fund the Independence War. Therefore, the first law article discussed and enacted in the new National Assembly was the new Livestock Tax Law (*Ağnam Resmi Kanunu*).

This law increased the tax by four-fold in 1920. In 1923, the new government increased it once again. Right after the abolition of the tithe, the government broadened the scope of the Livestock Tax, extending it from sheep and goats to other animals such as cows, buffalos, oxen, donkeys, pigs, horses, and camels. The tax rates were raised again. In addition, the government decided that livestock owners were to pay a fixed tax for each animal that was sent to slaughterhouse and was put on sale.¹⁰³

Especially when the peasants abandoned cultivation and turned to animal husbandry because of drought in 1927 and 1928,¹⁰⁴ the government raised the tax rates two times in 1927. In March 1927, the government increased the rates about 7.5 piasters for each animal. In June 1927, the rates were raised again by 50 percent as the Education Tax.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, *Yol: İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, Vol. 6 (İstanbul: Yol Yayınları, [1979]), p. 29, 126-127.

¹⁰³ Cezmi Emiroğlu, *Türkiye’de Vergi Sistemi: Vasıtasız Vergiler* (Ankara: Damga Matbaası, 1932), p. 110.

¹⁰⁴ See İ. Hüsrev, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı*, p. 142.

¹⁰⁵ Emiroğlu, *Türkiye’de Vergi Sistemi: Vasıtasız Vergiler*, p. 111.

In 1929, the tax rates on sheep, goats, and donkeys were doubled once more. The rates on other animals were increased by a half percent.¹⁰⁶ The Livestock Tax remained at these high rates until the mid-1930s. The average share of the Livestock Tax in the budget revenues was around 5.9 percent between 1925 and 1930 and 5.2 percent between 1930 and 1939.¹⁰⁷

Another tax that distressed all citizens and especially the poor peasant majority was the Road Tax. It was the most heartbreaking tax, leaving deep marks on the lives of the peasants. The National Assembly first enacted the Road Obligation Law (*Yol Mükellefiyeti Kanunu*) in 1921 during the National Struggle. The tax levied on each male between 18 and 60 except for the handicapped required the payment of four days of his daily wage or earnings or working compulsorily for three days at road building. Just before the tithe was abolished, the Republican government passed a new Road Obligation Law so as to offset the absence of the tithe that was planned to be discarded. In 1929, the government increased the amounts and obligations of the tax with the Law of Highroad and Bridges (*Şose ve Köprüler Kanunu*, No. 1525), according to which taxpayers were obliged to work on the road up to 12 days a year at road building sites at 12 hours distance from their domiciles, unless they paid the tax, which was between 8 and 10 TL.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, this tax allowed the government to benefit from an unpaid labor force constituted from the lower classes, most of whom was poor peasants. Those peasants who were unable to pay the tax were forced to work in the road building sites far from their villages. For instance, the İstanbul governorship decided that about 8000

¹⁰⁶ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran*, pp. 77-79.

¹⁰⁷ Önder, "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Tarım Kesimine Uygulanan Vergi Politikası," pp. 125-126.

¹⁰⁸ Afet İnan, *Yurt Bilgisi Notlarımdan: Vergi Bilgisi* (İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1930), pp. 95-98; Isparta Mebusu Kemal Turan, *Yeni Vergi Kanunları'nın Tatbiki Mahiyeti ve Tediye Kabiliyeti Hakkında Tahliller* (İzmir: Hafız Ali Matbaası, 1931), p. 97.

peasants who had not paid the taxes of 1926, 1927, and 1928 in the Çatalca district of İstanbul were to work at least 36 days in road constructions.¹⁰⁹

The road building companies, highway officials, engineers, and local administrators, and the gendarme soldiers in rural areas often abused this tax by forcing the peasants to work in very bad conditions in more distant places and longer amounts of time than the law prescribed. For instance, some peasants from İsabeyli Village of the Çal district in Denizli complained about that the highway engineer and officials had forced them to work for 18 days instead of 12.¹¹⁰

As reported from Kırklareli and Konya, for instance, even those laborer peasants whose daily wages did not exceed 10 piasters in Kırklareli and 20 piasters in the Ilgın district of Konya were forced to pay 12 TL. As expected, most of them who were not able to pay this amount were overworked in roads in heavy working conditions.¹¹¹ Especially in the eastern part of the country, the Road Tax reached 15 TL, and compulsory work on the roads lasted longer than the law ordained.¹¹² What is worse, sometimes, those peasants who had paid the Road Tax also were forcibly worked in roads on the grounds that they had not paid the tax.¹¹³

In addition to this, the government levied the Contribution Tax to the Turkish Aviation Society (*Türk Tayyare Cemiyetine Yardım Vergisi*) in 1931. This direct tax also constituted a financial burden for the peasantry as well as other segments of society. In villages and towns, the Aviation Society offices side by side with the

¹⁰⁹ *Milliyet*, 02.04.1932, quoted in Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2 (İstanbul: Bibliotek Yayınları, 1992), p. 239.

¹¹⁰ "Halk Sütunu," *Köroğlu*, 10.07.1929.

¹¹¹ BCA MGM [30.10/79.520.3], 06.01.1931.

¹¹² Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, pp. 126-127.

¹¹³ "Haksızlık Olur mu Ya!" *Köroğlu*, 28.03.1936.

gendarme stations or official buildings seized at least 1 percent of all agricultural crops and livestock that the peasants harvested or brought to sell in the market.¹¹⁴

In 1934, the government imposed a new tax titled the Wheat Protection Tax on the flourmills. The rate of this tax was the cash value of 12 percent of the wheat that was brought to the flourmills to grind. The Wheat Protection Tax covered only the mills in towns and city centers.¹¹⁵ On the other hand, most of towns in the Anatolian countryside in those years were not more than big villages, most of the populations of which were peasants engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. Therefore, the peasants living in small towns were affected adversely by this tax. Furthermore, most of those people who brought their wheat to flourmills in towns were peasants from neighboring villages. Therefore, the tax affected the village population living in close proximity to towns. Apart from this, some local governors and finance officials arbitrarily expanded the scope of the tax by taxing the flourmills in villages exempted from the tax.¹¹⁶

The tax burden of the peasants living in the eastern parts of the country was relatively heavier. First, as stated above, some tribal and abolished religious taxes continued to be enforced. Second, the purchasing power of the *mecidiye* (gold and silver coins, the old imperial monetary unit), which kept its function as current money especially in the southeastern region, depreciated with the Great Depression. By 1932 the value of 1 TL tripled, reaching 60 silver piasters, whereas 1 TL was equal to around 20 silver piasters before the economic crisis. In other words, they had been paying only 20 silver piasters for each TL to the tax collector in the past,

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29, 126-127.

¹¹⁵ *Buğday Koruma Karşılığı Vergisi* (İstanbul: T.C. Maliye Vekaleti Varidat Umum Müdürlüğü, 1938).

¹¹⁶ Eşref, "Haymana Halkı Neler Yapılmasını İstiyor?" *Vakit*, 10.10.1934; "Fakir Kasaba Halkı Yemeklik Undan Vergi Alınmaması İçin Hükümetten Rica Ediyorlar," *Köroğlu*, 04.08.1934; "Un Vergisi," *Köroğlu*, 08.12.1934.

but after the economic crisis, this amount rose to 60 silver piasters for each Turkish lira. This also made the tax burden heavier and more unbearable for low-income peasants.¹¹⁷

Finally, these taxes fell most heavily on the poor peasants, not on the rich landowners or tribal leaders. Because the tax collectors and the officials of the Aviation Society usually resorted to the *ağas* and tribal chiefs as intermediary group for taxation, these influential groups generally manipulated the tax collectors and other officials and the great portion of the tax burden fell down on the ordinary peasants.¹¹⁸

The State Monopolies

In addition to these direct taxes, the peasants as well as the city dwellers were exposed to indirect taxation through the state monopolies. This indirect taxation had begun to appear in the mid-1920s. After the establishment of the new state, the government started to monopolize the production and/or trade or both of many items such as salt, tobacco and all tobacco products, cigarette papers, alcoholic beverages, sugar, matches, lighters, and forest products. Heavily taxing them or leasing out the production or trade of some monopoly items to a limited number of traders, merchants and private enterprises, the government yielded great revenues. The monopoly revenues stood for the second largest source of revenue in the state budget after taxes. The state monopolies, which were devised to provide additional income as indirect taxation to the government, along with other direct taxes drove down the living standards in the countryside. The state monopolies hit hard not only the very

¹¹⁷ Kuvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 86.

¹¹⁸ See Kuvılcımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 384.

large number of non-cultivators who were involved in trade, but also the cultivators and peasant consumers of the items subjected to the monopoly.

In 1924, the government first monopolized the match and lighter trade and production and transferred the monopoly right to the American-Turkish Investment Corporation in 1930. In 1925, abolishing *the Régie Co-intéressée des Taback de l'Empire Ottomane* (tobacco monopoly in the Ottoman Empire granted to a French company),¹¹⁹ the Republican government directly undertook the functions of the Régie by establishing the General Directorate of Tobacco Monopoly (*Tütün İnhisarı Umum Müdürlüğü*).¹²⁰ In 1926, the government decided to extend the scope of the monopoly to a product that had been never monopolized before, i.e., spirits and alcoholic beverages. The General Directorate of Sprits and Alcoholic Beverages (*İspirto ve Meşrubat-u Küuliye İnhisarı Müdürlüğü*) was authorized to produce spirits, *raki*¹²¹, wine, and to sell licenses for the production and trade of alcoholic beverages.¹²² The following year, on 1 June 1927, the government, establishing the General Directorate of Salt Monopoly (*Tuz İnhisarı Umum Müdürlüğü*), monopolized salt production, and restricted its production and trade to only those merchants who held the licenses issued by the Monopoly Administration.¹²³ Finally, in July 1932, the government monopolized the export and import of sugar, tea and coffee.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ For detailed information on the regie administration in local level see Filiz Dıġıroġlu, *Memalik-i Osmaniye Duhanları Müşterekü'l-Menfaa Reji Şirketi, Trabzon Reji İdaresi, 1883-1914* (İstanbul: Osmanlı Bankası Arşiv ve Araştırma Merkezi, 2007).

¹²⁰ With the Law titled “Tütün İdare-i Muvakkatnamesi ve Sigara Kağıdı İnhisarı Hakkında Kanun,” No. 558 and Date. February 26, 1925, tobacco production and tobacco trade were monopolized by the government. Naşit Yılmaz, *Türkiye’de Tütün Ekspertliği Mesleği ve Tarihi Gelişimi* (İzmir: Tütün Ekspertleri Derneği, 1995), p. 11.

¹²¹ Anise-flavored strong spirit distilled from grape and popularly consumed in Turkey and the Balkans.

¹²² Fatma Doğruel and A. Suut Doğruel, *Osmanlı’dan Günümüze Tekel* (İstanbul: Tekel, 2000), p. 144.

¹²³ See also Emiroġlu, *Türkiye’de Vergi Sistemi: Üçüncü Kitap, İnhisarlar ve Devlet Emlâki*, p. 64.

¹²⁴ Bilsay Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 1 (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1988), p. 417.

All of these autonomous monopoly directorates, except for matches, lighters and salt monopolies that were performed by private companies, were merged in the General Directorate of Monopoly Administration (*İnhisarlar Umum Müdürlüğü*) in 1932 under the Ministry of Customs and Monopolies.¹²⁵

Although the state monopoly directorate did not include forests or forests products, the General Directorate of the Forestry under the Ministry of Economy monopolized the forests in the early 1920s. Restricting the use of the forests by peasants through several regulations, the government strictly enclosed the forests. Leasing out the large forests to timber and forestry companies or directly running some forests, the government deprived peasants of an important economic source.¹²⁶

The revenues that came from the monopolies provided a large funds to government projects such as industrialization, and highway and railway buildings. The tobacco monopoly alone generated between 10 and 14 percent of the total incomes in the state budget during the period.¹²⁷ Therefore, in the face of the resultant resistance to the monopolies through widespread smuggling activities, the government severely fought back. For this aim, the government promulgated the Law about Prohibition and Prosecution of the Smuggling (*Kaçakçılığın Men-i ve Takibine Dair Kanun*) in 1927.¹²⁸ When it proved to be ineffective, the new Law about the Prohibition and Prosecution of Smuggling was passed on 15 June 1929.¹²⁹ Since it also fell short of preventing the widespread smuggling activities, the government

¹²⁵ Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 130.

¹²⁶ See Sadullah, "Orman Teşkilatı," *Ziraat Gazetesi*, No: [9-10-47] (Oct., 1933), p. 469.

¹²⁷ Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 151.

¹²⁸ Kaçakçılığın Men-i ve Takibi Hakkında Kanun, No. 1126, Date. 10.07.1927, *Düstur III*, Vol.8, p.1783.

¹²⁹ Kaçakçılığın Men ve Takibi Hakkında Kanun, No. 1519, Date. 15.04.1929, *Düstur III*, Vol. 10, p. 1798.

amended it by enacting the Law about the Prohibition and Prosecution of Smuggling (No. 1918) in January 1932.¹³⁰

The Tobacco Monopoly

After the Regié was abolished, the government undertook the tobacco monopoly by promulgating the Law about Interim Tobacco Administration and Cigarette Paper Monopoly (*Tütün İdare-i Muvakkatesi ve Sigara Kâğıdı İnhisarı Hakkında Kanun*) (No.558) on 26 November 1925. With this law, monetary fines on smuggling were increased five times. In addition, the government banned the production and trade of cigarette papers and white carbon papers. With the end of the economic restrictions imposed by the Lausanne Treaty, in order to cope with the smuggling and regulate the tobacco market more effectively, the government enacted a new and more encompassing Tobacco Monopoly Law in 1930. The Tobacco Monopoly Law (*Tütün İnhisarı Kanunu*) (No.1701) regulated all of the details pertinent to the production and trade of tobacco and tobacco products. This law remained in force until the promulgation of new Tobacco Monopoly Law in 1938.¹³¹

The revenues generated by the tobacco monopoly were of great importance to financing the railway and bridge building. The ruling circles frequently declared the significance of the tobacco monopoly revenues in the state budget. In August 1928, the director of the tobacco monopoly administration explicitly stated the importance of the tobacco monopoly for the industrialization projects and especially the railway projects by declaring that the great portion of the state revenues assigned to the railway building was derived from the tobacco monopoly. Therefore, tobacco

¹³⁰ Kaçakçılığın Men ve Takibine Dair Kanun, No. 1918, Date. 07.01.1932, *Düstur III*, Vol. 13, p. 57.

¹³¹ Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 133.

smuggling had to be wiped out throughout the country and the people had to be convinced about the harmful effects of consuming the smuggled tobacco to the country and about the benefits of the using the monopoly products and with efficient propaganda.¹³²

Table 1 - State Revenues Yielded by the Monopoly Products and Their Share in the State Budget (A Thousand Turkish Liras).

Years	Tobacco	Salt	Alcoholic Beverages	Gun Powder	Match and Lighter	Defense Tax	Total Monopoly Revenues	Total State Revenues	Share of Monopoly Revenues in State Revenues Budget %
1924	5,487						5,487		
1925	10,181		132				10,313		
1926	9,844	9,170	374	32			19,420	206,000	9,43
1927	18,850	8,086	3,000	358			30,294	229,000	13,23
1928	22,110	7,354	4,100	675			34,239	249,000	13,75
1929	24,000	7,992	3,659	332			35,983	253,000	14,22
1930	23,500	7,641	3,302	954			35,397	224,000	15,80
1931	21,080	7,218	3,840	255			32,393	193,000	16,78
1932	20,100	6,478	4,550	124			31,252	212,000	14,74
1933	20,010	6,580	4,608	1	1,800		32,999	205,000	16,10
1934	18,789	6,179	4,330	2	1,277	3,189	33,766	233,000	14,49

Source: Fatma Doğruel and A. Suut Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel* (İstanbul: Tekel, 2000), p. 152.

Undoubtedly, such indirect taxation put additional burdens on the shoulders of the peasants as cultivators, traders and consumers. Although the official and nationalist literature has presented the abolition of Régie as a great benefit and grant to the peasants, the monopoly of the new regime also exerted great effort to control strictly

¹³² The most important financial source for the railway building projects of the government was the monopoly revenues, especially those came from the tobacco monopoly. Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, p. 251. Indeed, the documents of the Tobacco Monopoly Directorate confirm this. The Tobacco Monopoly Directory-Gerenal underlined the crucial importance of the revenues that came from the tobacco monopoly for the railway projects. In this respect, he argued that the tobacco smuggling was a serious threat to the implementation of the railway projects. See *Tütün İnhisarlar İdaresi, Muharreratı Umumiye Mecmuası*, IV, 1929, p. 79, quoted in Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 150.

the tobacco production and trade and harshly oppressed those who resisted it. The tobacco monopoly did not permit the peasants to cultivate tobacco or sell their products freely in domestic market. Because the government banned tobacco cultivation in some provinces and districts, the peasants in these restricted regions could not grow tobacco. Therefore, many tobacco farmers were hit by the government's ban on tobacco cultivation in their regions in the 1920s.

The ban on cultivation, production and trade of all tobacco and tobacco products outside the monopoly and a limited number of licensed companies closed a large field of business to many small-income tobacco farmers and traders. In other words, the introduction of the tobacco monopoly meant the removal of a common livelihood for many farmers and peasant-origin itinerant merchants travelling village-to-village or town-to-town with their donkeys, horses, camels, or on foot with their backpacks full of tobacco, cigarettes, and cigarette papers.¹³³

In addition, the fate of the tobacco peasants was in the hands of the monopoly administration, which determined the price levels and the amounts that would be produced. Furthermore, the government sought to dominate all tobacco and cigarette market even in the most distant parts of the country. In order to wipe out the informal tobacco production and trade in the eastern part of the country, the government established several small tobacco factories in Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Malatya and Urfa during the mid-1920s.¹³⁴

Consequently, the disputes and conflicts, sometimes to the death, between peasants who resisted the monopoly and monopoly officials or gendarme soldiers continued as in the past. What is worse, whereas in the Ottoman Empire the gendarme and local administrators had remained generally passive deliberately

¹³³ See Article 6 and 7, 8 of the Tobacco Monopoly Law No.1701, *Düstur III*, Vol.11, p.1804.

¹³⁴ Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 289, 293,

against Ottoman smugglers, because of their resentment of the Regié's control over the tobacco business,¹³⁵ the Republican government controlling the tobacco directly entrusted the gendarme to fight the smugglers efficiently. That is to say, the state itself took a stand against the smuggling with its official security forces.

Since tobacco was relatively a more lucrative industrial crop, more and more peasants tended to cultivate it throughout the inter-war period, except for 1932 and 1933, 1934, when the prices hit bottom. Approximately 120,000 farmers engaged in tobacco cultivation during the period. With their families and laborers, 500,000 peasants worked in tobacco cultivation between 1925 and 1938. Another 30,000 people were employed in tobacco processing in the same period.¹³⁶

However, tobacco cultivation was a difficult job in its all stages for both the cultivators and laborers. For the tobacco farmers, the cultivating and harvesting tobacco and especially post-harvest processes were literally life consuming. On tobacco lands, tobacco farmers were forbidden to produce any kind of tobacco without official permission. They had to pay a considerable sum of money fulfilling several bureaucratic procedures to receive tobacco cultivation permission from the monopoly administration. The monopoly administration had the right to limit both the lands the peasants would cultivate and the amounts of tobacco the cultivators would produce. Tobacco farmers were obliged to sell their produce to the monopoly administration or to the licensed companies at prices set by the monopoly administration under the strict control of the government. That is to say, the tobacco peasants were at the monopoly administration's and a few tobacco companies' mercy. Finally, as one can easily anticipate, several difficulties arose for the

¹³⁵ Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908, Reactions to European Penetration* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 19.

¹³⁶ Şevket Süreyya [Aydemir], *Ege Günü I*, (Ankara: Milli İktisat ve Tasarruf Cemiyeti, 1934), p. 54.

cultivators during the dealings with the monopoly administration and the tobacco companies due to the tricks of the tobacco experts to lower the prices.

The prices the monopoly administration and the companies offered were one of the most important problems the tobacco cultivators faced. The monopoly administration and the tobacco companies always sought to lower the prices to maximize their profits as far as possible. They especially sought to benefit from sharp price declines during the economic crisis and offered ruinous prices, although the prices of the tobacco products such as cigarette and cigarette papers remained stable during those time.

In the midst of the economic crisis, which lowered the tobacco prices noticeably, the monopoly administration offered only 10 piasters for one kilo of tobacco, while marketing a small package of cut rag at 120 piasters.¹³⁷ Although the prices varied from place to place, the average prices of tobacco were around 20-30 piasters per kilo. However, as will be addressed in detail in Chapter Five, the prices offered by the monopoly and the companies went down to 7 piasters per kilo. Compared with the prices before the crisis changing between 100 and 150 piasters, the price decline was shocking and very devastating to the tobacco producers.¹³⁸

Along with the crisis, the exploitative practices of the monopoly and tobacco companies played a role in the emergence of these ruinous prices. The tobacco companies made purchases in coordination with each other in order to lower the prices as much as possible. Before the purchases, they reached an agreement upon the low prices they would offer to the cultivators. Then, the experts of these companies did not give prices above such predetermined prices to the tobacco farmers. Even after the prices recovered in the mid-1930s, the tobacco monopoly and

¹³⁷ Arif Oruç, *Arif Oruç'un Yarını (1933)*, edited by Mete Tunçay (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1991), p. 145.

¹³⁸ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraat Buhranı*, p. 33, 35.

private companies gave only 25-30 piasters to farmers per kilo and made a killing by marketing a kilo of processed tobacco at around 3 or 4 TL.¹³⁹

The peasants engaging in tobacco cultivation often faced unfair and fraudulent treatment by monopoly and company experts, who frequently attempted to deceive the cultivators by scrapping and rejecting a huge part of the tobacco and then accepting these parts at very low prices. In fact, the experts offered normal or high prices before the harvest in order to make a bargain. Upon their contract, the peasants generally showed ultimate attention to their crops and did not accept the higher prices offered by other merchants and companies. However, after the peasants had harvested and made their tobacco bales available to the monopoly administration or companies they had contracted with, the experts, arguing that the tobacco was of poor quality and contained waste or rotten leaves, did not accept some part of it. Hence, at the final stage, they often insisted on paying lower prices than they had offered before. The monopoly administration and companies accepted proportionally only 60 percent of the tobacco crop, and demanded huge price cuts for remaining 40 percent.¹⁴⁰

As İsmail Hüsrev [Tökin] also noted, a peasant who submitted his crop of 20 bales to a tobacco company generally could receive the money for only 12 bales because the buyers scrapped remaining 8 bales, and maybe paid too low prices for only 2 bales of these 8 bales.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, monopoly and company weighers

¹³⁹ Hikmet Akgül (ed.), *Şoför İdris: Anılar* (İstanbul: Yar Yayınları, 2004), p. 31.

¹⁴⁰ For the complaints of tobacco producers in Bursa see BCA CHPK [490.01/729.478.1.], 09.02.1931.

¹⁴¹ İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı*, p.149-150. By the way, İsmail Hüsrev especially put an emphasis on “exploitation of Turkish peasants by the foreign tobacco companies.” Because of his strong nationalist stance, he omitted the similar and sometimes more harsh exploitation mechanisms of the state monopoly and Turkish tobacco companies.

generally weighed out tobacco bales of peasants less than they actually were by using false and manipulative scales.¹⁴²

Another difficulty for tobacco farmers was the long bureaucratic process of sale. First, before the sale, farmers had to wait for the completion of the quality control of their crops by monopoly experts. Usually this control phase lasted a long time because the experts always arrived in the villages late or frequently took long breaks lasting weeks and even months. At the same time, the monopoly administration and tobacco companies had deadlines for accepting tobacco. Therefore, due to the late expert controls, the farmers had difficulties transporting their crops to the warehouses in time.¹⁴³

Furthermore, when the expert control lasted too long, the tobacco had to stay on land in the open air, at homes, or in unsuitable village storage areas. This also affected adversely the quality of tobacco and caused the loss of weight and decay of the tobacco leaves. Because the control phase lasted too long, farmers could not deliver their crops in due time, which resulted in long delays in receiving their money from the state monopoly or the companies. Many tobacco growers were unable to receive their money for months.¹⁴⁴

After the expert control, farmers had to transport their harvest to the delivery points determined by the monopoly administration or companies in due time.¹⁴⁵ These delivery points mostly were located in towns or city-centers. Especially for peasants living far away from the city and town centers, it was a great problem and cost a great deal to arrange the transportation of the tobacco to a distant place. The long bureaucratic procedures, which lasted days or weeks at the delivery points,

¹⁴² BCA CHPK [490.01/729.478.1.], 09.02.1931.

¹⁴³ *CHP 28/12/936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi* (İzmir: Anadolu Matbaası, 1937), p. 30, 47.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Article 56 of the Tobacco Monopoly Law, No.1701, Date.28.06.1930, *Düstur III*, Vol.11.

made the delivery process so costly that some small or middle-sized farmers had to spend an important portion of the money they earned.¹⁴⁶

Apart from the costs of transportation and accommodation in towns and cities, there was a series of payments required to be made at each stage of the delivery process, including several fees farmers had to pay in their official dealings with the monopoly administration. For example, they had to pay 15 piasters for a declaration of tobacco farming form, 15 piasters for submitting a petition, 15 piasters for a tobacco transportation license, and 25 piasters for a bargain and sale deed, and other smaller fees for many additional bureaucratic procedures.¹⁴⁷

Table 2 - The Index of Tobacco Lands, Production, and Productivity, 1925-1938.

Years	Cultivated Land	Output	Productivity
1925	100	100	100
1926	105	96	91
1927	133	123	92
1928	99	77	75
1929	79	54	81
1930	106	83	77
1931	112	90	103
1932	42	32	75
1933	76	71	91
1934	67	63	94
1935	81	64	78
1936	127	131	102
1937	142	129	90
1938	126	104	82

Source: Prepared according to the figures in *DİE İstatistik Yıllığı* (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Yayını, 1948), p. 250-251.

In conjunction with the sharp decline in tobacco prices and the difficulties caused by the tobacco monopoly, tobacco peasants diminished their production. The total cultivated area began to shrink with the drought in 1928 and continued to decrease

¹⁴⁶ *CHP 28/12/936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi* (İzmir: Anadolu Matbaası, 1937), p. 25, 30.

¹⁴⁷ See *Adliye Encümeni Ruznamesi, TBMM Encümenler Ruznamesi, 1 Teşrinisani 1934* (Ankara: TBMM, 1934), p. 907.

with the Great Depression.¹⁴⁸ However, the relatively high prices of tobacco and faster recovery of tobacco prices as compared to other crops resulted in a relative recovery in tobacco production in the late 1930s.

As will be addressed in detail Chapter Five, tobacco smuggling became one of the mainstream informal economic transactions resorted by the peasants both as producers or traders. Thereby, the peasants, by either consuming smuggled tobacco or engaging in smuggling activities, tried to go beyond the restrictions and exploitation of the tobacco monopoly and tobacco companies.

However, as will be examined in the next chapter, prior to this last and dangerous resort, undoubtedly, they did not hesitate to get into contact with the state authorities, the local and central party administrations and bureaucrats in order to solve their problems. Furthermore, they displayed several resistance strategies and survival methods to reappropriate the actual value of their labor and crops.

Spirit and Alcoholic Beverages Monopoly

Since the Ottoman government had not monopolized the production and trade of alcoholic beverages, many peasants throughout Anatolia had long been producing spirits, *rakı* and wine in their homes or on their farms, along with the many small commercial workshops in towns and cities.¹⁴⁹ For instance, as Mehmet Enver Beşe noted in his survey on Anatolian towns and villages, before the establishment of the monopoly, the peasants in Safranbolu, for example, had long been producing *rakı*

¹⁴⁸ İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu* (Ankara: Ortadoğu Teknik Üniversitesi, 1982), p. 12.

¹⁴⁹ Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı’dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 144.

and spirits. This situation had been common to many other villages of Anatolia.¹⁵⁰

With the government monopoly over the spirits and alcoholic beverages, many peasants lost another means of livelihood.

The Republican government established the Monopoly of Spirits and Alcoholic Beverages (*İspirto ve Meşrubat-u Küüliye İnhisarı*) and authorized it to distill spirits, *rakı*, cognac, liquors, and wine from grapes and figs and to brew beer in 1926. In the beginning, the government transferred the rights of this monopoly to Business Bank (İş Bankası) and the Naçella Organizaçya Company. They established a joint stock company called the Turkish Joint-Stock Company of Spirits and Alcoholic Beverages Monopoly (*İspirto ve Meşrubat-u Küüliye İnhisarı İşletme Türk Anonim Şirketi*), and transferred the license given by the government to this new company. However, both the rising costs that stemmed from the successive transferring of the licenses from one company to another and the low demand for the expensive and relatively poor quality *rakı* and wine of the monopoly company resulted in the bankruptcy of the company and termination of its license by the government. Hence, the government directly undertook production and trade of the spirits and alcoholic beverages.¹⁵¹

In addition, it sold a limited number of licenses to private enterprises for the production of certain alcoholic beverages. They had to surrender their products to the monopoly administration in due time at a price 10 percent above the production cost.¹⁵² Again, the monopoly paid only 17 piasters for wine produced by the peasants, and, 6.5 piasters of this sum was deducted from this as tax.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ M. Enver Beşe, "Safranbolu'da Bir Köylünün Hayatı II," *Halk Bilgisi Haberleri*, No. 93 (July, 1939), p. 146.

¹⁵¹ Münir Karacık (ed.), *İnhisarlar Mevzuatı* (İstanbul: İnhisarlar Umum Müdürlüğü, 1944), p. 39.

¹⁵² Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 144.

¹⁵³ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 29.04.1933, pp. 133.

In other words, the state monopoly over alcoholic beverages meant a restriction of an economic activity not only in urban areas, but also in rural areas. The government compelled the peasants, who had been producing spirits, wine, and *rakı* freely for their own consumption and that of local village or town markets, to leave both the production and trade of spirits and alcoholic beverages to the state monopoly by confiscating the means and tools of unlicensed producers.

Moreover, the monopoly administration was authorized to purchase distilled alcohol from those farmers of figs, grapes, and sugar beets who formerly had engaged also in spirits and alcoholic beverage production. The monopoly generally paid no more than 16 piasters per kilo of *soma* (the most important raw material of alcoholic beverages distilled from figs, grapes and sugar beets), and sold it at a very large profit mark-up after making *rakı* from it. That is to say, the state monopoly began to takeover the incomes that some peasants and traders had earned until that time.¹⁵⁴

In addition, due to the expensive license prices and the uncompetitive monopoly status of the factories, this monopoly added the alcoholic beverages to the luxurious and consequently very costly industrial goods that the peasants needed to get from outside the village.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, as will be depicted in detail in the chapter on smuggling, both producers and consumers in rural areas as well as urban settings were involved in illegal production and trade of *rakı* in both rural and urban areas.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

State Control over the Forests

The state's interests in the forests as a source of revenues can be traced back to the 19th century. The Ottoman state began to be interested more closely in forests in the 19th century with the commercialization of agriculture and growing private ownership over the land. The first systematic attempt to restrict the free use of forest was the Forestry Regulation (*Orman Nizamnamesi*) in 1869. Yet, in the Ottoman Empire, timber cutting and firewood cutting were free in return for a small amount of tax.¹⁵⁶ With the establishment of the Republican regime, the government, seeing the forests as an important source of revenue for the state budget, absolutely banned timber and firewood cutting in the forested areas and the harvesting of forest products.¹⁵⁷

The Law of Peasant's Right to Benefit from the State Forests (*Devlet Ormanlarından Köylülerin İntifa Hakkı Kanunu*) (No.484), dated 15 April 1923, and the Additional Law to Second Section of the Second Chapter of the Regulations about Forests (*Orman Nizamnamesinin İkinci Babının İkinci Faslına Ek Olarak Çıkarılan Kanun*) (No.513), dated 22 April 1924, gave a limited right to peasants to benefit from the forest in return for a fee and official permission and raised the fines and penalties for timber cutting and forest farming without official permission. Finally, the Ordinance about Forest (*Orman Talimatnamesi*) (No.619), issued on 18

¹⁵⁶ Bekir Koç, İsmail Çetinkaya and Eftal Şükrü Batmaz, *Osmanlı Ormancılığı İle İlgili Belgeler I* (Ankara: Orman Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1999). Especially see "Sunuş." In addition see Bekir Koç, "Osmanlı Devletindeki Orman ve Koruların Tasarruf Yöntemleri ve İdarelerine İlişkin Bir Araştırma," *OTAM*, No. 10 (2000), p. 158.

¹⁵⁷ In fact, the forests had already begun to be seen as a financial resource for the state budget in the Ottoman Empire in the late 19th century. The Ottoman government had started to be interested in the forests in 1867 for the first time. The government invited foreign forestry experts such as Mösyö Tassy from France and entrusted them with the task of establishing a forestry school. In 1869, the government issued the Forestry Regulation and then established the Forest Directory for the first time. According to the forest regime of the Empire, the use of the forests was subjected to a tax of 10 percent of the timber cut from the forests or equivalent money. See Sadullah "Orman Teşkilatı," p. 469.

June 1924, regulated fines, penalties, and under which conditions the peasant could benefit from the forests.¹⁵⁸ This ordinance remained in force until the promulgation of the first Forest Law (*Orman Kanunu*) in 1937 (No.3116).¹⁵⁹

With these legal regulations, the government banned not only timber and firewood cutting, but also the collection of all forest products, the grazing the livestock in forested areas, and the most important village crafts like the making of wooden plates, spoons and other household utensils made from wood. Especially the Forest Law banned the use of firewood as a fuel in villages and towns at 50 kilometers distance from the railway lines and ports.¹⁶⁰

The Republican government, well aware of the economic potential of the forests for newly emerging industries and for very profitable timber export, attached great importance to the forests. Turkey was a timber-exporting country. Moreover, the Republican state initiated some industrial projects that exploited the forests as raw material. Accordingly, in a semi-official periodical *Verim* (Productivity), many articles were published emphasizing the importance of the forests and even each tree for the national wealth. Newspapers also propagated the idea of the preservation of the forests and importance of even one tree for the national economy.¹⁶¹

From that time onward, the forests were to serve only the newly emerging industries especially for the cellulose and paper mills by supplying them raw materials. Only some trade companies and industrial institutions that had obtained licenses from the General Directorate of the Forestry in return for a payment were

¹⁵⁸ Halil Kutluk, *Türkiye Ormancılığı İle İlgili Tarihi Vesikalar*, Vol. II (Ankara: Ogun Kardeşler Matbaası, 1967), p. 396, 414, 421.

¹⁵⁹ Sedat Ayanoglu and Yusuf Güneş, *Orman Suçları Ders Kitabı* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2003), p. 35.

¹⁶⁰ For the laws, regulations and ordinances regarding the forests between 1937 and 1939, see Niyazi Acun, *Ormanlarımız ve Cumhuriyet Hükümeti'nin Orman Davası* (Ankara: Recep Ulusoglu Basimevi, 1945).

¹⁶¹ For example, see Esad Muhlis Oksal, "Ormancılığın Ulusal Ekonomideki Yeri I," *Verim*, No. 1 (Apr. 15, 1935); Esad Muhlis Oksal, "Ormancılığın Ulusal Ekonomideki Yeri II," *Verim*, No. 4 (July 15, 1935); Prof. Schöpfer, "Ormanların Medeniyete Hizmetleri," *Verim*, No. 5 (Aug. 15, 1935).

permitted to trade in forests products.¹⁶² As a result of the exploitation of the forests by the public and private companies, the Turkey's export of timber rose sharply from about 18,000 tons in 1927 to approximately 39,000 tons in 1932.¹⁶³

Although the peasants had right to benefit from forests according to the regulations, many difficulties were encountered. First, because of the bureaucratic procedures, they had difficulties obtaining official licenses whenever they needed them. The laws and regulations recognized the peasants' right to cut wood and timber from forests for their own needs on condition that they obtained official permission from the forest directorates in their provinces. A peasant who needed to cut timber and wood in the forest had to obtain official license in return for a sum of money as before. For this aim, at the first stage, he had to apply to the local forest administration, declaring the sorts and amount of his need that had been officially approved previously by council of elders and village headman. Upon this application, the forest administration sent a forest engineer to investigate the validity of the peasant's application and his real needs and to determine the expiration date of the license and the maximum length of woods the license holder was permitted to cut. However, there were only 90 forest engineers in Turkey in 1931. The actual need was 1700 forest engineers at least. Therefore, the evaluations of license applications and other procedures always took a long time and deprived peasants of the wood and timber at needed times.¹⁶⁴ These difficulties, in conjunction with the high license fees, led peasants to get involved in smuggling.

In addition to this, the monopoly rights held by the state and some timber companies over the forests caused mass unemployment in some forest villages. The

¹⁶² Sadullah "Orman Teşkilatı," p. 469.

¹⁶³ Sirdar İkbāl Ali Shah, *Kamal: Maker of Modern Turkey*, (London: H. Joseph, 1934), p. 274.

¹⁶⁴ The Wish Lists of 1931 RPP Provincial Congresses Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1].

government saw the forests as a great source of income and licensed about 55 companies to run the forests throughout the country. In Kastamonu, for instance, the Ayancık Timber Factory and the Zingal Timber Company bought the license from the government to run the biggest forests of the country from 1926 to 1945. Before the monopoly of these companies over the forests in the region, 80 percent of the Kastamonu people, most of whom were peasants, around 200,000 in number, had been subsisting on wood chopping, the timber trade, and forest harvesting. The monopoly over the forests left these people unemployed and deprived them of an important source of income.¹⁶⁵

The large landowners and merchants in Antalya, who had close ties with the RPP, obtained the monopoly rights over the forests in the region. Establishing the Finike Forest Company, some landowners and merchants ran the most productive forestry areas of Antalya. At the same time, the company partners occupied the highest positions in the administration of the ruling party in Antalya. Thereby, the company had a free hand in the Antalya forests. The company did not allow the mountain peasants to benefit from the forests and even the isolated trees for their own use, whereas it overexploited the forest stocks as it pleased.¹⁶⁶

The peasants, however, especially those living in the mountains and in or near forests, relied on forest products for their subsistence. The state control over the forests via the General Directorate of Forestry left many peasants without a substantial economic resource and generated endless conflicts and lawsuits between them and the local authorities. Up to the mid-1930s, the conflicts over the forests

¹⁶⁵ Kıvılcımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 202.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

between the government and peasants intensified so such a degree that the number of court cases exceeded 3600.¹⁶⁷

Therefore, the government in 1937 promulgated the Forest Law, which defined for the first time those places that fell into the category of forestry areas, and provided more detail on activities considered crimes committed against the forests.¹⁶⁸ This law made harder for peasants to benefit from not only the forests but also small brushwoods by regarding them as the part of forests. Consequently, along with this law, all of the restrictive measures resulted in an increase in wood prices and the wood scarcity in villages and towns, which thereby compelled the peasants to cut and trade timber and wood clandestinely during the period under study.¹⁶⁹

The Salt Monopoly

Another important item the government monopolized was the salt itself. In fact, salt had been under the monopoly of the state from the mid-nineteenth century. The Ottoman state had assigned the revenues from the salt monopoly established in 1862 to the payment of its foreign debts. Be more specific, after the failure of the payment of foreign debts, *Public Debts Administration (Düyunu Umumiye)* took over and exploited the salt resources in lieu of the Ottoman state's foreign debts. This situation continued until the National Struggle. In 1920, the nationalist forces attempted to control the salt revenues to fund the national resistance movement. In order to find financial resources for the war against the occupation forces, the nationalist

¹⁶⁷ Falif Rıfki [Atay], *Bizim Akdeniz*, p.36; Asım Us, *Hatıra Notları: 1930'dan 1950 Yılına Kadar Atatürk ve İsmet İnönü Devirlerine Ait Seçme Fıkralar* (İstanbul: Vakit Matbaası, 1966), p.225.

¹⁶⁸ Ayanoglu and Güneş, *Orman Suçları Ders Kitabı*, p. 35.

¹⁶⁹ 1939 reports on the election districts wrote about the unfair and wrong implementation of the Forest Law, which caused the widespread discontent and a jump in the wood prices. The Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies who Visited Their Election Districts in the 1939 Summer Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1 / 515.2062.1]. *Köroğlu* newspaper also reported the similar situations in Anatolia due to the same reason. "Odun Yok," *Köroğlu*, 16.10.1937.

leadership raised salt prices several times between 1920 and 1924. In 1925, the government increased the price from 4 to 6 piasters per *okka* (1283 grams). Finally, the government took possession of salt production and trade completely by establishing the General Directorate of the Salt Monopoly in 1927.¹⁷⁰ The salt monopoly allowed the government to make a great profit on the production and trade of this essential resource. Due to the salt monopoly, the real prices of the salt increased between 1929 and 1934 in contrast to the declining salt prices in the international markets.¹⁷¹

This situation aggrieved the peasantry, especially the livestock owners. The salt was of vital importance as an input for the livestock farming and agriculture. Because the monopoly administration held the salt prices at high levels until 1935, these high prices increased the costs of keeping animals, although the animal prices together with agricultural prices decreased sharply with the economic crisis.¹⁷² Therefore, while not as widespread as tobacco smuggling, salt also became a subject of smuggling in the countryside.

Sugar Cartels and Sugar Beet Issue

The sugar industry became one of the backbones of the Turkish industrialization-drive in the 1930s. Sugar had long been one of the leading imported items in the Ottoman Empire. In order to save the economy from this dependence on imports, the government financially supported the establishment of a sugar industry. For this aim,

¹⁷⁰ Cezmi Emiroğlu, *Türkiye'de Vergi Sistemi: Üçüncü Kitap, İnhisarlar ve Devlet Emlâki* (Ankara: Damga Matbaası, 1933), p. 64.

¹⁷¹ Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, *Emperyalizm Geberen Kapitalizm* (İstanbul: Tarih ve Devrim Yayınevi, 1974), p. 82-83.

¹⁷² Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, pp. 231-232; Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 143.

it granted monopoly rights to the sugar factories by promulgating the Law on Concessions and Exemptions Granted to Sugar Factories (*Şeker Fabrikalarına Bahşolunan İmtiyaz ve Muafiyet Hakkına Kanun*) (No.601) on 8 April 1926. In accordance with this law, the first enterprise the government actively supported and gave monopoly status was the Uşak Sugar Factory owned by a sugar merchant and sugar beet farmer named Molla Ömeroğlu Nuri in 1926.¹⁷³

Around the same times, some sugar merchants and politicians together with Business Bank, and Agricultural Bank (Ziraat Bankası) cooperatively established another sugar factory in Alpullu, Tekirdağ. The Alpullu Sugar Factory went into production in 1926 with the financial support of the government. In following years, two other sugar factories, the Eskişehir Sugar Factory and the Turhal Sugar Factory, which were established with the partnership between Business Bank, Agricultural Bank, and Industry and Mining Bank (Sanayi ve Maadin Bankası), commenced the production of sugar in 1933 and 1934 respectively.

The government did not undertake directly the sugar monopoly, but granted some monopoly rights and financial support to these four factories. In order to create more effective monopoly conditions in the market and to increase the cooperation between these factories, they were brought under the roof of the Joint-Stock Company of Sugar Factories of Turkey (*Türkiye Şeker Fabrikaları Anonim Şirketi, TÜRKŞEKER*) established by Sümerbank, Business Bank, and Agricultural Bank in 1935.¹⁷⁴

The government relied on the high consumption taxes on sugar, which increased the sugar prices during the period. Furthermore, in the beginning, in order to encourage the peasants to cultivate sugar beets, the government and sugar factories

¹⁷³ See Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, p. 289.

¹⁷⁴ H. Bezmi Ötügen, “Türkiye Şeker Fabrikaları A.Ş. Nasıl Kuruldu?” in *30. Yılında Türkiye Şeker Sanayi*, Turan Veldet (ed.) (Ankara: Doğu Ltd Şirketi Matbaası, 1958), p. 577.

offered high prices for sugar beets and provided several agricultural inputs to the farmers.¹⁷⁵ Consequently, during the economic crisis, whereas the price of sugar was 5-10 piasters per kilo on the world market, it fluctuated between 40 and 50 piasters per kilo in western Turkey. In the east, the sugar prices were about 80-90 piasters. Whereas such high prices of sugar displeased the great majority of low-income peasants and urban dwellers, these price levels made those peasants who engaged in the sugar beet cultivation happy.

As a result of the government's support for the sugar beet cultivation, a growing numbers of peasants started to cultivate sugar beet, the price of which was comparatively higher than many other crops.¹⁷⁶ By 1932, 22,700 sugar beet farmers were cultivating 16,700 hectares in Thrace for the Alpullu factory and in Uşak, Afyon, Manisa, Kütahya for the Uşak factory. By 1934, the number of farmers and the area of cultivated land increased to around 65,000 and 32,500 hectares, respectively. That is to say, the number of producers increased almost three-fold, and the cultivated area two-fold within a few years.¹⁷⁷

Although the sugar beet cultivators enjoyed high prices from the mid-1920s to the mid 1930s, the big sugar plants, like the tobacco companies, tried to exploit the sugar beet farmers in many ways. First, the sugar factory experts often promised to pay in advance but did not keep their promises. Second, the experts generally refused to pay normal prices for a portion of a farmer's produce, declaring that some parts were rotten or had minimal sales value. In this way, they always lowered their price

¹⁷⁵ İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye'de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu* (Ankara: Ortadoğu Teknik Üniversitesi, 1982), pp. 127-128.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁷⁷ Hâbil Akıltepe, Sabri Malkoç, and İhsan Molbay, *Türkiye'de Şeker Sanayi ve Şeker Pancarı Ziraatı* (Ankara, 1964), pp. 30-44; Tekeli and İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye'de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu*, pp. 127-128.

offers to minimum rates. Finally, the experts cut about 9 percent of the prices for the sugar beets that farmers delivered to the factory warehouses.¹⁷⁸

The real problems for the sugar beet cultivators began with the government's efforts to decrease the price of sugar. In the face of increasing demand for the contraband sugar, the government had to reduce the prices and decrease the tariff rates on imported sugar. Thus, whereas the price of sugar was about 40-50 piasters per kilo in the early 1930s, this price was reduced to nearly 25-30 piasters in the second half of the decade.¹⁷⁹

Therefore, from 1935 onward, the sugar factories stopped offering relatively higher prices to the sugar beet farmers.¹⁸⁰ The government's effort to lower the soaring sugar prices pushed the sugar factories to keep down the costs. Accordingly, the price of sugar beet was reduced remarkably in 1935 from 12.5 TL per ton (50 *paras* per kilo) to 7.5 TL per ton (30 *paras* per kilo).¹⁸¹

The Railway Policy, Unifying Domestic Market, and Peasant Economy

The railway building drive of the Republican regime also had a number of important repercussions for the peasantry. After the establishment of the new Turkish state, the nationalist government initiated a comprehensive railroad building projects. The main motive behind these projects was to link the eastern part of Anatolia with the rest of the country and to create a unified domestic national market. The lines linking Ankara, Kayseri and Sivas, and linking Mersin Port, Ergani (Diyarbakır) and Malatya were completed between until 1930. With the construction of new lines

¹⁷⁸ BCA CHP [490.1/651.165.1], 05.08.1936.

¹⁷⁹ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 119; Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran*, pp. 55-57.

¹⁸⁰ Akıltepe, Malkoç and Molbay, *Türkiye'de Şeker Sanayi*, p. 117. Tekeli and İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye'de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu*, p. 129.

¹⁸¹ Behçet Günay, "Şeker," *Ülkü*, No. 31 (Sept., 1935), p. 79.

throughout the 1930s, the railroad network brought together the great part of the country from the east to the west and from the north to the south. This railway drive was so important for the ruling elite that one line of the 10th Year Anthem of the Republic said, “We wove all around the homeland with iron nets” (*Demir ağlarla ördük ana yurdu dört baştan*).

First, a considerable part of the financial burden of the railway projects was reflected to the peasantry via new heavy taxes, monopolies and low domestic terms of trade for agricultural commodities. Second, the railway networks brought tighter economic control over informal economic transactions in Anatolia, especially in the eastern parts. That is to say, the government endeavored to cut the continuing economic ties between the eastern Anatolia and Syrian market, and to integrate this distant region to the Turkish market. Indeed, the eastern, especially southeastern economy, still maintained its dependence on the Syrian economy, especially Aleppo.¹⁸² This posed a threat both politically and economically to the new state.

Moreover, the rulers perceived the railways as an efficient weapon against the smuggling. A nationalist newspaper of the time wrote, “The railway lines to the east were a sword driven into the smuggling” (*Şarka giden demiryolları kaçakçılığa karşı çekilmiş bir kılıçtır.*)¹⁸³ In a similar vein, it was reported how the lines linking Mersin Port to Malatya and interior regions competed with smuggling. The smuggled products entered into the country from İskenderun (Alexandretta) Port, which had not yet been annexed to Turkey. Therefore, the government strived to block the

¹⁸² Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, pp. 47-48.

¹⁸³ See Naşit Hakkı, “Kaçakçılar,” *Milliyet*, 24.02.1931, quoted in Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 48.

İskenderun Port by promoting Mersin Port through linking it to Malatya and then Ergani.¹⁸⁴

This was also a part of the nationalization scheme, aimed to create a well-protected Turkish national market. Especially after the Great Depression and commencement of the industrialization drive, the government tried to isolate the Anatolian economy from the long-established economic relations, which had been carried out with the Arabian peninsula, the Caucasus and the Balkans, keeping it under strict monitoring and control and sometimes banning cross-border economic transactions. The first motive for this policy was to protect the newly flourishing domestic industries and trades; the second one was to increase its customs revenues.

All this immense state control over the cross-border trade, which had long been carried out more freely before the establishment of the new Turkish state, also pressured the poor peasantry. The monopolies, the railways conveying the heavily taxed and priced commodities produced by the state factories and monopolies to the distant markets, and higher tariffs and relatively strict custom controls after 1929 forced the peasantry to pay more than they had before for industrial goods such as textiles, clothes, sugar, salt, tobacco, *rakı*, forestry products, tea and coffee.

The Great Depression, Declining Prices, and Running into Debt

After the devastating war period, the agricultural economy recovered relatively during the 1920s. Up until 1928, favorable prices helped a partial recovery in the agricultural sector. The production levels and economic transactions blossomed as

¹⁸⁴ “Gene, eskiden İskenderun ta Van’a kadar Şark’ın iskelesiydi. Bugün demiryoluyla Malatya’ya bağlı olan Mersin ona rekabet ediyor, İskenderun ise kaçak limanıdır.” Naşit Hakkı, “Hudut Boyunda Kaçakçılık,” *Milliyet*, 18.12.1931, quoted in Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvveti Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 52.

compared to the war years.¹⁸⁵ Accompanied by the growth of supply and demand, agricultural prices increased considerably. The domestic terms of trade of wheat, for example, increased 44 percent between 1923 and 1929. For tobacco and cotton, the domestic terms of trade rose 29 and 26 percent respectively.¹⁸⁶ Although the peasants enjoyed the high prices of the agricultural crops during the 1920s, undoubtedly, the group that benefitted the most was large landowners who produced surplus to be marketed.

Table 3 - Agricultural Production in Turkey, 1928-1934.

Years	Wheat (1000 tons)	Barley (1000 tons)	Tobacco (Tons)	Cotton (Tons)	Grape (Tons)	Fig (Tons)	Nut (Tons)
1928	1,641	900	43,035	76,110	634,449	71,663	21,549
1929	2,718	1,699	36,503	63,556	719,099	47,776	6,253
1930	2,586	1,536	46,211	51,435	493,499	54,290	47,625
1931	2,992	1,804	51,111	61,746	422,999	60,805	23,297
1932	1,936	1,167	18,040	19,897	916,499	54,290	41,567
1933	2,671	1,598	40,148	27,791	775,499	60,805	46,825
1934	2,714	1,672	35,678	37,762	879,927	46,462	33,599

Source: İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçilik* (Ankara: Ortadoğu Teknik Üniversitesi, 1982), p. 11.

In fact, the positive trend in agriculture reversed in 1929 with the Great Depression. Agriculture already had been hit by successive droughts in 1927 and 1928 before the economic crisis. However, the crisis was a deathblow for agriculture. As can be seen from the table below, prices hit bottom especially during the early 1930s. The prices of the most important agricultural item, wheat, sharply dropped 68 percent in 1932, according to the 1929 prices.¹⁸⁷ Whereas the prices of the leading crops like wheat, corn, and barley declined around 60-70 percent, other exported and industrial crops

¹⁸⁵ Owen and Pamuk, *A History of Middle East Economies*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁸⁶ Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi, 1908-2002* (9th ed.; Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2005), p. 55.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

such as tobacco, cotton, raisins, and hazelnuts declined around 50 percent between 1928 and 1933.¹⁸⁸

In parallel to unfavorable prices and shrink in the demand in international markets, the total outputs also decreased dramatically or fluctuated from one year to another. For example, the wheat production dropped about 46 percent in 1932 and then recovered rapidly. The production dropped more harshly in other crops such as tobacco and cotton in 1932.

Table 4 - Evolution of the Prices Offered to the Peasants, 1928-1934, (kg/piaster).

Years	Wheat	Barley	Tobacco	Cotton	Grape	Fig	Nut
1928	13.6	7.8	57	65.5	6.2	4.8	25.2
1929	12.6	7.5	72	62.3	4.7	5.1	37.1
1930	7.3	3.7	72	49.4	5.6	4.6	28.5
1931	4.0	2.9	36.11	31.7	8.0	5.2	25.3
1932	4.2	2.6	35.27	30	4.8	3.7	15
1933	3.7	1.9	30.60	30.7	3.4	3.6	16.4
1934	3.6	2.6	45.42	33.1	3.0	2.6	13.9

Source: İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçilik* (Ankara: Ortadoğu Teknik Üniversitesi, 1982), p. 13.

These crops were the leading agricultural products of Anatolia. In 1930, cereals occupied around 89.5 percent of the cultivated areas, industrial crops such as tobacco, cotton, opium, sesame 6.6 percent, and legumes around 3.9 percent of cultivated lands.¹⁸⁹ As of 1927, wheat occupied 57.2 percent of the arable land assigned to cereals, and barley covered 25.8 percent. Among the industrial crops, cotton covered 35.3 percent of the land cultivated under industrial crops, tobacco 28.2 percent.¹⁹⁰ That is to say, the sharp price decline in cereals and industrial cash crops that occupied the more than the 95 percent of the cultivated areas adversely

¹⁸⁸ Owen and Pamuk, *A History of Middle East Economies*, p. 16.

¹⁸⁹ Şevket Süreyya [Aydemir], *Cihan İktisadiyatında Türkiye* (Ankara: Ticaret Mektebi, 1931), p. 14.

¹⁹⁰ *Türk Ekonomisinin 50. Yılı* (İstanbul: İstanbul İktisadi ve Ticari İlimler Akademisi, Fatih Yayınevi, 1973), p. 38. In addition to see Kâzım Rıza, *Türkiye Ziraatı ve Türkiye Ziraatinin Mühim Şubeleri* (Ankara: Yüksek Ziraat Enstitüsü, 1935), p. 5

affected the great part of the Anatolian peasants. In addition, land prices also decreased with the depression.¹⁹¹

Especially with the rising tariff rates for industrial goods and the monopolization of many basic consumption goods and agricultural commodities by the government, the domestic terms of trade turned against agriculture by an average of 20 percent between 1928 and 1939.¹⁹² In 1931, as compared to 1927, the terms of trade of agricultural crops in the domestic market fell about 45 percent. This rate hit the bottom in 1933, declining by 65 percent, and from 1933 on began to recover slowly. Towards the end of the 1930s, the decline in terms of trade leveled out a 20 percent.¹⁹³ During the 1930s, the government took advantage of low agricultural prices to spur industrial development and provision the cities.

The prices of industrial items did not decrease in parallel to those of agriculture. Thus, the domestic term of trade for agriculture declined radically. That is, the peasants needed to produce much more to supply their necessities from the town market such as textile, clothes, sugar, salt, kerosene, cigarette, *rakı*, shoes, nail, and agricultural equipment. According to estimation of a contemporary agriculturalist, Şevket Raşit Hatipoğlu, for instance, whereas a cereal-cultivating peasant had to give 2.71 kg wheat or 2.71 kg barley or 4.71 kg corn for a meter of cotton flannel in 1927; these amounts reached 7.33 kg wheat or 11 kg barley or 11.38 kg in 1934. Similarly, whereas the same peasant had to give only 44.8 kg wheat or 72.2 kg barley or 92.9 kg corn for a meter of wool fabric in 1928, the price of wool

¹⁹¹ 1931 Ziraat Kongresi [Birinci Ziraat Kongresi] (Ankara: Milli İktisat ve Tasarruf Cemiyeti, 1931), p. 482.

¹⁹² For detailed information see Owen and Pamuk, *A History of Middle East Economies*, p. 16.

¹⁹³ Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, p. 426.

fabric in terms of wheat, barley and corn climbed to 155.5 kg wheat or 233.3 kg barley, or 241.3 kg corn.¹⁹⁴

Table 5 - The Price of a Meter of Cotton Flannel in Terms of Wheat, Barley and Corn between 1927 and 1935.

Years	Wheat (kg)	Barley (kg)	Corn (kg)
1927	2.71	2.71	4.71
1928	2.48	3.88	5.00
1929	2.52	3.86	3.65
1930	3.95	6.94	5.96
1931	6.80	9.19	10.00
1932	6.41	9.71	12.61
1933	5.60	13.75	18.33
1934	7.33	11.00	11.38
1935	5.50	11.43	-

Source: Şevket Raşit Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ziraî Buhran* (Ankara: Yüksek Ziraat Enstitüsü, 1936), p. 65.

Table 6 - The Price of a Meter of Wool Fabric in Terms of Wheat, Barley and Corn in 1928, 1931 and 1934.

Years	Wheat (kg)	Barley (kg)	Corn (kg)
1928	44.8	72.2	92.9
1931	160.0	206.2	235.2
1934	155.5	233.3	241.3

Source: Şevket Raşit Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ziraî Buhran* (Ankara: Yüksek Ziraat Enstitüsü, 1936), p. 66 [I summarized the table.]

The prices of livestock animals also dropped dramatically. The prices of sheep, which had fluctuated between 8 and 12 TL before the crisis, fell to 1 or 2 TL at most. The prices of a cow, which had been between 40 and 60 TL before the crisis, dropped to between 15 and 30 TL. Again, an ox, which had found buyers at between 60 and 80 TL, began to be sold for between only 25 and 35 TL.¹⁹⁵

The sharp drops of agricultural prices were accompanied by rising agricultural taxes. Despite the important falls in the prices of land, crops and

¹⁹⁴ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ziraî Buhran*, p. 66.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

livestock, the rate of the Land Tax, the Livestock Tax, and the Road Tax increased from the second half of the 1920s on.¹⁹⁶ This also worsened the material status of the poor, small and even middle-sized peasants.

Faced with deep budget deficits, the peasants resorted to several survival and resistance strategies ranging from crop diversification, taking on additional jobs, saving measures to tax avoidance and smuggling, as will be examined in detail in the following chapters. The first method before them was generally to borrow money to pay back their debts or to buy agricultural inputs. However, the borrowing did not ameliorate the peasant crisis; on the contrary, it deepened the financial difficulties and led many of peasant households to further pauperization, bankruptcy, and finally dispossession.

There were three choices for peasants to take on debt: the Agricultural Bank (the AB hereafter), provincial banks, or individuals (local usurers and landowners). The AB preferably gave adequate credits to the large landowners and merchants. Furthermore, many of those merchants and large landowners who took loans from the AB invested these loans to give credit at very high interest rates to small producers.¹⁹⁷

It was reported that the AB operated like a commercial bank working for merchants. Indeed, from 1924 to 1929, only 14 percent of the AB loans were allocated to agriculture. Although the share of the agriculture rose to 18 percent between 1930 and 1934, this rate dropped back to 15 percent in 1935.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, it

¹⁹⁶ Effimianidis, *Cihan İktisadi Buhranı Önünde Türkiye*, p. 278. By 1929, the Land Tax constituted 13.7 percent of the annual revenue of the government's budget. Z. Yehuda Hershtag, *Turkey: The Challenge of Growth* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), p. 51.

¹⁹⁷ 1931 Ziraat Kongresi, p. 848; İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye'de Köy İktisadiyatı*, p. 150.

¹⁹⁸ Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, p. 127.

was reported that the agricultural sector needed minimum 180 million TL, which was 4.5 times more than the current agricultural loans.¹⁹⁹

Therefore, the amounts of the loans always remained unsatisfactory. Approximately 90 percent of the agricultural loans remained below 100 TL. This did not mean that a huge number of small and middle-scale peasants achieved to take the most part of agricultural credits. First, the large landowners managed to take by far larger amounts of loans exceeding 1000 or 2000 TL than that of small and middle plot holders. Second, given the fact that the huge number of small and middle-scale peasants in comparison with the small amount of the AB funds assigned for agricultural loans, it is not hard to say that the most of middle-scale and especially small-scale farmers were not able to receive the AB loans; and very small portion of them managed to receive only unsatisfactory amounts. That is to say, the small amounts of the loans generally did not meet the needs of the small producers in dire straits.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, the number of branches of the AB was limited to 54 throughout Turkey in the 1930s, making it inaccessible to the great majority of agricultural producers.²⁰¹

The economic crisis, thus, created an opportunity for the private local banks and usurers.²⁰² These small banks, generally owned or managed by the local notables, merchants and RPP bureaucrats, offered credit to peasants at higher interest

¹⁹⁹ Yusuf Saim Atasagun, *Türkiye’de Ziraî Borçlanma ve Ziraî Kredi Politikası* (İstanbul: Kenan Matbaası, 1943), p. 287.

²⁰⁰ Celal Ömer Sarç, *Ziraat ve Sanayi Siyaseti* (İstanbul: İstanbul Yüksek İktisat ve Ticaret Mektebi, 1934), p. 254.

²⁰¹ Nurettin Hazar, *T. C. Ziraat Bankası, 1863-1983* (Ankara: T. C. Ziraat Bankası, 1986), p. 240. In addition to these branches, there were about 200 AB funds (*Ziraat Bankası Sandığı*) throughout Anatolia, but these funds were insignificant in satisfying the pecuniary needs of the peasantry because of their very small capitals.

²⁰² Cem Emrence, *99 Günlük Muhalefet: Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), p. 58.

rates.²⁰³ Besides, the peasants mostly borrowed from local usurers at very high interest rates. In 1931, the average interest rates of the banks loans was about 9-10 percent on the surface; but together with the other fees like commissions, the real values of these interest rates changed between 15 and 25 percent. Some of the local banks in Anatolia charged interests of 35 percent per annum.²⁰⁴ These high rates, which did not decrease despite the sharp drops in agricultural prices, placed a heavy burden on the peasants when their crops did not yield enough money to pay back their debts. Consequently, the increasingly many peasants ran into the debt within a short time.²⁰⁵

What is worse than the bank system was usury. Usury was a widespread practice throughout Anatolia due to the insufficiency of bank loans and very complicated and time-consuming bureaucratic procedures for any official bank-loan that generally daunted the peasants.²⁰⁶ For this reason, many peasants borrowed money from usurers. In Konya, for instance, the usurers charged ruinous and unreasonable interests rates on loans between 30 and 120 percent per annum. In Armutlu, the rates soared about 600 percent in practice.²⁰⁷

Beyond the high interest rates, many usurers also deceived their clients by means of unlawful, deceptive and counterfeit operations the usurers called

²⁰³ For instance see the Related Parts of the Report Submitted to the First Office by the Party Inspector İçel Deputy Hamdi Ogun who had inspected Ordu, Giresun and Çoruh Provinces, BCA CHP [490.1/836.367.1], 28.11.1935. In addition, for a complaint letter about a former gendarme commander who was elected to the local party administration made a killing through moneylending, BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1], 04.02.1933. Likewise, about the party administrators who engaged in money lending at the same time, see the inspection report on Giresun, BCA CHP [490.1/655.182.1], 21.08.1935.

²⁰⁴ Report about the Organization and Enlargement of the RPP Organizational Structure to the Konya and Aksaray Provinces, BCA MGM [30.10/79.520.3], 05.01.1931.

²⁰⁵ *Gezi Notları: Çanakkale-Bolayır İzmir Köyleri ve Orta Anadolu* (İstanbul: Milli Türk Talebe Birliği, Asri Basımevi, 1935), p.27, 31.

²⁰⁶ *1931 Ziraat Kongresi*, p. 36, 565, 694. The Anifa village peasants in Erzurum were complaining about their debts in 1937: "Each peasant is in heavy debt between a hundred and two hundred liras. There are also some peasants who are indebted a thousand liras (...) Some men can not even pay their debit interests..." Us, *Asım Us'un Hatıra Notları*, p. 191.

²⁰⁷ İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye'de Köy İktisadiyatı*, p. 147.

“doubling” (*katlama*), “prevaricating” (*kıvrma*), and “getting blood out of stone” (*hendek atlatma*). The first one was to demand much more interest from the borrower than the usurer had demanded at the beginning. The second was to refuse any payment of debt due by the borrower in due time by giving several pretexts in order to increase the debt. The last one meant to take a borrower who had already discharged all of his debts to court by falsely claiming that the borrower had not yet discharged his debt.²⁰⁸

The agricultural cooperatives pioneered by the AB in 1929 to fund the producers did no good for the disadvantaged peasants. A limited number of cooperatives reached solely 3 percent of the peasantry. They distributed about 3.5 million TL in 1930, which was not enough to satisfy the financial needs of the peasants in crisis. Furthermore, the administrative boards of the cooperatives were composed of rich peasants and merchants. In many cases, the peasants who took out loans from agricultural cooperatives paid their old debts with these cooperative loans to the cooperative administrators who were their moneylenders at the same time, even before going out of the door of the cooperative offices.²⁰⁹

Too heavy terms and complicated procedures either weakened the solvency of the peasants or led them to the avoidance of or suspension of the debt discharging. Whereas the total amount of the peasants’ debts to the AB was 17.2 million TL in 1927, this amount grew to 26.3 million TL in 1930.²¹⁰ Again, the peasants who took loan out from the cooperatives failed to pay back about 2 million TL in the early 1930s.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Kuvılcımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, pp. 126-127; İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye’de Köy İktisadiyatı*, p. 147.

²⁰⁹ İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye’de Köy İktisadiyatı*, p. 150.

²¹⁰ Atasagun, *Türkiye’de Ziraî Borçlanma*, p. 131.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

The inability of the peasants to pay their debts back or their avoidance caused widespread expropriations of peasant properties by the banks and usurers. In 1929, Mahmut Esat (Bozkurt), Minister of Justice, addressed the mounting foreclosures in the National Assembly. According to his speech, more than one million foreclosures had been recorded within only 1928 and 1929.²¹²

In 1935, in rural areas, the General Command of Gendarmerie reported that the local governments and finance offices had issued around 350,000 warrants of arrest due to the failure to pay debts. The gendarme had to arrest all of them. The offences to which warrants were related were largely avoidance of agricultural credit debt payment.²¹³ In a similar vein, a contemporary observer noted that there were many peasants who had lost their land, vineyards and orchards to the moneylenders and large landowners in many places in the Anatolian countryside like Konya, Armutlu, Ordu, Giresun and Edremit.²¹⁴

This debt load led many small and poor peasants to accept sharecropping tenancy or to work as part-time laborers on large landowners' farms along with their own small plots. Sharecropping for many farmers was the last stop before dispossession,²¹⁵ which happened to many of them. Indeed, the pages of the local newspapers were full of court announcements about public auctions for expropriated land and livestock.²¹⁶

²¹² Kazım Öztürk, *Türk Parlamento Tarihi (1927-1931)*, Vol. 1 (Ankara: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Vakfı Yayınları, No.3, 1995), pp. 207-208.

²¹³ Situation of Gendarmerie Performance in 1935. [030.10. / 128.923.12.1.].

²¹⁴ For detailed information, see İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye'de Köy İktisadiyatı*, pp. 146-148.

²¹⁵ See Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development* (London; New York: Verso, 1987), p. 141. In addition, see Kıvılcımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 124.

²¹⁶ "Ha Satılıyor!" *Köroğlu*, 06.07.1932. There are further news and announcements about the expropriated lands in the local newspapers. See "Aydın Defterdarlığından," *Aydın*, 01.08.1934; "Türkiye Ziraat Bankası Nazilli Şubesiinden," *Aydın*, 04.08.1934; "Türkiye Ziraat Bankası Nazilli Şubesiinden," *Aydın*, 05.08.1934; "Ziraat Bankası Aydın Şubesiinden," *Aydın*, 16.08.1934; "Söke Ziraat Bankasından," *Aydın*, 16.10.1934; "Aydın Defterdarlığından," *Aydın*, 07.04.1935; "Aydın Defterdarlığından," *Aydın*, 08.04.1935; "Aydın Defterdarlığından," *Aydın*, 11.04.1935; "Erzurum Ziraat Bankasından," *Erzurum*, 09.05.1935; "Ziraat Bankasından," *Erzurum*, 18.05.1935; "Erzurum Ziraat Bankasından," *Erzurum*, 20.05.1935. This list can be extended.

The state economic policies combined with the impact of the Great Depression resulted in impoverishment in countryside. In some regions, the economic conditions got so much worse that poor peasants suffered hunger, albeit not on a massive scale. The 1927-1928 droughts were, so to speak, harbingers of the difficult times to come by deteriorating the peasant's living standards. In the areas worst hit by the drought, especially the central Anatolian steppes, as an observer recorded, the economic problems were so bad that the peasants were deprived of even seeds. Almost each village had five to ten households suffering from hunger. Some peasants baked their bread with the addition of grass to the flour.²¹⁷ In May 1930, the official sources reported that four peasants had died because of hunger in Buğdalızir village of Giresun. Therefore, the local authorities demanded urgent food aid from the Red Crescent.²¹⁸ In some Aegean villages, poor peasants began to subsist on a diet of only wild pears.²¹⁹

These provisioning and food problems arose again from time to time in Anatolia. The flow of information to the government about such situations pushed the Ministry of Internal Affairs to pay utmost attention to the problem, especially to its repercussions on public security. The Ministry ordered the governors to prepare reports about the provisioning status of the towns and villages and the adverse effects of the economic conditions on security. A general overview of such reports suggests that the economic problems caused a widespread disruption of the public security in Anatolia.²²⁰

²¹⁷ İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye'de Köy İktisadiyatı*, p. 141.

²¹⁸ BCA MGM [30.10/120.858.5.], 27.05.1930.

²¹⁹ Emrence, *Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*, p. 63.

²²⁰ Provisioning Situation of the Provinces, From the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the Prime Ministry, BCA MGM [30.10/64.432.2], 26.07.1930.

Rural Oppressors:
Insiders (the *Ağa* and Village Headman) and Outsiders (Tax Collectors and the
Gendarme)

On the local level, many people exploited and oppressed the peasantry. Some of them were outsiders such as the gendarme soldiers, tax collectors, debt enforcement officials, and forest rangers. During the interwar period, the peasantry suffered at the hands of these state agents. However, despite shared experiences, habits, and worldviews, as emphasized by Clifford Geertz,²²¹ the peasantry was not a homogenous entity. Nor did they act as a class in the way Teodor Shanin defined class for peasantry.²²² Although the village community was based on several forms of solidarity, especially in the forms of kinship ties or patronage relations, it also included conflicting groups divided according to their power and amount of their property.

In other words, the peasantry as a whole was a social group that had inner class differentiations and accordingly interest conflicts. In this respect, another group who exploited and oppressed the poor peasantry was from the village community, i.e. large landowners called popularly *ağa*, moneylenders, usurers, the council of elders, and village headmen. The adverse effects of the Great Depression and the state economic policies on the poor and small-scale farmers sharpened not only the tension between the state and the peasants, but also the class differentiations and tensions within the peasantry.

²²¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5, 12.

²²² Teodor Shanin, "Peasantry as a Class," in *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, ed. by Teodor Shanin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 329.

Ağas and Despotic Households

The first social reality by which I was impressed during my research is that the exploitation and oppression of poor peasants by *ağas* is not an exaggeration or misrepresentation, but a bare fact. The main exploitative and oppressive social group in the village was the rich peasants and large landowners, popularly called *ağa*. Most of the villages and towns had their own rich peasants and relatively large estate owners. Large landowners had absolute power in many Anatolian villages and towns.²²³

Especially regions that specialized in cash crops and capitalistic agriculture was dominated by large agricultural farms owned by rich and influential landowners and local merchants. They controlled not only the means of production and vast arable land, but also directly or indirectly intervened in all aspects of the social and economic relations between the peasants. Furthermore, the large landowners enjoyed the advantages of close relations with the ruling party and the agents of the local government.²²⁴ For example, in Burdur, a mid-western province and a leading wheat center with a population of 90,000, about twenty large landowners who possessed the great part of the arable land in the region also occupied the important offices of the local government.²²⁵

Sometimes they indirectly affected the local administrations or directly dominated the local party and state apparatuses. Some prominent landowners had close relations with the local authorities such as the local governors, sub-district directors, civil servants in key positions, gendarme commanders, police chiefs, and

²²³ “Köyde Ağalık Meselesi,” *Yurt ve Dünya*, No. 17 (1942), p. 164.

²²⁴ Mübeccel B. Kıray, “Değerler, Toplumsal Tabakalaşma ve Gelişme,” *Toplumsal Yapı Toplumsal Değişme* (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 1999), p. 111.

²²⁵ M. Zeki [Doğanoğlu], *Mıntıkamızın Kitabı: Güzel İzmir ve İzmir İktisadi Mıntikasının Tabii Hazinesi, Ticari, Sınai ve Mali Vaziyeti* (İzmir: İzmir Ticaret ve Sanayi Odası Yayını, 1930), p. 135.

even judges by providing them certain economic advantages and “gifts.”²²⁶ In Konya, the largest province and the biggest grain producer in Anatolia, the rich and influential landowners dominated the local party administration. They were such a politically strong and dominant group that the peasants saw them as equivalent to the state and party. A party inspector reported that a peasant in a village of Konya had said, “The Party here was Ömer Ağa.”²²⁷

Likewise, Emin Sazak, the deputy of Eskişehir, was at the same time one of the biggest landowners of the region. In Giresun, a hazelnut center in the north Anatolia, a group of large landowners and merchants such as Tır Alizadeler, Hacı Ahmetzadeler, Katipzadeler and Hacı Emin Beyzadeler dominated all of the villages and the local party administration. From the northeastern Anatolian province of Artvin, it was reported that the party branches were domineered by the large landowners.²²⁸ It is possible to extend this list by citing many examples.²²⁹ The quantitative figures regarding the land distribution noted above also confirm the existence of large landowners throughout Anatolia.

Rich landowners dominated the village communities through the patronage system that prevailed across Anatolia. Patronage determined the relations between rich landowners and peasants. Rich landowners supported and aided peasants in need in return for obedience to their authority. In other words, rich and influential farmers

²²⁶ Kılılcımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 139.

²²⁷ Summaries of Election District Reports of 1935. BCA CHP [490.1/725.481.1], 16.01.1936.

²²⁸ Related Parts of the Report Submitted to the First Office by the Party Inspector İçel Deputy Hamdi Oğun who had inspected Ordu, Giresun and Çoruh provinces. BCA CHP [490.1/836.367.1], 28.11.1935.

²²⁹ For the official positions and roles of the landed groups and merchants in the local organizations of the RPP, see Murat Metinsoy, “Kemalizmin Taşrası: Erken Cumhuriyet Taşrasında Parti, Devlet ve Toplum,” *Toplum ve Bilim*, No. 118 (Spring 2010), pp. 124-164.

used patronage relations to endorse their own economic power and social prestige in the village by providing some aid and loans to peasants in need.²³⁰

In the villages, the large landowners strived to regulate the social life according to their own interests by intervening in all aspects of village affairs. They attempted to mediate between local administrations and peasants in order to isolate the peasantry from the government and to gain authority over the village community. Some intervened even in marriages, love affairs, family affairs, and played intermediary roles in intra-village disputes over land, vineyards, orchards, and inheritance.²³¹ They were supposed to solve the problems of those who ran into trouble or were in severe need.²³²

However, their economic assistance was not unconditional. The landowners expected to increase their legitimacy, the obedience of peasants to their authority, and their influence over all village affairs. Furthermore, in some villages, the peasants had to submit a part of their crops, selected vegetables, fruits, and a well-fed sheep or cow to them, when the landowners interceded in their disputes with official or helped them to get married, to take a loan, or to have their children circumcised.²³³

Patronage was one aspect of the relations between rich landowners and peasants. Another one was the economic exploitation and oppression of peasantry. It is well known story how the landed interests exploited and oppressed the small plot holders, poor peasants, sharecroppers and agricultural laborers. As noted by one observer, in some villages of Antalya, a southwestern province, many landowners exerted great effort to takeover the lands of weak peasants in fraudulent ways.²³⁴

²³⁰ Mübaccel B. Kıray, "Değişen Patronaj Kalıpları: Yapısal Değişme Üzerine Bir Çalışma," *Toplumsal Yapı Toplumsal Değişme* (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 1999), p. 273, 294.

²³¹ Ali Galip, "Köylü," *Ülkü*, Nov., 1933, p. 329.

²³² Behice S. Boran, "Köyde Sosyal Tabakalanma," *Yurt ve Dünya*, No. 15-16 (1942), p. 125.

²³³ Kıvılcımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 123.

²³⁴ Falih Rıfkı [Atay], *Bizim Akdeniz*, p. 37.

As addressed by Minister of Internal Affairs, Şükrü Kaya, in the National Assembly, in Anatolia there were many rich farmers who had an eye on even the small plots of land and vineyards that had been distributed to landless peasants and the Balkan refugees by the government. The minister complained about the rapacious landowners who occupied the lands cultivated by the poor peasants. Some landowners caused the lands of these peasants to be flooded by sabotaging small irrigation systems and dams.²³⁵

The Great Depression resulted in the dispossession of many peasant households by rich landowners. Due to the sharp decline in agricultural prices, smallholders ran into the debt taken on from the local moneylenders, mostly rich landowners at astronomic interest rates. These peasants generally were unable to pay their debts back, and therefore were exposed to expropriations, which resulted in the transfer of the debtor's properties to the rich landowner. Consequently, in some regions, as mentioned above, many small farmers who incurred enormous debts had to take up sharecropping.²³⁶

Some landowners were so brutal that they physically pressurized their sharecroppers and those peasants who had failed to pay back their debts. For instance, Mustafa Efendi, owner of a big farm in Ödemiş, a rich town in İzmir set his armed men against a sharecropper for debt collection. Since the borrower peasant was not able to make payment, the landowner's men shot him to death and shot his wife in her arm in order to wrest her gold necklace (*beşibiryerde*) from her.²³⁷

²³⁵ Speech of the Minister of Internal Affairs Şükrü Kaya in the Great National Assembly of Turkey about the Settlement Law on June 15, 1934. Aksoy, *100 Soruda Türkiye'de Toprak Meselesi*, p. 56.

²³⁶ Şevket Pamuk, "Intervention during the Great Depression: Another look at Turkish Experience," in *The Mediterranean Response to Globalization Before 1950*, eds. Şevket Pamuk, Jeffrey G. Williamson (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 334.

²³⁷ *Cumhuriyet*, 19.10.1931, quoted in Kivilımcılı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 176.

Large landowners had the utmost authority especially in the eastern part of Anatolia. The power and oppression of *ağas* in the eastern and southeastern regions was not only a discursive and political strategy the Republican bureaucrats devised for the liquidation of the disobedient tribal leaders, landowners and Kurdish nationalism. It was a social reality to a great extent.

As reported by the governor of Erzincan, Ali Kemalî, in many eastern and southeastern provinces, peasants were not in possession of the lands that they cultivated. Nor did they have possession of the homes in which they took shelter. In Urfa, for instance, the most of the villages were in the possession of rich notables. One of these *ağas* had almost 300 villages. Relatively less well-off landowners held approximately 30 or 40 villages. These *ağas*, although the government had abrogated the tithe seven years earlier, continued to collect it and other traditional taxes and levies.²³⁸

There were two sorts of *ağas* in the eastern regions. The first one was the more spiritual kinds, like *seyyids* and *şeyhs*. They represented the religious authority and had their own lands and livestock. They had great fiscal resources. The peasants had to pay them some religious taxes named “*niyaz*” and “*çıraklı*” and some fees for the *sine qua non* religious performance of the *seyyids* and *şeyhs* on occasions such as marriage, illness, circumcision, birth, and death. Nobody could not marry or divorce without their permission. The peasants were supposed to harvest the crops of these spiritual leaders and to carry them to their barns.²³⁹ In many villages, these men also had judicial authority.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Ali Kemâlî [Aksüt], *Erzincan: Tarihî, Coğrafi, İktimaî, Etnografî, İdarî, İhsaî Tetkikat Tecrübesi* ([İstanbul]: Resimli Ay Matbaası, 1932), pp. 197-202.

²³⁹ Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, pp. 82-84.

²⁴⁰ Naşit Hakkı Uluğ, *Tunceli Medeniyete Açılıyor* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2007), pp. 95-98.

Other sorts of rural dominants and *ağas* were the large landowners and rich livestock famers. Some of them possessed more than one village with their peasants, livestock, houses, coffeehouses, barns, mills, forests, grazing lands, and salt mines in villages. They also had a great power and authority in their villages, collecting a traditional poll tax called *cizye or uma* each year, although this tax was illegal. Even those peasants who migrated to other cities for work were also obliged to pay this tax when they returned to the village.²⁴¹

It was reported that some tribal chiefs, who were landowners and spiritual leaders at the same time, taxed even those members of the tribes who were living and working in distant provinces by sending their men as tax collectors. Seyit Rıza, a tribal chief who controlled 230 villages in Dersim, for instance, reportedly sent his armed men to İzmir and İstanbul to collect *cizye* (the poll tax) from the workers living there who belonged to the tribe. When these tribe members refused to pay the tax to Rıza, their relatives in Dersim were persecuted by the men of the chief, and consequently had no peace in the village.²⁴²

In addition, peasants were under some obligations, one of which was *corvée*, i.e. compulsory works. A landowner could demand a number of days' labor from his tenants, except for their routine agricultural work. Peasants had to perform their duties; otherwise, the landowner did have the right to drive the disobedient peasant out of the village. The landowner used the weapon of blackmail against nonconformist peasants. If a noncompliant peasant had broken the law in the past, the landowner threatened him to report his offence to the government in order to

²⁴¹ Ali Kemâlî, *Erzincan: Tarihî, Coğrafi, İktimaî, Etnografî, İdarî, İhsaî Tetkikat Tecrübesi*, p. 197.

²⁴² İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı*, p. 179.

manipulate him. Not only the disobedient peasants, but also their family members faced the consequences of the disobedience to landowner.²⁴³

Peasants were generally called *maraba*, which meant the possessor of one-fourth (*rubu*) of crops they produced. They worked the lands and farms owned by the landowners in return for one-fourth of the crops they harvested. *Marabas*, who owned their own small plots of lands, also worked on their own lands. However, they had to surrender a portion of the crops derived from their own lands to the *ağas*. The most indigent and poorest group of peasants has made up of those who worked as *ırgat* or *rençber* (farmhand). They were generally called *azap* (pain and suffering in Turkish), too. They did not have even a small a piece of land, and only worked on the farms of landowners for a very small portion of the crops, a pair of shoes, and clothes.²⁴⁴

Peasants did not have the right to pursue their rights against the *ağa*. In villages that were too isolated from the surrounding towns and city centers, the authority of the *ağas* was at the highest level. If the *ağas* did not give their consent, the peasants could not even wife or espouse their sons or daughters.²⁴⁵

Cemal Bardakçı, who was an eccentric governor of Diyarbakır from 1925 and 1926 and of Elaziz (Elazığ) from 1926 to 1929, convincingly depicted in his memoirs how local landowners and tribal chiefs had great authority over peasants. Not only the peasants, but also the local administrators obeyed them. Tribal chiefs and large landowners, as Bardakçı wrote, literally governed the region by manipulating the courts and local officials. In addition, by seizing the animals and

²⁴³ Ali Kemâlî, *Erzincan: Tarihî, Coğrafi, İktimai, Etnografi, İdarî, İhsaî Tetkikat Tecrübesi*, p. 196.

²⁴⁴ İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı*, p. 178.

²⁴⁵ Uluğ, *Tunceli Medeniyete Açılıyor*, pp. 113-114.

lands of the poor peasants, and continuing to collect the abolished tithe and pool tax, they reinforced their power and increased their wealth day by day.²⁴⁶

In 1926, more than 3500 peasants were sentenced to prison by default in Diyarbakır and its surrounding area. A large part of these “criminal peasants” was noncompliant peasants who had dared to defy the authority of these cruel landowners and tribal leaders by refusing to surrender the tribal taxes, their crops, animals or lands. Landowners who faced such noncompliant peasants generally manipulated the local official authorities and courts to punish these poor peasants by means of numerous false witnesses. Bardakçı wrote that there were some villages in which men had all been committed to prison by default by the greedy *ağas*. Furthermore, as soon as he had ordered the distribution of small plots of lands from the public land to the poor and landless peasants, such landowners had initiated a smear campaign against him.²⁴⁷

As another contemporary journalist also noted, many tribal chiefs and *ağas* had influential patronage networks that included state officials and gendarmes. They had always creamery butter, cheese, meat, and honey in stock for them. Providing such unfair benefits under the guise of gifts, the *ağas* received important information and privileged treatment in their relations with the central government and peasants.²⁴⁸

Again, as Bardakçı confessed in his memoirs, he as a provincial governor in Diyarbakır was unable to enforce the village headmen affiliated with the tribal chiefs and *ağas* to obey the laws and his orders. Once, he had failed to impose the re-election of the village headman in a village.²⁴⁹ In addition, the *ağas* had a great the

²⁴⁶ Cemal Bardakçı, *Toprak Dâvasından Siyasî Partilere* (İstanbul: Işıl Matbaası, 1945), pp. 14-15.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34, 41-45.

²⁴⁸ Uluğ, *Tunceli Medeniyete Açılıyor*, pp. 117-118.

²⁴⁹ Cemal Bardakçı, *Toprak Davasından Siyasî Partilere*, pp. 11-12.

judicial authority for their peasants. The peasants had to resort to him when they troubled each other or the laws. The landowners solved disputes between the peasants without government intervention.²⁵⁰

Village Headmen

The rich landowners generally exerted their authority over villages through village headmen. Although the institution of village headman had been first introduced in the mid-19th century, the office of village headman, council of elders, and their functions were clearly spelled out by the Village Law (No.442), enacted on 8 March 1924.²⁵¹

The council of elders was established as the legally responsible body of which village headman was the chief member. They had the responsibility of seeing that the government orders and the law rules were carried out in the village. In theory, the village headman was to administer the councils' decisions.²⁵² The village headman and the council of elders were the chief policy-making and administrative body of village.²⁵³ However, in practice, council of elders usually existed only on paper. Rather than the councils of elders, the village headmen enjoyed a great authority and played significant roles in the administration of the villages.²⁵⁴

The main requirement for obtaining the post of village headman, as the first realist village novelist Mahmut Makal noted, was to be a property owner.²⁵⁵ Village headmen in many Anatolian villages were mostly the men of rich and influential

²⁵⁰ *Cumhuriyet*, 22.07.1930, quoted in Kuvılcımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 72.

²⁵¹ For the Village Law see *Düstur III*, Vol.5, pp. 336-335.

²⁵² Richard B. Scott, *The Village Headman in Turkey: A Case Study* (Ankara: Institute of Public Administration for Turkey and the Middle East, 1968), pp. 11-14.

²⁵³ Joseph Szyliowicz, *Political Change in Rural Turkey: Erdemli* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966), p. 43.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁵⁵ Mahmut Makal, *A Village in Anatolia*, trans. by Sir Wyndham Deedes, (London: Valentine, Mitchell and Co. Ltd. 1954), p. 64.

households, and consequently often tied to these families' apron strings.²⁵⁶ When there arose rivalries between kin groups or between landowners, village headmen tended to side with largest kin group, tribe, or powerful landowners.²⁵⁷

According to the field studies of contemporary observers, the influential families in villages reinforced their authority and economic interests through controlling the office of the village headman or the council of elders. Similarly, for a middle-income peasant, becoming village headman was a way to increase his income and authority over the peasants in the village.²⁵⁸

In only those villages that were closely linked and nearer to city centers, village headmen tended to further represent the state administration, richest landowners or merchant located in cities. In isolated villages, the village community, especially the large landowners, who were the most influential figures of the community, had a great influence over village headmen.²⁵⁹

In eastern Anatolia, village headmen appear to have been the shadows of tribal leaders or influential *ağas*. The elections of the village headman and the council of elders were nothing but procedure in such villages.²⁶⁰ As mentioned above, even some provincial governors were not able to intervene in the elections, or rather, appointment of village headmen by local dominants. The fact that a village headman had to meet the approval of either the local administrators or landowners or

²⁵⁶ Kıray, "Değerler, Toplumsal Tabakalaşma ve Gelişme," p. 113.

²⁵⁷ R. B. Scott, *The Village Headman in Turkey*, p. 20.

²⁵⁸ Boran, "Köyde Sosyal Tabakalanma," p. 124. In addition, see İbrahim Yasa, *Hasanoğlan Köyü'nün İktisadî-İktisadî Yapısı* (Ankara: Doğu Ltd. O. Matbaası for Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü, 1955), pp. 195-196. İbrahim Yasa stated that in Hasanoğlan village like other Anatolian villages, the Council of Elders had been composed of the rich and influential landowners ever since the establishment of the council. Likewise, as stated in a study on Erdemli and Koyuncu villages of Mersin by Szyliowicz, "headman was often a member of one of important families of the community." "In most villages the headman was selected by the heads of a few leading families who comprised the local elite. These men, owing to their wealth and prestige, exercised great authority." "Sometimes the office was monopolized by one clan; in Koyuncu the headman had been members of the same family for many years (...)." Szyliowicz, *Political Change in Rural Turkey: Erdemli*, pp. 45-47.

²⁵⁹ Boran, "Köyde Sosyal Tabakalanma," p. 124.

²⁶⁰ Kılıncımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 80.

of both of them caused a dislike toward him among the rival groups and the resentful poor peasants.²⁶¹

Village headmen were empowered by the Village Law to carry out a vast array of the state jobs in the villages. According to Article 36 of the Village Law, the village headman as a state agent was to function as a channel of communication between the state administration and peasants. He was authorized to announce, clarify, and implement the government directives and laws. He had to maintain the security and to inform the security forces of suspicious persons, criminals, deserters and foreigners who visited the village. In addition, he was to assist the state officials, tax collectors and gendarme soldiers who came to village. He was obliged to keep a register of the population, deaths, births, marriages, divorces, taxes, and livestock in his village, too. In any possible general mobilization for war, his primary function was to assemble draftees for the army. Again, in times of natural disasters, it was his duty to organize the peasants to fight any fires or floods. According to Article 37, together with the council, he was authorized to levy and collect some taxes and dues. Moreover, the Village Law granted him judicial power to settle local disputes.²⁶²

Furthermore, the Village Law gave the headman the absolute right to impose a vast array of public works and duties on peasants, ranging from paving roads to building a school, laundry, bath, mill, village room, and marketplace. Again, it was his duty to grow trees, protect the forests, bring some books and newspapers to the village room, keep medicines distributed by the government, take measures about public hygiene, and develop the agricultural techniques by cooperatively buying agricultural equipments. Both for the expenditures for such works, the village headmen were empowered to levy a tax called *salma* on the peasants or to force them

²⁶¹ R. B. Scott, *The Village Headman in Turkey*, p. 19.

²⁶² The Village Law, Articles 36 and 37, *Düstur III*, Vol. 5, pp. 346, 347.

to work in village jobs. The Village Law (Article 13 and 56) authorized the village headmen to fine the peasants who refused the directives of the village headmen from 1 piaster to 100 piasters.²⁶³

Most of headmen had a tendency to use such tax revenues collected from the peasants for their private use, to save some portion for themselves, and to favor relatives or acquaintances.²⁶⁴ They were often so subjective in levying the taxes that they usually attempted to favor their relatives and friends and to punish their rivals. Many village headmen abused the taxes called *salma*.²⁶⁵ Likewise, the village headmen sometimes turned a blind eye to the tax evasions of the rich landowners or their relatives.²⁶⁶

Furthermore, although the Village Law limited the total amount of taxes a village headman could levy to 20 TL maximum a year, in practice, village headmen generally demanded much bigger amounts from the peasants. For instance, in Hasanoğlu village of the capital city, peasants paid annually 41 TL per person to the headman.²⁶⁷

The village headman was also responsible for taking the tax statements of the peasants and handing them into the finance office or tax collectors. The laws authorized him to assess some taxes peasants had to pay to the government. For instance, the Livestock Tax was imposed on the animals that were assessed as

²⁶³ The Village Law, Article 13 and 56, *Düstur III*, Vol. 5, pp. 339, 341.

²⁶⁴ B. Sıtkı Tugal, "Yeni Köy Kanunu Tasarısı Hakkında," *İdare Dergisi*, Vol.22, No. 212, Eylül-Ekim 1951, p. 21-22.

²⁶⁵ Sadık Artukmaç, *Köylerimizi Nasıl Kalkındırabiliriz?* (Ankara: Güney Matbaacılık ve Gzetecilik, T.A.O., 1955) p. 75.

²⁶⁶ Ali Nar, *Anadolu Günlüğü* (İstanbul: Beyan Yayınları, 1998), p. 58.

²⁶⁷ Yasa, *Hasanoğlu Köyü'nün İctimaî-İktisadî Yapısı*, p. 204.

taxable by the village headman.²⁶⁸ Likewise, he assessed also the Road Tax and listed the taxpayers.²⁶⁹

Another task of the village headman was to execute the debt enforcement proceedings in the village (Article 66 of the Village Law). When a peasant failed to pay his tax or debt, upon the directives of the officials, the village headman had to gather the council of elders and decide to apply an order of attachment that brought the property of the peasant into the custody of the council of elders. For this aim, the headman and other members of council of elders had to go to the debtor peasant's domicile and warn him that if he did not pay the tax or debt, they would have to sequester his properties. If the peasant did not perform his obligations, his properties corresponding to the value of his debts were taken into custody in the village room or in the home of a council member. Again, it was the task of the council members or only the headman to put the properties on sale by public auction.²⁷⁰ All these duties and authorities made them the most hated persons in the villages.

The Village Law gave the village headman and council of elders limited jurisdiction in intra-village disputes (Article 49 and 65). When the village headman or the council of elders were faced with a disobedience, opposition, or criticisms raised by a peasant, council members called this peasant to the village room or coffeehouse to warn him. If he insisted on his position, generally they put pressure on or intimidated him by beating and threatening him. When necessary, they referred such peasants to the gendarme.²⁷¹ The Village Law (Article 72 and 73) gave permission to the village headman to have a limited number of armed men called

²⁶⁸ Emiroğlu, *Türkiye'de Vergi Sistemi: Vasıtasız Vergiler*, p. 113.

²⁶⁹ According to Article 15 of the Law of Highroad and Bridges (*Köprüler ve Şoseler Kanunu*), No. 1525, Date. 02.06.1929, the village headmen and the council of elders were entrusted with the task of reporting the Road Tax obligation of peasants. See *Düstur III*, Vol.10, p. 1827.

²⁷⁰ Emiroğlu, *Türkiye'de Vergi Sistemi: Vasıtasız Vergiler*, pp. 281-283.

²⁷¹ Yasa, *Hasanoğlu Köyü'nün İctimaî-İktisadî Yapısı*, p. 204.

korucu (village guard). Any disobedience towards these militias was considered crimes against the state.

Tax Collectors

Both *tahsildar* (tax collector) and *jandarma* (gendarme) were the nightmares of poor and small-scale peasants throughout Anatolia. The tax collectors were some of the most disliked government agents in the countryside.²⁷² The peasants called them *solgun* (white-faced, bloodless), or *şahna* (hostile/malice). In fact, the accurate form of this term was *şahne* in the meaning of tax collector, but peasants pronounced it as *şahna*, which meant “hostile” and “malice” in Ottoman Turkish.

The tax collectors were low-income state official under the pressure of the authorities. The central and provincial administrators frequently pressed them to collect the maximum revenues as much as they could. In decrees sent to provincial administrators, the government ordered them to dismiss those inefficient tax collectors who ignored their tasks and who did not collect the great part of the assessed taxes.²⁷³ Along with the material austerity due to the low salaries, the pressure of their chiefs and local governors led many tax collectors to become brutal, heartless and abusive to extract as much money as possible.

Tax collectors toured the region assigned to them village by village on foot or by horse or donkey. Their appearance in a village was a sign of trouble for the village community because they were not only exactor of peasants’ limited incomes, but also unwelcome guests, intruding in village life, and staying in the peasants’ homes and eating their scarce food. The peasants were required to accommodate and feed them

²⁷² Yıldız Sertel, *Ardımdaki Yıllar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), p. 118.

²⁷³ Yunus Nadi, “Gene O Mesele,” *Cumhuriyet*, 17.09.1931.

until the end of the tax collection period. Therefore, the peasants viewed them with deep suspicion and anxiety as outsiders against whom they had to struggle by hiding their crops, animals and money or by giving bribes.

Generally, when a tax collector arrived at a village, first he met with the village headman and council of elders in the village room or village coffeehouse. On a predetermined date by the village headman, the peasants gathered in front of the village room or coffeehouse to submit their taxes to the tax collector, who sat with village headman and some members of the council of elders around a table. Sometimes, the peasants came to table of the tax collector after village headman and one of council members called out their names. If the called-out peasant did not appear or did not pay his tax, they raided his house or land accompanied by gendarme soldiers or village guards, and confiscated valuable items such as woolsacks, saddlebags, carpetbags, boilers, rugs and the like domestic utensils. Disputes over the estimated tax amounts and even fights between the tax collectors, village headmen, gendarme soldiers and taxpayers were not rare.²⁷⁴

It was reported that in rural areas, the power of the tax collectors was so great that it was equivalent to that of district governors. Although the peasants had the right to pay their tax in two or three installments within a year, the tax collectors, who did not like to revisit the villages again and again in the following months, always demanded the payment of the whole amount in a lump sum. Therefore, the tax collectors, accompanied by gendarme soldiers, usually sequestered the peasants'

²⁷⁴ For instance, see "Akköy Halkının Derdi," *Vakit*, 10.04.1934. There were several examples similar to this in the newspapers and archival reports. See also "Ödeşmek," <http://nihatakkaraca.blogspot.com/2007/05/demek.html>.

properties and put on the sale at public auction if the peasants did not or could not pay all of their annual taxes.²⁷⁵

Generally, the tax collectors and the debt enforcement officials pressured the peasantry through the village headmen. That is to say, the pressure of the village headmen over the peasants stemmed from not only the headmen's personal interests and the requests of *ağas*, but also the requests and demands of tax officials and other state authorities on the village headmen. They often ordered the village headmen to force the peasants to pay the unpaid taxes and debts immediately. For instance, in the villages of Konya and Aksaray, those peasants who were pressured by the state officials through the village headmen had no choice but to sell their livestock and household goods in the market.²⁷⁶

Some tax collectors and debt enforcement officials who expropriated the peasants' properties derived illicit personal benefits from their sale.²⁷⁷ As admitted by Aydın deputy Nuri Göktepe in 1935, there were many tax collectors who deceived the peasants. The peasants' lack of accurate information about the exact amounts of the tax rates or about their legal rights encouraged the tax collectors and debt enforcement officials to abuse them.²⁷⁸ For instance, the party inspectors of Zonguldak, Giresun, and Ordu provinces reported how the peasants suffered from corrupt tax collectors and state officials who demanded bribes under the title of gifts.²⁷⁹ Undoubtedly, the corrupt tax collectors upset many peasants; however, sometime this corruption enabled some peasants to avoid the heavy taxes, as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

²⁷⁵ Kemahlı A., "Vergiler Hakkında Anket," *Cumhuriyet*, 22.11.1930; see also "Ödeşmek," <http://nihatakkaraca.blogspot.com/2007/05/demek.html>.

²⁷⁶ Report about the Organization and Enlargement of the RPP Organizational Structure to the Konya and Aksaray Provinces, BCA MGM [30.10/79.520.3], 05.01.1931.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ BCA CHP [490.1/620.36.1], 01.12.1935.

²⁷⁹ Inspection Reports on the RPP Provincial Organizations in the Giresun, Ordu and Zonguldak provinces, BCA CHP [490.01/655.182.1], 14.09.1931.

Turkish literature also depicts unfair treatment, abuses and pressure by the tax collectors during the early Republic. Reşat Enis' novel *Toprak Kokusu* (Smell of Soil) illustrates the unfair treatment and abuses by tax collectors.²⁸⁰ Orhan Hançerlioğlu's book of *Karanlık Dünya-Ekilmemiş Topraklar* (Dark World-Uncultivated Lands) also noted how the tax collectors, with the help of gendarme soldiers, terrorized a village. The rigid and abusive treatments by the tax collectors led the gendarmes to beat or arrest the peasants who objected to the tax collectors.²⁸¹

Other state officials in the towns and city centers also created difficulties to the peasants. Especially in those villages that were in close proximity to towns or city-centers, high-ranking state officials had great authority over the village headmen. They generally put pressure on the headmen and peasants to implement the Village Law strictly. Some administrators, abusing the Village Law, forced the peasants to work on public work projects or even their private projects.²⁸²

The Gendarme

The moonshine lights up the bayonet of the gendarme
The captive comrade stares out of the window at the gendarme
And he says, gendarme you are my brother, my countryman
You came maybe yesterday from the village in the fields of which the tax collector
patrolled
Your mother, wife, children all went hungry in your village
Neither the government thrust out a hand, nor is there a hope for help from the *ağa*
Oh! If you knew, you gendarme, what they give you as an assignment
Maybe one day you will become an officer, they tell you to bayonet your
countryman²⁸³

²⁸⁰ Reşat Enis, *Toprak Kokusu* (İstanbul: Örgün Yayınevi, 2002), pp. 257-258.

²⁸¹ Orhan Hançerlioğlu, *Karanlık Dünya-Ekilmemiş Topraklar*, (İstanbul: Varlık Yayınevi, 1954), pp. 105-107.

²⁸² BCA CHP [490.01/724.477.1], 18.01.1931.

²⁸³ Ay ışıĒı jandamanın süngüsünü yakıyor
Mahpus yoldaş pencereden jandarmaya bakıyor
Ve diyor ki, jandarma sen kardeşimsin köylümsün
Kırlarında solgun (tahsidar) gezer köyden geldin belki dün
Anan, karın, çocukların köyünde hep aç kaldılar
Ne hükümet el uzatır, ne de ağadan medet var

This poem, penned by Nazım Hikmet in the 1930s, is, I think, the best illustration of the contradictory position of the gendarme soldiers in the village. Although the gendarme soldiers were mostly poor peasants, they were perhaps the most frightening and consequently the most hated government agents in the village. The origins of peasants fear of and hostility towards the gendarme can be traced back to the 19th century centralization process during the Ottoman Empire. Especially in the late 19th century, the gendarme together with the ruthless Régie guards had been the most threatening forces to village communities. With the Republican regime, the gendarme forces maintained their horrific place in the view of the villagers. As outsiders who were sometimes corrupt and brutal they were the principal agents of the government imposing its directives, laws, regulations, and policies, which were often opposite the peasants' interests, often by means of violence. Their bad treatment along with their exploitation of scarce resources of the peasants so upset the peasants that the criticisms of the gendarme pressure and violence would be the main component of the Democratic Party's propaganda in Anatolian towns and villages.

The upper echelons of the gendarme in localities were usually in cooperation with the propertied and ruling classes and prominent households. They sometimes were involved in corruption with the provincial notables. As for the rank and files, they were mostly composed of peasant-origin poor young men, who were overwhelmingly uneducated and ignorant. They also were involved in corruption, abusing the peasants for their own petty interests. In addition, they often confused their duties and rights, frequently violating the peasants' rights and lives.

The gendarme soldiers were so notorious for their oppression, brutality, and ruthlessness that it is hardly surprising that peasantry always resented them. The

Ah bir bilsen jandarma sen, sana ne iş verirler
Belki bir gün zabıt olursun sana köylünü süngüle derler

beating of peasants within villages or in gendarme stations was common throughout the country. Furthermore, when gendarmes went to a village to prosecute a suspected criminal, they forced the peasants to host or provision them with every possible means.²⁸⁴

Apart from their corruption and bad treatment, given the adverse effects of the state economic policies on the peasantry, even the lawful efforts and practices of the gendarme to fulfill their actual duties were also more than enough to evoke the peasants' discontent. As stated above, they usually accompanied the tax collectors and debt enforcement officials in their tours of the villages. They played a primary role in forced foreclosures and expropriations of the properties of peasants who had failed to discharge their debts or pay their taxes. A tax collector or a debt enforcement official could not cope with the angry peasants without the gendarme escort.

Like their commanders, the gendarme soldiers also were generally in cooperation with the large landowners, prominent households and the village headmen for their own interests and sometimes their very survival because they were hardly fed by the state. Benefitting from this situation, the oppressive headmen, landowners, and merchants maintained their authority over the peasantry via the force of the gendarme. When peasants objected to the unfair and unequal treatment by village headmen, for instance, the one important resort to which village headmen applied was the gendarme to quell the peasants' objections and resistance.²⁸⁵

In Turkish towns and provinces, the high and mid-ranked security forces, who generally were assimilated into the local interest relations, generally were on the side of the provincial mercantile elite and large landowners. For example, Sevim Belli,

²⁸⁴ Szyliowicz, *Political Change in Rural Turkey: Erdemli*, p. 48.

²⁸⁵ Nar, *Anadolu Günlüğü*, p. 58.

whose father was appointed to Artvin as director of the police department in 1936, has described in her memoirs how her father was included in an elite circle in close contact with each other at dinners and tea parties. Along with his father, the governor, gendarme commander, judge, public prosecutor, and some prominent and rich families of the province were in this circle.²⁸⁶

This characteristic of the provincial ruling bloc comprised of both the administrative and economic elites was not peculiar to Artvin; it appears to have been prevalent in other provinces of Anatolia. Take for example Giresun. According to the party inspectors, the richest merchant and large estate owner Hasan Tahsin Bey had acquired of wealth about 250,000 TL by means of money lending at astronomical interest rates. Cementing good relations with the state administrators and the gendarme commander, he always enjoyed their active support in all of his dealings and disagreements with the peasants. In return for the active support of the gendarme commander Major Zeki Bey, the magistrate Cemil Molla Bey, and some village headmen, he distributed to them some of the shares of the profits derived from money lending. Encouraged by him to engage in the money lending, these state officials and village headmen also lent the peasants at interest and made money. The gendarme commander and the magistrate helped Tahsin Bey by making it easier to sequester the properties of the debtors. Furthermore, they prearranged the back room sale of foreclosed properties without any public auction at cheap prices to rich landowners, especially Hasan Tahsin Bey.²⁸⁷

For instance, when a debtor to whom Hasan Tahsin Bey had lent 200 TL at enormous interest rates failed to pay his debt, which had climbed to 500 TL, the debt enforcement officials accompanied by the gendarme confiscated his properties.

²⁸⁶ Sevim Belli, *Boşuna mı Çığnedik? Anılar* (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1994), p. 76.

²⁸⁷ Inspection Reports on the RPP Provincial Organizations in the Giresun, Ordu and Zonguldak provinces BCA CHP [490.1/655.182.1], 14.09.1931.

Regarding the lands of the debtor that were valued at about 5000 TL in fact as equivalent to the total debt of 500 TL, the officials enabled Hasan Tahsin Bey to take over a land of 5000 TL in return for only 200 TL. At the end of this very profitable deal, of course, Hasan Tahsin Bey gave small shares out of his profit to the gendarme commander and the magistrate who had contributed to his lucrative “business.”²⁸⁸

Such exploitation mechanisms and corrupted order could not be maintained without gendarme violence, which was common in the province. In 1934, it was reported from Giresun that gendarme soldiers often beat the peasants. Probably, this violence was associated closely with the “business” of Hasan Tahsin Bey and similar influential people.²⁸⁹

In a similar vein, the gendarme commander in the Alaşehir district of Manisa also cemented close relations with one of the prominent families of the district. In a report, Manisa deputy Osman, notifying the government about the adverse effects of this close partnership between the security forces and a wealthier family, proposed the appointment of the gendarme commander to another district.²⁹⁰

The close relations and cooperation of merchants, large landowners, and gendarmes were quite striking in the districts of İzmir. According to the complaint letters of peasants and the reports of politicians between 1931 and 1933, the powerful landowners and merchants of Ödemiş, Kiraz and Kemalpaşa districts, backed by the gendarme commander Fuat Bey, had long exploited the small-scale farmers and poor peasants and were involved in corruption in many ways. For instance, Nihat Bey, a prominent large estate owner and merchant in Kemalpaşa, seized vineyards that had been cultivated by the peasants for 35 years by falsifying the land registers owing to

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ RPP Giresun Province Administrative Committee’s Three Months Report by the end of March 1934. BCA CHP [490.1/655.182.1].

²⁹⁰ From the Manisa Deputy Osman to the RPP Secretary-General, BCA CHP [490.01/684.317.1], 17.01.1931.

his friendship with the land registration official Malik Bey. Upon the persistent objections and protests of the peasants, the gendarme commander Lieutenant Fuat Bey set the gendarmes against the peasants and threatened them with prosecution for trespassing upon the property of Nihat Bey.²⁹¹ Furthermore, he ordered the gendarme soldiers to seize the grapes cultivated by the peasants, valued about 6000 TL. Upon the resistance of the peasants, the gendarme arrested them.²⁹² In 1933, Fuat Bey, after retiring from his job, was elected to the Party Administration of the Kemalpaşa district thanks to his close relations with the interest groups.²⁹³

Likewise, the gendarme commander of the Kiraz district, Şükrü Efendi, was of assistance to the headmen of Elbi village in his corrupt practices. As far as can be understood from the petition of an aggrieved small farmer named Apdioğlu Hüseyin, the village headman Çavuşoğlu Hüseyin, ordered the gendarme commander Şükrü Efendi to arrest his son and hold him hostage in the Kiraz district prison. Four day later, the village headman demanded 30 TL and the peasant's horse for him, and another 30 TL for the gendarme commander to release the peasant's son. The gendarme commander and the village headman threatened the peasant that if he refused to pay ransom for his imprisoned son, his son would be in great trouble.²⁹⁴

The story of a group of peasants in Torbalı who were discontented with the gendarme commander Şuayip Bey also demonstrates how the gendarme abused the poor peasants. In 1934, a group of small farmers and poor peasants complained about the gendarme commander Şuayip Bey to the government. They accused the gendarme commander of robbing the defenseless peasants and of suppressing those

²⁹¹ From the RPP Secretary-General and the Kütahya Deputy Recep Peker to the Minister of Internal Affairs Şükrü Kaya, BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1], 20.07.1931.

²⁹² Sait Efendi from the Kemalpaşa RPP Administrative Committee, BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1], 18.05.1931.

²⁹³ RPP Secretary- General Kütahya Deputy, BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1], 09.03.1933.

²⁹⁴ Hüseyin, Son of Abdi, BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1], 28.07.1934.

people who objected to his acts.²⁹⁵ According to another complaint letter related to the abuses of Şuayip Bey, the office of the village headmen had been sold to rich peasants in return for money paid to the gendarme commander. The officials and the gendarme commander collected money from the peasants for their personal interests. Furthermore, the gendarme and the tax collectors, hand in hand, robbed the peasants in Selçuk and Torbalı. The government, alarmed by these serious and constant complaints, investigated the validity of the allegations. At the end of the investigations, the inspectors found the gendarme commander guilty and appointed him to another place.²⁹⁶

As will be examined in detail in the following chapters, peasants who challenged the taxes and tax collectors usually were confronted by the harsh response of the gendarmes. Given the fact that it was the gendarme who arrested and forcibly took the peasants who did not pay the Road Tax to the road building sites to work compulsorily,²⁹⁷ many peasants who tried to evade overtaxation and the heavy

²⁹⁵ Mehmet Zeki from the RPP Torbalı members, BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1], 06.06.1934.

²⁹⁶ BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1].

²⁹⁷ "I would never forget how the Samsun governor Mustafa Arif Bey to whom I went as member of the Peasantism Branch of the Turkish Heart hoping to free the Gököy peasants from the gendarmes that came to arrest seventy-two peasant at a feast night because they had not paid 4 liras of road money, had hurled me out of his room yelling "You are an anarchist." Fikret Madaralı, *Ekmekli Dönemeç* (İstanbul: Hür Yayınevi, 1965), p. 7. According to a newspaper report, "in an Anatolian village, a gendarme soldier pressed a peasant to pay 960 piaster as road tax. Because the peasant could not give, he hangs himself." "960 Kuruş İçin," *Köroğlu*, 16.12.1929. According to another newspaper report, "In Kandıra peasants who could not give the road money are taken in by the gendarme gradually. Last week 200 people were arrested... In general the debt per head is between 20 to 45 liras, that is to say, they did not pay the tax for years." "Yol Parasını Vermiyen Borçlulara Dair," *Köroğlu*, 28.02.1934. "In some districts of Adana, police and gendarme waylay. The objective is to round up some muscle for road tax. Those who had been gathered by force are either sent to road working or to the private angary of the governor or district governor." "Bu Ne Rezalettir?" *Orak Çekiç*, No. 8 (1 June 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 420. "The tax collectors started to imitate the bandits. They waylay. When the peasants go to bazaar in specific days, they stop the peasants, search for their names from the records in their hands and demand money immediately from those having tax debt. When the peasants are not able to make payment at that moment, they seize the goods the peasants just bought from the town market and even their donkeys. In case that the peasants do not have some valuable goods to surrendered in lieu of their tax debts, the gendarme soldiers send the peasants immediately to the police station and then to road construction sites. In certain busts, peasant families get news from their men a week after." "Yol Kesmek," *Orak Çekiç*, No. 10 (Aug. 10, 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 435.

obligations of the Road Tax and the Livestock Tax frequently fought the gendarme soldiers as well as the tax collectors.

Again, those peasants who lived off the forests had to cope with gendarmes patrolling in the forests and mountains as well as forest rangers.²⁹⁸ Peasants who engaged in the smuggling also faced gendarme repression.²⁹⁹ Finally, those determined peasants who dared to defy the authority of their *ağas* or brutal officials by resisting them had to fight the gendarmes. In disputes between state and peasants over land and harvested crops, the gendarme functioned in the elimination of the peasant's resistance and protests.³⁰⁰

Gendarme oppression and abuses seem to have been more serious in the eastern parts of the country. The gendarme struggled against the rising peasants and tribal chiefs and cooperated with those landowners and tribes who sided with the government against their rivals. The poor peasants were exposed to the two-fold oppression and exploitation by the gendarme and landowner in any case.

In 1927, for instance, many tribes and landowners in eastern and southeastern Anatolia managed to keep their armed forces under the title of militias against bandits. Via such armed forces, they semiofficially or unofficially cemented close relations with the gendarme and the army. Some of these landowners integrated into the new state apparatus and became able to manipulate even the government, which saw them as partners in its struggle against the rising tribes, rebellious peasants, and Kurdish nationalism. Furthermore, in many places, their intermediary role was

²⁹⁸ Especially, with the government monopoly over the forests, another state servant with whom the peasants were often in trouble was forest rangers. Yıldız Sertel, *Ardımdaki Yıllar*, p. 120. The struggle between the gendarme or forests rangers and the peasants who cut timber in forests underhandedly without any official permission will be examined in detail in Chapter Five.

²⁹⁹ The fight and armed conflicts between the gendarmes and the smugglers who were mostly peasants will be addressed in Chapter Five, and partly Chapter Six.

³⁰⁰ For instance, according to a newspaper report, the gendarme attacked the peasants who protested the Uşak Sugar Factory and the municipality. "Kabahat Köylüler de Mi?" *Son Posta*, 09.09.1932.

indispensable to the collection of taxes or conscription.³⁰¹ A contemporary observer wrote, “Anyone who took a brief look at the correspondences between the district governors and large landowners would be amazed at the close cooperation between the large landowners and the local state officials.”³⁰²

In addition, the local official and the gendarme soldiers were embedded in local interest networks. A report written at a somewhat late date, in 1943, by Avni Doğan, the General Inspector of the First Inspectorate Region, confirms that in eastern Anatolia, gendarme soldiers partially depended on the local prominent households and large landowners. In addition, this report points out the lack of qualified gendarme soldiers and commanders and the necessity of their qualification as soon as possible.³⁰³

According to the other official reports written during the 1930s, the inefficiency of the gendarmes was not related to an inadequate number of the gendarmes but to their low quality. Rather than positive contribution of the existing undisciplined, untrained and inefficient gendarme soldiers to the implementation of the government’s plans, they aggravated the problems in the region. The most of the gendarmes were still dependant on the large landowners for their own survival. Due to the low salaries and allowances given to them, they had to appeal to the local prominent and powerful household for provisional and monetary assistances. Most of these local households had an eye on the limited sources of poor and small peasants.³⁰⁴ Furthermore, an important part of the gendarme soldiers were native

³⁰¹ Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 99.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 102.

³⁰³ See Mehmet Bayrak, *Kürtlere Vurulan Kelepçe: Şark Islahat Planı* (Ankara: Özge Yayınları, 2009), p. 94, 204, 207.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

young men who were mobilized, encouraged and supported by *ağas*. Therefore, they especially observed the interests and authority of their *ağas*.³⁰⁵

In many places, the gendarme forces treated the peasants badly. Cases of sexual harassment and rape increased in the 1930s throughout the region. Poor peasants were frequently abused and robbed by gendarmes who were ignorant and poor peasant boys who often abused their power.³⁰⁶

Along with the illegal use of force and other abuses, one of the main actors of the state violence against the insurgent peasants in both east and west was again the gendarme. As will be addressed in Chapter Six, thousands of poor peasants who were up in arms against the exploitation and oppression of their *ağas* and local officials had to struggle against the gendarme soldiers in the mountains.³⁰⁷ Especially the gendarme soldiers who came from the indigenous people and were supported by the local power holders especially took an active part in the struggle with those bandits who resisted the *ağas*.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ See Kılıncımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 177.

³⁰⁶ Faik Bulut, *Dersim Raporları* (İstanbul: Evrensel Basım Yayın, 1992), p. 288.

³⁰⁷ Bayrak, *Kürtlere Vurulan Kelepçe: Şark Islahat Planı*, p. 157.

³⁰⁸ See Kılıncımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 177.

CHAPTER TWO

PEASANT DISCONTENT

The lower-class peasants, having a subjective and autonomous consciousness and reasoning, did not remain silent in the face of adverse economic conditions, exploitation and oppression. The government's economic policies, like the abolition of the tithe and populist discourse devised to establish hegemony over the rural population, were not able to deceive the peasantry. The wish lists of local party congresses, deputy reports on inspection or election districts, the National Assembly discussions, and citizens' petitions and letters sent to the government agencies and the newspapers reveal the fact that the peasants frequently voiced their discontent and demands. They solicited the government to relieve their economic problems by keeping its promises and living up to its commitments. This section focuses on the grievances and demands of poor and small-income peasants that constituted the great part of the population, i.e., public opinion regarding the social and economic matters in rural areas.

Land Hunger and Its Effects

The primary problem of the Anatolian peasants was the lack of enough amount of arable land. Landless peasants or small-plot holders, who made a living the hard way with limited resources, complained of the lack of sufficient land to support their families. Even though most of them did not produce for the market, declining agricultural prices must have further displeased them since the price declines made more difficult to earn some money in return for a sale of a marginal portion of their

crops when they were pressed for cash. Debt crisis that was triggered by the economic crisis caused many small farmers to lose their small plot to large landowners and usurers.

Consequently, increasingly a growing number of peasants wished to keep their small plots of lands, have their own lands, or enlarge their very smallholdings. During the period under study, complaints about landlessness or lack of sufficient arable land and demands for the distribution of state lands or derelict lands to landless peasants and smallholders were widespread throughout the country.

The problem of the landlessness or of inadequate land of the low-income and poor peasants was reflected through various mechanisms to the government. A close look at the letters penned by the peasants to newspapers, their petitions, politicians' reports, and the wish lists of RPP's provincial congresses illustrate the immensity of the peasants' grievance with the land shortage.

In view of the discontent arising from landlessness, the Republican leaders, particularly Atatürk and İnönü had mentioned several times about the necessity of the distribution of fallow treasury lands to landless peasants during the late 1920s and especially in the mid-1930s. The promises of the Republican leaders catalyzed the peasants' demands for land. The peasants voiced their demands for land provision by appropriating such elite discourse. Many daring peasants who had heard about the politician's statements about the provision of land to the poor and landless peasants demanded land from the local and central governments.

The complaints about the lack of adequate arable land and landlessness especially increased with the settlement of Balkan refugees in Anatolia. The Balkan refugees, most of whom were peasants who had left behind their properties, constituted a large group suffering land hunger because the government distributed

very small pieces of land to them. The great part of them did not receive sufficient lands to continue their previous agricultural activities.³⁰⁹

The peasants of Turcoman tribes also suffered from the lack of free lands to stay on due to the ever-increasing consolidation of private property over the lands. Therefore, they also were discontented with the landlessness. Ali Rıza Yalman, a folklorist of the time, toured and observed the nomadic Turcoman's way of living in western and southern Anatolia, especially in the Taurus Mountains. According to him, although some of them still preserved their nomadic lifestyle, landlessness posed a great problem for them, too. They also demanded ownership of land. In one Turcoman village, an old woman used the nationalist rhetoric by putting forward their pure Turkishness and scathingly criticized their deprivation of land.

Efendi, we are Turks. Our fatherland was Turk, our tribe is all Turks, but we do not have a handful land. Is there anybody who worries about us? Spit on the land, we are dying!³¹⁰

Bahşiş tribe in Adana region was, as Yalman wrote, one of those many Turcoman tribes who suffered land hunger. They had neither land nor horses. They spent the winter in the places in the southern part of Adana that they rented seasonally. Reminding the authorities of the Republican leaders' discourse promising that each Turkish peasant would have his own land, they also demanded land. A peasant from the tribe told to Yalman how they suffered great pains because of landlessness. According to the peasant, they also wanted to have their own lands to settle permanently in like other peasants. "Like many other tribes" noted Yalman, "the

³⁰⁹ İskender Özsoy, *İki Vatan Yorgunları: Mübadele Acısını Yaşayanlar Anlatıyor* (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2003), p.

³¹⁰ A. R. Yalman [Yalgın], *Cenupta Türkmen Oymakları*, Vol. I, (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1977), p. 215.

Bahşış tribe also wishes to settle on land and say, ‘We are Turks, but do not have a piece of land.’ ”³¹¹

Perhaps, the most dramatic and epic story of a small Turcoman tribe, which had great difficulties to find a piece of land to stay in Çukurova after the increasing private properties with the new laws in the early Republic was *Binboğalar Efsanesi*, penned by Yaşar Kemal. This novel also underscores the land question in the early Republic by depicting how a Turcoman tribe dissolved due to the deprivation of land to stay in winter in Çukurova region and how it was thrown out of everywhere they went to stay by the new owners of the land.³¹²

Especially the increasing land concentration and growth of private properties over land due to the new legal reforms in the mid 1920s supporting the property rights of individuals and the Great Depression, which led many peasants to debt crisis and the ensuing dispossession, generated widespread complaints of landlessness and demands for land. In the late 1920s, many peasants in need of arable lands for cultivation demanded the provision of the waste state lands and pastures to themselves by writing to the official authorities. The lists of the petitions sent to the National Assembly were replete with demands for arable land. In 1928, for instance, Seyit Ahmet from the Çeltikli village of Yenişehir, and Ahmet from Arapkir demanded fertile lands for cultivation.³¹³ In 1930, a peasant named Fazıl from a village in Adana wanted the government to give him a piece of arable land and a house that had been abandoned by the minorities in the Great War. From Artvin, a small holder named Hüseyin wrote in his letter that his small farm had not met the needs of his family and he requested the government to give him a sufficient amount of land. A peasant named Fehmi from İzmir demanded a vineyard and land

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

³¹² See Yaşar Kemal, *Binboğalar Efsanesi* (İstanbul: Adam Yayınları, 1998).

³¹³ *TBMM Yıllık 1928*, p. 325; *TBMM Yıllık 1931*, p. 371.

for his sustenance. In a similar vein, peasants named Hasan Ferit from Yıldızeli, Ali from Cumalı, Mustafa from İzmir, Harun from Kozan, Derviş and his friend from Kayseri, Hasan from Akhisar, Ali from Tefenni, and many other peasants from different parts of the country submitted demands for sufficient amount of arable land to the government.³¹⁴ At later dates, the government continued to receive many demands for land provisioning from poor peasants. For instance, Ziya Karasu from a village of Aydın, Fethi, a peasant in Adana, Aşık Hasan from a village of Bozüyük, Yakup Semiz from Tirebolu, Hilmi Özpek from a village of İzmir, and many other peasants from several parts of the country pleaded with the government to distribute arable land to themselves.³¹⁵

Some villages inhabited by landless peasants and small holders sometimes collectively demanded land provision. For instance, in 1928, a peasant named Şaban in Kozan on behalf of himself and his landless peasant friends requested that the government give them land to cultivate.³¹⁶ In 1930, low-income peasants of the Bekir, a sub-district of Ödemiş, collectively demanded the distribution of the treasury lands lying idle in their district. From the Borçka district of Artvin, the northeastern end of the country, a peasant named Şevki and his peasant friends wrote a collective letter to the National Assembly requesting the allocation of a piece of fertile land to the poor peasants of the district.³¹⁷ In another collective letter to the National Assembly, a group of peasants from a village in Aydın wanted the government to

³¹⁴ *TBMM Yıllık 1930*, Petition No. 3749, 3760, 3795, 3883, 3889, 4007, 4374, 4398, 4475, 4504, 4577, 4949.

³¹⁵ *TBMM Yıllık 1939*, Petition No. 3362, 3864, 4389, 4572, 4631.

³¹⁶ *TBMM Yıllık 1928*, p. 321.

³¹⁷ *TBMM Yıllık 1930*, Petition No. 4949.

give them some part of the local fallow treasury lands for cultivation.³¹⁸ In 1931, peasants from Güveçli village of Van collectively raised their demand for land.³¹⁹

Such collective demands continued in the following years. Especially in the second half of the 1930s, the peasant awareness about land provisioning became more evident, and the demands for land distribution were raised further because of both the pressure of land deprivation and the Republican leaders' statements assuring the provision of land to landless peasants.

In 1935, for example, a group of peasants from the Keller village of Zonguldak collectively demanded the distribution of land to the landless peasants in their villages.³²⁰ In 1939, the landless peasants of Sarıbahçe in Ceyhan came together and collectively wrote to the party and government simultaneously. They requested the provision of unused land from Çukurova for cultivation.³²¹ From the Taşkesiği village of Ünye a peasant named Said Aksu and his poor fellows signed a collective petition describing how they were deprived of cultivable land and how they had been in need of the government help in the form of provision of land to themselves.³²² Again, a peasant named Ferhad Yaş wrote a petition in the name of 80 peasant households in the Mondulus village in Refahiye who were in need of cultivable land. In this collective letter, the peasants requested that the government distribute unoccupied state lands of about 318 *dönüms* within the boundaries of their village to the landless peasant households.³²³ Large and small groups of peasants from Konya,

³¹⁸ *TBMM Yıllık 1930*, Petition No. 3749.

³¹⁹ *TBMM Yıllık 1931*, p. 375.

³²⁰ *TBMM Yıllık 1935*, p. 300.

³²¹ BCA MGM [30.10/81.531.19], 25.07.1939.

³²² *TBMM Yıllık 1939*, Petition No. 3362.

³²³ *TBMM Yıllık 1939*, Petition No. 4366.

Bursa, Giresun, Tekirdağ, and many other provinces collectively voiced their demands for the provision of tillable treasury lands.³²⁴

Peasant wrote not only to the official authorities, but also to the nationwide newspaper to make their voice heard, especially after their petitions to the local or central government remained unresponsive. In 1936, a group of peasants from İnebolu wrote a collective letter to a newspaper about their desperate situation arising from landlessness. 335 peasants from 54 households had been for a long time demanding that the government distribute some part of the treasury lands in their village. However, the government had not yet taken into consideration their demand. In the letter, the peasants stated that they wished and had a right to have their own lands.³²⁵

In June 1935, a group of poor peasants and even shepherds and small herders in a village of Kütahya, for instance, resorted to the provincial government in person in the hope of acquiring their own small properties after they had heard the promise of the Prime Minister. They stated that they wished to be granted some idle state lands in their village that had been unused for a long time. However, they returned to their villages empty-handed. Thereupon, by writing to *Son Posta*, they notified the public about the refusal of their rightful demands by the local authorities.³²⁶

One month later, in a similar way, a small-scale tobacco cultivator named Karaahmetoğlu Mehmet from a village of Akçaabat wrote to a newspaper that he had been filled with hope when he had heard the promise of Prime Minister İnönü about the distribution of land to the landless peasants. Subsequently applying to the local government, he had demanded a derelict plot of land that had been abandoned by Armenians who had expatriated during the Great War. However, he had been

³²⁴ *TBMM Yıllık 1939*, Petition No. 4200, 4211, 4613, 4674.

³²⁵ “Toprak İsteyen Köylü,” *Köroğlu*, 26.09.1936.

³²⁶ “Toprak İstedik, Fakat Vermediler,” *Son Posta*, 29.06.1935.

disappointed with the rejection of his demand. Therefore, Mehmet expressed his disappointment and grief arising from this confusing situation by criticizing the contradiction between the speeches of the Prime Minister and the practices of the local government. He complained that despite the Republican leaders' promises, the government in fact had not provided land to poor peasants like him.³²⁷

The complaints about landlessness, lack of land distribution in conjunction with the land demands of peasants resonated in the local congresses of the RPP. For example, the provincial party congresses of Antalya, Aydın, Konya, Samsun, Sivas, and many other provinces held in 1936 emphasized the problems that emanated from the acute shortage of arable land. The wish lists of many provincial party congresses included many requests from the party to accomplish land legislation including land distribution to landless or smallholder peasants.³²⁸

In a similar line, the suffering and complaints of landless peasants were reflected in the local party congress in İzmir in 1936. The immediate distribution of the unused lands and vineyards owned by the state to the landless peasants in the villages of Bergama, Foça, Torbalı, Tire and Urla took place among the wish list of İzmir party congress submitted to the General-Congress of the RPP.³²⁹

The RPP deputies who toured their election districts also frequently heard peasants' complaints on the problem of scarcity of arable lands and landlessness. One of the most substantial demands peasants often put forward, and accordingly was recorded in deputy reports was the distribution of the local fallow lands to those peasants deprived of a sufficient amount arable land to cultivate. In 1939, for instance, deputies investigating their election districts reported that in their talks with peasants in villages, they had heard frequent demands for the immediate provisioning

³²⁷ "Akçaabatta Hakkı Kaybolan Bir Köylü Vatandaşımız," *Son Posta*, 16.07.1935.

³²⁸ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, pp. 51-52, 63-64, 354, 378-379, 292-293.

³²⁹ *CHP 28/12/1936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi*, p. 35, 43, 51, 58.

of treasury lands to themselves. Especially deputies of Burdur, Denizli, Gaziantep and İzmir reported that many peasants had expected the government to allocate some fallow state lands to them. The Gaziantep deputy, for instance, underscoring the fact that there were more than 12,000 households without any land in the villages of Kilis district alone, suggested the government to apportion some part of the state lands to them as soon as possible.³³⁰ Likewise, the Kırklareli deputy reported that the peasants who desperately needed a sufficient amount of arable land wished the government would give them arable lands.³³¹

The RPP leaders also personally witnessed the people's land hunger in their investigation tours. In İnönü's tour of the eastern provinces, for instance, the most repeated demand by the peasants in almost all of the villages was the land distribution as soon as possible. Many smallholders in the region expressed their hope for the land distribution to the peasants who suffered from the landlessness or shortage of arable lands.³³² The peasants complained of either landlessness or deadly fights between peasants over scarce arable lands and pastures.³³³

Despite a huge amount of landless and poor peasants in contrast to the large landownership of *ağas* and some tribal chiefs in the eastern provinces, petitioning newspapers and the official authorities was rare in this region. This was partially due to the lack of written-Turkish knowledge and of confidence in the official authorities, who were usually manipulated by *ağas*. In addition, the RPP did not establish local organizations in some of the eastern provinces.

As will be addressed in detail in Chapter Six, the peasants' deep grievance that originated from land hunger, sharp social and economic inequalities, and state

³³⁰ The Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies who Visited Their Election Districts in the 1939 Summer Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/515.2062.1].

³³¹ BCA CHP [490.01/538.2156.1], 1938.

³³² Saygı Öztürk, *İsmet Paşa'nın Kürt Raporu* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2008), p. 61.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

and *ağa* oppression appeared in the form of widespread banditry against the large landowners, well-off farmers and official authorities. For instance, according to a report penned by Hulusi Alataş, Minister of Health and Social Aid, Arabic, Kurdish and Assyrian peasants, who were mostly in desperate conditions and lacked even a small piece of tillable land of their own, engaged in a series of crimes in order to survive. According to the minister, the prerequisite of the peace and maintenance of the public and political order in the region was therefore provision of treasury lands to landless peasants. He suggested that the government continue to apportion the state lands to the poor peasants.³³⁴ In a similar line, Cemal Bardakçı, the governor of Diyarbakır in the mid-1920s, also saw the social disorder in the eastern Anatolia as an expression of the landlessness and poverty.³³⁵

In view of such social pressure, the government had to put a land reform project on its agenda. The RPP leaders were compelled to mention about the land hunger of peasants frequently.³³⁶ The Prime Minister İnönü in his parliament speech addressed the question of landless peasants and promised a land reform in 1929 and 1936. In his speeches in the National Assembly in 1928, 1935 and 1937, Atatürk also touched on the question of land hunger and encouraged the government to initiate a land reform program including the distribution of some treasury lands to landless peasants. In 1937, he said decisively “There should be no any landless farmer in the country” (“*Memlekette topraksız çiftçi bırakılmamalıdır*”).³³⁷ Apart from the RPP

³³⁴ About the importance of the land distribution to the folk in their own districts, Minister of Public Health and Welfare H. Alataş. BCA MGM [30.10/123.879.10], 05.03.1938.

³³⁵ Bardakçı, *Toprak Dâvasından Siyasî Partilere*, p. 24, 37.

³³⁶ About the Republican elite’s discourse about land reform, see Asım Karaömerlioğlu, *Bir Tepeden Reform Denemesi: Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunun Hikâyesi*, *Birikim*, No.107 (Mar. 1998), pp. 32-33.

³³⁷ See for the 1928 speech delivered in the National Assembly, A. Afet İnan, *Devletçilik İlkesi ve Türkiye Cumhuriyetinin Birinci Sanayi Planı, 1933* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1972), p. 108. For Atatürk’s other speeches addressing the land question, see “Cumhurbaşkanı Kemal Atatürk’ün Meclis Açış Nutku,” 01.11.1935. Bilsay Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 2 (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1993), pp. 369-370. See also

elite, the *Kadro* periodical, which attempted to theorize the new regime, fervently championed the idea of a comprehensive land reform.³³⁸

The government took several steps to distribute the fertile treasury lands to the poor and small peasants. The first step in this direction was the Law Regarding the Distribution of Land to Needy Farmers in the Eastern Region (*Şark Menatıkı Dahilinde Muhtaç Züraa Tevzi Edilecek Araziye Dair Kanun*) (No.1505) in 11.06.1929.³³⁹ This law was applied to many other regions in the western and central Anatolia.³⁴⁰

Moreover, the provision of the waste and abandoned lands to landless peasants was included in the economic program prepared in 1930. In 1934, the Settlement Law provided a legal basis for the land distribution to the poor peasants and small plot holders. In the Fourth General Congress of the RPP, held in 1935, the ruling party adopted a new article in its program that promised a land reform.³⁴¹

Subsequently, the Settlement-Land Law draft dated 1935 also intended the nationalization of fallow private plots and distribution of them to the landless peasants. This law was not approved by the National Assembly. Two years later, in view of social pressures and insistence of Atatürk on a comprehensive land distribution program, the government had to prepare a new agricultural reform program, titled Agricultural Reform Law Draft (*Ziraî Islahat Kanun Tasarısı*). This law draft, which targeted a land reform, also was not enacted due to the power of

“The Opening Speech given by Atatürk in the Opening of the first session of the National Assembly in 1937,” *Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, Vol. I (İstanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1945), p. 374, 379.

³³⁸ Mustafa Türkeş, *Kadro Hareketi: Ulusçu Sol Bir Akım* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1999), pp. 186-192.

³³⁹ *Düstur III*, Vol. 10, p.1793.

³⁴⁰ For instance see the application of the law (No.1505) to Ordu province, BCA BKK [30.18.1/02.84.85], 26.9.1938; The application of the law (No.1505) to İstanbul province BCA BKK [30.18.1/02.78.76], 27.8.1937.

³⁴¹ *CHP Dördüncü Büyük Kongre Zabıtları*, (Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1935), p. 81.

landed interests within the ruling party, the death of Atatürk in 1938, and the outbreak of World War Two.³⁴²

During the period, the RPP government did not enact a land reform law due to the political influence of the large capitalist landowners in the party. Yet, in the face of the pressure of land question, the government had to distribute a limited part of fallow state lands to landless peasant throughout the country during the 1920s and especially 1930s. According to the estimates of Barkan, until 1934, the landless peasants, small landowners, and the Balkan refugees received about 6,787,000 *dönüms* of arable land, 157,420 *dönüms* of orchard, and 168,659 *dönüms* of garden. In addition, between June 1934 and May 1938, the government distributed about 3 million *dönüms* of land to 88,695 peasant households. Between 1940 and 1944, the Ministry of Finance distributed 875,000 *dönüms* of fertile treasury land to 53,000 peasant families throughout Anatolia. Given that the total arable land amount was about 14.5 million hectares, 7.6 percent of the lands were redistributed in favor of the poor and small peasants.³⁴³

However, given the fact that total area under cultivation was only about 4.3 million hectares according to the 1927 Agricultural Statistics³⁴⁴ the proportion of the distributed lands to this amount was about 25.5 percent. However, it should be kept in mind that the single-party state was not able to collect precise statistical data and to complete the registration of all lands. I think, therefore, these figures should be taken with some reservation, although they strongly suggest that we should not underestimate the land distributions.

³⁴² Ömer Lütfi Barkan, “‘Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu’ ve Türkiye’de Ziraî Bir Reformun Ana Meseleleri,” *Türkiye’de Toprak Meselesi: Toplu Eserler 1* (İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1980), p. 456-457.

³⁴³ See Table I and Table 2 given by Barkan, “‘Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu’ ve Türkiye’de Ziraî Bir Reformun Ana Meseleleri,” p. 455-456. In addition, see Aksoy, *Türkiye’de Toprak Meselesi*, pp. 58-59.

³⁴⁴ See Kâzım Rıza, *Türkiye Ziraati ve Türkiye Ziraatinin Mühim Şubeleri*, p.4. The total amount of arable land under cultivation was 43,637,727 *dönüms* according to the 1927 Agricultural Statistics.

Under the pressure of peasant discontent, the RPP government had to enact the Law of Land Distribution to the Farmers (*Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu*) in 1945. Undoubtedly, other ideological and political factors like the political competition between the RPP and newly established Democratic Party, peasantist ideology were at work in its enactment. However, the peasants' demands and everyday politics also must have obliged the rulers to enact this law. Although this law was not implemented effectively by the RPP government, the land distributions to the poor and small peasants continued during the second half of the 1940s and the 1950s. Between 1947 and 1950, the government allocated additional 1,500,000 *dönüms* of fertile land to the peasants except for the lands distributed to Balkan refugees.³⁴⁵

These land allocations were, of course, an important social policy measure in the face of land hunger throughout the country. However, undoubtedly, they fell short of meeting the real needs of the Anatolian peasantry. Those peasants who received a small piece of land that did not yield enough crops also complained of the smallness of the land given by the state. The total amount of a piece of land that was given to a peasant family generally changed between three *dönüms* and one hectare. These amounts were not enough for some peasants to yield the needed crops. For instance, the peasants' talks in a village coffeehouse in Lüleburgaz about the provision of land by the government, on which a teacher eavesdropped and later reported, epitomize the view of the discontent peasants on the matter:

The government gave me a piece of land of 10 *dönüms*. The crop that this land yields does not afford a piece of dry bread, let alone clothes, salt and kerosene.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ *Türkiye Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, Türkiye İstatistik Yıllığı, 1968* (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Matbaası, 1969), p. 164.

³⁴⁶ Ferit Oğuz Bayır, *Köyün Gücü* (Ankara: Ulusal Basımevi, 1971), p. 165.

The Gaziantep deputy Ali Cenani's observations about social and economic matters throughout Anatolia also underscored the widespread discontent among the poor peasants who were granted with very small pieces of land by the government. These peasants complained about the size of the lands, which did not exceed 10 *dönüms*. In addition, the peasants criticized the government for not distributing larger, arable, unused state farms to them. According to the Gaziantep deputy, since the total amount of the distributed lands was by no means satisfactory, the peasants consequently received lands too small to cultivate.³⁴⁷

Another subject of complaint was the endless bureaucratic procedures in the deed transfer process of the lands distributed by the government to the poor peasants. This process often lasted too long. Even after distribution of land, the peasants were unable to establish strong ties with their own land. What is more, many hesitated to plow the land for a long time, because the legal title deed procedures approving their ownership had not yet been completed. According to a member of the Antalya People's House, who heard a complaint of a peasant in the Yeniköy sub-district of Antalya on this matter, the most important grievance of the peasantry was that they had not yet had the title to the land registered in their names. A peasant said,

The lands were already calculated, determined, and distributed, but their deeds were not transferred from the state to our name. Therefore, we cannot say 'we have our own lands,' and we cannot stick hearth and soul in these lands distributed by the state.³⁴⁸

In some places, these small amounts of lands given to the poor peasants were confiscated by the debt enforcement officials due to their growing tax or loan debts, even before the completion of the title transfers. According to the peasants, the

³⁴⁷ 1930 Journey Reports of Gaziantep Deputy Ali Cenani on Central Anatolia, Samsun, Trabzon, Thrace and Bursa BCA CHP [490.1/1454.34.3].

³⁴⁸ *Türk Akdeniz*, July 1, 1939, p. 12. A People's House member heard this conversation in a coffeehouse in Yeniköy, a sub-district of Antalya.

government was expropriating with one hand what it had given with the other. There raised several objections to this ridiculous situation among the peasantry. A peasant from İzmir, named Sittik, for instance, complained about “the forced restitution of the land that had been distributed by the government.” Peasants named Abdurrahman from İzmir, Ahmed and his friends from Kayseri, Ragıp from İzmir, Hurşit and his friends from Kocaeli, and many other peasants from other provinces requested that the government not expropriate the lands recently distributed to them.³⁴⁹ Peasants in the same situation continued to complain or to request the authorities to stop the restitution of their small plots given by the government. For instance, Alioğlu Mustafa Turgut, a peasant in the Uluğa village of Niğde, wrote in his petition that when he had been a landless peasant, he had been granted a piece of land by the government; however, the government, by seizing this land, now had behaved unjustly toward him.³⁵⁰

Discontent with Heavy the Tax Burden

Perhaps the most important factor that fuelled the peasant discontent was the heavy and various taxes. Despite the abolition of the tithe in 1925, the government had significantly increased the rates of many other taxes such as the Land Tax, the Road Tax, and the Livestock Tax. In addition, almost all of these agricultural taxes were direct in character. Both the increasing tax rates and their direct characters made the peasants feel their burden much more than ever before. They saw these taxes as the exploitation of them by the government and by the urban population. The tax collector was, in their eyes, the agent of the urban elite, who extracted and

³⁴⁹ *TBMM Yıllık 1930*, Petition No. 3487, 4227, 4650.

³⁵⁰ *TBMM Yıllık 1939*, Petition No. 3213.

transferred their resources to the urban areas and the government. When a tax collector came to the village, they sarcastically criticized the tax collector, by saying, “What can the poor fellow do? The masters in the cities cannot eat stone!” (“*Ne yapsın zavallı? Şehirdeki efendiler taş yiyecek değil ya!*”).³⁵¹ A politician of the time, Hilmi Uran, described the peasants’ discontent with the heavy direct taxes in the early 1930s as follows:

The major complaint of the people is the unbearable burden of the taxes. (...) The tax assessments are much higher as compared to the tax assessments of the earlier years. The objections of taxpayers to the assessed taxes remain inconclusive. (...) In Adana and Osmaniye, for instance, the milk cows of many livestock owner peasants are sold by tax collectors at only 7 or 8 TL in lieu of the tax debts. The prices at which these livestock are sold do not even afford the expenses of debt enforcement process. It is this type of tax assessment and tax collection that set the people against the government.³⁵²

Too high tax rates and their direct characters, and tax collection methods, especially the abuses, unfair treatments, mistakes by tax collectors, and bureaucratic red tape also increased the peasants’ grievances. The complaints about abusive and officious tax collectors and too long, unreasonable and exhausting bureaucratic procedures were widespread.³⁵³

Among the taxes that weighed on the peasantry were three major taxes: the Land Tax, the Livestock Tax, and the Road Tax. In addition to them, those peasants who sold their livestock or crops at the market had to pay the Income Tax (*Kazanç Vergisi*). The peasants also had to pay the Building Tax for their any structure covered with a roof such as barns, small depots, houses, and small gardens. In

³⁵¹ Mediha Esenel, *Geç Kalmış Kitap: 1940’lı Yıllarda Anadolu Köylerinde Araştırmalar ve Yaşadığım Çevreden İzlenimler* (İstanbul: Sistem Yayıncılık, 1999), p. 109.

³⁵² Hilmi Uran, *Hatıralarım* (Ankara: Ayyıldız Matbaası, 1959), pp. 216-224.

³⁵³ See the inspection reports on Burdur, Antalya and Isparta. Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/729.478.1], 16.03.1931. In addition, see the inspection reports of RPP Tokat deputy Bekir Lütü, Sivas deputy Rasim and Kayseri deputy Raşit. Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/724.477.1], 07.02.1931.

addition, perhaps the one of the most distressing taxes was the Wheat Protection Tax levied in 1934. In 1934, all peasants who needed to mill their own wheat even for their private use were required to give this tax directly. Lastly, the Aviation Society Tax also aggrieved peasants. Therefore, low-income and poor peasants often criticized these taxes, and demanded tax relief and reduction in tax rates.

The Land Tax

The rates of the Land Tax skyrocketed synchronically with the abolition of the tithe. The government, seeking the compensation of the loss caused by the abolition of tithe, increased the rates of the Land Tax. Moreover, since the finance office had registered the values of the lands at much higher rates than their actual values, the Land Tax assessments extremely grew proportionally as compared to previous years. One main reason for this was to register the values of these taxes in gold coin terms. However, since the value of the gold enormously increased, the values of the lands registered in gold coin terms hugely increased; but their real values as the Turkish Lira did not increase proportionally. In addition, due to the lack of an efficient land registry and cadastre information system, the finance office sometimes imposed by mistake the unpaid taxes of a plot of land on a new owner of the land. Similarly, sometimes the newly assessed taxes were imposed inadvertently on the previous owners of the lands. Therefore, the application of the Land Tax resulted in massive public criticism, especially during the first years of the Great Depression when the agricultural prices plummeted.

According to a report by RPP deputy Ali Cenani who investigated some central, western and northern Anatolian towns in 1930, farmers throughout Anatolia

grumbled about the Land Tax, especially the extremely high estimation of the land values which became the basis for the tax. In the Havza district of Samsun, for instance, some small farmers complained that the government officials overestimated the value of their lands of 20 TL as 80 TL.³⁵⁴

The peasants' letters that flooded into the newspapers, the party, and the government reveal the widespread grievance about the overestimation of the land values and high Land Tax rates during the 1930s. Especially the peasants' letters invaded the *Cumhuriyet*, which conducted a pool among the peasants about the agricultural taxes and assigned a special column to their letters, towards the end of 1930 and in 1931. The first complaint was about the uneducated and ignorant officials of land registry office and finance office who erroneously assessed the values of the lands that would be basis for the Land Tax. For instance, peasants queried how the non-expert officials who did not have any direct knowledge of agriculture or economy correctly were able to estimate the real values of their lands. Many peasants complained that these officials registered the monetary values of their lands between 15 and 40 times more than their real values. Criticizing the overvaluation of their lands in terms of gold coin, many peasants, by means of petitioning, solicited the government to reduce the registered official values of their lands.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁴ 1930 Journey Reports of Gaziantep Deputy Ali Cenani on Central Anatolia, Samsun, Trabzon, Thrace and Bursa. BCA CHP [490.1/1454.34.3].

³⁵⁵ "Vergiler Hakkında Anket: Arazi Vergisi Aşar Vergisine Rahmet Okutacak Kadar Ağırır," *Cumhuriyet*, 27.12.1930. In addition, see the petition lists in the *Grand National Assembly of Turkey Yearbooks (TBMM Yıllıkları)*. In 1937, from a village of Ünye, Rıza Kuru and his peasant friends complained of the unfair and wrong assessments of the values of their lands. *TBMM Yıllık 1939*, Petition No. 3750. Similarly, in 1937 and 1938, tens of peasants from İnebolu complained of the wrong assessments of the values of their lands and the Land Taxes. They asserted that the values assessed by the tax officials were higher than the real values of their lands. See *TBMM Yıllık 1939*, Petition No. 4680, 4684, 4686, 4687, 4696, 4697, 4698, 4705, 4706, 4721, 4722, 4765, 4766, 4767, 4768, 4769, 4770, 4771, 4772, 4773, 4780, 4781, 4782, 4783.

The peasants were not deceived by the official discourse exaggerating the benefits of the abolition of the tithe for the peasantry. Many of them compared the Land Tax to the abolished tithe. As a result of this comparison, in contrast to the official propaganda that presented the abolition of tithe as a gift to the peasantry, they argued that the current application of the Land Tax was more burdensome and arbitrary than the previous tithe. Some peasants, in their letters to *Cumhuriyet* often said, “The Land Tax is more undesirable and heavier than the previous Tithe” or “the Tithe was a pale in comparison with the Land Tax.”³⁵⁶

Likewise, a peasant named Muhittin from Kırklareli started his letter by comparing the abolished tithe and the current Land Tax and argued that the tithe had been more innocent as compared to the Land Tax. Then, he complained that the tax collectors had calculated his Land Tax on the basis of the astronomical value of his lands as overestimated unrealistically by the officials. As far as he alleged, the value of his land had been registered 60 times higher as compared to a few years earlier. Accordingly, the amount of the Land Tax he was expected to pay had increased in the same proportion.³⁵⁷ Similar complaints were heard by the RPP deputies who toured their election or inspection districts. The RPP deputies from Yozgat, Çorum and Kırşehir, for instance, reported widespread complaints about the assessed Land Taxes.³⁵⁸

Similarly, a peasant named Mehmet Emin from Adapazarı saw the Land Tax as “more harmful than the tithe.” The tax was so high that the small peasants who needed to save some part of the harvest had to sell off all of their crops in order to

³⁵⁶ “Umumî Bir Hulâsa: Hangi Vergilerden, Niçin Şikâyet Ediliyor?” *Cumhuriyet*, 11.01.1931; “Vergiler Hakkında Anket: Arazi Vergisi Aşar Vergisine Rahmet Okutacak Kadar Ağırdır,” *Cumhuriyet*, 27.12.1930.

³⁵⁷ “Vergiler Hakkında Anket: Çiftçi Aşarı Arıyor mu?” *Cumhuriyet*, 10.12.1930.

³⁵⁸ Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.01/724.477.1], 07.02.1931.

pay it. As another letter writer stated, almost all of the peasants in the Adapazari region where the arable lands had been overvalued were under great pressure of this tax.³⁵⁹

Another peasant complained that although he had been paying 150 piasters as Land Tax for years, within the last few years this amount had reached 1000 piasters. For the previous four years, he had been trying to inform the local and central authorities about the fact that it had been impossible to pay even only this tax, not to mention the other taxes. Because of the astronomic Land Tax, he had attempted to sell his land, but nobody had wanted to buy it. Therefore, he raised his objection to this harmful tax and wrote openly that he had no thought of paying this unjust tax.³⁶⁰

Many peasants from all corners of Anatolia collectively or individually complained about the Land Tax and solicited the government to decrease the tax rates or the official values of their land overestimated by the government. For instance, the peasants in Arıslı village of İzmit, penned a petition together that criticized the overestimation of the values of their small plots and accordingly the overassessment of the Land Tax and demanded a significant reduction in the Land Tax. In a similar manner, peasants in a village of Hopa expressed their grievance that stemmed from the astronomical amounts of the Land Tax and demanded a discount on the Land Tax imposed on them. Peasants from Vezirköprü and Ayvalık also petitioned the government demanding a decrease in the Land Tax.³⁶¹

Petitioning the government, the peasants sought the settlement of their tax debts or debt relief. In 1934, for example, a peasant named Faik from Ayvalık

³⁵⁹ “Anketten Neticeler: Arazi Vergisi Çiftçiye Aşarı Arattırmaktadır,” *Cumhuriyet*, 27.11.1930.

³⁶⁰ “Vergiler Hakkında Anket: Arazi Vergisi Aşar Vergisine Rahmet Okutacak Kadar Ağırdır,” *Cumhuriyet*, 27.12.1930.

³⁶¹ Complaints from high Land Tax: the peasants from the Arıslı village of İzmit (p. 367), *TBMM Yıllık 1929*; from Hopa Osman and his friends (p. 260); Mustafa from Vezirköprü (p. 370), *TBMM Yıllık 1931*; Ahmed and his friends from Edremit (No. 3407), *TBMM Yıllık 1939*.

wished the discharge of his Land Tax debts. In the same year, one village of Bilecik collectively wished the discharge of their Land Tax debts. In another case, a peasant named Abdullah and his friends from Adana wanted the government to forgive their all tax debts including the Land Tax in 1935.³⁶²

Tax relief demands also were expressed in the local congresses of the party and added to the wish lists. For instance, according to İzmir Party Congress held in 1936, peasants in İzmir requested the government to waive the 50 percent of their Land Tax debts on condition of paying the remaining 50 percent.³⁶³ Likewise, peasants in Denizli, Kırşehir, and Tekirdağ requested the government to forgive the Land Tax along with other agricultural taxes.³⁶⁴

Some peasants demanded a decrease in the rate of the Land Tax by writing to the newspapers. *Köroğlu*, for instance, in an article titled “If the Land Tax also is Decreased, Peasants will be Pleased,” wrote “the peasants had been sending many letters to the newspaper insisting on a reduction in the Land Tax rate.”³⁶⁵

Another problem related to the Land Tax that bothered the peasants was the inclusion of the uncultivated, boggy, marshy and bushy field to the Land Tax.³⁶⁶ Furthermore, some small and middle holders, who could not cultivate their small plots due to the lack of necessary equipment, credit, irrigation, seed and work force, also had to pay the tax. The old tithe had been levied on the crops, but the Land Tax, regardless of the peasants’ production activities, financial power, fertility of soil, and harvest, was imposed on all landowners equally. Therefore, the peasants, especially

³⁶² Faik from Ayvalık demands a land tax amnesty (p. 289), *TBMM Yıllık 1934*; Söğütlü village peasants in Bilecik demand a land tax amnesty (p. 271); Süleymanzade Abdullah and his friends from Adana demand a land tax amnesty (p. 290), *TBMM Yıllık 1935*.

³⁶³ *CHP 28/12/936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi*, p. 25, 40.

³⁶⁴ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, pp. 63-64, 151-153, 281, 383-384.

³⁶⁵ “Arazi Vergisi de İndirilse Köylü Sevinir,” *Köroğlu*, 30.10.1935.

³⁶⁶ 1930 Journey Reports of Gaziantep Deputy Ali Cenani on Central Anatolia, Samsun, Trabzon, Thrace and Bursa. BCA CHP [490.1/1454.34.3].

small-plot holders, saw the previously loathed tithe as having been better and more advantageous than the current Land Tax.

Niyazi Berkes, who had interviewed the peasants of Ankara villages, for example, wrote that those peasants who were able to cultivate only limited parts of their lands due to the insufficient input and equipment also had to pay the Land Tax for their uncultivated or fallow lands. Therefore, they came to hate the Land Tax and complained frequently of it. As Berkes wrote,

Although they were well aware of and talking about the malicious aspects of the old tithe system, they could not help but admit that the tithe had been more fair and advantageous in this respect.³⁶⁷

Another problem with the Land Tax the peasants frequently complained of was the unequal distribution of taxation. Deprived of an infrastructure necessary for mapping the social and economic resources that were the tax basis of the country, the government was not able to conduct an inclusive, precise, and an exact land registration. Furthermore, since Anatolian peasants mostly did not report their lands when they bought, sold or inherited so as to avoid the Land Tax, transfers of lands between peasants were generally carried out informally, and, therefore, were not recorded in the official registers. Consequently, the government, lacking accurate information about the land ownership and the movements of title transfers in the country levied the Land Tax according to the existing limited and outdated land registers. For that reason, sometimes, previous owners of lands were taxed erroneously. In some instances, the tax debts of previous landowners were imposed falsely on new owners of lands. In both of cases, the peasants, who were confused and shocked with these taxations, grumbled about the government.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁷ Berkes, *Bazı Ankara Köyleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma*, p. 43.

³⁶⁸ 1930 Journey Reports of Gaziantep Deputy Ali Cenani on Central Anatolia, Samsun, Trabzon, Thrace and Bursa. BCA CHP [490.1/1454.34.3]. According to the reports of the Eskişehir deputies,

The Livestock Tax

Another tax the government increased over and over in order to fill the gap in the budget that emanated from the abolition of the tithe was the Livestock Tax. This tax spurred peasant reactions equal to the reactions caused by the Land Tax. Especially the sharp decline in livestock prices with the economic crisis, while the Livestock Tax significantly increased in the late 1920s, made the financial burden of the tax more unbearable for the small and middle-income livestock owners. Peasants, in great trouble with the Livestock Tax, did not hesitate to express their discontent with the tax. They incessantly demanded either its reduction or tax relief, and sometimes both of them.

Peasants' complaints and demands about the Livestock Tax first were reflected in RPP's provincial congresses. One of the most repeated and widespread demands that came from the local congress to the Third General Congress of the RPP held in 1931 was the reduction of the Livestock Tax rates. The wish lists submitted by 39 provinces to the General Congress included the grievances of the peasantry that stemmed from the Livestock Tax and peasants' strong expectations for a decrease in the rates of this tax.³⁶⁹

Furthermore, many peasants, sometimes collectively, petitioning the local and central authorities, expressed their complaints and raised their objections to the Livestock Tax. Many who found the tax rates too high requested that the government decrease the rates. Again, many demanded a tax relief program including either an

land registers were not true even in a developed mid-western province such as Eskişehir. Eskişehir Election District Reports, BCA CHP [490.1/651.165.1], 20.11.1934.

³⁶⁹ Isparta Deputy Kemâl Turan, *Yeni Vergi Kanunları'nın Tatbiki Mahiyeti ve Tediye Kabiliyeti Hakkında Tahliller* (İzmir: Hafız Ali Matbaası, 1931), p. 84; see also 1931 Provincial Congresses' Wish Lists Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1].

installment plan for the taxes and tax debts or cancellation of the accrued tax debts.³⁷⁰

In the same period, Ali Cenani, in a comprehensive report on many Anatolian provinces, noted that livestock owners throughout Anatolia were in dire straits. Many of them grumbled frequently about the very high Livestock Tax rates despite the sharp decline in the prices of farm animals.³⁷¹ The Eskişehir deputies also mentioned widespread discontent with the soaring rates of the Livestock Tax in their elections districts.³⁷² From Thrace, the deputy of Edirne reported that the peasants' complaints about the Livestock Tax grew into a widespread discontent in the region.³⁷³ From southern Anatolia, Mersin and Cebeliberet (Osmaniye) deputies also noted in their reports that the major source of complaint in the villages was the high rates of the Livestock Tax. In addition, the peasants complained of the unintelligible tax assessment and tax collection methods followed by the tax collectors.³⁷⁴

Sometimes peasants wrote to newspapers to make their voices heard. Especially in the first years of the 1930s, newspapers wrote about the rampant displeasure among the peasants with the high Livestock Tax rates. *Son Posta*, for instance, wrote that the peasants in Safranbolu had sent a letter, complaining about the Livestock Tax. As far as the peasants had written, livestock farming had come to

³⁷⁰ Mehmet and his friends from Turgutlu (p. 225); Kınık peasants (p. 266); Hamdi and his friends from Beypazarı (p. 269); Hüseyin and his friends from Alucra (p. 275); Mustafa Halil and his friends from Nallıhan (p. 277); Hadi ve Kemal from Beypazarı (p. 280); Mustafa from Bolvadin (p. 306). *TBMM Yıllık 1931*.

³⁷¹ 1930 Journey Reports of Gaziantep Deputy Ali Cenani on Central Anatolia, Samsun, Trabzon, Thrace and Bursa. BCA CHP [490.1/1454.34.3].

³⁷² See Eskişehir Election District Reports, BCA CHP [490.1/651.165.1], 20.11.1934.

³⁷³ RPP Edirne Deputy Mehmet Faik's Report about the RPP Organizational Structure in Edirne, 29.02.1931. Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/729.478.1], 16.03.1931.

³⁷⁴ See Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/729.478.1], 16.03.1931.

a halt in their region due to the high taxes. Therefore, the peasants, on the edge of bankruptcy, wished a significant reduction in the Livestock Tax rates.³⁷⁵

Although the government decreased the rates of the Livestock Tax successively in 1931, 1932 and 1936 in the face of such social pressure, the peasants' complaints and demands for further decrease did not cease even after the last regulations of the government. The government received many petitions from the aggrieved peasants complaining about the soaring Livestock Tax and requesting a decrease in the tax rates.³⁷⁶

The discontent with the tax continued to be mentioned in deputy reports. For instance, Edirne deputy reported in 1936 that the livestock owners continued to grumble about the high rates of the Livestock Tax against the government.³⁷⁷

The prevalent disgruntlement with the Livestock Tax among the peasantry was discussed in the provincial congresses of the RPP, held in November 1936. The peasant's grievances about the Livestock Tax and the widespread requests for a decrease in its rates added to the wish lists at almost all provincial congresses. As far as understood from these wish lists, the peasants struggled over three matters regarding the Livestock Tax. First, they expected a radical decrease in the rates of the tax because the livestock prices were still in low levels as compared to the pre-crisis prices.³⁷⁸ Second, there was a conflict between the peasants and tax collectors over the age of the animals. One common wish of peasants was an increase in the age

³⁷⁵ "Sayım Vergisi ve Köylünün Temennisi," *Son Posta*, 09.10.1932.

³⁷⁶ Şevket and his friends from Pınarbaşı (p. 288); Karakoyunlu nomadic Turcoman Memet and his friends from Antalya (p. 324); From the Zirzak village of Mihallıççık, Mustafa Fahri (p. 326). *TBMM Yıllık 1935*.

³⁷⁷ Summaries of Reports of the RPP Deputies who Investigated the Workers' and Craftspeople's Situation in Some Provinces, BCA CHP [490.1/726.485.1], 10.02.1936.

³⁷⁸ Balıkesir: reduction in the tax of goats and sheep (p. 70); Bolu: decreasing of the livestock tax (p. 85); İzmir: decreasing of the Livestock Tax (pp. 251-256); Kastamonu: decreasing of the Livestock Tax (p. 264); Kayseri: decreasing of the Livestock Tax (p. 271); Kırşehir: decreasing of the Livestock Tax (p. 281); Konya: discount in the Livestock Tax (pp. 292-293); Manisa: decreasing of the sheep tax (pp. 316-317); Ordu: discount in the Livestock Tax (p. 349); Tekirdağ: reduction in the Livestock Tax (pp. 383-384). *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*.

limits of the tax exemption.³⁷⁹ The peasants often alleged that their animals were still under the age limits for taxation, and therefore exempt from taxation. Many disputes, brawls, and sometimes fights occurred in many villages between peasants and tax collectors over the ages of animals.³⁸⁰ Third, many peasants argued that draught animals should be exempted from the tax because these animals did not yield any profit.³⁸¹

The Road Tax

Undoubtedly, the Road Tax was the most heart-breaking tax especially in rural areas. In the interwar period, nothing bothered the low-income peasants as much as digging and breaking rocks in the roads because they mostly were not able to pay their tax in cash. The poor implementation of the tax along with its heavy burden and compulsory work obligation at road building sites in distant places produced a public outcry in rural areas. Peasant discontent with this tax frequently appeared in the politicians' reports, the provincial congresses of the RPP, and the petitions and letters of peasants sent to the official authorities and to the press.

³⁷⁹ Bilecik: taxing the cows from three years of age upward (pp. 77-78); Bolu: taxing the cows from three years of age upward (p. 85); Erzurum: excluding the lambs under one year old from livestock tax (p. 165). *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*.

³⁸⁰ Yozgat: there were frequent disputes between the livestock tax collectors and the peasants, which should be prevented as soon as possible. (p. 395). *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*.

³⁸¹ *CHP 28/12/1936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi* (İzmir: Anadolu Matbaası, 1937); in addition see 1936 İl Kongreleri. Afyon: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (pp. 16-17); Ankara: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (pp. 42-43); Balıkesir: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (p. 70); Bilecik: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (pp. 77-78); Çankırı: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (p. 117); Eskişehir: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (p. 175); Isparta: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (p. 202); Kastamonu: exemption of the draught animals from the livestock tax, (p. 264); Konya: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (pp. 292-293); Manisa: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (pp. 316-317); Niğde: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (p. 340); Samsun: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (p. 354); Tokat: exemption of the draught animals from the Livestock Tax, (p. 387).

The reports of the RPP deputies present the pictures of the public opinion regarding the Road Tax in the Anatolian countryside. For instance, Ali Cenani reported that he had listened to the peasants' complaints about the Road Tax everywhere he had visited in central Anatolia, Black Sea region and Marmara region.³⁸²

The deputy reports on Konya and Aksaray in 1931 also stated that the Road Tax afflicted the peasants. According to these reports, the decline in wheat prices had increased further the burden of the Road Tax in these two wheat-producing provinces. In addition, the mistakes and abuses of the tax collectors doubled the widespread complaints among peasants. Those poor peasants who could not pay the Road Tax in cash had been taken into custody. This had further reduced the already low productivity of the wheat producers. Above all, the transfer of those peasants who failed to pay to road building sites bothered the poor peasants in these provinces. Some of them were sent to the more distant places for road-building works than the laws had prescribed. In one case, peasants who had been sent to places too far were sent back without any work, due to the lack of efficient organization and synchronization between the local officials of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Public Works. After they returned to Konya, the finance office once again sent them to another very distant road-building site for days. Many of them had become exhausted in long trips on foot even before they worked on the road building. This outrageous treatment of peasants by the local administrators produced a widespread public outcry in the region. Many of the people who were subjected to such treatment criticized the government. Apart from such extreme

³⁸² 1930 Journey Reports of Gaziantep Deputy Ali Cenani on Central Anatolia, Samsun, Trabzon, Thrace, and Bursa. BCA CHP [490.1/1454.34.3].

cases, many other Road Tax payers and people obliged to work grumbled about the high rates of the tax and heavy working conditions in roads.³⁸³

The bad implementation of the Road Tax and the resulting common social discontent with it were not peculiar to Konya and Aksaray, but general to the other provinces. According to the election district and party inspection reports penned during the 1930s, the grievances about the Road Tax were rampant throughout Anatolia among the low-income people who could not pay the tax and therefore had to work under unfavorable conditions at road building sites.³⁸⁴

Many peasants saw the Road Tax as another unjust policy of the government. For them, collecting the same amount of money from all people, regardless of their income, was not an egalitarian and fair practice. A peasant in a letter to a newspaper wrote that the building of roads was the task of the government; therefore, a tax for road building was unreasonable.³⁸⁵

Peasants frequently criticized the single proportional rate of the tax. The application of the Road Tax at equal rates for both wealthy and poor peasants, for most of the people, was an inequalitarian practice. It was reported from İzmir, for instance, especially peasants criticized such characteristic of the tax and demanded the government to adjust the tax rates according to the incomes of the taxpayers. In Zonguldak, several items regarding the Road Tax that were included in the wish lists of the provincial party congress in 1936 also demonstrate how the people were

³⁸³ Report of RPP Gümüşhane Deputy Hasan Necmi, Konya Deputy Ahmet Kemal, and Aksaray Deputy Musa about the Organization and Enlargement of the RPP Organizations in Konya and Aksaray Provinces, BCA MGM [30.10/79.520.3], 05.01.1931.

³⁸⁴ For the widespread discontent in some central Anatolian provinces such as Çorum, Kırşehir and Yozgat see Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.01/724.477.1], 07.02.1931; In addition, see RPP Edirne Deputy Mehmet Faik's Report about the RPP Organization in Edirne, BCA CHP [490.1/729.478.1], 20.01.1931; Eskişehir Reports, BCA CHP [490.1/651.165.1], 20.11.1934; Summaries of the Reports of the Manisa Deputies Asım Tümer, Faik Kurdoğlu, Hikmet Bayur, Hüsnü Yaman, Kani Karaosman, Kazım Nami Duru, Kenan Örer, Osman Erçin, Rıdvan Nafiz Edgüder and Yaşar Özey, BCA CHP [490.1/684.317.1], 02.08.1937.

³⁸⁵ "Köylünün Şikâyet Ettiği Vergiler-Tahsildar Meselesi-Yol Vergisi," *Cumhuriyet*, 22.11.1930.

displeased with the single rate of the tax undifferentiating between the rich and poor citizens. Therefore, a progressive taxation according to the wealth of taxpayers was a common demand in Zonguldak.³⁸⁶

According to another objection to the Road Tax, although the cars, trucks, and busses belonging to the wealthy persons and merchants generally used and damaged the roads, the government obliged poor people to build and repair the roads. This was an injustice in the eyes of the peasants.³⁸⁷

Almost everywhere, besides the rate and obligations of the tax, the people criticized the widespread abuses and wrongdoings of the tax collectors. For instance, the RPP politicians in Yozgat and Kastamonu reported that the tax collectors abused the Road Tax for their personal interests and therefore upset the people.³⁸⁸ Denizli deputy Mustafa Kazım, in a similar manner, recorded in a report the malpractices of the tax officials and the gendarme in the implementation of the Road Tax:

Compulsory works that were arbitrarily burdened on the shoulder of the peasants under the pretext of the Village Law, and the forced labor obligation of the Road Tax that lasted about one and half months under the gendarme oppression and torture resulted in general discontent.³⁸⁹

Indeed, the local authorities attempted to exploit the unpaid and forced labor of the peasants as much as possible to build and repair the roads. Therefore, the peasants frequently objected that they were obliged to work more than the laws prescribed. In Çorum, Tokat, Yozgat, Kayseri, Kırşehir, Sivas and many other provinces, the peasants complained that they worked more than the laws stipulated. In some places, although the tax collectors had told them they would work only 10 days, they had

³⁸⁶ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, pp. 251-256, 413-414.

³⁸⁷ "Milletin Belini Büken Vergilerin Fazlalığı Değil, Yanlış Tahakkulardır," *Cumhuriyet*, 24.11.1930.

³⁸⁸ Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/724.477.1], 07.02.1931.

³⁸⁹ See Report of RPP Denizli Deputy, 26.02.1931, Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/729.478.1], 16.03.1931.

worked between 15 and 20 days. Apart from this, those peasants who had fulfilled their obligation were given official testimonials proving the fulfillment of the obligation right after they met their liabilities. However, the peasants had to wait for days in city centers in government offices for these official documents in desperate situation after heavy work on the roads. Another complaint of the poor peasants was the privileged treatment of those peasants who managed to circumvent the tax by bribing the tax collectors. Some peasants were, after two or three days of work at road building, released and given official testimonial easily on the pretext that they had fulfilled their obligations successfully. Some peasants accused the local administrators of employing the tax payers in their own personal projects not related to the Road Tax.³⁹⁰

There were more tragic cases. Some peasants argued that although they had already fulfilled their work obligation, the tax collectors, alleging that they had not fulfilled their obligations, attempted to force them to work on the roads once again. These peasants complained that they had been taxed twice or fined unfairly. Karaburun village peasants in İzmir collectively wrote to *Köroğlu* that although they had already worked on roads 8 days, the tax collectors had fined them on the grounds of avoiding the tax. Therefore, the tax collectors pressured them to pay the tax and the fine together, amounting 9 TL for each taxpayers.³⁹¹

In August 1934, the same newspaper, in an article titled “A Very Legitimate Query: We Received a Letter Signed and Stamped by Several Peasants in Safranbolu,” published the peasants’ grievance about the implementation of the Road Tax. The peasants in the villages of Safranbolu were too poor to pay the tax in cash.

³⁹⁰ Inspection Reports on Çorum, Kırşehir and Yozgat, see Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.01/724.477.1], 07.02.1931.

³⁹¹ “Haksızlık Olur mu Ya!” *Köroğlu*, 28.03.1936.

Therefore, they had to work at road building sites to fulfill their tax obligation. The local authorities had put them under a road-building company's order. Although the laws had prescribed that each person could be worked up to 9 hours a day and no more than 8 days, the company forced them to work up to 14 hours a day and held them captive at the road-building site for 23 days. The peasants queried whether this was a violation of the laws or not, and demanded the authorities to take corrective action to redress their grievance caused by this malpractice.³⁹²

In a similar line, the peasants of the İsbeyli village in Denizli, by writing collectively to the same newspaper, complained that the local government forced them to work on roads much longer than the laws prescribed. Furthermore, although they had already fulfilled their obligation, the road engineer and other officials did not let them go back to their villages for 18 days.³⁹³ A peasant from Erzurum, writing to the same newspaper, argued that the tax collectors and the gendarme had arrested him on the ground that he had avoided the tax, although he had already paid it in cash and provided the official testimonial and the receipts of the money he had given to the tax collectors.³⁹⁴

The peasants directly submitted their complaints about the Road Tax to the local party organizations. During the 1930s, the wish lists of many provincial RPP congresses included several demands about the reduction in the Road Tax rate or tax reliefs for the Road Tax debts. For instance, 30 provinces sent their demands for Road Tax reduction to the Third Congress of the RPP, held in 1931.³⁹⁵ In the general congress of the party in 1936, the reduction of Road Tax rates or an amnesty for Road Tax debts appeared as major demands on the wish lists of many provincial

³⁹² "Çok Haklı Bir Sorgu: Safranbolu Köylülerinden Bir Çok Mühür ve İmzalı Bir Mektup Aldık," *Köroğlu*, 29.08.1934.

³⁹³ "Halk Sütunu," *Köroğlu*, 10.07.1929.

³⁹⁴ "Halkın Köşesi," *Köroğlu*, 27.05.1936.

³⁹⁵ Turan, *Yeni Vergi Kanunları'nın Tatbiki*, pp. 98-99.

party congresses.³⁹⁶ For instance, İzmir peasants sought the discharge of the 50 percent of all Road Tax debts.³⁹⁷ Again, Aydın peasants demanded the government soften the obligations of the Road Tax and forgive the accrued Road Tax debts.³⁹⁸ The peasants' negative remarks about the tax were reflected in the petitions sent to the RPP and the government. Indeed, there were many petitions criticizing the Road Tax among the petition lists in the GNAT Yearbooks.³⁹⁹

The Wheat Protection Tax

The Wheat Protection Tax did not cover the primitive mills in villages, but only the mills in towns and city centers. However, most of towns in the Anatolian countryside in those years were not more than big villages, most of the populations of which were peasants who engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. Therefore, the peasants living in small towns were the major group that was aggrieved by this tax. Furthermore, most of the people who brought their wheat to flourmills in towns that were subjected to the Wheat Protection Tax were peasants of neighboring villages. Therefore, the tax affected adversely the village population living in close proximity to towns and city centers. Apart from this, some local governors and finance officials arbitrarily expanded the scope of the tax by taxing the flourmills in the villages exempted from the tax.

³⁹⁶ In the RPP's provincial congresses in 1936 following demands regarding the Road Tax were raised: Aydın: decrease of the Road Tax and remission of the outstanding Road Taxes, (pp. 63-64); Denizli: decrease of the Road Tax, (pp. 151-153); İzmir: assessment of the Road Tax according to income of taxpayers, (pp. 251-256); Kayseri: decrease of the road money, p. 271; Kırşehir: decrease of the road money, (p. 281); Zonguldak: assessment of the Road Tax according to wealth, (pp. 413-414). *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*.

³⁹⁷ *CHP 28/12/1936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi*, p. 25.

³⁹⁸ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, pp. 63-64.

³⁹⁹ Ardahan: Nurettin, on behalf of Piklop Sokara village peasants (p. 316); Posof: Ahmet, on behalf of Papula, Gümicivante, Zindar, Satlel villages' peasants (p.333); Posof: Muhtar Şenlik, on behalf of Şuvaska village peasants (p. 333), *TBMM Yıllık 1935*.

The complaints about the Wheat Protection Law spread quickly among peasants after its promulgation on 30 May 1934. A peasant from Haymana, for instance, in his letter to a newspaper, wrote of the harmful effects of the tax to the all peasants living in the town.⁴⁰⁰ In a similar vein, in August 1934, a group of low-income peasants in Ilgaz penned a letter collectively and sent it to a newspaper in the name of the townsfolk. They stated that although Ilgaz was a small town inhabited mostly by poor peasants and small farmers, its inhabitants were not exempt from the Wheat Protection Tax. The letter-writers, as poor and low-income peasants living in a village near the town center, implored the Ministry of Agriculture and the Prime Ministry to exempt them from this tax.⁴⁰¹

Indeed, as *Köroğlu* reported, the peasants living in small and poor towns that were indistinguishable from villages were not exempted from the tax. The peasants in these towns suffered the additional burden of the Wheat Protection Tax. Therefore, the newspaper had received several complaint letters from the townsfolk living in the poor and small towns of Anatolian provinces like Kırşehir, Sivas, and Kastamonu. In these letters, the peasants criticized the Wheat Protection Tax, and wished to be exempted from this tax.⁴⁰²

In some villages, tax collectors attempted to collect the Wheat Protection Tax from small flourmills. In September 1934, the peasants of the Ortahisar village of Ürgüp, for instance, complained that the local authorities had attempted to levy a 12 percent Wheat Protection Tax on them contrary to the laws. They implored the government to heed their complaint and solve this problem.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ Eşref, "Haymana Halkı Neler Yapılmasını İstiyor?" *Vakit*, 10.10.1934.

⁴⁰¹ "Fakir Kasaba Halkı Yemeklik Undan Vergi Alınmaması İçin Hükümetten Rica Ediyorlar," *Köroğlu*, 04.08.1934.

⁴⁰² "Un Vergisi," *Köroğlu*, 08.12.1934.

⁴⁰³ "Halkın Köşesi," *Köroğlu*, 08.09.1934.

Similarly, the local authorities had tried to tax the peasants in some villages of Ankara on the grounds that they were within the borders of the towns that were subjected to the tax. In the end, the flourmill owners in the villages of Ankara came together and collectively appealed to the Ministry of Finance to stop this wrong taxation in July 1934.⁴⁰⁴

The discontent with the Wheat Protection Tax especially was reflected in the provincial party congresses. The congresses in Afyon, İzmir, Erzurum, Çanakkale, Yozgat, Çorum and many other provinces recorded that peasants, be they wheat producers or not, requested that the government lower the tax rate of 12 percent and rescue the small flourmills in villages and small towns from the tax.⁴⁰⁵

Perhaps the best indicator of the widespread discontent with the tax was a series of collective women's protests, held in front of the government offices in some towns of the central Anatolia, as soon as the low-income wheat-producing townsfolk faced the tax in June 1934. When those poor women brought their small amounts of wheat to flourmills to grind, they faced this new tax. Bitterly resenting the government, they spontaneously marched in the streets to protest the local authorities, as will be described in detail in the chapter about the tax resistance.⁴⁰⁶

As stated above, those peasants who could not pay the taxes or avoided paying the taxes frequently sought tax debt relief. As a consequence of the widespread complaints about the agricultural taxes and demands of tax relief, together with the rampant tax resistance and the dischargeability of the tax debts, which will be discussed in Chapter Four, the government had to lower the rates of many taxes

⁴⁰⁴ "Köy Değirmenlerinden Alınacak Muamele Vergisi," *Vakit*, 31.07.1934.

⁴⁰⁵ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, pp.16-17, 114, 121, 165, 251-256, 395.

⁴⁰⁶ Since their protests will be addressed in detail in Chapter Four in the context of tax resistance, I will not dwell on these protests here.

during the 1930s. The Land Tax was reduced about 35 percent.⁴⁰⁷ As for the Livestock Tax, widespread complaints and objections as well as the widespread tax evasion, as will be addressed in Chapter Four, resulted in successive reductions in its rates in 1931, 1932, and 1936. The total rate of tax reduction between 1930 and 1936 was 51 percent on an average.⁴⁰⁸ Finally, in view of the continuing wishes, complaints, and tax avoidance, the government needed to further lower the rates of the tax and make easier the tax collection methods once again and to narrow the scope of the tax in March 1938. By pulling down the rates, taking horses and donkeys out of the scope of the tax, and giving clarity to the tax assessment and collection procedures, the government tried to relieve the peasants' discontent.⁴⁰⁹ As for the Road Tax, the complaints of the peasants along with the tax resistance, which will be examined later, compelled the government to lower the tax rates and compulsory-work durations in 1931. The tax in cash was discounted by 50-60 percent from 8-10 TL to 4-6 TL. The compulsory work obligation on the roads for those citizens who did not pay the tax in cash also was decreased by 60-66 percent from 10-12 days to 6-8 days. Furthermore, the maximum distance of the road-building site from the domiciles of the taxpayers was determined as 10 hours drive away instead of the previous 12 hours.⁴¹⁰ Finally, in the face of the women's protests and complaints about the Wheat Protection Tax, the government had to retreat by limiting its scope in May 1935 and exempting all village flourmills even those

⁴⁰⁷ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 12.

⁴⁰⁸ Turan, *Yeni Vergi Kanunları'nın Tatbiki*, p. 84.

⁴⁰⁹ Us, *Asım Us'un Hatıra Notları*, p. 247.

⁴¹⁰ Turan, *Yeni Vergi Kanunları'nın Tatbiki*, p. 82.

located around towns and city centers.⁴¹¹ Apart from this, the government made two motions to forgive some parts of the taxes in 1934 and 1938.⁴¹²

Discontent with State Monopolies

The Tobacco Monopoly

Complaints about Low Prices of Tobacco and Difficulties Raised in Relations with the Tobacco Monopoly

Peasants engaging in tobacco cultivation faced the exploitation of the state monopoly administration and licensed tobacco companies, which generally paid the lowest possible prices for tobacco. Throughout the period, the low prices the monopoly and company experts offered to tobacco farmers received the most complaints in tobacco producing areas. Late expert controls, late purchases, the abuses of the monopoly and company representatives, time and money consuming bureaucratic procedures at every stage of the tobacco work, from the acquiring a license for tobacco cultivation to the submission of the harvest to the Monopoly or company depots, spurred reactions of the tobacco farmers.

The first thing that displeased the tobacco peasants was the very low prices offered for their crops. As a result of the economic crisis and of the monopoly system, the tobacco prices during the 1930s remained below those of the 1920s. The monopoly administration resorted to price discrimination. The tobacco prices varied throughout the county according to the quality of the crops. According to official price tariffs dated 1939, even after the prices recuperated, the monopoly

⁴¹¹ Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 2, p. 327.

⁴¹² Çetin Güneş, "Vergi Aflarının Vergi Mükelleflerinin Tutum ve Davranışları Üzerindeki Etkisi," *Yönetim ve Ekonomi*, XIV, No. 2 (2007), p. 177.

administration gave between 60 and 70 piasters per kilo for tobaccos growing in Samsun, Manisa, Muğla, İzmir and Aydın, whereas it gave 35 piasters for Edirne tobacco, 20 piasters for Zonguldak tobacco, 25 piasters for Çanakkale and Adana tobaccos, and 17 piasters for Gaziantep tobacco.⁴¹³

Undoubtedly, the real prices given to the farmers were always below these official levels. In addition to the low price levels, this price discrimination also caused widespread frustration and resentment among the tobacco producers who received far lower prices for their produce as compared to other tobacco cultivators who received more money for their produce. Tobacco cultivators in Zonguldak and Edirne, for instance, found the prices given to their produces too low and undeserved.⁴¹⁴ Another region where the tobacco monopoly offered low prices for tobacco was Adana. In the Misis village of Adana, a tobacco farmer named Abdullah Hasan wrote how he and other tobacco cultivators in the region were discontented with the price policy of the monopoly administration.

We submitted our tobacco to the monopoly administration. But the expert gives money to whomever he wants. I am a poor peasant. Do you know what happens to a peasant if he cannot get the money for his crops he grew with a heavy heart during a year? Of course, he suffers hunger and poverty. Those peasants who see that they are not paid enough for their tobacco by the monopoly have to align themselves with the smugglers. The tobacco I gave to the monopoly is the best quality in the country, but its price is so low. The officials of the monopoly administration here should be invited to come to reason and to behave well to the peasants who are complying with the orders of the government.⁴¹⁵

The monopoly experts often obliged farmers to sell their crops to them after harvest by paying in advance. However, after the harvest, the experts generally lowered the prices they had offered before. This violation of the agreement drew widespread

⁴¹³ Adnan Halet Taşpınar, Ömer Refik Yaltkaya, Avni Ülgen and Mazlum Işın, *The Tobacco Affairs* (Ankara: The State Monopolies of Turkey, 1939), p. 42.

⁴¹⁴ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 158, 413-414.

⁴¹⁵ "Halk Sütunu: Tütün İnhisarının Nazarı Dikkatine," *Cumhuriyet*, 27.11.1930.

reactions among the tobacco farmers that resonated even in the National Assembly. The deputy of Tekirdağ, Mahmut Rasim, expressed the woe of the tobacco cultivators in his election district in the National Assembly as follows:

I have received many complaints from the peasant in my election district. They said that monopoly administration officials had come into the villages right after the harvest and offered 30 piasters for good-quality tobacco. Thus, they had warehoused this tobacco immediately. A few days later, although the company experts had offered higher prices than that of the monopoly experts, the peasants had rejected these good offers due to their adherence to the agreement with the monopoly officials. However, the monopoly officials, coming to the villages to buy the tobacco officially, had not given the prices agreed upon previously. Violating their oral agreements, they had offered only 20 or even 10 piasters.⁴¹⁶

The kind of tobacco that was grown in İzmir was of high quality and priced higher as compared to that of many other tobacco-producing regions in Anatolia. However, farmers of İzmir also did not satisfy with the prices and monopoly system. As *Cumhuriyet* reported, the local newspapers in İzmir region were replete with the complaints from tobacco farmers about the exploitation and abuses of the monopoly administration and licensed private enterprises.

Newspapers published in İzmir are full of complaints about the state monopoly. According to the complaints, the tobacco farmers of Akhisar were financially in bad shape. The main cause of this was the radical price reduction by the monopoly administration, which bought the tobacco at low prices to export it to other countries. The price cuts by means of scrapping eight or ten bales of tobacco in each party killing a tobacco farmer, it is the same difference. Company experts checked the tobacco crops of peasants on the lands, liked them and offered good prices in the beginning, but after the harvest they tell they do not approve of 50 percent of the produce. What is more interesting is that these merciless experts, who are well aware of the difficult economic conditions of farmers, generally say to the farmers, “If you want, give us the advance loans we paid to you, and then take back your tobacco.” There is no one protecting the peasants (...). We ask, will nobody object to the unfair exploitation of the tobacco farmers?⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 29.04.1933, p. 138.

⁴¹⁷ “Tütünçülerimizi Koruyacak Kimse Yok mu?” *Cumhuriyet*, 05.12.1930.

Problems of tobacco farmers were discussed at the İzmir provincial RPP congress in 1936. As stated in the congress, the tobacco monopoly created serious problems for the tobacco cultivators in Ödemiş, Foça, and Çeşme. The peasants had to stay in the cities for days due to the endless bureaucratic procedures and indolent and clumsy administration. In addition, the peasants frequently complained of the too late payment of the tobacco prices. Some argued that they could not receive their money even three months after the sale. Too late controls of the tobacco bales by the monopoly experts and too long durations of keeping the tobaccos in depots and homes also harmed the tobacco and lowered the value of the crop. The congress stated that the central party administration and government should take heed of these complaints.⁴¹⁸

One of the most debated matters brought forward by the peasants was the rate of the scrapped parts of the tobacco by monopoly or company experts. Indeed, buyers generally tended to discard a relatively large part of the tobacco that the farmers submitted to them, for the reason that it included rotten leaves, dust, and waste particules. As far as many peasants argued, the monopoly administration and companies accepted proportionally only 60 kilos of every 100 kilos of tobaccos, and demanded a sharp price cut on the remaining 40 kilos. Furthermore, many peasants complained of fraudulent behavior on the part of the monopoly weighers, who weighed the tobacco submitted by the peasants just before the sale. According to the peasants, their bales generally lost weight, since the experts and weighmen fraudulently underweighed the tobacco crops by using manipulated bascules.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁸ *CHP 28/12/936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi* (İzmir: Anadolu Matbaası, 1937).

⁴¹⁹ For instance, see the report of Bursa Deputy Şefik Lütü, 09.02.1931. Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/729.478.1], 16.03.1931.

The complaints about the improper weighing of their crops by the monopoly weighmen were widespread in all tobacco producing provinces. In some places, a bale of 40 kilos weighed at least 4 kilos less than it must have. That is to say, the monopoly scales underweighed the tobacco submitted by the peasants about 10 percent. On the top of that, by due process of law, tobacco farmers had to pay fines between 2.5 and 5 TL because of these false weight losses.⁴²⁰

According to the investigations of a commission composed of RPP deputies in Balıkesir, a tobacco producing area, in January 1931, the tobacco monopoly was the nightmare of the people in the region, especially among the peasants in the villages of Gönen, Sındırgı and Balya. The peasants concertedly said, “The tobacco monopoly make several difficulties for the peasants and small merchants to get tobacco on the cheap.” Some peasants also argued, “The tobacco monopoly purchases the high quality of tobacco at a reduced price for which the tobacco merchants offers higher prices, and then sells this tobacco to other private companies at higher prices.” In other words, the tobacco monopoly, functioning like a greedy intermediate merchant, took tobacco farmers’ livelihood away. The commission members, upon their investigations, found the peasants’ grievances right.⁴²¹

In some cases, the peasants sometimes wanted to cancel the oral agreement with the state monopoly and pay back the advance payment, when another licensed buyer offered higher prices for their crops. However, the monopoly officials, generally violating the farmers’ freedom of contracts and claiming the pre-emption right of the state monopoly, insisted on the agreement, and did not permit the peasants to sell their tobacco to another licensed private company. Therefore, the

⁴²⁰ 1930 Journey Reports of Gaziantep Deputy Ali Cenani on Central Anatolia, Samsun, Trabzon, Thrace and Bursa, BCA CHP [490.1/1454.34.3].

⁴²¹ Report of RPP Giresun Deputy Hacim Muhittin, Beyazıt Deputy Halit and Balıkesir Deputy İsmail Hakkı on Balıkesir, BCA CHP [490.1/35.146.1], 26.01.1931.

peasants, seeking to carry out business freely with the other certified buyers who offered higher prices than the state monopoly, often complained of the violation of their rights by the abusive monopoly experts.⁴²²

The displeasure of the peasants with the monopoly administration became a subject of Turkish literature. *Tütün Zamanı* (Time for Tobacco), *Zeliş*, and *Acı Tütün* (Bitter Tobacco) penned by Necati Cumalı depicted the hard living and working conditions and exploitation of the tobacco producers by the state monopoly around İzmir from the 1930s to the late 1950s. The author, as a member of a peasant family who engaged in tobacco farming in İzmir, noted that the problems his father as a small-scale tobacco farmer faced during and after the harvest inspired his novels:

My father supported his family with the income that came from tobacco farming. However, this was such a difficult job that he never became happy in his lifetime. Tobacco was a source of disappointment and grief for him. I remember how he was ready to burst with anger during the sales every year in the face of organized exploitation.⁴²³

Another novelist, Talip Apaydın, told the story of a poor tobacco farmer in *Tütün Yorgunu* (Tired with Tobacco). Throughout the novel, the farmer expresses his woe by complaining about how the state monopoly and other private monopoly companies offered the lowest prices for the tobacco he cultivated, harvested and baled with great difficulty. The poor farmer says,

Traitors! They did not give money for my tobacco. O woe is me! What the hell! They made unequal and unfair treatment. Damn them! We took pains with it, traitors! Bastards! They are keeping us for three days here. I was worn to the bone. (...) We burnt the candle at both ends for a year for this? Traitors! Will not God punish you? Sitting around a table, they only throw a glance at bales and offer price... Four liras for all bales. What four liras, traitors! Eight was too low. Even ten was low. Dou you know how I worked hard for this? Oh, my God. (...) Traitorous headman... When you levied a tax

⁴²² 1930 Journey Reports of Gaziantep Deputy Ali Cenani on Central Anatolia, Samsun, Trabzon, Thrace and Bursa, BCA CHP [490.1/1454.34.3.]. In addition see also, Report of RPP Giresun Deputy Hacim Muhittin, Beyazıt Deputy Halit and Balıkesir Deputy İsmail Hakkı on Balıkesir, BCA CHP [490.1/35.146.1], 26.01.1931.

⁴²³ Seyit Kemal Karaalioğlu, *Türk Romanları* (İstanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 1989), p. 319.

and demanded forced labor, you can find me easily, but you cannot find me when the Bank distributed a little credit to farmers. I fuck your family (...). We requested many times from you to complain about these tobacco affairs to the authorities. Did you go? Did you complain? No. Instead, you gave a feast for the monopoly expert in restaurant and buttered him up in order to receive higher prices for your tobacco.”⁴²⁴

As a result of the widespread discontent with the unfair treatment and abuse by the tobacco experts, the government decided in April 1934 that the tobacco experts could not reject or demand reduction in prices for tobacco as waste and poor quality above a maximum waste level without going to arbitration.⁴²⁵ The maximum waste portions the expert could discard or offer low price were officially determined between minimum 7 percent and maximum 15 percent. Only for the tobacco of poorest quality grown in the Hasankeyf district of Gaziantep, the scrap rate was determined as 45 percent. Moreover, the experts would also cut 1.5 percent at most for the loss of weight caused by transportation to the tobacco warehouses or factories.⁴²⁶

The keeping of tobacco bales waiting in the depots of the monopoly administration for long periods also aggrieved the peasants by causing them to accrue extra expenses. They had to pay for hotels to stay in the towns and city centers until the end of the sales transactions. In addition, they had to pay on the depots to the monopoly administration. The longer the sale transactions and procedures took, the more the peasants were charged for the depots. Therefore, the peasants complained of these additional difficulties and costs caused by the tobacco monopoly.

The tobacco producers in Bilecik, for example, solicited the monopoly administration not to keep the tobacco bales waiting in the depots in the town centers for months and to not charge for these depots. According to the peasants, since they

⁴²⁴ Talip Apaydın, *Tütün Yorgunu* (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1975), p. 48.

⁴²⁵ Tekeli and İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçilik*, pp. 119-120.

⁴²⁶ *Adliye Encümeni Ruznamesi, TBMM Encümenler Ruznamesi*, 1 Teşrinisani 1934, p. 906.

were not responsible for the red tape and endless procedures, the monopoly administration should not charge them for the depots.⁴²⁷ In Kandıra, the peasants criticized the fees charged for the monopoly depots because the monopoly administration kept the peasants' tobacco bales much too long in depots before the official purchase.⁴²⁸ Similarly, as reported from İzmir, the bureaucratic red tape dragging out the purchase process and increasing the expenses of the tobacco cultivators caused general discontent among the tobacco cultivators.⁴²⁹

Another problem of the tobacco cultivators was the decrease in the tobacco purchases made by the tobacco monopoly with the crisis. In parallel with the transactional and organizational downsizing in domestic and international markets due to the economic crisis, the tobacco monopoly restricted the quantities of the tobacco it purchased for a while. Therefore, the produce of some farmers remained unsold. In Urla, for example, thousands of kilos of tobacco went unsold in 1932. The peasants begged the government to purchase it as soon as possible. Likewise, it was reported from the Değirmendere and Bulgurca villages of Tire that many tobacco cultivators could not sell their produces and pleaded with the government for the purchase of their produces.⁴³⁰ Petitioning the central government, many of them whose crops had remained unsold expressed their grief since the tobacco monopoly did not make a purchase, and asked the government to make new purchases.⁴³¹

⁴²⁷ See Wish Lists of 1931 RPP Provincial Congresses, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1].

⁴²⁸ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, pp. 285-286.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 251-256.

⁴³⁰ *Akşam*, 01.08.1932, quoted in İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı*, p. 144.

⁴³¹ For example, see the petitions that came from: Hüseyin from Çarşamba (No. 4909); Halit and his friends from Samsun (No. 4576), *TBMM Yıllık, 1930*. Yusuf and his friends from Fethiye (p. 253); Halil and his friends from Ödemiş (p. 249); Osman from İstanbul (p. 264); Cafer and his friends from İzmir (p. 279), *TBMM Yıllık 1931*.

Restrictions and Ban on Tobacco Cultivation

As Régie had in the Ottoman Empire, the tobacco monopoly also restricted the tobacco farming rigidly. It did not permit every peasant who wanted to cultivate tobacco or to sell his tobacco in domestic market to do so. Cultivation of the tobacco was forbidden in many provinces and districts that previously had engaged in tobacco farming. The monopoly administration, limiting the tobacco-growing areas and banning the cultivation in many places, engendered the reactions of the peasants in those areas that had long been subsisting on the tobacco farming.

As reported by Eskişehir deputies in 1935, for instance, the villages of Seyitgazi and Mihaliççık districts had been for a long time producing tobacco. With the ban on tobacco farming in these two districts, the peasants who lived on that crop had become extremely impoverished in the last years. Grumbling against the government, the peasants in these villages frequently asked the deputies who visited their villages and the local party organizations for permission to grow tobacco.⁴³² The peasants' requests were the same in Mardin, another place of where the government had banned the tobacco cultivation. According to the report of the Mardin deputy, the peasants who had talked to him had expressed both their grief because of the ban on tobacco farming and their strong hope for the lifting of the ban.⁴³³

Popular discontent with the ban on tobacco cultivation was common especially in Yozgat, Kütahya, the Gaziler district of Kayseri, the Tavas district of Denizli, and the İspir district of Erzurum, all of which had long relied on tobacco agriculture. The peasants in these places sought the permission of the government to

⁴³² Eskişehir Election District Reports, BCA CHP [490.01/651.165.1], 25.12.1935.

⁴³³ Summary of the Reports of the Deputies who Visited Their Election Districts during the 1935 Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/725.481.1].

cultivate tobacco as before.⁴³⁴ Likewise, the peasants living in tobacco-cultivation-free zones such as Bartın, Elbistan-Maraş, Isparta, Trabzon, and Niğde also collectively or individually applied to the government for permission to cultivate tobacco and expressed their frustration with the ban on tobacco cultivation.⁴³⁵

The ban on the tobacco cultivation adversely affected not only the previous tobacco farmers, but also some grain producers who had suffered losses due to the sharper decline of grain prices with the economic crisis and wanted to switch from the cereals to tobacco, which was relatively more lucrative. The ban on the tobacco growing, which limited their alternatives, displeased them. That is to say, the limitation of the tobacco-cultivation areas not only hit the tobacco farmers, but also other peasants who strived to survive by diversifying their crops repertoire or switching from less worthy crops to comparatively more profitable cash crops like tobacco.

In sum, the peasants and the government struggled over in which areas the tobacco farming was to be legal. In this contestation, the peasants' complaints and demands and the constant smuggling that will be discussed in Chapter Five, had some actual repercussions. Some of the peasants living in areas in which tobacco cultivation was forbidden succeeded at manipulating the government and acquiring the right to cultivate tobacco. A careful comparison of the forbidden and free zones for tobacco cultivation in the Tobacco Monopoly Law (No.1701) dated 1930 and the next Tobacco and Tobacco Monopoly Law (No.3437) enacted in 1938 proves that

⁴³⁴ Yozgat: permission of tobacco planting, (p. 395); Kütahya: permission to cultivate tobacco in certain districts, (p. 298); Kayseri: permission to cultivate opium and tobacco, (p. 271); Denizli: permission of planting tobacco in Tavas, (pp. 151-153); Erzurum: permission of planting tobacco in İspir, (p. 165), *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*.

⁴³⁵ See the petitions that came from: Mehmet Kamil from Bartın (p. 330), *TBMM Yıllık 1928*. Peasants from Elbistan (p. 344), *TBMM Yıllık 1929*. Mehmet Esat from Isparta (p. 273); Zeki from Gaziler-Kayseri (p. 291); Saadettin and his friends from Niğde (p. 303), *TBMM Yıllık 1931*. Hasanoğlu Ahmet and his friends from the peasants from Denizli (p. 330); Osman Nuri Dede and his friends on behalf of Ardanç tobacco producing peasants in Trabzon (p. 330), *TBMM Yıllık 1935*.

the great part of the peasants managed to open the forbidden zones to the tobacco farming. Indeed, the new Tobacco Monopoly Law dated 1938 gave permission for tobacco cultivation to those peasants who wanted to engage in tobacco in Eskişehir-Mihalıççık, Kütahya-Emed, Çanakkale-Yenice, Denizli-Tavas and Buldan, Bursa-Karacabey, Manisa-Alaşehir, Trabzon-Maçka, Kırklareli-Babaeski, Isparta-Atabey, Muğla-Marmaris, and Mardin-Gurs.⁴³⁶

Köylü (Peasant): Poor Quality Cigarette for Peasants

Peasants as consumers of tobacco also were adversely affected by the tobacco monopoly due to the poor quality of the tobaccos and cigarettes it produced. They never liked the tobacco products of the state enterprises.⁴³⁷ The tobacco monopoly produced a cheap brand of cigarette, *Köylü*, for peasant smokers exclusively. This brand was marketed at lower price as compared to other brands. It was of poor quality even for its low price. It was reported from a number of Anatolian towns that the tobacco inside the cigarettes was either insufficient or rotten and in the form of dust. Therefore, the peasants did not like it and demanded the quality improvement frequently.⁴³⁸

Furthermore, the cut-rags marketed within the packages produced by the tobacco monopoly did not include an adequate number of cigarette papers. For this reason, the peasants had to buy extra cigarette papers.⁴³⁹ Some who could not afford to buy extra resorted to using old newspapers as cigarette paper. The public

⁴³⁶ Tobacco Monopoly Law (No. 1701) 05.06.1930 and the Tobacco and Tobacco Monopoly Law (No. 3437) 10.06.1938.

⁴³⁷ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 29.04.1933, p. 131.

⁴³⁸ For instance, peasants in Konya complained of the poor quality of *Köylü* cigarette, (pp. 292-293). Again peasants in Aydın complained of the poor quality of *Köylü* cigarette and demanded the improvement of its quality (pp. 63-64). For many complaints and demands like these, see *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*.

⁴³⁹ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 29.04.1933, p. 131.

dissatisfaction with these monopoly products reached up to Atatürk. As Kılıç Ali, one of Atatürk's men, noted as an anecdote in his memoirs, one day Atatürk was informed by the police that a peasant had cursed at him because he had had to use old newspaper to roll his tobacco. When Atatürk heard this event, he sympathetically showed understanding for the angry peasant.⁴⁴⁰

Furthermore, *Köylü* cigarette, notwithstanding its relatively cheap price, was deemed to be expensive by many low-income peasants. The lack of quality as well as the relatively high prices led the smokers in rural areas to complain about the tobacco monopoly during the interwar period. Therefore, they frequently demanded price-reduction and quality improvement.⁴⁴¹

Bitter Experiences of Sugar Beet Cultivators

When agricultural prices began to recuperate slightly in the mid-1930s, the comparatively high sugar beet prices reversed and moved lower. The government policy of reduction in the high sugar prices in 1935 resulted in a radical decrease in sugar beet prices. The government tried to keep down the costs by decreasing the prices of sugar beets. In 1935, the sugar factories began to offer 30 *para* per kg for sugar beet instead of 50 *para*. The price decline was about 40 percent. This new price

⁴⁴⁰ Hulûsi Turgut, ed. *Atatürk'ün Sırdaşı Kılıç Ali'nin Anıları* (İstanbul: İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2005), p. 601.

⁴⁴¹ Kırşehir: decrease in the price of tobacco, (p. 281); Kocaeli: decrease in the price of *Köylü* cigarette, (pp. 285-286); Konya: decrease in the price of *Köylü* cigarette, and improvement of the quality of tobacco inside these cigarettes that were deficient, dustlike, or rotten, (pp. 292-293); Manisa: decrease in the prices of tobacco and cigarettes, (pp. 316-317); Yozgat: decrease in the price of *Köylü* cigarette, (p. 395); Zonguldak: decrease in the price of *Köylü* cigarette, (pp. 413-414); İzmir: decrease in the price of *Köylü* cigarette, and quality improvement of cigarettes, (pp. 251-256); Isparta: decrease in the prices of tobacco and the *Köylü* cigarette, (p. 202); Erzurum: decrease in the prices of tobacco and cigarettes, (p. 165); Afyon: decrease in the price of tobacco, (pp. 16-17); Aydın: quality improvement of the *Köylü* cigarette, (pp. 63-64); Çorum: decrease in the prices of tobacco and cigarettes, (p. 121); Denizli: decrease in the prices of tobacco and cigarettes, (pp. 151-153). *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*. See also Kuşadası: decrease in the price of *Köylü* cigarette, (p. 42); Karaburun: decrease in the price of *Köylü* cigarette, (p. 45); Foça: decrease in the price of *Köylü* cigarette, (p. 59). *CHP 28/12/1936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi*

frustrated the sugar beet producers and provoked strong hostility towards the government among them. In addition, the government doubled the prices of the heavy plows used in sugar beet farms from 20 TL to 40 TL, creating extra costs for the farmers. Therefore, the complaints of sugar beet producers grew louder against the government and the sugar factories for the declining sugar beet prices and the increasing costs of equipment. They also repeatedly demanded higher price for their crops.

From Eskişehir, an important sugar beet center, the deputies reported in 1935 that since the costs of sugar beet cultivation had increased, it was necessary to increase the price of sugar beet slightly in order to boost the productivity of the sugar factory and continuation of sugar beet agriculture. Otherwise, the number of farmers who had begun to complain about the low sugar beet prices would continue to grow. In addition, according to the deputies, those farmers who were dissatisfied with the low prices tended to abandon sugar beet cultivation.⁴⁴²

In 1936, the cultivators further pressured the government about sugar beet pricing. Peasants from Kırklareli, another important sugar beet center, pleaded with the Alpallu Sugar Factory and the local government to increase the sugar beet price. In Tokat, the sugar beet cultivators insisted on 40 *para* per kilo from the Turhal Sugar Factory. The cultivators in Afyon and Amasya also expressed their dissatisfaction with 30 *para* and demanded 1 piaster (40 *para*) per kilo. The dissatisfaction with the low sugar beet prices, and accordingly the wishes for higher prices were widespread among the cultivators in other sugar beet producing areas such as Bilecik, Edirne, Kocaeli, and Kütahya.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴² Eskişehir Election District Reports, BCA CHPK [490.01/651.165.1], 25.12.1935.

⁴⁴³ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 275, 16-17, 20, 77-78, 158, 175, 285-286, 198, 387.

Furthermore, the sugar factories, like the tobacco monopoly administration, usually paid the farmers too late after the purchase of their crops. This led the farmers to criticize the sugar factories and the government. In Kütahya, for instance, the cultivators had not received their money for a long time since when the factory had purchased their crops. The peasants' grievance about the deferment of the payment and widespread demands for the payment on delivery of the sugar beets on time resonated in the provincial RPP congress and featured in the wish list of Kütahya province.⁴⁴⁴

Moreover, some sugar beet cultivators did not receive any money from the sale of their crops to the sugar factories. Many of them had received advances before the cultivation. The factory managements always cut these advances from the price of the sugar beet. In addition, along with the radical decline in sugar beet prices and an increase in expenses, the cultivators were not receiving payment in return for the crops they delivered to the factories. The sugar factories alleged that farmers were in debt to them because of the advance payments and loans they had received before. After the delivery of the sugar beets, the factories directly discounted these accrued debts from the prices of the sugar, instead of making payment to the farmers. Many cultivators who received no money after sale complained of this practice and accused the sugar factories of paying no money for their crops.⁴⁴⁵

Another issue over which the sugar factories and the peasants contested was the transportation costs of the sugar beets from the land to the depots of the sugar factories or to the purchasing stations. The sugar factories left the transportation of sugar beets and its costs completely to the cultivators. However, the peasants did not comply with this decision of the factories. Therefore, among the requests that

⁴⁴⁴ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 298.

⁴⁴⁵ "Pancar Eken Köylü," *Köroğlu*, 18.03.1936.

reached the local party congresses were their exemption from the transportation costs.⁴⁴⁶

As tobacco monopoly experts did, the sugar factory experts also exploited the sugar beet farmers as much as possible. The exploitation mechanisms were similar: scrapping some part of the sugar beets as a loss or waste, and offering reduced prices or no payments for this part. The amount of the scrapped sugar beets was a matter of debate between the factory experts and the peasants. In Eskişehir, for example, the factory experts usually discarded 9 percent of the sugar beet as waste or spoiled and cut the prices of this part. In some instances, the scrapped parts reached up to 15 percent of the crops. Displeased with such treatment, the peasants always argued that these rates of so-called waste were too high because they submitted very good, unsoiled and unspoiled crops. The peasants viewed 3 percent at most as a valid rate of waste and rotten sugar beet. They demanded the factories, party, and government lower the rate of scrapping to this amount.⁴⁴⁷

Another source of discontent about the sugar factories among the peasants was insufficient purchases. Especially the boom in sugar beet production in 1934 and 1935 incapacitated the sugar factories to absorb all the production. Therefore, there emerged an overstock in sugar beets. For this reason, many cultivators had growing stocks waiting unsold, which distressed and led them to accuse the sugar factories of ignoring the farmers. The peasants requested that the government purchase their sugar beet stocks immediately, as it did for wheat.⁴⁴⁸

Perhaps the best gauge of the dissent of the sugar beet cultivators was the increasing tendency to avoid the sugar beet agriculture from the mid-1930s onward. The second half of the decade witnessed a rapid flight from sugar beet production to

⁴⁴⁶ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 20.

⁴⁴⁷ Eskişehir Election District Reports. BCA CHPK [490.01/651.165.1], 25.12.1935.

⁴⁴⁸ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 04.05.1935, p. 44.

other more promising crops. The surface areas under sugar beet cultivation contracted within a short time. Whereas the number of farmer supplying the Alpulu factory had climbed from 3000 in 1927 to 20,000 in 1934, this number fell to 17,000 in 1935, 15,700 in 1936, 14,500 in 1937, and 12,800 in 1938.⁴⁴⁹ In a similar line, notwithstanding the boom in number of sugar beet growers supplying the Uşak Sugar Factory from 3600 in 1926 to 18,600 in 1934, this trend reversed within a short time with a sharp fall to 5300 in 1936.⁴⁵⁰

The peasants were so discontented with the declining prices that sugar factory experts began to have a difficult time finding any peasant willing to cultivate sugar beets. Many of farmers who had previously engaged in sugar beets farming avoided even meeting with the sugar beet experts. Some of them protested against them angrily. For instance, when a sugar factory expert and other factory officials visited a sugar beet village in Turhal in 1934, some angry women peasants who resented the sugar factory protested with hoes in their hands shouting:

God damn you! From where have you come to our town? We wish you had never come here! We have a sore back because of lifting these sugar beets. We injured our fingers and nails to control their roots. On top of it, you planted that jinx leafs in our barley fields, therefore we have been in need of barley.⁴⁵¹

Again, when the same sugar experts went to the Perili village of Kütahya in order to persuade the peasants to cultivate sugar beets, the peasants refused to even bargain with them due to the very low prices. In the end, the headman Mehmet, complaining of the prices for the sugar beet said, “Efendi, your efforts are in vain. If they behead us, we will not plant sugar beets for 30 *para*.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁹ Turan Veldet, *30. Yılında Türkiye Şeker Sanayi* (Ankara: Doğu Ltd. Şirketi Matbaası, 1958), p. 401.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 182.

The Salt Monopoly

Salt was an important input in agriculture and especially in animal husbandry. The salt monopoly, creating a salt shortage in the market and increasing salt prices, caused public discontent especially in rural areas.⁴⁵³ After the salt was taken under the state monopoly in 1927, the government fixed the price at 6 piasters with the Law on the Salt Trade and Salt Prices (*Tuz Satışı ve Tuz Fiyatları Hakkında Kanun*) (No.1518). In the market, the prices exceeded 10 piasters in many places.

These prices were beyond the purchasing power of peasants who needed to use salt in great quantities in agriculture and livestock farming. Consequently, the peasants, especially livestock owners, criticized the government because the high salt prices and the strict ban on the free use of salt mines and lakes for their animals increased the costs of the animal husbandry. Some wrote to the newspapers that they had been deprived of this important input because of its expensiveness. The party and the government received many requests for a decrease in salt prices from the rural areas during the 1930s. The local party congresses also expressed such requests of the peasants.⁴⁵⁴

The salt monopoly paved the way for salt smuggling, as will be addressed in Chapter Six. The government, in the face of complaints, requests and smuggling activities, had to reduce the salt prices noticeably about 50 percent, from 6 piasters to 3 piasters per kilo.⁴⁵⁵ Notwithstanding the alleviation in the public discontent with

⁴⁵³ Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 143.

⁴⁵⁴ Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 1, pp. 231-232.

⁴⁵⁵ The Law about the Salt Price, No. 2752, Date. 05.06.1935. *Düstur III*, Vol. 16, p.1281.

the salt prices, the salt monopoly continued to get reactions from the peasantry in the second half of the 1930s.⁴⁵⁶

Disgruntlement with the State Control over the Forests

Strict state control over the forests also spurred negative reactions throughout the countryside, especially in mountainous and forested areas. The forest policy of the government hit the peasants who had relied on the forests as an economic source for years. The forests, which had been a source of timber, wood, and many other side products, were now enclosed by the government and rented to the capitalist forest companies. The Republican elite perceived the forests as an important source of revenue for the state budget and a source of raw material for the state enterprises, which must be protected from all “predators” including peasants. Therefore, the forests became a kind of restricted area for the peasants. For peasants, the ban on the cutting timber, cutting wood, and collecting forest products seemed unfair. Although peasants had beneficial interests in the forests in theory according to the regulations and orders issued in the early 1920s, in practice, it was very difficult for a peasant to acquire the official permission to cut timber in the forests. Therefore, the restriction on forest sources constituted one of the main problems that distressed the peasants during the period.

⁴⁵⁶ Bolu: no permission for the sale of salt at too high prices, (p. 85); Edirne: reduction in the price of salt, (p. 158); Kars: reduction in the price of salt, (p. 260); Kastamonu: reduction in the price of salt, (p. 264); Kayseri: taking measures to prevent salt profiteering, (p. 271); Kırşehir: reduction in the price of salt, (p. 281). *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*. See also Summary of the Reports of the Deputies who Visited Their Election Districts during the 1935 Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/725.481.1].

Discontent with the Forest Enterprises and Companies

First, the peasants saw that the government enterprises and the private forest and timber companies exploited the forests as they wished, which heightened their resentment of these forestry companies that had taken their livelihoods away. In Kastamonu, the largest forestry area of Turkey, for instance, the Ayancık Timber Factory and the Zingal Timber Factory in 1926 enclosed the great part of the forests in the region that had provided an important economic resource for 200,000 peasants until that time. These peasants unsurprisingly hated these companies and the government. In a short tour of İsmet İnönü to Kastamonu, a peasant with whom İnönü had a talk about the forestry affairs poured out his troubles and grief as follows:

We, the peasants in this region subsist on cutting timber. Although the law prescribed that 10 meters timber were to be allocated to each of us, the forestry administration never gave our allowances, and therefore we are in economic distress. Although a merchant was granted a huge forest, we are so needy that we have to work for him, or we languish in prison because we cut timber illegally.⁴⁵⁷

As it is obvious from this statement, the peasants felt deep sorrow. This policy of the government that deprived them of the forests was an injustice. As understood from what the peasant said to İnönü explicitly, they began to act on by cutting timber clandestinely. This is a resistance to the government's and capitalists' control over the forested areas. This resistance, as will be examined in detail in Chapter Four, was rampant throughout the country.

Another example of social discontent with the forest companies can be given from the situation in the Finike and Elmalı regions of Antalya. The government had

⁴⁵⁷ Mustafa Eski, *İsmet İnönü'nün Kastamonu Gezileri* (İstanbul: Çağdaş Yayınları, 1995), p. 63.

rented the forests in the region to the Finike Forest Company. By the early 1930s, the company had great economic and political influence in the region. The power of the company was derived from that some local party administrators and influential households were at the same time shareholders and managers of the company. Therefore, it had great influence over the local party organization. Backed by the party authority, it completely closed the forests to the peasants. This absolute power of the company frustrated the local people.⁴⁵⁸

Likewise, the operation rights of the large forests in İçel were transferred to a big timber enterprise. As reported by the İçel deputy, the enterprise, having an absolute power over forested areas, monopolized all of the forests and drove the peasants living in the forested areas out of their villages. This was also a reason why timber and firewood prices began to soar in the region. This situation caused widespread public grievance not only among the peasants, but also among the people in the city center.⁴⁵⁹

Difficulties in Getting License to Cut Wood from the Forests

Notwithstanding the peasant's right to benefit from the forests, the bureaucratic red tape usually hindered the use of this right. It was not easy to get official permission from the forestry administration. Obtaining a license always took a long time due to the lack of an adequate number of forest staff and engineers to find out the peasants' real needs and to determine the maximum length of timber the peasants were permitted to cut. Probably, the bureaucratic elite's perception of the peasants as

⁴⁵⁸ Summary of the reports prepared by the deputies who have visited their election districts during the 1935 Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/ 725.481.1].

⁴⁵⁹ The Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies who Visited Their Election Districts in the 1939 Summer Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/515.2062.1].

“ignorants” and “enemies of trees” made the forest administration bureaucracy more reluctant to issue licenses to the peasants.⁴⁶⁰

Thus, the peasants faced with the most powerful obstacle raised by the state, that is, bureaucratic red tape. As a result, illicit timber-cutting and trade of forestry products, which frequently resulted in serious conflicts between the peasants and the forest rangers or the gendarme, spread throughout Anatolia. This situation aroused massive hatred for the forest administration, forest officials, and rangers in rural areas. Peasants who were unable to obtain licenses to benefit from the forests for a long time complained about them and pleaded with the government to make things easier.

The most widespread complaints were about the difficulties raised by the forest administration in issuing licenses. The case of Paşalar village peasants in Bursa in 1930 vividly illustrates what the peasants experienced and felt about the matter. Paşalar village was located in a forested area and most of the peasants in the village subsisted on forestry. However, the government banned the use of forest without official permission. Despite their efforts to get licenses to use their right to benefit from the forests, they were unable to get a result for six months. As a last resort, they decided to write to a newspaper to make their voices heard:

We have been for a long time living on timer cutting (...). We are unable pay the taxes. Our families suffer hunger. Our business has come to a halt. We do not reap a good harvest. For six months in this year, even the peasants who are ready to pay for the licenses have not yet been granted the official licenses necessary to use the right to benefit from the forests.⁴⁶¹

The Paşalar village peasants first had applied to the forest administration directorate in their district and begged the forest officials to issue their licenses. The officials

⁴⁶⁰ For the Republican elite's perception of the peasantry as “killer of trees and forests,” see Azmi Demir, “Adana’da Orman Kaçakçılığı,” *Verim*, No. 7-8 (1935), p. 7.

⁴⁶¹ “Bir Orman İşi,” *Cumhuriyet*, 19.10.1930.

rejected their request and referred them to the forest director. Their talk with the forest director also yielded no result. Thereupon, writing a collective petition to the Minister of Economy, they requested he solve their problem. The Ministry replied to the peasants within a short time, saying, the Ministry had officially ordered the forest directorate to make things easier. Encouraged by this official letter, the village headman took this letter with him and visited the Bursa forest administration director. The director put the headman off by saying that he had ordered the forest engineer to investigate their application. However, the peasants still did not get the licenses, even after a long time had passed since the director had assured them that he would issue their licenses right after the investigations of the forest engineers.⁴⁶²

In many places in Anatolia, the inert forest administration bureaucracy, officious, clumsy and merciless forest officials were sources of grief and anger among the peasants. A newspaper correspondent reported that peasants everywhere in Anatolia were complaining about the forest administrations and forest officials disregarding their right to benefit from the forests. The officials always made things difficult for the peasants who applied for permission to cut timber and firewood. According to the correspondent, this situation caused widespread complaints among peasants.⁴⁶³

As reported from Adana in 1931, again, although the peasants in many villages had lived on the forests, the forest administration further deprived them of their main economic resources. The biggest problem of these peasants was the forest officials' refusal or delay to issue licenses. The officials generally declined their applications for licenses. Even when they accepted, they did not do it in good time.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

⁴⁶³ A. Fuat, "Memlekette," *Cumhuriyet*, 27.11.1930.

The peasants from Adana villages wanted the government to make things easier for the peasants who wanted to benefit from the forests.⁴⁶⁴

Likewise, the peasants from Bilecik requested the government to permit them to use their legal rights to cut timber from the forests. From Denizli, the peasants complained that their right to benefit from the forests had been violated by the local authorities. The peasants in the villages of Mersin also faced obstacles raised by the forest administration.⁴⁶⁵

Again, it was reported from Samsun and Tokat that all the peasants who needed to cut timber and wood for firewood or for building and the repair of their barns, houses and fences, also were adversely affected by the forest directorates' and officials' rigorous care and strict measures for the forests. Moreover, the strict state control over the forests, especially after the 1936 Forest Law deprived the citizens of the firewood and timber needed for carpentry, and the repair works.⁴⁶⁶

This negative approach of the forest administration to the peasants adversely affected those village artisans who produced wooden items such as wooden plates and spoon, too. The monopoly over the forests divested them of the raw material of the items that they produced and traded. They were under double obligations: the first obligation was to have a license to cut timber from the forests. The second one was to have a different license to use woodworking machines. Because the village artisans faced difficulties in obtaining these licenses, they were very upset and frequently complained about the local forest administrations.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁴ 1931 RPP Provincial Congresses' Wish Lists Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1].

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ "In Samsun, innocent peasants are left in a difficult position because of injustices due to the misapplication of the Forest Law. Therefore, fuel prices have increased. In Tokat, fuel prices have 3-fold increased." The Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies who Visited Their Election Districts in the 1939 Summer Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/515.2062.1].

⁴⁶⁷ Evaluation of the 1933 Provincial RPP Congresses' Wish Lists about Agriculture and Forests, BCA CHP [490.1/502.2016.2], 26.09.1936.

These notices and orders seemingly were not put into practice efficiently. The forest directorates and officials continued to receive complaints until the end of the decade and the peasants continued to implore the government to mitigate their problems created by the forest administration. In 1935, the peasants in Eskişehir, for example, stated that they were deprived of the timber necessary to build and repair their barns and houses. Likewise, the peasants in Kars who had great difficulties in finding timber to repair their hovels sought to use their rights to benefit from the forests. The peasants in the villages of Antalya, in severe need of timber to repair their houses, also implored the government to change attitude towards them by recognizing their rights to benefit from the forests.⁴⁶⁸

The election district reports also provide evidences of the widespread grievances of the rural population with the officious forest administration. The Manisa deputies who toured their election district in 1937 pointed out that they had frequently received complaints about the forest officials and rangers in each village they had visited.⁴⁶⁹ Bursa deputies in same year reported that the forestry administration caused public outcry everywhere in the province. In many villages, they had often listened to complaints about the forest administration and violation of their rights to cut timber.⁴⁷⁰ Similarly, the deputies of other forested provinces such as Bolu and İçel noted the widespread grievance that stemmed from the attitudes of the forest administration towards the peasants. They pointed out that the requests

⁴⁶⁸ Evaluation of the 1935-36 Provincial RPP Congresses' Wish Lists about Agriculture and Forests, BCA CHP [490.1/502.2016.2.], 26.09.1936.

⁴⁶⁹ Summaries of the Reports of the Manisa Deputies Asım Tümer, Faik Kurdoğlu, Hikmet Bayur, Hüsnü Yaman, Kani Karaosman, Kazım Nami Duru, Kenan Örer, Osman Erçin, Rıdvan Nafiz Edgüder and Yaşar Özey, BCA CHP [490.1/684.317.1], 02.08.1937.

⁴⁷⁰ Election District Reports of the Bursa Deputies, BCA CHP [490.1/631.79.1], 11.11.1935.

about the simplification of the license procedures were among the main wishes of the people.⁴⁷¹

The local party congresses of the RPP, especially the wish lists the congresses sent to the RPP general secretariat also included many complaints and requests regarding the matter. In 1935, the Manisa and İçel congresses demanded that things be made easier for peasants who wanted to cut timber and that the license applications be approved without long delays.⁴⁷² According to the minutes of the İzmir RPP congress held in 1936, peasants from Ödemiş wanted the forest administration to tolerate those peasants who cut timber in suitable areas.⁴⁷³ Peasants in Kapukaya, İncecikler and Tahtacı villages of Bergama, who had long engaged in the timber trade, also argued that the strict interventions of the forest administration in their work undermined their livelihood. These villages pleaded with the government to find a remedy to their problem.⁴⁷⁴ In a similar vein, the wish lists prepared by the provincial party congresses of Aydın, Bolu, Erzurum, İstanbul, Kars, Kırklareli and Tekirdağ included the peasants' demands such as "making the license procedures easier for peasants," "approval of licenses without long delays," "decrease in license fees," and "no difficulties for peasants who were severely in need of timber and firewood."⁴⁷⁵

Towards the end of the decade, especially after the enactment of the Forest Law, the deputies who toured their election districts continued to record the peasants' discontent with the forest administration. The peasants in Bolu, according to the Bolu deputies, wanted the application of the Forest Law without disregarding the peasants'

⁴⁷¹ Summary of the Reports of the Deputies who Visited Their Election Districts during the 1935 Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.01/ 725.481.1.].

⁴⁷² Evaluation of the 1935-36 Provincial RPP Congresses' Wish Lists about Agriculture and Forests, BCA CHP [490.1/502.2016.2], 26.09.1936.

⁴⁷³ *CHP 28/12/936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi*, p. 27.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁴⁷⁵ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, pp. 63-64, 85, 165, 245, 260, 275, 383-384.

right to benefit from the forests. The deputies of Çanakkale, Manisa, Muğla, Zonguldak, Samsun, and Tokat recorded the criticisms of the peasants about the ban on timber farming and other bureaucratic impediments to the timber-cutting.⁴⁷⁶

In addition, the rural population petitioned the government and bemoaned the harmful effects of the forest administrations to them. They especially demanded “free use of the forests to make available timber for the building or repair of their houses and barns,” “free wood-cutting for firewood,” and “using the forests without any restraint.”⁴⁷⁷

Conflicting Claims over Forest Products, Pastures, Heathlands, Scrublands, and Marshy Places

Especially before the 1936 Forest Law, there was no clear legal definition of what “the forestry areas” meant.⁴⁷⁸ Therefore, there were disputes over the pastures, heathlands, scrublands, and bushy, marshy and reedy fields between the authorities and the peasants. Considering these fields as a part of forested areas, the forest officials banned the peasants from collecting bushes, marsh plants and from pasturing their livestock in these places. Some officious forest administrators tried to prevent the peasants from collecting the forest products such as acorns and

⁴⁷⁶ Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies who Visited Their Election Districts in the 1939

Summer Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/515.2062.1].

⁴⁷⁷ Selimiye village headman Ali and his friends demand to be allowed to benefit from the forests, (p.276), *TBMM Yıllık 1935* (Ankara: TBMM Matbaası, 1935); Koyulhisar people want to benefit from the nearby forests easily (p.418), Mustafa Sözer from the Dindebol village of Ermenek wants to be allowed to cut trees in his private plot (p.420), *TBMM Yıllık 1939* (Ankara: TBMM Matbaası, 1939); Mustafa and his friends from the Gölcük village of Mudurnu demand official license allowing them to cut tree (p.282), *TBMM Yıllık 1936* (Ankara: TBMM Matbaası, 1936); Hasan Faikoğlu Osman from Bartın wants the government to allow the peasants to benefit from the forests (p. 316); Mehmet Kamil from Bartın wants the government to give permission to him to benefit from the forest (p. 330); the Keryeler village headman and peasants of Antalya complain that they are not given a license to cut tree in the forest (p. 344); Rasih Efendi and his friends from Domaniç complain of local authorities who do not issue licence to cut tree (p. 344); on behalf of his peasants, village headman Veli from İnegöl wants to be allowed to benefit from the forest for their own use (p. 351); Osman from Bartın wants to use the forest (p. 354); Mustafa from İzmir Kemalpaşa wants to benefit from the forest (p. 361), *TBMM Yıllık 1929*.

⁴⁷⁸ Ayanoğlu and Güneş, *Orman Suçları*, p. 35.

pinecones. Furthermore, regarding the fruit trees on private farms and gardens as a part of the forests, the local authorities sometimes fined their owners when they cut or pruned these trees. However, the peasants objected to such very broad definition of forested areas and claimed their own rights over such fields and trees. In other words, they resisted the broader definition of the forested area that were forbidden to the peasants by the local authorities.

As reported in 1937 from Manisa, for example, there were several disagreements between the forest administration and the peasants arising from the collection of the acorns, pinecones and bushes in the pastures, and the cutting of trees and reeds in private gardens and pastures. Again, the forest rangers fined those peasants who cut reeds from small heathlands, riverside lands, and marshy places for the purpose of making reed baskets. The forest administration argued that the peasants violated the laws regarding the forests; but the peasants rejected this accusation claiming the opposite. According to the peasants, because it was impossible to consider these fields as forests, their acts could not be regarded against the law.⁴⁷⁹

Similar problems emerged in Aydın. The local authorities denied the peasants' free access to pastures, small scrublands and bushy fields, in addition to the forests. Livestock grazing in grasslands became impossible for animal owners. For that reason alone, some peasants had to sell off their animals. Moreover, there appeared a shortage of firewood and timber for carpentry. The peasants bemoaned these harmful effects of the forest administration.⁴⁸⁰

In İçel, the authorities banned the collection of the tree roots in the private gardens and farms. The forest rangers confiscated even the tree roots, heather and

⁴⁷⁹ Summaries of the Reports of the Manisa Deputies Asım Tümer, Faik Kurdoğlu, Hikmet Bayur, Hüsnü Yaman, Kani Karaosman, Kazım Nami Duru, Kenan Örer, Osman Erçin, Rıdvan Nafiz Edgüder and Yaşar Özey, BCA CHP [490.1/684.317.1], 02.08.1937.

⁴⁸⁰ Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies who Visited Their Election Districts in the 1939 Summer Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/515.2062.1].

brushwood of which many peasants collected for sale or their own use as firewood in winter. The peasants pleaded with the government to revoke the authorization of the forest rangers that worsened their economic conditions.⁴⁸¹

These peasants also made their voices heard in the highest state organs, as is evident from an official notice sent by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1933 to the provincial forest administrations in Kastamonu, Antalya, İçel, İzmir, Bolu, İstanbul, Bilecik and Çankırı. With this notice, the Minister ordered them to make things easier for those village artisans who applied for the licenses to cut timber from the forests and to use woodworking machines.⁴⁸²

Furthermore, in view of the public outcry in villages, in same year, the Ministry of Agriculture and the General Directorate of the Forest Enterprises issued an order to the provincial forest directorates, according to which the forest directorates were supposed to distribute sufficient timber, firewood or other forest products or to give official permissions for timber cutting more easily to peasants right after the council of elders informed the forest directorates about the needs of the peasants.⁴⁸³

Agricultural Bank and Agricultural Cooperatives

Perhaps the most important component of the populist image of the party and the government was the Agricultural Bank (AB). Apart from the populist motivations of the Republican elite, in some respects, the growing discontent of the peasantry during the Great Depression also compelled the government to support the farmers in

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸² Evaluation of the 1933 Provincial RPP Congresses' Wish Lists about Agriculture and Forests, BCA CHP [490.1/502.2016.2], 26.09.1936.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*

dire straits through the AB. During the 1920s and 1930s it opened credit to farmers as well as to merchants. In addition, it implemented wheat-purchasing policy in the 1930s. The government initiated the establishment of agricultural cooperatives to solve the funding problem of the farmers.

However, all these policies fell short of satisfying the needs of the peasantry for several reasons. Rather than their positive effects, the peasants were usually preoccupied with and talked about their shortcomings and adverse effects. The peasants' endless complaints and demands about the AB loans and agricultural cooperatives' credits compelled the government to modify the activities and policies of these institutions during the 1930s.

Complaints about Insufficient Bank Branches and Loans

The first thing that displeased the peasants about the AB was the lack of adequate number of branches in the countryside. In 1924, there were only 46 branches across the country. This number increased to 54 in the 1930s, along with a number of very small AB funds with limited capital in relatively large towns. Many peasants were not able to access the bank branches and the funds, which were generally located in only one or a few town centers in each province, which were far from some villages.⁴⁸⁴

According to a newspaper, the peasants in Kahta were not able to apply for the bank credits due to the lack of a branch in their district. For that reason, many had fallen into the hands of usurers and lost their lands and livestock.⁴⁸⁵ A brief look at

⁴⁸⁴ Hazar, *T.C. Ziraat Bankası*, p. 240. In addition to these branches, there were several small funds of the AB in certain districts, but these were insignificant in meeting the financial needs of the peasantry because of their very small monetary assets.

⁴⁸⁵ "Kâhta'da," *Son Posta*, 20.12.1936.

the wish lists submitted by the local party congresses shows that the peasants throughout the country suffered the absence of the AB branches in close proximity to their villages. For that reason, the rural population wished the opening of AB branches nearby their villages.⁴⁸⁶

Despite the increase in number of branches in the countryside from 1932 on especially as a result of the peasants' demands and of the increasing transactions of the bank with the wheat purchasing policy, the peasants continued to suffer from the inadequate number of the AB branches. In the mid-1930s, for instance, the peasants from Burdur, Çanakkale, Erzincan, İçel, İstanbul's distant districts (Yalova, Şile, Silivri), Kars, Kayseri, Kırşehir, Kocaeli, Konya, Seyhan, Tekirdağ and Yozgat requested the opening of branches of the bank in their districts.⁴⁸⁷

Apart from the inaccessibility of the limited number of the AB branches, those peasants who had access to the bank faced another problem: inadequate agricultural loans. As noted in the former chapter, the loans usually were not enough to support the cultivators, especially during the Great Depression years. Furthermore, most of the AB branches that were located in small and distant places did not have enough cash on hand to open credit to the peasants.

Thus, the government received many complaints about the inadequacy of the agricultural loans granted by the bank. As reported by a local newspaper, *Yeşilgireson*, for instance, a group of peasants in Giresun had applied for a short-term agricultural loan towards the harvest season in 1934. Because its existing capital was too short to open such a loan, the bank had rejected their application. The peasants, in serious need of cash for the harvest, had begged the bank administration for the

⁴⁸⁶ 1931 RPP Provincial Congresses' Wish Lists Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1].

⁴⁸⁷ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 109, 114, 160, 198, 246, 260, 271, 281, 286, 364, 394.

loan, but this had yielded no result. Therefore, many peasants in the region began to grumble against the bank.⁴⁸⁸

In another case, a peasant named Osman from the Yomra district of Trabzon, in a letter to *Cumhuriyet*, criticized the AB activities in the region. The peasants in his village were poor and in debt to moneylenders. However, the total capital of the AB branch in the Yomra district was only 20,000 TL. Even if the bank had delivered this entire amount as a loan, it would not have met the needs of one village of the district. Therefore, the peasants in the region were highly critical of the loan system of the bank.⁴⁸⁹

The situation and accordingly the general opinion of the peasantry in Eskişehir, an important wheat center, was similar. Inadequacy of agricultural loans led those peasants who were in need of financial support to criticize the bank. Many peasants in Eskişehir, who were not able to receive the agricultural loans of the bank, complained that they had fallen into the hands of usurers.⁴⁹⁰ Likewise, according to a deputy report on Sivas, another wheat-producing province, the lack of agricultural loans was a frequent complaint among peasants.⁴⁹¹

Correspondingly, the one important demand raised in the rural areas was the increase in the capital of the local bank branches that were allocated to agricultural loans. In the provincial party congresses, held in 1931, the peasants of almost all provinces demanded the government turn on the agricultural credit taps.⁴⁹² In mid-

⁴⁸⁸ “Ziraat Bankası ve Halk,” *Yeşilgireson*, 12.07.1934.

⁴⁸⁹ “Anketimize Cevaplar: Ziraat Bankası,” *Cumhuriyet*, 31.03.1931.

⁴⁹⁰ Eskişehir Election District Reports, BCA CHP [490.1/651.165.1], 20.11.1934.

⁴⁹¹ Report of Sivas Deputy Rasim, 20.01.1931, see Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/724.477.1], 07.02.1931

⁴⁹² From Aydın, it was demanded that the Agricultural Bank’s capital be increased. It was reported from Amasya that the Agricultural Bank’s assets in the province, which was about 40,000 TL, fell short of meeting the financial needs of the peasants. Therefore it was reported that Amasya peasants had demanded sufficient amount of agricultural loans. From Bolu, Çanakkale, Cebelibereket, Trabzon and many other provinces, as well, it was demanded that the agricultural loans be augmented through

1930s, the peasants continued to want more effective agricultural loan system.⁴⁹³

What is evident from these wishes is that the agricultural loans did not satisfy them throughout the period.

Complaints about Misallocation of Credits

Another complaint of the peasants regarding the bank was the allocation of the lion's share of the funds to commercial loans. In addition to that, the agricultural loan terms of the bank were so heavy for especially poor and small farmers that most of them had great difficulty to receive these loans. For that reason, the peasants frequently criticized the bank on the grounds that the loans did not go to the agricultural producers, but instead to well-off merchants. For example, the peasants from Bursa and Bilecik stated that "The bank should aid only agricultural producers." According to peasants in the villages of Denizli, "The commercial credits of the bank should be removed, and all funds of the bank should be devoted to only peasants."⁴⁹⁴ A 1931 report of Sivas deputy Rasim also pointed out that the peasants in the villages of

an increase in the capital of the Agricultural Bank. 1931 Provincial Congresses' Wish Lists Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1].

⁴⁹³ Amasya peasants demanded agricultural credit. Peasants in Trabzon demanded increase in amounts of agricultural loans. In Afyon, the peasants complained about the Agricultural Bank because the agricultural loans were not given on time and in needed amount. They demanded that the necessary credit be provided on time. For more, see 1931 Provincial Congresses' Wish Lists Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture. BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1]. See also *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, for instance, İçel peasants demanded agricultural loans of more than 150 TL, (p. 198); Kars peasants demanded agricultural loans, (p. 260); Manisa demanded increase in agricultural loans' amounts, (p. 317). In addition, there were several petitions to the National Assembly asking for agricultural loans. Şevket from a village of Sındırgı (Petition No. 3324); Avni and his peasant friends from Yalvaç (Petition No. 4888); Memet from İnebolu in the name of the peasants (Petition No. 4889); Sadık from Gerede (Petition No. 4894). *TBMM Yıllık 1930*. Ömer from the Kilhidik village of Sivas (p. 322); Karacabey peasants and farmers (p. 320); Karacaviran Yabani village headman Ahmet (p. 327), and for many other petitions asking for the agricultural loans of the Agricultural Bank, see *TBMM Yıllık 1935*.

⁴⁹⁴ Wish Lists That Came From the 1931 RPP Provincial Congresses, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1].

Sivas viewed the bank as an institution in the service of the merchants, not of the peasants.⁴⁹⁵

It is evident from the demands that the peasants were well aware and critical of the fact that the AB carried out commercial banking for its own benefit, and not for the benefit of the agricultural sector. Moreover, in the eyes of the peasants, the loan system of the AB became a litmus paper that revealed the real side of the government in the class differentiation within the village community. The peasants realized and criticized the fact that the large landowners and influential families, who were involved in commercial activities as well as agriculture, had easier access to the bank loans. A peasant named Hüseyin, in a letter published in *Cumhuriyet* on 23 March 1931, for example, argued that the rich landowners easily received the AB loans and invested them in commercial activities rather than in the agriculture.⁴⁹⁶

Another critical letter from a peasant accused the bank of funding especially big property owners. Apart from this, the letter writer went on, alleging that the loans enjoyed by these property owners enabled them to sustain their usuriousness by lending the loans taken from the bank to the poor peasants at higher interest rates than the interest rates of the bank loans.⁴⁹⁷ Another letter to the same newspaper said that the Agricultural Bank did not in fact fund agriculture, but financed rich rentiers.⁴⁹⁸

The terms of agricultural loans were criticized for being too short and thus very difficult for lower-income peasants to rely on these loans. For a small peasant, it was impossible to give security for due payments or to mortgage any property other

⁴⁹⁵ Report of Sivas Deputy Rasim, 20.01.1931, see Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/724.477.1], 07.02.1931.

⁴⁹⁶ “Anketimize Cevaplar: İkraz Usulleri Basitleştirilmelidir,” *Cumhuriyet*, 21.03.1931.

⁴⁹⁷ “Anketimize Cevaplar: Ziraat Bankası Ayağını Yorganına Göre Uzatmalıdır. Bankanın Parası Zürradan Ziyade Tüccarların Elinde Tedavül Etmektedir,” *Cumhuriyet*, 12.03.1931.

⁴⁹⁸ “Anketimize Cevaplar: Ziraat Bankasının Sahibi Bizzat Zürra Olduğu Halde...” *Cumhuriyet*, 15.03.1931.

than a house, a few animals, and a piece of land. Therefore, a letter writer said that the AB loans had served to the property owners, since nobody could give security for the poor peasants already in debt.⁴⁹⁹

Complaints about High Interest Rates

The high interest rates of the AB loans, which reached up to 16.5 percent (9 percent interest rate + 5 percent commission + 2.5 percent other fees) was also a subject of frequent complaint. Indeed, despite the disastrous decline in agricultural prices in the Great Depression years, the interest rates of the loans were not lowered in the same proportion. This made it more difficult to pay off the loan debts since the profits that came from the crop sales began to fall short of the high interest rates of the loans. Due to the relatively high interest rates of the AB loans, many peasants viewed the bank as “an institution of the money lenders” or as “a fair usurer.”⁵⁰⁰

Some peasants criticized the bank by arguing that it contradicted itself. Upon the confiscation of a cow of a peasant due to his debt to the bank, some complained, “The Agricultural Bank ignores agricultural banking,” and “In order to compete with *İş Bankası* (Business Bank), the Agricultural Bank is trying to fill its moneybox.”⁵⁰¹ In other words, in the eyes of the peasants, the AB was not different from the other profit-seeking commercial banks and even the usurers.

The critical letters to the newspapers condemned the bank for charging high interest rates. A small farmer from Konya, named İrfan, wrote that it was impossible for small farmers like him to make profits great enough to enable them to pay the

⁴⁹⁹ “Anketimize Cevaplar: Ziraat Bankasından Para Almağı Zorlaştıran Sebepler Nelerdir?” *Cumhuriyet*, 16.03.1931.

⁵⁰⁰ “Anketimize Cevaplar,” *Cumhuriyet*, 15.03.1931.

⁵⁰¹ “İnek Haczedilir mi?” *Köroğlu*, 22.10.1932.

high interests rates of bank.⁵⁰² Another malcontent person from İzmir criticized the bank for charging high rates harmful to the cultivators. Especially the earnings of grain growers did by no means meet the bank rates.⁵⁰³ Likewise, a peasant named Nuri from Thrace questioned on what the bank spent its funds. According to him, the bank should lend money at much lower interest rates to cultivators.⁵⁰⁴

In addition, the commissions fees that were added to the interest rates were a subject of complaints. A peasant criticized the bank for charging commissions on top of high interest rates.⁵⁰⁵ It is possible to see the objections of the peasants to the high interest rates and the frequent demands for more reasonable rates in the reports of the RPP deputies and the wish lists of the provincial party congresses.⁵⁰⁶

Complaints about Too Short Maturity Period and Red Tape

Peasants who received the bank loans with heavy hearts also had great difficulties in paying their debts off at maturity. The main reason for this was undoubtedly the economic crisis, which decreased the agricultural profits terribly. Despite the radical decline in agricultural prices, neither the rates nor the credit periods were adjusted to the worsening situation of the peasant economy. The sharp decrease in agricultural incomes together with the small loans with too high interest rates and too short maturity periods made it harder to clear the debts before their due date. Therefore,

⁵⁰² “Anketimize Cevaplar: Çiftçilerin Belini Büken Faiz Miktarile İkrizat Vadelerinin Kısıklığıdır,” *Cumhuriyet*, 20.03.1931.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ “Anketimize Cevaplar: Zürrain Belini Büken En Ağır Şey Faizdir,” *Cumhuriyet*, 25.03.1931.

⁵⁰⁵ “Anketimize Cevaplar: Ziraat Bankasından Para Almağı Zorlaştıran Sebepler Nelerdir?” *Cumhuriyet*, 16.03.1931.

⁵⁰⁶ See the reports on Sivas, Kırşehir and Yozgat in the file titled Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/724.477.1], 07.02.1931. In addition see 1931 Provincial Congresses’ Wish Lists Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1]. See also *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*.

the short maturity periods of the bank loans came under criticism among the peasantry.

A peasant named Faruk in a letter to *Cumhuriyet* criticized the bank for opening only short-term loans with no more than a year maturity period and at high interest rates. These loans were far from ameliorating the situation of the peasants, but on the contrary, such loans further squeezed them. The peasants who urgently needed to cash money to repay their debts had to barter their crops away hastily at a loss.⁵⁰⁷

Another letter writer voiced criticism of the agricultural loans policy of the bank based on short-term loans and the “best and brace approach” to the loans. He argued that on the one hand the bank gave only small and very short-term loans; on the other hand, it stipulated several heavy conditions for its loans in order to reduce the risks. He stated that all of these features of the bank loans displeased the producers.⁵⁰⁸

The very short maturity periods of the agricultural loans were commonly seen as the main reason for the increasing defaults. As pointed out by a peasant, upon the failure to pay back the loans within a very short maturity period, the AB always attempted to levy an execution, which pushed the peasants in debt to fall into the hands of usurers in order to pay their debts. In other words, in the eyes of peasants, the bank did not save the peasants from the usurers. On the contrary, the unfavorable terms and conditions of the bank loans further compelled the peasants to borrow

⁵⁰⁷ “Anketimize Cevaplar: Kısa Vadeli İstikraz Muameleleri Köylüyü Muzdarip Ediyor,” *Cumhuriyet*, 09.03.1931.

⁵⁰⁸ “Anketimize Cevaplar: Ziraat Bankası Sırf Çiftçiler İçin Çalışacak Bir Hale Getirilmelidir,” *Cumhuriyet*, 06.03.1931.

money from usurers at higher rates so as to pay back the interest rates of the bank loans and to avoid expropriation for a while at least.⁵⁰⁹

Therefore, the extension of the term of the agricultural loans became one of the important wishes of the producers. This common desire was frequently included in the wish lists of the local party congresses of many Anatolian provinces. There were also more specific wishes about the duration of the loans. Peasants in Çorum, for instance, wanted the prolongation of the durations to five or ten years. Kocaeli peasants demanded a five-year loan term. Peasants of Amasya, Bolu and Çanakkale put forward that the duration of the loans should not be shorter than three years.⁵¹⁰

The bureaucratic red tape during the application to the AB loans also was so daunting for many peasants that some of them preferred to borrow money from the usurers or *ağas* without any bureaucratic procedures and expenses. Many peasants, therefore, found the bank cool, unlikable and discouraging those who wanted to obtain loans from it.⁵¹¹

According to a peasant from the Ereğli district of Konya, the AB branches raised many bureaucratic difficulties and obstacles as much as they could when a peasant applied for an agricultural loan. The orderly arrangement of “application registration,” “general decision document,” “order of special center,” “certificate of good conduct,” “clearance,” “village headman’s approval,” and “notary attestation” was pretty discouraging for many peasants.⁵¹²

Similarly, a peasant from Samsun complained of too long and complex bureaucratic procedures to apply for loans. The long and daunting procedures were

⁵⁰⁹ “Anketten Neticeler: Vade Az, Faiz Çoktur,” *Cumhuriyet*, 11.04.1931.

⁵¹⁰ 1931 Provincial Congresses’ Wish Lists Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture. BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1].

⁵¹¹ “Anketimize Cevaplar” *Cumhuriyet*, 16.03.1931.

⁵¹² “Anketimize Cevaplar: Ziraat Bankası Münhasıran Çiftçilerin Bankası Olmalıdır,” *Cumhuriyet*, 10.03.1931.

redolent of, as the peasant argued, the Ottoman government's old-fashion clumsy bureaucracy. He said, "The farmers of the Republic are complaining of the *Bab-ı Ali* red-tape."⁵¹³

Another farmer named Ahmet Reşit also wrote, "We spent at least three or four days in the town center to get a loan by leaving a side our work. In addition to that, we had to spend some part of the loans in the town center as soon as we got them."⁵¹⁴ Another said, "A peasant who wanted to get a small loan of about 50 TL from the AB had to spend at least 10 TL of this loan for inutile expenses" in the city or town centers right after he received the money.⁵¹⁵

Dissatisfaction with the Agricultural Cooperatives

The agricultural cooperatives were devised to support small and middle-scale peasants by filling the gap left by the Agricultural Bank. Yet they also spurred complaints among the peasants. First, the agricultural cooperatives, despite the increase in their numbers during the 1930s, they reached only a limited number of peasants. Therefore, peasants in many places in Anatolia frequently asked the government to open agricultural cooperatives in their districts.⁵¹⁶

However, those peasants who were supported by the cooperatives also criticized the operations of the cooperatives as being profit-seeking institutions like commercial banks. Peasant who were critical of the agricultural cooperatives generally called them "village banks" (*köy bankası*) or "village branches of

⁵¹³ "Anketimize Cevaplar: Çiftçi Sakat Usullerden ve Kırtasiyecilikten Müşteki," *Cumhuriyet*, 19.03.1931.

⁵¹⁴ "Anketimize Cevaplar: Herşeyden Evvel Halledilmesi Lâzım Gelen Mes'ele Nedir?" *Cumhuriyet*, 14.03.1931.

⁵¹⁵ "Anketimize Cevaplar," *Cumhuriyet*, 15.03.1931.

⁵¹⁶ 1931 Provincial Congresses' Wish Lists Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture. BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1]. In addition see *CHP 28/12/936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi*, p. 59.

usuriousness” (*tefeciliğin köy şubesi*).⁵¹⁷ A farmer who wrote from Manisa to *Cumhuriyet* said,

There is an agricultural credit cooperative in Demirci. The first and foremost thing it does is to lend money to peasants at high rates and to oppress the peasants in debt by expropriating their possessions. The debt of a man who had gotten 183 TL from the cooperative grew into 1170 TL within only one and a half years. Another peasant who had received 300 TL from the cooperative had to pay back 1000 TL to the cooperative, nonetheless he could not clear all of his debts (...). Therefore, the farmers have become impoverished and their lands, houses, vineyards, and household goods have been expropriated by the cooperative.⁵¹⁸

Many peasants who obtained loans from the cooperatives found the conditions very heavy. Even from the western Anatolian provinces like Denizli, İzmir, and Afyon in which the agricultural cooperatives were more efficient, peasants raised their demands such as “the prolongation of the loan term,” “no expropriation for defaulted debts,” and “debt relief for the peasant’s debts to the cooperatives”⁵¹⁹

Demand for Relief Program for Agricultural Loan Debts

In the late 1920s and especially in the early 1930s, especially with the Great Depression, many peasants who had taken loans from the AB and the agricultural cooperatives strongly demanded a debt relief program. The first factor that notably fuelled the demands for debt relief was the drought in 1927 and 1928. Accordingly, in late 1920s, “suspension of debt payments,” “debt cancellation,” or “a deferred payment plan for agricultural loans” had begun to appear among the peasants’

⁵¹⁷ Kırılcımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 149.

⁵¹⁸ “Bir Zat,” *Cumhuriyet*, 14.06.1931.

⁵¹⁹ Afyon demanded the end of the expropriations of properties of the agricultural cooperative debtors by the cooperatives, (pp. 16-17); Denizli demanded the installment of the agricultural cooperative loan debts just like the Agricultural Bank debts with 3 percent interest and for a period of 15 years, (pp. 151-153); İzmir demanded that the peasants who were indebted to the agricultural cooperatives should pay their debts within 15 years and with a low interest rate, (p. 256), *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*. In addition see *CHP 28/12/936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi*, p. 29, 48, 49.

demands in their petitions to the government. The second and the most profound factor that gave rise to the demands for debt relief was the Great Depression. The economic crisis that hit hardest and weighed heavily on the peasants stimulated such demands in rural areas. Petitioning the government individually or collectively, many cultivators, who had credit debts to the AB and the agricultural cooperatives, sought a debt relief program.⁵²⁰

Such demands grew in 1931. There were many requests for the delay of the debt payments for different durations from one to ten years. For instance, peasants from Bursa demanded only one year of suspension; Bilecik, Konya and Çorum peasants asked for five years of suspension; and Denizli peasants sought the suspension of debt payments for about ten years.⁵²¹

⁵²⁰ In the following petitions, peasants, sometimes collectively, demanded the postponement of their agricultural loan debts to the Agricultural Bank: Karaman peasants (p. 316); Ali and his friends from Mut (Petition No. 1971, p. 326); Council of elders of the Kura village in Giresun (Petition No. 2071, p. 331); *TBMM Yıllık 1929*. Memet from Konya (Petition No. 3701); Ahmet and his friends from Kütahya (Petition No. 3569); Ahmet and his friends from Bor (Petition No. 3555); Hüseyin and his friends from Kemalpaşa (Petition No. 3459); Osman from Dinar (Petition No. 3539); Memet from Afyonkarahisar (Petition No. 4301); Reşit from Elbistan (Petition No. 4008); Abdülkadir from Burdur (Petition No. 3882); Emin from Balya (Petition No. 4603); Mustafa and his friends from Gaziantep (Petition No. 4605); İbrahim and his friends from Tarsus (Petition No. 4701); Hüseyin and his friends from Tarsus (Petition No. 4809); Süleyman from Kütahya (Petition No. 4851); Latif and his friends from Kütahya (Petition No. 4869); Memet from İnebolu (Petition No. 4889); Abdullah and his friends from Ordu (Petition No. 4935); Memet from Kula (Petition No. 4936); Sadettin from Düzce (Petition No. 4937); İsmail Hakkı and his friends from Kasaba (Petition No. 4984); Halil and his friends from Bergama (Petition No. 4986); Halit from Amasya (Petition No. 4997); the village headmen and his friends from Çatalca (Petition No. 5014). *TBMM Yıllık, 1930*. Hortumluzade Hafız Efendi and his friends in the name of the peasants from Malatya (p. 224); Osman Kadıoğlu and his friends from Boğazlıyan (p. 226); Madas peasants from Develi (p. 228); Kemal and his friends from Adana (p. 230); Yusuf and his friends from Koçhisar (p. 237); Nail from Sandıklı (p. 257); Ali and his friends from Konya (p. 255); M. Tevfik and his friends from Sungurlu (p. 252); Turan and his friends from Niksar (p. 244); Süleyman Hulusi from Tarsus (p. 267); Muhtar Mustafa Efendi from Biga (p. 271); İhsan and his friends from Tepeköy (p. 380); Rasim and his friends from Kale (p. 381); Council of elders of Alderman in the name of the Iğın peasants (p. 383). *TBMM Yıllık 1931*. Babant peasant headman Halil and his friends from Söğüt (p. 273); Şerifoğlu Rüştü and his friends from Tire (p. 277); Hüseyin Tombuloğlu Ali and his friends from Nazilli (p. 279); Muhtar Hasan and his friends from Karaköse (p. 290); Musaoğlu Abdurrahman from the Pülürek village of Bayburt (p. 325); Peasant Süleyman and his friends from Diyarbakır (p. 300); Hacı Bekiroğlu and his friends from Sivrihisar (p. 308); Keçecizade Memet and his friends (p. 322). *TBMM Yıllık 1935*. It is possible to cite many other examples.

⁵²¹ 1931 Provincial Congresses' Wish Lists Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Agriculture. BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1].

In 1932, the provincial congress of Konya reported that the bad harvest and the ruinous wheat prices did not allow the peasants to pay their debts to the bank. Because of this, they insisted on the postponement of the debt payments. In addition, many peasants implored the government to revoke the authority of the AB to initiate debt enforcement proceedings.⁵²²

The peasants used the press to express their opinion and requests regarding the AB loans. In their letters published in newspapers, the calls for the suspension of debt payments or a comprehensive debt relief plan were common. In September 1932, many villages of the Tire district of İzmir, for example, petitioned the government collectively declaring that they were unable to pay their debts to the AB because of the too low prices of their crops as compared to the increasing prices of monopoly goods such as kerosene, sugar, coffee, and *rakı*. Therefore, they requested debt relief.⁵²³

Likewise, tobacco farmers in Bursa penned a letter to *Köroğlu* together in order to show their resentment of the debt enforcement proceedings initiated by the AB. In this letter, describing their difficult situation, the peasants stressed the necessity of a debt relief program, as follows:

We could not sell our crops this year, and the income that came from the other crops we grew fell short of our expectations. We hardly stocked the cereals for winter food. Therefore, we are unable to pay back the AB. Now the bank is trying to sequester our cattle. How will we plow our lands?⁵²⁴

Another example of collective peasant demands came from the İslamköy village in Isparta in 1934. The total debt of the peasants to the bank was about 5000 TL. However, they said it was impossible to pay their debts because of the decline in agricultural prices and of the bad harvest in the previous years. Yet, the AB, by

⁵²² RPP 1932 Congress Wish Lists, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2010.1].

⁵²³ “Ne İstemişler?” *Köroğlu*, 24.09.1932.

⁵²⁴ “İnek Haczedilir mi?” *Köroğlu*, 22.10.1932.

initiating debt enforcement proceedings, pressed them to pay off all of their debts as soon as possible. Their major wish from the government was for the suspension of their debt payments and cancellation of some part of the total debt.⁵²⁵

These extensive complaints and demands compelled the government to suspend the debt enforcement proceedings and expropriations through a written notification in 1933. The following year the government ordered the AB to remove the commission fees for loan less than 1000 TL. In addition, the government limited the interest rates to 9 percent. This rate was decreased again a little bit more to 8.5 percent in 1938. Finally, the government divided the existing loan debts to 15 equated annual installments in return for 3 percent interest rate in 1935 with the Law about the Installment of the Agricultural Mortgages and Joint Debts to the Agricultural Bank (*Türkiye Ziraat Bankasının İpotekli ve Müteselsil Kefaletli Zirai Alacaklarının Taksitlendirilmesine Dair Kanun*) (No.2814). By 1936, this program covered the debts that amounted to 23,703,000 TL of 164,766 farmers.⁵²⁶ In addition, in 1935, the government ordered the AB not to expropriate the livestock of the peasants due to their debts to the bank.⁵²⁷

This was, I think, an important retreat for an etatist economic system in the middle of the industrialization drive. Indeed, the government had to step back in the face of a widespread public outcry, and a growing amount of the defaulted debts.⁵²⁸ However, even this debt relief program did not silence the critical and negative remarks about the AB loans. Especially hit by the drought of 1935-36, many small

⁵²⁵ Ragıp Kemal, "İslamköy ve Atabey Halkı Ne İstiyor?" *Vakit*, 25.10.1934.

⁵²⁶ Evaluation of the 1935-36 Provincial RPP Congresses' Wish Lists about Agriculture and Forests, BCA CHP [490.1/502.2016.2]. In addition see, Yusuf Zaim Atasagun, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ziraat Bankası, 1888-1939* (İstanbul: Kenan Basımevi ve Kışe Fabrikası, 1939), p. 290, 293-296.

⁵²⁷ "Hayvanlarına ve Mahsullerine Haciz Konmayacak," SP, 6.7.1935

⁵²⁸ The list of those debtors who could or did not pay back only in İstanbul was about 270 pages. See *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ziraat Bankası'nın İpotekli ve Zincirleme Kefaletli Tarımsal Alacaklarının Taksitlendirilmesine Dair Olan 2814 Nolu Kanun Mucibince İstanbul İline Bağlı İlçe, Kamun ve Köylerdeki Borçluların İsimlerini Gösterir Kitaptır* (Ankara: Ziraat Bankası, 1935).

farmers sought more comprehensive debt relief. The government responded to this social demand by expanding the scope of the debt relief in 1937 for those farmers who were affected by the drought.⁵²⁹ In addition, the peasants' discontent with the very short maturity period of the AB loans and the demands for longer maturity periods was discussed in the Fourth General Congress of the RPP in 1935. Finally, in 1937, the government had to extend the maturity periods of the agricultural loans in parallel with the public opinion in rural areas.⁵³⁰

Peasants' debts to agricultural credit cooperatives also were suspended for five years in return for a 9 percent interest rate.⁵³¹ However, this debt relief fell short of relieving the peasant's anxiety about the cooperatives. From Çeşme, for instance, the peasants criticized the five-year suspension and demanded the government postpone the payments of the debts more than five years.⁵³² Peasants in Denizli also demanded that the payment of debts to the cooperatives should be handled like the AB debts.⁵³³

Dissatisfaction with the Wheat Purchasing Policy of the Agricultural Bank

One economic measure of the government to restrain the catastrophic price declines and fluctuations in wheat was a wheat purchasing policy. In the beginning, the AB attempted to procure the wheat of each peasant in return for erasing his loan debt, but the peasants did not want to submit their crop under such terms.⁵³⁴ Upon this, passing the Wheat Protection Law (No.2056) in 1932, the government declared it would

⁵²⁹ Evaluation of the 1935-36 Provincial RPP Congresses' Wish Lists about Agriculture and Forests, BCA CHP [490.1/502.2016.2].

⁵³⁰ See Atasagun, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Borçlanma*, p. 28.

⁵³¹ The Decisions of the Party Great Congress, BCA CHP [490.1/3.12.11], 08.02.1936.

⁵³² *CHP 28/12/936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi*, p. 48.

⁵³³ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, pp. 151-153.

⁵³⁴ "Köylü Ziraat Bankasına Buğday Vermiyor," *Köroğlu*, 12.09.1931.

purchase wheat directly in order to prevent further decline in wheat prices. Until the establishment of the Soil Product Office in 1938, the AB itself carried out wheat purchases. Between 1932 and 1934, it offered 5.5 piasters per kg for wheat, when the prices were fluctuating between 2.5 and 3.5 piasters on the market.⁵³⁵

Undoubtedly, this price police leveling up the wheat prices was in favor of the small and middle-sized wheat producers. On the other hand, it cannot be said that this policy ameliorated the difficulties with which the wheat cultivators faced. There were two causes for this: First, the bank did not have an adequate number of depots and stores in order to stock the large amounts of wheat. The inadequate storage capacity obstructed the acquisition of wheat on a massive scale. Partly related to this cause, at the outset, the bank began to purchase only in 11 wheat centers; therefore, the purchases did not reach the great portion of the wheat producers.⁵³⁶ Consequently, many wheat cultivators began to ask for the building of new depots in their regions or for larger scale and easier purchases. In addition, many wheat producers demanded for the inclusion of their regions in the wheat purchase policy.

A report of Erzurum deputy Asım Vasfi Bey, for example, recorded that one important demand expressed by the peasants in the villages of Erzurum was the wheat purchase by the bank.⁵³⁷ From Manisa, an important wheat center in western Anatolia, the RPP deputies reported that peasants wanted the building of purchase centers and depots and the extension of the wheat purchase to the distant villages.⁵³⁸

Distressed by the insufficient storage capacity, the wheat producers of Çankırı implored the government to build a wheat depot in order to make the purchases

⁵³⁵ See Atasagun, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ziraat Bankası*, p. 306.

⁵³⁶ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran*, p. 110.

⁵³⁷ From the Erzurum Deputy Asım Vasfi to the RPP Secretary-General Recep Peker, BCA CHP [490.1/648.151.1], 27.11.1934.

⁵³⁸ Summaries of the Reports of the Manisa Deputies Asım Tümer, Faik Kurdoğlu, Hikmet Bayur, Hüsnü Yaman, Kani Karaosman, Kazım Nami Duru, Kenan Örer, Osman Erçin, Rıdvan Nafiz Edgüder and Yaşar Özey, BCA CHP [490.1/684.317.1], 02.08.1937. Manisa demanded the purchase of cereals by Agricultural Bank, see *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, pp. 316-317.

easier and more efficient.⁵³⁹ Even the wheat producers of Eskişehir, an important wheat center, suffered from the lack of an adequate number of wheat depots in sufficient capacity. It was reported that the wheat purchase of the bank did not come close to satisfying the peasants in the Eskişehir. Many wheat producers criticized the lack of sufficient wheat depots and efficient wheat purchase, which compelled them to sell off their produce at too low prices to the merchants or millers.⁵⁴⁰

The second negative thing about the wheat purchase policy for the wheat producers was the lack of any adjustment of the official wheat prices to the changing price trends in the market. In the first half of the decade, the prices the AB offered were above the market levels, and thus were comparatively in favor of the wheat producers. However, while the wheat prices began to recuperate from 1935 on, the bank steadily lowered the prices. Whereas the market prices increased to 4.6 piasters at minimum in 1935, the bank offered only between 3.8 and 4.5 piasters. In the rest of the decade, the prices offered by the bank remained below these market levels.⁵⁴¹ What is worse, the low prices the bank offered also affected the average price levels by bringing down the market prices.

Consequently, wheat farmers began to grumble about the low wheat prices offered by the bank and to demand an increase in the official prices of wheat. Peasants from Afyon, for instance, criticized the bank for buying their wheat at cheaper prices than the market prices, and said that the bank should protect the wheat producers more efficiently. Wheat producers in Ankara demanded that the bank adjust the wheat prices according to the current prices in the market. In the other leading wheat centers such as Eskişehir, Kütahya, Isparta and Konya, wheat

⁵³⁹ Çankırı demanded the construction of a wheat storehouse for more efficient wheat purchases, *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 117.

⁵⁴⁰ Eskişehir Election District Reports, BCA CHP [490.1/651.165.1], 20.11.1934.

⁵⁴¹ Atasagun, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ziraat Bankası*, p. 306.

producers who began to be dissatisfied with the price policy of the bank raised their demands for higher prices for wheat.⁵⁴²

Together with other reasons, such innumerable demands prompted the government to open new purchase centers and new grain depots across Anatolia within a short time. The number of wheat purchase centers, which was 11 in the beginning, increased to 25 in 1934.⁵⁴³ This number reached 85 in 1936, even though 15 centers were closed down immediately afterwards, in 1937.⁵⁴⁴ However, despite this public demand, the government insisted on low price policy in the second half of the decade, which upset the wheat producers.

Agricultural Prices

The 1920s was a decade of relative recovery for the agricultural sector. Accompanied by the growth of supply and demand both in the domestic and international markets, the agricultural prices increased considerably. The domestic terms of trade for wheat increased 44 percent between 1923 and 1929. For tobacco and cotton, the domestic terms of trade rose 29 and 26 percent, respectively. The same rate gradually increased in favor of many other crops during the 1920s.⁵⁴⁵

However, as stated above, this positive trend reversed in the beginning of the 1930s with the Great Depression.⁵⁴⁶ The prices of many crops drastically declined in the early 1930s. Whereas the prices of the leading crops like wheat, corn, and barley declined around 60-70 percent, other exported and industrial crops such as tobacco,

⁵⁴² *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, pp. 16-17, 42-43, 175, 202, 292-293, 198.

⁵⁴³ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran*, p. 111.

⁵⁴⁴ Atasagun, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Ziraat Bankası*, p. 307.

⁵⁴⁵ Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi*, 1908-2002 (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2005), p. 55.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

cotton, raisin, and hazelnuts declined around 50 percent between 1928 and 1933.⁵⁴⁷

The prices of livestock also dropped sharply. The prices of cows and sheep fell spectacularly about fivefold from 1926 to 1934.⁵⁴⁸

Therefore, the peasants frequently complained that they needed to pay more for industrial goods such as sugar, kerosene, clothes, coffee, shoes, cigarette, spirit, and *rakı*. A peasant, in a letter to *Cumhuriyet*, complained that he needed to give 30 *okkas* of wheat for 1 *okka* of sugar. According to him, this was an injustice.⁵⁴⁹

A group of peasants from the Tire district of İzmir wrote to *Köroğlu* as well as the government about their grievance of the rising costs of industrial goods. They were no longer able to afford their basic needs from in the town market with their current income, which came from the sale of their crops. They complained that they needed to pay 30 piasters for kerosene, 60 piasters for sugar, 100 piasters for coffee, 300 piasters for *rakı*. These prices were very high as compared to the prices of a few years earlier.⁵⁵⁰

According to a RPP politician's observations, throughout Anatolia in 1930, some peasants directly expressed in a critical manner how much their purchasing power decreased. A peasant in a village of Edirne, for instance, complained about how they were losing in their trade, and said, "We are selling our crops at lower prices, but buying out needs at higher prices."⁵⁵¹

As discussed in detail above, especially the decline in the prices of wheat and some cash crops such as tobacco in the early 1930s provoked widespread discontent

⁵⁴⁷ Owen and Pamuk, *A History of Middle East Economies*, p. 16.

⁵⁴⁸ Şevket Raşit Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran* (Ankara: Yüksek Ziraat Enstitüsü, 1936), p. 49. Especially see "Kastamonu mebusu H. Fehmi Bey'in sayım vergisi kanununda bazı değişiklikler yapılmasına dair 2/49 numaralı kanun teklifi." *Adliye Encümeni Ruznamesi, TBMM Encümenler Ruznamesi, 1 Teşrinisani 1934* (Ankara: TBMM, 1934), p. 904.

⁵⁴⁹ "Halk Sütunu," *Cumhuriyet*, 12.11.1931.

⁵⁵⁰ "Ne İstemişler?" *Köroğlu*, 24.09.1932.

⁵⁵¹ 1930 Journey Reports of Gaziantep Deputy Ali Cenani on Central Anatolia, Samsun, Trabzon, Thrace, and Bursa in 1930, BCA CHP [490.1/1454.34.3].

and complaints among the peasants. The demands for a rise in price especially in these crops took a substantial place among the demands of the peasantry. As for sugar beet producers, as mentioned in detail above, they also began to grumble at the declining prices against the government and sugar factories in the second half of the 1930s.⁵⁵² Another cash crop that was undervalued during the period was opium. Opium producers also wanted the government to increase prices.⁵⁵³

The Peasants' Complaints about Rural Oppressors

The oppression and tyranny of village headmen, *ağas* and the gendarme in the villages also provoked the peasant's discontent throughout Anatolia. Oppression was not exclusive to the brutal acts of the gendarme or state officials, but it especially came from insiders, i.e., the large, influential, and rich landowners called *ağa*, and the village headmen who mostly were elected from among the most influential and propertied peasants or their men.

A brief look at the petitions of peasants shows that they frequently complained about the oppression of the large and powerful landowners and the village headmen. In 1930, for instance, in a petition written by a group of peasants in Giresun, signed as "Asım and his friends," stated in a complaining manner how they suffered the oppression (*icra-i zulm*) of some powerful persons in their villages. In next years, the peasants in Giresun continued to complaint the oppressiveness of the

⁵⁵² For the demands of the sugar beet producers in Eskişehir see Eskişehir Election District Reports, BCA CHPK [490.01/651.165.1], 25.12.1935. For the demands for the rise in the price of the sugar beet listed in the wish lists of the provincial congresses see *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 275, 16-17, 20, 77-78, 158, 175, 285-286, 198, 387.

⁵⁵³ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, Çorum: a raise in the opium prices, p. 121; Isparta: higher prices for opium, p. 202. Isparta: opium production decreases because of the low prices given by the Monopoly Administration, therefore the higher prices of opium. The Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies who Visited Their Election Districts in the 1939 Summer Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/515.2062.1], 1939.

ağas. In 1937, it was reported that because of ongoing oppression by the powerful and tyrant *ağas*, the peasants in the villages of Giresun had been in a great sorrow for a long time.⁵⁵⁴

During the 1930s many complaints were raised about the oppressive, despotic and rapacious *ağas* called *mütegalibe*, in the countryside. Many peasants sent disgruntled petitions complaining about despotic landowners to the party and the National Assembly individually or collectively. For example, a group of peasants from Giresun in their petitions signed by several peasants denounced an influential group terrorized their village. The peasants in a village of Palu complained of the tyranny of İbrahim Necip Ağa. A peasant woman named Münevver in Elbistan complained of the abuses and oppression of Hacı Metmet Bey. From Siverek, a peasant named Hasan complained of a powerful household named Küçükosmanoğulları in his village. From one village of Isparta a group of peasants bemoaned the oppression of Hacı Bey. In a village of Kocaeli, a peasant named Şaban complained of the oppressive groups in his village. A person named İbrahim in the Kemalpaşa district of İzmir complained of the existence of the tyrannical persons in his village.⁵⁵⁵

Similarly, in 1931, a retired civil servant named Ahmet Nuri, living in the Kan village of the Saimbeyli district of Adana, denounced the oppressive attitudes the *ağas* towards the peasants. A peasant named Enver in Erzurum and another one named Cebail in Sivas bemoaned the cruelty of the *ağas* in their villages. A group of peasants from the Yalakdere village of Kocaeli also wrote to the government of their grievance because of the oppression of Yusuf Ziya Ağa and his brothers.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ Letters of the Giresun Deputy M. Akkaya, BCA CHP [490.01/60.231.3], 10.03.1937.

⁵⁵⁵ *TBMM Yıllık 1930*, p.349, 361, 362, 365, 381, 401, 421.

⁵⁵⁶ *TBMM Yıllık 1931*, p. 230, 245, 287, 304.

The complaints about the oppressive persons, households, and *ağas* continued to be heard in the rest of the 1930s. In a petition dated 1934, Mustafaoğlu Veli and his friends in the Karlık village of Adana pleaded with the government to save them from the atrocities of Kadir Ağa. Abovementioned individual named Ahmet Nuri from the Kan village of Saimbeyli continued to denounce the *ağas* by imploring the government to start legal proceedings against Halil Efendi, who tyrannized the village. Another peasant who insisted on calling for the government help against the *ağas* was Enver from Erzurum. A peasant named Mevlüt from Şebinkarahisar demanded legal measures be taken against the despotic and greedy persons in his village.⁵⁵⁷

In 1935, a peasant named Abdülkerim from Midyat, and a group of peasants from Dere Village of Pertek informed against the oppressive *ağas* in their villages. In another petition from the Büyükkışla village of Ankara, sent by “İzzet and his peasant friends,” a group of peasants complained of the excessive power of the Molla Yakupoğulları household and pleaded with the government to save the peasants from the tyranny of this family.⁵⁵⁸

Peasants’ grievances with the rapacious landowners were reflected in the police reports. Komiser Tahsin from Tosya, for example, reported to the Ministry of Internal Affairs about the tyranny of an influential landowner named Şükrü Ağa in his village. According to the report, the peasants living in his village were so anxious because of the arbitrary and cruel acts of Şükrü Ağa that in the end they poured out their griefs to the security forces in the town.⁵⁵⁹

In another instance, according to the report of a party inspector, people in Sürmene hated the *ağas*. The inspector noted that he had heard several complaints

⁵⁵⁷ *TBMM Yıllık 1934*, p. 222, 230, 245, 304.

⁵⁵⁸ *TBMM Yıllık 1935*, p. 270, 273.

⁵⁵⁹ Report of Police Commissioner Tahsin, EGMA [13216-7], September 1935.

about the rich and oppressive local persons called by the local people as “class of *ağas*” (*ağalar zümresi*). As commonly said by the people, there was a great and powerful group of *ağas* that held the people captive. Furthermore, the complainers claimed that the RPP supported these *ağas*.⁵⁶⁰

The peasants also criticized those village headmen who treated the peasants unfairly and arbitrarily. Village headmen generally tended to legitimate their acts on the basis of the Village Law, which authorized them with the administration of villages. Many headmen acted arbitrarily and abused their official authority. As stated earlier, most of them had a tendency to spend the levies called *salma* collected from peasants for their own personal interests and to favor their relatives or friends. Therefore, their misuse of the *salma*, other village funds and the seed and agricultural equipment aid by the Agricultural Bank caused reactions among peasants. Village headmen were also the official representative of the state in villages as well as the unofficial hands of rich and influential households. Therefore, their social and administrative positions within the village community laid them open to the criticisms of the ordinary peasants. As for the Village Law, given its appropriation by the village headmen for their own arbitrary acts and private interests, or some financial and compulsory labor obligations imposed by the Village Law on the village populace, it is hardly surprising to see that the peasants viewed it negatively.

In a letter to the RPP Secretary-General, the Edirne deputy Faik told how he had witnessed two peasants’ critical talks in a village coffeehouse in Edirne about the Village Law and the arbitrary implementation of it by the village headman. The peasants in the coffeehouse had especially spoken negatively about the heavy village taxes and compulsory work demanded by the village headman. They had dwelt on

⁵⁶⁰ Inspection Report of the RPP Çoruh District Inspector Muğla Deputy Cemal Karamuğla, BCA CHP [490.1/612.125.2], 11.07.1940.

the Village Law disapprovingly.⁵⁶¹ Likewise, Denizli deputy Mustafa Kazım reported that the taxes and compulsory labor obligations imposed by the village headmen on the poor peasants created a general atmosphere of discontent among the peasants of Denizli.⁵⁶² The peasants in Ankara villages also accused the village headmen of collecting too much money from the poor peasants under the title of the wage of nightwatchman, *imam*, marriage fee, contribution to the building of the school and similar reasons on the basis of the Village Law.⁵⁶³

Via their letters to the newspapers and petitions to the authorities, peasants stated their criticisms about the village headmen. In a village of Bilecik, for example, the peasants criticized the headman for collecting money frequently on basis of the Village Law.⁵⁶⁴ Some peasants accused the village headmen of embezzling the money collected from the peasants. The peasants from the Araplar village of Ayvalık, for example, alleged that the village headman, named Mustafa, wasted the money collected from the peasants by gambling and drinking. The peasants also accused him of forcing them to work on his personal projects without any payment under the pretext of the Village Law.⁵⁶⁵

Similarly, the peasants in some villages of Adapazarı complained that the village headmen wasted the money the poor peasants paid to him for the public works in the village. According to the peasants, the village headmen did not use the budget of the village for the benefit of the villages, but for their own needs.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶¹ Hasan Rıza Soyak, *Atatürk'ten Hatıralar* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004), p. 467.

⁵⁶² Election District Report of the RPP Denizli Deputy Mustafa, 26.02.1931, see the file titled Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/729.478.1], 16.03.1931.

⁵⁶³ "Köy Kanunundan Doğan Bir Mesele," *Son Posta*, 05.12.1936.

⁵⁶⁴ "Halkın ve Göçmenlerin Derdi," *Köroğlu*, 25.01.1936.

⁵⁶⁵ "Bu Muhtar Ceza Görmeli," *Orak Çekiş*, No. 12-21 (Nov. 7, 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 448.

⁵⁶⁶ "Halkın Köşesi," *Köroğlu*, 09.05.1936.

The hostility toward the village headmen was expressed in the memoirs of contemporaries. As stated by a contemporary who spent his childhood in a village in those years, it seems apparent that the village headmen, in the eyes of the poor peasants, was a “pain in the neck” (*baş belası*):

The headman presses whomever he wants into his service. He brings the gendarme, and set the peasants to work for days. There is no official authority to listen the peasants’ complaints. All peasants above 18 years-old, no matter if they are unemployed or not, had an obligation to pay the Road Tax or to work on the roads. The kids of the rich peasants are skipped when a tax official demands the Road Tax. (...). The extension of this order into the village was the village headman and his gang. He judges the peasant in the Village Room. If necessary, he beats the peasants or drives them out of the village.⁵⁶⁷

The village headmen were seen generally as corrupt people who exploited the peasants under the pretext of doing duty for the sake of peasants. For example, they frequently collected chickens, eggs, cereals, and vegetables on grounds that they would give these to the bureaucrats as a gift in order to make things easier for the peasants. However, headmen appropriated some part of them for their own use. Peasants were generally aware of this and displeased with such acts of headmen.⁵⁶⁸

Subdistrict directors, tax collectors, and gendarme soldiers were also a nuisance for the peasants.⁵⁶⁹ Particularly the gendarme was one of the most hated agents of the government in rural areas. Conditioned by the nationalism of the new regime or by their ignorance and poverty, the gendarme soldiers and officers generally showed little or no respect for peasants.⁵⁷⁰ In the eyes of the peasants, “the gendarme was sided with the *ağas*.”⁵⁷¹ A 1931 report of the RPP Denizli deputy Mustafa Kazım also reveals the peasants’ dislike of the gendarme. According to the

⁵⁶⁷ Nar, *Anadolu Günlüğü*, p. 58.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁷⁰ Szyliowicz, *Political Change in Rural Turkey*, p. 48.

⁵⁷¹ Nar, *Anadolu Günlüğü*, p. 58.

report, among the most frequent complaints of the peasants in Denizli “the atrocities and tortures of the gendarme” came after “the misconduct of the Village Law.”⁵⁷²

Among the peasants’ petitions to the government, there were many about the gendarme oppression or gendarme’s collaboration with the tyrannical *ağas*. In 1929, an individual from Kastamonu, named Mustafa, criticized the unfair acts of the gendarme. Another peasant, named Mustafa again, in Keskin bemoaned “the torture of the gendarme” in his village. A peasant, Naci, complained of “the gendarme violence.” Hüseyin from Of reported on the “the oppression of the gendarme.” Two peasants from different places of the country, Rıfkı from Çanakkale-Ayvacık and Hüseyin from Adana-Kozan wrote of the abuses by the gendarme soldiers and accused them of thievery.⁵⁷³

In 1930, a person named Bekir from Kemaliye complained of “the gendarme commander.” Another petitioner named Ali from a village of Siverek alleged, “His house and land were illegally seized by the gendarme without any reason.” A peasant from Harran complained about the gendarme commander. A group of peasants from Samsun, in their petitions signed as “Yaşar and his friends,” criticized the gendarme commander in their district. Another peasant from Trabzon also informed against the gendarme commander Memduh Efendi.⁵⁷⁴

In 1931, “the gendarme violence and corruption” continued to generate several complaints of the peasants. For example, the peasants of the Sotik village in Arapkir, a peasant named Halil from Emre village of Kula, and a peasant named Kadri from Emet complained about the violence or abuses by gendarme soldiers and

⁵⁷² Election District Report of the RPP Denizli Deputy Mustafa, 26.02.1931, see the file titled Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/729.478.1], 16.03.1931.

⁵⁷³ *TBMM Yıllık 1929*, p. 350, 362, 363, 364.

⁵⁷⁴ *TBMM Yıllık 1930*, p.336, 344, 355, 361, 414.

commanders in their villages.⁵⁷⁵ Again, in 1931, a group of peasants from Ödemiş petitioned the government complaining of the abusive and cruel behaviors of the gendarme commander Fuat in the Kiraz sub-district. The peasants alleged that the gendarme commander Fuat had been involved in corruption for a long time. At the same time, he oppressed the peasants by violating their rights. In collaboration with Nihat Bey, a dishonest well-to-do landowner who had an eye on the fertile lands of the peasants, the gendarme commander Fuat attempted to seize their lands.⁵⁷⁶

Obviously, the complaints regarding the gendarme did not disappear in the mid-1930s. In İzmir, another gendarme commander about whom the peasants complained was Şuayip Bey. In 1934, a group of peasants from one village of Torbalı complained of the gendarme commander Şuayip Bey, accusing him of favoring some livestock thieves and robbers in the villages. Moreover, the peasants accused him of collecting money from the peasants arbitrarily for his personal interests and robbing the peasants as well.⁵⁷⁷

In 1935, a peasant from the Karacabey district of Bursa complained of “the pounding by the gendarme.” In another instance, a group of peasants from Karacabey criticized the gendarme soldiers patrolling in their villages. The peasants from the Çakıllar and Rakıllar villages of the Gördes district of Manisa also collectively condemned “the corruption of the gendarme” by petitioning the National Assembly.⁵⁷⁸

In the eastern parts of the country, the gendarme violence and accordingly the widespread hostility toward the gendarme forces were well known, although they

⁵⁷⁵ *TBMM Yıllık 1931*, p. 229, 294.

⁵⁷⁶ For the complaint letters of the peasants about the Gendarme Commander Fuat, see BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1].

⁵⁷⁷ For the complaint letters about the cruel behaviors by the Gendarme Commander Şuayip, see BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1].

⁵⁷⁸ *TBMM Yıllık 1935*, p. 284, 333, 335.

have not hitherto been documented or analyzed in depth. Alongside the gendarme forces, the militia forces, which were organized and manipulated by influential *ağas* in cooperation with the security forces, also triggered several complaints and reactions among poor peasants of the region.

Perhaps the best example of the widespread frustration with the gendarme and the militia in the region was a meeting of the Chief of the General Staff Fevzi Paşa [Çakmak], the First General Inspector İbrahim Tali and Mardin Governor Talat with the peasants in the Savur district of Mardin. Their visit to the district drew a curious crowd. As soon as they appeared in the road, some peasant women among the crowd wailed, “We are burning! Please, have a heart!” (*Yanıyoruz! El, aman!*). Then, these peasants gave several petitions to Fevzi Paşa, voicing their complaints about corruption and brutal acts of militia forces and *ağas*, and blaming the district governor Osman implicitly.⁵⁷⁹

During the period, the poor peasants whose rights were violated by the local officials, the gendarme, and militias frequently complained about their atrocities and awfulness by petitioning the government. They especially demanded the abolition of the militia forces because of militias’ inclination to use violence and to protect the interests of *ağas* who recruited and aided them.⁵⁸⁰

Among the Kurdish population of Dersim, the gendarme soldiers and other Turkish army soldiers were called popularly “djins with grey dress” (*gri elbiseli cinler*) (The uniform of the gendarme and soldiers were grey in those years). Rumor had it that those grey djins, unleashed by Abdal Musa, a famous ancient dervish, were the enemy of the people.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁹ “Savur Kadınlarının Fevzi Pş.’ya Şikâyetleri,” *Cumhuriyet*, 18.10.1930.

⁵⁸⁰ “Şark Vilayetlerinde Milis Teşkilatı,” *Cumhuriyet*, 24.10.1930.

⁵⁸¹ Celal Yıldız, *Dersim Dile Geldi: 1938’in Çocukları Konuştu* (2nd ed.; İstanbul: Su Yayınları, 2008), p. 68.

Other state officials also spurred public reaction because of their proclivity to corruption. The inspection reports about Zonguldak dated 1931, for example, warned the governments to save the peasants from the pressure of those corrupt officials who left the peasants no choice but to give bribes or small gifts to them.⁵⁸² Indeed, some subdistrict directors and district governors also collected money from the peasants for their personal benefits by referring to the Village Law. Some of the land registry officials (*tapu memuru*), the heads of the financial office in districts (*mal müdürü*) and tax collectors often attempted to exploit the ignorance of the peasants.

The arbitrary and frequent levies by the state administrators were, for instance, a frequent complaint in Giresun in the mid-1930s. The peasants who were not informed about how the levies they paid to district governors and subdistrict directors were spent, asked, “We wonder, are we enriching some persons with the money we gave?”⁵⁸³ They viewed the subdistrict directors, district governors and the gendarme commanders as exploiters and blood suckers.⁵⁸⁴

The petitions to the government illustrate how such corrupt and abusive state officials thwarted and exasperated the peasants. Especially with the economic crisis, which gave a shock to the peasant economy, the corrupt, rude, unfair, and oppressive state administrators further drew the peasants’ fire. To give some examples from the petitions of 1930, two peasants named Sadık and Fahri from a village of Siverek a peasant Mustafa from Çapakçur, and another, named Halil from Tirebolu complained of the heads of the finance offices in their districts. Salim and his friends from Karamürsel, Ahmet from Kağızman, Abdullah from Kalecik, Ali and Ahmet from Gebze, İzzet and his friends from Şarkikaraağaç, Nurettin from Menemen, Cemal

⁵⁸² Inspection Reports of Antalya Deputy and Erzincan Deputy on the RPP Provincial Organizations in the Giresun, Ordu and Zonguldak, BCA CHP [490.1/655.182.1], 14.09.1931.

⁵⁸³ “Köyden Bir Ses,” *Yeşilgireson*, 21.12.1935.

⁵⁸⁴ Nar, *Anadolu Günlüğü*, p. 57.

from Silvan, Mustafa from Akhisar, İbrahim from Karağaç, Adem from Daday, and a group of peasants from Balya complained about the cruel and corrupt acts and practices of the district governors.⁵⁸⁵

Likewise, a series of complaint petitions that came from Bayburt indicate the widespread discontent with the attitudes of the district governor. A person named Mehmet criticized the district governor because he had collected of huge amount of money from the peasants. Another peasant named Mehmet alleged that the local authorities had embezzled 20,000 TL, which had been collected from the people. A citizen named Kamil criticized the district governors' harsh attitudes towards the people. Again, three petitioners named Hulusi, Hamit, Ruşen separately accused the district governor of being involved in corruption.⁵⁸⁶

Many peasants also criticized the sub-district directors and land registry officials. For instance, Eyüp and his friends from Elaziz, Mehmet from Tokmaylı village, the headman of Naipli village from Edremit, Halil from Tirebolu, Hamdi from Yumurtalık, İbrahim from Silvan, Mehmet from Bafra, Şaban from Giresun, Osman and his friends from Van, and Hakkı and his friends from Samsun complained about the subdistrict directors, the heads of financial offices or the land registry officials in their regions.⁵⁸⁷

The peasants were suspicious of all foreigners and especially state officials in their villages, thinking they might be tax officials.⁵⁸⁸ An RPP inspector admitted the adverse impact of the image of the tax collectors on the image of the government in the eyes of the peasants. The tax collectors and some local state officials were the representatives of the government in closest proximity to the peasants. Therefore, the

⁵⁸⁵ *TBMM Yıllık 1930*, p. 332, 339, 372, 374, 378, 391, 405, 414, 415, 416, 418.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 338, 374, 375, 376, 380, 388.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 340, 375, 415, 421.

⁵⁸⁸ "Köylülüğü Kalkındırmak İçin Hazırlanan Proje," *Son Posta*, 28.12.1936.

peasants formed their opinion about the government according to the attitudes of the tax collectors and local officials. Their opinion about the government was to a great extent negative due to the faults of these rank-and-file agents of the government.⁵⁸⁹ Although this RPP bureaucrat tried to make the low-ranking local civil servants scapegoat of the state policies, his negative remark about the local state officials reflect the truth to a great extent.

Indeed, the peasants mostly looked at the tax collectors with hate and complained of their impolite, unmerciful and abusive behavior.⁵⁹⁰ An inspection report of a committee of the RPP inspectors underlined that the injustices by the tax officials were one of the most expressed grievances of the peasants in Antalya, Burdur and Isparta provinces.⁵⁹¹ According to another inspection report on Kastamonu, the peasants complained that the tax officials and land registry officials aimed to increase the state revenues as much as possible. They always assessed the values of the lands and accordingly the land taxes so much higher than their real values that consequently the peasants became unable to pay such amounts.⁵⁹² Similarly, it was reported from Rize that the inexpertness, erroneous assessments, and deliberate injustices of the tax collectors were the subjects of widespread complaints in the region.⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁹ A Report on the RPP Afyon Organization, see Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/729.478.1], 16.03.1931.

⁵⁹⁰ Ferit Oğuz Bayır, *Köyün Gücü* (Ankara: Ulusal Basımevi, 1971), p. 165.

⁵⁹¹ Inspection Report on Antalya and Burdur, see Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/729.478.1], 16.03.1931.

⁵⁹² Inspection Report on Kastamonu, see Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/724.477.1], 07.02.1931.

⁵⁹³ A Report of the Rize Deputy, 03.01.1931, see Reports About the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/724.477.1], 07.02.1931.

In 1935, one of Aydın deputies also reported that there were so many corrupt tax collectors that they caused a common grievance among the local people. Mardin deputies also touched on the widespread griveness that arose from the corruption of tax collectors and their bad attitudes toward citizens. In addition to this, the heads of the finance offices also caused deep dissatisfaction among the people.⁵⁹⁴

The Anatolian people, mostly the peasants, did not like the other state officials. According to the observations of Hilmi Uran in 1930, the people in the Anatolian countryside distrusted and hated the judicial authorities, courthouses and debt enforcement offices. In the eyes of the people, the state officials had sunk into corruption. The embezzlement, bribing, and dishonesty of the officials, especially in the courthouses, forest administrations, land and resettlement offices had resulted in widespread public aversion of the government.⁵⁹⁵

The party inspectors reported in 1931 that there was a common grievance with the misconduct and corruption of the low-ranking state officials in Anatolian towns. An RPP deputy and inspector, Hacim Muhiddin, for example, wrote that he “regretfully” had to listen to the complaints about the state officials in every place he visited.⁵⁹⁶ 1935 reports of the deputies on their election district also were full of complaints about the bad treatment or abuses by the local civil servants. The grievance that arose from the dishonest civil servants who abused the citizens was widespread throughout the country.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁴ Summary of the Reports of the Deputies who Visited Their Election Districts during the 1935 Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/ 725.481.1].

⁵⁹⁵ Uran, *Hatıralarım*, pp. 216-224.

⁵⁹⁶ Report of RPP Giresun Deputy Hacim Muhittin, Beyazıt Deputy Halit, and Balıkesir Deputy İsmail Hakkı on Balıkesir, BCA CHP [490.1/35.146.1], 26.01.1931

⁵⁹⁷ See BCA CHP [490.1/725.481.1].

CHAPTER THREE

ECONOMIC SURVIVAL METHODS

Confronted by the difficulties described above, peasants displayed several strategies, tactics, and stratagems that prevented them from falling below subsistence level in the short term. Undoubtedly they were not the “master of the nation,” but nor were they ignorant and desperate bystanders in the face of adverse economic conditions, state policies, and their oppressors. The great part of peasants tried to hedge their bets. They made use of various economic strategies for their very survival. First, following fluctuations in the agricultural prices and acting rationally according to the market conditions, many peasant changed or diversified the harvest they produced by cultivating more profitable and promising crops. In order to keep down the costs and expenses, many peasants worked harder and produced various items that they had bought from the town markets up until that time. Those peasants who were squeezed by the sharp price declines, radical loss of income, heavy tax weight, and debt burden migrated to the cities for short-term work or engaged in different jobs in their villages and town centers to sustain themselves.

Changing or Diversifying the Crops

The substitution of the crops the prices of which had fallen with more profitable crops was the primary way to preserve the household income. In response to the declining prices, some peasants abandoned the planting of the cheap crops or reduced the area under cultivation for these crops, and instead, turned to more profitable crops. Although the replacement of cheaper crops by relatively more expensive crops

gained momentum in the Great Depression, Anatolian peasants responded to the price changes throughout the 1920s and 1930s by changing or diversifying their crops.

Abolition of the Tobacco Régie and cruel régie guards, for example, accompanied by the steady rise of the prices given by the State Monopoly and private companies in the mid-1920s encouraged the producers to cultivate tobacco. Anatolian peasants increasingly turned to planting the tobacco. The tobacco cultivated area was 361,000 *dönüms* in 1920, and increased to 882,000 *dönüms* in 1927. In parallel to this, the number of farmers who cultivated tobacco increased from 100,000 to 172,000 in the same time-span.⁵⁹⁸

However, with the price decline that first appeared in 1928 and 1929, the tobacco cultivators began to reduce the tobacco cultivation. In Samsun, a high quality tobacco producing area, for instance, a sharp price decline from 250 piasters/kg to 140 piasters in 1928, 59 piasters in 1929 and 83 piasters in 1930 resulted in a remarkable contraction of tobacco cultivated lands. The number households remarkably decreased from 32,156 in 1926 to 18,461 in 1930. Again, whereas 1448 villages engaged in tobacco in 1926 across Turkey, this number was only 497 in 1930.⁵⁹⁹

Due to the price decline fuelled by the Great Slump, both the number of tobacco cultivators and the cultivated area considerably decreased in the early 1930s throughout Turkey. Although the tobacco prices were generally attractive even during the economic crisis, those peasants who could not yield enough money from

⁵⁹⁸ Salih Zeki, *Türkiye'de Tütün* (İstanbul, 1928), p. 348.

⁵⁹⁹ İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı*, p. 73.

cultivation to meet their other needs sometimes switched from tobacco to other more attractive crops.⁶⁰⁰

In 1932, the tobacco cultivated areas decreased to 280,000 *dönüms* and the number of cultivators to 47,000.⁶⁰¹ That is to say, the tobacco cultivated areas and the number of the farmers engaged in tobacco production dropped sharply around 69 percent and 73 percent, respectively, as compared to the figures of 1927.

Indeed, many cultivators of cash crops such as tobacco, opium and cotton who had difficulties in meeting their wheat needs for food because of their dropping incomes, began to assign some parts of their lands for the cultivation of wheat for their own needs, or turned entirely to wheat production.⁶⁰² Although wheat prices also declined, they saw wheat cultivation as easier and low-cost at least as compared to tobacco production. In addition, wheat was of great importance for especially impoverished peasants whose diet was based on wheat.

After 1933, tobacco prices began to recover, albeit in a limited manner. This steady and limited recovery steered the cultivators into the tobacco production for most of the 1930s. Because of the relatively more attractive prices of tobacco over those of other crops, an increasing number of the Anatolian cultivators once again began to plant tobacco.⁶⁰³ A brief look at the figures confirms this argument. In 1936, the number of the tobacco farmers increased to 132,000. Accordingly, the tobacco planted area extended to 841,000 *dönüms*.⁶⁰⁴ Indeed, the main reason for this turn to tobacco was that it yielded more profit for its cultivators. Accordingly, the tobacco output began to increase especially in mid-1930s.

⁶⁰⁰ Necati Cumalı, *Acı Tütün* (İstanbul: E Yayınları, 1975), p. 208.

⁶⁰¹ Şevket Süreyya, *Ege Günü I*, p. 54.

⁶⁰² Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran*, p. 40.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁶⁰⁴ See Taşpınar et al., *Tobacco Affairs*, p. 42.

Table 7 - Number of Villages under Tobacco Cultivation and Number of Tobacco Farmers between 1925 and 1940.

Years	The Number of Villages	The Number of Farmers
1925	-	179,645
1930	5,082	99,973
1932	-	47,756
1935	4,332	101,799
1940	3,818	133,557

Source: This table was prepared according to the figures in Şevket Süreyya [Aydemir], *Ege Günü I* (Ankara: Milli İktisat ve Tasarruf Cemiyeti, 1934), p. 54, and Şevket Saltan, İzzettin Sallı, and Aydın Ak, *Cumhuriyet'in 50. Yılında Tekel* (Tekel: İstanbul, 1973).

On the other hand, the overall increase in the cultivated areas and the number of peasants may be misleading. Despite the price recovery, tobacco prices varied from place to place. For instance, the official price of Çoruh tobacco was about 25 piasters, whereas that of the Aegean tobaccos fluctuated between 60 and 70 piasters. Therefore, the tobacco cultivators whose crops were bought by the state monopoly at quite low prices continued to leave or to lower the tobacco production in the mid-1930s. In 1936, the Çoruh governor reported that the total tobacco harvest of Çoruh had decreased to 200,000 kg from 1,500,000 kg of previous years. The peasants, who were dissatisfied with the low price of 25 piasters, abandoned the tobacco production.⁶⁰⁵

On the other hand, some cultivators of other cash crops like grapes hit by sharper price declines in 1932, 1933, and 1934 found tobacco a somewhat attractive option and turned to planting it. Especially in the Aegean region, producing high quality tobacco that were paid high prices comparatively, the grape producers began

⁶⁰⁵ General Situation Report on the Çoruh Province, Governor of Çoruh Province, BCA MGM [30.10/65.434.4], 20.07.1936.

to cultivate tobacco when the grape prices decreased to 3-4 piasters in 1932. In many parts of İzmir, the peasants tore up their vineyards and planted the tobacco.⁶⁰⁶

However, in the same region, some of the cereal producers shifted to grapes because of the more dramatic decrease in the prices of cereals. The foreign demand for grapes and especially raisins also made the viniculture more attractive for some. The price of grapes climbed from 5.1 piasters to 8 piasters between 1929 and 1931. Although some farmers left the viniculture after the price decline in the next few years, many continued to cultivate grapes. In Behice Boran's interview with the peasants of some Aegean villages in 1942, the peasants told her they had opted to produce grape and raisins instead of cereals in the previous ten years.⁶⁰⁷

The increase in *rakı* and wine production and demand of the State Monopoly likely played a role in the shift to viniculture in later years. Indeed, the State Monopoly used 4,332,000 kg of grapes for production of *soma* in 1928. This amount climbed to 9,225,000 kg in 1932. The wine production of the State Monopoly also gained momentum in the early 1930s. The state monopoly alone processed 4,670,000 kg grape for winemaking.⁶⁰⁸ This demand for grapes kept its importance during the 1930s. Indeed, the surface of vineyards increased from 345,000 *dönüms* to 395,000 *dönüms* between 1933 and 1940.⁶⁰⁹

Again, during the economic crisis, the cotton producers also responded to the decline in prices by lowering the production and partially leaving cotton cultivation. In 1931 and 1932, the cotton harvests yielded low output because of the contraction

⁶⁰⁶ Necati Cumalı, *Yağmurlar ve Topraklar* (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1983), p. 31.

⁶⁰⁷ Boran, "Köyde Sosyal Tabakalanma," p. 123.

⁶⁰⁸ İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı*, pp. 76-77.

⁶⁰⁹ Erkan Aktaş, "Bağcılığın Türkiye Ekonomisindeki Yeri," (MPRA Paper, University Library of Munich, Germany, 2002), p. 3.

of the cotton planted lands.⁶¹⁰ As a contemporary observer also wrote, the cultivation of some cereals and especially dry legumes, which were severely hit by price declines, also decreased. In some places of Anatolia, when the tobacco prices were attractive, the peasants, who previously had engaged in dry legumes, turned to tobacco farming. When the tobacco prices decreased, the same peasants returned to the dry legumes.⁶¹¹ That is to say, the peasants, following the price trends, responded to it actively by engaging in the more lucrative or less unprofitable crops at least.

On the other hand, the peasants enjoyed the opportunities offered by comparatively profitable crops such as sugar beet. The Republican government, aiming to lessen the dependency on imported sugar, supported sugar beet agriculture. Therefore, in a period in which agricultural prices went upside down, the government offered relatively good prices like 12.5 TL (1.25 piasters or 50 para per kg) per ton for sugar beets.⁶¹² This price support continued from the late 1920s up to the mid-1930s. Therefore, the peasants, particularly central Anatolian farmers whose lands were suitable for sugar beet planting perceived this crop as an opportunity and good alternative to other crops devaluated by the crisis.

Some tobacco peasants who were dissatisfied by the bad treatments by the monopoly experts and too low prices offered for their tobacco harvests, for instance, gave up the tobacco and began to cultivate sugar beets. For instance, a tobacco farmer named Tevfik Bozkurt who was very upset about the tobacco monopoly because of the low tobacco prices switched from tobacco to sugar beet cultivation even in the mid-1930s.⁶¹³ In Kütahya, peasants who had been cultivating several kinds of crops previously, began to cultivate sugar beets because the government

⁶¹⁰ Tekeli and İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçilik*, pp. 11-12; and see Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ziraî Buhran*, p. 83.

⁶¹¹ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ziraî Buhran*, pp. 84-85.

⁶¹² Behçet Günay, “Şeker,” *Ülkü*, No. 31 (Sept., 1935), p. 79.

⁶¹³ “Bu Nasıl İş!” *Köroğlu*, 01.01.1936.

gave good prices in the early 1930s. A village teacher named Nuri in Alayund village of Kütahya wrote in an article published in *Ülkü* that the peasants saw sugar beet cultivation as an alternative that would save them from the adverse effects of the crisis. Therefore, many peasants had left their previous crops and turned to sugar beets.⁶¹⁴

The figures regarding the number of sugar beet cultivators and areas under sugar beet cultivation may be more explanatory for understanding how the peasants made use of the high-price opportunity presented by the sugar beet cultivation. In the villages around Alpullu, whereas the sugar beet cultivated areas was only 3450 hectares in 1927, the land under sugar beet cultivation reached 14,200 hectares in 1933. The number of farmers supplying the Alpullu Sugar Factory also increased from 3000 in 1927 to 20,000 in 1934. As for the harvest, whereas the sugar beet farmers produced 3500 tons in 1926, the production reached 317,000 tons in 1933.⁶¹⁵

In a similar manner, the number of those farmers in Uşak who produced sugar beets for the Uşak Sugar Factory was 3600 in 1926. This number increased to 18,600 in 1934 in association with the high sugar beet prices. As for the cultivated area, whereas the area under sugar beet cultivation in Uşak was only 1500 hectares in 1927, the cultivated lands expanded to 6000 hectares in 1933. In parallel to these, the sugar beet production also sharply increased from 8573 tons to 102,000 tons in the same time span.⁶¹⁶

Sugar beet planting was one of the best options as long as its prices were attractive. However, when the government decided to keep down the cost of the sugar so as to reduce the sugar prices and when sugar beet stocks reached high levels, the sugar factories began to offer lower prices to about 30 *paras* per kg for

⁶¹⁴ Köy Muallimi Nuri, "Kütahya'da Alayund Köyü," *Ülkü*, No. 8 (Sept., 1933), p. 154.

⁶¹⁵ Veldet, *30. Yılında Türkiye Şeker Sanayi*, p. 401.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

sugar beets.⁶¹⁷ This meant a 40 percent decrease in prices. This quick reversal of the price trend changed the peasants' approach to the sugar beet. Many sugar beet producers began to hold back on sugar beet planting from the mid-1930s on.

In 1938, Prime Minister Celal Bayar admitted that the relatively low sugar beet prices had distracted the farmers from the cultivation.⁶¹⁸ Indeed, the number of farmers supplying the Alpulu factory decreased to 14,500 in 1937 and 12,800 in 1938. The total production, reaching 317,000 tons in 1933, went down to 48,000 tons in 1938.⁶¹⁹ In a similar manner, the number of those farmers who were producing sugar beets for the Uşak factory reversed in 1936 by decreasing shockingly from 18,600 to 5300 in 1936. The total amount produced for the Uşak factory also dramatically decreased from 102,000 tons in 1933 to 30,000 tons in 1938.⁶²⁰

In spite of the sugar factory experts' efforts to convince the peasants to cultivate sugar, the peasants aggressively refused to plant it, and protested against the factory experts. Many of them passively resisted the demands of the sugar factories by hiding themselves from the sugar beet experts.⁶²¹ According to the memoirs of a sugar beet expert working in the Turhal Sugar Factory in 1930, he and his friends went to Dereköyü of Turhal in the spring of 1934, peasant women who worked in the sugar beet field immediately came together and attacked the experts.⁶²² Another sugar factory official, Ökkaş Ergun, in Eskişehir stated when he went to villages to convince the peasant to engage in sugar beet growing, almost all of the peasants hid

⁶¹⁷ Behçet Günay, "Şeker," *Ülkü*, No. 31 (Sept., 1935), p. 79.

⁶¹⁸ *Atatürk Pertek'ten Iğın'a Bakıyor ve Türkiye'nin Sanayileşmesinin Tarihçesi, 1930-1965*, Book No: 2, Oct. 10, 2005, p. 37. www.kemalizm.1938.org.

⁶¹⁹ Veldet, *30. Yılında Türkiye Şeker Sanayi*, p. 401.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, p. 180.

at home and avoided meeting with him in order to be able to leave the sugar beet production.⁶²³

The peasants' attitudes towards livestock farming also changed according to the costs of the animal breeding, prices of the livestock animals, and livestock taxes. After the long destructive wars, the livestock farming recovered in the first years of the Republic. Especially the severe drought that hit the agriculture in many cereal centers of central Anatolia such as Konya, Eskişehir, Kırşehir, Yozgat, Afyon and Aksaray in 1927-1928 pushed many cereal producers to engage in livestock farming. Indeed, because of the bad harvest that stemmed from the climate conditions, an increasing number of central Anatolian peasants began to make use of the recovery of livestock farming by leaving the agriculture and turning to animal breeding. A politician warned the government about the dimension of such a withdrawal from agriculture and flooding into livestock farming, which allegedly caused the dissolution of many villages.⁶²⁴

However, the government, most likely in order to balance such an escape from the agriculture, increased the livestock taxes several times between 1927 and 1929. In addition, livestock prices also dropped drastically in the economic crisis. Before 1929, the price of a sheep was about 10 TL. This price dropped more than 80 percent to between 1 and 2 TL in 1932. Again, whereas the price of a cow was between 40 and 60 TL, this price also decreased to 20-30 TL within the same period. In some places, cows were put on sale at 15 TL. Similarly, an ox that previously had found buyers between 60 and 80 TL began to be sold only between 25 and 35 TL.⁶²⁵ The increasing tax rates associated with the radical decline in livestock prices dissuaded many livestock farmers from animal breeding until the mid-1930s when

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

⁶²⁴ İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı*, pp. 141-142.

⁶²⁵ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraat Buhranı*, p. 49.

the livestock taxes were reduced considerably. Indeed, upon the increase in tax burden, many peasants began to slaughter or to sell their animals to butchers in 1930. At this conjuncture, the supply of meat increased so much that meat prices in urban areas hit the bottom especially in the winter of 1930.⁶²⁶

A peasant in Çorlu, in a letter to a newspaper, also confirmed that the peasants did not want to engage in livestock animal breeding, and therefore the number of the sheep in the villages halved in comparison to the previous few years.⁶²⁷ Similarly, it was reported that the peasants in Safranbolu had given up livestock farming because of the heavy taxes.⁶²⁸

Even after the taxes were slightly decreased in the early 1930s, the peasants continued to leave livestock raising. An RPP politician stated in the Justice Commission of the GNAT that the peasants increasingly sold off their livestock to the butchers because of the high costs of salt and high tax levels.⁶²⁹ According to the correspondent of *Köroğlu* newspaper, in one of the central Anatolian villages, a livestock farmer who was not able to pay the livestock taxes had to set a number of sheep free. Local people were surprised when they saw many sheep straying here and there.⁶³⁰

The number of sheep in Konya decreased from 2,500,000 in 1926 to 500,000 in 1930.⁶³¹ Again, according to the Livestock Statistics collected in 1946, the number of taxed sheeps decreased from 13,632,000 in 1927 to 10,180,000 in 1929 and remained at about 10 million until the sharp reduction in the Livestock Tax rates in 1935. This number reached 12,476,000 in 1935, and 14,801,000 in 1936. Similarly,

⁶²⁶ 1930 Journey Reports of Gaziantep Deputy Ali Cenani on Central Anatolia, Samsun, Trabzon, Thrace and Bursa, BCA CHP [490.1/1454.34.3].

⁶²⁷ "Ağnam Resminin Ağırlığı Koyunculüğümüzü Baltıyor," *Cumhuriyet*, 06.12.1930.

⁶²⁸ "Sayım Vergisi ve Köylünün Temennisi," *Son Posta*, 09.10.1932.

⁶²⁹ Adliye Encümeni Ruznamesi, TBMM Encümenler Ruznamesi, 1 Teşrinisani 1934 (Ankara: TBMM, 1934), p. 910.

⁶³⁰ "Köylü Fakirleşti mi?" *Köroğlu*, 05.05.1934.

⁶³¹ See Akçetin, "Anatolian Peasants in Great Depression," p. 84.

the number of taxed goats declined from 12,106 in 1927 to 8988 in 1934. The number of sheep and goats was 25,738,000 in 1925. This number decreased to 21.313,000 in 1929. This number began to climb especially after the tax reduction in the mid-1930s to 26,000,000 in 1936 and 31,451,000 in 1938.⁶³² Similarly, the number of cattle and buffalo remained about 5 million until 1935, and then start to increase considerably to 6.7 million in 1936, 7.2 million in 1937, 7.8 million in 1938, and 8.2 million in 1939.⁶³³

However, it seems equally reasonable to interpret the change in the number of livestock as a response of the livestock owners to the costs of livestock and especially the heavy taxes. Indeed, as can be understood from above-mentioned figures, with the considerable reduction of the livestock taxes in 1935, the peasants returned to livestock raising again. Indeed, it was reported that the number of animals increased one-fourth in 1935 right after a considerable reduction in taxes. Undoubtedly, lower tax rates encouraged the peasants to engage in livestock farming.⁶³⁴ However, this increase in the number of animals also related to the fact that the peasants, since the taxes had decreased to tolerable levels, no longer needed to hide their animals from the tax officials or underreport their livestock. That is to say, the animals which had not been declared or had been underreported by the peasants for the tax and hidden from the tax collectors began to be declared more honestly and counted by the officials.⁶³⁵

⁶³² T.C. Başbakanlık İstatistik Genel Müdürlüğü, *Hayvanlar İstatistiği 1944*, ([İstanbul]: Hüsniyatıat Basımevi, 1946), p. 2.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁴ "Sayım Vergisi," *Son Posta*, 27.05.1936.

⁶³⁵ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraat Buhran*, p. 84.

Working Hard

Another way to cope with the unfavorable prices and heavy taxes that fell upon the shoulders of the peasants was to work hard together with all household members and cut the costs by limiting the relations with the market. That is to say, many peasant household, instead of employing a sharecropper or laborer, worked in land and at home all together. The labor of children and women played a crucial role in this process. Again, producing some goods that the peasants previously had bought from the town market, they tried to cut their expenditures. In addition, they supplemented their budgets by working hard and producing much more crops.

As a first and widespread way to keep the subsistence level or household income, all household members began to work in agriculture and in domestic works. For example, the peasants of Ulucak Village in the Kemalpaşa district of İzmir, who were hit by the sharp decline in the prices of cash crops stopped employing their usual agricultural laborers. Instead of hiring laborers from outside their village, almost all family members, including women, children and elders, began to work hard on the land. In so doing, the peasant families strove to lessen the costs and increase the output.⁶³⁶

For the peasants as well as workers, child labor was the primary resort in preserving the minimum subsistence levels of peasant households. Exploiting child labor, peasants tried to maintain the agricultural work without the employment of paid agricultural laborer. Therefore, in addition to the suspicion about the new secular education, the crucial function of child labor in the village played a key role in large rates of absenteeism in primary and secondary schools throughout the

⁶³⁶ “Kemalpaşa Köylülerinin Çalışkanlığı,” *Cumhuriyet*, 10.06.1930.

period.⁶³⁷ A contemporary village teacher admitted that although he struggled against the widespread absenteeism, the peasants resisted putting their children in school for economic reasons. According to the teacher, the main reason behind the absenteeism was the importance of child labor in agricultural works such as cultivation, harvest, animal husbandry, and cutting firewood.⁶³⁸

As a poor child in a village of Edremit during the early Republic, Hasan Kudar wrote in his memoirs that it was not possible for the peasant children in the 1920s and 1930s to enjoy their childhoods to the full. “They could not play a game, they did not know what a toy or child’s play was. They had to work and to contribute to the economic life of their families and house work. I spent my childhood doing so.”⁶³⁹

Fehmi Yavuz, another person who spent his childhood in Anatolian villages in first years of the Republic, told in his memoirs about how he and other peasant children had to leave school for works on the land and home in Nazilli. As a peasant child, he was supposed to work from sunrise to sunset at various jobs such as taking care of the animals, carrying water and helping with the agricultural work.⁶⁴⁰

Keeping family members together was an important strategy in that respect. Many big families including married grandsons lived at same home and worked in same plot all together. In Kastamonu villages, for instance, many of the peasants did not employ a sharecropper or laborer on the land. A peasant, in his interview with the İnönü, said that his sons helped him in cultivating and harvesting the crops.

-What is your job?

-I am a countryman.

-How large is your land? How many people are working on it?

⁶³⁷ About the function of the child labor especially in difficult times of economic downturn, see Metinsoy, *İkinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Türkiye*, pp. 402-407.

⁶³⁸ M. Ferid Karşı, *Köy Öğretmeninin Anıları* (Ankara: Köyhocası Basımevi, 1935), p. 60.

⁶³⁹ Hasan Kudar, *Tahtakuşlar’dan Paris’e* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), p. 21.

⁶⁴⁰ Fehmi Yavuz, *Anılarım* (Ankara: Mülkiyeliler Birliği Vakfı Yayınları, [n.d.]), pp. 12-16.

- We are cultivating 10 or 11 kg each year. Around 10 people that are my sons and their families are working here.
- Do you employ a sharecropper?
- No! I have three children who have fulfilled their military service and we are working all together to meet our own needs.⁶⁴¹

Another interview by İnönü with a peasant also demonstrates how the all household members, even after the young male members had got married and had children, worked on the land and lived in the same home together.

- How many people are working on your land?
- 17
- Oh, what?
- 17 people
- You employ a laborer?
- No, sir; household members are working.
- 17 people are living in one house?
- Yes, we are three brothers. After my father died, we did not separate from each other. My family is composed of 6 persons, each of the other two brothers have 5 persons. Plus, our mother; we are in total 17.⁶⁴²

Indeed, despite the price decreases in cereals during the crisis, the agricultural output increased by 50 and 70 percent, except for the 1932. As Şevket Pamuk states by drawing on Chayanov's arguments about the economic behaviors of the small-plot holders, such a paradoxical situation might be explained by the hard work and exploitation of the household members in response to the crisis as a way of survival.⁶⁴³ In addition, the increase in wheat output coincided with the wheat purchase policy of the Agricultural Bank at the prices above the market-levels. I think, it is possible to say that despite the limited purchases, this mild price support

⁶⁴¹ Mustafa Eski, *İsmet İnönü'nün Kastamonu Gezileri* (İstanbul: Çağdaş Yayınları, 1995), p. 21.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁴³ Owen and Pamuk, *A History of Middle East Economies*, p. 22.

may also explain the increase in the wheat production after a sharp production decrease in 1932.⁶⁴⁴

The village women also worked as weavers not only for merchants or small textile mills, but also for themselves. In many villages of Anatolia, especially in the hard times of the crisis, female peasants weaving their own linens and sewing their own clothes contributed to the household economy. They also sewed the pants, shirts, and clothes of their husbands and children. Hence, they saved some cash and avoided spending a lot of money in town markets for clothing.⁶⁴⁵ Similarly, the peasants in Kastamonu also wove and sewed 60 percent of their own clothes. They bought the remaining part from the town market.⁶⁴⁶

In the early 1930s, peasants further kept down the costs of clothing by producing their own clothes at home. Especially in eastern Anatolia, the great part of the fabrics, clothes, and shoes were produced at home for private use. In Muş, for example, peasants themselves produced their own clothes, underclothes, shoes, socks, and many household goods. Women especially played an important role in this production by weaving fabrics, carpets and sewing the clothes. In Elazığ, the unique groups that did shopping in the market were the civil servants and soldiers. The great part of townsmen and peasants satisfied their basic needs except for tea, coffee, sugar, and kerosene, by producing them at home. Despite the relatively stronger ties of peasants to the market in other parts of Anatolia, the number of peasants who produced the necessities for their own use was considerable, especially in the period of the economic crisis. By the early 1930s, in the Black Sea Region, for

⁶⁴⁴ Indeed, total wheat production sharply decreased more than one million tons from 2,992,000 in 1931 to 1,936,000 tons in 1932, although it recovered immediately afterwards. See Tekeli and İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçilik*, p.13.

⁶⁴⁵ Yalçın Dağlar, *Köylerimizden Örnekler: Köylerimiz Hakkında Bir İnceleme* (İstanbul: Kader Basımevi, 1951), p. 19.

⁶⁴⁶ Eski, *İnönü’nün Kastamonu Gezileri*, p. 31.

instance, even the villages near the city center in Ordu, eighty percent of the peasants produced their own underclothes and charshafs. Likewise, in the rural areas of Bilecik, a western Anatolian province, except for shoes, coffee, and kerosene, the peasants, the peasants supplied all of their necessities on their own. In Kurtköy village of Bilecik, for instance, peasants engaged in sugar beet agriculture. Therefore, they produce their own sugar from these sugar beets. The oil was distilled from opium. The peasants also produced a small amount of cotton and wool. The fibers, fabrics, and clothes were made from this cotton and wool on handlooms at homes. The women themselves wove fabrics and sewed dresses for their own use.⁶⁴⁷

Temporary Migration and Engagement in Short-Term Jobs

Temporary migration and engagement in temporary jobs were the peasants' universal way to keep the home going in the face of an acute economic emergency.⁶⁴⁸ When they faced extraordinary price declines or they defaulted on their taxes and debts or when they encountered urgent needs such as to buy a tempting field, to re-roof a hose, or to build a barn or house, peasants also left their villages to work in temporary jobs for search for a bit of cash to make ends meet. By doing so, they supplemented their scarce resources.

Although some peasants searched for jobs after they lost their production means, most of the peasants did not wait until they had been dispossessed, and looked for new sources outside the villages in the neighboring villages, towns or cities. Such temporary jobs enabled them to buy seed, pay their debts and taxes, and to keep their minimum subsistence levels on their own lands as much as possible.

⁶⁴⁷ İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı*, pp. 22-25.

⁶⁴⁸ Eugen J. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (California: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 278.

However, the great majority of the peasants did not lose their ties with their villages. As soon as they had earned enough money to meet their needs, they returned to their villages.

According to a contemporary observer, in the face of the Great Depression, peasants began to flood into the towns and cities temporarily for a new source of income. This temporary migration was so widespread that in 1932 some villages of the central Anatolian provinces such as Konya, Karaman, Aksaray and Kırşehir exported the great part of their men to the big city centers. There were some villages without adult men because of the temporary migration to the outside the village.⁶⁴⁹

Another reason pushing the peasants to the outside of their villages was the bad harvest and especially unsuitable climate conditions. Due to the severe droughts in central Anatolia in the mid-1920s and mid-1930s, peasants, who could neither harvest sufficient crops nor pay their debts and taxes, saw working in the towns as a way to survive.⁶⁵⁰

Peasants, especially those who were pressured by the acute needs, taxes and debts, went to other villages, towns and cities for seasonal work during the off-seasons. After the harvest, some peasants who did not have demanding livestock animals spent their time not in the village rooms or coffeehouses, but in other villages, towns and cities working. Upon saving a sum, they returned to their villages and resumed their agricultural works.⁶⁵¹

Many peasants worked for a while in state enterprises and private factories in towns and cities. The industrial drive of the 1930s relatively widened the job opportunities for them. Indeed, many state enterprises attracted and recruited their workforce from such peasants, who were in search for temporary source of income.

⁶⁴⁹ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran*, p. 86.

⁶⁵⁰ Atasagun, *Türkiye'de İktisadî Siyaset Meseleleri*, p. 10.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

The peasants, who were willing to work for a while as unskilled workers in public and private undertakings, constituted the great part of the casual and unskilled laborers. Especially the building sector and coalmines fully depended on this cheap labor of the peasants.

Peasants living around Zonguldak and the northwestern countryside, for instance, took the opportunity to find jobs in the coalmines.⁶⁵² These peasants had dreams of having a piece of land. Some of them aimed to redeem their old lands and livestock animals expropriated by the state. Indeed, according to a study conducted by the Zonguldak Chamber of Commerce in 1931, most of the peasants who were dispossessed because of the accrued debts and taxes were working in coalmines or in other jobs in neighboring towns. Most of them were motivated by the hope of recovering their economic standings by saving enough money to reestablish their old “affluent life” in the village. Therefore, they hoped to redeem their expropriated plots and production means. The coalmine workers, for instance, were overwhelmingly composed of such peasants, 80 percent of whom was smallholders. Their main aim was to return to their agricultural work after saving a certain amount of cash money for their needs.⁶⁵³ Likewise, many smallholders living in the eastern parts of the Black Sea region were apt to work in the Kuvarshan and Murgul copper mines in Artvin. Like other peasants, they also saw these coalmines as an optional and temporary source of income and did not continue to work after a while in these places.⁶⁵⁴

Similarly, the young peasants in some central and western Anatolian villages left their villages to work in the Fethiye mines because the arable land were limited

⁶⁵² Ahmet Naim Çıladı, *Zonguldak Havzası: Uzun Mehmetten Bugüne Kadar* (İstanbul: Hüsnütabiat Matbaası, 1934), p. 149.

⁶⁵³ Oya Köymen, *Türkiye’de Tarımsal Yapının Gelişimi (1923-1938)* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1981), p. 95.

⁶⁵⁴ “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Köyde Hayat,” <http://www.artvinliyiz.com/index.php>.

as compared to the rural population. Generally, they went in winter, which was off-season for agricultural work. They worked 9 hours a day and received between 70 and 100 piasters as daily wage. Most of them returned to their villages after saving some money.⁶⁵⁵

Throughout the late 1920s and especially the 1930s, the railway and highway building projects of the government provided temporary working opportunities for the peasants in need of some cash. In 1932, a great part of the peasants found jobs not requiring specific skills at railway and highway building sites. Among the railway workers, there were many peasants who planned to go back to their villages after saving enough money so as to pay their taxes or debts.⁶⁵⁶ In 1934, the central Anatolian peasants found a temporary working opportunity in the railway building sites in Malatya and Diyarbakır.⁶⁵⁷ Again, the peasants looking for a temporary source of income worked also in railway construction in Sivas by Simeryol Company. Indeed, the workers of the Simeryol railway building company were overwhelmingly peasants. The foreign engineer of the company complained that they did not spend any money they earned on themselves in order to save every piaster. When they did have enough money to buy new clothes for themselves, sugar, a few stuff for their families, or to pay their taxes, they went home again to their villages and lands.⁶⁵⁸

Another job field the peasants continuously moved in and out of the textile industry. Cemil Calgüner, who conducted a survey on the agricultural workers, almost half of the workers in the Seyhan National Textile Factory (*Seyhan Milli Mensucat Fabrikası*) were small plot-holders who continued to engage in agriculture

⁶⁵⁵ *Gezi Notları: Çanakkale-Bolayır, İzmir Köyleri ve Orta Anadolu* (İstanbul: Milli Türk Talebe Birliği, Asri Basımevi, 1935), p. 53.

⁶⁵⁶ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ziraî Buhran*, p. 86.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶⁵⁸ Lilo Linke, *Allah Dethroned* (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1937), p. 189.

seasonally.⁶⁵⁹ The Kayseri Textile Factory also attracted peasants for short-term work. Most of the workers of the Kayseri Textile Factory were still in contact with their villages and left their jobs periodically for agricultural work. Especially in summer and autumn, they went to their vineyards to harvest grapes.⁶⁶⁰

In other industrial factories, the peasants found the opportunity to spend their off-seasons by working and saving money. The peasants who left village for seasonal work were employed mostly as unskilled labor in fruit-drying plants and soap plants.⁶⁶¹ According to a report prepared by a group of American experts led by Walker Hines on the Turkish economy in 1933 and 1934, the great part of the Turkish working class was composed of peasants, who worked in industry and other sectors a few months in order to save some money for their debts and taxes, and returned to their villages.⁶⁶² Again, as a Turkish industrial expert said to an American traveler and journalist, “a peasant comes to work in a factory- but too often, after a few years, the call of the land gets too strong and he goes home to his village.”⁶⁶³

Furthermore, the peasants especially engaged in casual jobs as doorkeeper, cleaners, domestic servants, street vendors, wage laborers, and porters in towns and cities. A considerable part of those people who were temporarily working as caretakers, doorkeepers, domestic servants, and tea-makers in government offices and private institutions were peasants. Their engagement in such jobs was short term and most of them migrated from the villages and left their agricultural work for an impermanent period.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁵⁹ Çalgüner, *Türkiye’de Ziraat İşçileri*, p. 19.

⁶⁶⁰ Mümtaz Faik, “Kayseri Kombinarı ve İşçi Buhranı” *Tan*, 02.10.1936.

⁶⁶¹ Radmir Platonovich Korniyenko, *The Labor Movement in Turkey (1918-1963)* (Washington: U. S. Department of Commerce Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information, Joint Publications Research Service, 1967), p. 46.

⁶⁶² Walker D. Hines, et al. *Türkiye’nin İktisadi Bakımdan Umumi Bir Tetkiki, 1933-1934*, Vol.V-VI (Ankara: Mehmet İhsan Matbaası, 1936), Vol. 6, p. 238.

⁶⁶³ Bernard Newman, *Turkish Crossroads* (London: Robert Hale Ltd., 1951), p. 79.

⁶⁶⁴ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ziraat Buhranı*, p. 87.

As a contemporary observer recorded, those peasants who temporarily left their agricultural work in villages worked as porters and street vendors in towns and cities during the 1930s.⁶⁶⁵ Again, it was reported in 1931 that especially heavy taxes fuelled the short-term migration of the peasants to outside the villages. For instance, peasants of Karacaşehir village of Eskişehir defaulted on the heavy Land Tax due to the very high rates as well as the economic slowdown. The more the Land Tax increased, the more the peasants who were depressed by the tax burden held several casual jobs in town and city centers in order to support their families.⁶⁶⁶ A newspaper also reported that because of the low demand for the harvest of the previous year, some peasants, in acute need of cash, began to move into the cities and towns in search of temporary jobs as porters, street vendors, or wage laborers.⁶⁶⁷

Indeed, İnönü's conversations with the peasants in his tour to Kastamonu in 1938 show how the peasants under the pressures of their many needs strove to keep or to improve their economic status by all ways outside the home village without breaking their ties with the village and agriculture. When İnönü asked a peasant, who had declared that his and other peasants' lands were infertile, how the villagers were able to support their families, the peasant responded, "Some of our villagers go to İstanbul, İzmir and Ankara, work there, and bring money to the village."⁶⁶⁸ The same peasant, upon İnönü's question of how the peasant were planning to improve their economic standings, replied, "There are coal mines in Azdavay; if God allows we will make do with a few piasters we earn there."⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁵ Atasagun, *Türkiye'de İktisatî Siyaset Meseleleri*, p. 8.

⁶⁶⁶ H. Z., "Arazi ve Müsakkafat Vergilerinin Tahrir Usulleri Niçin Ta'dile Muhtaçtır?" *Cumhuriyet*, 19.06.1931.

⁶⁶⁷ "Köylü İş Bulmak İçin Şehirlere Geliyor," *Köroğlu*, 09.05.1931.

⁶⁶⁸ Eski, *İnönü'nün Kastamonu Gezileri*, p. 22.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

In the next village, replying to İnönü's question about how the peasants could support their families, a middle-aged man, named Hasan Kırmacı, said that the peasants were going to distant places far from home and worked as wage laborers, caretaker and workers.⁶⁷⁰ Another peasant, named Mehmet Karakaş, told İnönü that because he did not have any land, he had to work in neighboring villages and towns as a laborer periodically.⁶⁷¹

Likewise, a talk between İnönü and a middle-aged farmer named Mehmet Ali Yılmaz, who had a small plot in Karadönü village of Kastamonu, shows how young male members of peasant families managed to live by working at different jobs in different cities temporarily. As usual, İnönü asked:

- How many people at home?
- 12
- What?
- 12
- Who are they?
- I, my wife, and my 10 children.
- (...)
- All of your children always live with you?
- No, they have temporarily left for seasonal works to here and there.
- Whereabouts?
- İstanbul, Zonguldak, Safranbolu, and other such places.
- Are there any in Zonguldak?
- Yes, there are.
- How much money do they earn as daily wage?
- Too low, 70 or 80 piasters.
- Are your children working there permanently?
- For only two or three months.
- (...)
- How do you support your family?
- My children were working here and there and in the Zonguldak coalmines.⁶⁷²

Working seasonally on large estates, orchards and vineyards in neighboring villages was also an option for the low-income peasants. As Niyazi Berkes noted, in Ankara villages, women of poor farmers worked in the orchards of the neighboring villages.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Again those peasants with small plots of land or without any land were apt to work on the large estates of Saray and Karacakaya villages as seasonal laborers. They generally earned 60 or 70 piasters a day.⁶⁷³

Fehmi Yavuz described how in the mid-1930s tobacco farmers with small plots yielding small incomes migrated to work on the large tobacco farms in Milas, Söke and Kuşadası after they had completed their own work.⁶⁷⁴ Similar cases were widespread in the other parts of Anatolia.

These economic survival methods of the peasants undoubtedly did not aim at any change in state policies. However, given the fact that the policy change may not be contingent upon the people's intentions every time, it is possible to see some policy changes unintended by the people as consequences of these economic behaviors of the people. From this viewpoint, I think that the peasants' survival methods and economic self-seeking behaviors played a role in the fluctuations in the wheat production, especially the sharpest decline in total output in 1932 and in the emergence of the high turnover rates of the labor force in the industry. Therefore, simultaneously with this dramatic decrease in total wheat production, the government had to purchase wheat at prices above the market prices albeit in a limited manner. In addition, the high labor turnover, partially caused by the peasant-workers who opted to work in the industry for a short-term for their needs for cash to weather the financial difficulties also would force the ruling circles to consider the social policy measures to create a more stable labor force.

⁶⁷³ Berkes, *Bazı Ankara Köyleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma*, p. 53.

⁶⁷⁴ Yavuz, *Anılarım*, p. 25.

CHAPTER FOUR

TAX RESISTANCE

During the period, taxes, specifically agricultural taxes were heavy, and collection methods made them more burdensome. There were three main direct taxes that most aggrieved the peasantry: the Land Tax, the Livestock Tax, and the Road Tax. These three taxes bore hardest upon the small-sized and low-income peasantry. In addition to these, peasants also had to pay the Building Tax for their houses and barns, and the Income Tax for every sale of crop and livestock in the town market. Furthermore, in the mid-1930s, the government crowned it all by levying a sort of tax titled the Contribution to the Aviation Society Tax. The Wheat Protection Tax, although levied on the townsmen in theory, also adversely affected the peasants living in towns and villages near the town centers. Especially in the years of economic crisis that pushed the agricultural prices down, these taxes began to weigh heavily on peasants.

However, the peasantry never remained passive in the face of these heavy taxes. One important dimension of the everyday politics of the peasantry was to follow a set of tactics of avoidance of paying these taxes as much as possible. They resisted the taxes by employing anonymous resistance strategies without stirring up a hornet's nest, although they sometimes directly roused their objections and protests. They undertook several avoidance strategies ranging from the concealment of livestock, not declaring or under-declaring livestock and land, escape from tax collectors, attacking the tax collectors to spreading rumors that encouraged the tax resistance or discouraged the tax collectors. As David Burg states in a recent study on tax revolts, "avoidance, although perhaps not overtly insurrectionist but more

covert act, has been a significant act of resistance to taxation.”⁶⁷⁵ On the other hand, peasants collectively protested and rose up against heavy taxation, albeit in limited cases.

During the 1920s, although the rural economy recovered comparatively and the tithe was abolished in 1925, the increase in rates of the existing taxes, and the extension of some taxes to hitherto exempt areas provoked the reactions of the peasants to taxation. The main factors that precipitated the widespread tax resistance were the increasing rates of the Land Tax combined with the overvaluation of the lands that multiplied the peasants’ obligations, the increasing rates of the Livestock Tax and extension of it to many other animals previously exempted, and the heavier Road Tax obligations and abuses of it in its implementation, and of course, the pressure and corruption of tax collectors. Moreover, the additional burden of the Aviation Society Tax, the Wheat Protection Tax, the Income Tax, and the Building Tax led poor peasants to tax resistance and protest.

Another important factor that fuelled peasant hostility and resistance to the increasing tax obligations was the negative economic trends, i.e., the economic crisis and bad harvests that stemmed from the adverse climatic factors such as droughts of the mid-1920s and mid-1930s. The resulting decline in peasants’ income, which made the payment of the taxes more onerous, led the peasants to resist to the taxes.

Furthermore, the most important common feature of all these tax obligations was that they were all direct taxes. After the abolition of the tithe, the proportion of the direct taxes to the total tax revenues within the state budget began to rise in 1931. Whereas the average proportion of the direct taxes to the total tax revenues was 22.6

⁶⁷⁵ David F. Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions: An Encyclopedia of Tax Rebels, Revolts, and Riots from Antiquity to the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. ix.

between 1925 and 1930, the direct taxes consisted of 34.3 percent of total tax revenues on an average between 1931 and 1940.⁶⁷⁶

However, “the most hated taxes those most likely to engender protest are” as stated by David Burg, “direct taxes.”⁶⁷⁷ Direct taxes set the stage for the tax resistance. Tax payers, since they directly made out-of-pocket payment, feel the direct taxes more heavily. Moreover, direct taxation necessarily entails face-to-face relations with tax collectors, which sometimes set off frequent confrontations of tax payers with tax collectors and security forces. For these reasons, the direct and heavy agricultural taxes in Turkey during the interwar period prompted widespread discontent and tax avoidance in rural areas.

Main Indicators of Tax Resistance

Although unorganized, tax resistance was rampant in rural Anatolia. It took several forms, overwhelmingly the forms of the peasants’ everyday tactics of avoidance, passive resistance, foot-dragging, dissimulation, concealment, and cheating. These acts of resistance, I think, signal the confrontation between the conflicting interests of the government and the low-income peasantry.

One of the most important indicators of the tax avoidance was the considerable decrease in total tax revenues as can be seen in Table 8. Accordingly the share of the tax revenues in the general state revenues decreased during the 1930s. As can be seen from the Table 11, this rate dropped from 75 percent in 1930 to 58 percent in 1935 and to 50 percent in 1939. That is to say, the tax revenues among the state revenues decreased about one-third within nine years. Undoubtedly,

⁶⁷⁶ T.C. Maliye Bakanlığı Bütçe ve Mali Kontrol Genel Müdürlüğü Sayı: 1995/5. *Bütçe Gider ve Gelir Gerçekleşmeleri (1924-1995)*, Ankara, 1995, p. 74.

⁶⁷⁷ Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, p. xviii.

the tax relief programs and gradual decrease in agricultural tax rates in the mid-1930s played a role in this. Yet, given the increasing indirect tax burden of the urban dwellers in this period, one of the main causes of this remarkable decrease must be the tax avoidance in the agricultural sector. Indeed, a discussion in parliamentary session in 1934 reveals the massive tax evasion. According to a deputy, by 1934, the total outstanding tax debt of the population had reached 120,500,000. The outstanding Land Tax alone was about 20,600,000 TL.⁶⁷⁸ The great gap between the assessed direct taxes and collected direct taxes given in Table 10 indicates the existence of tax avoidance as well as the state's incapacity to collect the taxes. Given the fact that the great part of the direct taxes was levied on agriculture, the great difference between the expected tax revenue and the realized tax revenues implies the peasants' avoidance of and resistance to the taxes.

Table 8 - Total Tax Revenues in the State Budget, 1925-1939.

Years	Tax Revenues in General Budget (Million TL)
1925	138.3
1926	149.4
1927	163.4
1928	180.1
1929	182.5
1930	164.6
1931	141.4
1932	214.3
1933	156.5
1934	143.6
1935	155.0
1936	135.4
1937	163.1
1937	203.2
1938	196.2

Source: *T.C. Maliye Bakanlığı Gelirler Genel Müdürlüğü, Bütçe Gelirleri Yıllığı 1977-1978: 1923-1978 Bütçe Gelirleri İstatistikleri* (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 1979), p. 6.

⁶⁷⁸ "Vergi Bakayasının Tasfiyesi ve Mükelleflere Bazı Kolaylıklar Gösterilmesi Hakkında Kanun Lâyihası Görüşmeleri," in Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 2, p. 217.

Table 9 - The Annual Increase of Tax Revenues from One Year to Another, 1925-39.

Years	Increase (%)
1925	20.0
1926	8.0
1927	9.3
1928	10.2
1929	1.3
1930	-10.8
1931	-16.4
1932	51.5
1933	-36.9
1934	-8.9
1935	7.9
1936	-14.4
1937	20.4
1938	24.5
1939	-3.5

Source: *T.C. Maliye Bakanlığı Gelirler Genel Müdürlüğü, Bütçe Gelirleri Yıllığı 1977-1978: 1923-1978 Bütçe Gelirleri İstatistikleri* (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 1979), p. 7.

Table 10 - Levied and Collected Direct Taxes, 1925-1930 (Million TL).

Years	Levied Amount	Collected Amount	Collection Rate (%)
1925	32.3	22.2	68.7
1926	35.5	23.2	65.3
1927	37.0	21.6	58.3
1928	37.6	20.1	53.4
1929	42.7	22.5	52.6
1930	41.2	22.5	54.6

Source: This table was prepared according to the data in *Bütçe Gider ve Gelir Gerçekleşmeleri (1924-1995)*, Sayı: 1995/5 (Ankara: T.C. Maliye Bakanlığı Bütçe ve Mali Kontrol Genel Müdürlüğü, 1995), p. 132.

Table 11 - The Share of the Tax Revenues in General State Revenues, 1930-1939.

Years	Share of Tax Revenues (%)
1930	75
1931	75
1932	76
1933	78
1934	60
1935	58
1936	60
1937	63
1938	63
1939	50

Source: *T.C. Maliye Bakanlığı Gelirler Genel Müdürlüğü, Bütçe Gelirleri Yıllığı 1977-1978: 1923-1978 Bütçe Gelirleri İstatistikleri* (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 1979), p. 3.

As Muzaffer Egesoy, a contemporary expert of the Ministry of Finance, noted about the direct taxes that most of which were paid by the peasantry, the state failed to collect the great part of the expected tax revenues during the early Republican era. Therefore, the direct taxes, as Egesoy wrote, never reached the target levels the government anticipated. The tax evasion was out of control and widespread. The weak measures taken against the tax evasion also proved to be unsuccessful. Furthermore, the arbitrary and unsystematic fines, which were devised against the evasion, probably fuelled the tax avoidance ever further. Lack of high quality, educated and sufficient number of finance department officials and tax collectors played a negative role in this. The low wages of the tax collectors also adversely affected the tax estimation and collection processes by causing widespread corruption among the tax officials.⁶⁷⁹

From the standpoint of the taxpayers, the corruption of the tax collectors made the tax avoidance easier in return for bribes or “small gifts” to them. In addition, their corruption, creating social discontent and distrust in the finance department and the government, also damaged the legitimacy of the taxes in the eyes of peasants and fostered the tax evasion.

Even a brief look at the state documents providing detailed figures about the tax collections reveals the evasion and avoidance. The figures regarding the Land Tax suggest that the state had great difficulty to collect it. In 1932, according to the report of the General Inspector İbrahim Tali Öngören on the First Inspectorate

⁶⁷⁹ Muzaffer Egesoy, *Cumhuriyet Devrinde Vasıtasız Vergiler* (Ankara: Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Maliye Enstitüsü, 1962), pp. xii-xiv.

Region including eastern provinces like Diyarbakır, Van, Siirt, Hakkari, Muş, Mardin, Bitlis and Urfa, the outstanding land taxes had been gradually increasing.⁶⁸⁰

For example, the government collected barely half of the estimated Land Tax in Urfa in 1932. The outstanding Land Taxes were impossible to collect because of the insufficient finance department organization, laxity and ignorance of the tax collectors, and several difficulties raised before the local administration to monitor the outstanding taxes. 87 percent of the Land Tax that had been expected to be collected in Urfa in 1931 were in arrears. In 1932, the rate of the outstanding Land Taxes in the districts of Urfa was 61 percent in Suruç, 61 percent in Viranşehir, 56 percent in central city, 54 percent in Siverek, 41 percent in Birecik, 45 percent in Harran, 28 percent in Yaylak, and 23 percent in Hilvan.⁶⁸¹

The complaints of the people about the unbearable amounts of the Land Tax and huge Land Tax debts attracted the attention of the Prime Minister İsmet İnönü in his tour to the eastern provinces in 1935. Peasants were discontent with especially the quite high and wrong tax assessments. The grievance about the Land Tax was so common that İnönü said, “We are waiting for the payment of the taxes in vain. They would not pay this high tax. We should not fool ourselves.”⁶⁸²

The General Situation Report of the Erzurum governor gives the figures about the estimated taxes and collected taxes in 1932, 1933 and 1934. According to these figures, whereas the assessed Land Tax was 192,522 TL, the collected tax hardly reached 47,303 TL in 1932. That is to say, there was 76 percent in arrears. In the next year, the estimated tax was 195,900 TL, but the collected amount remained far behind this amount once again, reaching only 60,838 TL. In other words, there was

⁶⁸⁰ From the First General Inspector İbrahim Tali to the Prime Ministry, Taxes that the Collection of Which is Unattainable, BCA MGM [30.10/69.457.11], 20.10.1932.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸² Öztürk, *İsmet Paşa'nın Kürt Raporu*, p. 55, 61.

69 percent outstanding Land Tax. In 1934, the amount of the Land Tax that was assessed was 159,165 TL, but the collected amount remained at only 55,448 TL. This meant that 65 percent of the levied tax could not to be collected. The total portion of the arrears of the Land Tax in these three years was 71 percent.⁶⁸³

Not only in the eastern provinces, but also in one of the most developed western provinces like İzmir, peasants minimized their tax liability and did not pay considerable part of the Land Tax. Due to the growing amount of Land Tax debt and widespread complaints of the peasants, the RPP İzmir Congress, held in 1936, demanded a Land Tax amnesty or tax relief.⁶⁸⁴

As for the Livestock Tax, the tax collection in Erzurum, the most important center of livestock farming in Turkey remained below the anticipated levels. Although the tax amounts levied were 263,036 TL for 1932, 202,495 TL for 1933, 178,501 TL for 1934, the amounts the peasants paid were only 163,042 TL, 147,185 TL, and 138,962 TL respectively. The proportions of the unpaid taxes were 38 percent in 1932, 27 percent in 1933, and 23 percent in 1933.⁶⁸⁵ That is to say, taxpayers managed to curtail their tax burden about one-third on an average.

The Livestock Tax revenues collected in the First General Inspectorate Region were also too low as compared to the animal stocks in the region. Furthermore, as the general inspector wrote in his report, it was not possible to collect the huge outstanding Livestock Taxes of the previous years. In Urfa, for

⁶⁸³ Report on the General Situation of the Erzurum Province, Governor of Erzurum, BCA MGM [30.10/65.433.1], 15.07.1935.

⁶⁸⁴ *CHP 28/12/1936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi* (İzmir, Anadolu Matbaası, 1937), p. 25, 40.

⁶⁸⁵ Report on the General Situation of the Erzurum Province, Governor of Erzurum, BCA MGM [30.10/65.433.1], 15.07.1935.

instance, the peasants did not pay around 20 percent of the assessed Livestock Tax.⁶⁸⁶

According to the general inspectorate, the real number of the livestock animals outnumbered the registered and taxed ones in Dersim. In 1931-32, the number of the taxed animals in the six districts of Dersim was 24,000 sheep, goat, cattle, and cow, and 7500 camels. Their tax values were about 59,000. However, 41,428 TL of this amount was not paid in 1932.⁶⁸⁷ In other words, livestock owners did not pay 70 percent of the tax. Given the fact that many farm animals were not reported to the government, thereby were not subjected to the tax, the rate of unpaid Livestock Tax can be estimated to be higher than 70 percent.

As for the Road Tax, many peasants paid it less than the levied amounts or fled from the tax officials and road building obligation. In 1931, a newspaper reported that the local government had begun to put 8000 peasants who had not paid the Road Tax of 1927, 1928 and 1929 in Çatalca villages of İstanbul to work in compulsory road building. According to the newspaper, an additional 3000 peasants in these villages did not pay the Road Tax in 1932, either. They also would be employed at road building sites.⁶⁸⁸

In another example, it was reported in 1934 that since many peasants in Kandıra who had not paid the Road Tax for years had been forced to work at road building. Within a week, the gendarme forcibly recruited more than 200 peasants who had not paid their taxes for compulsory work in road building sites.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁶ See BCA MGM [30.10/69.455.11], and From the First General Inspector İbrahim Tali to the Prime Ministry, About Taxes that the Collection of Which is Unattainable, BCA MGM [30.10/69.457.11.], 20.10.1932.

⁶⁸⁷ Faik Bulut, *Dersim Raporları* (İstanbul: Evrensel Basın Yayın, 2007), p. 253.

⁶⁸⁸ “Bugünden İtibaren Yedi Bin Köylü Yollarda Çalışacak,” *Son Posta*, 01.04.1932.

⁶⁸⁹ “Yol Parasını Vermiyen Borçlulara Dair,” *Köroğlu*, 28.02.1934.

The provincial RPP congresses demanding decrease in the Road Tax or cancel of the outstanding Road Tax debts also point out the existence of the widespread tax avoidance. The RPP provincial congress held in İzmir in 1934, for example, mentioned about the unpaid Road Taxes and demanded the cancellation of 50 percent of the outstanding Road Tax debts levied before 1934.⁶⁹⁰ Likewise, the RPP Provincial Congress held in Aydın in 1936 also demanded the cancellation of the Road Tax debts.⁶⁹¹

Indeed, the Road Tax evasion was so widespread that Republican bureaucrats frequently complained of peasants' avoidance of the Road Tax obligation. Refet Aksoy, for instance, addressed the tax evasion of the peasants in his book *Köylülerimizle Başbaşa* (Tête-à-Tête with Our Peasants) in 1936. According to Aksoy, most of peasants neither paid the Road Tax nor fulfilled their working obligations at road building sites in due time. Therefore, the peasants were running into the tax debt, and consequently began to look for ways to circumvent their official obligations.⁶⁹²

Apart from this Republican bureaucrat's observations, the local statistical figures regarding the Road Tax revenues of some provinces may give an idea about the peasants' resistance to the Road Tax. In Erzincan, for example, as can be seen from the Table 12, the amount of the tax which the people paid remained below the assessed tax amount. The great majority who did not pay the tax with cash money avoided working at road building at the same time. Therefore, it is possible to read the figures below as an indicator of tax evasion to great extent.

⁶⁹⁰ CHP 28/12/936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi (İzmir, Anadolu Matbaası, 1937), p. 25.

⁶⁹¹ CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri, pp. 63-64.

⁶⁹² Refet Aksoy, *Köylülerimizle Başbaşa* ([Yozgat]: Yozgat İl Baylik Basımevi, 1936), pp. 54-55.

Table 12 - The Road Tax Collections between 1925 and 1930 in Erzincan.

Years	Levied Tax	Collected	Proportion of the Collected Tax to the Levied Amount (%)
1925	38,288	24,143	63
1926	91,326	72,929	80
1927	84,688	54,415	64
1928	56,856	33,297	59
1929	69,750	43,906	62.8
1930	78,900	36,574	46.3

Source: [Erzincan Governor] Ali Kemâlî, *Erzincan: Tarihî, Coğrafi, İktisadî, Etnoğrafi, İdarî, İhsâî Tetkikat Tecrübesi* (İstanbul: Resimli Ay Matbaası, 1932), p. 423.

As for the Aviation Society Tax, the peasants did not like this obligation, too. Thus, the collected taxes remained below the targeted amounts. The figures given in the 1936 report of the party inspector of Konya, Adnan Ertekin [Menderes], offer an insight into how far the local administration, even in a big center, succeeded to collect this tax. As Menderes wrote in 1936, the total money that was collected as the Aviation Society Tax in Konya in previous five years was so low that it did not even come close to the expected amounts.

Table 13 - Assessed and Collected Amounts of Aviation Society Tax Revenues in Konya between 1931-1935

Districts	Assessed Amount TL	Collected Amount TL
Konya (center)	207.126	4000
Ereğli	67.826	3000
Karaman	74.156	4500
İlgın	65.734	5000
Akşehir	92.122	6500
Total Amounts	506,964	23,000

Source: Inspection Report of Adnan Ertekin [Menderes] on Konya Party Organization, BCA CHP [490.1/677.289.1.], 16.02.1936.

As it is evident from Table 13, the Konya governorship had expected to collect approximately 506,964 TL as the Aviation Society Tax between 1931 and 1935. However, the total revenue collected in this time period had barely reached 23,000

TL. That is to say, the people paid only 4.1 percent of the amount that was demanded from them. Given the fact that salaried and waged people paid this small amount because it was deducted from payrolls,⁶⁹³ it was the peasantry and self-employed people, who were to great extent responsible for such low collection rate.

Tax Avoidance: Indirect Forms and Methods of the Tax Resistance

The Concealment of Properties

The first way to avoid the taxes was to hide economic standing and valuable and taxable properties. Some contemporary observers pointed out the incommunicative and skeptic character of the peasants especially in the presence of a strange person in the village. They especially disliked talking about their property. In her village surveys in the early 1940s, sociologist Mediha Berkes [Esenel], for instance, wrote about how difficult to gather exact information about the peasants, particularly their economic situation, because of their suspicion of strangers. Main reason for their suspicion of strangers was that they feared the taxes and tax collectors. They always refused to talk about their economic standing and assets. Those peasants who hid their infant children from the government did not say how many children they had in order to escape a possible tax on their heads. Some peasants suspected Mediha Berkes of being a tax collector or state official spying for the government. Therefore, she preferred to record secretly what she saw and heard about the village life in order not to arouse the peasants' suspicions about her further.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹³ Inspection Report of Adnan Ertekin [Menderes] on Konya Party Organization, BCA CHP [490.1/677.289.1.], 16.02.1936.

⁶⁹⁴ Esenel, *Geç Kalmış Kitap*, pp. 107-110.

At a somewhat late date, in the mid-1940s, another village observer, Yıldız Sertel described the secrecy of the peasants especially about their economic status, and linked this peasant behavior to their tax avoidance. Their most frightening nightmare, Sertel wrote, was the tax collectors. They hid their properties from the state. Therefore, it was almost impossible to learn exactly their economic conditions. They did not want to talk about their property and did not give exact information about the amount of their lands, crops, livestock animals or understated their properties generally.⁶⁹⁵

It is no wonder they were so suspicious about the strangers who wanted to learn about their economic conditions and lifestyles. The most important reason for this was that they evaded several agricultural taxes. To this goal, they were frequently concealing their properties and earnings by not reporting or underreporting their lands, vineyards, animals, barns and houses. In an address to the peasants, Refet Aksoy, as a voice of the RPP, criticized those peasants who avoided the taxes. According to him, many peasants said, “I was not wealthier than the state,” and “these peasants had an eye on the state revenues.”⁶⁹⁶

In the case of the Land Tax, the most widespread tax avoidance tactic peasants made use of was either not reporting or underreporting the land they owned. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Turkish government was not able to complete the cadastral survey. Therefore, the government did not have exact cadastre information. As documented by Ömer Lütfi Barkan in his detailed studies on the Turkish land tenure system, the great part of the lands in the early Republican Turkey had not yet been registered in the name of those who owned these lands. Those peasants who bought a new piece of land or inherited land either ignored or deliberately avoided

⁶⁹⁵ Y. Sertel, *Ardımdaki Yıllar*, p. 118.

⁶⁹⁶ R. Aksoy, *Köylülerimizle Başbaşa*, p. 80.

the registration of their own lands under their names. The main motive of the peasants for the avoidance of registering their land was undoubtedly to evade the Land Tax.⁶⁹⁷

Barkan emphasized two ways of Land Tax evasion: the first one was to avoid registering the land. The second one was to underreport the amount of the lands. Therefore, there was not exact registration of the landowners. Peasants came to use and have possession of their lands without any land registration to the Office of Register of Deeds or to the Directorate of Tax Administration. The amount of lands that fell into such category was quite a lot. Furthermore, of the registered lands, the total land surface registered to the name of their real owners was quite small. That is to say, the great part of the registered lands was under other people's *de facto* possession instead of their legal owners.⁶⁹⁸ According to a report on the Settlement and Land Law Draft prepared by the Ministry of Finance, around 30 percent of the lands were under *de facto* ownership and unregistered. In addition, 20 percent of the registered lands were under the *de facto* ownership of other peasants than the legal owners and inheritors due to the unofficial transfers of inheritance and unofficial sales.⁶⁹⁹ That is to say, those peasants whose lands were not registered in their names did not pay the Land Tax.

Detailed observations of Gaziantep deputy Ali Cenani also confirm the widespread existence of the Land Tax evasion through unreporting the lands throughout Anatolia. After his long tour to some important provinces in Central Anatolia, the Black Sea region, and the Marmara region, especially in Thrace, in 1930, Cenani reported that the landowners had not registered their lands so as to

⁶⁹⁷ Barkan, "Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu," p. 509.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

avoid paying the land-register fees and especially the Land Tax. This situation resulted in several problems for both the people and the government.⁷⁰⁰

By underreporting or not declaring their farm animals, peasants also evaded the Livestock Tax. Those peasants who underreported or did not report their animals hid them when tax officials came to the villages. For the peasantry, the heavy taxes made the peasants the thieves of their own property. Against the heavy taxes, a peasant admitted that he had to resort to tax avoidance, as follows:

The people are dying out of hunger. They [state elite] are building cinemas, by seizing the people's bread (...) Ha, we will have to deceive the state (...). If you are a fox, I am your tail. I am from the general staff with rawhide sandal (*çarıklı erkan-ı harp*).⁷⁰¹

In his advisory pamphlet addressing to peasantry, a Republican writer and bureaucrat also confirmed how the peasants hid their animals from the tax collectors. He accused such peasants of thievery and being dishonest:

Some mean and traitorous people regard evading four sheep and two goats from the tax collectors as a great profit for themselves. The real meaning of this tax evasion against the state revenues was theft. The laws always punish such people.⁷⁰²

Indeed, many peasants often deceived the tax officials to evade the heavy livestock taxes. For this goal, they often hid their animals. It is possible to read the stories of such peasants from the press. In Giresun, for instance, a peasant named Ayadaşoğlu in Titrik village hid his cow in the forest by tethering it to a tree.⁷⁰³ In the same village, the *imam* hid his sheep to a cave in order to evade the livestock tax.⁷⁰⁴ It was

⁷⁰⁰ 1930 Journey Reports of Gaziantep Deputy Ali Cenani on Central Anatolia, Samsun, Trabzon, Thrace and Bursa, BCA CHP [490.1/1454.34.3].

⁷⁰¹ Nar, *Anadolu Günlüğü*, p. 45.

⁷⁰² R. Aksoy, *Köylülerimizle Başbaşa*, p. 81.

⁷⁰³ "Devlet Vergisinden Kaçanlar," *Yeşilgireson*, 22.05.1937.

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

reported that some peasant women in eastern Anatolian villages hid their goats in their house within their bed.⁷⁰⁵

Livestock Tax evasion was rampant especially in the eastern provinces, where the most important economic mainstay was animal husbandry. According to the observations of an inspector of civil service (*mülkiye müfettişi*) named M.R. Mimaroglu, who worked in the eastern provinces in the 1920s, there were a great gap between the real number of livestock and the declared and taxed ones. The real number of the animals outnumbered the ones declared by peasants. In Mutki district of Siirt (today a district of Bitlis), for instance, the number of sheep was greater than ten-fold of the sheep registered by the government. Although the number of sheep in the Hizyan district of same province was 50,000, the registered amount was only one-sixth of this number. Whereas there were 5000 sheep in the center of Bitlis according to the official records, the real number reached up to 40,000 sheep at least. As for another eastern province, Van had 40,000 cattle according to the official figures. However, the real number must have been two-fold this number. Likewise, in Siirt, whereas the peasants declared only 12,000 sheep, the true number was 25,000.⁷⁰⁶

The case in Dersim, another eastern province, was similar. The numbers of officially recorded and taxed animals that the peasants declared or the government discovered were 3599 in Ovacık, 4857 in Hozat, 10,980 in Nazimiye, 21,885 in Mazgirt and 27,554 in Pertek. However, the real figures exceeded these official figures, reaching up to 30,000 in Ovacık, 35,000 in Hozat, 30,000 Nazimiye, 37,000 Mazgirt, and 37,000 in Pertek. In other words, whereas the total number of declared

⁷⁰⁵ Necmeddin Sahir Silan, *Doğu Sorunu: Necmeddin Sahir Silan Raporları (1939-1953)* Ed. by. Tuba Akekmekçi and Muazzez Pervan (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2010), p.74.

⁷⁰⁶ M. Reşat Mimaroglu, *Gördüklerim ve Geçirdiklerim'den*, Vol. 2, *Memurluk Hayatımın Hatıraları* (Ankara: T.C. Ziraat Bankası Matbaası, 1946), pp. 105-114.

and officially recorded farm animals was 68,875, the peasants actually had around 170,000 farm animals. That is to say, the peasants managed to hide about 100,000 animals from the Livestock Tax during the 1920s and 1930s.⁷⁰⁷

As stated earlier, the number of livestock decreased in parallel with the increase in taxes. This decrease partly stemmed from the slaughter of animals by the farmers and the increase in the sales of animals to butchers and food industry due to the soaring Livestock Tax rates. The farmers shifted away from the livestock raising because of the rising costs. In addition, the sharp decrease in the number of animals was partly related to the tax evasion at the same time. In other words, the heavier the taxes became, the more animals began to be hidden from the government and were shifted to the informal economy. This also was reflected in the official records as a sharp decline in the number of livestock animals.

Indeed, it was reported from Konya that the number of sheep in the province decreased from 2.5 million to 500,000 within four years when the Livestock Tax doubled between 1926 and 1930.⁷⁰⁸ Likewise, it was reported that while the Tırmanlar village of Bornova had 500 cows in previous years, this number decreased to 150 in 1930.⁷⁰⁹ Again, it was reported from the Çorlu district of Tekirdağ in 1930 that while there had been more than a hundred thousands sheep in the villages three years earlier, the number of sheep had halved by that time.⁷¹⁰

In many important centers, the number of livestock continued to decrease in the early 1930s. In Aydın, for example, whereas the number of sheep and goat was 404,874 in 1929, this number decreased sharply to 272,318 in 1933. In İçel, the number of sheep and goat decreased from 480,927 in 1929 to 321,484 in 1933. In

⁷⁰⁷ Bulut, *Dersim Raporları*, p. 254.

⁷⁰⁸ Akçetin, "Anatolian Peasants in Great Depression," p. 84.

⁷⁰⁹ Dağlar, *Köylerimizden Örnekler*, p. 25.

⁷¹⁰ "Ağnam Resminin Ağırlığı Koyuncululuğumuzu Baltalıyor," *Cumhuriyet*, 06.12.1930.

Kars, the sheep and goat diminished in number from 498,169 to 228,411 between 1929 and 1933. Similarly the number of sheep and goats in Manisa decreased from 824,043 in 1929 to 621,214 in 1933. It is possible to give additional examples.⁷¹¹

No doubt the fact that the peasants abandoned the animal husbandry for other more profitable work played a role in this decrease. Yet, it is reasonable to establish a link between this radical decline and the tax evasion. All these figures particularly imply tax evasion as well as the sell-off of the animals that had become more costly than ever. Indeed, a sudden boom was seen in the number of animals on the market with the gradual decrease of the Livestock Tax rates until the mid-1930s. This was partially caused by a shift of the livestock owners from the “informal economy” to formal and legal transactions.⁷¹²

Some peasants who wanted to hide their animals that were registered in the tax records alleged that their animals had been stolen in order to avoid a possible prosecution and fine by the officials and gendarme. These tactics were so common throughout Anatolia that some novels that told the story of that period include such peasant actions. In Kemal Tahir’s *Sağirdere*, for instance, one of the most hated things in the village community was the Livestock Tax. Therefore, whenever the tax officials came to the village, the peasants hid their animals to avoid paying it. Especially the peasant whose animals had been previously recorded by tax officials lied that their animals had been stolen a short time earlier.⁷¹³

A widespread tactic to avoid paying the tax was to claim that the ages of their animals were under the ages for which the tax was applicable. The Livestock Tax did not include animals below one year old. Therefore, many peasants argued that their

⁷¹¹ T.C. Başvekâlet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü. *Hayvanlar İstatistiği 1929-35* (Ankara: Mehmet İhsan Matbaası, 1936), p. 6, 16, 20.

⁷¹² “Sayım Vergisi,” *Son Posta*, 27.05.1936.

⁷¹³ Kemal Tahir, *Sağirdere*, (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1971), pp. 77, 86-87.

sheep were younger than one year old, and thus exempt from the Livestock Tax. Several discussions and quarrels arose due to disagreements between peasants and tax collectors over the ages of the animals.⁷¹⁴ Many peasants, by declaring and insisting that their sheep and goat were below one year old, attempted to avoid the tax.⁷¹⁵

The tax evasion using such fraudulent means was so widespread that such acts became the subject of humor in village communities. A joke about a peasant who tried to avoid paying the Livestock Tax implies how the peasant resorted to the deceptive methods.

One day an animal-owning peasant named Çavuş Emmi says to İbik Dayı that if my donkey dies, I will skin it and cover my cow with its skin so that I will escape from the Livestock Tax. Thereupon, İbik Dayı suggests that he wear this skin in order to avoid the Road Tax.⁷¹⁶

This popular joke implied Road Tax avoidance as well as the Livestock Tax evasion. Indeed, the peasants exerted a great effort to escape the monetary and labor obligations of the Road Tax. As mentioned above, a considerable part of the peasants throughout the country neither paid the tax nor worked at road building for the government. One way to avoid paying it or fulfilling the work obligation was to run from the tax collectors and gendarmes. Moreover, there was a legal way to overcome the tax: to make additional babies. Indeed, having five children or more exempted the family from the Road Tax in parallel to the pronatalist population policy pursued by the government.⁷¹⁷ Accordingly, some peasants appropriated this exemption of the Road Tax and tried to have a few more babies only to be exempt from the tax. A

⁷¹⁴ From the First General Inspector İbrahim Tali to the Prime Ministry. Taxes that the Collection of which is Unattainable, BCA MGM [30.10/69.457.11], 20.10.1932.

⁷¹⁵ R. Aksoy, *Köylülerimizle Başbaşa*, p. 81.

⁷¹⁶ <http://www.bizimmekan.com/fikra/11741-yol-vergisi.html>.

⁷¹⁷ For the common aspiration of the state elite, bureaucrats and intellectuals for population growth, see *Nüfus Meselesi ve Nüfus Sayımı: Nüfus Sayımı Propagandası İçin Muhtelif Gazetelerde İntişar Eden Yazılar ve Radyoda Verilen Konferanslar* (Ankara: Başvekalet İstatistik Umum Müdürlüğü, 1941).

peasant in a village of Şavşat, for instance, managed to escape from the Road Tax by having five children for four years until one of his sons died.⁷¹⁸ Again, in some villages the number of families with five and more children increased with the Road Tax. In Datça, for example, a remarkable number of village households managed to be exempt from the tax through adding new children to their ranks. Therefore, it was reported that the number of crowded families increased in those days.⁷¹⁹

Peasants especially resorted to several pretexts against the village taxes named *salma* levied by the village headmen or district governors. Especially the *salmas* levied by village headmen upon the demands of schoolteachers or local civil administrators to equip the schools with some tools and apparatus or to build additional classrooms was the most disliked and challenged kind of the village-based taxes. As a peasant observer of the time stated, when village headmen attempted to collect *salma* upon the demand of teachers in order to purchase some tools and equipments for village schools, both headmen and teachers usually encountered the peasants' foot-dragging. Along with those who overtly refused to pay it, some pretended to be ill and wanted to be excused.⁷²⁰ In his detailed village survey, İbrahim Yasa also mentioned about peasants who avoided paying *salma* in Hasanoğlu village of Ankara.⁷²¹

Absconding from Tax Collectors

The most widespread tax evasion strategy of peasants was to disappear whenever they saw or heard the coming of tax officials to the village. In Ardahan, a peasant

⁷¹⁸ "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Köyde Hayat," <http://www.artvinliyiz.com/index.php>. For a similar example, see Özer, *Toprağın Sancısı*, p. 11.

⁷¹⁹ İmamoğlu Mehmed Ali, "Ödeşmek," http://nihatakkaraca.blogspot.com/2007_05_06_archive.html.

⁷²⁰ Mahmut Makal, *A Village in Anatolia*, p. 7.

⁷²¹ Yasa, *Hasanoğlu Köyü'nün*, p. 204.

said to Lilo Linke in 1935 that “The peasants have nothing for themselves. They are so poor that they disappear into the mountains when the tax-collector comes near them.”⁷²²

In some villages, the peasants established an alarm system for the detection of tax officials who were getting closer to the village. In Diyarbakır villages, for example, the Zaza shepherds and peasants, who had sheep and goat in mountains, cunningly devised an original alarm system against tax officials. When they saw a tax official in the mountains, they quickly spread the word about the coming danger by shouting one another from one mountain to another, “the wolf is coming!” (*vêr gamê vêr* in Zazaki). Zaza peasants perceived the tax officials so dangerous that they usually referred to them as wolves.⁷²³

Furthermore, calling the tax official a wolf was in fact a strategy, a secret message concealing what they really meant. Even when tax officials heard this message in the mountains, they understood its literal meaning because the mountains were full of predatory wolves that were a real danger for the peasants living in the mountains and their livestock animals.

As for the Road Tax, in the face of the people’s resistance to it and especially their escape from the tax officials, the local governments authorized the gendarme to arrest those peasants who did not fulfill their obligations and to send them to the road building sites right away. Therefore, in some places the gendarme began to take the control of the roads and streets in order to control whether or not the people had met their Road Tax obligations according to the list of the taxpayers in their hands. They arrested those who have not fulfilled their Road Tax obligations, and then sent them to the road building sites straightaway. Sundays were the best days for hunting Road

⁷²² Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, p. 130.

⁷²³ Orhan Miroğlu, *Hevsel Bahçesinde Bir Dut Ağacı: Canip Yıldırım’la Söyleşi* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2005), p. 53.

Tax evaders because the peasants went down to town markets on that day. Therefore, the gendarme and tax officials controlled the roads between the villages and towns. In Balıkesir, for instance, the gendarme raided villages to arrest Road Tax evaders and arrested 200 peasants on their way downtown in June 1936. Upon this incident, the peasants began to hide quickly and collectively whenever they saw a motor vehicle or gendarme.⁷²⁴

In some Anatolian villages, the peasants picketed a few lookouts at certain points on the roads linking their villages to the towns in order to escape the danger of a probable raid of the gendarme and tax officials, because most of them had not paid their taxes. Whenever a suspicious person resembling a tax collector approached the village, the lookouts immediately informed the village community about the coming danger. Hence, those peasants who defaulted on their taxes left the village for a short time or took shelter in convenient places until the danger had passed.⁷²⁵

In a similar way, fleeing from coffeehouses and village rooms to escape from the tax officials was widespread throughout Anatolian villages. The coffeehouses and village rooms were the first places the tax collectors dropped by in order to look for those peasants who did not pay their taxes. Therefore, whenever the tax collectors with their bags appeared in the villages, the coffeehouses became almost empty immediately.⁷²⁶

Bribing the Tax Officials

During the early Republican era, the majority of state officials including tax collectors lived at the minimum subsistence level. Tax collectors as low-ranking state

⁷²⁴ “Gözcüler,” *Orak Çekiş*, No. 9 (July 20, 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 435.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁶ İmamoğlu Mehmed Ali, “Ödeşmek,” http://nihatakkaraca.blogspot.com/2007_05_06_archive.html.

personnel generally were in a low economic status due to the too low salaries and lack of any social security coverage. Their economic situation led many of them accept bribes especially in hard times. Accepting bribe among state officials was so widespread throughout the country that the inclination of civil servants to bribery was one of the things that came to the attention of a foreigner observer, the General Ambassador of the United States, John Grew. Grew pointed out how low-paid state personnel and even some higher bureaucrats were apt to accept bribe under the guise and name of tip (*bahşiş*).⁷²⁷

Undoubtedly, the corruption of the tax collectors and other finance office bureaucrats aggrieved the peasantry. On the other hand, it was this corruptive feature of the bureaucracy that made possible the peasant resistance to heavy taxation. Such a tendency of state officials, to be more specific, of the tax collectors created an opportunity for peasants to get rid of the government obligations, especially the weight taxes. Indeed, the peasants took the advantage of this tendency of the tax collectors in their resistance to the taxes.

Bribing tax collectors was seen as a method which was the lesser of two evils (*ehven-i şer*). After reaching an agreement with the tax officials and giving a certain sum of money to them, sometimes a quarter of the tax, many peasants managed to avoid paying higher sums.⁷²⁸

Indeed, the bribing tax officials was such a popular way to overcome the government obligations that it is possible to find scenes of sweetheart agreements between tax officials and the peasants. Kemal Tahir, a novelist and a keen observer of the ordinary people's lives in the early Republican era, depicted in his novel *Sağırdere* how the peasants in the grip of heavy tax burden and declining prices

⁷²⁷ Joseph Grew, *Atatürk ve Yeni Türkiye, 1927-1932* (İstanbul: Gündoğan Yayınları, 2002), p. 127, 175.

⁷²⁸ Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 128.

attempted to conceal their livestock or to bribe the tax collectors in order to get rid of the Road Tax obligation. The peasants generally saw the bribe as cheaper than the taxes.⁷²⁹

The RPP politicians' inspection reports also confirm this situation. It was reported from Ünye that the corrupt tax collectors who were in agreement with the peasants were responsible for the widespread Livestock Tax evasion.⁷³⁰ Again, according to a report by the General Inspector İbrahim Tali, the laxity and corruption of the finance department employees paved the way for tax evasion in the region. One responsible factor behind the increasingly growing amount of the outstanding Livestock Taxes in the eastern provinces was the tax collectors. They did not work effectively. Most of them ignored the crucial controls and investigations, in cooperation with the local people in return for minor advantages. Therefore, the General Inspector demanded the application of Clause 230 of the Criminal Law to the tax officials who disregarded their duties.⁷³¹

Direct Confrontation and Protest: Fight against Tax Collectors, Gendarmes, and Women's Tax Protests

In the eyes of the peasants, the tax collectors were not sympathetic persons. The peasantry always considered them as a threat to their economic wellbeing. As mentioned earlier, for the Zaza shepherds in Diyarbakır and probably for most of the Kurdish peasants in the region the tax officials were as dangerous as wolves. They expressed their loathing of taxation by referring to the tax collectors as wolf in their daily talks. As a foreign journalist noted, in the great part of the Anatolia, the

⁷²⁹ Kemal Tahir, *Sağırdere*, pp. 77-87.

⁷³⁰ Inspection and Activity Reports of the Ordu Province, BCA CHPK [490.1/696.365.1], 19.02.1935.

⁷³¹ From the First General Inspector İbrahim Tali to the Prime Ministry. Taxes that the Collection of which is Unattainable, BCA MGM [30.10/69.457.11], 20.10.1932.

peasants regarded the tax collector as “an agent of the devil.”⁷³² As Yıldız Sertel noted, in respect to tax matters, the state and its officials represented “the angel of death” in the eye of the Anatolian peasants.⁷³³

This negative representation of the tax officials and widespread fear of them as a threat to their livelihood along with the deterioration of the economic conditions due to the Great Depression and increasing tax rates provoked widespread hostility towards the tax officials. When they could find no way out, they settled the matter by outright refusal. When avoidance was not possible, they did not hesitate to confront the tax collectors and gendarme forces accompanying the tax collectors.

In this resistance, the first clever way was to mobilize the other local people’s resistance against the tax collectors. One method for this was to release specific subversive rumors regarding taxation or tax officials. When the taxes increased and tension between peasants and tax collectors rose, these kinds of rumors sprang up and circulated among the peasants in some villages. These rumors generally functioned to confront the tax officials or to accuse them of several crimes or immorality in order to provoke the reaction of both the local government and the local populace against them. Thus, the peasants tried to decrease their legitimacy and authority in order to cope with the taxes easily.

For example, a few months after the death of Atatürk, in January 1939, a rumor had swept through the villages of the Poshof district of Kars. The rumor had it that a tax official named Aziz had fired his gun into the air to celebrate the death of Atatürk. Furthermore, he had not been content with firing his gun into the air, but shouted, “From now on we are free! We will regain our old religion!” This rumor was denounced to the security forces and local governor by the people. As soon as

⁷³² Newman, *Turkish Crossroads*, p. 187.

⁷³³ Yıldız Sertel, *Ardımdaki Yıllar*, p. 118.

the local authorities heard this rumor, the General Inspectorate ordered the district governor and the provincial governor to investigate whether or not what the people were talking about was the truth. After detailed investigations, it was understood that there was a tension that stemmed from a disagreement over taxes between the peasants and the tax collector Aziz. Aziz had warned and pressured those peasants who avoided paying their taxes. Therefore, some peasants, especially a peasant named Yakup Ömer, had spread this rumor to set the government, the party, and the people against the tax collector by slandering him.⁷³⁴

Some sorts of rumors advanced various hypotheses prompting a public resistance to the tax officials. Especially a rumor that argued there was chaos and civil war in Ankara was intended to encourage the people to disregard the government's obligation, particularly the taxes. The first days of the post-Atatürk era prepared a ground for such rumors about the intra-elite conflict. In January 1939, a peasant named Dursun Atal living in a village of Trabzon appropriated the political atmosphere that was marked by the uncertainty of the post-Atatürk era. He objected to the tax levied on him and refused to pay it. Therefore, he tried to agitate other peasants to resist the taxes. So as to avoid the tax and to hearten the village community to act in cooperation against the tax, he spread a rumor of a coup-d'état in Ankara. He said, "There is a conflict in the cabinet. İnönü has taken five shots at Celal Bayar and killed him." However, the local authorities figured out why he had spread such unfounded news and prosecuted him immediately.⁷³⁵

Another rumor alleged that a fight to death had broken out between İsmet İnönü and three tax collectors. This rumor spread during the İsmet İnönü's tour of Kastamonu in December 1938. Rumor had it that İnönü had killed three tax

⁷³⁴ İBA [12212-4], 24.01.1939.

⁷³⁵ İBA [12212-4], 11.01.1939.

collectors when he had visited Kastamonu. Upon people's complaints about a tax collector, İnönü had wanted to investigate the situation. When he was investigating the situation, this tax collector together with his two colleagues attacked İnönü. İnönü, in self-defense, shot these three tax collectors to death.⁷³⁶ It was not possible to ascertain who spread this rumor and why from the archival documents. However, it is reasonable to think that those peasants who hated the tax collectors in the region, seeking to justify their fights and resistance to the tax collectors, spread this rumor.

More direct confrontations with the tax collectors, who were accompanied by village headmen and gendarmes, also frequently occurred in the Anatolian countryside. Resistant peasants sometimes objected to the demands of the tax collectors or the amounts levied upon them individually. In 1937, in a village of Cebelibereket (Osmaniye), a peasant named Ömer was invited by the village headman, the council of elders, and the tax collector to the village square to pay his tax debts. However, Ömer declined the invitation of the village headman and the council of elders by saying, "This is dishonesty!" The quarrel between Ömer and the council, headman and tax collector ended up in court. The council, headman and tax collector accused Ömer of insulting state officials who were on the job. The court recognized the council, headman and tax collector as right, and punished Ömer. However, Ömer went for an appeal. The Supreme Court also reached the same decision.⁷³⁷ The peasant Ömer was not able to win his legal struggle; but this example suggests that the peasants resorted to legal actions against their oppressors and heavy taxes.

Sometimes peasants protested the taxes collectively by coming together and staging protests in front of the offices of the local authorities. Especially a protest

⁷³⁶ İBA [12212-4], 16.02.1939.

⁷³⁷ *1937 Temyiz Kararları*, (Ankara: T.C. Adliye Vekaleti Neşriyat Müdürlüğü, 1938), p. 80.

wave of the peasant women that spread throughout the central Anatolia in 1934 stands as a striking example of such protest actions of the peasantry. As mentioned in previous chapters, the government passed the Wheat Protection Tax Law in May 1934 in order to subsidize the wheat purchases of the Agricultural Bank. According to this tax, those people who wanted to grind their wheat at the mills in city and towns centers had to pay a tax. Villages were exempt from this tax. However, many towns in Anatolia were not more than big village, complete with many peasant inhabitants. Furthermore, some of the local governments attempted to tax the mills even in villages. Therefore, right after the tax went into effect, the poor peasants living in towns or villages near to towns began to murmur. Petitioning the government and the newspaper, many of them raised their objections to the implementation of the tax.⁷³⁸

More interestingly, some poor peasant women took to the streets and came together in front of the government offices to protest the tax. In a few months following the implementation of the Wheat Production Tax, a wave of women's protests swept the central Anatolian countryside. On 10 June 1934, fifteen women in Kayseri came together in front of the government office. By shouting in the square before the building, they demanded the decrease of the rate of the Wheat Protection Tax. The security forces did not disperse them. After that, the women went on with their protests in front of the Municipality. When the local authorities told them it was impossible to decrease the tax, they replied by shouting together, "What kind of law is that?" and "What kind of government is that?" In same day, some women came together in front of the government office of the Develi district of Kayseri. They

⁷³⁸ Eşref, "Haymana Halkı Neler Yapılmasını İstiyor?" *Vakit*, 10.10.1934; "Fakir Kasaba Halkı Yemeklik Undan Vergi Alınmaması İçin Hükümetten Rica Ediyorlar," *Köroğlu*, 04.08.1934; "Un Vergisi," *Köroğlu*, 08.12.1934.

shouted slogans against the government and the Wheat Protection Tax. Alarmed by the growing protests, the security forces prosecuted some of them.⁷³⁹

Subsequently poor and old peasant women in the İskilip district of Çorum and Mudurnu district of Bolu gathered in front of the government offices in July 1934. According to the official who reported the events to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, “women made a great fuss in streets and created uproar.” The protesting women, who addressed the local authorities, complained of the Wheat Protection Tax by comparing it to their very low purchasing power and poverty. They demanded the local government reduce the tax rate as much as possible. Undoubtedly, in the short term, the women’s actions failed to compel the local government to reduce the tax to an acceptable level.⁷⁴⁰

Some angry men also protested the tax by collectively applying to the local authorities. In Ankara, some district governors had attempted to tax the peasants in villages on the grounds that they were within the borders of the towns that were subjected to the Wheat Protection Tax. In the end, the small flourmill owners in the villages of Ankara came together and collectively resorted to the Ministry of Finance in order to prevent this wrong and unfair taxation of the district governors.⁷⁴¹

Tax protests and acts of resistance frequently took the form of attacks on the tax collectors. When local or central administrators disregarded the peasants’ grievances and demands, the last resort for peasants was to defend themselves or to intimidate the oppressive tax officials and their escort forces, i.e., gendarme soldiers by attacking them. Given the common public hostility toward taxes, the tax collector often became vulnerable to the attacks of angry poor peasants. During the period,

⁷³⁹ From the Minister of Internal Affairs to the Prime Ministry, BCA MGM [30.10/104.676.24], 14.06.1934.

⁷⁴⁰ From the Minister of Internal Affairs to the Prime Ministry, BCA MGM [30.10/104.676.24], 08.07.1934.

⁷⁴¹ “Köy Değirmenlerinden Alınacak Muamele Vergisi,” *Vakit*, 31.07.1934.

they were the main target for tax anger and were frequently subjected to scorn, plunder, beatings, and even murder.⁷⁴²

In May 1929, the peasants in a village of Urfa openly opposed a census of the livestock animals by the tax officials. Upon the arrival of a gendarme battalion to help the tax officials in the face of the peasant resistance, the quarrel grew into a serious fight. The peasants did not avoid the clash with the gendarmes. At the end of the armed conflict, six peasants were wounded and the gendarme arrested six peasants and seized 350 sheep, although some peasants managed to escape with their animals.⁷⁴³

In April 1930, a peasant in Gırlavik village of Birecik, who had a great deal of tax debt, attempted to flee the village as soon as he saw that the tax official and accompanying gendarmes had arrived. However, the suspicious behavior of the peasant caught the attention of the official and gendarmes. They immediately gave him a stop warning. However, he continued to escape and took shelter in a house. When the gendarmes surrounded him, he took shot at one gendarme soldier and the tax collector to death, and then managed to disappear from sight and to escape from the hands of the gendarmes.⁷⁴⁴

In June 1934, the Konya governorship received an anonymous tip about the Livestock Tax evasion in the Botsa village of Konya. Some of peasants, as the denouncer alleged, had hidden their animals. Then the district governor ordered the tax officials and gendarme soldiers to raid the village to investigate the situation. Indeed, the gendarme and officials discovered a number of animals the taxes for which had not been paid until that time. They subsequently began to expropriate

⁷⁴² For examples from other countries see Burg, *A World History of Tax Rebellions*, p. xx.

⁷⁴³ Public Order Report to the Prime Ministry, BCA MGM [30.10/127.914.14], 26.05.1929.

⁷⁴⁴ From the Minister of Internal Affairs to the Prime Ministry, BCA MGM [30.10/105.684.13], 08.04.1930.

these animals. However, because the night set in, they could not transport these animals to another place but put them to a barn in the village only for that night. At mid-night, a group of peasants, most likely the owners of the expropriated livestock, armed with guns, raided the barn and took their animals from the barn by overriding the gendarmes. The peasants drove the tax officials and gendarmes out of the village.

However, as soon as the provincial governor heard this peasant disobedience, a gendarme battalion was set against the village. The gendarmes wrongly beat many of the peasants regardless of their involvement in the incident. The tax officials, in revenge for the attack on them, overtaxed the peasants. However, the peasants did not lose heart, but stood up against such unjust and brutal treatment of the officials and gendarme soldiers. They appealed to the court by accusing the tax officials and gendarmes of beating, torturing, and overtaxing them unjustly. They alleged that they had been forced to sign the documents affirming the tax evasion under coercion. Therefore, the local government fined them five-times more than had been mandated by law. It is not clear whether they won the case, but it is obvious that they did not bow to the pressures.⁷⁴⁵

Another armed tax resistance took place in the Manavgat district of Antalya. At midnight on 3 June 1937, an armed attack by peasants on a gendarme battalion occurred in a village of Manavgat. The main cause that paved way for the incidents was evasion of the Livestock Tax. On the morning of the same day, upon receiving a denunciation about the animals that had been concealed from the tax officials in Bolasan village, the gendarme station commander in Beşkonak sub-district raided on the village with a battalion and sequestered the livestock the taxes on which had not been paid. On the night of same day, some peasants prepared an ambush for the

⁷⁴⁵ The Incident that Took Place in the Botsa Village of Konya due to the Tax Collection, BCA MGM [30.10/128.923.7], 21.03.1935.

gendarme commander in order to extract revenge for their sequestered animals or to retake their animals. At mid-night, the gendarme was called urgently to the village because of a murder incident. However, when the gendarme battalion got close to the village, it was exposed to a gunfire, which caused the death of one gendarme soldier.⁷⁴⁶

Again, unknown persons attacked a tax collector named Ali Fikri Efendi, when he was on the way downtown after he had collected the taxes in the villages of Düzce in June 1931. The attackers murdered him.⁷⁴⁷ The press also reported similar attacks on tax collectors on duty. In January 1931, for instance, unknown persons murdered the tax collector Tahsin Efendi, who collected a sum of money in one Anatolian village that day. In the evening, a few people, most likely those peasants who had paid Tahsin Efendi, attacked him when he was on the way to town. They murdered and robbed him.⁷⁴⁸ In another case, a peasant shot a tax collector through the head in Muğla in 1936. The court sentenced the murderer to the death penalty and executed the decision within a short time.⁷⁴⁹ Again, a tax collector who had collected about 550 TL in a village was robbed on duty, while he was taking a nap under a tree in his way to town.⁷⁵⁰ Another tax collector who was killed on duty was Raşid Efendi in 1936. He also was murdered by unknown persons after he completed the tax collection in the villages of an Anatolian province.⁷⁵¹

In eastern Anatolia, there occurred many tax-related armed attacks on tax collectors and the gendarme. Some of these attacks grew into uprisings, which have

⁷⁴⁶ From the Secretary of the Minister of Internal Affairs to the Prime Ministry, BCA MGM [30.10/105.686.2], 14.06.1937.

⁷⁴⁷ Payment of 750 Lira to the Family of the Tax Collector Tahsin Killed after the Tax Collection, BCA BKK [30.18.1.2/21.43.5.], 17.06.1931.

⁷⁴⁸ "Maliye Tahsildarı Öldürdü," *Köroğlu*, 24.01.1931.

⁷⁴⁹ "Tahsildarı Vuran Asıldı," *Köroğlu*, 23.05.1936.

⁷⁵⁰ "Tahsildar Uyumaz!" *Köroğlu*, 20.05.1936.

⁷⁵¹ Payment of 520 Lira to the Family of the Tax Collector Raşid Efendi Killed on Duty, BCA BKK [30.18.1.2/62.17.17], 02.03.1936.

been explained with reference to the Kurdish nationalism or backward tribal reactions until today. However, a closer look at such incidents reveals the economic causes, particularly tax matters, behind such risings.

The Buban Rebellion is a good example to economic struggle underpinning the state and society conflicts in eastern Anatolia. In 1934, some villages in Mutki district of Siirt rebelled against the government. This rebellion, called the Buban Rebellion, is usually considered to have been engineered by Kurdish nationalist groups and an unruly tribe motivated by the resistance to Turkish nationalism and state. However, as in many other insurrections in the region, this rebellion also was not against the Turkish state or Turkish nationalist ideology, but against the state itself and state control over the local economic sources and order of things, in the sense that James Scott defines in his latest book *The Art of Not Being Governed*. In other words, these rebellions were to a great extent the efforts of autonomous peasant communities to remain stateless, i.e. a resistance to the “internal colonization.”⁷⁵²

The incident that set the stage for the insurrection in Mutki was the Road Tax and disarmament of the peasantry. The peasants first objected and then rose up to the government, when the tax collectors and the gendarmes attempted to collect the Road Tax and to force those peasants who did not pay the tax to work in road building sites. The disarmament policy, which laid the foundation of the state dominance over the local people and left the peasants without a defense in the face of the threats and attacks of outsiders, also prompted the insurrection. The insurgence lasted about one year at the end of which the army and gendarme put down the rebellion.⁷⁵³

⁷⁵² See James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁷⁵³ Cenani Gürbüz, *Mondros'tan Milenyuma Türkiye'de İsyanlar, Olaylar ve Bölücü Faaliyetler* (İstanbul: Bilge Karınca Yayınları, 2006), p. 92.

Less than one year later, in April 1935, the Kurdish peasants in the Sason district of Siirt rose up against the government officials and security forces. Neither a Kurdish nationalism, nor a foreign power agitated this insurgence. The rebellion was set by the growing tension between the tax collectors and the poor peasants who lived on animal husbandry in mountains. April was the month when the tax collectors began to take the census of the existing taxable livestock of the peasants by touring village by village. During such census taking, there appeared several moments of tension and quarrels between the peasants and the tax collectors, who tried to register each animal. The peasants frequently strived to underreport and to hide their animals. In one of these confrontations, the peasants of some villages in Sason refused to report their animals and did not allow the officials to count their animals. The peasants collectively drove the tax officials out of their villages. Furthermore, they had for a long time engaged extensively in illegal tobacco cultivation and tobacco products smuggling. The tobacco monopoly officials' interventions in the tobacco cultivation also fuelled anxiety among the peasants and caused the fights between the tobacco monopoly officials and the tobacco cultivators.⁷⁵⁴

Upon such widespread non-cooperation of the peasants with the officials and open defiance of the state authority, tax evasion and smuggling, the district governor of Sason named Rıdvan visited some villages in order to warn and persuade the peasants to cooperate with the government. This visit resulted in a fight that led the peasant to revolt eventually. On the day of incident, the district governor, accompanied by gendarme soldiers, tax officials and the *müftü*, went to a mountain village named Gov to talk with livestock owners. Then, the peasants from the Horvat

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

village invited the district governor Rıdvan to their village for a dinner in his honor. However, when he was at the dinner, a furious fight between the officials and the peasants broke out over tax matters. At the end of the fight that grew into a big clash between the officials and the peasants, some peasants murdered the district governor and severely wounded the *müftü*. These peasants, who were affiliated with the Buban Tribe, were accused of murder by the official authorities. Therefore, they had to hide themselves in the mountains and rebelled against the government. The rebellion spread many villages of Sason and transformed into a local peasant rebellion, which attracted many other peasants in the region distressed by similar issues.⁷⁵⁵

Repercussions of Tax Resistance

As stated in Chapter Two, those peasants who could not pay the taxes or avoided paying the taxes frequently sought tax debt relief or demanded a reduction in the tax rates. Widespread complaints and demands regarding the agricultural taxes were accompanied by the rampant tax resistance. In view of such social pressure from below, consequently, the government had to lower the rates of many taxes during the 1930s. The government reduced the Land Tax by transferring the Land Tax revenues to the local governments. The local governments cut the tax rate about 35 percent according to the local conditions.⁷⁵⁶

As for the Livestock Tax, the common complaints and objections as well as the rampant tax avoidance resulted in successive decreases in the rates of the Livestock Tax in 1931, 1932, and 1936. The total amount of tax reductions in 1931

⁷⁵⁵ “Sason Kaymakamı Nasıl Vuruldu?” *Köroğlu*, 12.06.1935. In addition see Reşat Hallı, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nde Ayaklanmalar (1924-1938)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Harb Tarihi Başkanlığı, 1972), p. 156.

⁷⁵⁶ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 12.

and 1932 was between 15 percent and 32.5 percent, as seen in Table 14 below.⁷⁵⁷

However, this decrease did not satisfy the peasantry. Therefore, complaints about this tax did not cease during the early 1930s. Nor did the tax avoidance decrease. Finally, towards the end of 1935, Atatürk, well aware of social discontent with the agricultural taxes and widespread tax avoidance, suggested the government in his speech delivered in the National Assembly to reduce the Livestock Tax.⁷⁵⁸

Consequently, in the beginning of 1936, the government once again had to modify the Livestock Tax by decreasing the tax rates about 41.5 percent on an average, as seen from the Table 15. Thus, the total decrease in the tax rate from 1931 to 1936 reached about 51 percent on an average.

Table 14 - The Livestock Tax Rates between 1924 and 1932.

Livestock Tax	1340 [1924] (piasters)	1930 (piasters)	1931 (piasters)	1932 (piasters)	Reduction (%)
Sheep	23	60	60	50	20
Hair Goat	23	60	60	50	20
Angora	50	50	40	40	20
Cattle	-	125	100	90	32.5
Buffalo	-	200	150	150	25
Donkey	-	60	50	50	20
Horse	-	155	125	125	20
Camel	100	230	200	200	15
Pig	200	350	350	300	15

Sources: This table was prepared according to the data in [Isparta Deputy] Kemal Turan, *Yeni Vergi Kanunları'nın Tatbiki Mahiyeti ve Tediye Kabiliyeti Hakkında Tahliller* (İzmir: Hafız Ali Matbaası, 1931), pp. 79-84; and "İnen Hayvan Vergileri," *Köroğlu*, Nov. 13, 1935; and *Hayvanlar Vergisi Dökümanları* (Ankara: T.C. Ziraat Vekaleti Birinci Köy ve Ziraat Kalkınması Kongresi Yayını, 1939).

⁷⁵⁷ Turan, *Yeni Vergi Kanunları'nın Tatbiki*, p. 84.

⁷⁵⁸ "Cumhurbaşkanı Kemal Atatürk'ün Meclis Açış Nutku," 01.11.1935. See Bilsay Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 2 (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1993), pp. 369-370.

Table 15 - The Livestock Tax Rates after the Reduction in 1936.

Livestock Tax	Before 1936 Rates (piasters)	After 1936 (piasters)	Reduction (%)
Sheep	50	40	20
Hair Goat	50	40	20
Angora	40	30	25
Cattle	90	60	43.4
Buffalo	150	75	50
Donkey	50	25	50
Horse	125	65	48
Camel	200	100	50
Pig	300	100	66.7

Sources: This table was prepared according to the data in “İnen Hayvan Vergileri,” *Köroğlu*, Nov. 13, 1935; and “Hayvan Vergisi Kanunu Kabul Edildi,” *Son Posta*, Jan. 14, 1936; and *Hayvan Vergisi Dökümanları* (Ankara: T. C. Ziraat Vekaleti Birinci Köy ve Ziraat Kalkınması Kongresi Yayını, 1939).

Finally, in view of the continuing wishes, complaints, and tax avoidance, the government needed to lower the rates of the Livestock Tax further, to narrow its scope and to modify the tax assessment and collection methods once again in March 1938. For this aim, reducing the rates, taking horses and donkeys out of the scope of the tax, and giving clarity to the tax assessment and collection procedures, the government tried to redress the peasants’ paramount grievance more thoroughly.⁷⁵⁹

As for the impact of the tax resistance on the Road Tax, the tax avoidance together with the complaints of the peasants about the tax, which were addressed in Chapter Two, pressured the government to lower the tax rates and compulsory-work durations. The tax underwent a considerable reduction in 1931. The tax in cash was discounted at 50-60 percent from 8-10 TL to 4-6 TL. The obligation of working on the roads for those citizens who did not pay the tax in cash also was reduced by 60-66 percent from 10-12 days to 6-8 days. Furthermore, the maximum distance of the

⁷⁵⁹ Us, *Asım Us’un Hatıra Notları*, p. 247.

road building site from the domiciles of the taxpayers was determined as 10 hours drive away instead of the previous 12 hours.⁷⁶⁰

The peasant women's public protests against the Wheat Protection Tax in several central Anatolian provinces in front of local administrations also resonated among the ruling circles in the same way as did the discontent with the other taxes. Alarmed by the women's protests, widespread complaints about the Wheat Protection Tax, and the bureaucratic malfeasance in its implementation, the government had to amend the law a year after its promulgation. The second clause of the law was amended in May 1935 to limit the scope of the tax by exempting all village flourmills and small flourmills even those located around towns and city centers.⁷⁶¹

Apart from this, the government made two motions to forgive some parts of the outstanding taxes in 1934 and 1938. The Law of the Discharge of the Arrears of Taxes (No.2566) (*Vergi Bakayasının Tasfiyesine Dair Yasa*) was passed in the National Assembly on 4 July 1934. According to this law, half of the unpaid taxes was to be forgiven on condition of payment of the remaining half.⁷⁶²

In the face of the daunting amount of the outstanding Land Tax, the government adopted a new tax relief law on 9 June 1938, titled The Discharge of Arrears of the Land Tax Until the End of the Fiscal Year (No.3568) (*Arazi Vergisinin Mali Yıl Sonuna Kadar Olan Bakiyesinin Terkinine Dair Yasa*). With this law, the government accepted forgave the half of the Land Tax debts of those taxpayers who paid the remaining half of their Land Tax debts by the end of 1938.⁷⁶³

⁷⁶⁰ Turan, *Yeni Vergi Kanunları'nın Tatbiki*, p. 82.

⁷⁶¹ See Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 2, p. 327.

⁷⁶² Güneş, "Vergi Aflarının Vergi Mükelleflerinin Tutum ve Davranışları Üzerindeki Etkisi," p. 177.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER FIVE

SMUGGLING: RESISTANCE TO THE MONOPOLIES

Peasants, as consumers, cultivators, or traders, resisted the backbone of the etatist economic policies, specifically the state monopolies, through smuggling. Challenging the strict state control over the everyday economic transactions and overtaxation of some basic consumption goods like salt, sugar, textile, tobacco, alcoholic beverages, and forest products like firewood and timber, peasants strived to reappropriate the economic resources the government had seized from them. Besides tax avoidance, smuggling was the one of the best means for such reappropriation of the economic resources. Despite the punitive measures of the government and propaganda against it, widespread smuggling gained foothold in rural Anatolia during the period.

The restriction of the production, high fees, heavy taxes, the maze of regulations, and the difficulties raised in relations with the state monopolies and monopoly companies led agricultural producers and traders to get involved in smuggling. The high prices of monopoly goods that stemmed from the protectionist economic policies under high tariff rates and the poor quality of these highly priced domestic goods induced the consumers to demand the contraband products. Especially price disparity between smuggled goods and taxed goods encouraged the smuggling.

Briefly, both the discontent of the producers and traders with the strict state control, regulations, heavy taxation, and the discontent of lower-class consumers with the high prices and poor quality of the monopoly products resulted in a great “black economy.” It was largely a survival method for low-income producers,

sellers, and consumers in a repressive tax regimen and interventionist economic system. In other words, the smuggling implies not only the resistance of the producers and traders, but also that of the consumers. Peasants, as both producers and consumers, tried to compensate the unfavorable internal terms of trade by means of smuggling, which enabled them to reappropriate informally and illegally the profit margins and tax revenues targeted by the state.

This smuggling was to such a great extent a social character that I prefer to call it “social smuggling” in resemblance to Hobsbawm’s “social banditry.” That is, first, the smuggling was not under a “monopoly” of a limited number of professionals, organized bands or cross-border smuggling groups of big merchants in urban areas. Rather, it was an informal web of widespread daily economic transaction, in which the great part of the rural population engaged as producers, traders or consumers. Smuggling in the sense of illegal trade across borders through custom stations by organized bands was of course an important part of this black economy. Big smuggling bands and cross-border smugglers carried out some part of smuggling activities. Yet, the small and individual smuggling within the borders in the sense of illicit and informal everyday economic transactions of untaxed items constituted the great part of the activities. In other words, the actors who got involved in it were not a limited number of organized band or merchant, but it diffused throughout society. I mostly deal with this kind of smuggling in the sense of informal and illegal trade and production of bootleg and contraband items within the borders by individuals or small groups.

Second, this smuggling was relatively a life-improving kind of economic activity against the exploitation of the state capitalism thorough state monopolies and certain licensed monopoly firms. Social smuggling, I propose here, served not only

the economic interests of smugglers but also the enhancement of ordinary people's lives through decreasing the burden of the taxes, bureaucratic costs and prices, and increasing the bargaining power of consumers for basic consumption goods. Furthermore, it probably prevented the emergence of provisioning crises by providing the consumers with basic consumption goods, when the state and formal economic institutions fell short of supplying the market with basic consumption goods. In this respect, smuggling in the sense of arms, drugs, and human trafficking are not social smuggling activities, and therefore beyond the scope of this chapter. At the risk of too normative, I think that it is incorrect to put these criminal activities in the same category with the social smuggling.

The government strived to prevent the smuggling activities by various means. The ruling circles had to enact laws against the smuggling. Since the state began to run most of the monopolies, the gendarme directly undertook the tasks of the ruthless Régie-guards in the fight against the smuggling. The government established a smuggling tip-off line and rewarded those people who denounced smugglers with prize money. For the forests, which were completely enclosed by state and licensed timber companies, special rangers were employed against wood and timber smugglers. The rulers propagated anti-smuggling ideas through education, press, and constant propaganda by labeling smuggling as treason and by praising the use of non-smuggled and taxed domestic goods.

When all these measures fell short, the ruling circles began to look for economic recipes in order to eliminate the smuggling. For this aim, some politicians and even Prime Minister İnönü himself proposed to discount the high prices of some items that were subjected constantly to the smuggling. İnönü, after his tour to the eastern Anatolia, recommended the government to lower the custom tariffs on those

goods that were smuggled. Indeed, the government made some reductions, however limited, in the high custom tariffs on sugar and textiles in the second half of the 1930s. Reducing the consumption taxes on some items and accordingly reducing the price disparity between the taxed and smuggled items, the government aimed to discourage the smuggling.

That is to say, the smuggling increased the bargaining power of some producers, traders, and consumers by compelling the government to soften the prices, taxes, and tariff rates that contributed to the price inflation. In addition, the smuggling, undermining the status of monopoly, created an informal duopoly that enabled both the cultivators and consumers to choose the better alternative.⁷⁶⁴ Therefore, the Anatolian people, especially the peasants did not give up the illegal economic transactions throughout the period, even though the smuggling activities sometimes decelerated after the price and tax reductions.

The production and trade of contraband items in Turkey was not peculiar to the Republican era, but dated back to the Ottoman Empire. Smuggling had been a long-standing phenomenon in Ottoman society that had gained new momentum with the establishment of the Régie in the last decades of the Empire. The tobacco producers and traders that had been driven out of their business fields by the Régie had challenged it as well as the Ottoman government by engaging in widespread smuggling activities.⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶⁴ For the duopoly effect of the smuggling, see Fairuz L. Chowdhury, "Smuggling, Tax Structure and The Need for Anti-Smuggling Drive," *Fiscal Frontier*, Vol. 6, (2000).

⁷⁶⁵ See Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908: Reactions to European Economic Penetration* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), pp. 13-40.

In the face of widespread smuggling, the Régie had to establish special armed guards known popularly as *kolcu*.⁷⁶⁶ The tobacco smuggling was so widespread that according to some researchers, conflicts between *kolcus* and smugglers had caused the death of 60,000 people until the Second Constitutional Era.⁷⁶⁷ The most optimistic figure about the casualties in armed clashes between *kolcus* and smugglers, given by Hüseyin Avni, is 20,000 people.⁷⁶⁸

With the Republican regime, the state tobacco monopoly replaced the Régie in 1925. From that time on, the government directly undertook the monopolies or gave out the right of production or trade of specific products to some private companies by contract. The government abolished the *kolcus* and entrusted the gendarme and customhouse guards with the task of fighting against smugglers. The establishment of the state monopolies and imposition of the new taxes once again stimulated smuggling in the 1920s. However, it was the high tariff rates, overtaxation and overpricing of monopoly products, and the etatist economic policies in the 1930s that led to a massive upsurge in smuggling activities.

Dimensions and Primary Causes of Smuggling: “A Crime against Property” and Contestation over Property Rights

Despite the great effort of the government to prosecute smugglers, the great number of people continued to be involved in this activity in anyway. Despite successive laws against smuggling enacted in 1927, 1929, and 1932, and widespread propaganda against the smuggled items, smuggling activities continued to prevail

⁷⁶⁶ During the first years of the Régie administratoin, the number of its special armed guards rapidly increased. From 1887 to 1897, they increased from 3,600 to 6,700. See Quataert, *Social Disintegration*, p. 21.

⁷⁶⁷ Salih Zeki, *Türkiye’de Tütün*, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁶⁸ Hüseyin Avni Şanda, *1908’de Ecnebi Sermayesine Karşı İlk Kalkınmalar* (İstanbul, 1935), p. 40.

throughout Anatolia during the interwar era. It climbed in parallel to the economic crisis, state intervention in the economy, increase in taxes, tariff rates and state monopolies. For example, *İkdam* newspaper reported several smuggling cases by drawing attention to the prevalence of smuggling activities across the country in the mid 1920s.⁷⁶⁹ It is evident from the reports prepared by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1927, 1928 and 1929 on smuggled items caught in some provinces that smuggling activities were not rare in the mid and the late 1920s.⁷⁷⁰

Especially in the 1930s, smuggling activities gained momentum. For example, on 1 April 1932, a newspaper wrote that only the specialized court for smuggling in İstanbul had ruled eleven smuggling cases a day, some of which had been committed in the villages of İstanbul and Adapazarı.⁷⁷¹ In June 1932, in Muğla, the gendarmes had arrested 400 smugglers, 16 of whom had been sentenced to prison only in the last days.⁷⁷² Only within the first week of February 1933, the security forces and Custom Enforcement Officers had detected 40 smuggling cases and caught 43 smugglers along the southern border.⁷⁷³ On 30 August 1933, it was reported that 235 smugglers, 17,000 kilos of smuggled goods, 54,000 rolls of cigarette papers, guns and 800 livestock animals had been seized only within the previous month.⁷⁷⁴ Within the first 15 days of October 1934, the authorities caught 67 smugglers with their 74 horses carrying contraband items. Six of these smugglers were killed and wounded in the armed conflict with the gendarme. The newspaper

⁷⁶⁹ "Sigara Kağıdı Kaçakçıları," *İkdam*, 24.01.1926; "Bursa'da Yakalanan Kaçakçılar," *İkdam*, 13.11.1927.

⁷⁷⁰ Tobacco Smuggling in Afyon, BCA MGM [30.10/180.242.15], 20.01.1927; The Sale of Smuggled Tobacco in the Shops in the Gaziantep City Center, BCA MGM [30.10/180.242.19]; Report of the Ministry of Internal Affairs about the Contraband Items Captured During the Last Three Months in Various Provinces, BCA MGM [30.10/180.242.23], 29.11.1928; The Smuggling Activities that Took Place in 60 Provinces in October, November and December of 1929, BCA MGM [30.10/180.243.1], 01.02.1930.

⁷⁷¹ "Kaçakçılık," *Son Posta*, 01.04.1932.

⁷⁷² "Muğla'da Mahkum Olan Kaçakçılar," *Son Posta*, 02.06.1932.

⁷⁷³ Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 48.

⁷⁷⁴ "Yalnız 1 Ayda Neler Yakalandı," *Köroğlu*, 30.08.1933.

wrote with astonishment, “If these are the contraband items seized within 15 days, imagine those were seized in a year!”⁷⁷⁵

Again, it was reported on 29 June 1936 that just within a week, the gendarmes and custom enforcement officers had caught 53 smugglers with their weapons, 1000 TL, 2 boats and 17 packhorses in western Anatolia.⁷⁷⁶ On 6 October 1936, the security forces reported that 204 smugglers, 5 of them dead and 1 severely wounded had been caught within just the first week of October. There were 6,000 kilos of various stuffs, 11 guns, 663 Turkish Liras, 90 sheep, and 111 packhorses among the seized smuggled items.⁷⁷⁷ When the amount of the smuggled items was proportioned to the number of smugglers in each case, it is possible to think that the great majority of the smuggling activities were not big deals for making fortunes, but relatively small transactions.

The number of the smuggling cases that occupied the courts also gives an idea about the dimensions of the matter. The specialized courts against the smuggling were inundated with smuggling cases. The specialized court in Gaziantep, for instance, was choked with thousands of cases. The court arrived at a decision on reportedly 4250 cases in 1934 alone. The court imposed several fines amounting to 2 millions TL. Despite such high numbers, the authorities estimated that those smugglers who were taken to the court were only about two-thirds of all smugglers. That is to say, there were many who managed to escape from the wrath of the government and continued to transact business in “the black economy.”⁷⁷⁸

The civil courts were also full of such smugglers. According to the Justice Statistics, the number of smuggling cases prosecuted by the civil courts in 1937 was

⁷⁷⁵ “Kim Kâr Ediyor?” *Köroğlu*, 17.10.1934.

⁷⁷⁶ “Bir Haftada 53 Kaçakçı,” *Köroğlu*, 29.07.1936.

⁷⁷⁷ “5 Kaçakçı Mortiyi Çekti,” *Köroğlu*, 07.10.1936.

⁷⁷⁸ “Kaçakçılara Hiç Aman Yok,” *Son Posta*, 30.01.1935.

1033.⁷⁷⁹ That is to say, the courts had to deal with more than two cases every day. Although even these figures show the existence of the widespread smuggling activity, this was only the tip of the iceberg because most of the smuggling cases were handled in special courts.



Smugglers caught in the villages of Tokat. They were peasants who engaged in tobacco and *rakı* smuggling. “Tokat’ta Kaçakçılarla Mücadele,” *Son Posta*, 03.06.1935.

Indeed, one year later, in 1938, a contemporary observer admitted, “the smuggling maintains its dominance, and triumphs despite the struggle of the state organizations that costs millions of Turkish Liras.”⁷⁸⁰ In contrast to the anti-smuggling propaganda of the government calling the smugglers “traitors” and “degenerates,” the poor peasants and especially those who were living in the eastern provinces saw it as a way out for themselves in the face of the high-cost of living and provisioning problems that the government was not able to solve. Furthermore, for many people, the smuggling was an “honorable” and “glorious” activity due to the risks it entailed

⁷⁷⁹ “Adliye İstatistiklerine Göre Memleketimizde Cürümler ve Mücrimler,” *Polis Dergisi*, No. 10 (May 1, 1940), p. 43.

⁷⁸⁰ Ali Enver Togsoy, “Cenub Hudutlarımızda Kaçakçılık,” *Resimli Ay*, No.28 (June, 1938), p. 20.

and the benefits it provided for the local people.⁷⁸¹ This “honorable” and “glorious” everyday informal economic activity in which the peasantry were mostly involved especially concentrated on such items as tobacco products (tobacco, cigarette, cigarette paper, and carbon paper), salt, sugar, printed and cotton fabrics and clothes, and forest products such as timber and wood.

Primary Causes

The main cause for smuggling was the strict state control over the economy through the state monopolies and state factories. The state monopolies, overtaxation, and limitations on production and trade of some monopolized cash crops and basic consumption goods hit many tobacco cultivators, tobacco and cigarette traders, forest farmers, *rakı* distillers, grape cultivators, vintners, salt and sugar traders, and many weavers and mobile textile traders throughout Anatolian countryside. As long as the state pursued more interventionist economic policies, the more and more people needed to be involved in the smuggling activities. Those people who insisted on continuing their informal economic activities, which the government was not able to monitor and tax, automatically fell into the smuggler category.

In addition, the limited production of the state monopolies and domestic factories under the market protected by the high custom walls raised against the free importation did not meet the needs of the people. For the majority of low-income consumers, especially those who lived in rural areas, the basic consumption goods produced or marketed by the state monopolies and state factories were by no means easily available or accessible. Furthermore, even when accessible, they were both

⁷⁸¹ Kuvvâlcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 51.

expensive and poor in quality. In addition, especially in the eastern parts of the Anatolia, not only their quality, but also their amount did not meet the local demand. The fabrics and clothes produced by the big textile factories, for instance, did not reach the consumers easily, particularly the peasants in distant places because of the difficulties of transportation.⁷⁸²

The price differentiation in two different but interrelated levels also set the scene for the smuggling activities. First, the prices of heavily taxed monopoly products and domestic manufactures were too high for consumers with limited purchasing power. Although the agricultural prices declined sharply with the economic crisis, the prices of the processed agricultural products and other manufactured goods did not decrease proportionally. On the contrary, the protectionist policies and state monopolies undermining the competition further elevated the prices of the industrial commodities or prevented the sharp price declines at least. In other words, the heavily taxed legal products marketed under uncompetitive market conditions were too expensive as compared to the informally produced and marketed untaxed products by smugglers.

Second, there was another great price disparity between the expensive and highly taxed homemade products or legally imported goods and the foreign goods in neighboring countries. The high tariff rates made the imported items unaffordable for lower-class consumers. In addition, the government imposed several quota restrictions on the goods imported from the neighboring countries. Therefore, even the eastern regions had to buy industrial goods from the western provinces. However, this domestic trade route was more costly than the cross-border trade because of the many taxes on the domestic goods, compulsory insurance premiums, and

⁷⁸² Halûk Cillov, *Denizli El Dokumacılığı Sanayii* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi İktisat ve İktimaiyat Enstitüsü Neşriyatından-İsmail Akgün Matbaası, 1949), p. 147.

transportation costs. Consequently, these expensive goods lost their charm for local customers living in the countryside, especially inner and eastern parts of Anatolia. That is to say, the price differentiation between the domestic market and the neighboring markets paved the way for the cross-border smuggling.⁷⁸³

The prolongation of the economic and social ties of the eastern provinces to the Syrian markets, especially Aleppo and Damascus, also played a role in cross-border smuggling activities. The establishment of the Turkish Republic within a narrower geography than that of the Ottoman Empire caused the interruption of the age-old commercial relations between the regions, which were in close proximity to each other. The new borders of the nation-state restricted the cross-border mobility and connections of the people with their economic partners and relatives. In addition, the new nationalist regime aimed to tie the Kurdish-populated eastern and southeastern frontier zones to the western Turkey economically and culturally. Indeed, the main prerequisite of the newly established Turkish nation-state was the integration of the national economy within the borders of the Republic of Turkey.⁷⁸⁴

However, since the eastern part of Turkey had long depended economically on the north-Arabian Peninsula, breaking the cross-border ties proved to be difficult for the Turkish government. Indeed, Elbistan, the western edge of the southeast, continued to export cattle, carpet, wool and other raw materials to Syria and import various goods from Aleppo even in the 1930s. Although Elbistan began to trade with İstanbul and Mersin during the Great War, the old route of trade with Aleppo remained alive during the Republican period. Again, Alexandretta (İskenderun) had long operated as a port of eastern Anatolia. With the Republican era, the port of Mersin supported by the Republican government began to compete with the port of

⁷⁸³ Kuvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 47.

⁷⁸⁴ See Togsoy, "Cenub Hudutlarımızda Kaçakçılık," p. 21.

Alexandretta under the French mandate. However, the latter continued to be the most important door of eastern Anatolia for contraband items until the annexation of Hatay into the Turkish Republic in 1939.⁷⁸⁵ Perhaps, that is the reason why the Turkish government made a great effort to take control of Hatay, a province including Alexandretta, which has never been mentioned by scholars so far.

Again, the tribes and the peasants who engaged in animal husbandry and trade in eastern Anatolia also continued their cross-border transactions as they had been in the past. Due to the new national borders and the national customs policy, all these economic transactions, which had long been carried out without any restriction, fell into the category of smuggling.

Another factor that boosted the smuggling was the local needs and tastes of consumers. The domestic goods generally did not appeal to the local needs and tastes of the consumers in the rural areas. For instance, the tobaccos and cigarettes produced by the monopoly factories were not attractive to peasant smokers. Again, Anatolian peasants, both in the east and west, did not like the styles and colors of the Sümerbank fabrics and clothes. According to the peasants' lifestyle, the pants, shirts, and jackets were too close-fitting, delicate, and perishable. Leaving aside their needs for more economic clothes, they needed more wide-cut and loose-fitting clothes in order to be able to move more quickly and freely when they were working on the land, in the vineyards and barns. In the Anatolian provinces, especially in the eastern parts, the peasants were used to wearing more wide-cut pants, especially baggy trousers.⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸⁵ Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, pp. 47-52, 71.

⁷⁸⁶ Even in the villages of Ankara, the peasants did not like ready-made dresses sold by Homemade Products Market (*Yerli Mallar Pazarı*). Instead, they preferred to buy their clothes and suits from the mobile peddles of textile in Sheepmarket (*Koyunpazarı*). The pants marketed in the Homemade Products Market were tight, too fit, and not in the form of the baggy trousers, which made the

Again, the men and women preferred to buy thick durable cotton textiles and clothes due to their low costs. Women, both in the east and west preferred more colorful silk fabrics, printed cloth and headscarves. Therefore, the new textiles and clothes of Sümerbank did not appeal to the peasants' local tastes, lifestyles or habits. What is more, it is a well-known reality that the homogenization of the local society was the main ambition of the Republican rulers. However, the great majority of the peasants refused to pay for such homogenizing clothes, instead buying smuggled ones appealing their own tastes. It was reported that the goods with eastern prints, colors and patterns produced in Syria and Armenia were far more appealing and cheaper than the domestic goods for the local people of the eastern provinces. Consequently, the smuggling of these highly sought after fabrics and clothes was widespread in the region.⁷⁸⁷

As for timber and wood smuggling, the peasants also resisted the strict state control over the forests. As mentioned in Chapter One, the Republican government saw the forests as an important source of revenue, leasing them out to the big timber factories. In addition, for the profitable timber exportation and the newly rising cellulose and paper industry, the government needed to monopolize the forests and restrict the peasants' free exploitation of them. Therefore, deprivation of their one of the most important economic resources because of bureaucratic restrictions and difficulties in acquiring licenses from the forestry administration to cut timber, and the insufficient provisioning of wood and timber for wood works and carpentry resulted in the illicit timber and wood cutting and trade. Despite several regulations, ordinances in 1924 and 1925, and finally the Forest Law promulgated in 1937, all of

peasants uncomfortable during their agricultural work. Therefore, they did not buy these pants. See Berkes, *Bazı Ankara Köyleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma*, p. 55.

⁷⁸⁷ Hüseyin Koca, *Yakın Tarihten Günümüze Hükümetlerin Doğu-Güneydoğu Politikaları: Umumi Müfettişlikten Olağanüstü Hal Bölge Valiliğine* (Konya: Mikro Yayınları, 1998). p. 474.

which restricted the peasants' timber and wood cutting and the making of wooden utensils, the peasant insisted on cutting timber and wood clandestinely.

For all these reasons, smuggling activities gained impetus throughout Anatolia. Diverting the economic resources to society rather than to the state, smuggling enabled the peasants to get rid of the indirect taxes and high-profit margins reflected in the prices of the monopoly products and the other taxed goods. Indeed, smuggling was rampant during the late 1920s and the early 1930s. The government prepared special reports upon the increasing smuggling activities in 1928 and 1929. According to the reports, the transactions of the contraband items were widespread throughout all provinces of the country. Among the main items subjected to smuggling were tobacco, cigarette paper, carbon paper (used as cigarette paper), salt, *rakı*, wine, wood, and timber.⁷⁸⁸ In addition, as will be discussed below, cotton and silk clothes, printed fabrics and clothes, and sugar shifted into the “informal economy” in the countryside especially after the imposition of high tariff rates on these products.

The government took strict measures against smuggling as stated below. However, whatever measures the government took, the peasants did not give up the advantages of such informal economic relations. Smuggling gained a foothold in the social and economic context in which the Great Depression, the etatist economic policies, high taxes and import duties hit the economic standing of the ordinary people hard. In this sense, the smuggling, except for that by the big organized bands, can be seen as a part of the class struggle between the propertied classes, the state and the low-income people. Indeed, for the ruling circles, the smuggling fell into the

⁷⁸⁸ Report of the Ministry of Internal Affairs about the Contraband Items Captured During the Last Three Months in Various Provinces, BCA MGM [30.10/180.242.23], 29.11.1928; The Smuggling Activities that Took Place in 60 Provinces in October, November and December of 1929, BCA MGM [30.10/180.243.1.], 01.02.1930.

category of crimes against property. *The Polis Dergisi* (the Police Periodical) of the time put smuggling under the title of crimes against the property.⁷⁸⁹

The great part of this “crime against property” was committed by the low-income ordinary people, especially poor peasants in rural areas and frontier zones. As noted by an observer, in the rural areas, the smugglers were all poor men striving to make ends meet; they were not like the big drug smuggling bands who made fortunes.⁷⁹⁰ The newspaper *Köroğlu*, though it criticized smuggling, could not help admitting that there were many people who lived on the moderate earnings from the various kinds of smuggling activities.⁷⁹¹ Many people engaged in this illicit trade as a way out of poverty. Indeed, poverty fed the smuggling. In a trial of two smugglers in April 1935, the defendants alleged that they had had to get involved in smuggling because of their poverty.⁷⁹²

Tobacco Products Smuggling

What the tobacco smuggling meant is best described in the Tobacco Monopoly Law. According to the laws, the following acts fell into the category of smuggling: cultivating and harvesting tobacco without official permission; cultivating much more tobacco than the amount previously reported to the government; stocking or selling tobacco and tobacco products, which were produced under no control and permission of the tobacco monopoly; trade and consumption of tobacco products without the official, legal stamps and trademarks of the tobacco monopoly; selling

⁷⁸⁹ “Adliye İstatistiklerine Göre Memleketimizde Cürümler ve Mücrimler,” *Polis Dergisi*, No. 10 (May 1, 1940), p. 43.

⁷⁹⁰ Barbro Karabuda, *Goodbye to the Fez: A Portrait of Modern Turkey*, trans. by Maurice Michael (London: Denis Dobson Books, 1959), p. 79.

⁷⁹¹ “Kaçak,” *Köroğlu*, 13.04.1932.

⁷⁹² “Ağır Bir Duruşma,” *Son Posta*, 10.04.1935.

tobacco and tobacco products outside the places and prices that were determined by the tobacco monopoly; affixing fake symbols, stamps or trademarks to the non-monopoly products; importing tobacco or tobacco products from other countries without official permission; and selling the products of the monopoly which had been stolen from the custom warehouses.⁷⁹³

The main factor fuelling this smuggling was the overpricing of tobacco products by the tobacco monopoly. The prices of tobacco products became the subject of widespread dissatisfaction among the low-income people, particularly the peasants, who paid comparatively high prices for the poor quality brand *Köylü*. Furthermore, the tobacco packages generally did not include an adequate number of cigarette papers, which caused extrapayment for cigarette papers. As a result, people attempted to buy cheaper smuggled tobacco and cigarette papers.⁷⁹⁴ In addition, those traders and street hawkers who wanted to acquire official permission for the tobacco trade were obliged to pay between 5 TL and 20 TL to the monopoly administration.⁷⁹⁵ These payments led the low-income traders who found such fees high to trade in tobacco products without acquiring an official permission.

It is reasonable to think that the tobacco products of the state monopoly could not meet the demands of the all consumers living in the countryside in isolated, distant or mountain villages. Therefore, there was a consumer base for the smuggled, cheaper, readily available and sometimes higher quality tobaccos, cigarettes, and cigarette papers. Briefly, the poor quality tobacco products at high prices and lack of

⁷⁹³ See Articles 7, 13, 83, 98, 103 of the Tobacco and Tobacco Monopoly Law, No. 1701, Date. 28.06.1930, *Düstur III*, Vol.11, p.1804.

⁷⁹⁴ Even as early as 1926, *İkdam* reported that the cigarette paper smuggling had become widespread due to the lack of enough cigarette papers in tobacco packages and the high prices of the cigarette papers and tobacco. "Sigara Kağıdı Kaçakçıları," *İkdam*, 24.01.1926.

⁷⁹⁵ About the license fees, see Emiroğlu, *Türkiye'de Vergi Sistemi: Üçüncü Kitap, İnhisarlar ve Devlet Emlâki*, p. 49.

enough cigarette papers led the peasants to pay for more economical and sometimes higher quality tobaccos, cigarettes, and cigarette papers.⁷⁹⁶

In respect to the tobacco cultivators, the tobacco monopoly, so to speak, compelled them to engage in smuggling. The unattractive prices offered by the tobacco monopoly, long and costly bureaucratic procedures, storage and transportation costs, fraudulent treatments and malfeasance by the monopoly experts, long delays in the payments to the cultivators, and the many hardships raised during the selling of the tobacco to the tobacco monopoly or related companies all led many peasant to sell their crops to smugglers. The smugglers, free from the taxes and other costs, did not hesitate to offer relatively higher prices to the cultivators. Sometimes the cultivators were directly involved in smuggling by trading their own produce. The ban on tobacco cultivation in some places that previously had subsisted on tobacco farming also led those farmers who had long engaged in tobacco cultivation to the illegal cultivation and trade of tobacco.

The smugglers were able to sell the tobacco products at lower prices than the monopolies because their costs were lower than those of the monopoly administration. The smuggled tobacco products were less processed and untaxed, which gave them a tremendous price advantage over the monopoly goods. The somewhat high prices of the monopoly products made it possible for the smugglers to enjoy the profits from the sales even below legal market prices. This also encouraged the smuggling activities.

Indeed, as addressed by a deputy in the National Assembly, despite the sharp decline in tobacco prices, the cigarette and tobacco product prices did not decrease proportionally. This growing price disparity was one of the causes for the smuggling.

⁷⁹⁶ Ertuğrul Ökten, "Cumhuriyet'in İlk Yıllarında Tütün," in *Tütün Kitabı*, ed. by Emine Gürsoy Naskali (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2003), p. 174.

The decline in the prices of tobacco as raw material in spite of the high prices of the tobacco and cigarette as processed products encouraged the peasants to enjoy the high profit margins instead of underselling their crops to the tobacco monopoly. For that reason, in 1933, some deputies suggested reductions in cigarette prices in order to decrease the rampant smuggling activities.⁷⁹⁷ Similar ideas repeatedly were put forward in the National Assembly in 1935 in the face of the persisting challenge of smuggling.⁷⁹⁸

Probably due to the high prices of the monopoly products, the people either decreased their consumption or substituted the monopoly products with the cheaper smuggled ones. In December 1931, according to the authorities, 70 percent of Kütahya peasants were consuming smuggled tobacco.⁷⁹⁹ In the same year, it was reported that the smuggling was so out of control in Adana, Antep and Urfa that the tobacco and cigarette sales of the tobacco monopoly had decreased almost three-fold in the previous few years. Most of the people in these provinces were reportedly consumers of smuggled tobacco.⁸⁰⁰

The uncontrolled tobacco and tobacco products smuggling evidently maintained its strong position throughout the 1930s. In 1935, Ali Rana Tarhan, the Minister of Customs and Monopolies, admitted that the tobacco and cigarette sales of the monopoly administration was 400,000 tons less than the previous year owing to the high prices and overtaxation of cigarettes.⁸⁰¹ That is to say, probably the cheaper smuggled tobacco products substituted the monopoly products.

⁷⁹⁷ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 29.04.1933, p. 134.

⁷⁹⁸ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 04.05.1935, p. 43. The Session about the 1935 Budget of the Monopoly Administration: Hüsnü Kitapçı (Muğla Deputy): "The tobacco products of the Monopoly Administration were too expensive. If the Monopoly Administration reduces the prices and increases the consumption of the tobacco products marketed by the monopoly, it will struggle against the smuggling more effectively."

⁷⁹⁹ "Kaçakçılar," *Köroğlu*, 10.12.1931.

⁸⁰⁰ "İşe Bakın!" *Köroğlu*, 12.12.1931.

⁸⁰¹ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 04.05.1935, p. 43.

The price discrepancy between the highly-taxed cigarettes sold in urban areas and those lowly-taxed cigarettes that were marketed in rural areas also paved the way for the cigarette smuggling. In 1932, *Köylü*, which was put on sale only in villages, was about 6-7 piasters per box whereas the other brands marketed in towns and city centers were between 15 and 60 piasters per box. Therefore, the low-income urban dwellers often demanded the sale of the *Köylü* in the town and city centers. In parallel to this demand, although the sale of *Köylü* was illegal in cities and towns, many smugglers brought it to the city and town centers and sold with a profit margin. Operating as an incentive mechanisms for smuggling, this price differentiation, as well as the strong demand from the majority of the low-income groups in urban areas led the smugglers, most of whom were peasants, to buy large amounts of *Köylü* at low prices in villages for sale in towns and big cities by adding a small profit margin.⁸⁰² In 1932, the newspapers wrote that the smuggled *Köylü* cigarettes were being consumed in large quantities in İstanbul although its sale in cities and towns was forbidden.⁸⁰³ In another newspaper report dated 1934, the legal licensed tobacco sellers complained of the widespread illicit trade of *Köylü* cigarettes in their towns, which caused huge loss of sales for them.⁸⁰⁴

Of the acts that the laws considered smuggling, the underreporting or hiding of tobacco that had been cultivated and harvested for private use or sale prevailed during the period as the most important sources of illegal transactions. Contrary to Article 83 of the Tobacco and Tobacco Monopoly Law, there were many tobacco cultivators who cultivated much more tobacco than they reported to the monopoly administration for their own use or for trade on the sly. Indeed, because the

⁸⁰² “Tesadüfen Yakalanan Kaçakçı,” *Son Posta*, 16.03.1932.

⁸⁰³ “İstanbul’da Bu Sigaradan İçenler Takip Ediliyor,” *Son Posta*, 07.12.1932; “İstanbul’da Köylü Cıgarası İçilmez,” *Son Posta*, 15.12.1932.

⁸⁰⁴ In Ayrancık, *Köylü* cigarette was traded illicitly and the tobacco sellers took a financial bath. “Halkın Köşesi,” *Köroğlu*, 08.08.1934.

monopoly experts attempted to exploit them or the authorized companies offered prices that were too low, the tobacco cultivators produced some tobacco secretly and sold it in the market or to smugglers surreptitiously.⁸⁰⁵

Indeed, as mentioned before, the tobacco cultivators were deeply discontented with the tobacco monopoly and other legal tobacco companies that tried to exploit them as much as they could. For instance, according to a newspaper report dated 1 February 1932, a tobacco farmer in İzmir, upon the monopoly's offer of very low price like 7.5 piasters per *okka* for his tobacco crops, grew very upset at the monopoly administration and set his 38 bales of tobacco on fire to protests the tobacco monopoly.⁸⁰⁶ Indeed, there were many tobacco cultivators in the same situation throughout Anatolia. Probably many cultivators in same difficult situation did not choose to destroy their produces; but instead they were involved in smuggling.

In 1927, Mahmut Yesari, in his novel *Çulluk*, about the lower classes in the 1920s, depicted how the tobacco farmers, who did not have a right to smoke or to sell their crops freely, engaged in tobacco smuggling, called popularly "*ayıngacılık*." They often concealed the smuggled cut rags in their tobacco cases. Many tobacco cultivators was set aside some so-called "waste" or "garbage" tobacco leaves they commonly called chaff (*saman*) for sale secretly in the market as cut rags.⁸⁰⁷

Such kinds of acts continued into the late 1930s. Peasants who were depressed by the tax burden and by too low tobacco prices the state monopoly and other legal buyers offered attempted to sell their tobacco secretly without official permission. One of them was a peasant named Rahmi from the Gönen district of Balıkesir. Since the American Tobacco Company coerced him to undersell the

⁸⁰⁵ Ökten, "Cumhuriyet'in İlk Yıllarında Tütün," p. 175.

⁸⁰⁶ "Tütününü Ateşe Verip Yakan Çiftçi," *Son Posta*, 01.02.1932.

⁸⁰⁷ Mahmut Yesari, *Çulluk* (İstanbul: Oğlak Yayıncılık, 1995), especially see Chapter 2 of the book.

tobacco crops harvested in 1935, he refused the offer of the company. Thereupon, he decided to sell his crops himself to the consumers stealthily. Nonetheless, he was unable to pay the taxes and his debts. Therefore, as a last resort, in order to escape from his defaulted taxes and debts he decided to set his small house on fire. Upon the denunciation by the usurer Mustafa from the same village, he was taken to the court. The communist newspaper, *Orak Çekiç* (Hammer and Sickle) wrote about him, “The peasant Rahmi was neither firesetter nor smuggler. He was only one of those peasants who was devastated and dissolved.”⁸⁰⁸

Likewise, according to an interview of a newspaper correspondent with the peasants in the tobacco producing villages of the Atabey sub-district of Isparta in 1934, the tobacco farmers complained of the tobacco monopoly with one voice and admitted that they sold their crops illegally. First, they condemned the monopoly administration that aggrieved them by “paying chickenfeed for their crops.” Second, the peasants complained that the tobacco monopoly did not purchase the tobacco in good time, but often too late. Therefore, the peasants were compelled to sell off a few kilos of their tobacco crops illegally so as to be able to afford to buy wheat for food. Because of this, they were generally caught by the gendarmes and sometimes put in prison.⁸⁰⁹

The story of the tobacco farmer Ruşid also illustrates the tobacco smuggling of a farmer by setting some tobacco aside for sale clandestinely. According to a court record dated 1937, Ruşid, who was supposed to harvest 356 kilos of tobacco, turned in only 254 kilos to the tobacco monopoly. He had probably sold one-third of his

⁸⁰⁸ “Köylü Rahmi Ne Kaçakçı Ne de Kundakçı,” *Orak Çekiç*, No. 6 (Mar. 15, 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 409.

⁸⁰⁹ Ragıp Kemal, “İslamköy ve Atabey Halkı Ne İstiyor?” *Vakit*, 25.10.1934.

crops at higher prices than the tobacco monopoly had offered. Therefore, the court fined him 202 TL and 50 piasters.⁸¹⁰

The situation report dated 24 July 1935, written by Talat Demirsoy, the Lieutenant Governor of Trabzon to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, emphasized the prevailing tobacco smuggling in the countryside of his province. According to the report, one of the most widespread illegal acts was tobacco and cigarette paper smuggling. The local government and security forces failed to prevent this illegal trade. The main reason for the failure of the fight against the smuggling in Trabzon was that the monopoly administration was not able to purchase all of the tobacco crops in the stocks of the peasants. “If the tobacco in the hands of the peasants were not purchased by the monopoly,” wrote Lieutenant Governor Demirsoy, “it would be very difficult to prevent smuggling.” According to Demirsoy, since they paid their taxes and bought their foods with the money that came from the tobacco, it was not difficult to understand why these peasants and even their children of 7 years old were actively involved in smuggling.⁸¹¹

Anatolia was full of such tobacco peasants who engaged in the illegal tobacco trade. In Artvin during the 1920s and 1930s, it is understood that the tobacco cultivators used some part of their crops for their private needs and sold the remaining part illegally.⁸¹² In a similar vein, those peasants who were dissatisfied with the prices of the tobacco monopoly in the Karaçay village of Ankara did not hesitate to engage in tobacco smuggling, which they called commonly *ayıngacılık* during the 1920s and 1930s.⁸¹³

⁸¹⁰ 1937 *Temyiz Kararları*, (Ankara: T.C. Adliye Vekaleti Neşriyat Müdürlüğü, 1938), p. 139.

⁸¹¹ The General Situation Report of the Trabzon Province by the Lieutenant Governor of Trabzon Talat Demirsoy, BCA MGM [30.10/65.433.4], 24.07.1935.

⁸¹² “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Köyde Hayat,” <http://www.artvinliyiz.com/index.php>.

⁸¹³ <http://www.karasar.com/yeni/html/elsanat.htm>.

Some police cases imply that tobacco peasants in the tobacco producing villages near the big cities brought their tobacco to the cities for sale. In February 1932, a peasant named Mehmetoğlu Ahmet from Tavşancıl, one of the tobacco producing villages with its neighboring villages like Tütünçiftlik (Tobacco Farm) of Kocaeli, was caught in İstanbul with 42 tobacco packages, each of which was full of an half *okka* cut rag.⁸¹⁴

According to the above-mentioned report on Trabzon, the main form of the tobacco and cigarette paper smuggling in the region was to bring the smuggled tobacco and cigarette papers from the tobacco producing villages or the southern provinces to the towns and the city center.⁸¹⁵

İbrahim Balaban, a famous painter who depicted the poor peasants, also tells in his memoirs about how his family got involved in the illicit trade and cultivation of tobacco. In the mid-1930s, his family lived on tobacco farming in the Seçköy village of Bursa. However, as many other farmers did, his father also tried to take advantage of smuggling by keeping some part of their tobacco crop for sale in the market after giving the rest to the state monopoly. They marketed the remaining tobacco as cut rags at higher prices clandestinely. In addition to the tobacco smuggling, when they attempted to cultivate the cannabis sativa in 1937 illicitly, İbrahim Balaban ended up in prison for three years.⁸¹⁶

In the eastern villages, although the cross-border tobacco smuggling was widespread, the tribes and peasants, especially in Dersim, Muş, Siirt and Bitlis, produced tobacco without any official permission during the 1920s and 1930s. Many peasants, on their a few *dönüms* of land, generally preferred to produce tobacco as a

⁸¹⁴ “Bir Köylü Muhakeme Ediliyor,” *Son Posta*, 21.02.1932.

⁸¹⁵ The General Situation Report of the Trabzon Province by the Lieutenant Governor of Trabzon Talat Demirsoy, BCA MGM [30.10/65.433.4], 24.07.1935.

⁸¹⁶ http://www.gorselsanatlar.org/roportajlar-ve-makaleler/**ibrahim-balaban-roportaji.

more profitable cash crop without reporting it to the government. After harvest, they immediately sold their tobacco to the neighboring tribes and towns together with smuggled cigarette papers.⁸¹⁷

In March 1932, in the rural areas of Bitlis, the security forces detected and seized 1100 rolls of cigarette paper and 657 kilos of smuggled tobacco. Just one month later, the gendarmes confiscated 460,000 smuggled cigarette paper and tobacco in the villages of Bitlis. Likewise, in a village of Muş, which had a reputation for the involvement of each peasant in smuggling, 190,000 smuggled cigarette papers were captured by the security forces.⁸¹⁸ In 1936, the gendarme commandership in a frontier province, Mardin, reported several cases of tobacco and cigarette paper smuggling.⁸¹⁹

Sometimes such activities of the peasants engendered serious tensions and fights with the security forces. In 1933, the monopoly administration officers raided the Halikan and Harabak villages of Sason and attempted to destroy the illegal tobacco farms. However, the peasants did not let them to do so by confronting them openly.⁸²⁰

This situation continued until when the government took a decisive action against those peasants who cultivated tobacco without official permission for both smuggling and their own use. In 1935, the authorities increased the dose of the intervention against Sason's smuggling peasants. This spurred widespread discontent in the region. The growing popular discontent emanated from such anti-smuggling

⁸¹⁷ Gürbüz, *Mondros'tan Milenyuma Türkiye'de İsyânlar*, p. 93.

⁸¹⁸ "Bitlis Civarında 460 Bin Kaçak Cigara Kağıdı Ele Geçirildi," *Son Posta*, 09.04.1932.

⁸¹⁹ Crimes Committed during the Last Six Months in the Mardin Province by July 1, 1936, BCA MGM [030.10/40.239.11].

⁸²⁰ Gürbüz, *Mondros'tan Milenyuma Türkiye'de İsyânlar*, p. 93.

and anti-tax evasion campaigns of the government gaining momentum in 1935 caused a peasant uprising called the Second Sason Rebellion.⁸²¹

Other than cultivating tobacco illicitly, there were many other forms and ways of tobacco and tobacco product smuggling. The newspapers of the time were full of reports of peasants who illicitly stocked and traded tobacco or tobacco products. Many peasants hid the contraband tobacco and tobacco products in their homes or in secret places to hard to find such as inside streams, water wells, or forests. Some of the smugglers transported the tobacco packages and rolls or notebooks of cigarette papers on their packhorses or within their backpacks from one place to another. Some used the postal service to conceal their activities. More organized smugglers imitated the packages, symbols, labels, and stamps of the tobacco monopoly.

Many peasants concealed their smuggled tobacco at home or hidden places like streams, water wells, and deep forests. In May 1932, the gendarme prosecuted three village headmen in the Kızılgüney, Endişegüney, Şevikgüney villages of Alaiye (Alanya). They had undertaken the smuggling of tobacco products by stocking in their homes, on the strength of their status in the village. Upon a denunciation, the security forces found kilos of tobaccos and rolls of cigarette paper in each of their houses. Likewise, in the same region and within the same day, the monopoly officials and gendarmes caught a peasant named Ali from the Gazipaşa sub-district, who stocked tobacco and a tobacco press (*tütün havanı*), which was used to cut the tobacco.⁸²²

In June 1935, the gendarmes and the monopoly officers found some smuggled tobacco products in the villages of Tokat, a tobacco region. Those peasants

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*

⁸²² “Kaçakçılık Yapan Üç Muhtar,” *Son Posta*, 14.05.1932.

and smuggled tobaccos captured by the ganderme were: in Muhat village, 300 kilos of cut rag, 572 kilos of leaf tobacco, tobacco press and other equipments in the houses of two peasants; in Cincife village, 39 kilos of leaf tobacco and a tobacco press in the house of a peasant named Papak Mustafa; in the same village, two tobacco presses inside a stream; in Mengelli village, 10 kilos of cut rag in a peasant's house; in a village of Erbaa, a tobacco press and other equipments inside a stream bed.⁸²³ In August 1938, a village headman, who engaged in tobacco smuggling in the Karlı village of Biga, was caught by the gendarme. Upon the denunciation of a peasant named Ali, hostile toward the village headman, the gendarmes found 4 kilos of tobacco in his house.⁸²⁴

Some peasants tried to avoid prosecution by giving pretexts for their acts. Those peasants who stocked tobacco in their homes sometimes cited the insects harming the clothes as an excuse. It is understood that some peasant families who engaged in tobacco cultivation and tobacco trade without official permission hid the tobacco among the clothes in chests or large closets for bedding. When caught, they argued that they needed to put some tobacco among their clothes in order to preserve them from harmful insects like moths.⁸²⁵

Along with homes and streams, forests also were common places to hide smuggled goods or the trade of smuggled goods. The smugglers especially followed the paths inside the forest in order to hide themselves and their packhorses from the sight of the gendarmes. However, the security forces even in deep forests sometimes

⁸²³ "Tokat'ta Kaçakçılarla Mücadele," *Son Posta*, 03.06.1935.

⁸²⁴ "Vay Gidi Muhtar Vay," *Köroğlu*, 10.08.1938.

⁸²⁵ Because the people widely consumed or kept the smuggled tobacco under the pretext of keeping the tobacco against the insects in the home, 1938 Tobacco and Tobacco Monopoly Law included an article that did not accept such excuse. See the Article 104 of Tobacco and Tobacco Monopoly Law No.3437, Date.10.06.1938.

caught them. In May 1932, for instance, two peasants were caught by the gendarmes when passing through a forest in Kastamonu carrying 500 kilos of tobacco.⁸²⁶

Using the gaps and suitable articles in the laws, some smuggler peasants tried to circumvent the security forces and legal authorities. According to Clause 1 of Article 8 of the anti-smuggling law (No.1918), if the total value of the contraband items detected by the security forces was under 25 TL or if these goods seemed to be for personal use of their owners, the judges always declared mistrial and set the defendant free by operation of the law. Those people who engaged in smuggling became familiar with such provision of the law in the course of time. Therefore, many of them began to carry in tobacco cases or packsacks in limited amounts valued under or about 25 TL on their backs instead of on packhorses or donkeys. Thereby, most of small-scale smugglers, if even not all, managed to avoid the legal proceedings of the security forces and the courts.⁸²⁷

Although some gendarmes continued to act officiously against the people carrying even a small piece of contraband tobacco as soon as they identified it, many gendarme soldiers, in compliance with such article of the law, did not need to act against those peasants with cut rag in tobacco cases. The security forces perceived these tobaccos as insignificant or not worth the trouble. This situation became such an efficient and widespread way out for the small-scale smugglers that at a somewhat late date, in 1946, the authorities needed to warn the security forces. The Directory-General of the Monopolies, for instance, stated that the security forces and the monopoly officers should take such cases seriously and prosecute even those peasants who conveyed cut rag in small tobacco cases.⁸²⁸

⁸²⁶ “Kaçar mı Hiç?” *Köroğlu*, 09.05.1931.

⁸²⁷ Ali Enver Togsoy, “Cenub Hudutlarımızda Kaçakçılık.” *Resimli Ay*, No. 28 (June, 1938), p. 22.

⁸²⁸ Hasan Basri Erk, *Kaçakçılık İşleri* (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Matbaası, 1946) p. 172.

Indeed, the tobacco smuggling in small tobacco cases increased in Anatolia. In the Domalan village of Alaiye, for instance, the gendarmes caught a peasant named Molla Ahmet carrying some cut rag in his tobacco cases.⁸²⁹ This kind of smuggling, as reported by the deputies of Manisa in mid-1930s, was widespread in the region. Peoples in the rural areas of Manisa commonly called the fines on such kind of smuggling “tobacco case fine” (*tabaka cezası*).⁸³⁰

The smugglers of cigarette papers and carbon papers that were used as cigarette paper also managed to take advantage of the gaps in the laws. Anti-smuggling laws had banned the trade of white cigarette paper and carbon paper. However, the laws did not mention anything about cigarette or carbon papers in other colors. Therefore, smugglers began to trade paper with colors other than white, such as cream or yellow papers in order to circumvent the ban. When caught and taken into courts, they often claimed that their carbon papers were not white, and thus were not unlawful. Since many smugglers managed to circumvent the laws by this way, the lawmakers were compelled to alter the related clause of the law. In the new Tobacco and Tobacco Monopoly Law (No.3437), passed on 10 June 1938, the phrase “white carbon papers” was replaced by “white and whitish carbon papers.”⁸³¹ According to the preamble of the amendment of this Article, peasants under cover of that the laws banned only the white carbon paper had begun to use and trade whitish smuggled carbon paper in the villages.⁸³²

⁸²⁹ “Kaçakçılık Yapan Üç Muhtar,” *Son Posta*, 14.05.1932.

⁸³⁰ Summaries of the Reports of the Manisa Deputies Asım Tümer, Faik Kurdoğlu, Hikmet Bayur, Hüsnü Yaman, Kani Karaosman, Kazım Nami Duru, Kenan Örer, Osman Erçin, Rıdvan Nafiz Edgüder and Yaşar Özey, BCA CHP [490.1/684.317.1], 02.08.1937.

⁸³¹ Erk, *Kaçakçılık İşleri*, pp. 134-138.

⁸³² See Tobacco and Tobacco Law No. 3437, Article 8, Clause A. In addition see, Erk, *Kaçakçılık İşleri*, p. 137.

Furthermore, the smugglers made the carbon paper or cigarette paper look like notebooks in order to mislead the security forces.⁸³³ The newspaper reports about notebooks made from smuggled cigarette paper caught by the gendarme confirm that there were several cigarette papers in the forms of the notebook. In rural areas of İzmir, many peasants got involved in the trade of the illegal cigarette paper by hiding them in this manner. In Gümüldür village, for instance, the gendarmes seized 450 notebooks made with cigarette paper in 1930.⁸³⁴

Another way to hide the smuggled tobacco, cigarette, or cigarette papers during the transportation from one place to another was to use the postal service. In this method, the smuggled items were often overwrapped and mailed through the postal service among many other packages. Thus, the smugglers camouflaged the smuggled items and avoided the risk of prosecution.⁸³⁵

A more comprehensive, advanced and organized way for smuggling was to affix outdated or fake monopoly trademarks, symbols, labels and stamps on the smuggled goods. Again putting the smuggled items in empty packages and cases of monopoly goods and imitating the seals, trademarks, symbols, stamps and flags belonging to the monopoly administration and affixing them on the smuggled goods were among the stratagems to which the smugglers resorted.⁸³⁶ According to a case discovered by the police in Çorum, for instance, the smugglers labeled the packing boxes of the smuggled goods that looked like they belonged to the monopoly

⁸³³ Erk, *Kaçakçılık İşleri*, pp. 134-137.

⁸³⁴ Emel Göksu, *1929 Dünya Ekonomik Buhranı Yıllarında İzmir ve Suç Coğrafyası* (İzmir: İzmir Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür Yayını, 2003), p. 199.

⁸³⁵ "Posta Paketlerle Kaçakçılık Yapıyorlarmış," *Son Posta*, 28.03.1932.

⁸³⁶ The Law about Prohibition and Prosecution of Smuggling (*Kaçakçılığın Men ve Takibine Dair Kanun*), No. 1918, Date. 07.01.1932, Article 34, 43.

administration. In this way, the smugglers had long managed to circumvent the officials and the gendarmes.⁸³⁷

A different sort of the tobacco smuggling of which both the urban or rural poor engaged in was to collect cigarette butts to use the remaining tobacco pieces. This was called *izmaritçilik*. Although the laws also banned this, some poor people who were called cigarette butt collectors (*izmaritçi*) picked up the cigarette butts one by one in streets, dustbins, and coffeehouses and then extracted the tobacco remainders. After the small pieces of tobacco remainders reached a certain amount, they used or resold them secretly.⁸³⁸

When they were caught with smuggled tobacco or tobacco products, some peasants who were involved in smuggling denied the accusation of smuggling and alleged that they had seized the smuggled tobacco from another smugglers who had managed to escape. They tried to use the law article and the government discourse that encouraged the citizens to fight the smugglers in order to justify their cases. For instance, in January 1935, in a village of Merzifon, when a peasant named Cemal Gümüşhacı was caught with smuggled tobacco, first he attempted to run away from the gendarmes but failed. Understanding that he could not escape, he walked towards the gendarmes with his big knife. However, the gendarme soldiers overpowered him in the end. However, he changed his strategy by alleging that he had caught a smuggler with this tobacco to bring him to justice, but the smuggler had managed to run away, leaving the smuggled tobacco. He had taken this tobacco to submit to the security forces.⁸³⁹

⁸³⁷ “Çorum’da Kaçakçılar,” *Köroğlu*, 24.07.1929.

⁸³⁸ Erk, *Kaçakçılık İşleri*, p. 172; “İzmaritçiler Arasında,” *Son Posta*, 05.08.1932. (Photograph).

⁸³⁹ “Merzifon’da Bir Kaçakçılık Vak’ası,” *Son Posta*, 08.01.1935.

In a report dated October 1933, it was stated that many smugglers also engaged in banditry.⁸⁴⁰ Indeed, for smugglers, another way to cope with the security forces was to fend them off with weapons. When the gendarmes opened fire on those who disobeyed stop warning, the smugglers sometimes ran away or shot back. Many armed conflicts occurred between the gendarmes and the smugglers. In other words, armed resistance was another form of the self-defense of the smugglers, especially in the borderlands and eastern parts of the Anatolia. Peasants who were still armed did not hesitate to take up arms whenever any threat was posed against their very survival. However, not only in the eastern countryside, but also in the western part of the country, the smugglers, if they were armed, resisted with firearms when they felt caught in a trap.

Indeed, the security forces and custom officers in the rural areas sometimes fought with the smugglers intensely. Even though they did not act arbitrarily or abruptly like ruthless Régie guards of the late Ottoman period, they also used arms against the smugglers when they did not obey the stop warning. In June 1936, when two peasants named Mustafa and Ahmet were passing through the Madenmezari village of Balıkesir with their two packhorses and packsacks loaded with smuggled tobacco, the gendarmes noticed them and ordered them to stop. They did not obey the gendarme order. Then, the gendarmes shouted at Mustafa's packhorse and captured him, but Ahmet managed to escape.⁸⁴¹ In another instance, a peasant named Selahattin from an Aegean village was shot by a custom officer when in the act of smuggling.⁸⁴²

In the face of such gunfire, the smugglers did not wait to become easy targets, but shot back at security forces and custom officers. For instance, the Lieutenant

⁸⁴⁰ BCA MGM [30.10/105.684.33], 16.10.1933.

⁸⁴¹ "Dur! Ateş!" *Köroğlu*, 24.06.1936.

⁸⁴² "Kaçakçılığın Sonu," *Son Posta*, 06.06.1932.

Governor of Trabzon stated in a report that in the early 1930s the convoys of the armed tobacco smugglers did not hesitate to open fire on the government forces.⁸⁴³

According to a newspaper report dated 14 March 1931, especially the eastern and southern part of the country had become hot bed of armed smugglers. There were several gunfights between smugglers and the gendarme forces. In Antep, for example, ten armed smugglers clashed with gendarmes and managed to escape at nightfall. In the same province, another fight broke out between fourteen armed smugglers and gendarmes. One smuggler was captured dead along with 11 animals and 14 boxes of contraband items.⁸⁴⁴ Near the same date, *Köroğlu* reported an armed conflict between custom officers and tobacco smugglers in Urfa.⁸⁴⁵

There were famous smugglers who had been wanted for a long time and were caught only with great difficulty. One of them was Kızılbaş Bekir Dede, who brought contraband items to Turkey from Syria. One day the gendarme ambushed his convoy consisting of 28 people when they were crossing the border secretly. The convoy was caught in the cross-fire at the border. The smugglers shot back at the gendarme, but in the end Kızılbaş Bekir Dede and one of his men were captured dead together with 30 packhorses loaded with the tobacco and various contraband items.⁸⁴⁶

Armed smugglers appeared in western Anatolia, too. In December 1931, in the Tepeköy village of Kütahya, for instance, seven armed smugglers were ambushed and captured with 250 *okkas* cut rag.⁸⁴⁷ In the mid-1930s, armed smugglers continued to carry on their illicit transaction in the western countryside. For instance, in April 1936, as a result of a gunfight between the security forces and smugglers, the

⁸⁴³ The General Situation Report of the Trabzon Province by the Lieutenant Governor of Trabzon Talat Demirsoy, BCA MGM [30.10/65.433.4], 24.07.1935.

⁸⁴⁴ "Tabur Tabur Kaçakçılar," *Köroğlu*, 14.03.1931.

⁸⁴⁵ "Buna Bir Çare!" *Köroğlu*, 04.02.1931.

⁸⁴⁶ "Kızılbaş Bekir Dede!" *Köroğlu*, 25.04.1934.

⁸⁴⁷ "Kaçakçılar," *Köroğlu*, 10.12.1931.

smugglers managed to escape by abandoning their smuggled goods.⁸⁴⁸ Only during the last week of July 1936, fifty-three armed smugglers, mostly tobacco and cigarette paper traders, were caught in western provinces. One of them was caught dead and another one wounded.⁸⁴⁹

Smuggling in Alcoholic Beverages

Since there had been no private or state monopoly over alcoholic spirits in the Ottoman Empire, many small producers and a few big factories produced and traded *rakı*, wine, spirits and other alcoholic beverages. However, the Republican government monopolized both the production and trade of all the alcoholic beverages and spirits in 1926. The government transferred the rights of this monopoly to the İş Bankası and Naçella Organizaçya Company. They established a joint stock company named the *İspirto ve Meşrubat-u Külliye İnhisarı İşletme Türk Anonim Şirketi* and retransferred the license given by the government to this new company. However, both the rising costs due to the successive transferring of licenses from one company to another and low demand in the expensive and relatively poor quality *rakı* and wine of the company resulted in its bankruptcy and the termination of the monopoly license by the government.⁸⁵⁰

Smuggling played a key role in bankruptcy of this company. The smuggling was so widespread and persistent that it brought the private monopoly company into its knees within one year. Producing and trading higher quality *rakı* and wine at lower prices, the smugglers won the hearts of the drinkers. Even some legal dealers

⁸⁴⁸ BCA MGM [30.10/105.685.9], 15.04.1936.

⁸⁴⁹ “Bir Haftada 53 Kaçakçı,” *Köroğlu*, 29.07.1936.

⁸⁵⁰ Münir Karacık (ed), *İnhisarlar Mevzuatı* (İstanbul: İnhisarlar Umum Müdürlüğü, 1944), p. 39. In addition see Emiroğlu, *Türkiye’de Vergi Sistemi: Üçüncü Kitap, İnhisarlar ve Devlet Emlâki*, pp. 77-79.

began to praise and even to sell the smuggled *rakı* and wine.⁸⁵¹ As a result of the victory of the smuggled products as well as other causes, the government had to undertake the alcoholic spirit monopoly in 1927. The monopoly administration both directly undertook the production of the great part of the spirits and alcoholic beverages, and sold a limited number of licenses to private enterprises.⁸⁵²

However, the smugglers also challenged this monopoly throughout Anatolia. The state monopoly could not alter the situation. The illicit production and trade of *rakı* and wine had already gained impetus with the establishment of the monopoly. A newspaper wrote that not a day went by without news about smuggled alcoholic beverages and *rakı*. Although the authorities closed down the unlicensed companies and fined the smugglers, they continued to produce alcoholic beverages for smuggling. The number of police and the gendarme cases related to illegal *rakı* and wine production and trade reached approximately 1000 between 1926 and 1928.⁸⁵³

There were four reasons for these smuggling: first, the previous *rakı* and wine producers and traders did not want to give up this business easily. Second, the high tax and duty rates levied on *rakı*, wine, and other spirits made the clandestine production and trade of them free from the taxes, restrictions, duties a profitable venture for impoverished local producers and traders. Third, with the economic crisis, the sharp decline in grape prices as compared to the high prices of *rakı* and wine led the peasants who sought to compensate their losses further into smuggling. And, fourth, the winegrowers were never satisfied with the low prices the government offered them for their wine or *soma* that was the basic raw material of the spirits, especially the *rakı*.

⁸⁵¹ Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 146.

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁸⁵³ "Gizli," *Köroğlu*, 12.01.1929.

Perhaps the most important reason for the smuggling was the sharp decline in the prices the monopoly offered to the peasants' soma and wine. By 1933, the state monopoly offered only 18 piasters for wine that had been purchased at about 30 piasters in previous years. Many wine makers demanded the state monopoly to purchase their wines at higher prices. However, the monopoly did not accept such demands and a great amount of the wine the Anatolian peasants produced remained unsold in 1933. It was reported, for example, that Bozcaada was full of unsold wine.⁸⁵⁴ Thus, it is not difficult to anticipate that the peasants in these conditions had to get involved in smuggling.

Again, the monopoly paid too little money to the peasants for *soma*, about 16 piasters per kilo. On the other hand, it marketed *rakı* with great profit margins. By 1933, the government put on sale several brands of *rakı* at very high prices changing between 120 and 300 piasters per kilo. The cheapest brand, *Boğma Rakı*, was 120 piasters.⁸⁵⁵ Indeed, it became so expensive that a newspaper criticized the soaring prices of *rakı*.⁸⁵⁶

This huge price gap between *rakı* and *soma* compelled the grape growers and many other smugglers to produce and sell *rakı* illicitly. The illegal production and sale of *rakı* even at lower prices than the products of the state monopoly yielded much more money than the sale of *soma* to the state monopoly. Consequently, the smuggling of *rakı* and wine did not cease during the rest of the period. The newspapers were filled with the reports of *rakı* and wine smugglers caught by the police and the gendarme.⁸⁵⁷

⁸⁵⁴ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 29.04.1933, pp. 133-134.

⁸⁵⁵ Emiroğlu, *Türkiye'de Vergi Sistemi: Üçüncü Kitap, İnhisarlar ve Devlet Emlâki*, p. 89.

⁸⁵⁶ "Rakı Çok Pahalı," *Köroğlu*, 31.01.1934.

⁸⁵⁷ "Her Gün Bir Kaçak Rakı Fabriyası Yakalanıyor," *Köroğlu*, 12.01.1929; "Gizli Bir İçki Fabrikası Daha Bulundu," *Son Posta*, 23.03.1932.

In the 1930s, the illegal production of *rakı* was widespread in İzmir, particularly in the grape-growing villages and sub-districts of Bornova and Buca. Especially the poor Cretan refugees sought to make their living by producing and selling smuggled *rakı*. They generally engaged in small-scale family production.⁸⁵⁸

Narlıdere was one of the centers of the illegal production and trade of *rakı* in İzmir. Peasants brought the tinned *rakı* they had produced in their homes to İzmir. In one case, for instance, the gendarme and monopoly officials found equipment for *rakı* production with 2000 kilos of contraband *rakı* in the house of a peasant in Narlıdere. However, the peasants collectively refused to surrender the equipment and protested the government officials and gendarme by pouring and destroying all of the *rakı* the security forces tried to confiscate.⁸⁵⁹

Rakı smuggling dominated also in Değirmendere villages of İzmir. The main factor lying behind the *rakı* smuggling was undoubtedly the rural poverty. Many peasants in Değirmendere villages in which the smuggling prevailed suffered from hungry to such a degree that they had to eat grass in 1930. Therefore, they had begun to get involved in the illicit production and trade of *rakı*.⁸⁶⁰

The low price policy of the government for *soma* despite the high prices of *rakı* resulted in widespread smuggling in the rest of the 1930s. It is evident from the press news and archival documents, the illegal production and trade of *rakı* and wine continued. According to one newspaper, the security forces had detected 376 cases of contraband *rakı* just in the last two months of 1931.⁸⁶¹

⁸⁵⁸ Göksu, *İzmir ve Suç Coğrafyası*, p. 198.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶¹ *Akşam*, 06.12.1931, quoted in Birgün Ayman Güler (ed.), *Açıklamalı Yönetim Zamandizini, 1929-1939* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Basımevi, 2007), p. 296.

In one case, a peasant in a village of İnebolu who had long been producing *rakı* at his home was caught consuming his own beverage at home in May 1934.⁸⁶² Again, *Son Posta* reported that the gendarmes found kilos of *rakı* and some equipment to distill it in a peasant's house in the Mengelli village of Tokat on 3 June 1935.⁸⁶³ In another instance, *Yeşil Giresun* newspaper reported that the gendarme had caught several *rakı* smugglers with a horse loaded with smuggled *rakı* in the Avutmuş village of the Şebinkarahisar district.⁸⁶⁴

Salt, Sugar and Textile Smuggling

Salt Smuggling

Salt also was among those items that had long been subjected to smuggling especially after the establishment of the monopoly over the salt mines and salt lakes in 1862. The nationalist elite's first attempts to control the salt mines and salt revenues had begun during the National Struggle. In order to find financial sources for the war against the occupation forces, the nationalist leadership had raised salt prices several times from 1919 to 1924. In 1925, the government increased the price from 4 to 6 piasters per *okka*. Finally, the government took possession of salt sources by taking the salt production under the state monopoly in 1927.⁸⁶⁵

Because salt was an important input for animal husbandry and the people's daily use as food, the high monopoly taxes levied on salt and accordingly high salt prices became a source of discontent among the livestock owners and the

⁸⁶² "Kaçakçının Sonu," *Köroğlu*, 26.05.1934.

⁸⁶³ "Tokat'ta Kaçakçılarla Mücadele," *Son Posta*, 03.06.1935.

⁸⁶⁴ "Kaçakçılar Tutuldu," *Yeşilgiresun*, 12.01.1936.

⁸⁶⁵ Emiroğlu, *Türkiye'de Vergi Sistemi: Üçüncü Kitap, İnhisarlar ve Devlet Emlâki*, p. 64.

consumers.⁸⁶⁶ In addition, despite the sharp decline in agricultural prices with the Great Depression, the government did not reduce the salt prices in the early 1930s.⁸⁶⁷ As can be seen from the table below, the average prices in cities remained almost in same levels. On the other hand, the retail prices the peasants had to pay was more than these prices. In the mid-1930s, Anatolian peasants paid between 8 and 10 piasters per kg for salt.⁸⁶⁸

Table 16 - Average Prices of Salt (Piaster/kg).

Years	İzmir	Bursa	Samsun
1927	7,00	7,75	8,05
1935	6,45	7,75	7,40

Source: Şevket Raşit Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran* (Ankara: Yüksek Ziraat Enstitüsü, 1936), p. 59.

Therefore, some peasants and traders continued to exploit salt mines and lakes clandestinely. Those who sought to avoid the high salt costs illicitly extracted salt from nearby salt resources. One indicator of the salt smuggling is the sharp decline of the salt monopoly revenues between 1926 and 1934 although there was no considerable price decline. Indeed, whereas the total salt monopoly revenues were 9,170,000 TL in 1926, they decreased radically to 6,179,000 TL in 1935.⁸⁶⁹ That is to say, despite the decrease in salt prices about 7 percent from 1927 to 1935, the total salt revenues in same time-span dropped about 33 percent. One possible explanation for this comparatively great decline was the shift of the salt production and trade from the formal economy to the informal one.

Indeed, the peasants throughout Anatolian countryside resisted the salt monopoly by stealing salt from salt mines and salt lakes. For example, the peasants

⁸⁶⁶ Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 1, pp. 231-232.

⁸⁶⁷ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran*, p. 59.

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁹ Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 152.

near Seyfe Lake, an important salt lake in Kırşehir, shoveled the salt from the lake and loaded it on their donkeys. Sometimes they were confronted by monopoly officials who stabbed the peasants' donkeys loaded with salt. The use of contraband salt was so widespread in villages around Seyfe Lake that the peasants kept the salt they owned like a secret.⁸⁷⁰

By 1935, it was reported from Trabzon that the sale of salt in the previous years had decreased considerably because of the declining purchasing power of the people. Probably the peasants supplied the salt they needed in illegal ways.⁸⁷¹ According to the official records, the salt smuggling was widespread in many southern provinces, too.⁸⁷² Likewise, in the eastern provinces, peasants produced and consumed smuggled salt. According to Prime Minister İnönü's reports on his observations in eastern Anatolia, the share of the salt in the all smuggled items was about 15 percent.⁸⁷³

The conflict over the salt mines, which overlapped with other sorts of conflicts between the government and the local people, caused rebellious incidents in these eastern parts of Turkey. In Siirt, a dispute between the monopoly officials and the peasants that arose from the peasants' use of salt mines or lakes without any official permission grew into a local rebellion colored with Kurdish and Islamic tones. The Abdürrahman Rebellion broke out in 1926. The economy of the Siirt was based on the animal husbandry and Abdürrahman was a livestock farmer who had a great need for salt for his animals. The main cause of the rebellion was the struggle for control over the salt mines in the Baykan district of Siirt between the state and the peasants, particularly the livestock owners. Although the government claimed the

⁸⁷⁰ İsmail Yağcı, "Tuz, Tahta Kaşık Kaçakçılığı ve Yol Parası," <http://www.tumgazeteler.com>.

⁸⁷¹ The General Situation Report of the Trabzon Province by the Lieutenant Governor of Trabzon Talat Demirsoy, BCA MGM [30.10/65.433.4], 24.07.1935.

⁸⁷² The Salt Smuggling in Our Southern Provinces, BCA MGM [30.10/180.245.4], 10.07.1936.

⁸⁷³ Öztürk, *İsmet Paşa'nın Kürt Raporu*, p. 25.

right to all of the salt mines in the region, the peasants persistently disobeyed the government and continued to use the salt mines secretly against the law. The final incident that prompted the revolt was the stealing of a huge amount of salt by the peasants from the salt depots in the Melekhan sub-district of Baykan. When the gendarme attempted to arrest Abdürrahman and his fellows as the suspected thieves, Abdürrahman, supported by his tribe and many peasants, rose up against the security forces and the government. The rebellion spread to Mollaşeref, Merijan and Navalın sub-districts and continued for two years. The government had to create a restricted area in the region in order to take the rebellion under control.⁸⁷⁴

Sugar Smuggling

Sugar was another item frequently smuggled, since Turkey did not have a sugar factory until the mid-1920s. Despite the establishment of a series of factories during the 1920s and 1930s, the total sugar production did not come near to meeting the demand. Because of the insufficient supply, heavy taxation and high tariff rates, sugar continued to be a very expensive and luxurious foodstuff. For that reason, it was often subjected to black-marketing and smuggling.

Even though sugar prices were not as high as they had been in the past thanks to the newly established production facilities, prices continued to be exorbitant. During the early 1930s, sugar prices in the cities were between 40 and 50 piasters per kilo. However, peasants had to pay at least 60 piasters for sugar. In some distant places of the country, especially in the eastern Anatolia, the prices reached up to 80 and 90 piasters due to transportation and other costs.⁸⁷⁵

⁸⁷⁴ Gürbüz, *Mondros'tan Milenyuma Türkiye'de İsyancılar*, p. 89.

⁸⁷⁵ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraat Buhranı*, p. 58.

On the other hand, the sugar prices on the other side of the border were lower than the domestic prices. For instance, the delivery price of imported sugar to the Turkish customs stations was about 20 piasters per kilo in 1927.⁸⁷⁶ However, this sugar was put on sale in the domestic market about 50 piasters per kilo because of enormous profit margins enjoyed by the Turkish merchants and consumption tax on sugar. Even before the increase in tariff rates, the government had imposed a special tax on the sugar about 8 piasters per kilo in 1926.⁸⁷⁷ Within a short time, this consumption tax had been raised to 12 piaster.⁸⁷⁸

The prices in the international markets and in the neighboring countries had dropped sharply between 1927 and 1932 because of the economic crisis. The untaxed entry price of imported sugar decreased more than half to 10.2 piasters in 1932.⁸⁷⁹ However, the sugar prices in domestic market decreased slightly as compared to decrease in international prices of sugar. Main reason for this was the high tariff rates and consumption tax on sugar. The government increased the tariff rates for sugar sharply in 1929 and 1933. In addition, the government monopolized also the importation of sugar along with tea and coffee in 1932.⁸⁸⁰ Consequently, although the international prices of sugar decreased about 55 percent, the domestic prices decreased about 20 percent in the early 1930s to about 40 piasters.⁸⁸¹

From another standpoint, sugar's value raised as compared to other agricultural items such as wheat. Whereas a wheat cultivator needed to give 3.23 kilos of wheat for one kilo of sugar in 1929, this rate tripled to 6.60 kilos of wheat for one kilo of sugar in 1933. It means that although the nominal price of sugar

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-56.

⁸⁷⁷ Oruç, *Arif Oruç'un Yarını*, p. 145.

⁸⁷⁸ See Behçet Günay "Şeker," *Ülkü*, No. 31 (Sept., 1935), p. 79.

⁸⁷⁹ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran*, pp. 55.

⁸⁸⁰ Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 1, p. 417.

⁸⁸¹ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran*, p. 56.

decreased from about 50 piasters to 40 piasters with the crisis, the real price in terms of wheat prices in rural areas rose three times in same period.

Such conditions set the scene for the sugar smuggling throughout the country, particularly in rural areas. Especially the cross-border smuggling of sugar became common in the southern borderlands. In Bitlis, in March 1932, for instance, a big convoy of smugglers was caught with 73 wooden boxes loaded with contraband sugar along with cut rag and cigarette papers.⁸⁸² According to a newspaper article, there was a huge amount of sugar among the contraband items that were caught in the first two weeks of October 1934.⁸⁸³

Textile Smuggling

Fabrics and clothes also were illicitly produced, imported, and traded by peasants especially for the consumers of Anatolian villages and towns. There were three main reasons for smuggling of fabrics. First, the fabrics and clothes in all kinds were still expensive for low-income people, especially for peasants. During the economic crisis, prices of fabrics and clothes in the domestic market did not change in parallel to the price trends in the international markets. Despite the radical price decline in textiles in the foreign markets, the textile prices in Turkey did not decrease evenly. On the contrary, the purchasing power of Anatolian peasants for fabrics and clothes remarkably decreased because of the sharp price declines in the agricultural sector. Second, the shape and style of the fabrics and clothes produced by the state factories did not fit the lifestyles and working conditions of the peasants. Third, the colors of the fabrics and clothes produced by the state factories and marketed by the Domestic

⁸⁸² “Bitlis Civarında Bir Çok Kaçak Eşya Yakalandı,” *Son Posta*, 19.03.1932.

⁸⁸³ “Kim Kâr Ediyor?” *Köroğlu*, 17.10.1934.

Goods Market (*Yerli Mallar Pazarı*) did not appeal to the local tastes. Therefore, some peasants individually or collectively engaged in cross-border smuggling by importing more attractive, cheaper, and good quality fabrics and clothes to the country. In addition, peasants weaved fabrics on handlooms, sewed clothes, and marketed them illicitly without any taxation at cheaper prices.

Peasants usually preferred to consume especially the thick and rough cotton flannel, canvas, and wool fabrics because they were both cheaper and durable. The prices of these three sorts of fabrics dropped during the Great Depression. Cotton flannel prices decreased from 35 piasters per meter to 32 piasters between 1927 and 1935. Canvas prices decreased from 972 piasters per 1 yard (0,9144 meters) to 869 piasters from 1927 to 1932. Wool fabrics prices decreased from 550 piasters per meter to 500 piasters between 1927 and 1935. Nevertheless, these moderate price declines did not bring about an economic advantage for the peasantry. Despite the nominal price fall, the real prices of these fabrics in terms of agricultural products were completely reverse of the trend of the nominal prices. The decline in purchasing power of peasantry was far sharper than the decline in the textile prices. A peasant needed to give 2.71 kilos of wheat, or 2.71 kilos of barley, or 4.71 kilos of corn to afford one meter of cotton flannel in 1927. In 1934, one meter of cotton flannel was equal to 7.33 kilos of wheat, or 11 kilos of barley, or 11.3 kilos of corn. That is to say, for wheat cultivators the price of cotton flannel increased more than about two and half times. For barley and corn producers, the real price increase was about four times and two-and-a half times, respectively. As for the wool fabric, whereas a peasant had to give 44.8 kilos of wheat for one meter of wool fabric in 1928, this amount rose more than threefold by rising to 155.5 kilos of wheat in 1934.⁸⁸⁴ This is

⁸⁸⁴ Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraat Buhranı*, pp. 63-64.

the reason most likely why Anatolian peasants resorted to cheaper smuggled fabrics and clothes.

However, the main reason for smuggling was not the high prices of the domestic products. As stated above, the clothes and fabrics produced by the state factories were not popular in the countryside. Peasants in middle and western Anatolia opted to buy fabrics according to their needs and tastes, and sewed their own clothes. Most of the peasants bought their clothes from local tailors. They found the ready-made clothes produced by the state factories of Sümerbank close-fit and delicate, which was not suitable for their agricultural works and village life.⁸⁸⁵

During İnönü's visit to Kastamonu, a tailor in a town who sewed dress for peasants complained about the clothes produced by Sümerbank, and explained why the peasants did not like to use the factory-made clothes as follows:

The reason why nobody wants to buy it is that: they [the Sümerbank textile factories] steal from the waist and arms, and there remains only a quite narrow dress. When the peasant raises the pickax on the land, it tears up and leaves the body (...). These clothes are not comfortable. The length of belt is too short, the waist is low, trouser leg is short, and thread is too weak, so they always torn to shreds within a short time.⁸⁸⁶

Especially in the eastern provinces, the peasants never liked the fabrics made in the state factories.⁸⁸⁷ The shapes, colors, and prints of the ready-made clothes and fabrics produced by the new textile mills did not appeal to local tastes. Attractive fabrics and clothes for the eastern and even central and western Anatolian peasants were those contraband fabrics and clothes that were produced in Syria and Armenia. These were imported by the smugglers and sold by local traders and tailors. Furthermore, these goods were cheaper than the heavily taxed and priced Sümerbank goods. As a

⁸⁸⁵ Berkes, *Bazı Ankara Köyleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma*, p. 55.

⁸⁸⁶ Eski, *İsmet İnönü'nün Kastamonu Gezileri*, p. 30.

⁸⁸⁷ Mehmet Nuri Alpay, *Köy Dâvamız ve Köyün İç Yüzü* (Ankara: Örnek Matbaası, 1953), p. 75.

contemporary observer noted, smuggled items, especially those brought from Aleppo, permeated the Anatolian countryside.⁸⁸⁸

Another contemporary writer, Ali Enver Togsoy, wrote in an article on smuggling that textile smuggling was the life-blood of the peasant economy for both smugglers and buyers in eastern Anatolia. Smugglers provided the great part of the cheap and favorite cotton and silk fabrics and clothes for eastern Anatolia.⁸⁸⁹

Especially after the rise of custom tariffs, the smuggling of cotton and silk products became a profitable trade for smugglers and more economical for the low-income village and town inhabitants. In eastern provinces, 60 percent of the smuggling was concentrated on the cotton fabrics and 10 percent in the silk fabrics and clothes. In other words, the 70 percent of the smuggling activities engaged in textiles.⁸⁹⁰

Although the government imposed a quota on textile products in order to protect the domestic factories, especially the new state-owned industrial textile mills, the smugglers overcame this quota restriction. In 1934, the government permitted the importation of only 3,000 bolts of fabrics from the Syria border. However, only Mardin province in the region consumed about 260,000 bolts of fabric a year. The great gap was, to great extent, filled by the smuggled fabrics and clothes.⁸⁹¹

According to the RPP deputies' report on their election districts dated 1935, the smuggling of silk fabrics and of durable cotton fabrics and canvas called *Amerikan bezi* or *kaput bezi* was common in the eastern provinces. Mardin and Urfa

⁸⁸⁸ Ali Nihat, "Elbistan'da Vaziyet-i İktisadiye," *Cumhuriyet*, 22.11.1930.

⁸⁸⁹ Togsoy, "Cenub Hudutlarımızda Kaçakçılık," p. 22.

⁸⁹⁰ Öztürk, *İsmet Paşa'nın Kürt Raporu*, p. 25.

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid.*

deputies proposed considerable price reduction in textiles in order to prevent the smuggling.⁸⁹²

In a similar line, Prime Minister İnönü, alarmed by the rampant textile smuggling during his tour to the eastern provinces in 1934, proposed a decrease in custom tariffs and quotas in order to allow the legal importation of enough fabrics and clothes to the eastern provinces. According to İnönü, this would both decrease the smuggling and increase the custom revenues.⁸⁹³

On the other hand, the contraband fabrics and clothes circulating in the market were not the only illicitly-imported goods. In some Anatolian towns, the poor peasants bought cotton yarn from the town market. After spinning cotton yarn and weaving durable cotton canvas with these cotton yarns, they sewed clothes. These clothes were both cheaper and more durable as compared to ready-made ones.⁸⁹⁴ Undoubtedly, many handloom weavers marketed these fabrics and clothes without taxation and accordingly at lower prices than the Sümerbank goods. The handlooms that weaved untaxed contraband fabrics and clothes were widespread especially in the eastern Anatolian villages and towns. They also constituted one of the dimensions of the textile smuggling.⁸⁹⁵

Resistance to State Control over the Forests

“People in Anatolia were the enemy of the trees. Anatolian villages were rife with those people with axes and hatchets who cut down trees.”⁸⁹⁶ Thus wrote Ali Naci

⁸⁹² Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies Who Visited Their Election Districts During the 1935 Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/ 725.481.1].

⁸⁹³ Öztürk, *İsmet Paşa'nın Kürt Raporu*, p. 26.

⁸⁹⁴ Eski, *İsmet İnönü'nün Kastamonu Gezileri*, p. 29.

⁸⁹⁵ Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 49.

⁸⁹⁶ Ali Naci Karacan, “Ağaç,” *Verim*, No. 3 (June 15, 1935), p. 11.

Karacan, a famous Republican journalist in 1935. Undoubtedly, these words reflect the standpoint of the ruling circles and their worries about the forests. On the other hand, this statement can be read as an evidence of peasant resistance to the state control and monopoly over the forests, which were one of their primary economic sources. Indeed, the peasants resisted the control of the government and some big licensed forest companies over the forests during the inter-war period.⁸⁹⁷ The Republican archive are full of stories about those peasants who were prosecuted for illegal wood and timber cutting.⁸⁹⁸ Indeed, by 1937, there were 3600 cases in courts related to conflicts between the government and the peasants who violated the laws concerning the forests.⁸⁹⁹

The government saw the forests as “a wealth of the nation,” or to put in more frankly, as “a source of revenue.” Thus, it strove to appropriate the forests and forest products since the first years of the Republican regime in order to increase the state revenues in two ways. First, it directly exploited the forests via the Directory-General of Forest depended on the Ministry of Economy. Second, the Ministry of Economy leased out the forests to 55 companies throughout the country.

⁸⁹⁷ Süreyya Toygar, “Kaçakçılık İşleri II,” *Verim*, No.11 (1936), p. 4.

⁸⁹⁸ For example, see “Devlet Ormanından izinsiz ağaç kesen ve yangın çıkaran Of’un Holayisa, Ançipranoz ve Hızır köylerinden Hamit, Ahmet, Gülsüm ve Süleyman,” [Hamit, Ahmet, Gülsüm and Süleyman from the Holayisa, Ançipranoz and Hızır villages in Of, who had cut trees without permission from the state forest and who had set the forests on fire] BCA BATDB/ÜK [30.11.1/101.1.3], 04.01.1936; “Ormandan izinsiz kestikleri ağaçların bedelinin tahsili talebiyle Bursa’nın Çatak köyünden Nevzat ve arkadaşları,” [Nevzat and his friends from the Çatak village in Bursa demanding the encashment of the trees that they had cut from the forest without permission] BCA BATDB/ÜK [30.11.1/116.32.12], 18.09.1937; “Devlet ormanından izinsiz ağaç kesmekten suçlu Orhanelili Süleyman Hizar,” [Süleyman Hizar from Orhaneli who is guilty of cutting trees from the state forest without permission] BCA BATDB/ÜK [30.11.1/123.30.14], 01.09.1938; “Ağaç kesme suçundan bir hafta hapse mahkum edilen Hüseyin oğlu İsmail,” [Hüseyin oğlu İsmail who is committed to prison for a week due to the guilt of cutting trees] BCA BKK [30.18.1.2/88.72.12], 22.07.1939; “Bozüyük’de Devlet ormanından ruhsatsız ağaç kesip bağ yapmak suçundan Hüseyin Çirkon ve arkadaşları,” [Hüseyin Çirkon and his friends in Bozüyük guilty of cutting trees from the state forest without permission and making vineyard] BCA BATDB/ÜK [30.11.1/135.39.18], 19.10.1939; “Lapseki’de Devlet ormanlarından izinsiz ağaç kesen ve yangın çıkaran Ali Yavuz”, [Ali Yavuz in Lapseki who had cut trees from state forest without permission and who had set fire] BCA BATDB/ÜK [30.11.1/135.43.6], 03.12.1939; “Bursa’da Devlet ormanından izinsiz ağaç kesmekten sanık Hasan Parmak,” [Hasan Parmak in Bursa who is suspect of cutting tree from the state forest without permission] [30.11.1/133.29.16], 02.08.1939.

⁸⁹⁹ Us, *Asım Us’un Hatıra Notları*, p. 225.

Indeed, with the Republican regime, there appeared several forestry and timber companies. Some of these private companies were also owned or managed by RPP politicians. For example, the owner of the Bozüyük Timber Factory was İbrahim Çolak. He was the RPP deputy of Bilecik province at the same time. Çolak had begun to manage the factory in 1926. The Finike Forest Company in Antalya was co-owned by the local RPP politicians. One of the shareholders was Antalya mayor Hüsni Karakaş. The Finike Forest Company was so powerful that the Elmalı and Finike party administrations were, according to a party inspector, in the hands of this company.⁹⁰⁰

However, peasants, especially with the pauperizing effects of the Great Depression, did not hesitate to defy the state's and privileged companies' control over the forests by secretly cutting timber, wood and collecting some forest products. Those peasants who were adversely affected by the price declines of the crops tried to exploit the forests to compensate their losses. Especially landless peasants or small-land owners saw the forests as a source of land and opened additional land by cutting trees. Forestlands that had not been used for agriculture previously became a source of hope for those peasants who had become landless by losing their small lands to usurers or the government. In some places in Anatolia, when peasants lost their lands, they tried to live on the forests.⁹⁰¹ In addition, there were many peasants who escaped from the cruelty of the large landowners and took shelter in the forestlands, maintaining their lives on forest products.⁹⁰²

⁹⁰⁰ Inspection Report on the Antalya Province by the RPP Inspector Adnan Ertekin [Menderes], BCA CHP [490.1/618.27.1], 03.12.1936. In addition, see Antalya Province Inspection Report that is sent to the First Bureau, BCA CHP [490.1/618.28.1.].

⁹⁰¹ F. Rıfki [Atay], *Bizim Akdeniz*, p. 37.

⁹⁰² Nihat Eyriboz, "Plansız Köycülük Yerine Planlı Köycülük," *Hep Bu Topraktan*, No. V (Apr., 1944), p. 10.

According to a contemporary observer, peasants living in forest areas like Kastamonu lacked enough arable land for agriculture. Therefore, they, in the words of one contemporary observer, “destroyed the forests.” They cleared a piece of land by cutting trees in order to grow crops. In addition, they also benefitted from the other products of the forests. The destruction of the forests was in that sense a solution of the peasants to land hunger and pauperization. Indeed, those without enough land for agriculture cut or sometimes burned the forests to create land. The peasants popularly called these acts as *göynük* and *hopurculuk* respectively.⁹⁰³ Similarly, poor Balkan refugees who were generally settled on very small plots of land and consequently suffered land hunger also tried to expand their land by cutting trees in forests to open additional arable lands.⁹⁰⁴

The radical decline in agricultural prices compelled some peasants to exploit the forests to compensate their economic losses. Those poor peasants who could not live on wheat or barley cultivation, for instance, cut timber and sold it in town markets. In 1935, a Republican bureaucrat saw more than fifty ox carts loaded with oak lumber and timber on the road between Hafik and Sivas. He called this spectacle a funeral procession for the dead oaks (*meşelerin cenaze alayı*). Many men and women were brought the oak lumber and timber they had felled to Sivas for sale. When the observer reminded them this was illegal, a peasant woman replied him:

Wheat is worthless nowadays. If we do not cut and sell these oaks, how will we pay the taxes to the state? (...). On the other hand, the winter in Sivas is too hard and long. Sivas needs firewood.

The observer, despite his anger, acknowledged the peasant woman to be right. He also admitted that for similar reasons, there were many poor peasants who destroyed

⁹⁰³ İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye Köy İktisadiyatı*, p. 49.

⁹⁰⁴ Report of RPP Giresun Deputy Hacim Muhittin, Beyazıt Deputy Halit, and Balıkesir Deputy İsmail Hakkı on Balıkesir, BCA CHP [490.1/35.146.1], 26.01.1931.

trees.⁹⁰⁵ Similarly, *Köroğlu* newspaper dated 1 February 1936 reported that the indigent peasants perceived the forests as a vital resource for their very survival. One of them in a village of Kayseri had cut firewood and brought it to Kayseri for sale when he was in desperate straits financially. However, the officials had seized his firewood on the grounds that it had been cut without any official permission.⁹⁰⁶

The Ermenek district of Konya, for instance, had a reputation for the high quality of its nut and walnut trees. A great number of peasants had long been living on these nuts by collecting and selling them to the local merchants. However, the nut prices dropped by three-fold from about 90 piasters to 25-30 piasters per kilo between 1930 and 1935 due to the economic crisis. In the face of such sharp price decline, the peasants gave up selling nuts but produced nut-oil, the price of which was higher. Another alternative the peasants increasingly resorted to after the decline of nut prices was to fell walnut trees secretly for sale to the furniture industry. In the last years, the trade of walnut tree timber, which provided relatively more money than the trade of nuts, began to spread not only in the region, but also throughout countryside of Turkey. There were so many peasants who cut walnut trees that the writer depicted the situation in the following words:

There is a covert war in Anatolia that which we cannot see. This war is between the walnut trees and woodcutters (...). The peasants cut and sell the walnut trees because their products do not bring in money.⁹⁰⁷

Another Republican bureaucrat, Pertev Erkal, faced the same situation when he was travelling in the Adana countryside. Erkal wrote that the peasants who were involved in timber smuggling were constantly “destroying” the forests in the Taurus

⁹⁰⁵ Ş. R. “Meşelerin Cenaze Alayı,” *Verim*, No. 5 (1935), p. 10.

⁹⁰⁶ “1 Köylünün Başına Gelenler,” *Köroğlu*, 01.02.1936.

⁹⁰⁷ Kerim Yund, “Ermenâk Ceviz Ağaçları,” *Verim*, No. 7-8 (1935), pp. 9-10.

Mountains and other small forests in Pozantı. He pointed out the fact that the single forest ranger was not able to prevent such damage of the forests alone.⁹⁰⁸

The monopoly over the forests as well as the increasing exports of forest products during the 1930s drove up the prices of timber and wood. In many places, finding firewood, wood and timber for furniture, home building, or repair works began to pose a great problem. In Adana, for instance, the price of timber was about 4.5 TL in the market. However, the peasants and many timber traders illegally cut timber and sold at only 2.5 TL in “the black economy.” Since they did not pay any tax, the average cost of these timbers to the tree-cutter peasants and traders was only 1.2 TL. There was a great demand for these cheaper contraband timbers in Adana, which encouraged more and more peasants and timber merchants to get involved in the timber smuggling.⁹⁰⁹ Actually, it can be said that this smuggling activity in Adana represents a situation common to other regions of Anatolia. The restrictions about the forests and increasing exportation of wood and timber drove the prices of firewood, timber and other forests products up. This price mechanism expectably encouraged the illegal trade of the forest products.⁹¹⁰

Peasants, faced with the aggravation of their economic standing and the bureaucratic red tape before the use of their rights to benefit from forests (*ormanlardan intifa hakkı*), clandestinely cut trees and collected forests products for trade or their own use. Especially those villages in forestry areas that had long been engaged in forest harvesting and the timber trade defied the ban on the use of the

⁹⁰⁸ Perteve Erkal, “Pozantı-Toros Ormanlarında Gördüklerim,” *Verim*, No. 3 (June 15, 1935), p. 10.

⁹⁰⁹ Azmi Demir, “Adana’da Orman Kaçakçılığı,” *Verim*, No. 7-8 (1935), pp. 5-6.

⁹¹⁰ It was reported that in Tokat, the firewood prices had tripled in the last years. In Aydın, there was a scarcity of firewood and timber due to the strict implementation of the Forest Law; this situation increased the prices remarkably in the recent years. In Samsun, the prices of firewood and coal soared due to the misapplication of the Forest Law. In İçel, since the local government licensed only a limited number of big capitalists to run the forests, there appeared a monopoly, which prevented the peasants to benefit from the forests. Therefore, the prices of firewood and timber climbed in the last years. Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies Who Visited Their Election Districts during the 1939 Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/515.2062.1].

forests by engaging in the smuggling of timber and other forest products.⁹¹¹ Especially those woodcutters who had become unemployed after the government leased out the forests to the timber companies became involved in smuggling.⁹¹²

In Kastamonu, one of the biggest forestry provinces of Turkey, for example, a great number of the peasants in many villages had been living on the trade of timber and other forest products for a long time. However, after the government leased out the forests to a forest company, tens of thousands of forester peasants lost their economic mainstays. Although they had a right to benefit from the forests for their own needs, it was very difficult to obtain an official license to do so. Therefore, some peasants had to work in the forest company as laborers. However, most of the peasants continued to cut down tree and trade wood and timber illegally.⁹¹³

Another reason stimulating the illicit tree cutting was the traditional village crafts producing such wooden items as shingles, wooden spoons, wooden plates, and wooden mortar. Mostly deprived of official licenses to benefit from forests and carry out their business, they also challenged the forest policy of the government. In the Black Sea region, for instance, the shingle-making (*hartamacılık*) was an important village craft, which required timber from spruce trees or pine trees. There were many peasants who engaged in the shingle-making art and shingle trade. However, the strict ban on tree cutting deprived those peasants who lived on shingle-making of the timber as a unique raw material. Therefore, the shingle-makers and traders also began to cut timber without official permission. For example, a group of shingle-maker peasants from the Yağlı Kökçe village of Görele was caught in the act in the

⁹¹¹ Süreyya Toygar, "Kaçak Mes'elesi," *Verim*, No. 7-8 (1935), p. 16.

⁹¹² Kerim Yund, "Ermenâk Ceviz Ağaçları," *Verim*, No. 7-8 (1935), p. 9.

⁹¹³ Eski, *İsmet İnönü'nün Kastamonu Gezileri*, p. 63.

forest by the gendarme. However, they managed to escape by opening fire on the soldiers.⁹¹⁴

In those years, another village art suffered from the ban on the wood works and timber cutting was wooden spoon making. In those years, not only peasants in villages, but also townsfolk in the Anatolian countryside, except for some upper class bureaucrat and merchant families, used wooden spoon. It was a popular business field in towns and villages. Some villages near the woodlands specialized in this craft. There were many wooden spoon-making villages and peasants who exclusively lived on this trade. For this village craft, peasants needed to cut suitable timbers from box and juniper trees.

However, due to the restrictive measures, the wooden-spoon-makers were not permitted to make use of the forests. Furthermore, local governments put wooden-spoon making and trade under a ban. Therefore, those peasants who lived on this craft could not help but cut tree at night secretly. After they got the necessary timber, they made and sold wooden spoons in great secrecy. The wood-worker peasants of Kastamonu, for instance, carefully hid and carried their wooden spoons in oxcarts to neighboring provinces. In Ankara, for example, they sold wooden spoons secretly and great fear in the Ulus district.⁹¹⁵

Turcoman nomads called *Tahtacılar* (wood workers), who lived in central, western and southern Anatolia, also subsisted on forest products, as is evident from their name. They are the chief woodworkers of Anatolia. Woodworking was their age-old and unique expertise. Upon the prohibition of this activity with the legal regulations regarding the forests, they became a law unto themselves.⁹¹⁶ These

⁹¹⁴ "Orman Kaçakçıları," *Yeşilgireson*, 09.01.1937.

⁹¹⁵ İsmail Yağcı, "Tuz, Tahta Kaşık Kaçakçılığı ve Yol Parası," <http://www.tumgazeteler.com>

⁹¹⁶ H. N. Kutluk, "Tahtacılar," *Verim*, No. 4 (1935), pp. 6-7.

“ignorant peasants,” “forest monsters” or “forest killers,” as called by the Republican elite, continued to cut timbers and to carry them with convoys of packhorses to Kayseri, Niğde, Bor and similar forestless places for sale. They also engaged in tree-cutting and the timber trade in the Tarsus, Osmaniye, Saimbeyli and Feke districts of Mersin and Adana.⁹¹⁷

Tahtacı peasants were so professional in timber smuggling that they always covered up their tracks. Their main strategy to avoid arrest or fines was to change their names incessantly. Using different phony names and nicknames in each place they went to cut trees, they often managed to cover their tracks, and confused the security forces. Even taken into courts several times, they did not lose heart and generally managed to circumvent the laws thanks to their phony names.⁹¹⁸

The election district reports, inspection district reports and the wish lists of the local congresses of the RPP reveal how the peasants challenged the government’s restrictions and monopoly over the forests. In 1931, it was reported from Denizli, for example, that the local authorities avoided giving licenses to the peasants even for limited use of the forests. Therefore, the peasants had to resort to thieving. Some forests rangers also cooperated with the peasants in return for small interests.⁹¹⁹ According to the report of a Bursa deputy dated 1935, the peasants had to cut tree secretly because the local authorities had not given them official permission.⁹²⁰

The situation in the eastern parts of the country was similar. İsmet İnönü, in his tour of region, noted that the villages of the Avundur district of Ağrı, an important forestry area of the region, for instance, the peasants were continuing to “destroy” the forests. In Ardahan, likewise, the peasants were, in Prime Minister’s

⁹¹⁷ Azmi Demir, “Adana’da Orman Kaçakçılığı,” *Verim*, No. 7-8 (1935), p. 7.

⁹¹⁸ H. N. Kutluk, “Tahtacılar,” p. 8.

⁹¹⁹ Wish Lists of the 1931 RPP Provincial Congresses, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1].

⁹²⁰ Election District Reports of the Bursa Deputies, BCA CHP [490.01/631.79.1], 11.11.1935.

words, “plundering” and “looting” the forests. Needless to say, his words of “destroy,” “plunder” and “loot” reflect the government’s standpoint and give us an important clue about the peasant resistance to the government control over the forests.⁹²¹

In 1939, Samsun deputies reported that despite the Forest Law, the peasants did not obey the rules and consequently many disputes arose between the peasants and the state officials. Zonguldak deputies warned the government that the peasants were continuing timber smuggling activities as they had before. The forest rangers who received only 7 TL as salary per month did not efficiently fight against these smuggler peasants. On the contrary, they were depraved by getting involved in smuggling. Tokat deputies also recorded in their report that despite the large forest areas of 400,000 hectares, there was a limited number of rangers patrolling in the forests of Tokat. They were not able to protect the forests. That is to say, they were not able to cope with the peasants who continued to exploit the forests.⁹²²

In a similar vein, Niyazi Berkes in his surveys about Ankara villages noted why and how the peasants challenged the government by cutting trees in Ankara forests illegally. One of the villages he studied was near a forest. Therefore, the wood-cutting had for a long time been a longstanding and deep-rooted business activity in the village. In addition, the village community used firewood as fuel. Therefore, after the restrictions on the use of the forests, they began to cut trees at night.⁹²³

A newspaper article titled “Don’t Cut without License!” (*Ruhsatsız Kesmeyin*) in the issue of *Köroğlu* dated 3 September 1938 demonstrates the

⁹²¹ Öztürk, *İsmet Paşa’nın Kürt Raporu*, pp. 43-45.

⁹²² Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies Who Visited Their Election Districts during the 1939 Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/515.2062.1].

⁹²³ Berkes, *Bazı Ankara Köyleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma*, p. 40.

permanence of the peasants' challenge to the strict government control over the forests. The article warned the peasants about the ban on the use of the forests without official permission by giving a recent case of the Kızılcahamam peasants. They had been going against the law for a long time by cutting tree in the forest. However, one day, when they were carrying the timbers in oxcarts, the forest rangers arrested and took them to the court. The newspaper advised the peasants, who mostly disregarded the rules regarding the forests, to draw a lesson from this dramatic situation of the illegal tree-cutters.⁹²⁴

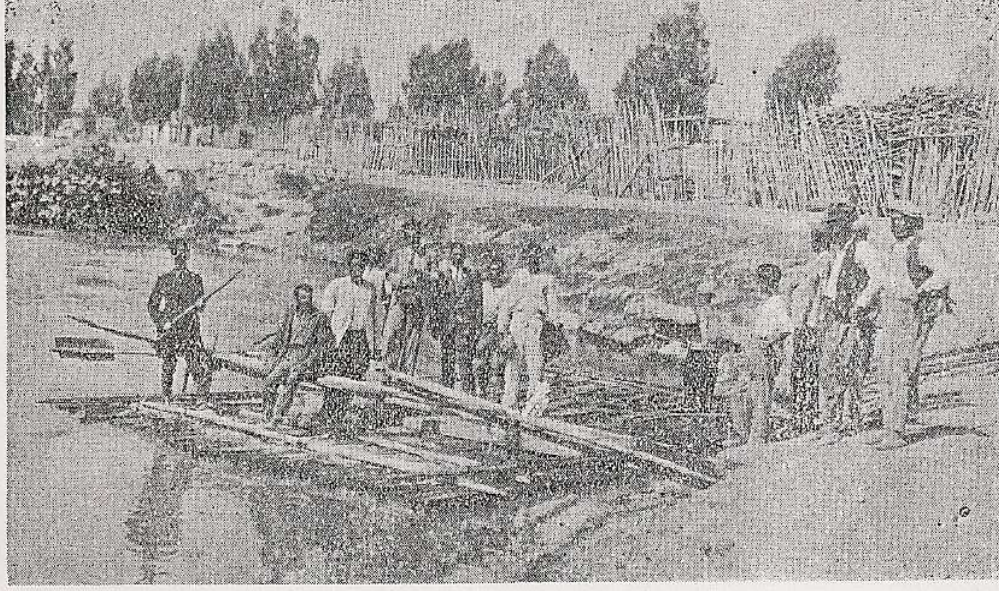
An article published in 1935 on the wood and timber smuggling in Adana gives an idea about the permanence and tenacity of the peasant resistance to the state's control over the forests. Timber smuggling became, so to speak, "a popular art" among the peasants in Adana. Inadequate number of forest rangers as compared to immensity of the Karaisalo Jungles and Seyhan and K rk n rivers and their reaches passing through the jungle provided a suitable environment for the smugglers. The peasants living along the rivers and nearby villages were all engaged in illicit trade of forest products. These peasants were informally organized according to a certain division of labor. Some peasants only cut trees, some carried trees on rafts in the rivers, and some made wood items, some made rafts the smugglers always used. Among them, there were peasants who were on the lookout for gendarmes and forest rangers to warn the others immediately, when any danger emerged.⁹²⁵

The rafts loaded with timbers and woods usually moved on the rivers at night or at any time whenever the forest rangers were far away. As soon as the items in the rafts were unloaded, the peasants carried them to their homes. Sometimes, they hid

⁹²⁴ "Ruhsatsız Kesmeyin," *K ro lu*, 03.09.1938.

⁹²⁵ Azmi Demir, "Adana'da Orman Ka ak ılı ı," *Verim*, No. 7-8 (1935), p. 5.

them under the sand or camouflaged them with grass and haycocks in secret places for the purpose of transporting them to the home or to the market at a more suitable time.⁹²⁶



Forestry officials, smugglers, and smuggled timbers caught in a raft in Seyhan river in Adana. “Adana’da Kaçakçılık,” *Verim*, No.5 (August 15, 1935), p.12.

The illegal wood and timber trade was so widespread that there was a great discrepancy between the official statistics about the total timber consumption and real amount of timber consumed in Adana. According to the official statistics, the total consumption of timber in Adana was between 100,000 and 120,000 pieces, equivalent to 8000 and 10,000 meters. These figures were the tip of iceberg. However, the real amount of timber consumed in the province as estimated by the local authorities fluctuated from one year to another between 30,000 and 40,000 meters. That is to say, the smuggled wood and timbers met a far greater part of the demand.⁹²⁷

⁹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Upon the increase in smuggling cases, the security forces and forest rangers deployed at certain points along with the rivers. They were entrusted with standing watch all day long for 20 days between 4 July and 15 August 1935. As a result, they caught 435 pieces of timber equivalent to 1700 TL. In addition to this, about 500 pieces of timbers were found hidden inside homes, under sands and grass, and in rivers. In other words, in total 935 pieces of tall and short timber at the value of 3000 TL were seized by the forest rangers and security forces only within 20 days.⁹²⁸

On the other hand, these smugglers were only those who were caught. Many continued their activities, managing to escape from the rangers and the gendarme. When the forest rangers found them, they generally ran until nightfall and vanished without a trace in the dark. Moreover, sometimes, the tree-cutter peasants showed solidarity by assisting each other. If one tried to escape from rangers, others became a part of the action by taking over the contraband timber. A few tired rangers were seldom able to catch these provisional and more energetic forces.⁹²⁹

Another peasant strategy was to delegitimize the companies that controlled and exploited the forests. Using the power of rumor, they sometimes set the village community together against the bans on tree cutting. For instance, the peasants in Cerrahköy, located in a forestry area of İnegöl, had bore resentment against the Bozüyük Timber Company and its owner, RPP deputy İbrahim Çolak, since the company had deprived them of the wood and timber by taking over the forests in the region. On 10 February 1939, some peasants from the village who engaged in timber trade rumored that new President İnönü had shot to death the timber company's owner. Probably, the main motive for this rumor was probably to hearten the peasant

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

community to challenge to the company by cutting and trading timber without worrying.⁹³⁰

Bribing the forest rangers was the most widespread way to exploit the forests. Many forest rangers and even forest administration officials closed their eyes to the illegal timber cutting and trade in return for bribes. Peasants bribed also forest engineers who investigated the peasants' needs and determined the maximum amount of timber the peasants could legally cut. Thus, the engineers recorded the amounts the bribe givers wanted.⁹³¹ Furthermore, some forest rangers directly or indirectly involved in the smuggling activities by cooperating with the peasants.⁹³²

Effects of Smuggling and Measures Against It

Undoubtedly, smuggling was viewed as a subversive and dangerous action by the ruling circles. Smuggling meant the people's reappropriation of the taxes and profits that the government had appropriated and tried to appropriate through monopolies and state factories. The revenues the state monopolies yielded to the government was about 15 percent of all state revenues. The profits of the state monopolies financed many state projects, particularly the railway building construction projects which were considered a national goal.⁹³³

⁹³⁰ From the Bursa Governor Şefik Soyer to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, İBA [12212-8], 1939.

⁹³¹ "Büyükdere'de Kesilen Ağaçlar İçin Sarıyer Kaymakamının Muhakemesine Karar Verildi," *Verim*, No. 4 (July 15, 1935), p. 12; "Çirkin Bir Hadise," *Verim*, No. 5 (Aug. 15, 1935), p. 11. According to these news, Bursa forest director accepted bribe; "Çirkin Hadise İkileşti," *Verim*, No. 6 (Sept. 15, 1935), p. 11. Based on the newspaper reports, *Verim* reported that the forest engineer in Gönen accepted bribe; "Eski Adana Orman Başkatibi Müddeiumumiliğe Verildi," *Verim*, No. 6 (Sept. 15, 1935), p. 11. In this case, the forest director in Adana was prosecuted due to the corruption. Also see F. Rıfki [Atay], *Bizim Akdeniz*, p. 36.

⁹³² Report of the RPP Kırklareli Deputy Şevket, BCA CHP [490.1/724.477.1], 18.01.1931. See the file titled Reports about the Situation of the RPP Organizations in Some Provinces and About Their Reorganization and Enlargement, BCA CHP [490.1/724.477.1], 07.02.1931.

⁹³³ Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 1, p. 251.

In 1928, the general director of the Tobacco Monopoly Administration stated that since the large part of the revenues yielded by the tobacco monopoly were assigned to the railway construction, the tobacco smuggling was the most serious obstacle before the railway building schemes of the government. The director requested the press to publish articles portraying smuggling as a crime committed against the nation and the state.⁹³⁴

During the 1920s and especially 1930s, the government exerted great efforts to eliminate smuggling by several means. The anti-smuggling measures can be divided into three categories: the legal and security measures, the ideological propaganda, and economic measures. The first way to which the government resorted was to take legal measures by enacting several anti-smuggling laws. Since the smugglers identified and exploited the gaps in the laws every time, the lawmakers had to upgrade the anti-smuggling laws to bridge the gaps every few years.

The government promulgated the Law about Prohibition and Prosecution of the Smuggling (No.1126) in 1927.⁹³⁵ Only two years later, because this law fell short of the expectations of the government in the struggle against smuggling, the government had to enact a new anti-smuggling law (No.1510) in 1929.⁹³⁶ This new law included all of the state monopolies, the cross-border smuggling and the regulations about the customs. The new law also reflected the increasing development of the state monopolies and the trends toward protectionism with high custom tariffs.⁹³⁷ Indeed, the cross-border smuggling increased after the Turkish

⁹³⁴ *Tütün İnhisarlar İdaresi, Muharreratı Umumiye Mecmuası*, IV, 1929, p. 79, quoted in Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 150.

⁹³⁵ Kaçakçılığın Men-i ve Takibi Hakkında Kanun, No.1126, Date. 10.07.1927, *Düstur III*, Vol.8, p. 1783.

⁹³⁶ Kaçakçılığın Men ve Takibi Hakkında Kanun, No.1510, Date. 15.04.1929, *Düstur III*, Vol.10, p. 1798.

⁹³⁷ Fahri Çoker, *Türk Parlamento Tarihi: TBMM IV. Dönem (1931-1935)*, Vol. 1 (Ankara: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Vakfı, 1996), p. 335. In addition see, *Düstur III*, Vol. 10, p. 1798; *Resmî Gazete*, 15.06.1929.

government raised the tariff walls after 1929. Therefore, the government established a semi-military force against the smugglers in the frontier zones in 1931 and organized these forces under the name of the Custom Enforcement General Command (*Gümrük Muhafaza Umum Kumandanlığı*) in 1932.⁹³⁸

However, neither internal nor cross-border smuggling slackened in the face of these measures. Therefore, the ruling circles began to talk about the reestablishment of the Independence Tribunals (*İstiklal Mahkemeleri*), which had been set up by the nationalist forces during the Turkish War of Independence to prosecute war criminals, deserters, and anti-nationalist persons. Although the tribunals except for Ankara tribunal were closed in 1921, and the tribunal in Ankara continued to operate until 1927 in order to prosecute anti-regime rebellions. In 1931, the RPP elites again suggested setting up Independence Tribunals so as to wage war on all people who engaged in smuggling.⁹³⁹

When the new law also failed to yield the expected results, soon after, the government modified it once again by enacting another anti-smuggling law in 1932. According to the preamble of the new law draft, smuggling had reached a new dimension that threatened the country; therefore, smuggling, its causes and antidotes had required reconsideration.⁹⁴⁰ This new law did differentiate between the cross-border smuggling and domestic smuggling of untaxed Turkish goods and severely punished both sorts of these illegal economic activities.⁹⁴¹

Based on this new law, in 1932, the Ministry of Justice set up specialized courts of smuggling in several provinces in which smuggling activities were most

⁹³⁸ The Law about the Reorganization of Customhouse Guards According to the Military Organization (*Gümrük Muhafaza Memurlarının Askeri Teşkilata Göre Tensiki Hakkına Kanun*), No. 1841, Date. 19.07.1931, *Resmî Gazete*, 27.07.1931.

⁹³⁹ *Akbaba*, 23.10.1931, quoted in Güler (ed.), *Açıklamalı Yönetim Zamandizini*, p. 293.

⁹⁴⁰ Çoker, *Türk Parlamento Tarihi: TBMM IV. Dönem*, p. 334.

⁹⁴¹ Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 1, pp. 398-399.

active. The specialized civil courts began to operate in Adana, Antalya, Balıkesir, Diyarbakır, İstanbul, İzmir, Kars, Lüleburgaz, Malatya, Muğla, Siirt, Sinop, Sivas, Trabzon and Van. In addition to these courts, specialized military courts were founded in the Gaziantep, Urfa and Mardin.⁹⁴² However, the civil special courts proved to be ineffective and consequently closed down within a short time. Only three specialized military courts continued to operate in the following years.⁹⁴³

The government once more amended the anti-smuggling law in 1934 by adding a new clause about social assistance by the government to the families of those people who had fallen victim in conflicts with smugglers. Thereby, the government tried to encourage the state personnel and security forces to struggle against the smugglers more effectively.⁹⁴⁴

The ordinary citizens were also called for the fight with smuggling by denouncing those people who were involved in the trade of contraband items. For this aim, the government set up a smuggling tip-off system and issued the Regulation about the Prize that would be Given to Those Persons Who Made a Big Contribution to the Prosecution of the Smugglers in February 1935⁹⁴⁵

It is understood that the authorities did not succeed in encouraging the people to join their anti-smuggling efforts. Indeed, the government endeavored to persuade the citizens to give their support to the anti-smuggling campaign. Because the smuggling tip-off system proved to be ineffective in the mid-1930s partly due to the

⁹⁴² Government Order about the Military and Specialized Lawcourts (Askeri ve İhtisas Mahkemeleri Hakkına Kararname), *Resmî Gazete*, 26.01.1932.

⁹⁴³ Togsoy, "Cenub Hudutlarımızda Kaçakçılık," p. 21.

⁹⁴⁴ Çoker, *Türk Parlamento Tarihi: TBMM IV. Dönem*, p. 337.

⁹⁴⁵ Kaçakçıların Takibinde ve Muhafaza Hususlarında Büyük Yararlılıkları Görülenlere Verilecek İkramiye Hakkında Nizamname, *Resmî Gazete*, 23.02.1935.

people's fear of smugglers, the authorities declared in January 1937 that the denouncers' identities would be kept secret.⁹⁴⁶

Along with all these measures, the government launched a propaganda campaign against smuggling. In 1927, with the introduction of the first comprehensive anti-smuggling law, the government decided to use the education institutions for the ideological struggle against smuggling. The Ministry of Education issued a circular about the anti-smuggling campaign in schools. In this circular, it was stated that citizens did not support the government's anti-smuggling efforts in the face of the extensive trade of smuggled goods. Therefore, citizens should be persuaded to join the fight against smuggling through education. For this aim, some courses in primary and secondary schools should teach the next generations of the harmful effects of smuggling to society. According to the circular:

It is understood that the use and trade of contraband items still astonishingly continue in many places of the country and the more astonishing reality is that the use of smuggled tobacco is not stuck in the people's minds as a moral corruption as well as a delinquency. Smuggling means stealing money from the state treasury and accordingly from the pocket of the loyal citizens. That is to say, it is nothing but literally theft (...). Given that one task of our educational institutions is to preserve the morality, our schools and educational institutions needed to warn the public conscious. Therefore, the educational institutions will carry out a grim struggle against smuggling. (...). In *Yurt Bilgisi* (Civics) courses in primary schools and in courses about the citizenship and national services in secondary schools, the great importance of fulfilling the tax obligation for the welfare of the country and the nation should be taught to the students in order to prevent the new generations from the use of contraband items, which is a great moral corruption.⁹⁴⁷

In 1929, when the government began to turn to more protectionist policies and enacted a more comprehensive law against smuggling, the National Economy and Saving Society (*Milli İktisat ve Tasarruf Cemiyeti*) was founded under the auspices and presidency of Kazım Özalp, the Chair of the GNAT. This was the harbinger of a

⁹⁴⁶ "Kaçakçılığı İhbar Edenler Gizlenecek," *Cumhuriyet*, 16.01.1937.

⁹⁴⁷ "Kaçakçılık ve Mektep Müdürleri, Muallimleri," *İkdam*, 10.11.1927.

massive propaganda campaign against the smuggling and the foreign goods. Especially on National Saving Day (*Milli Tasarruf Günü*) on December 25, posters and slogans about the merits and benefits of consuming legal taxed domestic goods and the harmful effects of foreign and smuggled goods were hanged in the public places, schools, state offices, and mosques.

In 1934, the government went a step further and officially assigned December 12-18 as the National Economy and Home Products Week (*Ulusal Ekonomi ve Yerli Mallar Haftası*). In the schools, the pupils were taught the well-known popular tongue twisters praising the consumption of legal domestic goods. One of them was as follows: “Home product, the product of the country, everybody should use it” (*yerli malı, yurdun malı, herkes onu kullanmalı*).⁹⁴⁸

Smuggling was considered to be treason by the authorities. An ideal citizen who loved his country was supposed to consume only legal, taxed domestic goods.⁹⁴⁹ The newspapers published announcements and aphorisms praising non-smuggled and domestic goods, as in the sample below. The pamphlets written for the peasants accused those who consumed the contraband goods of harming the nation and the state. The people were supposed to do their part in the elimination of smuggling by avoiding buying smuggled goods or by informing the authorities about smugglers. Refet Aksoy, for instance, wrote in his pamphlet as follows:

Our government loses millions of liras because of the smuggling carried out by bastard persons (...). Dear Countryman! Do not buy even a matchstick from smugglers who come to your village, and report this bastard to the village headman or gendarme station so that nobody can infringe the people's right or your right.⁹⁵⁰

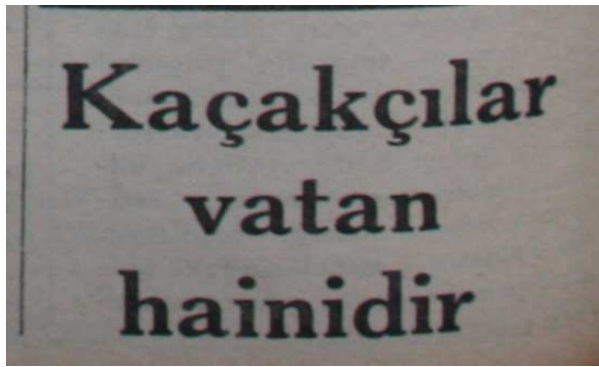
⁹⁴⁸ *Cumhuriyet Ansiklopedisi, 1923-2000*, Vol. 1, 1923-1940 (İstanbul: YKY, 2005), p. 133, 238.

⁹⁴⁹ Kuvvettilli, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 46.

⁹⁵⁰ R. Aksoy, *Köylülerimizle Başbaşa*, p. 62.



Advertisement of *Köylü* cigarette. The uncle peasant will make himself comfortable / He will no longer drink bad *rakı*, dirty smuggled / Lying on a shade after his works like that / He will light up a best quality of cigarette of 6 piasters per box. *Köroğlu*, 11.03.1931.



Local press published sayings declaring the smuggling as a treason. This newspaper poster says, "Smugglers are traitors," *Yeni Adana*, 05.12.1936

The government used propaganda in the face of timber and wood smuggling, too. In the semi-official magazine *Verim*, many articles were published pointing out the importance of the forests and even each tree for the national wealth. Many newspapers also propagated the idea of preserving the forests and the importance of even one tree for the national economy. Tree cutting was seen as an inhumane and immoral behavior detrimental to both humanity and the nation.⁹⁵¹

⁹⁵¹ For example, see Esad Muhlis Oksal, "Ormancılığın Ulusal Ekonomideki Yeri I," *Verim*, No. 1 (Apr. 15, 1935); Esad Muhlis Oksal, "Ormancılığın Ulusal Ekonomideki Yeri II," *Verim*, No. 4 (July 15, 1935); Prof. Schöpfer, "Ormanların Medeniyete Hizmetleri," *Verim*, No. 5 (Aug. 15, 1935).

Another anti-smuggling weapon was the railways, which transported the goods produced by the state monopolies and factories to the remote places of the country. Along with the military and security goals, the railways were designed to unify the national market and especially to integrate eastern Anatolian informal economy to the formal economy of the rest of the country. Indeed, the railways, particularly those in eastern Anatolia, were described by a columnist as “the swords drawn against the smuggling.”⁹⁵²

Finally, smuggling activities compelled the government to take economic measures to eliminate the economic conditions that paved way for it. This point is of great importance to our discussion of smuggling as a phenomenon that benefitted the large part of the low-income cultivators and consumers. Indeed, in the face of uncontrolled tobacco smuggling, the government had to permit some farmers to cultivate tobacco. In other words, there was a contestation between the peasants and the government as to which areas the tobacco farming was to be legal. In this contestation, the peasants’ complaints and demands and their smuggling activities had some actual repercussions. Indeed, some of the contestant peasants living in forbidden zones for tobacco production succeeded to manipulate the government and accessed the right to cultivate tobacco. A careful comparison of the forbidden and free zones for tobacco cultivation in the Tobacco Monopoly Law (No.1701) dated 1930 and the next Tobacco and Tobacco Monopoly Law (No.3437) enacted in 1938 proves that the great part of the peasants managed to open the forbidden zones into the tobacco farming. Indeed, the new Tobacco Monopoly Law dated 1938 gave permission of tobacco cultivation to those peasants who wanted to engage in tobacco cultivation in Eskişehir-Mihalıççık, Kütahya-Emet, Çanakkale-Yenice, Denizli-

⁹⁵² *Milliyet*, 24.02.1931, quoted in Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 48.

Tavas and Buldan, Bursa-Karacabey, Manisa-Alaşehir, Trabzon-Maçka, Kırklareli-Babaeski, Isparta-Atabey, Muğla-Marmaris, and Mardin-Gurs.⁹⁵³

Again, the widespread discontent with the unfair treatment and abuse by tobacco experts, which led the cultivators to engage in smuggling, compelled the government to decide in April 1934 that tobacco experts would not reject or demand reduction in price for tobacco as waste and poor quality above a maximum waste level without going to arbitration.⁹⁵⁴ The maximum waste portions that the monopoly experts could discard or offer lower prices were officially determined between minimum 7 percent and maximum 15 percent. Only for the poorest quality of tobacco growing in the Hasankeyf district of Gaziantep, the scrap rate was determined as 45 percent. Moreover, the experts would not cut more than 1.5 percent for the loss of weight caused by transportation in delivery to tobacco warehouses or factories.⁹⁵⁵

In addition, as a result of the ongoing smuggling activities, along with the widespread complaints about the high prices of the monopoly goods, the government had to decrease the taxation and accordingly the prices of several items which were subjected to smuggling such as sugar, salt, cigarette, *rakı* and cotton textiles in the mid-1930s. In other words, the smuggling, in some respects, served the ordinary consumers by prompting the government to take action against soaring prices of the monopoly goods.

In the early 1930s, the government had to decrease the prices of some brands of cigarettes, especially those brands called *mamulâtı cariye* which were produced for low-income people. For example, whereas *Köylü* between 6 and 7 piasters,

⁹⁵³ Compare the Tobacco Monopoly Law, No. 1701, Date. 28.06.1930 and the Tobacco and Tobacco Monopoly Law, No. 3437, Date. 10.06.1938.

⁹⁵⁴ Tekeli and İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçilik*, pp.119-120.

⁹⁵⁵ *Adliye Encümeni Ruznamesi, TBMM Encümenler Ruznamesi*, 1 Teşrinisani 1934, (Ankara: TBMM), p. 906.

Hanımeli 10 piasters, *Tatlı* 9 piasters, *Gazi* thin 30 piasters, *Ahali* 19 piasters by 1929 were reduced to 4-5 piasters, 8 piasters, 8 piasters, 20 piasters, 18 piasters, respectively.⁹⁵⁶ The price decreases continued during the 1930s due to both economic crisis and smuggling effect. As of 1 February 1936, the Ministry of Monopoly and Customs reduced the prices of many cigarette brands between 20 and 40 percent.⁹⁵⁷

The government also discounted the prices of *rakı* in the mid-1930s. According to a 1935 report by the RPP Urfa deputy, the recent price decreases in cigarette and *rakı* had weakened the smuggling of these two items to some extent.⁹⁵⁸ Indeed, as noted in an article published in *Resimli Ay* on smuggling, the price reductions in tobacco, *rakı* and sugar partially destabilized the smuggling of these items by 1938.⁹⁵⁹

Indeed, in the face of escalating demand for contraband sugar, for instance, the government decided to diminish the sugar prices in order to discourage the smuggling activities in 1935. For this aim, it began to keep down the costs of sugar by reducing the prices of sugar beets. In addition, the consumption tax and tariff rate for sugar were lowered in 1935 and 1937. The consumption tax on sugar was reduced from 12 piasters to 4 piasters per kg.⁹⁶⁰ According to the estimations of Şevket Pamuk, tariff rate on the import of sugar decreased from 240 percent to 220 percent by 1937 as compared to the 1933 tariff rates. Although this rate was still high

⁹⁵⁶ Compare the prices in 1927 given in Salih Zeki, *Türkiye’de Tütün* (İstanbul, 1928), p.337-339 and the prices in 1932 listed in Cezmi Emiroğlu, *Türkiye’de Vergi Sistemi: Üçüncü Kitap, İnhisarlar ve Devlet Emlâki* (Ankara: Damga Matbaası, 1933), p. 53-55.

⁹⁵⁷ For the earlier and reduced prices of some brands, see “Sigara Fiyatlarında Tenzilat,” *Yeşilgireson*, 18.01.1936.

⁹⁵⁸ Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies Who Visited Their Election Districts during the 1935 Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/725.481.1].

⁹⁵⁹ Togsoy, “Cenub Hudutlarımızda Kaçakçılık,” p. 22.

⁹⁶⁰ See Behçet Günay “Şeker,” *Ülkü*, No. 31 (Sept., 1935), p. 79. See the Law about the Sugar Consumption Tax and Tariff Rate (Şeker İstihlak ve Gümrük Resimleri Hakkında Kanun), *Resmi Gazete*, No. 2785, Date. 17.06.1935 (The Enactment Date: 12.06.1935).

in comparison with the pre-1929 levels, it was reduced by 9 percent by 1937.⁹⁶¹ Thus, whereas the sugar was about 40-60 piasters per kilo in 1932, this price was reduced to nearly 25-30 piasters in 1935.⁹⁶² In eastern and southeastern Turkey, where sugar prices were about 80-90 piasters,⁹⁶³ these prices also were marked down to around 50 piasters in 1935.⁹⁶⁴

Another item, price of which was reduced by the government due to the smuggling and constant complaints was salt. In 1935, the government, taking widespread complaints, requests, and rampant smuggling activities into consideration, reduced the salt prices noticeably, about 50 percent, from 6 piasters to 3 piasters per kilo.⁹⁶⁵

In addition, the extensive textile smuggling pressured the rulers to decrease textile prices. The Prime Minister İnönü, after his tour to the eastern provinces, recommended the government to drive the textile prices down through decreasing the tariff rates and the import quotas in order to prevent the rampant textile smuggling in 1935. In a similar line, the press also underlined the problem of widespread textile smuggling in the region. *Son Posta* reported that the eastern provinces were full of textile smugglers. According to the newspaper, the main reason for the textile smuggling in the region was the high prices of the domestic fabrics and clothes. For that reason, the newspaper wrote that the most effective weapon against this smuggling would be the reduction of the prices of cotton and silk fabrics.⁹⁶⁶ In parallel to these recommendations, the government had to recude the tariff rate on

⁹⁶¹ I would like to thank Professor Şevket Pamuk and Yelda Yücel for sharing this data with me.

⁹⁶² Hatipoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ziraî Buhran*, p. 57; *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 119.

⁹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁹⁶⁴ Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies Who Visited Their Election Districts during the 1935 Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/725.481.1]. Especially see the summaries of the reports on Urfa and Mardin provinces.

⁹⁶⁵ The Law about the Salt Price (Tuz Fiyatı Hakkına Kanun), No.2752, Date. 05.06.1935, *Düstur III*, Vol. 16, p. 1281.

⁹⁶⁶ "Kaçakçılığa Karşı Ancak Ucuzlukla Karşı Konulabilir," *Son Posta*, 29.12.1936.

the import of cotton textiles. Whereas this rate was 85 percent by 1933, it was reduced by about 6 percent in 1937 to 80 percent.⁹⁶⁷

Despite all these measures, the smuggling did not cease during the second half of the 1930s, although it was reported that it comparatively decreased in some items whose prices were reduced. For instance, it was reported from eastern Anatolia that even though the decrease in sugar prices from 80-90 piasters to 50 piasters weakened the sugar smuggling, it was still alive because the smuggled sugar was still cheaper by half, about 25 piasters. According to a politician familiar with the economic conditions of the region, unless the sugar price decreased to such low rates as 25 piasters, the people could not be supposed to give up using the smuggled sugar.⁹⁶⁸

An official circular of the Directory-General of the Monopolies (No. 29, Date. 10.03.1941), sent to the local monopoly directories, stands for the fact that the smuggling continued to dominate throughout Anatolia. In the circular, the authorities acknowledged that it would not be possible to be successful in the fight against the smugglers unless the real origins and causes underlying the smuggling were not grasped completely.⁹⁶⁹

Although no evidence exists to connect directly the decrease in the custom revenues and the widespread smuggling, the smuggling, along with the slowdown of the international trade and price declines, must also have played a role in decline of the custom revenues. Again, especially given the high prices of the monopoly products in spite of the radical decline in the prices of the raw materials, it is

⁹⁶⁷ I took these data from Şevket Pamuk and I would like to thank him one more time for his contribution.

⁹⁶⁸ Summaries of the Reports of the Deputies Who Visited Their Election Districts during the 1935 Break of the National Assembly, BCA CHP [490.1/725.481.1]. Especially see the summary of the report on Mardin.

⁹⁶⁹ Erk, *Kaçakçılık İşleri*, p. 172.

reasonable to think that the smuggling also, more or less, played a role in the decrease in monopoly revenues.

Table 17 - State Revenues of Customs and Monopolies (1000 TL).⁹⁷⁰

Years	Customs	Monopolies
1930	71,700	41,875
1931	56,273	39,117
1932	38,500	32,675
1933	45,250	32,995
1934	36,600	32,290
1935	34,400	32,440

Source: Yorgaki Effimianidis, *Cihan İktisad Buhranı Önünde Türkiye* (İstanbul: Kaadçılık ve Matbaacılık Anonim Şirketi, 1936), p. 275.

As for the effects of the peasant resistance to the state control over the forested areas, as stated above, the peasants aggrieved by the ban on the use of the forests and exploitation of the forest products by a limited number of capitalist companies. They voiced their complaints and demands frequently. This public outcry together with the peasants' endless efforts to exploit the forests compelled the government to take some measures. This is evident from an official notice sent by Ministry of Agriculture in 1933 to the provincial forest administrations in many forested provinces. By this notice, the Minister invited them to make things easier for those village artisans who engaged in woodworking and applied for the licenses to cut timber from the forests and to use woodworking machines.⁹⁷¹

Furthermore, in the face of widespread wood and timber smuggling and complaints about the forest administrations, in the same year, the Ministry of Agriculture and the General Directorate of the Forest Enterprises issued an order to the provincial forest directorates, according to which the provincial forest

⁹⁷⁰ There are some differences between the figures regarding the monopoly revenues given by Doğruel-Doğruel and Effimianidis. For the figures given by Doğruel-Doğruel see Table 1.

⁹⁷¹ Evaluation of the 1933 Provincial RPP Congresses' Wish Lists about Agriculture and Forests, BCA CHP [490.1/502.2016.2], 26.09.1936.

directorates were supposed to distribute sufficient timber, firewood or other forest products or to give official permissions for timber-cutting to peasants more easily without any delay.⁹⁷²

Undoubtedly, all of the smuggling activities did not generate favorable consequences for the peasants. In the face of the peasants' strong everyday resistance to the state control over the forests, the government needed to prepare more restrictive Forest Law in 1937 that was the first comprehensive law regarding the forests and aiming at the demarcation of the forests as soon as possible. On the other hand, although the government planned to enclose about 543,200 hectares forests areas through nationalization from 1937 on, because of the legal resistance by individuals and village communities over the oversight of forested areas, the total area of the nationalized forests remained at quite low levels, about 28,839 hectares.⁹⁷³ That is to say, this restrictive law did not halt peasant's resistance.

⁹⁷² *Ibid.*

⁹⁷³ See Hüseyin Ayaz, "Türkiye'de Orman Mülkiyetinde Tarihi Süreç ve Avrupa İnsan Hakları Mahkemesi Kararları," *III. Uluslararası Ormancılık Kongresi*, 20-22 Mayıs 2010, Vol.I, p.190.

CHAPTER SIX

THEFT, VIOLENCE, AND BANDITRY

As Aşık Veysel, the greatest folk poet of twentieth century Turkey, said in one of his verses, weak people turned into soil to endure the difficulties of the life and their oppressors. However, a nineteenth century popular Turcoman folk poet, who rebelled against the Ottoman state, Dadaloğlu had said, “The decree belongs to the Sultan, the mountains to us” (*ferman padişahın, dağlar bizimdir*). Indeed, when push came to shove, the peasants did not hesitate to turn into sharp rocks. One kind of the rural strategies of survival and resistance adopted by the poor peasants was the violation of property rights and lives of the wealthy and oppressive persons, ranging from theft, extortion, robbery, verbal and physical attacks to banditry.

In this respect, this study proposes to abandon an unconditional distinction between political and self-interested or self-defensive criminal acts. Especially in a single-party system that did not allow the poor peasants to express themselves through the legitimate political participation, the acts that were accepted as criminal by the established order were the last resort for survival and self-protection.

Turkish historiography has long assumed that the Anatolian peasants under the single-party regime did not rebel against the exploitation and oppression, except for a few well-known Kurdish uprisings. The peasants, according to the conventional literature, did not respond with active and violent methods to the state economic policies, exploitation and the oppression by government agents and large landowners.⁹⁷⁴

⁹⁷⁴ In a similar line, Elif Akçetin, despite her social history approach, concludes that she could find no sign of aggressive peasant resistance, open and violent resistance acts, and uprising during the early 1930s. Akçetin, “Anatolian Peasants in Great Depression,” p. 88, 99.

The greatest part of the scholarly literature has seen the early Republican peasantry as passive and ignorant masses and the hapless victims of the Great Depression, etatist economic policies, state repression, and oppressive rural households. Some accounts, overestimating the effects of the small-land holding system and the populism principle of the RPP and overlooking the agricultural taxes, monopolies, inequality of land distribution, and the local oppression by *ağas*, gendarmes, and civil servants, argued that the peasants remained silent during the interwar era.⁹⁷⁵

As regards to collective and violent resistance, the scholarly and popular studies exclusively have exclusively focused on a few well-known religious or Kurdish uprisings such as the Şeyh Sait Rebellion, the Ağrı Dağı Rebellion, the Menemen Uprising, the Dersim Rebellion and a few other Kurdish rebellions. These incidents have attracted special attention because they were shaped with more political and ideological colors and have implications for the current political debates. However, the banditry of the poor peasants pervading the Anatolian countryside during the 1920s and 1930s from east to west and south to north has remained unknown until now.

Although Turkish scholars have mentioned the widespread banditry, they have taken the issue in the context of the Kurdish question. They have viewed the banditry as a problem peculiar to the eastern regions and explained it with reference to the political agitation of the French or British intelligence services and the efforts of the Kurdish nationalists across the borders. Taking the view of the early

⁹⁷⁵ For an account overemphasizing the small-land holding and overlooking the differentiation and economic struggle within the village community, see Çağlar Keyder, “Türk Tarımında Küçük Meta Üretiminin Yerleşmesi (1946-1960),” in *Türkiye’de Tarımsal Yapılar: [Bildiriler]*, ed. by Şevket Pamuk and Zafer Toprak (Ankara: Yurt Yayınevi, 1988), pp. 163-174. In addition see Faruk Birtok and Çağlar Keyder, “Agriculture and the State: An Inquiry into Agricultural Differentiation and Political Alliances: The Case of Turkey,” pp.447-463. For a classical example of exaggeration of the abolition of the tithe and the populism principle, see İzzettin Önder, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Tarım Kesimine Uygulanan Vergi Politikası,” pp. 132-133.

Republican government that saw the banditry as the result of the efforts of foreign enemies, Kurdish separatists and backward, uncivilized, and anti-government tribes and *ağas* at face value, they have reproduced the official discourse that concealed the real local, social and economic causes of the phenomenon.⁹⁷⁶

Likewise, the nationalist Kurdish history studies have also overemphasized and exaggerated the role of the Kurdish intellectuals and organizations like Azadi and Xoybûn in the peasant uprisings in the eastern provinces. This approach, belittling the Kurdish peasants's subjective and mostly self-seeking struggles to the tribal reactions or the Kurdish nationalism, ignored the people's ongoing and firm resistance not only to the Turkish state, but also to Kurdish *ağas*, merchants, and militias, which did not cease in the absence of credited well-known rebellions like Şeyh Said, Ağrı, and Dersim.⁹⁷⁷ That is, "the art of not being governed"⁹⁷⁸ of the

⁹⁷⁶ For official discourse about the banditry in eastern and southeastern Anatolia as backward, criminal or separatist people agitated by the unruly tribes, *seyyids*, Kurdish conspirators, and foreign powers, see the Report of Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, Saygı Öztürk, *İsmet Paşa'nın Kürt Raporu*, pp. 24-26. In addition, the General Inspectors in their reports also shared the similar perspective. For these reports, see Cemil Koçak, *Umumi Müfettişlikler, 1927-1952* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2003). For reproduction of the Republican-nationalist and official view by current nationalist accounts, see Bilal Şimşir, *Kürt Sorunu, 1924-1999* (İstanbul: Bilgi Yayınevi, 2009), pp. 74-87, 101-112, 140-147, 152-160, 239-241, 312-326, 429-432. Vedat Şandilli, *Türkiye'de Kürtlük Hareketleri ve İsyanlar I* (Ankara: Kon Yayınları, 1980); Uğur Mumcu, *Kürt-İslam Ayaklanması, 1919-1925* (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1995); Cenani Gürbüz, *Mondros'tan Milenyuma Türkiye'de İsyanlar, Olaylar ve Bölücü Faaliyetler* (İstanbul: Bilge Karınca Yayınları, 2006); Safiye Dünder, *Kürtler ve Azınlık Tartışmaları: Tarih, Kimlik, İsyanlar, Sosyo-Kültürel Yapı, Terör* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2009); Reşat Hallı, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Ayaklanmalar (1924-1938)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Harb Tarihi Başkanlığı, 1972).

⁹⁷⁷ See David McDowall, *A Modern History of The Kurds* (London: I. B.Tauris, 2004), pp. 202-211. The Kurdish peasants' subjective experience and resistance was written out of history in McDowall's account. He also reduced all of Kurdish people's survival struggle to the tribal movements or acts of the Azadi and Xoybun. For similar "nationalist," "modernist" or "elitist" approaches to the experience of Kurdish people in Turkey's east and southeast, see Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kürdistan Üzerine Yazılar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), pp. 340. Assuming that the tribal loyalties were too strong within village communities, Bruinessen has focused on the behaviors of tribes and large landowners and argued that the rebellions and armed resistances in the eastern part of Turkey were engineered by the religious authorities, tribal chiefs, and some nationalist intellectuals. In addition, for similar accounts that stressed the role of the local power holders and nationalist ideology, see Hamit Bozarslan, "Kurdish Nationalism in Turkey: From Tacit Contract to Rebellion (1919-1925)," in *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism*, ed. by Abbas Vali (California: Mazda Publishers, 2003). Robert W. Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989). See also Wadie Jwaideh, *Kürt Milliyetçiliği'nin Tarihi: Kökenleri ve Gelişimi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008), p. 403-433.

autonomous Kurdish peasants in these regions were reduced to the Kurdish tribal and nationalist elite's efforts.

It seems that both Turkish and Kurdish nationalist narratives, in fact covertly but not deliberately, supported each other by focusing on the role of the Kurdish tribes, intellectuals and political organizations, who were "separatists" or "ignorant-criminal masses" for Turkish nationalists whereas "the leaders of the freedom movement" for Kurdish nationalists. Thus, both of them have overlooked subjectivity of the peasants, and specific social and economic matrix of the peasant rebels in the region.

Furthermore, particularly Turkish nationalist literature on Dersim, have presented the region as a hotbed of tribal banditry. Official discourse and nationalist scholarship, in addition to a strong emphasis on the efforts of the Kurdish separatist organizations and foreign agitation, generally have tended to equate the banditry in the east with the nomadic customs of raiding the villages of other tribes and sheep-lifting peculiar to pastoral tribes. In parallel with this, almost all bandit groups have been regarded as the men of *ağas* and tribal leaders or as backward and ignorant rural criminals who generally robbed the poor peasants. These accounts saw the ongoing bloody struggles between rival tribes or between rival *ağas* looting each other's villages as the main source of the banditry in the region.⁹⁷⁹

⁹⁷⁸ For a brilliant account to understand why and how the autonomous peasant communities living in uplands resist to state-building efforts, see James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁹⁷⁹ See Naşit Hakkı Uluğ, *Tunceli Medeniyete Açılıyor* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2007), pp. 116-120; İsmail Hüsrev, *Türkiye'de Köy İktisadiyatı*, pp. 180-182. Especially look at reports about Dersim, Faik Bulut, *Dersim Raporları* (İstanbul: Evrensel Basın Yayın, 2007). In addition see Hüseyin Aygün, *Dersim 1938 ve Zorunlu İskan: Telgraflar, Dilekçeler, Mektuplar* (Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları, 2009). Perhaps these words of a writer of *Milliyet* newspaper illustrate the Republican elite's perception of Dersim in 1930s: "Bu yerler, bu dağlar ve bu taşlıklar cahil ve gaflet ocaklarıdır... Bunun yalnız birkaç yüz kelimelik bir dili ve eline öldürmek için şeyhin, beyin verdiği tüfeği vardır. İşte bunlar bu dağların sakinleridir. Marifetleri de yalnız adam öldürmek ve rasgelen köyü, insanı, kervanı soyaktır ve hepsini götürüp müemmime, şeyhe, seyyide vermektir." Orneblili Şeref, *Milliyet*, 02.01.1932, quoted in Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 101.

This view has tended to overemphasize the power of vertical ties linking the poor peasants to the tribal leadership through a patronage and other hierarchies.⁹⁸⁰ This comment, though true a limited extent, presents the highly idealized form of the peasant and tribal leader relations, but not the all aspect of the reality. Omitting the tensions and class conflicts inherent to tribal or village communities, this approach treats the village community as a cohesive and homogenous class or group free from inner differentiation and class struggle.⁹⁸¹ Undoubtedly, there were some bandits who served to the tribal leaders and *ağas*. However, most of the bandits taking to mountains were not the men of local dominants. On the other hand, given the fact that the Turcoman nomads were mostly sedentarized and the tribal organization was comparatively rare in the western and central Anatolia, the view equating the banditry with the tribes fell short of explaining the widespread banditry in the western and central parts of the country that will be documented below.

The first argument this chapter advanced is that the poor peasants resorted to those protest activities that were called by the ruling groups as “anti-property crimes,” open confrontations, and banditry to defend themselves or to protests their oppressors. In this way, they attempted to reappropriate the scarce resources of which the *ağas*, local influential households, and the government had appropriated before. Although for the most part they were apt to resort to more subtle and covert resistance and survival methods, they did not hesitate to rise up when the degree of exploitation and oppression became unbearable.

⁹⁸⁰ For a similar perspective about the 17th century Ottoman banditry, see Karen Barkey, *Devlet ve Eşkıyalar: Osmanlı Tarzı Devlet Merkezileşmesi* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999), p. 13. Barkey argued that the bandits did not represented the peasants, but local dominant groups, and generally stole from the poor.

⁹⁸¹ For a critique of such exaggeration of inner-village community ties in the context of Iran of Shah Riza, see Stephanie Cronin, “Resisting the New State: the Rural Poor, Land and Modernity in Iran, 1921-1941,” in *Subalterns and Social Protest: History From Below in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. by Stephanie Cronin (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 158-161.

Second, those peasants who rose up as bandits were not mostly unconscious and “criminal minded” persons. Nor were they mostly the men of oppressive landowners or tribal leaders or connected with the Kurdish nationalist groups. On the contrary, the great majority of bandits in the eastern provinces had no ties with the Kurdish national cause or the tribal struggles. Undoubtedly, some bandits, especially those supported by the landowners and tribal leaders robbed innocent poor peasants or raided the villages of rival tribes in favor of a certain landowner or tribe leader. However, most of the bandits took to the mountains for their own struggle against the oppression and exploitation of the landowners, tribal leaders, village headmen, and the government agents. The Great Depression, the increasing exploitation via increasing taxes and state monopolies, the deepening penetration of the capitalist state into rural areas, and the consolidation of private ownership over the lands and pastures all spurred the peasant reaction in the form of banditry. For self-defense, survival, and the reappropriation of the resources and rights seized by their local exploiters and oppressors, they generally attacked wealthy and propertied classes and state representatives, particularly well-off farmers, merchants, tax collectors, state bureaucrats, and security forces in the sense of “thieves,” “robbers,” “avengers,” and “brigands.”

Many of the bandits partially fit into Hobsbawm’s notion of “social banditry,” in the sense of banditry in which outlaw peasants who oppose the oppressive elements, and consequently are sometimes aided by the poor peasants. If we use the social banditry in more broader meaning as a banditry that stemmed from the rural exploitation and oppression, and therefore mostly targeted the rural oppressors, exploiters, and well-off persons rather than the ordinary peasants, it is possible to call

the banditry in the early Republican era as a social phenomenon and a social banditry.⁹⁸²

Indeed, the folk songs celebrating certain bandits or their heroic acts composed in those years are an important indicator of their social characteristics. Some bandit groups remained in close contact with the local people, who generally supported them because of ties of kinship or economic interests. Because some bandits championed the interests of the local folk masses, the local people sang songs about their merits, bravery, and power, or about their mournful fate after the gendarme killed them.⁹⁸³

Admittedly, the relations of some of the bandits to the local village communities were antagonistic. Whereas most of bandits differentiated their target according to their social and economic background and status, some bandits terrorized and robbed the peasants indiscriminatingly for their very survival. Yet, even if such bandits did not have a concern for the social welfare of the peasants, they were “social” in the sense that they were created by the social conditions that pushed them to give a struggle against the system by violating the order of law.

The third point this chapter underscores is that the banditry was not limited to the eastern parts of the country, although it was more widespread in those remote parts of the country in which the both the local *ağas* and government agents were

⁹⁸² Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981). Many historians of rural resistance and rural outlaws criticized Hobsbawm’s notion of “social banditry” by arguing that there were very few cases fitting to the model of social banditry. Some researchers have argued that because of the social and economic causes lying behind the banditry, many bandit groups can be labelled as social bandits. For these critical approaches, see Richard White, “Outlaw Gangs of the Middle Border: American Social Bandits,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, No. 12 (Oct. 4, 1981); Pat O’Malley, “Social Bandits, Modern Capitalism and the Traditional Peasantry: A Critique of Hobsbawm,” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, VI, No. 4 (July, 1979); Anton Blok, “The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XIV, No. 4 (Sept., 1972). However, I think it is not reasonable to expect from a “social bandit” to meet all criteria put by Hobsbawm and to measure “the social bandits” according to a strict scale.

⁹⁸³ Especially see Mehmet Bayrak, *Eşkıyalık ve Eşkıyalık Türküleri: İnceleme, Antoloji* (Ankara: Yorum Yayınevi, 1985); and Mehmet Bayrak, *Öyküleriyle Halk Anlatı Türküleri: İnceleme, Antoloji* (Ankara: n.p., 1996).

more cruel and the land distribution was more unequal. It was a socio-economic phenomenon, a sort of daily class conflict between the poor peasants and their exploiters and oppressors throughout the country.

Indeed, there was a correlation between the deterioration of the peasants' economic standing and their aggressiveness. As James C. Scott has pointed out, the peasants may become more aggressive and violent when the prices of their crops drop sharply, the exploitation become more intense, and the moral economic relations were broken.⁹⁸⁴ Likewise, Hobsbawm in his book *Bandits* also has strongly related banditry to the social and economic factors such as economic differentiation within the peasants, growing inequality, economic crisis in agriculture, and rural oppression⁹⁸⁵

In this respect, the banditry was a last way out for poor peasants and pervasive in all regions of Anatolia during the interwar period. That is, the major force fuelling the banditry was neither the tribal organizations nor the Kurdish question, but the deterioration of the social and economic conditions of the peasantry which was more or less common to all parts of the country.

The banditry, particularly in the early and mid-1920s, was partly a survival from the past years of wars when the state authority eventually broke down. However, in fact, as stated above, it was largely connected with the rural impoverishment, the accompanying intensification of inner-village class conflicts, the state-capitalism that aimed to take all of the informal economic activities under state control, the growing centralization of the government, and accordingly the preoccupation of the authorities with security in the countryside by setting the gendarme against the peasantry.

⁹⁸⁴ James C. Scott, *Moral Economy of The Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in South Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 120.

⁹⁸⁵ Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, p. 22, 67.

How did the poor and oppressed peasants become bandits? Undoubtedly, as pointed out in the former chapters, open confrontation with the oppressors was not the first option before the peasants. They displayed several everyday avoidance tactics and covert forms of resistance strategies. They mostly opted to act on the sly. However, when the oppression and exploitation reached an unbearable level at which they would do nothing but overt resistance, they tried to take a second step: rustling, robbing, arsoning, and fighting individually or collectively. This stage was a critical crossroad that was just a stone's throw away from banditry. At this juncture, some peasants took a further step and resorted to banditry.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the path to the banditry, i.e., individual attacks on the rural oppressors and violation of the property rights by the poor peasants, or “crimes against property” as put by the rulers. The most important issues stimulating rural resistance of all kinds and especially banditry were peasants’ land hunger, overtaxation, falling prices, rural poverty, and expropriations, state intervention in informal economic transactions like smuggling, and ağa or gendarme oppression. For that reason, it requires a look at the peasants’ rejection of landowners’ claims of ownership over lands, pastures or other resources, and their fights for this cause. In this direction, this chapter initially concentrates on peasants’ first hand and unorganized fights and challenges such as individual attacks on gendarme, village headmen and ağas, fight over land, pastures and water resources, and livestock thefts. I think these acts constituted a layer between the everyday resistance and resentment of the peasantry and the banditry, which sometimes left the peasants no choice but to engage in banditry inevitably. Therefore, the first section here will cast light upon the formation of the banditry during the early Republican period.

The second section focuses on the bandits, their activities, their attacks, targets, strategies and the clashes with the oppressive elements throughout the country. Explaining why and how some famous bandits took to the mountains, with a special focus on their pre-banditry disputes and struggles against the greedy *ağas* and the malfeasant and abusive state officials, this section underscores the class struggle factor that paved the way for the banditry. In addition, on the basis of the gendarme records and the newspaper reports about the numbers and activities of numerous small and large bands, with a particular focus on their attacks on wealthy and oppressive elements in rural areas, the second section attempts to give evidence of the rampant banditry in both western and eastern parts of the country during the interwar period.

Increase in Rural Crimes and Use of Violence

The main factors behind the banditry in countryside were the struggle over land and other rural economic resources. In general, the last stop before taking to the mountain as a bandit was individual attacks and “crimes against property” like theft. Many peasants were at this last stop. Indeed, the crime rates in rural areas were on the rise, especially during the late 1920s and early 1930s. According to the official reports, the agricultural security (*zirai asayış*, as put by the authorities) was not good throughout Anatolian countryside. After about ten years of the recovery of agriculture in the 1920s, the Great Depression and the heavy taxes affected adversely the rural areas and boosted the criminal activities.

According to the Report on the Provisioning Situation by the Ministry of Internal Affairs dated 26 July 1930, the food shortage and provisioning problems in

many places resulted in the widespread violation of public security. For example, the food shortage was so pervasive in some towns of Ankara such as Polatlı, Bala, Ayaş, Haymana, Yukarı Abat, Kalecik, Ballıhan and Keskin that the crimes had increased in the last months in these places. Therefore, the government needed to reinforce the gendarme forces. In addition to this, an army battalion also was charged with the keeping the rural security. Again, in Cebelibereket (today Osmaniye), the food shortage worsened public security in rural areas. In Kırşehir, the food scarcity affected the security in rural settings so badly that there was a severe need of additional armored cavalry troops. In Urfa, the food shortage was so pervasive that the public order was disrupted in rural areas. According to the report, the poor peasants in many places engaged in smuggling or theft. The number of gendarme in especially the Viranşehir district of Urfa was not enough to maintain the order and safety of the people. It is possible to cite many instances.⁹⁸⁶

Along with the deterioration of the agricultural economy, decline in prices and according in supplies, provisioning problems and rural impoverishment augmented the land disputes and conflicting claims over scarce resources in Anatolian villages, which ended in quarrels, fights, and murders. Ömer Lütfi Barkan, who briefly examined the courts files of 1279 murder cases committed in Kocaeli, Bursa, Denizli, Konya, İçel, Rize, Malatya and Sivas, wrote that 129 of them was related to “land disputes” including seizing of a piece of land belonging to another person, and cases of boundaries issues. 59 cases stemmed from the intrusion into the land by putting livestock on land belonging to another person. Disputes over pastures, water sources, inherited lands, livestock, and other agricultural issues constituted the causes of more than 300 cases. In other words, approximately 40

⁹⁸⁶ Summaries of the Reports on Provisioning Situation of 21 Provinces, BCA MGM [30.10/64.432.2], 26.07.1930.

percent of the murder cases were closely connected to the disputes over land and other agricultural sources.⁹⁸⁷

The Justice Statistics published in the *Polis Dergisi* (Police Periodical) also confirm this conclusion. According to the statistics, the number of the crimes and criminals gradually increased from 1926 to 1938. The total number of criminal cases was around 57,000 in 1926; this number jumped to 73,000 in 1931 and 83,000 in 1932 and did not fall under 80,000 until 1936. That is to say, the number of the criminal cases grew at high-velocity about 66 percent between 1930 and 1932. The number of the criminals was about 71,000 in 1930, whereas this number increased proportionally in the early 1930s, climbing to 106,000 in 1931 and 116,000 in the following year. This number also did not fall behind 106,000 until 1938. The increase was about 63 percent only for two years between 1930 and 1932.⁹⁸⁸

As for the type of crimes, there was a hundred percent increase in felonies (*ağır suç*) between 1932 and 1938.⁹⁸⁹ The proportion of the offences to the total population was 2 per thousand in the 1920s, this ratio increase more than double to 4.6 per thousand in 1932 and did not decreased below 4 per thousand.⁹⁹⁰

The most striking part of the statistics pertinent to this discussion was the distribution of the number of the criminals to their occupational backgrounds. The great part of the criminal incidents that pushed up the statistical figures mentioned above took place in villages and was committed by peasants. Among the criminals whose occupational backgrounds were able to be determined, the number of peasants who committed a crime was 27,206 in 1935, this number climbed to 47,118 in 1937. The increase was about 73 percent. Although the number of criminal workers and

⁹⁸⁷ Barkan, “‘Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu’,” p. 513.

⁹⁸⁸ “Adliye İstatistiklerine Göre Memleketimizde Cürümler ve Mücrimler,” *Polis Dergisi*, No. 10 (May 1, 1940), p. 31.

⁹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

artisans also increased about 77 percent in the same period, their number was far less than the number of peasants.⁹⁹¹

Table 18 - The Number of the Crimes and Criminals between 1926 and 1938.

Years	Number of Crimes	Number of Criminals
1926	57,000	85,000
1927	57,000	87,000
1928	63,000	95,000
1929	54,000	77,000
1930	50,000	71,000
1931	73,000	106,000
1932	83,000	116,000
1933	81,000	114,000
1934	82,000	116,000
1935	80,000	110,000
1936	78,000	107,000
1937	79,000	106,000
1938	72,000	98,000

Source: “Adliye İstatistiklerine Göre Memleketimizde Cürümler ve Mücrimler,” *Polis Dergisi*, No. 10 (May 1, 1940), pp. 38-39.

Table 19 Occupational Backgrounds of Criminals

Years	Criminals (Peasant)		Criminals (Worker and Artisan)	
	Number of criminals	Index	Number of criminals	Index
1935	27,206	100	5,550	100
1936	43,472	159	8,516	153
1937	47,118	173	9,866	177

Source: “Adliye İstatistiklerine Göre Memleketimizde Cürümler ve Mücrimler,” *Polis Dergisi*, No. 10 (May 1, 1940), pp. 38-39.

That is to say, in rural areas, the struggle over scarce economic resources and the struggle to survive intensified in the 1930s. In this struggle, peasants resorted to the ways that were classified as “criminal acts.” Many peasants fought for a piece of land or a few livestock. They violated the property rights of well-off peasants or terrorized them in order to defend their rights or preserve the economic mainstays.

⁹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

Fight for Land and Other Scarce Resources

The main cause of such crimes in villages was disputes over land. In parallel with Barkan, Fahri Ecevit, another contemporary observer, in an article published in *Police Periodical*, discussed the causes of the boom in criminal activities in rural areas. In contrast to the contemporary bureaucrats' simple fabrication ascribing the problem to alcoholism and love affairs (*kadın davası*), Ecevit argued that the main thrust responsible for the criminal activities among the peasantry was land disputes and conflicts over economic sources rather than alcoholism or disputes over women.⁹⁹² An agricultural expert, Yusuf Saim Atasagun also drew attention to the peasants' aggressiveness because of land disputes. He wrote of the increasing tension in rural area as follows.

We frequently witness bloody fights for land between peasants in many places. The lack of official land borders, the disorganization of land subdivision, the scarcity of pastures in villages, the lack of disciplined organization of water sources for irrigation caused the bloody fights between peasants.⁹⁹³

The land struggle was so evident that communists, liberals, and some Kemalists agreed in their appraisals of the increasing crimes in the villages. The anti-government communist *Kızıl İstanbul* wrote that the furious struggle for land between poor peasants and landed farmers plagued the countryside.⁹⁹⁴ *Köroğlu*, which published almost everyday several reports of fights and murders, wrote about these incidents as "Either a Love Affair or Fight for Land" (*Ya Kadın Dalgası Ya Toprak Kavgası*).⁹⁹⁵ According to an article published in *Ülkü* in November 1933,

⁹⁹² Fahri Ecevit, "Suçluluk Bakımından Köylümüzün Ruhi Yapılışı," *Polis Dergisi*, No. 3-4 (Oct., 1938), pp. 49-50.

⁹⁹³ Atasagun, *Türkiye'de İktimaî Siyaset Meseleleri*, p. 5.

⁹⁹⁴ *Kızıl İstanbul*, Apr., 1934, quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 347.

⁹⁹⁵ "Ya Kadın Dalgası, Ya Toprak Davası," *Köroğlu*, 08.02.1936.

the widespread fights and crimes that emanated from the disputes over land and cases of borders were the biggest problems afflicting the peasants.⁹⁹⁶

Indeed, land became the main cause for the sake of which the peasants ran the risk of committing murder or being victims of murder. Some peasants individually confronted with rapacious landowners due to the disputes over lands and pastures. In Yomra district of Trabzon, for example, a poor peasant named Kamil killed Mustafa Ağa, who had attempted to take possession of his land.⁹⁹⁷ In one of Anatolian village, a peasant shot another peasant because of a quarrel over the ownership of a vegetable garden.⁹⁹⁸ In August 1931, two peasants named Hacı Mehmed and Hasan in the Hacılar village of Kayseri fought over land and water for irrigation in their village. At the end of the fight, Hacı Mehmed killed Hasan.⁹⁹⁹ During Prime Minister İnönü's visit to Kastamonu in 1938, the peasants complained of widespread murder because of disagreements about the lands and cases of boundaries between peasants.¹⁰⁰⁰

Likewise, one of Behice Boran's village surveys conducted in the early 1940s includes a short story of a fight between a poor peasant and power holders because of a land dispute that erupted in the 1930s. As Boran recorded, in a village of İzmir, a young, poor peasant, who was literate and aware of the Village Law, had an eye on the vacant land outside the village. He occupied a part of this land under the pretext of transforming it into a village park in accordance with the Village Law. In fact, the idea of a village park was a pretext of his takeover of the land. Appropriating the related article of the Village Law according to which each village had to build a public park, he planned to control this land. However, the village headmen and *ağa*, who also had an eye on the vacant land, did not permit the peasant and pressured

⁹⁹⁶ Trakyalı Ali Galip, "Köylü," *Ülkü*, (Nov., 1933), p. 330.

⁹⁹⁷ Kıvılcımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 290.

⁹⁹⁸ "Bostan Yüzünden Bir Köylü Diğerini Saçma İle Yaraladı," *Köroğlu*, 10.09.1938.

⁹⁹⁹ *Cumhuriyet*, 10.08.1931, quoted in Kıvılcımlı, *Yol* 2, p.145.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Eski, *İsmet İnönü'nün Kastamonu Gezileri*, p. 48.

him, but he challenged them. One day, the village headmen, in order to agitate the village men against the young man, slandered him by alleging that he had attempted to rape a village woman; but as soon as the canny peasant heard this allegation he walked towards the village headmen with a drawn knife. The fight that ensued ended at the courthouse without any casualties.¹⁰⁰¹

Sometimes peasants collectively rose up against rapacious landowners who had eye on vacant arable lands used by the peasants communally. One example of such collective resistance took place in the Karacabey district of Bursa in August 1931. The peasants of Azatlı village and a large studfarm-owner argued over a large Karacebey studfarm. The landless peasants and small-scale farmers in the village wanted to expand their small plots by cultivating some part of the Karacebey studfarm near to their village. Three hundred and sixty peasants occupied a part of the studfarm and cultivated it immediately. However, upon the complaints of the studfarm owner, they altogether were taken into the court.¹⁰⁰²

In another case, a tumultuous incident broke out between poor peasants and Ömer Ağa, owner of the large Katranya farm in Şember village near Bakırköy in April 1934. The main cause for the incident was Ömer Ağa's attempts to expand his farm by driving out the peasants from their lands neighboring his farm. Upon the disobedience of the peasants, Ömer Ağa called on the police and gendarme to force the peasants to leave the lands they had been cultivating for a long time. The peasants resisted the police and gendarme forces. At the end of the fights between the security forces and the peasants armed with stones and sticks, a few peasant women and an infant child were severely wounded and fifty peasants were taken into custody. The resistant peasants, who continued to claim their property rights over the

¹⁰⁰¹ Boran, "Köyde Sosyal Tabakalanma," p. 126.

¹⁰⁰² "360 Köylü Mahkemeye Verildi," *Cumhuriyet*, 18.08.1931.

lands they had been using for years, achieved their goal. At the end of the incident, the Ministry of Internal Affairs recognized the peasant's ownership rights.¹⁰⁰³

Fights between two neighboring villages over scarce resources were another form of conflict between peasants. Many fights erupted between rival villages during the period. In these fights, adult male inhabitants of neighboring villages fought each other for a piece of land, pasture, reed field, a small lake or a stream. Generally armed with stones, sticks, axes, hooks, pistols and rifles and sometimes supported by their children and wives, men of villages brutally clashed each other for scarce resources close to their villages. One of such "war of villages" took place in Biga on 14 April 1934. The hostility between the inhabitants of the villages of Pekmezli and Karanti emanated from a disagreement about a plot of arable land. It turned into a bloody clash in which the peasants opened fire on each other. At the end of the incident, a peasant was shot to death.¹⁰⁰⁴

Köroğlu recorded two similar incidents that occurred successively in July 1935. The first one took place in Adapazarı. The adult males of two rival neighboring villages fought tooth and claw in order to take possession of a small stream. In the second incident, all young and adult males of two neighboring villages in Beyşehir district of Konya fought over a marshy field. The fight resulted in the severe wounding of 22 peasants.¹⁰⁰⁵

Another target of the peasant violence for the defense of lands and properties was the local government agents. For instance, a peasant who had been abused by the land registry official (*tapu memuru*) of Aydın killed him in the end.¹⁰⁰⁶ According to a report in *Son Posta* titled "A Tragedy Because of Land" (*Toprak Yüzünden Bir*

¹⁰⁰³ *Kızıl İstanbul*, Apr., 1934, quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 347.

¹⁰⁰⁴ "Bir Tarla Kavgası," *Köroğlu*, 14.04.1934.

¹⁰⁰⁵ "22 Yaralı," *Köroğlu*, 20.07.1935.

¹⁰⁰⁶ "Deli mi İdi?" *Köroğlu*, 01.08.1934.

Facia), four peasants were severely wounded in a clash between the gendarme and a group of peasants in the Akse village of Uşak. The main factor triggered the incident was the conflicting interests of the Akse village peasants and Uşak municipality. Both sides claimed possession of a pasture of about 100 *dönüms*. The local court found the municipality right and gave the legal ownership of the pasture to the municipal administration. However, all of the peasants collectively staked claim on the field and disregarded the court decision. Upon the escalated tension between the peasants and the municipality officials, the peasants decided to go to the council of state.¹⁰⁰⁷

In the meantime, the mayor Alaaddin Bey sold this land to the Uşak Sugar Factory. However, when the Sugar Factory experts and workers came to the village and began to plow the disputed pasture area, they encountered with the collective and firm resistance of the peasants. The peasants came together immediately and did not allow the sugar factory workers to plow the land. Furthermore, the peasants armed with stones and sticks mobbed the factory workers as a whole and descended on the factory building in order to intimidate the factory administration. After this incident, when the Uşak mayor accompanied by the gendarme went to Akse village in order to enclose the land, the peasants once again objected and tried to stop them. In the end, the brawl between the gendarme and the angry peasants turned into a gunfight. The peasants and gendarmes opened fire on each other. Four peasants were severely wounded. The incident resulted in the prosecution of several peasants.¹⁰⁰⁸

In the Kozan and Ceyhan districts of Adana, the peasants who suffered land hunger frequently occupied and appropriated state lands and pastures. Although the authorities sued them, the duration of lawsuits generally lasted so long that the

¹⁰⁰⁷ “Toprak Yüzünden Bir Facia,” *Son Posta*, 08.09.1932; “Kabahat Köylüler de Mi?” *Son Posta*, 09.09.1932.

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

peasants took *ipso facto* possession of these lands in the meantime. From time to time tensions or fights also broke out between these peasants and officials.¹⁰⁰⁹

The prisons in the eastern provinces were full of resistant peasants who opposed the unlawful land takeovers of the greedy landowners. As Diyarbakır Governor Cemal Bardakçı noted, there were more than 3,500 inmates in the prisons in Diyarbakır province in 1926. According to his personal examinations, most of them were poor peasants who had refused to surrender their lands or pastures to the large landowners. Because they had resisted influential landowners, they had been prosecuted by the security forces and ended up in prison.¹⁰¹⁰

Bardakçı, during his governorship in Diyarbakır, saw widespread crimes, thefts, banditry, and peasant uprisings in the region in connection with the landlessness and poverty. Drawing on his observation, he effectively distributed state lands of tens of thousands *dönüms* to poor peasants. Within a few months, the number of crimes such as livestock theft, brigandage, raids on village, murder, and kidnapping had decreased remarkably in the province. Thus, he surmised that the disorder would have disappeared with a comprehensive land reform in the region.¹⁰¹¹

Livestock Theft

Another form of crime in rural areas that reveals the resistance of poor peasants against propertied and well-off peasants was the theft of livestock and crops. Unlike land, livestock and crops were movable properties that could be easily lifted. Therefore, struggles over livestock and crops did not necessarily generate open struggles or fights. The main threat directed towards the livestock and crops was

¹⁰⁰⁹ BCA MGM [30.10/81.531.19], 19.08. 1939.

¹⁰¹⁰ See Cemal Bardakçı, *Toprak Dâvasından Siyasî Partilere* (İstanbul: Işıl Matbaası, 1945), p. 33.

¹⁰¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-37.

theft, which was one of the most widespread phenomena of rural life. As stated by a contemporary observer in his address to peasants, the theft of livestock and crops plagued the Anatolian villages to much a degree that farmers were not able to protect their crops and livestock. Despite the heavy punishments, especially livestock theft was not eliminated in Anatolia.¹⁰¹²

In both the west and east, livestock theft became an acute problem during the period, especially with the economic crisis. For that reason, the government issued a law on 6 April 1929, titled the Law for Elimination of the Livestock Theft (*Hayvan Hırsızlığının Men'i Hakkında Kanun*). The preamble of the law addressed the problem as an epidemic plaguing the whole country.¹⁰¹³

Indeed, livestock thefts, which began generally in small numbers in villages, became gradually a large and more frequent. In some villages, many livestock farmers began to stand guard with their rifles day and night in the early 1930s.¹⁰¹⁴ That is to say, the law against the livestock theft enacted in 1929 did not alleviate the problem. Incapable of preventing the livestock thefts, this law was once again discussed in the National Assembly in December 1933. In a parliamentary session on 11 December 1933 Samsun deputy Mehmet Hacıyunus underscored how livestock theft plagued his election district as follows:

The people of this province, I feel ashamed to say, really I feel honestly ashamed to say, are thieves. Furthermore, it is not possible to count the number of thieves. The lifted animals were brought to Sivas, Çorum, Sinop, Ordu, Karahisar and Trabzon. The people in the region were deeply aggrieved by this situation. Despite a law to prevent livestock thievery, this law yielded no positive results due to the ignorance of the state officials.¹⁰¹⁵

¹⁰¹² R. Aksoy, *Köylülerimizle Başbaşa*, p. 36.

¹⁰¹³ "Hayvan Hırsızlığının Men'i Hakkında Kanun," *Resmî Gazete*, 06.04.1929.

¹⁰¹⁴ Trakyalı Ali Galip, "Köylü," *Ülkü*, Nov., 1933, pp. 327-328.

¹⁰¹⁵ "Hayvan Hırsızlığının Önüne Geçilmesi Hakkındaki Kanunun Bazı Maddelerinin Değiştirilmesi Üzerinde Görüşmeler," see Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 2, p. 99.

The local authorities also reported the widespread livestock theft incidents frequently. According to the General Situation Report of Ordu Governor dated 1935, 29 livestock theft cases and 45 thieves had been brought into the courts within last year.¹⁰¹⁶ Even those peasants who were employed as shepherds also attempted to steal the sheep and goats they herded. Likewise, it was reported from İzmir in 1936 that “agricultural security” was not good in the districts. Many of the shepherds who were employed on the farms of Dikili stole crops and animals, and cut the trees illegally as well.¹⁰¹⁷

As stated by the Minister of Internal Affairs in the National Assembly, many poor shepherds and herders stole the livestock of their *ağas* and then pretended to have been raided by robbers. For this aim, shepherds or herders hid the animals they stole. Then a companion tied their hands and feet in order to make it look like a robbery or a bandit attack.¹⁰¹⁸

Some lively accounts that appeared from time to time in newspapers purported that animal theft was rampant in countryside. As reported by the Adana correspondent of *Son Posta* in 1932, the theft of horses and packhorses in Çukurova had so much increased in last a few years that the number of stolen horses had exceeded 500 a year. The security forces estimated that there were about 100 animal thieves only in the Çukurova region. Only two of whom had been caught and put in prison.¹⁰¹⁹

Similarly, another newspaper report titled “Livestock Theft in Aydın” reported that the livestock theft had begun to prevail the region. In the last incidence, seven poor peasants from the Acarlı village of Aydın had stolen the cows of a

¹⁰¹⁶ General Situation Report on the Ordu Province, BCA MGM [30.10/65.433.5], 01.08.1935.

¹⁰¹⁷ *CHP 28/12/936 Tarihinde Toplanan Vilâyet Kongresi Zabıtnamesi*, p. 31, 50.

¹⁰¹⁸ “Hayvan Hırsızlığının Önüne Geçilmesi Hakkındaki Kanunun Bazı Maddelerinin Değiştirilmesi Üzerinde Görüşmeler,” see Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 2, p. 100.

¹⁰¹⁹ “Yakalanan At Hırsızları,” *Son Posta*, 10.09.1932.

farmer. Slaughtering the animals, they had sold the meat and cowhides in the Aydın marketplace.¹⁰²⁰

Köroğlu reported in October 1936 that Karaman was full of livestock thieves.¹⁰²¹ Another report published in the same newspaper in same days wrote of a big livestock theft in the Gediz district of Kütahya. Two poor peasants named Ömer and Memet in the Kurtcan village of Gediz had stolen 40 goats belonging to a rich livestock farmer named Kahya Mustafa.¹⁰²²



Two poor peasants named Ömer and Memet who lifted 40 sheep of a rich farmer named Kahya Mustafa in the Kurtcan village of Gediz. They appear with the posts and suet (*iç yağı*) of some sheep they had slaughtered. “Gediz’de Hayvan Hırsızları,” *Köroğlu*, 31.10.1936

According to an official report written in 1938 by Hulusi Alataş, Minister of Health and Social Aid, the lack of land for agriculture led the poor peasants, especially in the eastern provinces, to engage in mischievousness like theft and robbery for their

¹⁰²⁰ “Aydın’da Hayvan Hırsızları,” *Son Posta*, 03.04.1932.

¹⁰²¹ “Karaman’da Hırsızlar,” *Köroğlu*, 24.10.1936.

¹⁰²² “Gediz’de Hayvan Hırsızları,” *Köroğlu*, 31.10.1936. By the way, it should be kept in mind that the *kayhas* as rich farmers or associates of big landowners were one of the most hated groups by the poor peasants because of their tyrannical behaviors. See Şevket Raşit, “Ziraatımızda Kahyalar İdaresi,” *Dönüm*, No. 42 (June, 1936), pp. 235-239.

very survival and to arson in the struggle against the domination. Especially livestock theft plagued the eastern countryside.¹⁰²³ Apart from this, some poor peasants attempted to steal the posted items in mail trains. When train was on the move, they lifted small items and packages in lorries by means of hooks.¹⁰²⁴ Therefore, Alataş proposed the government to distribute sufficient pieces of land to the landless poor peasants as soon as possible so as to prevent the social disorder.¹⁰²⁵

Attacks on Village Headmen, Tax Collectors, and the Gendarme

Poor peasants especially hated village headmen and members of the councils of elders, who mostly came from influential and rich peasant families and used their official power for their personal interests. For that reason, the discontent of the poor, abused and oppressed peasants was turned into acts of violence directed to the village headmen and members of the council of elders. Indeed, violence against village headmen and members of the council of elders was common during the period, especially in the 1930s when the economic crisis highlighted the class differences and intensified the antagonisms within the village community. In addition to these power holders in villages, the state officials who cooperated with them such as tax collectors, debt enforcement officials, and gendarme soldiers were particularly vulnerable to the attacks of peasants. However, the peasants did not attack them without any specific reason; on the contrary, the peasants generally terrorized them

¹⁰²³ Distribution of Land to the Native People in the First Settlement Region, BCA MGM [30.10/123.879.10], 16.02.1938.

¹⁰²⁴ Saygı Öztürk, *İsmet Paşa'nın Kürt Raporu*, p. 45.

¹⁰²⁵ Distribution of Land to the Native People in the First Settlement Region, BCA MGM [30.10/123.879.10], 16.02.1938.

in connection with their specific and harmful acts. In other words, these attacks were different from the expression of peasant hooliganism.¹⁰²⁶

In the Burhaniye village of Geyve district of Adapazarı, for example, the village headman insisted and pressured some poor peasants to pay a tax he levied for the village fund. Some of the peasants objected. The ensuing squabble between the peasants and the headman led three of the peasants to fight with him. In the end, one peasant fired a shot that hit the headman and killed him.¹⁰²⁷ In a village of Balıkesir, due to a disagreement, a peasant named Mustafa first shot the village headman to death and then cut his throat.¹⁰²⁸

In another case, a village headman named Ali Efendi in one village of İzmir levied a tax as a contribution to the village fund. However, some peasants avoided paying this tax. One of them was a peasant named Hasan, who had already a debt to the village fund. Therefore, Ali Efendi attempted to confiscate his cow, whereupon there broke out a row between Ali Efendi and Hasan, at the end of which Hasan shot Ali Efendi to death.¹⁰²⁹

In the Hoşköy village of Tekirdağ, a few peasants opened fire on the village headman Mehmet Efendi in the dark of night when he was in front of the door of his house. Mehmet Efendi was shot in the arm. As soon as gendarme soldiers heard the gunshots, they burst onto the scene. After an immediate and detailed investigation, two peasants named Hüseyin and Memed, who had a serious dispute with the

¹⁰²⁶ For instance, Fitzpatrick describes the Russian peasants' hooliganisms in the context of the Soviet peasants' violence toward the kolkhoz leaders, activists, and Stakhanovits. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 235.

¹⁰²⁷ "Köy Sandığı Parası İçin Muhtarı Vurmuşlar," *Köroğlu*, 07.10.1936.

¹⁰²⁸ "Muhtarı Vurdular," *Köroğlu*, 17.10.1936.

¹⁰²⁹ "Muhtarı Vurdu," *Köroğlu*, 20.06.1934.

headman, were arrested on the grounds that they had attempted to wound the headman.¹⁰³⁰

The state officials, especially the tax collectors and the gendarme also became frequent objects of defensive attacks by discontented peasants. In one instance in Balıkesir, a debt enforcement official accompanied by a gendarme officer toured the villages for the collection of tax and confiscation of the properties of those peasants who had not paid their taxes. In Akça village, they confiscated by force of gendarme soldiers the money and properties of a poor peasant named Adem Pehlivan, who had not paid the Road Tax. After that, they went to the neighboring Bayat village and decided to spend the night there when it got dark. Adem Pehlivan, deeply resented the debt enforcement official and gendarme soldiers, was accompanied by his two angry friends who were armed with rifles, and raided Bayat village. They shot the gendarme soldiers to death. After taking all the money the debt enforcement official had collected and confiscated, three peasants ran away.¹⁰³¹

Likewise, a poor peasant named Hino in the Gırlavik village of Birecik shot a tax collector and the accompanying gendarme officer who came to village to collect the taxes and tax debts. After killing them, he had to take to the mountains to hide from the security forces. After that, the security forces and the local people began to call him Gırlavikli Hino, a locally famous outlaw.¹⁰³²

Another fearless peasant named İbrahim in the Sal village of Amasra did not hesitate to confront the gendarme who had come to the village to arrest him. The local court had issued an arrest warrant for him because he never paid his taxes. In addition, the authorities assumed that İbrahim had long aided an outlaw named Kara Hasan, who also had escaped from prison and was hiding in the mountains.

¹⁰³⁰ “Muhtarı Niçin Vurdular,” *Köroğlu*, 24.04.1937.

¹⁰³¹ “Bir Jandarma Askeri Görevi Başında Şehit Edildi,” *Son Posta*, 29.08.1932.

¹⁰³² BCA MGM [30.10/105.684.13], 08.04.1930.

However, İbrahim did not obey the gendarme and opened fire, but at the end of a long firefight, he was caught dead by the gendarme.¹⁰³³

There were further vivid accounts about tax collectors who were attacked, robbed or killed by the peasants. In one village of Düzce, peasants killed a tax collector named Akif Fikri.¹⁰³⁴ In another village, a peasant killed a tax collector named Raşid when Raşid pressed him to pay his tax debts.¹⁰³⁵ As mentioned in Chapter Four, in one of villages of Muğla, a poor peasant fired a shot at a tax collector and killed him.¹⁰³⁶ In İzmir, some unknown peasants killed and robbed a tax collector named Tahsin Efendi, after he had collected the taxes in a village.¹⁰³⁷ In one instance, a tax collector in Balıkesir was robbed after he had collected 550 TL from villages.¹⁰³⁸

On 17 May 1929, some peasants in one village of Urfa who opposed a census of their livestock by the tax officials assaulted the tax officials and the gendarme. Finally, in the armed conflict that broke out in the village between the resistant peasants and the gendarme soldiers, six people were severely wounded.¹⁰³⁹ In a similar but larger and longlasting resistance in Mutki, all of the peasants assaulted the Road Tax collectors and the gendarme in April 1934.¹⁰⁴⁰ In June 1935, the peasants in Sason who were aggrieved by the Livestock Tax assaulted the gendarme and the district governor, who had pressed the peasants to pay their tax. In the end, the peasants killed the district governor and rebelled against the government.¹⁰⁴¹

¹⁰³³ “Yasaya Karşı Gelen Bir Soyguncu,” *Milliyet*, 11.06.1932, quoted in Kınılıcım, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 291.

¹⁰³⁴ BCA BKK [30.18.1.2/21.43.5], 17.07.1931.

¹⁰³⁵ BCA BKK [30.18.1.2/62.17.17], 02.03.1936.

¹⁰³⁶ “Tahsildarı Vuran Asıldı,” *Köroğlu*, 23.05.1936.

¹⁰³⁷ “Tahsildarı Öldürdü,” *Köroğlu*, 24.01.1931.

¹⁰³⁸ “Tahsildar Uyumaz!” *Köroğlu*, 20.05.1936.

¹⁰³⁹ BCA MGM [30.10/127.914.14], 26.05.1929.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Gürbüz, *Mondros’tan Milenyuma Türkiye’de İsyânlar*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁴¹ “Sason Kaymakamı Nasıl Vuruldu?” *Köroğlu*, 12.06.1935.

The peasants attacked the tax officials not only physically, but they also sometimes assaulted them verbally in order to defy their authority and intimidate them. In one village of Giresun, for instance, a peasant named Yusuf and his wife Fatma in Çandırçalış village refused to pay the tax that the tax collector Hamid demanded. Furthermore, they walked all over him and assaulted him verbally in the village square.¹⁰⁴²

Widespread discontent with the exploitative agricultural companies and merchants also triggered violent behaviors by the peasants. Especially the abusive monopoly and company experts deceiving and exploiting the poor peasants engendered the peasants' violent reactions. For instance, in 1931, a poor tobacco cultivator named Cemaloğlu Mehmet shot and killed the Purchasing Director of the Geri Tobacco Company, Hüsameddin Bey, his driver, and the rich landowner named Hüseyin Ağa, who had accompanied the Purchasing director. The main reason for this incident was the disagreement between tobacco farmer and the purchasing director of the tobacco company. They had previously reached an agreement about the price of tobacco. The purchasing director had accepted to pay 45 piasters per *okka* to 8 bales of tobacco with a 20 percent discount in price. A few weeks later, he broke the agreement by claiming that the company demanded a greater discount in the price. Then, he scrapped additional 4 bales of tobacco, seeking to take these 4 bales without any payment. The remaining part of the story is told in the court statements of the tobacco peasant who had committed a murder as below:

I begged him, I told him that the money he gave me was too little, and I said to him "You beggar me." He did not listen to me. When he was about to get into his car, I went down on my knees to him and once again said to him, "Many people I borrowed money from are pounding at the door, please, have

¹⁰⁴² "Tahsildara Karşı Gelinmez," *Yeşilgireson*, 08.02.1936.

a heart!” He replied me, “Fuck off, you beggar!” I was feverishly angry at him, drew my gun, and shot him through.¹⁰⁴³

In another instance that is somewhat different in its form, but similar in respect to its reasons, a crowd composed of poor angry peasants in a small town of Konya attacked the newly built house of a moneylender *ağa* and merchant and pulled it down in a one moment. The peasants had long been discontented with the moneylender who had pressured them for a while. In the end, the peasant found a pretext for intimidating him in the dream of a *hodja*, who saw that the devil was hidden under the house of the merchant. As soon as news of the dream spread among the peasants, an angry crowd armed with stones, stick, axes, and digging tools raided the house and leveled it to the ground.¹⁰⁴⁴

Banditry and Taking to the Mountains

One step further of such acts of violence was banditry in rural society. Banditry was the last resort among the peasant’s repertoire of popular protest as a response to oppression and exploitation. In fact, banditry was no stranger to Turkish society or to other peasant cultures. Especially in the Ottoman Empire, banditry emerged connected with the social effects of the wars, social and political turmoil, decline of the state authority, bad administration, bureaucratic malfunctioning, and increasing smuggling. During World War I and the National Struggle, banditry plagued the countryside. Only eleven days before the proclamation of the Republican regime, on 18 October 1923, the Grand National Assembly had to enact a law against the

¹⁰⁴³ “Seferihisar Cinayetinin Ayrıntıları,” *Cumhuriyet*, 08.11.1931. In addition, see “Seferihisar Cinayeti,” *Cumhuriyet*, 09.11.1931.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Kivilımlı, *Yol*, Vol. 2, p. 293.

banditry titled “The Law for Extirpating Brigandage” (*İzlae-i Şekavet Kanunu*) (No.356).¹⁰⁴⁵



“Gendarme Bekir in Search of Bandit. Our New Serial. How did the Gendarmerie Station Commander Sergeant Bekir Catch Djin Ali?” *Köroğlu*, 30.01.1932.

Despite the government’s preoccupation with security and endless efforts to create a strong and central state administration, banditry did not disappear during the period. On the contrary, it rose with the adverse effects of the Great Depression and the state economic policies in the early 1930s. Some desperate peasants disfranchised by the regime followed the traditional way out and escape route into the forests and mountains, when other more covert tactics were inconclusive or useless. Banditry and the struggles between the bandits and the gendarme became so common throughout the country that *Köroğlu* serialized a short novel titled *Candarma Bekir Eşkiya Peşinde* (Gendarme Bekir in Search of Bandit) that began to be published on 30 January 1932.¹⁰⁴⁶

¹⁰⁴⁵ BCA CHP [490.1/227.898.3], 15.02.1938.

¹⁰⁴⁶ See “Candarma Bekir Eşkiya Peşinde.” The first episode of the serial is “Karakol Kumandanı Bekir Çavuş Cin Ali’yi Nasıl Bastı?” *Köroğlu*, 30.01.1932.

Main Features of the Anatolian Bandits and Social Banditry

Most of the bandits were not cruel, ill intended or criminal peasants. On the contrary, they were for the most part oppressed, exploited, and abused peasants who strived to survive, to defend themselves, and to struggle against their oppressors. Admittedly some of them were not good social bandits. However, most of them were good men who did not work for an *ağa* or any oppressor, and did not target the poor people. They mostly struggled only for themselves by mostly targeting the well-to-do and oppressive people in reprisal in rural areas.

According to a contemporary observer, there were by and large four kinds of bandits in the countryside of Turkey during the period: thieves, robbers, raiders, and more organized bands.¹⁰⁴⁷ In fact, most of bandits generally had to be involved in all of these forms. The major activities of the Anatolian bandits were theft and robbery, generally occurring in the forms of raids on wealthy villages, and the domiciles and cottages of well-off landowners and merchants in the dark of night. In addition, they often hi-jacked and robbed cars, lorries, and buses generally transporting rich people, merchants, and state and company officials on remote intercity roads and passages by blocking the highways or opening fire on the vehicles. Some of the poor peasants who engaged in the theft of livestock animals and in smuggling also hid in the forests and mountains and took up arms against security forces.¹⁰⁴⁸

The great parts of the bandit groups were composed of those poor peasants who had had to fight with or kill a state official, tax collector, gendarme soldier, village headman, a cruel landowner or a greedy merchant. Following such incidents, they generally needed to take the shelter in the mountains to hide from their

¹⁰⁴⁷ See Trakyalı Ali Galip, "Köylü," *Ülkü*, (Nov., 1933), p. 327.

¹⁰⁴⁸ See *Ibid.*, p. 328.

oppressors and to escape from the laws. They had not only hidden from the oppressive forces, but also continued to struggle with them or took revenge fearlessly by assaulting, robbing, and terrorizing them from time to time.

The mountainous terrain of the Anatolian countryside and uninhabited forests facilitated the banditry and enabled the bandits to survive out of the sight and reach of the security forces. The bandits generally preferred to stay in their houses, huts, cottages, or caves hidden in the forests or mountains during winter with their food and drink stocks. They began to operate with the spring and especially in summer. Their operations peaked especially in the harvest seasons and tax payment periods. In addition, springs and summers when livestock were left in pastures for grazing and the passenger traffic increased in roads also were the best times for raid and robbery.¹⁰⁴⁹ Some big bands separated into several divisions in order to survive more easily in small caves in winter and got back together in spring for new operations.¹⁰⁵⁰

The bandit groups needed weapons and provisioning for their own needs in mountains. Therefore, it was inevitable for them to be involved in illicit economic transactions such as smuggling, robbery, and to rely on the hidden support of the peasantry in order to obtain more rifles, guns, ammunition, food, and drink. For that reason, the robbery, smuggling, and theft were the primary ways for survival of all bandits.

However, perhaps what distinguished the good bandits akin to the social bandits of Hobsbawm from the other outlaws and criminals who were sometimes supported by the oppressors and did not differentiate their targets was that the former chose their targets from among the rich, wealthy, oppressive persons, state officials, and security forces that generally aided the dominant groups in the countryside.

¹⁰⁴⁹ "Yaz Gelince Azıyorlar," *Köroğlu*, 09.05.1934.

¹⁰⁵⁰ F. Övünç, "Zilân Asilerinden Reşo Çetesinin Takip ve Tenkilinde Hangi Usuller Tatbik Olundu ve Nasıl Yapıldı," *Jandarma Karakol Mecmuası*, No. 15 (Mar., 1939), p. 13.

The petitions written to the National Assembly which complained of the bandits, their robbery and theft, give an idea about which groups the bandits targeted. The authors of these petitions generally were rich peasants, as understood from the money they lost to robbers, or nicknames and titles they had such as village headman, *hacı*, *ağa*, *efendi*, and the title of “*eşraftan*” (from the notable). Again, according to the petition sent to the National Assembly, it is understood that the merchants and private company employees travelling in intercity roads also were among those people who were targeted by the bandits. In a petition written in 1928, a receiving clerk of a timber factory who had been robbed by the bandits demanded the government provide security in the region¹⁰⁵¹ According to the petitions written in 1934, for example, Hacı B. from Ünye complained that a group of bandits usurped his 1500 TL. Haşim Efendi, also from Ünye, complained of the widespread robbery, usurpation, and murder by the bandits in the region. In a similar vein, a merchant named Hüdaverdi Efendi from Elaziz demanded the government compensate him for his lorry, which had been stolen by bandits. Likewise, a livestock merchant Ali Efendi in Erciş district of Van claimed damages from the government for 700 sheep extorted by the bandits. In Kozan, Dedezade Mehmet Efendi, one influential notable of the region and his well-off friends who had taken part in the National Struggle as the leading figures of the region, complained of the banditry threatening them in the region. The complaint of a notable named İbrahim Efendi from the Pazarcık district of Maraş was also similar. Furthermore, he complained that many peasants in the villages of Pazarcık supported the bandits.¹⁰⁵² Similarly, a village headman Hasanoğlu Şükrü from the İncirli village of Hozat, in his petition to the National Assembly, complained of the bandits who had stolen his properties in 1935. He

¹⁰⁵¹ For instance, a receiving clerk (*tesellüm memuru*) of a lumber mill company complained about the banditry around Kığı and Pülümür, *TBMM Yıllık 1928*, p. 339.

¹⁰⁵² See *TBMM Yıllık 1934*, p. 251, 287, 297, 370, 381.

demanded the government act against the bandits, punish them, and compensate his losses.¹⁰⁵³

The disputes over land and other rural resources were one of the causes that pushed the poor peasants to adopt banditry to defend their small properties and rights of use over some fields. For example, the rampant banditry in the Kadirli district of Adana (today in Osmaniye) toward the end of the 1920s and in the early 1930s emanated from the land disputes over a large uncultivated area of land called Akçasaz. Such dispute led them to become bandits against the dominant elements in the district. According to a local historian, the peasants was so disposed to banditry that being a bandit was fashionable in the late 1920s in the region.¹⁰⁵⁴

The story of one of these peasants might shed light upon the causes of the banditry in the region. A peasant named Remzi, aggrieved by the abusive official authorities and politically dominant *ağas*, opposed them in 1927. In order to silence this nonconformist peasant, the public prosecutor issued an arrest warrant for him. Therefore, Remzi fled into the mountains as soon as he heard this decision of the public prosecutor and engaged in banditry. The story of another bandit named Hacıveli was similar more or less. Hacıveli also adopted banditry against the *ağa*, who had seized his land. Again, Safiye Mehmet, a popular bandit in Kadirli, opposed his *ağa*, who had extorted his horse, and then took shelter in mountains to struggle against him.¹⁰⁵⁵ Upon the increasing banditry in the region, a folk poem was composed in those years as follows:¹⁰⁵⁶

¹⁰⁵³ See *TBMM Yıllık 1936*, p.315.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Cezmi Yurtsever, *Kadirli Tarihi* (Osmaniye: Kadirli Hizmet Birliği Kültür Yayınları, 1999), p. 260.

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-261.

¹⁰⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.261.

Kadirli'de eşkıyalık çoğaldı
Herkes ağalığın ilan eyledi
Emniyet bozuldu daha ne kaldı
(...)

The banditry became widespread in Kadirli
Everyone declared himself *ağa*
The security was disrupted, what else remained behind.
(...)

Bandit Cello was another famous bandit in the early 1930s. He was a poor young peasant, who herded the cattles of his *ağa* in the İncedere village of Kayseri. Because he had not given any money or crops to him in return for his service for a long time, he decided to challenge to the *ağa*. Thereupon, Cello bought a gun by selling one of the *ağa*'s donkeys and began to challenge the *ağa*. He robbed a mail car in order to survive in the mountains.¹⁰⁵⁷

In another case, a poor peasant named Feyzo in Kemah mounted an armed resistance to his *ağa*, because the *ağa* had extorted his wife. In his first action, Bandit Feyzo shot the men of the *ağa*. Then he terrorized other oppressive *ağas* in the region.¹⁰⁵⁸ Similarly, Deli Omar, a poor peasant in Urfa, fought against Alişir Ağa, who tyrannically dominated the peasants and had molested and sexually harassed Omar's wife. In order to struggle against the *ağa*, Deli Omar armed with rifles and took shelter in mountains in Urfa region.¹⁰⁵⁹

Another well-reputed bandit of the 1930s was Alo. Alo was a poor shepherd working on the farm of Demiroğlu Molla Hüseyin Ağa in the Keklikoluk village of Maraş. Cheated by his *ağa* in several times, Alo eventually came to hate him. Finally, because the *ağa* did not keep his promises, Alo began to bear a grudge against the *ağa*. Well aware of Alo's resentment, one day the *ağa* decided to punish him by alleging falsely that Alo and his mother had stolen a lamb from the farm and eaten it together. Then, the *ağa* had Alo's mother beaten severely in the village

¹⁰⁵⁷ Bayrak, *Öyküleriyle Halk Anlatı Türküleri*, p. 461.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 527.

¹⁰⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 548.

square. Upon the death of Alo's mother within a short time because of the beating, Alo girded himself with rifles and took to the Taurus Mountains by joining the band of Kara Paşo, a good and anti-*ağa* bandit. Kara Paşo taught him the key points and passages in the mountains, and the tricks and strategies of the banditry. Alo and Kara Paşo managed to receive the hidden support of the poor peasants in the village. Aware of the peasant's covert support of Bandit Alo, Demiroğlu began to terrorize the poor peasants of the village. In addition to that, he sent his armed men to kill Alo. However, Alo, who had been well trained by Kara Paşo, shot to death about twenty men of the *ağa*. Then, after a while, Alo managed to take his revenge by raiding Demiroğlu Molla Hüseyin's cottage and killing him.¹⁰⁶⁰

In another case that occurred in the late 1920s, a peasant named Reşko in Çaçşak village of Kayseri shot 17 rich farmers who had murdered his brother. Reşko's family was in conflict with some farmers in the village over some grazing land. Some farmers had staked their claims on the grazing land in the village. One day, some of these farmers killed Reşko's brother during a row. Upon this, Reşko armed with rifles and killed all of the rich farmers who were responsible for the murder of his brother one by one. The gendarme caught him within a short time. The local court sentenced him to prison. However, a few years after his imprisonment, he benefited from the general amnesty on the tenth anniversary of the Republic in 1933 and got out of prison. However, he again engaged in banditry and smuggling to survive outside his village.¹⁰⁶¹

The story of a young peasant boy named Alim, who was reputed as a brave bandit, to be more specific, *efe* (the title of bandits and swashbucklers in the Aegean region) around Afyon in the 1930s, was similar. Alim's family wanted to cultivate

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 558.

¹⁰⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 565.

crops on their lands in Dinar, but the dominant and tyrannical household named the Mustanlar did not permit them to engage in agriculture in the village. The Mustanlar probably wanted to hold the agricultural production under their monopoly. Intimidating and hassling Alim's family, the Mustanlar tried to displace them from their lands. Therefore, in the course of time, several brawls and fights broke out between the families. In one of these fights, Alim killed one of the Mustanlar and severely wounded two of them. In order to escape prosecution and a probable attack of the Mustanlar as a reprisal, he began to live in the mountains. Then, he waged guerilla warfare against the Mustanlar, who disproportionally retaliated for Alim's action. From that time onward, the peasants, who were pleased with his challenge to the most tyrannical family of the region, began to call him Alim Efe. The fights and reciprocal murders between Alim Efe and the oppressive Mustanlar household continued well into the 1950s.¹⁰⁶²

Such good bandits became the subjects of two masterpieces of Turkish literature, *İnce Memed* and *Memo*. The hero of Yaşar Kemal's most popular book, *İnce Memed* was one such figure who waged war a greedy *ağa* in the 1930s.¹⁰⁶³ Likewise, *Memo* was another bandit who rose up against a cruel *ağa* in the same period.¹⁰⁶⁴ As an eyewitness who wrote in *Ülkü* argued, the peasants actually respected or looked with sympathy at most of these good bandits.¹⁰⁶⁵ Indeed, the peasants told of their heroic struggles, fights and their bravery and composed songs about them.¹⁰⁶⁶

¹⁰⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 616.

¹⁰⁶³ Yaşar Kemal, *İnce Memed*, 4 vols. (İstanbul: Toros Yayınları, 1987).

¹⁰⁶⁴ Kemal Bilbaşar, *Memo* (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1969-1970).

¹⁰⁶⁵ Trakyalı Ali Galip, "Köylü," *Ülkü*, (Nov., 1933), p. 328.

¹⁰⁶⁶ See Bayrak, *Öyküleriyle Halk Anlatı Türküleri*, p. 123. Many years ago I also heard from my grandfather a folk song composed by the local populace of Afyon about the dramatic life story and bravery of Alim Efe.

Bandit Activities: A General Overview

Undoubtedly, there were many more bandits than these in the early Republican period. Turkey's countryside was rife with these peasant rebellions and peasant rebels throughout 1920s and 1930s. I am not using the term of "peasant rebellions" and "peasant rebels" in the sense of some well-known Kurdish or religious uprisings and their actors, but armed resistance of the ordinary peasants for their survival to the gendarme soldiers, large estate owners, moneylenders, merchants, tax officials, and monopolies.

Summative statistics on the activities of the bandits are available for some years. Most data on bandits derives from documents of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs and the General Commandership of Gendarmerie in the Republican Archives. As indicated by the table below conducted by the General Commandership of Gendarmerie, the activities that fell into the category of political brigandage remarkably decreased after 1924 with the relatively consolidation of the new state. On the other hand, highway robbery, armed extortion, armed robbery, theft of livestock, burglary, raids on house, and murder maintained their importance until 1931. Some of these cases gained new momentum in 1931, despite a sharp and inexplicable decline in 1932. Over the next two years, although the brigandage and other organized crimes seem to have decreased gradually, they did not disappear even in the mid-1930s. On the contrary, as recorded by the General-Directorate of Security, petty brigandage increased to 70, the highway robbery to 225, murder to 1594 in 1934.¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁶⁷ *Emniyet İşleri Umum Müdürlüğü: Geçen Dört Yılda Yapılan ve Gelecek Dört Yılda Yapılacak İşler Hılasası* (Ankara: T.C. Dahiliye Vekaleti, Başvekalet Matbaası, 1935), p. 13.

Table 20 - The Number of Crimes of Banditry between 1923 and 1932.

Years	Political Brigandage	Brigandage	Highway Robbery	Kidnapping	Armed Extortion	Aggravated Larceny (Armed)	Livestock Theft (Abigeatus)	Burglary and Raid on House	Murder
1923	-	25	42	-	149	94	263	10	218
1924	332	331	563	78	2,243	884	2,993	200	3,688
1925	169	231	131	368	2,465	900	2,710	150	2,316
1926	5	130	204	16	778	200	500	677	1,347
1927	4	85	904	104	483	87	400	373	778
1928	10	47	119	24	718	389	1,389	380	2,420
1929	5	55	145	6	641	379	587	387	2,907
1930	10	40	233	5	570	327	384	489	2,975
1931	2	30	330	19	645	500	1,988	1,988	962
1932	2	31	128	2	279	89	269	86	274

Source: CHP tarafından verilecek Cumhuriyet devrinde asayişle ilgili konferans metni, BCA CHP [490.1/227.898.3], 15.02.1938.

Table 21 - The Number of the Crimes that Damaged the Public Order, 1931-1934.

Years	Brigandage	Highway Robbery	Armed Extortion	Murder
1931	30	330	645	962
1932	31	28	279	274
1933	25	10	20	109
1934	70	225	220	1,594

Source: *Emniyet İşleri Umum Müdürlüğü* (Ankara: T.C. Dahiliye Vekaleti, Başvekalet Matbaası, 1935), p. 13.

Banditry in Eastern Anatolia

The mountainous terrain of the region and socioeconomic structure characterized by more unequal land distribution, absolute power of *ağas*, and animal husbandry as main economic activity that necessitated keeping and bearing arms paved the way for and fostered the banditry. According to one report of the First General Inspectorate, as can be seen in Table 29 below, there were about 80 bands consisting of about 2000 men (and a few women) by 1928 only in the First Inspectorate Region including Urfa, Mardin, Siirt, Van, Hakkari, Bitlis, Ağrı, Elazığ, Dersim and Bingöl.

Although some were connected with the tribal uprisings, most of them were autonomous bands free from any tribal or organizational affiliation. However, when looked at the other security reports, which will be touched on in following pages, it can be seen easily that there were many more bands and bandits than this list included.¹⁰⁶⁸

Table 22 - Prominent Bandits in Eastern Anatolia in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Name of the Band	Number of Men
Ömerganlı Ahmedî Süleyman Band	30
Ömerganlı Yusuf Band	25
Kurdisli Ali Ahmet Band	40
Sürkicili Ali Bezari Band	18
Ramanlı Emin Band	50
Ramanlı Şükrü Band	20
Ramanlı Abdullah Band	40
Senikanlı Hüsni and His Brothers' Band	50
Cehizli Molla Ali Band	25
Cehizli Mako and Cendi Band	25
Dobazlı Gorgin Band	25
Eruhlu Abdurrahman Band	25
Karisanlı Ömer Band	25
Mehmet Ali Yunus Band	50
Şeyh Abdurrahman Band	50
Ahmede İskan Band	10
Abdi Şari Band	110
Raçkotan Tribe Chief Riza Band	20
Raçkotan Tribe Chief Sabri Band	20
Raçkotan Tribe Chief Sait and Baha Band	20
Hasenanlı Ferzende and Abdalbaki Bands	80
Nuh Band	25
Ali Kalmezoğulları Band	20
Abdürrahim-Mendi-Tahir Bands	50
Kelhaslı Şeyh Hüseyin Band	30
Botyanlı Ömer Faro Band	20
Miranlı İboğlu İbrahim Band	10
Termanlı Hasan Zişan Band	10

¹⁰⁶⁸ Report about the Gendarmerie, Its Activities, and the Results Obtained (*Jandarma Teşkilatı, Yaptığı Çalışmalar ve Sonuçları Hakkında Rapor*) BCA MGM [30.10/128.923.6], 29.12.1936. Especially See two reports titled as "Situation of Security" (*Asayiş Vaziyeti*) and "Situation of Security for Ten Years" (*10 Senelik Asayiş Vaziyeti*).

Melikanlı Mustafa Band	10
Diyarbakirli Kado Band	15
Mestanlı Rıza Gözü Band	15
Tavsalalı Haydar Band	20
Emin Miko Band	10
Ömer Faro Teyzeoğlu Maktül Mehmet Band	10
Cibranlı Ahmet Band	12
Girnoslu Hacı Selim Band	30
Girnoslu Halit and Mustafa Band	30
Valirli Rıza Band	10
Ardonşinli Mahmut and Eyyüp Band	15
Batikanlı İsmo Band	10
Yado Band	-
Hasan Bekanlar Band	45
Hanili Şeyh Mustafa Band	15
Maktul Darhinili Yusuf Band	8
Biçarlı Mustafa Bey Band	15
Hirtalı Abdülcebbar Band	15
Halil and Sabri Band	15
Mestanlı Abdülgani Band	8
Şeklanlı Seyfullah Band	30
Band of Hasan, Brother of Tavsalalı Haydar	15
Darahinili Mehmet Ağa Band	9
Tavsalalı Galip Band	10
Liceli Yusuf Perişan Band	30
Liceli Mehmet Osman and Çelikli Kahyaoğulları Band	30
Liceli Molla Mustafaoğlu Ömer Band	10
Babikli Hüseyin Band	10
Termanlı Molla Keziban Band	15
Mire Sadık Band	5
Silvanlı Şeyh Fahri and Feyzi Bands	50
Yertalı Hacı İsaogulları Band	6
Silükanlılar Band	25
Gedon Köylü Mehmet Ali Band	10
Girizanlı Talhaoğlu Band	20
Sulhanlı Mehmet Ali Band	50
Tulhomlu Raşit Band	25
Gavur Hoca Band	5-10
Şeyh Salih Band	15
Deli Abdullah Band	35
Tahir Band	30
Giravili Nur and Ebabekir and Brother Nadir Bands	100
Muazzez from Abdo Aziz Band and Kel Nadir Band	30
Müküslü Adil Band	25

Silleli Ahmet Band	50
Hacıoğlu Mehmet Band	15
Erzikaklı Şeyh Tahir's Biraderzade Abdülbari Band	30
Kofifanlı Mehmet Reşo and his Amcazade Resul Band	15
Şahinzadelerin Cemal Pulat Band	10
Şemdinan's Benavik Village Countryman Ahmet Bey Band	40
Several bands in Van such as Hoşaplı Faris Band, Hinoplu Sano Band, Halis Band, Abbas Hasan Band, Şeyh Zahir Band, Şemikanlı Timur Band, Kerem Osi Band, Palulu Yusuf Band, Ömer Band, Ali Beki Band, Ali Gör Band, Büro Hasso Band, Tello Band.	-
More than 80 Bands	About 2000 men

Source: Hüseyin Koca, *Yakın Tarihten Günümüze Hükümetlerin Doğu-Güneydoğu Politikaları: Umumi Müfettişlikten Olağanüstü Hal Bölge Valiliğine* (Konya: Mikro Yayınları, 1998), pp.219-229.

Highway Robberies and Attacks on the Ağas, State Officials, and Gendarme

These bandits concentrated on several activities to survive and struggle against the authorities and dominant groups in the region. The first way was of course to intimidate, terminate or rob the well-off *ağas* and merchants in their regions. The bandits generally targeted the well-off farmers, *ağas* and merchants in their areas of action. The activities of the band of İdo and İbo in Diyarbakır are good examples of bandits who waged war against *ağas*. İdo and İbo were poor peasants from Diyarbakır. They attacked a village and killed a village headman and Mustafa Ağa. They badgered the rich *ağas* in the region to death by breaking into their houses and robbing them. In addition, they shot a gendarme and robbed a truck in Lice.¹⁰⁶⁹

¹⁰⁶⁹ “İdo ve İbo,” *Köroğlu*, 18.08.1934.

By December 1935, it was reported from Urfa that two bandit leaders named Kucaklı Hasan and Siverekli Ramazan had been robbing the rich peasants and passengers in the region since 1926. Among the poor peasants they had many supporters. These two bands had killed eight civil people within nine years, and four gendarmes within only 1934.¹⁰⁷⁰ Sometimes bandits kidnapped the wealthy peasants for ransom. For example, in June 1933, six bandits kidnapped two rich men in Elbistan and demanded ransom amounting to 2000 TL.¹⁰⁷¹

The bandits frequently attacked and killed state officials. For instance, the bands of Kelereşli Halil and Rıza shot to death a Director of the Subdistrict and 11 gendarmes in their attacks during the early 1930s.¹⁰⁷² A reputed bandit of Kemah named Bandit Zühtü shot to death the mayor of Karacaviran district in 1931. Furthermore, he stole the cars of some bureaucrats and robbed mail cars until October 1937, when he and his men were killed by a gendarme battalion.¹⁰⁷³



“Bandit Zühtü, his friend Abdullah, his mistress Feride, and the security forces of Erzincan who caught them.” “Kemah Ovalarında Can Yakan Haydut,” *Köroğlu*, 02.10.1937.

¹⁰⁷⁰ “Başbelası Bir Çete Reisi Gebertildi,” *Son Posta*, 01.12.1935.

¹⁰⁷¹ “Candarma Yetiş!” *Köroğlu*, 07.06.1933.

¹⁰⁷² Report about the Gendarmerie, Its Activities, and the Results Obtained, BCA MGM [30.10/128.923.6], 29.12.1936. In this file, see the security reports about the incidents that occurred in 1933 and 1934.

¹⁰⁷³ “Kemah Ovalarında Can Yakan Haydut,” *Köroğlu*, 02.10.1937.

Tax collectors were also targets of the bandits. As mentioned above, Gırlavikli Hino, a famous bandit in the Urfa region was compelled to become a bandit after he killed a tax collector and gendarme officer. Again, in Hakkari, a group of bandits shot to death the tax collector in December 1930.¹⁰⁷⁴ In another instance, the bandits attacked a tax collector named Hamdi when he was collecting tax in the Ziravenak village of Erzurum in June 1931. They did not kill him, but took the all money he had collected from the peasants and all of his equipment.¹⁰⁷⁵ Again, a bandit named Darıh killed a tax collector in a village of the Genç district of Bingöl.¹⁰⁷⁶

They especially did not show mercy to the gendarme. Indeed, many gendarmes died in the conflicts with the bandits or in ambushes laid by the bandits. According to the memoirs of Oryal Gökdemir's mother, whose husband was an army officer, when they were in Siirt in 1932, they felt threatened by the local people and especially by the bandits. The gendarme forces frequently came to conflict with the bandits, and many gendarme soldiers died during bandit attacks.¹⁰⁷⁷ As his mother related, the bandits hated the gendarme. Some bandit groups often ambushed them, and, in her words, "pitilessly killed those gendarme soldiers" who endeavoured to prevent their activities.¹⁰⁷⁸

Indeed, the official reports that enumerated the bandits who had been caught or killed one by one give also information about the casualties of gendarmes between the lines. For instance, eight gendarmes were killed in the gunfights in the hot pursuit

¹⁰⁷⁴ BCA BKK [30.18.1.2/16.84.5.], 31.12.1930.

¹⁰⁷⁵ BCA BKK [30.18.1.2/21.41.19.], 10.06.1931.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Report about the Gendarmerie, BCA BKK [30.10/128.923.6.], 29.12.1936.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Oryal Gökdemir, *Annemin Anlattıkları* (İstanbul: Arkın Kitabevi, 1998), p. 109.

¹⁰⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

of bandit Reşo in the early 1930s.¹⁰⁷⁹ Bandit Zaza Hüseyin and Çolak Mehmet Ali killed nine gendarmes. Only in the pursuit of the gang of Zaza Hüseyin, the men of Hüseyin shot to death two gendarmes, one soldier, two militias, and two peasants and severely wounded two gendarmes.¹⁰⁸⁰ One might cite many other examples from the security reports.

Perhaps the primary way to which almost all bandits resorted was of course highway robbery. There were a lot of newspaper reports and official security reports about highway robberies. The bandits especially targeted motor vehicles like cars, buses, and lorries, whether civil or military, generally conveying rich men, commodities, crops, foods, arms, and equipment. Such activity was so common that it was reported that bandits had robbed nine lorries a day around Pazarcık on 24 July 1929.¹⁰⁸¹ A newspaper reported that ten bandits had robbed mail cars in Muş and Bitlis. According to the same report, two other bandits named Çalkıoğullarından Tahir and Bekir had long carried out highway robberies around Mardin by 1932.¹⁰⁸²

In the mid-1930s, similar events continued to occur. In July 1934, a bandit group that had stopped a lorry around Antep extorted 3000 TL.¹⁰⁸³ In May 1935, *Köroğlu* announced that a bandit, named Kato, from the Kızıltoprak village of Arapkir, who had taken shelter in the forests, robbed the vehicles on roads, and raided rich villages for fifteen years. A gendarme officer had ambushed and captured him.¹⁰⁸⁴

In June 1936, the gendarme detected two bandit leaders named Çoban Mehmet and Hasan with their men in a cave. They were among the most wanted

¹⁰⁷⁹ F. Övünç, "Zilan Asîllerinden Reşo Çetesinin Takip ve Tenkilinde Hangi Usuller Tatbik Olundu ve Nasıl Yapıldı?" p.17-18.

¹⁰⁸⁰ The Security Report on the First General Inspectorate Region, BCA MGM [30.10/128.923.2], 09.11.1932.

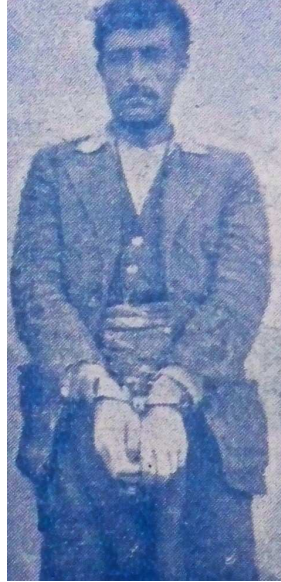
¹⁰⁸¹ "9 Otomobil Soyanlar," *Köroğlu*, 24.07.1929.

¹⁰⁸² "Cinayet ve Soygun Yapan Haydutlar Yakalandı," *Son Posta*, 21.08.1932.

¹⁰⁸³ "Eşküyaya Aman Yok!" *Köroğlu*, 14.07.1934.

¹⁰⁸⁴ "15 Yıllık Eşküyaya," *Köroğlu*, 08.05.1935.

bandits who had been carrying out highway robberies for a long time in Malatya and its surroundings. However, except for Hasan, who was shot in the clash, the other bandits in his gang had managed to escape by killing a gendarme soldier.¹⁰⁸⁵



Bandit Kato, after he was arrested by the gendarme. He had robbed the rich persons, raiding their houses and hijacking motor vehicles in the Arapkir district of Malatya. “15 Yıllık Eşkıya,” *Köroğlu*, 08.05.1935.

Some bandits, who did not like to rob the ordinary citizens, but needed to do it for their survival, apologized to the people they robbed. For example, something like this happened at the end of a bus robbery near Sivas in 20 July 1937. A group of bandits stopped a bus by blocking the road with rocks, and then robbed the passengers. On the other hand, they treated their victims kindly and did not seize their rings or clocks, which were probably family heirlooms. They seized only money and other useful and valuable things. After they were done with the bus, before leaving the passengers, they apologized by asking the passengers to give their blessing to them (“*hakkınızı helâl edin*”).¹⁰⁸⁶

Even in the mid-1930s, the gendarme and high politicians travelling on the highways of eastern Anatolia were vulnerable to the robberies of the bandits. The roads were so insecure that the passengers did not continue their travel in nights. The

¹⁰⁸⁵ “Mağaradaki Çete,” *Köroğlu*, 24.06.1936.

¹⁰⁸⁶ “Yolcular Hakkınızı Helal Edin!” *Köroğlu*, 21.07.1937.

foreign observers who travelled the region in 1935 also witnessed or heard about the bandits. One of them was Lilo Linke. Her conversation with her Turkish companion illustrates how daring the bandit had become and how they attempted to prey on the gendarmes:

“I’m afraid you can’t leave here before tomorrow morning.”

“Why?”

“Because the road is not safe.”

“You mean it’s too bad?”

“Well, that isn’t the worst of it. But there are highwaymen in the mountains.”

“Highwaymen?” Thank heavens, at last some excitement. Now I simply had to go. I implored the fat man to tell me more about them. Did they shoot? Had they ever killed anyone?

“Well, they have guns, and it depends on the circumstances if they use them. Some of them are just poor peasants who need a bit of money. The police cannot deal with them. The moment the men sense danger, they simply retreat into the mountains or go back to their villages.”

“Have you ever heard of an attack?”

(...)

“I remember,” he said at last, “the case of the soldiers’ transport. They were travelling in six lorries, some twenty men and an officer to each. The highwaymen –about a dozen of them- lay in ambush at a narrow pass. (...)

“They stopped a lorry after another at the point of their guns. The officers who carrying the soldiers’ pay had to hand over a lira for each soldier and two for themselves, and then the lorries were allowed to pass one by one.”¹⁰⁸⁷

Bandits especially targeted the well-dressed and well-off passengers. The high politicians were also vulnerable to the robberies of the bandits. In one case, despite the gendarme escort protecting them, Erzurum deputy Asım Vasfi and Kars deputy Ömer Kamil were waylaid and robbed by a band of twenty men on the road linking Erzincan to Sivas on 28 November 1934. What is more bizarre, the robbery happened in a place that was within walking distance to a gendarme station, not more than 1000 meters proximity. When they arrived in Erzincan, as Asım Vasfi wrote in his report, all the people they talked to in the province complained of the widespread banditry and robbery in the region. He wrote, “The things that happened to us were

¹⁰⁸⁷ Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, p. 52.

common here in the villages (...). It should be very striking that even the state officials took this event in stride as if nothing important happened.”¹⁰⁸⁸

In another case, the bandit Hasanoğlu Şükrü robbed the Gendarme Inspector Kemal Bey and killed some gendarme soldiers escorting him.¹⁰⁸⁹ In a similar case, the unidentified bandits stopped the car of Governor of Mardin by blocking the road in Mardin in September 1936. Then, they robbed the Health Director driving the car.¹⁰⁹⁰ It is possible to cite many more examples.

Livestock Theft and Extortion

The most valuable and accordingly the most vulnerable property to the bandit attacks in the eastern countryside was livestock. For bandits, livestock meant both money and food. Therefore, the bandits frequently robbed the big livestock farms. A security report concerning the livestock theft occurred in three districts of Urfa, that were Viranşehir, Harran and Birecik during the first two months of 1937 gives an idea about the dimensions of the matter. On January 5, some robbers seized 55 sheep in Harran. On the following day, İbrahimoglu band seized 100 sheep in Viranşehir. About one week later, unidentified robbers raided a farm and extorted 200 sheep on January 11 in Viranşehir. The next day, five robbers, probably the robbers of the 200 sheep, clashed with the security forces. Within same day, five person clashed with

¹⁰⁸⁸ From the Erzurum Deputy Asım Vasfi to the RPP Secretary- General Recep Bey, BCA CHP [490.1/648.151.1], 28.11.1934.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Report about the Gendarmerie, Its Activities, and the Results Obtained, BCA MGM [30.10/128.923.6], 29.12.1936.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Incidents that Occurred at the Frontiers from the Last Four Months of 1936 to the First Three Months of 1937, BCA MGM [30.10/ 128.923.19].

the security forces around the Harran Custom Station. On January 16, seven armed robbers usurped several sheep in Harran.¹⁰⁹¹

February was more eventful. On the second day of the month, the seizure of many horses was reported from Viranşehir. The next day, three armed bandits killed a person in Viranşehir. In the same day, ten armed robbers raided a house in Viranşehir. On February 9, a band of 25 robbers extorted 100 sheep in Harran. Ten armed robbers lifted 70 sheep in Birecik within the same day. Two days later, a band raided a house and stole two sheep in Harran and then the security forces confronted five bandits in Harran. On February 15, 203 sheep were extorted by armed bands in the region.¹⁰⁹²

Similar events continued in March. Armed robbers stole 200 sheep in Viranşehir on March 6. Only two days later, 60 sheep were stolen in Viranşehir. In the meantime, there were several raids and robberies that took place in neighboring provinces, especially in Diyarbakır and Siirt.¹⁰⁹³

The newspapers also reported livestock thefts in the east. The issue of *Köroğlu* dated 10 August 1935 reported on an armed group of 20 bandits, who especially stole livestock and other commodities in the villages and highways of the Hasankale district of Erzurum.¹⁰⁹⁴

Smuggling

Perhaps one of the most important causes lying behind the banditry in the eastern provinces was smuggling, another crime against the property. As I examined the

¹⁰⁹¹ Incidents that Occurred in the Borderline from the Last Four Months of 1936 to the First Three Months of 1937, BCA MGM [30.10/128.923.19].

¹⁰⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹⁴ "Haydutluk," *Köroğlu*, 10.08.1935.

smuggling in detail above, I will not dwell on it here at length. The point I want to underline here is that there was a relation between smuggling and banditry. Smuggling was just one of activities some gangs had to be involved in for their very survival. On the other hand, smuggling also partially produced banditry. Many smugglers had long been acting like bandits in order to defend themselves against the security forces and inhuman armed guards of the Régie since the Ottoman period. The similar conditions, despite the abolition of the merciless Régie administration and its guard, appeared in the Republican era with the institutionalization of the state monopolies and especially protective foreign trade policies in the 1930s. The strict security measures of the government against the smuggling by means of the gendarme, local militias and customhouse guards compelled many smugglers to take up arm like bandits. They also did not hesitate to clash with the security forces and sometimes benefitted the advantages of engagement in banditry. In addition, those bandits whose causes were not smuggling were compelled to engage in the illicit trade of contraband items in order to survive in the forests and mountains.



Surviving members of a gang of 15 bandits who engaged in smuggling and highway robberies in the eastern borderline.

“Müthiş Bir Eşkiya Çetesi Nasıl Gebertildi?”

Köroğlu, 23.12.1929.

One such bandit group of 15 men was caught by the gendarme in December 1929. They had long carried out trade of contraband items by engaging in cross border smuggling and highway robberies. However, challenged by the gendarme, they

fought with the gendarme soldiers. In the armed conflict, gendarme sergeant was shot to death.¹⁰⁹⁵

Again, one of the big bandit groups that engaged in smuggling at the same time was the band of Reşo. There were about 50 armed men in the band. They stole animals in Iran, and tried to sell them in Turkey. For instance, in October 1933, the band lifted hundreds of sheep in Iran. For their own needs, they stocked many cows and horses on a farm in the Diyadin district of Ağrı.¹⁰⁹⁶

Banditry in the East Portrayed in the Security Reports

For a general view of the banditry that plagued the eastern countryside, the best informative sources are the monthly and annual security reports of the gendarme. These reports summarize the main activities of the bandits and the clashes of the bandits with the security forces. To cite some cases recorded in these reports also might provide a vivid picture of the banditry. According to a security report of May 1929, within that month, five armed robbers had clashed with the gendarme battalion in Hilvan. On the road between Pertek and Hozat, two bandits had robbed two passengers. In the road between Muş and Varto, two armed bandits had ambushed eight passengers and killed one of them during a robbery. In Silvan, three armed men had killed two peasants. A group carrying weapons had robbed a peasant in the Ahlat region. Similarly, a group of bandits had seized the money and goods of a peasant in

¹⁰⁹⁵ “Müthiş Bir Eşkıya Çetesi Nasıl Gebertildi!” *Köroğlu*, 23.12.1929.

¹⁰⁹⁶ F. Övünç, “Zilân Asilerinden Reşo Çetesinin Takip ve Tenkilinde Hangi Usuller Tatbik Olundu ve Nasıl Yapıldı,” pp. 8-13, 20.

Palo. Another group of bandits had waylaid and robbed a passenger from Birecik. Some armed persons had wounded the night watchman of Birecik Akpınar.¹⁰⁹⁷

In another monthly security report by the General-Commandership of Gendarmerie concerning the bandit activities taking place in the First General Inspectorate Region only during October 1932, it was stated that most of the banditry that violated the public security occurred in Diyarbakır, Urfa, Elaziz and Muş provinces. In all of these eastern provinces, 72 robbery and thefts, raids on six villages, raids on three village flourmills, 13 border violation by the criminal bands had occurred within a month. In Diyarbakır, 14 robberies and armed extortion, and three village raids had taken place. In the Korukçu village of Bismil, four unidentified armed men had opened fire to a gendarme battalion entrusted with the task of looking for some outlaws in the village. Ten armed bandits, possibly the Band of Kör Şemo Band, had opened fire on three gendarmes in Silvan. In Beyazıt, the Band of Süleyman of six bandits had made one robbery; and the Band of Malazgirtli Kamil had committed the act of two armed extortions in the same district. In Mardin, ten bandits had raided a flourmill in Savur. In addition, there had been occurred three robberies, a raid on a village and a border violation. In Urfa, ten border violations, three robberies, and extortion had taken place. In Elaziz, the bandits had committed thirteen robberies, two flourmill raids, and a village raid. An unruly bandit Zaza Hüseyin and Çolak Mehmet Ali who had shot nine gendarmes were caught dead. In the hot pursuit of the Band of Zaza Hüseyin, the security forces had caught 14 bandits dead, five wounded, and 32 alive. The bandits shot to death two gendarmes, one soldier, two militias, and two peasants and severely wounded two gendarmes.¹⁰⁹⁸

¹⁰⁹⁷ General Commandership of Gendarmerie, Security Reports dated 26.5.1929 and 27.5.1929, BCA MGM [30.10/127.914.14], 08.05.1929.

¹⁰⁹⁸ The Security Report on the First General Inspectorate Region, BCA MGM [30.10/128.923.2], 09.11.1932. In this file, especially see the Security Report on October 1932.

In addition, the gendarme had caught the Band of Maktul Tevfik, who had carried out robberies in the region for a long time. In Muş, there occurred three robberies and one village raid. The band of Feyzullah was caught after an armed conflict in Sason. Among the bandits caught alive, there was a female bandit. Another female bandit named Hayro had been caught in another armed conflict in the region. There occurred four robberies, two border violations in Van and three robbery cases in Siirt. In Gaziantep, four armed robbers stopped and robbed two lorries and one car on the road between Kilis and the city center. The gendarme patrol squad patrolling in Nizip road came across a band of six armed persons, one gendarme had been killed in the armed conflict, and one bandit had been caught dead. There had been taken place 12 robberies and extortions and an incursion into house in Erzincan; two extortions in Erzurum; six robberies and extortions in Kars; two robberies in Sivas.¹⁰⁹⁹

The security report prepared special for the Tenth Year Anniversary of the Republic listed the bandits who had been eliminated by the gendarme. The report gives an impression that the countryside was full of bandits who were at a war with the security forces and propertied people. According to this long report, the security forces quelled the following big bands and bandit leaders who had terrorized eastern Anatolia only between 1929 and 1933.¹¹⁰⁰

Band of Palulu Yado; Band of Kürt Fakri in Cebelibereket; Band of Altındış Osman; Band of Seyit Resul; Band of Mahmut; Band of Şeyh Mustafa; Band of Civarlı Ömer; Band of Seyit Han (30 armed men); Band of Şeyh Cüneyt; Band of Kolihanı oğlu Bekir (100 armed men); Band of Alican Band; Band of Şaki Aliko; Band of Topal Hüseyin; Band of Ramazan; Band of Sabri Ahmo; Band of Mehmet Çavuş (20 armed men); Band of Hanili Refo; Band of Homan Band; Band of Reyso; Band of Ali Abdo; Band of Raşit Tahir; Band of Şaki Bozu; Band of Kör Şemo; Band of Gürgür (18 armed men); Band of Ramanlı Eminoğlu Şükrü; Band of Cansurlu Abdullah; Band of

¹⁰⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰⁰ Report about the Gendarmerie, Its Activities, and the Results Obtained (*Jandarma Teşkilatı, Yaptığı Çalışmalar ve Sonuçları Hakkında Rapor*) BCA MGM [30.10/128.923.6], 29.12.1936.

Mecit; Band of Kirdisli Şaki Esat oğlu; Band of Nuri Halil Hamo; Band of Müküslü Adil; Band of Dünya Malı; Band of Mestanlı Musa; Band of Zaza Hüseyin; Band of Çolak Memedali; Band of Kelereşli Halil; Band of Polat; Band of Koço; Band of Alo; Band of Şeyh Resul; Band of Abdülhalef Feto; Band of Faris; Band of Şeyh Abdürrahim; Band of Benili Abdurrahman; Band of Musa; Band of Cevahir; Band of Bazo; Band of Ahmet Aziz; Band of Nikitli Ali Şeyho; Band of Nikitli Şaki Hasanoğlu Davut; Band of Molla Bekir Ahmet; Band of Koç Ali; Band of Ramazan Polat Cemal; Band of Koço; Band of Buçaklı Bofo; Band of Zülfü Şemo; Band of Piranlı Molla Mansur; Band of Ahmo Hüseyin; Band of Erikanlı Topal Mehmet; Band of Şikolulardan Tayfur ve Musa; Band of Sincar; Band of Fersooğullarından Miro ve Sevdin; Band of Cansurlu Hasan, Cansurlu Abdullah; Band of Güllüllü Mehmet; Band of Darih; Band of Norşinli Bisko ve Aleko (18 armed men); Band of Hutan; Band of Aptal and Haydar; Band of Mirzo, Ahmet, Kasım (12 armed men); Band of Fakı Mehmet; Band of Solhanlı Ali; Band of İsmail; Band of Helezenli Şükrü; Band of Ferit Abdo; Band of Rahineli Yusufoglu Ahmet; Band of Gürgün (18 armed men); Band of Reşinalı Hacı; Band of Dervişli Fettah; Band of Güverli Ömer (12 armed men); Band of Nebil; Band of Hasan; Band of Şeyh Mustafa; Band of Seyit Resul; Band of Bürooğlu Davut; Band of Çoban İsmail; Band of Fettah; Band of Müküslü Adil; Band of Zeylanli Seviş; Band of Cello; Band of Vello; Band of Mestanlı Mustafa; and Band of Halil Simi.

Although this report declared that the banditry had been reduced to sporadic acts of a few bandits in the region thanks to the gendarme's grim struggle, the newspaper reports or other security reports penned in following years after the splendor of the 10th Anniversary indicate that eastern countryside was still crawling with the bandits. For example, the Reşo's band continued to be active in the southeastern Anatolia until the mid-1930s and killed eight gendarme soldiers during the pursuit.¹¹⁰¹ According to the reports on the bandit cases in some frontier districts, many robberies and raids by bandits had occurred within only last four months of 1936 and within only the first three months of 1937, as can be seen from the table above.

¹¹⁰¹ F. Övünç, "Zilân Asilerinden Reşo Çetesinin Takip ve Tenkilinde Hangi Usuller Tatbik Olundu ve Nasıl Yapıldı," pp. 17-18.

Table 23 - Incidents that Took Place at the Frontiers from the Last Four Months of 1936 to the First Three Months of 1937.

Date	Incidents
Sept. 1, 1936	Health Director in the car of the Mardin governor was robbed on the highway.
Sept. 4, 1936	Halil Ağayisor and his six men robbed the cars and passangers on the Cizre-Şırnak highway.
Sept. 27, 1936	Benilli Abdurrahman raided the Kasımı village with his 10 men.
Oct. 18, 1936	Şeyh Mispah Band raided the Belli village of Bismil with his seven men.
Oct. 24, 1936	Halil Ağayisor with his 7 men conflicted with Customs station officers and wounded one soldier.
Nov. 14, 1936	Halil Ağayisor committed robbery on the Cizre-Şırnak highway.
Nov. 22, 1936	Çalkıoğlu Tahir and Benilli Abdurrahman raided the Dikni village in Diyarbakır with their eight men.
Dec. 4, 1936	Çalkıoğlu Tahir and Benilli Abdurrahman raided a village in Bismil.
Dec. 13, 1936	Çalkıoğlu Tahir committed robbery in Mardin.
Jan. 5, 1937	Four men extorted 55 sheep in Harran district.
Jan. 6, 1937	İbrahimoglu and his men extorted 100 sheep in Viranşehir.
Jan. 11, 1937	Unknown persons stole 200 sheep in Viranşehir.
Jan. 12, 1937	Five people and security forces combat in Viranşehir.
Jan. 12, 1937	Five people conflicted with the security forces around the Customs Station in Harran.
Jan. 16, 1937	Seven armed people extorted sheep in Harran.
Feb. 2, 1937	A mare was extorted in Viranşehir.
Feb. 3, 1937	Three armed men murdered a man and escaped to Viranşehir.
Feb. 3, 1937	10 armed attacks happened in Viranşehir.
Feb. 9, 1937	25 robbers extorted 100 sheep in Harran.
Feb. 9, 1937	10 armed robbers extorted 70 sheep in Birecik.
Feb. 11, 1937	A band of five armed men conflicted with the security forces in Harran.
Feb. 11, 1937	A band stole two sheep and a camel in Harran.
Feb. 15, 1937	203 sheep were extorted in Viranşehir.
Feb. 27, 1937	30 armed men raided the Binarin village in Garzan.
Mar. 6, 1937	200 sheep were extorted in Viranşehir.
Mar. 8, 1937	60 sheep were extorted in Viranşehir.
Mar. 15, 1937	14 men took part in a robbery in Diyarbakır and they killed a gendarme soldier and a peasant.

Source: This table was prepared according to the information in the report titled Incidents that Occurred in the Borderline from the Last Four Months of 1936 to the First Three Months of 1937, BCA MGM [30.10/128.923.19].

Banditry in the Other Regions of Anatolia

Although the number of bandits and of bandit activities in eastern Anatolia were higher than in any other region of Turkey, banditry was not peculiar to eastern Anatolia. It was a widespread phenomenon in central, northern, and western parts of country, too. By intimidating, attacking, robbing the state agents, merchants, and wealthy and cruel peasants, the bandits stood for social challenge to the growing rural pauperization and the oppression of local official and social dominants.

As in the eastern part of the country, even in central and western Anatolia, banditry was not a new phenomenon. The bandits in this area, especially in the Aegean region had long been known as *efe*. Well-known *efes* like Çakırcalı Mehmet Efe had given the Ottoman security forces and Régie guards hard times.¹¹⁰² There were also many smugglers that engaged in banditry at the same time. We know, although not in detail, that the poverty, long war years, bad administration, and lack of state authority set the stage for the widespread banditry throughout Anatolian peninsula in earlier decades, creating a power vacuum that was filled by the numerous bands.

Therefore, the new Republican state, which was preoccupied with the elimination of such power vacuum in Anatolia launched a war against banditry. For this aim, the government enacted the Elimination of Brigandage Law in 1923 and the Law for Maintenance of Order Law in 1925. The duly-authorized Independence Tribunals judged not only the political dissidents, but also the bandits on the grounds that they subverted the social order and peace. In addition, the government tried to

¹¹⁰² Sabri Yetkin, *Ege'de Eşkîyalar* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2003), p. 144.

modernize the security forces and pursued a disarmament policy to establish state authority.

The government was undoubtedly more powerful and in closer proximity to the western and central Anatolia due to the more developed transportation and communication infrastructure and larger state administration as compared to the eastern part of Anatolia. Therefore, it seems reasonable to expect that the government was more successful in its struggle against the banditry in these parts of the country. Indeed, in these regions, the banditry was less common as compared to eastern Anatolia. Nevertheless, the banditry continued to be an important weapon of the weak which the government failed to overcome completely during the interwar era.

The economic recovery in agricultural sector in the 1920s was not reflected in the daily life of the poor peasantry. In addition, the centralization and bureaucratization reforms of the new state resonated negatively in the everyday life of the poor masses. The new laws and economic policies accelerated the commercialization of land and agriculture as well as the pauperization of the poor and small peasantry. In addition, the specific context of the 1930s marked by the Great Depression and statist economic policies also increased the rural poverty and inequalities, in which the banditry sprang up consequently. Consequently, the banditry as a last way out of the pauperized and oppressed peasantry did not disappear in the 1930s.

The main targets and methods of the bandits in western and central Anatolia were similar to those of their counterparts in the east, whereas they were not such big bands and not so ruthless or daring in the face of the gendarme. Like the eastern bandits, they also were poor and desperate peasants compelled to be outlaws by the

economic conditions, oppression, and exploitation of the *ağas* and government agents. Accordingly, they generally did not snatch the poor peasants' crops, animals and belongings. They particularly targeted the rich or oppressive peasants or state officials in the countryside. Among their methods, there were the raiding the houses of the well-to-do peasants to rob, beat, intimidate or kill them; the extortion of their money, livestock and valuable belongings; and the highway robbery of cars, busses and lorries. Some bandit groups also tried to substitute the state authority and the law by operating as a local informal courts and by solving the disagreements between peasants. Indeed, there were some bandit groups that the folk masses admired or supported from the heart or for their own interests.

Below, I will first show briefly how the rest of Anatolia other than the eastern parts of it witnessed "peasant rebellions" in the form of banditry in the late 1920s by relying on the cases reflected in the newspapers and the official reports. Then, I will focus on the main activities of the numerous bandit groups throughout the 1930s. The main point I want to make here is that a fierce social struggle between the rebellious poor peasants and "the rule of law" of the official and social power holders in the countryside continued throughout the 1930s.

In the second half of the 1920s, western, northern and central Anatolia was still crawling with several bandit groups. The Republican Archive was full of documents reporting aggressive and plundering peasants who "broke the peace and quiet" (*huzur ve sükuneti bozan*) and their referral to the Independence Tribunals in the mid-1920s. The band of Muhacir Ali consisting of 250 men had terrorized Niğde and the surrounding provinces until the mid-1920s.¹¹⁰³ A band of five men who had violated

¹¹⁰³ BCA BKK [30.18.1.1/13.28.6], 10.05.1925.

the public security and killed the village headman of the Mustafakemalpaşa District of Bursa was taken into the Independence Tribunal in May 1925.¹¹⁰⁴ Bandits named Süleymanoğlu Ali and Hüseyinoğlu İsmail had committed many robberies in Bursa province and were captured in December 1926.¹¹⁰⁵ Bandit Kızbekiroğlu İbrahim and his 15 friends who had broken the public security in the Tavas district of Denizli was caught in May 1926.¹¹⁰⁶ Again, Bandit Karağaçalı Ali and his five men carried out robberies around Denizli until 1926 when they were caught by the security forces.¹¹⁰⁷ Bandit Mustafa Ali and Bandit Mehmet Çavuş were the popular bandits who held sway in the Aydın province until August 1926 when the gendarme eliminated them.¹¹⁰⁸ In Eskişehir, two bandits named Zort Hasan and Bursalı Rıza maintained their activities until the end of 1927.¹¹⁰⁹ It is possible to cite many more examples from the archival records regarding the bandits prosecuted in the second half of the 1920s.

Despite the government's struggle against the banditry, many of them continued to survive or new bandit groups sprang up after the Independence Tribunals were closed in 1927. The band of Beldağlı İzzet around Tokat, the bands of Katil İlyas and Kürt Osman around Kırşehir, Aksaray, Konya and Ankara, the band of Katil Rıza in Burdur, Muğla, Denizli and Antalya, the band of Nedim around Konya, Afyonkarahisar, Isparta, and the band of Kara Haydar in Ankara, Yozgat, Kırşehir, the band of Ferik Osman around Denizli, Burdur and Isparta, and the bands of Nusret, Koço and Sürmeneli Ahmet continued to violate the security and the rule

¹¹⁰⁴ BCA BKK [30.18.1.1/14.23.1], 27.05.1925

¹¹⁰⁵ BCA MGM [30.10/105.683.6], 14.12.1926

¹¹⁰⁶ BCA BKK [30.18.1.1/19.36.5], 25.05.1926

¹¹⁰⁷ BCA BKK [30.18.1.1/22.74.9], 15.12.1926.

¹¹⁰⁸ BCA BKK [30.18.1.1/20.53.15], 11.08.1926.

¹¹⁰⁹ BCA MGM [30.10/105.683.13], 10.09.1927.

of law in their regions until the early 1930s.¹¹¹⁰ From the late 1920s to the mid-1930s, a bandit named Dağıstanlı Ali gave the Bergama and İzmir local government a hard time.¹¹¹¹

The activities of the bands especially concentrated in the regions in which the capitalist agriculture was more developed, and the land and capital concentration were greater, and the social differentiation was higher, such as Adana, İzmir, Aydın, Denizli and Konya. On the other hand, other provinces of central Anatolia and Black Sea region, hit by the state policies, declining agricultural prices and impoverishment, also were full of bandits.

Bandits mostly raided rich peasants' homes. In Adana, for instance, a big group of bandits received information about a dinner party of 12 rich notables with the Adana gendarme commander in May 1929. Aiming to intimidate both the *ağas* and the commander, the bandits raided the party and killed the gendarme commander who attempted to fight back against the bandits.¹¹¹²

In another raid on a rich peasant's house in January 1931, a group composed of eight armed bandits raided a rich village in Kozan and robbed two homes.¹¹¹³ Again, in April 1931, 12 bandits entered the Eğridağ village of İçel by firing their guns into the air, and broke into the house of Topal Mehmet Ağa, the richest man in the village. Beating him and his wife, they extorted his money.¹¹¹⁴

In the first years of the 1930s, an overbold bandit group led by a bandit named Çıplak Mustafa (Naked Mustafa) emerged in Adana and its surroundings. His title Çıplak probably originated from his poorness and nudity in the past. Çıplak

¹¹¹⁰ Report about the Gendarmerie, Its Activities, and the Results Obtained, BCA MGM [30.10/128.923.6], 29.12.1936. Especially see "Situation of Security for Ten Years" (*10 Senelik Asayiş Vaziyeti*)

¹¹¹¹ BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1], 06.03.1934.

¹¹¹² "Müthiş Bir Çarpışma," *Köroğlu*, 08.05.1929.

¹¹¹³ "Bu Ne Vahşet İş," *Köroğlu*, 31.01.1931.

¹¹¹⁴ "Baskın: 12 Haydut," *Köroğlu*, 11.04.1931.

Mustafa became a nightmare to the rich farmers in Adana, who, so to speak, had made him naked by pauperizing him. Raiding the farms of the prominent farmers of Adana such as Molla Durmuş Ağa, Müslim Ağa, and former Adana deputy Kemal Bey, he stole and extorted many sheep and cattle until he was caught in October 1932.¹¹¹⁵

Another region which the social differentiation grew was İzmir. After the Menemen Rebellion, colored with religious tones, although the waters seemed to be settled in respect for the high politics, the discontented and rebellious peasants continued to rise up, albeit not directly and ideologically as in Menemen incident, against the system by attacking against the rich and oppressive landowners in the region. As reported by the correspondent of *Köroğlu* in May 1933, there emerged a new kind of outlaw in Menemen who ravaged the rich peasants and passangers: the masked bandits (*maskeli haydutlar*). The masked bandits first appeared in the Çapak village of Menemen. There they broke into the house of a large estate owner. By threatening him, they extorted a great amount of money and jewelry valued at 3000 TL.¹¹¹⁶

Similar cases were seen in the mid-west and central Anatolia. A group of bandits broke into the house of Ali Ağa in the Bünyanlar village of Akşehir. When Ali Ağa refused to say where he put his money, they attempted to burn his wife. They extorted the money of Ali Ağa, and fled immediately.¹¹¹⁷

In Uşak, the bandits robbed the community praying in the mosque of Kayalı village in which several wealthy landowners lived. At the moment that the peasants were performing prayer, the bandits, raiding the village, encircled the mosque. After

¹¹¹⁵ “Adana Köylerini Soyan Bir Çete Yakalandı,” *Son Posta*, 20.10.1932.

¹¹¹⁶ “Köy Baskını: Maskeli Haydutlar,” *Köroğlu*, 10.05.1933.

¹¹¹⁷ “Amma İş Ha!” *Köroğlu*, 30.01.1929.

that, taking the peasants out of the mosque one by one, they extorted their money. The total amount the peasants had to surrender to the bandits was about 5000 TL.¹¹¹⁸

The village headmen, who mostly came from the richest families in the village, were also at risk for bandit attack. In Çorum, for instance, the bandit leader Kel Şükrü, who had violated the region for years, in his last raid, had entered into Eymir village and extorted 300 TL from the village headman by threatening him in March 1929.¹¹¹⁹



Bandit Kel (Bald) Şükrü. He had been active in Çorum and surrounding provinces since the National Struggle. In his last attack on a village, he was captured by the village headman and other farmers of whom he had attempted to rob.
“Eşkîya,” *Köroğlu*, 29.07.1929

Likewise, seven bandits, making a surprise attack on the house of village headman Süleyman Efendi in Hacılar village of Manisa, extorted all of his money in June 1931. Shortly thereafter, seven armed robbers, probably the same band, conducted a

¹¹¹⁸ “Amma İş Ha!” *Köroğlu*, 02.03.1929.

¹¹¹⁹ “Eşkîya,” *Köroğlu*, 29.07.1929.

raid on Burhaniye village of Afyon and robbed Hasan *ağa*. *Köroğlu* reported that such incidents had begun to prevail in the region in recent years.¹¹²⁰

In 1934, two poor peasants from the Bolvadin district of Afyon began to violate the rule of law in Afyon and Isparta. They especially badgered the rich peasants, especially Abidin Ağa, the owner of a large plateau near Eber Lake in Bolvadin. One of these bandits was a poor peasant named Halil from the Korucuova village of Bolvadin. He was also a draft-dodger. The other one was also a poor man named Osman from Eber village of the same district. They had worked as sheepman for the farmers in the villages and lastly for Abidin Ağa in Eber. However, due to a disagreement with the *ağa* and his son Kâzım, one of sheepmen, Halil, had fought with them and stabbed Kâzım severely three years earlier. Then, feeling threatened by a possible revenge by the *ağa*, Halil and Osman, armed with rifles and girded with cartridge belts, adopted banditry. Within three years, they robbed rich peasants, state officials, and even the security forces in the region. On 10 July 1937, they had ambushed and robbed a gendarme commander, two night watchmen, and four persons in Yalvaç district of Isparta. Apart from these robberies, they had attempted to kill Abidin Ağa in Eber village. However, upon the screams of the women who saw that they were about to enter his large tent on his plateau, they had to flee.¹¹²¹

In another incident that took place in a village of Nazilli in April 1938, two bandits armed with rifles broke into the house of Mustafa Ağa, a rich landowner in the region. The bandits extorted his money and a huge amount of gold he kept at home.¹¹²²

Some of these bandits were much closer to the Hobsbawm's notion of "social bandit." They helped the indigent peasants in some ways. Solving the disagreements

¹¹²⁰ "Jandarma Eşkiyaya Aman Vermesin!" *Köroğlu*, 06.06.1931.

¹¹²¹ BCA MGM [30.10/105.685.25], 06.08.1937.

¹¹²² "Yediler Kurşunu," *Köroğlu*, 27.04.1938.

between them, they attempted to save the poor peasants from the justice system which was handicapped with inefficiency and unfairness and manipulated by local affluent persons. Serving as more efficient, quicker, mobile, and poor-sided “moral law courts,” they also aimed to gain popular support.

One of them was Gezik Duran (or Gizzik Duran). Imitating a historical and well-reputed social bandit, Çakırcalı Mehmet Efe, Gezik Duran dominated the Adana region throughout the 1920s. He carried out many raids on the rich peasants’ houses, and robbed or killed many people. Since he aided the poor peasantry, the peasants supported and aided him actively.¹¹²³ Because of the social support for him in the region, there were some folk songs expressing the grief after his death at the hands of a man named Kel Kadı Osman, who was hated by the poor peasants.¹¹²⁴

In Kozan district of Adana, a bandit group of 67 armed men began to violate the many oppressors and rich estate owners by June 1931. Their first attack was on Alçalı village, where they robbed a village grocer, seizing 400 TL of the grocer. In addition, they tried to replace the government authority and laws with their own more practical and moral authority and laws. They went down to the villages not only for robbery or raids, but also for the settlement of disputes between the peasants. Reportedly, they reconciled a husband and wife in one case. In another, cutting a notarized debt instrument valued at 100 TL, they cancelled the debt of a poor peasant.¹¹²⁵ As reported by a newspaper in July 1933, some poor peasants admired and actively aided these kinds of bandits in Adana region.¹¹²⁶

Sometimes a whole village was involved directly or indirectly in banditry. In the first years of the 1930s, some bandit groups began to become famous around

¹¹²³ “Gezik Duran,” *Köroğlu*, 26.06.1929.

¹¹²⁴ See Bayrak, *Eşkîyalık ve Eşkîya Türküleri*, pp. 188-190.

¹¹²⁵ “Bir Çete Türedi,” *Köroğlu*, 24.06.1931.

¹¹²⁶ “Eşkîya Yatağı,” *Köroğlu*, 26.07.1933.

İzmir. These bandits robbed an automobile in Bergama in 1932. According to the official reports, the main supporters of these bandits in the region were those poor refugee peasants who lived in the Gerev village of Foça. This village was inhabited mostly by poor, landless, and therefore distressed refugees who had immigrated from Salonika and Albania. Some peasants in this village were both involved in robberies and aided and abetted the brigandage around İzmir. For example, they directly took part in the robbery of a car in Bergama highway in 1932. Again, it was these peasants who had been aiding and abetting a bandit named İngiliz Memet for two years until he was arrested in 1933 in Çanakkale.¹¹²⁷

Passengers traveling on highways, mostly rich farmers, merchants, and bureaucrats, were the main targets of the bandits. The highways, particularly in remote areas, were the main places where the bandits caught the moneyed passengers, bureaucrats, merchants, and mail cars and lorries loaded with whatever they wanted to steal. It seems that one of the challenges to the interregional trade other than the lack of a sufficient highway network was the lack of security in the roads due to the surprise attacks of the bandits. Undoubtedly, the bandits did not have any intention of preventing the interregional trade or capitalist system by interrupting the highway traffic, but their highway robberies of mail cars, trucks, lorries and busses transporting the commodities and individuals seems to have posed a threat to the interregional trade, and accordingly the unification of the national market the during the period.

Indeed, many highway robberies occurred in rural Anatolia, especially during the Great Depression. For instance, a group of four armed bandits frequently robbed the cars and busses in highways of Konya until July 1929 when the gendarme caught

¹¹²⁷ BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1], 06.03.1934.

them.¹¹²⁸ In Çorum, a bandit group of 25 armed peasants stopped a bus by force of arms in June 1931. Some passengers in the bus attempted to resist the bandits, but the bandits shot to death five of those who opened fire them and robbed all of the passengers.¹¹²⁹ Two months later, again in Çorum, around 15 bandits, blocking the road, stopped and robbed the car of two road engineers in the Sungurlu district at a distance of a few kilometers to the gendarme station. The newspaper that reported this incident added a comment to the end of this newspaper report that the roads in the region had become very dangerous in recent times.¹¹³⁰

Two bandits named Pelvan Osman and Yozgatlı Battal robbed four lorries on the highway between Urla and Çeşme in February 1932.¹¹³¹ In Zonguldak, a bandit leader named Gıddık Mustafa and his band conducted many highway robberies and home raids during the early 1930s.¹¹³² In the districts of Bursa, five armed bandits waylaid and robbed two buses and killed one gendarme soldier and one passenger who attempted to resist them in June 1933.¹¹³³

In the following years of the 1930s, similar highway robberies did not disappear. In the countryside of İzmir, in March 1934, the bandits ambushed the car of a doctor, but the driver of the doctor managed to escape from the ambush by speeding up despite the the gunfire.¹¹³⁴ About one month later in İzmir again, two bandits again stopped a car in Akhisar by opening fire on the vehicle, and then extorted the money of the three persons in the car.¹¹³⁵ In another case, five armed

¹¹²⁸ “Konya’nın 4 Haydutu,” *Köroğlu*, 10.07.1929.

¹¹²⁹ “Çorum Yolunda,” *Köroğlu*, 03.06.1931.

¹¹³⁰ *Cumhuriyet*, 16.08.1931, quoted in Kıvılcımlı, *İhtiyat Kuvvet Milliyet (Şark)*, p. 176.

¹¹³¹ “Urla Yolunda Yol Kesenler Bu Herifler,” *Köroğlu*, 06.02.1932.

¹¹³² “Bir Çete Nasıl Yakalandı?” *Köroğlu*, 18.02.1933.

¹¹³³ “Candarma Yetiş!” *Köroğlu*, 07.06.1933.

¹¹³⁴ “Aferin Şoföre,” *Köroğlu*, 07.03.1934.

¹¹³⁵ “Haydutlar,” *Köroğlu*, 25.04.1934.

bandits robbed three buses and a car in the road between Bursa and Eskişehir at a close distance of three kilometers from the gendarme station in September 1935.¹¹³⁶



Highway robbers named Pelvan Osman and Yozgatlı Battal with gendarme officers who arrested them. “Hijackers in Urla Highway are These Guys,” *Köroğlu*, 06.02.1932

Muradoğlu Vahid was a popular highway robber in Düzce and its surrounding region. Muradoğlu, with his men, took to the mountains in 1933 and became famous with his hijackings and home raids on influential persons until May 1935 when the gendarme shot him to death in an armed conflict.¹¹³⁷

The Black Sea region was no exception to the banditry, particularly highway robberies. In the late 1920s, several highway robberies were reported from Trabzon and Rize. In June 1929, a bandit group waylaid and robbed a mail car on Zigana hallway.¹¹³⁸ Again, two bandits named Şakir and Arif robbed the villages and passengers around Ünye in 1927 and 1928.¹¹³⁹ Sürmeneli Ahmet Band, Türapoğlu Band, İsmail Band, Mercanoğlu Dursun Band, and Bandit Nurettin were among

¹¹³⁶ “Bursa Eskişehir Yolunda 5 Silahlı Ne Yaptı?” *Köroğlu*, 21.09.1935.

¹¹³⁷ “Muradoğlu Geberdi,” *Köroğlu*, 08.05.1935.

¹¹³⁸ “Posta,” *Köroğlu*, 08.06.1929.

¹¹³⁹ “Bir Yıldan Beri Ünye Taraflarını Kasıp Kavuran Eşküyadan Şakirle Arif,” *Köroğlu*, 26.12.1928.

those bandit groups who conducted robberies and home raids throughout the Black Sea region, especially Trabzon, Rize and Gümüşhane in the late 1920s.¹¹⁴⁰

Until the late 1920s, the gendarme forces caught many of these bandits in Rize and the neighboring provinces one by one. However, many of the arrested bandits managed to escape from prison and picked up where they left off. As noted by the American ambassador, Joseph Grew, who visited the region in the early 1930s, although the governor of Rize had waged a war against the banditry and had caught 67 bandit leaders along with their men, most of them had escaped from prisons and overrun the region again.¹¹⁴¹



A bandit killed by the gendarme, with his wife (mistress according to the authorities because of their religious marriage), and his infant child. "Dostunu Dağdan Dağa Taşıyan Eşkîya," *Köroğlu*, 14.10.1931.

One of these bandit leaders who raided the rich villages and robbed the cars, trucks, and buses in Amasya was Kara Mustafa. He stormed through Amasya and the surrounding areas until his death in a gunfight with the gendarme in 1931.¹¹⁴² Likewise, Bandit Mehmet was a poor peasant whose activities concentrated in the

¹¹⁴⁰ BCA MGM [30.10/105.683.29], 30.07.1929

¹¹⁴¹ Grew, *Atatürk ve Yeni Türkiye*, p. 148.

¹¹⁴² "Eşkîya Reisi Kara Mustafa Nasıl Vuruldu?" *Köroğlu*, 13.06.1931.

Taşköprü district of Kastamonu. He had been wanted for a long time by the security forces. Living with his unofficial wife and his child in the deep forests of Kastamonu, he managed to hide from the security forces for years. He had been involved in many highway robberies until the gendarme shot him to death.¹¹⁴³ The bandit activities in the Black Sea Region also were reflected in the security reports of the gendarme. One of the monthly reports of the gendarme recorded two robberies by unidentified bandits in Samsun, and another robbery incidence of a lorry by two bandits in Bayburt only within October 1932.¹¹⁴⁴

¹¹⁴³ “Dostunu Dağdan Dağa Taşıyan Eşkiya,” *Köroğlu*, 14.10.1931.

¹¹⁴⁴ The Security Report on the First General Inspectorate Region, BCA MGM [030.10/128.923.2.], 09.11.1932. In this file, especially see the Security Report on October 1932..

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although Turkish society was a rural society, and peasants constituted the great majority of population, scholarly attention has not been given to the peasant politics due to the overemphasis on the agenda of the elite. Neither their critical opinion and everyday politics, nor the intended or unintended consequences of their demands, complaints, and everyday politics have been examined thoroughly. The widespread acceptance of the peasants' passivity thesis has obscured both their autonomous, subjective, and critical opinion and resulting rural contention and conflict.

Overestimating the impact of the small land holding system as well as the strength of the state, the class conflicts both within the village community and tensions between the poor peasants and the state have been overlooked. The scholars, preoccupied with the state agenda, have not explored the peasants' response to the state policies. One underlying reason for this indifference to the peasant politics was the absence of massive scale peasant rebellions and organizational peasant movements radically restructuring Turkish politics in this period.

Delving into the public opinion in rural areas and the peasant's everyday politics, this part attempted to contribute to fill in these gaps in Turkish historiography and to question the mainstream assumptions regarding the peasantry of the interwar period. In general, this part has shown that peasants responded to the power holders and state policies actively in various forms and methods familiar to them.

The RPP was overwhelmingly dominated by landed and mercantile interests as well as the modernizing bureaucrats. Consequently, the concentration of the land in private hands gained new impetus in this period. Although the small land holding

was still a dominant form of the land tenure system, it was not a static model. The small plots were under the serious threat of large landowners, usurers, and state more than ever before. The state economic policies, the commercialization of agriculture, and the economic crisis fuelled this process. The large and influential landowners generally manipulated the new law rules which consolidated the private land ownership.

The abolition of the tithe did not put the peasantry at ease. Sharp increases in several agricultural and general taxes followed the abolition of tithe and weighed on the poor peasants and small farmers who lived at the subsistence level. Despite the recovery of agriculture until the late 1920s, the monopoly system, the economic crisis, the disadvantageous agricultural prices, and unfavorable terms of agricultural loans resulted in rural pauperization by driving down the peasants' living standards. The accompanying harsh exploitation, abuse, and oppression by large landowners, usurers, village headmen, and the state agents such as the district governors, sub-district directors, gendarme soldiers, tax collectors, and debt enforcement officials also aggrieved the poor and small peasants acutely.

The peasants did not remain silent in the face of this intense exploitation and oppression. Critically and keenly observing the economic trends, social and economic policies of the state, exploitative and oppressive large landowners and state agents, they often voiced their criticisms and complained about them. Petitioning the government and the National Assembly, they made known their grievances, sought their rights, and asked for redress. Using the official discourse and the promises of the government rhetorically against the rulers, they demanded the government live up its commitments. They frequently sought tax relief, debt relief, high prices for their crops, and the distribution of vacant arable lands and agricultural equipments.

Informing the authorities about oppressive affluent landed households, corrupt or harsh state officials and brutal security forces, they frequently called the government to take corrective action against them. They sometimes took their complaints to the press in order to put pressure on the local and central authorities. In addition, they expressed their views through several informal ways familiar to them, i.e. popular culture. In some cases, peasants made use of rumors as a means for mobilization of resistance.

In order to weather the economic problems and cope with the rural exploitation and oppression, peasants frequently resorted to a variety of everyday survival and resistance methods. The heavier the weight of the state policies became, the more often they undertook many averting tactics, survival methods and resistance strategies ranging from short-term migration to the towns for temporary works, switching from lower-priced crops to higher-priced ones, working hard to tax evasion, smuggling, livestock and crop thefts, and finally violence against the oppressors. All these activities, contrary to recognized forms of politics such as formal, organized, well-programmed, and direct movements, were characterized by pragmatism, opportunism, and flexibility. That is to say, their main motive for such acts was to maintain their subsistence levels and to defend the household economy, and reappropriate the resources that the government and the rich landowners had appropriated.

The first and most widespread method was to resort to economic survival strategies such as short-term migration to the towns for temporary jobs, cultivating more advantageous crops and working hard and the employment of all household members together. They sometimes saved money by producing their own clothing and many other household utensils themselves and reducing their relations with the

market. Especially, the fluctuations and especially radical decline in the wheat production in 1932 arising from the economic response of the peasantry to the declining prices was probably one of the most important factors that compelled the government to support the peasantry, albeit in a limited manner, by offering relatively higher prices than the market prices to the wheat producers.

In addition, the second way to survive and resist the exploitation was tax avoidance. The increasing taxes, which placed a heavily burden on the shoulders of the peasantry, spurred several reactions. Peasants expressed their discontent with the high taxes in several ways ranging from petitioning the authorities and the press to the popular culture. They frequently sought a tax amnesty for their tax debts or reduction in the rates of the agricultural taxes. Sometimes, they expressed their discontent loudly as in the case of peasant women's tax protests in several central Anatolian towns.

Apart from expressing their complaints and demands, peasants resisted the taxes in several ways. Despite the absence of organized and open resistance movements, they struggled against the taxes in everyday life through informal tax avoidance tactics. Where avoidance was possible, tax evasion was the best way to circumvent the taxes. The popular culture and especially rumors played an important role in instigating and encouraging the tax avoidance. Finally, the resistance against the heavy taxes took the forms of open confrontation and collective rebellion of a village or a few villages together. For instance, the Buban Rebellion in Mutki in 1934 was an act of resistance against the Road Tax to a great extent. Again, the Sason Rebellion in 1935 emanated from the dispute over the Livestock Tax between the local authority and the peasant community in the region. The tax avoidance was so widespread that the government failed to collect the assessed taxes in most

instances. The tax avoidance was so widespread that the government failed to collect a considerable portions of the assessed taxes in most instances. Undoubtedly, the weakness of the administrative infrastructure also played a crucial role in the state's failure to collect the expected taxes from peasants.

The exploitation and onslaught on their economic life through the state and private monopolies also evoked a huge reaction among the peasantry. Aggrieved by several monopolies, many poor and small farmers and peasant traders engaged in illicit production, trade, and consumption via smuggling. They frequently violated the state's monopolistic control over the forests and salt mines. Many peasants continued to cut or deal in timber and firewood, challenging the prohibitions and the capitalist lumber mills' monopoly. In addition, many sought their rights to benefit from the forests through resorting to local and central authorities. Similarly, peasants challenged the salt monopoly by extracting salt from salt mines and lakes and using smuggled salt.

I proposed to call this kind of illicit and informal production and trade activities "social smuggling," by which I mean separately small but cumulatively significant transactions of highly taxed and priced basic consumption goods which were carried out by poor and low-income peasant producers and traders, except for human, drug and arm trafficking or other forms of smuggling by the big bands and merchants. Social smuggling diffused to the lower segments of the society throughout the Anatolian countryside as a response of the poor peasants to the monopoly system. This sort of smuggling was a covert way of the peasants' reappropriation of the resources that the government had forcibly appropriated. In addition, another feature of this smuggling that made it beneficial to rural population was that the smuggling, as an informal economic activity, solved the provisioning

problem of the rural communities in remote parts of the country by addressing the basic and urgent needs of the local peoples which were not satisfied by the central state and formal economy.

Some smugglers did not hesitate to confront the gendarme. The struggle over the resources the government tried to monopolize led them to rebel against the government individually or collectively. The resistance of the smugglers occasionally took the form of rebellion of peasants engaging in a trade or cultivation of a forbidden crop or item. For instance, the conflict over the salt mines caused the armed conflicts between local livestock owners and the state in the 1926 Abdurrahman Rebellion in Siirt, which has been identified incorrectly as a religious-Kurdish uprising. Likewise, the Livestock Tax evasion and tobacco smuggling in the form of tobacco cultivation without official permission played an important role in the outbreak of the Sason Rebellion in 1935.

Peasants aggrieved by desperation and pauperization resisted the rural exploiters and oppressors through a series of acts falling into the category of “rural crimes.” These acts ranged from “crimes against property,” as labeled by the authorities such as livestock theft, crop theft, extortion to robbery and banditry. The affluent landowners, usurers, village headmen, gendarme soldiers, and especially tax collectors were vulnerable to the physical attacks of protesting peasants. The bureaucrats, well-off people and especially merchants travelling on the highways on busses, lorries, or in their cars also were primary targets of the poor peasants who engaged in banditry. Especially raids on the domiciles of rich, greedy, and oppressive landowners were the main resistance forms of the downtrodden peasants adopting the banditry.

In general, the first option of the poor peasants was to negate the property rights by covertly appropriating the crops and livestock of the well-off peasants. The second option to which they resorted was to intimidate through verbal assaults or to display controlled violence against those people who abused and exploited them. Where avoidance was impossible, and when the conditions provoked them into more serious direct confrontation, the peasants did not hesitate to defy the local authorities and rich landowners by assaulting them. Many poor peasants abused by the landed classes, security forces, and state officials engaged in banditry.

These acts, although they decreased in frequency with the end of the long war years and the establishment of the new state, did not disappear until the end of the period. On the contrary, the rural crimes in various forms plagued the Anatolian countryside especially in the early 1930s, when the economic crisis highlighted the class differences and intensified the antagonisms within the village community. Indeed, the state economic policies, the growing financial imposition on the peasants via increasing taxes and state monopolies, the deepening penetration of the capitalist state into rural areas, the consolidation of private ownership over the lands and pastures, and the social impact of the Great Depression all spurred the peasant reaction in the form of banditry throughout the Anatolian countryside in which the authority of the government was more fragile than in the urban areas.

Let alone some well-known rebellions and tribal banditry in eastern Anatolia and some riots colored with the religious tones against the secular reforms, there were intense rural unrests in the form of banditry across Anatolia. The Anatolian countryside, not only the east but all parts of it were overrun with poor peasant bands up in arms against their oppressors and exploiters during the interwar period. These poor peasants were not unconscious or “criminal minded” persons. Nor were they

mostly the men of oppressive landowners or tribal leaders or connected with the Kurdish nationalist groups.

In other words, the major force fuelling the banditry was neither the tribal organizations, nor Kurdish question or foreign agitation, but the deterioration of the general economic standing of the peasantry, which was more or less common to all parts of Anatolia. In contrast to tribal banditry, most of the bandits took to the mountains for their own struggle against the oppression and exploitation of the landowners, tribal leaders, village headmen, or the government agents. Again land hunger and endless disputes over the scarce arable lands were among the primary causes of the serious fights and murders, which sometimes led the aggrieved sides to launch a sort of guerilla warfare against the power holders in the village. These bandits generally targeted well-off landowners, merchants, or state agents in the sense of “avengers,” “brigands” and “robbers.” Many of the bandits partially fit into Hobsbawm’s notion of “social banditry,” in the sense of the banditry of those outlaws who opposed the oppressors.

The peasant politics in all these diverse forms appeared in conjunction with the state intervention. Therefore, this part was not only a study of peasants’ responses, but a study of the early Republican state in its interaction with the peasantry as well. In other words, how the peasant response shaped the decision-making or elite discourse was one of the central questions in this part. Going beyond the narrow conceptualization of the state and rural society as isolated entities, this study aimed to broaden our understanding of state and society relations and the class relations within the society as interplay occurred in daily life.

Indeed, the peasant response compelled the government to alter some of its decisions and policies. Again, the peasantist discourse was generated from not only

in the brains of the Republican elite, but, I think, the rural contention and unrest also forced the elite to adopt the peasantist discourse and to modify some policies and practices. That is to say, there took place an unceremonious and off the record process of negotiation in which the peasantry obtained some concessions from the government.

In the view of the widespread complaints about the agricultural taxes and demands for tax relief, together with the widespread tax resistance and the resultant increase in the amount of unpaid taxes, the government had to lower the rates of Land Tax, Livestock Tax, and Road Tax several times during the 1930s. In the face of widespread Land Tax evasion and the lack of a central and accurate land registry and cadastral information, the government left the Land Tax revenues to the local governments. The local governments, according to the local conditions, reduced the tax rate about 35 percent.

As for the Livestock Tax, widespread complaints and objections of peasants as well as rampant tax avoidance resulted in successive decreases in the rates of this tax in 1931, 1932, and 1936. The total rate of tax reduction in 1931 was between 15 percent and 32.5 percent. In the face of continuing discontent and resistance, towards the end of 1935, Atatürk recommended the government to reduce the rates of the Livestock Tax further. Consequently, the government reduced it once again in high rates. Finally, the Livestock Tax was amended in favor of peasantry in 1938.

Similarly, the public grievance that stemmed from the Road Tax and the resulting tax avoidance also forced the government to lower the Road Tax rates and to shorten compulsory-work durations in 1931 around 50-65 percent. Finally, the women's protests and widespread complaints about the Wheat Protection Tax prompted the government to amend the law by limiting its scope in May 1935.

Apart from all these, the government made two motions to forgive some parts of the tax debts in 1934 and 1938. In 1934, the government declared that it would forgive the half of the tax debts of those taxpayers who would pay the remaining half. In 1938, the half of the Land Tax debts was forgiven on condition of payment of the remaining half.

The prevalent smuggling activities, together with the public outcry about the high prices of monopoly products, also forced the government to reduce the prices of these products. In this regard, smuggling increased the bargaining power of the small-scale producers, traders, and consumers by compelling the government to decrease the prices, consumption taxes and tariff rates of some basic commodities. Especially in 1935, 1936 and 1937, the government lowered the price of those items that were subjected to constant smuggling such as salt, sugar, cotton textiles, cigarettes, other tobacco products, and *raki*. The specific tariff rates on sugar and cotton textiles also were reduced, albeit slightly, in the mid-1930s.

In this process, the people's demands through petitioning the party and the central authorities also played a role as well as smuggling. Indeed, the wish lists of almost all provincial party congresses included the people's widespread demands for the price reduction in such basic consumption goods. Apart from this price effect, the smuggling, undermining the status of the monopolies, created an informal duopoly that enabled both the cultivators and consumers to choose the better alternative.

The tobacco smuggling, especially illegal tobacco cultivation, and peasants' demands for legal permission for cultivation of tobacco had some actual repercussions as to in which areas the tobacco farming was to be legal. Indeed, some of the contestant peasants living in the regions in which tobacco production was forbidden succeeded in manipulating the government and accessing the right to

cultivate tobacco as a result of their endless demands for the free tobacco cultivation. Moreover, in the face of widespread complaints about the unfair treatment and abuse by the tobacco experts and too high scrapping rates which drove the peasantry to be involved in smuggling, the government decided in April 1934 that the tobacco experts would not reject the tobacco crop or demand a discount in the price above the maximum levels determined by the law.

The extensive complaints about the high interest rates of the AB loans and demands for lower interest rates and longer maturity periods, and the growing non-performing loans volume forced the government to suspend the debt enforcement proceedings and expropriations in 1933. Then, the AB removed the commission fees for the credits less than 1000 TL. In addition, the government limited the interest rates with 9 percent. This rate decreased a little bit more to 8.5 percent in 1938. In 1935, a comprehensive debt relief program divided the existing loan debts of the peasants to 15 equal annual installments in return for a 3 percent interest rate.

Especially hit by the drought of 1935-36, many small farmers sought more comprehensive debt relief. The government responded to this social demand with expanding the scope of the debt relief in 1937 for those farmers who were affected by the drought. In addition, in 1935, the government ordered the AB not to expropriate the livestock of the peasants due to their debts to the bank. The peasants' discontent with the short maturity period of the AB loans and the demands for longer maturity periods also was discussed at the Fourth General Congress of the RPP in 1935. Finally, in 1937, the government had to extend the maturity periods of the agricultural loans in parallel with the demands of the peasants. The debts to the agricultural credit cooperatives were also suspended for five years in return for 9 percent interest rate.

In the wake of the dramatic incidents such as the dissolution of families, serious fights, murders, and public outcry that stemmed from the trade of the usurers, the government outlawed the usuriousness. In 1935, the RPP added a promise about the struggle against the usuriousness to its party program as a party principle in Article 8.¹¹⁴⁵

The Land Reform was one of the most controversial topics debated among the ruling strata and intellectuals during the period. The land reform discourse and projects generally have been regarded as either the result of the good intention of the Republican elite, its struggle against *ağas* or a solution to the Kurdish and tribal uprisings and a component of peasantist ideology. However, the social pressure that prompted the ruling circles to consider a land reform program has not been explored. Or rather, scholars did not see the connection between the rural unrests and the land reform debates among the ruling elite. This research has found important hints about this social underpinning of the land reform proposals during the single-party era.

As this part has shown, the land reform was not a self-generated idea emerged spontaneously in the minds of the Republican elite and intellectuals. The land hunger and the resultant social contention in rural areas gave rise to this idea among the ruling circles. The widespread land demands and the rural unrest that stemmed from the fiercest struggle for a piece of arable land manifested in ever-increasing fights and murders for land might have forced the rulers and intellectuals to consider a land reform.

As a consequence, the Republican leadership brought up repeatedly a land reform proposal aiming at the distribution of some vacant state lands and pastures to the landless peasants and small-plot owners. İnönü and Atatürk in his parliament

¹¹⁴⁵ Refet Aksoy, *Köylülerimizle Başbaşa*, p. 87.

speeches frequently addressed the question of landless peasants and promised a land reform during the late 1920s and the mid-1930s. In 1937, Atatürk decisively said, “There should be no any landless farmer in the country” (*Memlekette topraksız çiftçi bırakılmamalıdır*).¹¹⁴⁶

Furthermore, from the first years of the 1930s on, the RPP advocated and propagated “peasantism.” That is to say, the Republican elite, felt threatened by the social, economic and political costs of a possible dissolution of the peasantry, began to attach importance to the preservation of a stable peasant society and village life by giving the landless peasants some lands and educating the peasants.¹¹⁴⁷

For a moment, let us leave aside the question about to what extent the peasantism was put into practice; I think, why the ruling strata needed to use such discourse is worth dwelling on. This reason, as far as my findings imply, must have been the social pressure and rural unrest, i.e. fights over land, complaints about landlessness, demands for lands, and widespread rural discontent manifested in tens of thousands disgruntled petitions, news in press, and ever increasing rural unrest.

Moreover, the government had to go beyond the peasantist discourse more than is usually assumed. Although the government did not launch a comprehensive land reform campaign, in the face of such social pressure, it had to distribute some amount of fertile treasury lands to landless peasants and small landholders. As stated also in Chapter Two, for this aim, the Law Regarding the Distribution of Land to

¹¹⁴⁶ Especially Atatürk, in his parliamentary speeches, touched on the land hunger and recommended the government to distribute land to the landless peasants in many times. For the 1928 speech delivered in the National Assembly, see A. Afet İnan, *Devletçilik İlkesi ve Türkiye Cumhuriyetinin Birinci Sanayi Planı, 1933* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1972), p. 108. For his other speeches addressing the land question, see “Cumhurbaşkanı Kemal Atatürk’ün Meclis Açış Nutku,” on 1 November 1935. See Bilsay Kuruç, *Belgelerle Türkiye İktisat Politikası*, Vol. 2 (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1993), pp. 369-370. See also the opening speech given by Atatürk in the opening of the first session of the National Assembly in 1937. *Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri*, Vol. I (İstanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1945), p. 374, 379.

¹¹⁴⁷ For an analytical study on the peasantist discourse of the Kemalist elite, see M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu, *Orada Bir Köy Var Uzakta: Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Köycü Söylem* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005).

Needy Farmers in the Eastern Region (*Şark Menatıkı Dahilinde Muhtaç Züraa Tevzi Edilecek Araziye Dair Kanun*) (No.1505) was enacted in 11.06.1929.¹¹⁴⁸ This law was applied to some other regions of Anatolia.¹¹⁴⁹

Moreover, the provision of the waste and abandoned lands to landless peasants was included in the economic program prepared in 1930. The Settlement Law, which was promulgated in 1934, provided a legal basis for the land distribution to the poor peasants and small plot holders throughout Anatolia. The RPP adopted a new article in its program that promised a land reform in the Fourth General Congress, held in 1935.¹¹⁵⁰

The Settlement-Land Law Draft, dated 1935, which was prepared according to the decisions taken in the Fourth Congress of the RPP, also intended the nationalization of some part of fallow private plots and distribution of these lands to the landless peasants. This law was not approved by the National Assembly. Two years later, in view of social pressures and insistence of Atatürk on a comprehensive land distribution program, the government had to prepare a new agricultural reform program, titled Agricultural Reform Law Draft (*Ziraî Islahat Kanun Tasarısı*). This law draft, which targeted a land reform, also was not enacted upon the death of Atatürk and the outbreak of World War Two. Undoubtedly, the power of the landed interests within the RPP also played a role in the suspension of this project until the mid-1940s.¹¹⁵¹

Notwithstanding, the government distributed relatively significant amount of fallow state lands to the landless peasants and small holders during the period.

¹¹⁴⁸ *Düstur III*, Vol. 10, p.1793.

¹¹⁴⁹ For instance see the application of the law (No.1505) to Ordu province, BCA BKK [30.18.1/02.84.85], 26.9.1938; the application of the law (No.1505) to İstanbul province BCA BKK [30.18.1/02.78.76], 27.8.1937.

¹¹⁵⁰ *CHP Dördüncü Büyük Kongre Zabıtları*, (Ankara: Ulus Basımevi, 1935), p. 81.

¹¹⁵¹ Ömer Lütfi Barkan, “‘Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu’ ve Türkiye’de Ziraî Bir Reformun Ana Meseleleri,” *Türkiye’de Toprak Meselesi: Toplu Eserler I* (İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1980), p. 456-457.

According to the estimates of Barkan, the landless peasants, small landowners, and Balkan refugees received 6,787,234 *dönüms* of fallow arable land, 157,420 *dönüms* of orchard, and 168,659 *dönüms* of garden until 1934. In addition, between June 1934 and May 1938, the government distributed about 3 million *dönüms* of uncultivated arable land to 88,695 peasant households. The land allocations to the poor peasants and small farmers continued during the 1940s. Between 1940 and 1944, the Ministry of Finance distributed 875,000 *dönüms* of fertile treasury land to 53,000 peasant families throughout Anatolia.¹¹⁵²

Given that the total arable land amount was 14.5 million hectares, 7.6 percent of the lands were redistributed in favor of the poor and small peasants.¹¹⁵³ However, the proportion of the distributed lands to the total cultivated lands was much higher than this amount. The total area under cultivation was only about 4.3 million hectares according to the Agricultural Statistics conducted in 1927.¹¹⁵⁴ In other words, the proportion of the distributed lands to this amount was about 25 percent.

However, it should be kept in mind that the single-party state was not able to collect accurate statistical data and to complete the cadastral survey of the country. Therefore, these figures should be taken with some reservation. Nevertheless, they point out that the land distributions were by no means inconsiderable.

Furthermore, the RPP government enacted the Law of Land Distribution to the Farmers (*Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu*) in 1945. Undoubtedly other ideological and political factors were at work, like the political competition within the RPP elite and the peasantist ideology. However, the pressure of the land hunger and peasant politics also must have compelled the rulers to enact this law. Although

¹¹⁵² See Table 1 and Table 2 given by Barkan, "Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu," p. 455-456. In addition, see Aksoy, *Türkiye'de Toprak Meselesi*, pp. 58-59.

¹¹⁵³ Barkan, "Çiftçiyi Topraklandırma Kanunu," p. 455.

¹¹⁵⁴ See Kâzım Rıza, *Türkiye Ziraati ve Türkiye Ziraatinin Mühim Şubeleri*, p.4. The total amount of arable land under cultivation was 43,637,727 *dönüms* according to the 1927 Agricultural Statistics.

this law was not implemented effectively by the RPP government, the land distributions to the poor and small peasants continued during the second half of the 1940s and the 1950s. Until 1950, the government allocated about 1,500,000 *dönüms* of fertile fallow land to the peasants except for the lands distributed to refugees who came from Balkans.¹¹⁵⁵

Finally, I proposed that it is possible to evaluate the wheat purchases of the government above market prices that started in 1932 as a consequence of the peasants' active response to the changing economic trends. In the face of sharp decline of agricultural prices, the peasants decreased the production of several crops. In the beginning, the radical price declines in wheat also hit the wheat production, one of the lynchpins of the social and political order. Where substituting the wheat for more profitable crops was possible, some wheat producers began to cultivate different crops that were more profitable. This was a primary survival strategy of the peasants which caused a wheat shortage in town markets and consequently fuelled the social discontent and unrest in the countryside especially in 1932. It is most likely this rational and self-seeking economic behavior of the producers that created a possibility of a subsistence crisis and forced the government to purchase wheat at prices above the market levels from 1932 onward in order to hold back the dangerous fluctuations in wheat prices. Although the implementation of this policy encountered several problems like insufficiency of the state infrastructure and storage capacity, and therefore caused complaints among the peasants, it partially precluded the devastation of many wheat producers and further pauperization at least during the first half of the decade.

¹¹⁵⁵ *Türkiye Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, Türkiye İstatistik Yıllığı, 1968* (Ankara: Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Matbaası, 1969), p. 164.

PART TWO

THE EVERYDAY FORMS OF THE WORKING CLASS POLITICS

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF TURKISH WORKING CLASS

Short Historical Background of the Turkish Working Class

The working class discontent with and response to economic conditions, state economic policies, exploitation and oppression under an authoritarian capitalist system only can be understood against the background of the workers' changing standard of living and working conditions in this period. For that reason, before the examination of the working class's critical opinion about and active response to the state policies and adverse economic conditions, it is necessary to touch on in which conditions and against which transformations and policies such opinion and response were emerged and shaped. On the other hand, since the socio-economic conditions and state policies are recurrent themes mostly brought to fore in the literature, this chapter only sketches the contours of social-economic and political setting.

Above all, who were the people we called the the Turkish working class? Republican Turkey was founded on the remnants of Ottoman society. Although the prevalence of the agricultural structure and the unbalanced integration with the European capitalist system had not allowed the Ottoman Empire to develop a large-scale industrial base with a great number of industrial wageworkers as copared to the western societies, the involvement of European capital in the Empire commercialized the Ottoman economy and integrated it to the world capitalist market, which generated new enterprises employing wageworkers especially in transportation, public construction, ports, railways, urban services and some manufactures. Both these workers, who complained about the working conditions and wages, and

artisans, who were displeased with the penetration of European manufactured goods into their own markets, constituted important social dynamics of the Ottoman politics from the last quarter of the 19th century to the first decade of the 20th century. In the same period, workers began to come together under the roofs of trade unions, syndicates and mutual aid societies.

Indeed, some 50 strikes were recorded from 1872 until July 24, 1908, and 111 strikes from July 24 to the end of the year. Some of them were led by the trade unions. Local struggles over declining wages, food prices and shortages, loss of jobs and pressure over the working class set the social scene for the Young Turk opposition against the Hamidian Regime and the 1908 Revolution.¹¹⁵⁶ Most of these strikers sought higher wages, overtime pay, or paid vacations in compensation for the decline in real wages in the last years of the reign of Abdülhamid II. The strikes were partially successful and the average daily wages rose about 15 percent from 1905 to 1908.¹¹⁵⁷

However, as Quataert has stated, the unique form of working-class struggle was not the formal organizations. “There are many other forms of behavior that workers employed in order to shape, curb or circumvent state policy.”¹¹⁵⁸ Especially among journeymen, there were other forms of negotiation besides strikes that could have been used to increase wages.¹¹⁵⁹

At the beginning of the Constitutional Period, the Young Turk government took a sympathetic stance towards the worker’s strikes and boycotts, as long as these

¹¹⁵⁶ See Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 77.

¹¹⁵⁷ Yavuz Selim Karakışla, “The 1908 Strike Wave in the Ottoman Empire,” *The Turkish Studies Association Bulletin*, XVI, No. 2 (Sept., 1992), pp. 154-159.

¹¹⁵⁸ Donald Quataert, “Workers and the State during the Late Ottoman Empire,” in *The State and the Subaltern: Modernization, Society and the State in Turkey and Iran*, ed. by Touraj Atabaki (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, in association with the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 2007), p. 27.

¹¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

movements could help the political struggle against both the Abdulhamid.¹¹⁶⁰ However, shortly after the strikes began to paralyze the economy and especially the railway transportation throughout the Empire in September 1908, the political power realized the “dangerous potential” of these movements and banned the strikes in some critical sectors with the Strike Law (*Tadil-i Eşgal Kanunu*) in 1909.¹¹⁶¹ The enactment of the Association Law supplemented the Strike Law, which obstructed the class-specific organizations in the same year. However, taking advantage of the political competition between the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and the Liberty and Entente Party (LEP), some worker groups sustained their activities until the end of 1913, when the CUP established a dictatorial government after a *coup d'état*.¹¹⁶²

Under the dictatorial regime of the CUP, especially World War I and the national economy policy both adversely affected all of the wage earners in the Ottoman Empire. Strikes and all forms of protest movements were suppressed. Despite the increase in nominal wages, the real wages fell considerably in the face of the sharp price rises during the war and the wage-cuts in especially public enterprises.¹¹⁶³ Wages were at the lowest points in those industries employing the cheap labor of women and children such as tobacco, cigarette, textile, sugar and cotton.¹¹⁶⁴

¹¹⁶⁰ Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908: Reactions to European Economic Penetration* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), pp. 121-145.

¹¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-118.

¹¹⁶² Lütü Erişçi, “Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfının Tarihi (Özet Olarak),” *Sosyal Tarih Çalışmaları* (İstanbul: Tüstav Yayınları, 2003), p. 94.

¹¹⁶³ Zafer Toprak, *İttihat-Terakki ve Cihan Harbi: Savaş Ekonomisi ve Türkiye’de Devletçilik, 1914-1918* (İstanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2003), pp. 153-168.

¹¹⁶⁴ Mesut Gülmez, *Türkiye’de 1936 Öncesinde İşçi Hakları* (Ankara: Türkiye Yol-İş Sendikası’nın Türkiye İşçi Hakları Kitabından Ayrı Basım, 1986), pp. 54-55. In addition, see Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, *Türkiye İşçi Sınıfının Sosyal Varlığı* (İstanbul: Sosyal İnsan Yayınları, 2008), pp. 51-52, especially see p. 57.

After the overthrow of the CUP with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, an authority vacuum emerged throughout the Empire, which the socialists and working-class movements also exploited. Both the adverse effects of the war and of the occupation gave a new impetus to working-class activism during the Armistice Period. In this period, working-class organizations and socialist parties (the Turkish Socialist Party led by İştirakçi Hilmi, and the Communist Party of Turkey led by Mustafa Suphi) began to appear once again.¹¹⁶⁵

Up to the 1923, İstanbul witnessed numerous strikes by the workers of tramways, tunnels, gas companies, railroads, and seamen of municipal shipping. Actually, the main thrust behind the workers' movements was the desire for the betterment of their living and working conditions and their rights. However, the Ankara government perceived these movements and the Bolsheviks so important allies against the occupation forces that May 1 of 1922 was celebrated in İstanbul and officially in Ankara.¹¹⁶⁶

On the other hand, the National Struggle was, at the grassroots level, carried out with immense industry of the unskilled workers as well as peasants throughout Anatolia. During the war, the real wages of Anatolian workers decreased sharply in the face of the wartime inflation. Most of the workers, harshly hit by the wartime scarcities, were not able to support their families. No considerable major laws to regulate the wages, working hours and the conditions under which the work was carried on existed in Anatolia,¹¹⁶⁷ except for a few minor protecting legislative measures such as the Law on Selling Coal Dust in the General Interest of Workers of

¹¹⁶⁵ Erişçi, "Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfının Tarihi," pp. 97-101.

¹¹⁶⁶ For the celebrations in İstanbul, see Zafer Toprak, "İstanbul'da Amele Bayramları I: Cumhuriyet Öncesi," *Tarih ve Toplum*, No.41 (May 1987), pp. 35-42.

¹¹⁶⁷ Some foreign observers underlined the hard working and living conditions of the workers in Anatolia. For instance see, Simon Ivanoviç Aralov, *Bir Sovyet Diplomatının Türkiye Anıları*, trans. by Hasan Âli Ediz (Ankara: Birey Toplum Yayınları, 1985), p. 108.

Zonguldak and the Ereğli Coal Basin (*Zonguldak ve Ereğli Havza-i Fahmiyesinde Mevcut Kömür Tozlarının Amele Menafî-ı Umumiyesine Olarak Fûruhtuna Dair Yasa*) and the Law Concerning the Law of Mine Workers of the Ereğli Coal Basin (*Ereğli Havza-i Fahmiyesi Maden Amelesine Müteallik Yasa*), passed in 1921.¹¹⁶⁸

After the victory of the nationalist forces, the new nationalist elite that took over the political power and began to embark radical reforms during the 1920s and the 1930s crushed the organized labor movement. In the first years of the Republic, some workers were organized under the roof of the Workers' Advancement Society (*Amele Teali Cemiyeti*). However, it was permanently closed down in 1928 by the government. Due to the economic depression on the one hand and an industrial drive on the other, the government tightened its grip on the organized activism of the working-class.

In addition, as pointed out by Quataert, due to the successive wars and the subsequent population exchange, the working class had lost many of its more qualified Christian members experienced in organizational labor struggle.¹¹⁶⁹ However, as this chapter puts forward, the organization or leadership was, though undoubtedly important, not everything in class struggle. Although the nationalist single-party government brought the organized and formal labor movement to a standstill, the working class struggle continued in more open forms until the late 1920s and then in disguise, mundane and in covert ways during the entire 1930s. Despite the differences in forms, there was continuity rather than rupture in terms of working class struggle between the 1920s and the 1930s. In this part, main manifestations, forms, characteristics and outcomes of these working-class struggle

¹¹⁶⁸ Gülmez, *Türkiye'de 1936 Öncesinde*, p. 23.

¹¹⁶⁹ Quatert, "Workers and the State," p. 30.

as a whole will be taken under scrutiny; but first of all, such an analysis entails looking at the backdrop against which the working class resisted.

A wave of strikes in the second half of 1923 emerged right after the occupying armies were repelled. In İstanbul, May 1 Day was celebrated by the workers for the first time. At the İzmir Economic Congress of 1923, a “workers’ group” brought forward economic and social demands including an eight-hour work day, a paid weekly day off, annual vacation after one year’s service, amendment of the 1909 Strike Law and the official recognition of May 1 as a workers’ holiday. Undoubtedly, these demands were not satisfied by the new rulers of the country. The National Struggle had liberated the country from the foreign powers; but it had not liberated the working class from its foreign and native exploiters. In the face of harsh exploitation without major social policy measures, the several strikes continued actively in 1924 and 1925, and then decreased until the late 1920s with the increasing repressive policies of the government.

However, the RPP, which was composed of landed and mercantile interests, was well aware of the political potential of the urban workers, and therefore did not hesitate to show reaction to the organized workers by arresting their leading figures and communist intellectuals who were in touch with workers. Especially from the late 1920s on, most of the organizational efforts, open protests and right-demands of the working-class were confronted with the prosecutions.

In the 1920s, the Republican government had to pursue a liberal economic policy. Reforms in the legal domain paved the way for further development of capitalistic social relations. The government introduced the new Civil Law (*Medeni Kanun*), the Obligations Law (*Borçlar Kanunu*), and the Commercial Law (*Ticaret*

Kanunu) in 1926 by modeling the liberal European countries. In 1927 the government enacted the Encouragement of Industry Law (*Teşvik-i Sanayi Kanunu*), supporting the new-Republican Turkish bourgeoisie. In order to obtain extra revenues from the commerce of some critical consumption goods, the government also monopolized the production and trade of some industrial goods or granted monopolistic privileges to some firms, allowing them to be the sole providers of commodities such as tobacco, cigarette, alcoholic beverages, salt, sugar, matches, coffee, tea, timber and firewood. The monopolistic firms and state agencies also provided some services such as ports. Corruption among the ruling and business circles was another form of the “national economy policy” that stimulated the national capitalist accumulation.¹¹⁷⁰

The end of the economic obligations imposed by the Lausanne Treaty, and the economic effects of the Great Depression shaking all segments of society, especially the lower classes, created an opportunity for both the large-scale industrial schemes and Turkish capitalism to develop behind high custom tariff walls. Furthermore, the government, hand in hand with the entrepreneurs, strived to place the financial costs of this process on the shoulders of the lower-classes with new taxes, fees, monopolistic profits, wage-cuts, and of course, repressive control and discipline mechanisms over the labor.

Liberal economic policies dictated by the Lausanne Treaty marked the 1920s. In these years, despite the government’s harsh attitude towards the communist movements, the working-class partially benefited from this liberalism and went on strikes when needed. On the other hand, strikes that played a role in facilitating the nationalization of foreign enterprises were partly tolerated by the nationalist

¹¹⁷⁰ For a self-criticism of the Republican elite about the widespread corruption among the high bureaucrats and politicians, see Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Ankara* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002), p. 105-106, 151. In addition see, Doğan Avcıoğlu, *Türkiye’nin Düzeni: Dün, Bugün, Yarın*, Vol.1 (İstanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1998), pp. 402-443.

government. However, it was in this period that the government began to evolve into an authoritarian state capitalism under one-party regime. Working class associations and leftist parties began to be repressed severely by the security forces. Leaving aside the left, the government was not even tolerant of the moderate liberal right political leanings.

The Law for the Maintenance of Order (*Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu*), which was enacted in 1925 upon the outbreak of the Kurdish-Islamic Sheikh Sait Rebellion, wiped out the left and labor activities throughout the country as well as the conservative-liberal Progressive Republican Party (PRP) opposition. A new Criminal Law, adapted from the fascist Italian Criminal Law in 1926. Three repressive and authoritarian laws as the legacy of the CUP to the Republic remained in force during the period: the Assembly Law (*İçtimaat Kanunu*), the Strike Law (*Tadil-i Eşgal Kanunu*), and the Tramps Law (*Serseriler Kanunu*).¹¹⁷¹ In 1931, the government enacted a new and stricter Press Law.

After the self-closure of the Free Republican Party in 1930, the face of the pressures of the government, the authoritarian tone of the regime peaked. The Law of Police Powers of 1934 (*Polis Vazife ve Selâhiyet Kanunu*) granted the security forces a broad authority and important rights.¹¹⁷² Amendments in the Criminal Law in 1936, and finally the new Association Law in 1938 posed obstacles to the lower classes to claim their social, economic and political rights legal political domain.

¹¹⁷¹ Ferdan Ergut, *Modern Devlet ve Polis: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e Toplumsal Denetimin Diyalektiği* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004) p. 192.

¹¹⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 337-338.

The Main Characteristics

Number, and Sectoral Concentration

During the early Republican period, the formation of a capitalist economy, which was underway before the Republic, gained a momentum. Industrialization schemes began to alter the living conditions of the working class. Industrialization was not merely a matter of establishing factories and introducing new machines. It entailed a supply of labor force, an entire education of the producers, the imposition of new values and norms, and a new conception of time. In addition, industrial mass products began to replace the traditional artisanal products, which accordingly undermined the artisanal production, the moral economy and customary forms of social relations. Above all, it required the commoditization of human labor and proletarianization *en masse*. In contrast to most of the traditional forms of work, workers in factories were confronted with unusually harsh measures of discipline, control, and long workdays in unhealthy conditions. They were expected to adjust to new rhythms of work and time to which they were not accustomed.

In this period, the Turkish people underwent a dispossession process. First, the social effects of the Great Depression on poor peasants pushed them to the cities to look for temporary work. There reportedly appeared a new marginal social group called “those with the quilts” (*yorganlılar*) in the big cities.¹¹⁷³

The establishment of state factories also created a severe need for industrial labor force. While the share of agriculture in the GDP fell from 48 percent to 39 percent between 1925 and 1939, the share of industry showed a steady growth from

¹¹⁷³ See Karaosmanoğlu, *Ankara*, p. 112, and I. Nikolaevich Rozaliyev, *Türkiye Sanayi Proletaryası*, trans. by Güneş Bozkaya (İstanbul: Yar Yayınları, 1974), p. 34.

9.7 percent to 18.9 percent.¹¹⁷⁴ Surely, this change was reflected on the profile of the working class to some degree. According to the population census of 1927, there were 147,712 workers only in the industrial enterprises employing more than four workers.¹¹⁷⁵

Towards the end of the 1930s, the government, well aware of the increase in the number of workers and the labor question, conducted industrial censuses in all workplaces employing five workers or more.¹¹⁷⁶ According to these censuses, the number of workers covered by the Labor Law was 275,000 by 1940. In addition to this, the total number of workers was estimated to be 701,000. Of them, 20,000 engaged in small-scale industries, 100,000 in domestic work at home, 100,000 as artisans, 6000 as fishermen, and 200,000 in agriculture.¹¹⁷⁷

Table 24 - The Number of Workers per Industrial Enterprise, 1932-1939.

Years	Workers
1932	37.6
1933	46.5
1934	52.8
1935	44.5
1936	51.6
1937	67.2
1938	73.5
1939	78.1

Source: Erdal Yavuz, “Sanayideki İşgücünün Durumu, 1923-40,” p.177

During the 1930s, the number of workers only in state factories increased progressively and reached about 125,000 at the end of the decade.¹¹⁷⁸ The proportion

¹¹⁷⁴ See Tuncer Bulutay, Yahya Sezai Tezel, and Nuri Yıldırım, *Türkiye Milli Geliri: 1923-1948* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayını, 1974), Tablo 8.6.A. Ayrıca bkz. Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi*, 1908-2002 (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2005), p.71.

¹¹⁷⁵ Erişçi, “Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfının Tarihi,” p. 101.

¹¹⁷⁶ Ahmet Makal, “Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi ve Tarihçiliği Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme,” in *Ameleden İşçiye: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi Çalışmaları* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007), p. 70.

¹¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44. In addition, for rapid increase in number of workers in the early 1930s, see Samed Ağaoğlu and Selahattin Hüdaioğlu, *İş Hukuku Tarihi* (Ankara: Merkez Bankası, 1938), p. 114.

of all of the industrial workers to all of the labor force increased to 8 percent in 1939, whereas this rate was 4.6 percent in 1924.¹¹⁷⁹ As for state officials, their number, which was about 105,000 in 1931, reached approximately 130,000 in 1938.¹¹⁸⁰

However, these numbers, according to some experts, underestimated the real quantitative characteristic of the working-class. Gerhard Kessler, a contemporary social policy expert, argued that because some employers did not fill properly the industrial census forms, the total number of workers should be estimated to have been 20 percent more than the census registered.¹¹⁸¹

In parallel to Kessler, Hikmet Kıvılcımlı also, in a short but detailed essay on the quantitative features of the working class, calculated the number of workers as between 800,000 and 960,000 in the mid-1930s. Minus the agricultural workers, the working-class located in the urban areas together with their families amounted to approximately 2,000,000, which corresponded to a larger portion of the urban population.¹¹⁸²

Who were these people? Undoubtedly, the working-class was not composed of exclusively industrial workers, but of a very wide range of wage laborers. They were workers who were employed in transportation, shipping, construction, fishing, ports, postal services, and clerks, journeymen and apprentices in the workshops of artisans, and other self-employed workers such as carriage drivers, taxi drivers, porters, street vendors, and agricultural laborers. Another group of the workers was handloom weavers, mostly women and children working in their own homes from morning to night as textile or carpet weavers. For instance, in the Aegean region

¹¹⁷⁹ Ahmet Makal, "Türkiye'nin Sanayileşme Sürecinde İşgücü Sorunu, Sosyal Politika ve İktisadi Devlet Teşekkülleri: 1930'lu ve 1940'lı Yıllar," in *Ameleden İşçiye: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi Çalışmaları* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007), p. 118.

¹¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸¹ Gerhard Kessler, "Türk İş İstatistikleri," *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, IV, No.1 (Oct., 1942), p. 249.

¹¹⁸² Kıvılcımlı, *Türkiye İşçi Sınıfının Sosyal Varlığı*, pp. 33-35.

there were more than 9000 looms in carpet factories and workshops. Together with these factories, there were about 5000 handlooms. The number of workers weaving carpet at homes was about 60,000.¹¹⁸³

Despite the industrial drive and steady proletarianization, the Turkish economy and society were still characterized by the agriculture. About 80 percent of laboring people was employed in agriculture. In agriculture, even though some concentration of land in the hands of large landowners took place in the 1930s with the economic effects of the Great Depression and heavy taxes,¹¹⁸⁴ the small-plots holders and low income peasants insisted on preserving their ties with the village and lands in any way and resisted to the dispossession process underway, as stated in Part One.

Therefore, peasant-workers who were temporarily employed in industry and other sectors in urban areas constituted the great part of the urban laborers in the early Republic. Indeed, the bulk of the workers came from the village populace among the pauperized small and poor peasants who were depressed under the triple yoke of heavy taxes, debit interests, and the disadvantageous agricultural terms of trade.¹¹⁸⁵ In order to save money to pay the taxes, debts, or bride price and to weather the economic crisis that stemmed from the low-agricultural prices or bad-harvests, many peasants often sought temporary employment in the factories. However, they maintained close affiliations with their rural backgrounds, moving back during part of the year or expecting to return after some years of factory work. As soon as they saved the money needed, they left the jobs and returned to their villages for

¹¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹¹⁸⁴ Gülten Kazgan, "Türk Ekonomisinde 1927-1935 Depresyonu, Kapital Birikimi ve Örgütlemeler," in *Atatürk Döneminin Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Sorunları Sempozyumu* (İstanbul: İktisadi ve Ticari İlimler Akademisi Mezunları Derneği, 1977), p. 273. See also Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, p. 334.

¹¹⁸⁵ Radmir Platonovich Korniyenko, *The Labor Movement in Turkey (1918-1963)* (Washington: U. S. Department of Commerce Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information, Joint Publications Research Service, 1967), p. 46.

agricultural works.¹¹⁸⁶ These peasant-workers outnumbered the permanent and skilled workers in many sectors, especially in mining, textile, foundry works, stone, construction, clay, cement production and the like.

Although the entrance of the women and children into working life in industry had started in the late Ottoman era, social impact of the World War One, the National Struggle, the Great Depression, and finally the industrial drive in the 1930s accelerated their employment. According to the official statistics collected in 1927, the number of female workers employed in industrial enterprises employing four or more workers was about 30,000. The number of child workers under 14 years old was about 23,000.¹¹⁸⁷

With the Great Depression and the subsequent industrialization drive, the inadequate household incomes and increasing pauperization necessitated the working of the other family members who previously had been outside of the labor market. Together with this, the tendency of the employers to the employment of cheaper and more docile female and child workers also accelerated the entrance of them into the labor market.¹¹⁸⁸

According to the official statistics of 1937, the number of female workers and juvenile workers between 12 and 18 years old in those companies that were covered by the Labor Law was about 51,000 and 23,000 respectively.¹¹⁸⁹ Although the employment of juvenile workers in the factories subjected to the Labor Law seems to have remained stable during the period, the together with the child apprentices, child and female handloom weavers, and those child workers employed in smaller

¹¹⁸⁶ Walker D. Hines, et al. *Türkiye'nin İktisadi Bakımdan Umumi Bir Tetkiki, 1933-1934*, Vol.V-VI (Ankara: Mehmet İhsan Matbaası, 1936), p. 233, 238.

¹¹⁸⁷ Kıvılcımlı, *Türkiye İşçi Sınıfının Sosyal Varlığı*, p. 54.

¹¹⁸⁸ Suad Derviş, "Günü Gününe Geçinenler: Kapı Kapı İş Arayan Bir İşsizle Dolaştım," *Cumhuriyet*, 13.04.1936.

¹¹⁸⁹ Erişçi, "Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfının Tarihi," p. 103.

workplaces, which were not covered by the Labor Law, the total number of both female and child workers was likely much higher than these official figures. As will be stated below, even many big factories disregarded the Public Hygiene Law and continued to employ small children between 7 and 12 years old during the 1930s without reporting to the official authorities.

Wages and Purchasing Power

Undoubtedly, the wages, though they varied according to the sectors and qualifications of the workers, were too low in general. In some state factories, both wages and working conditions were comparatively better than in the private sector.¹¹⁹⁰ However, overall, wages were far from being satisfactory throughout the period. The levels of average wages fluctuated between 1925 and 1939. Undoubtedly, cyclical sharp wage declines during these fluctuations often hard hit the poor working-class families living from hand to mouth.

According to the official statistics compiled between 1927 and 1938 the daily wage of workers in some sectors decreased by ten to thirty percent. In the Zonguldak coalmines, for instance, the average daily wage of a worker was 128 piasters in 1927. From 1927 to 1929, the average daily wage increased to as high as 148 piasters. However, after 1929, it decreased regularly and recorded only 104 piasters in 1936.¹¹⁹¹ Therefore, the coalmine workers lived mostly on bread and corn.¹¹⁹² The wages of the coal miners employed in Fethiye chome mines run by a French company were lower than that of the Zonguldak miners. Their average daily wages

¹¹⁹⁰ Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye'de Çok Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1946-1963* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2002), p. 437.

¹¹⁹¹ Erişçi, "Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfının Tarihi," p. 113.

¹¹⁹² Korniyenko, *The Labor Movement in Turkey*, p. 47.

changed between 40 and 60 piasters.¹¹⁹³ The first American ambassador to Turkey Joseph Grew wrote in his memoirs about the low wages of the coal miners in Turkey. According to him, a coal miner in Turkey earned only one-tenth of his American counterpart.¹¹⁹⁴ Especially seasonal workers felt the low wages severely. Tobacco workers in İstanbul, for example, received a daily wage changing between 50 and 100 piasters for 10 to 12 hours of hard labor.¹¹⁹⁵

As noted above, some sectors that required skilled labor offered higher wages to their qualified workers. For instance, the Electricity and Tramway Company paid some of its workers 195 piasters per day.¹¹⁹⁶ As a matter of fact, each sector included both a well-paid skilled minority and a poorly paid unskilled majority of workers. The unskilled workers at the textile, tobacco and leather industry enterprises of İstanbul were paid 40 to 100 piasters a day, whereas a skilled worker received on an average of 120 to 200 piasters per day. Without a doubt, women and child workers received lower than even the unskilled male workers did.¹¹⁹⁷ In the Anatolian countryside, women and children who were employed in carpet and silk weaving received only 10 or 15 piasters a day despite the grueling working hours.¹¹⁹⁸

In contrast to some general assumptions about the wages of the workers employed in the state factories, the general levels of the wages for most of the workers were low as in the private sector. As stated by an RPP inspector, the wage per hour in Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory, one of the largest public enterprises, was only 6 piasters. The wages that most of the workers received were far from

¹¹⁹³ "Fethiye'de," *Orak Çekiç*, No. 9 (July 20, 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 427.

¹¹⁹⁴ Joseph Grew, *Atatürk ve Yeni Türkiye, 1927-1932* (İstanbul: Gündoğan Yayınları, 2002), p. 144.

¹¹⁹⁵ See Zehra Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996), p.59, 71. In addition, see Mustafa Özçelik, *1930-1950 Arasında Tütcüleri Tarihi* (İstanbul: TÜSTAV, 2003), p.75, 78.

¹¹⁹⁶ Yıldırım Koç, *Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık Tarihi, Olaylar- Değerlendirmeler* (Ankara: Yol-iş Sendikası Yayınları, 1996), p. 114.

¹¹⁹⁷ Korniyenko, *The Labor Movement in Turkey*, p. 47.

¹¹⁹⁸ Oruç, *Arif Oruç'ın Yarın'ı*, p. 56.

being satisfactory, except for a limited number of more qualified workers, who received 60 TL monthly.¹¹⁹⁹

As for the workers who were employed in small workshops such as journeymen and apprentices, there was a great differentiation in their wages. In a traditional shoemaker's shop, the master, journeymen, and apprentice worked all together up to 14 hours a day. The master only designed, the journeymen sewed, and the apprentice put it onto a wooden shoe last, painted and polished it. A master paid around 300-350 piasters per week to a journeymen, and 80 piasters per week to an apprentice.¹²⁰⁰ Likewise, a saddler, whose workday lasted up to 12 hours from the morning prayer to the evening prayer, paid his journeymen and apprentice around 200-300 piasters and 50 piasters per week, respectively.¹²⁰¹

During the interwar period, real wages remained below the pre-1914 levels, though they recovered as compared to the war years and the first years of the Republic. The statistics below shows how the real wages remained below their 1914 level during the 1930s.

Table 25 - The Nominal and Real Wages Index, 1914-1939 (1914=100).

Years	Nominal Wages	Prices	Real Wages
1914	100	100	100
1918	-	-	30-40
1935	778	957	81
1939	841	988	85

Source: Roger Owen and Şevket Pamuk, "Turkey, 1918-1945," in *A History of Middle East Economies in the Twentieth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), p. 459. (Notes: Summary of Table 2)

¹¹⁹⁹ BCA CHP [490.1/670.258.01], 15.04.1942.

¹²⁰⁰ Mehmet Halid Bayrı, "Balıkesirde Pabuçculuk," *Halk Bilgisi Haberleri*, No. 48 (May 9, 1935), p. 295.

¹²⁰¹ Mehmed Halid [Bayrı], "Balıkesirde Saraçlık," *Halk Bilgisi Haberleri*, No. 32 (Jan. 15, 1934), pp. 237-238.

One important factor lowering the wages was the various and heavy taxes on wages. Especially the Income Tax (*Kazanç Vergisi*) bore hardest upon the lower income civil servants and workers, who could not avoid it.¹²⁰² Jules Picharles and Frederic Benham, two international experts who were invited by the government in 1930 to prepare a special report on the Turkish tax system, were shocked by the great unequal tax burden. On the average, 82 percent of the Income Tax revenues of the state were cut from the wages between 1932 and 1938. The proportion of the Income Tax collected from the merchants, industrialists, and state enterprises to all of the Income Tax revenues was only about 18 percent in the same period. Given the fact that the important part of the Income Tax was paid by the state enterprises, the private sector paid less than 10 percent of it.¹²⁰³

The tax burden over the wages and salaries increased with the Great Depression. The government levied three new indirect taxes on wages and salaries from 1931 onward. These taxes meant the increase in the Income Tax. The first tax was the Economic Depression Tax (*İktisadî Buhran Vergisi*) which began to be collected in 1931. Then government levied another economic crisis tax in 1932, called the Equalization Tax (*Muvazene Vergisi*). According to its preamble, the government aimed to “equalize the burden of the economic crisis on each citizens.” However, it also bore hardest upon the wages and salaries at rates changing between 10 percent and 16 percent. Then, in order to finance the Turkish Aviation Society, the Aviation Society Tax was levied in 1934.¹²⁰⁴ These taxes were levied on not only wages and salaries, but also on the limited incomes of the artisans and self-employed people working in their small shops and stores. During the 1930, artisans

¹²⁰² Newman, *Turkish Crossroads*, p. 188; Muzaffer Egesoy, *Cumhuriyet Devrinde Vasıtasız Vergiler* (Ankara: Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Maliye Enstitüsü, 1962), p. 187.

¹²⁰³ Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, pp. 437-438.

¹²⁰⁴ Cezmi Emiroğlu, *Türkiye’de Vergi Sistemi: Vasıtasız Vergiler* (Ankara: Damga Matbaası, 1932), p. 244, 263.

and small-scale traders were obliged to pay these new taxes along with the Income Tax.¹²⁰⁵

Table 26 - The Share of the Extraordinary Taxes Collected From Wages and Salaries in the Total Tax Revenues of the State (%).

Years	Economic Depression Tax	Equalization Tax	Aviation Society Tax	Total
1932	6.16	8.56	-	14.72
1933	6.65	9.33	-	15.98
1934	8.84	10.86	-	19.70
1935	8.91	10.52	1.10	20.53
1936	7.16	9.81	2.74	19.71
1937	9.14	12.39	3.43	24.96
1938	8.07	8.46	3.00	19.53
1939	9.28	9.63	3.36	22.27

Source: Fatih Saraçoğlu, “1930-1939 Döneminde Vergi Politikası,” *Maliye Dergisi*, No. 157 (Temmuz-Aralık 2009), p. 142.

Given the significant increase in the prices of basic consumer goods, black-marketing in basic foodstuffs and housing shortage during the interwar period, the great part of the workers’ wages were spent on food and housing.¹²⁰⁶ The Chamber of Commerce in İstanbul declared on June 1933 that a family of four persons in İstanbul could hardly live on a minimum 122 TL. According to a newspaper, if this minimum subsistence level was taken for granted, it could be postulated that many low-income people, say, postmen earning 25 TL, teachers earning between 20-30 TL, policemen earning 50 TL, workers and wage-laborers earning around 20-30 TL, apartment caretakers earning 25 TL were not able to support their families.¹²⁰⁷

As for old people, many of them had no retirement rights and they did not receive any retirement pensions, premiums or gratuities. Only a limited number of

¹²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 135. In addition see, Egesoy, *Cumhuriyet Devrinde Vasıtasız Vergiler*, p. 56-59. By the way, as stated above, the peasants also were obliged to pay the Aviation Society Tax.

¹²⁰⁶ About housing question in these years, see also Ruşen Keleş, *100 Soruda Türkiye’de Şehirleşme, Konut ve Gecekondu* (İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1972), pp. 183-184.

¹²⁰⁷ “İstanbul’da Bir Aile Nasıl Geçinir?” *Köroğlu*, 07.06.1933.

state officials had retirement rights but most of them, even after a service of 30 years, received only 20 TL as retirement pension.¹²⁰⁸ Even for a civil servant who had retirement right, it always took a long time and required many bureaucratic procedures, sometimes lasting years to obtain such pensions and grants. The newspapers of the time and the list of the petitions sent to the National Assembly are full of complaint letters and petitions penned by old and poor retired persons.

Moreover, in many sectors, sometimes the distribution of the salaries and wages was delayed for several days or months. Due to the lack of regular wage-payment procedures and rules, many companies and workplaces did not pay the wages of their workers on regular base. For instance, the tobacco companies generally delayed the distribution of wages or sometimes underpaid their workers. The memoirs of tobacco warehouse workers such as Şoför İdris [Erdoğan] (Driver İdris) and Zehra Kosova are full of such cases. Similarly, printing houses and textile workers, for instance, not generally receive their weekly wages in due time. Moreover, some factories cut the wages according to their will and paid the workers less than they had promised before. Many companies paid their workers in kind instead of cash.¹²⁰⁹

Apart from their low wages, many state officials, particularly those officials who were paid by local governments such as teachers and preachers were unable to receive their salaries for months. Even when they received their salaries, they sometimes had to wait for a long time to obtain their unpaid and accrued salaries of previous months or years. The living conditions of majority of the lower-class

¹²⁰⁸ “İşten Çekilen Memurlar,” *Köroğlu*, 10.12.1932.

¹²⁰⁹ “İzmir’in Esnaf ve İşçi Teşkilatında Bir Buçuk Senelik Mesâi ve Tetkikatıma Ait Umumî Rapor,” BCA CHP [490.1/1444.26.1], 17.06.1933. See also, “Bir İşçi Kadın Diyor ki!” *Cumhuriyet*, 09.03.1929. According to this newspaper report, the Feshane-Defterdar Textile Factory of Sümerbank underpaid the workers. In another instance, a communist paper, *Kızıl İstanbul* reported in January 1932 that Niğde-Burgaz railway company did not pay the wages of the workers, but instead distributed only some foodstuffs to them. *Kızıl İstanbul*, No. 35 (Jan. 3, 1932), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 288.

officials were not better than that of the workers.¹²¹⁰ Even in Ankara, the heart of the bureaucracy, the low-income state officials had difficulties in the face of the high cost of living in the 1930s.¹²¹¹

Working Conditions and Lack of Social Security

In many sectors, except for a few big public enterprises, the working conditions were unbearable. The working hours were grueling, and the employers gave no importance to basic social measures, safety principles, and hygiene rules in their workplaces. Most of employers neither followed regular procedures and principles in hiring and layoff, nor provided the simplistic social security facilities such as free medical treatment, retirement funds, and compensation mechanisms for job-related accidents and industrial diseases.

Long Working Hours

The working hours, though they varied from one workplace to another, generally exceeded 10 hours a day. In many sectors, a normal shift was no less than twelve hours and workers had to work often in unsanitary conditions without any safety measures against industrial accidents. In such extremely exploitative sectors as textile, a workday could reach up to 17 hours. For instance, when Linke visited one of the largest cotton factories of Mersin, a southern developing province of Turkey, in 1935, she observed that two shifts were employed to keep the factory running

¹²¹⁰ Makal, *Çok Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, pp. 437-474.

¹²¹¹ Soyak, *Atatürk'ten Hatıralar*, p. 18; see also "İslahiye Muallimleri Maaş Alamıyorlarmış," *Son Posta*, 11.06.1932; "Muallim Aylıkları," *Köroğlu*, 12.08.1931; "Konya Muallimlerinin Maaşı," *Son Posta*, 24.05.1932; "Günah Be Yahul!" *Köroğlu*, 22.04.1931; "Halkın Köşesi," *Köroğlu*, 04.08.1934.

uninterruptedly, “Each working 12 hour with only one hours of break for a meal half-way through.” The factory was too noisy because of the outmoded machinery dated back to 1895. Furthermore, the buildings were too airless, dark, and unhealthy.¹²¹²

In tobacco warehouses, which were hard hit by the economic crisis, the normal working time could even reach up to 15 hours a day. According to the memoirs of Mustafa Özçelik, a tobacco worker in the 1930s, the work in the tobacco warehouses started at seven in the morning and continued until eight in the evening.¹²¹³ Tobacco warehouse workers were, in his words, “at the mercy of the employers.”¹²¹⁴ Zehra Kosova, a female tobacco warehouse worker, also confirms the destitute situation of the workers of tobacco warehouses. She states in her memoirs that especially in the years following the economic crisis, “workers had to grapple with the hunger, diseases, and poverty.”¹²¹⁵ They had to endure the long working hours and difficulties of the work in the unsanitary warehouses.¹²¹⁶

The mining sector had the heaviest working conditions. In the Zonguldak Ereğli coalmines, for instance, most of workers were peasants working seasonally. They, despite the laws, worked more than eight hours. A workday sometimes reached up to 15 hours under exhausting and dangerous working conditions.¹²¹⁷ The most severe conditions were in the Fethiye chrome mines run by a French company.

¹²¹² Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, p. 265.

¹²¹³ Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 25.

¹²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹²¹⁵ Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, p. 70.

¹²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.70.

¹²¹⁷ Sina Çıladır, *Zonguldak Havzasının Tarihi Gelişimi* (Zonguldak: Genel Maden-İş Yayınları, [1994]), pp. 118-119. An inspection report states, “The inspectors who are entrusted with the inspection of the companies in Zonguldak generally live in İstanbul and do not even go to the Zonguldak province (...). The living conditions of the workers were really terrible.” Inspection Reports of Party Inspectors of Giresun, Ordu and Zonguldak, BCA CHP [490.1/655.182.1], 14.09.1931.

In the mines, more than 2000 men worked underground no fewer than 12 hours a day.¹²¹⁸

A leftist and illegal newspaper of the time gave brief information about the long working hours in big factories. For instance, as stated above, in the Ereğli coal mines, the working hours reached up to 14-15 hours a day regardless of whether or not the workers were well nourished or healthy. Many private factories forced the workers to stay on the shop floor about 12 hours a day. Almost all textile plants and food factories employed many young girls and boys below 10 years old. Like adult workers, these children workers also were supposed to work about up to 14 hours a day, in same workplaces with the adult workers, on empty stomachs and without sleep. Some large factories, like the famous Süreyyapaşa Textile Factory, for instance, did not allow their workers to have a day off on even at weekends and other holidays. Even in the public enterprises of Sümerbank and the state monopolies, the working hours were not less than 9 hours a day.¹²¹⁹

The low-income workers and sales clerks in small workshops and stores also had to work long hours a day. The workers who were employed in the drapery stores, for instance, were supposed to work minimum 12 hours every day without a break. The shop floors were generally dark, damp, musty, and cold cellars.¹²²⁰ Perhaps the longest working hours were in the bakeries. The bread makers in the bakeries generally worked between 14 and 18 hours a day, without a day off a week. The most of the bakers, who did not want to pay high wages to qualified workers,

¹²¹⁸ "Fethiye'de," *Orak Çekiç*, No. 9 (July 20, 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 427.

¹²¹⁹ "8 Saat İş Günü," *Orak Çekiç*, No. 90 (20 Dec. 1935), quoted in Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 90-91.

¹²²⁰ "İş Kanunu ve Esnafımız," *Esnaf Meslek Mecmuası*, No. 3 (1934), p. 2.

generally preferred to employ unqualified cheap labor exploited as much as possible. That was a reason why the bread was generally was in poor quality.¹²²¹

In the handloom weaving industry, the working hours were unregulated. The competition of the cheaper items produced by the big industry and imported fabrics and carpets forced the weavers to overwork for their very survival. All members of a weaver family generally worked between 8 and 14 hours a day without a break. If a master employed workers at home or in a small shop, they generally forced their workers to work as much as possible.¹²²²

Most of the workers in both the public and private sectors were deprived of a weekly day off. Almost all employers and foremen pressed their workers to work on the weekends, even after the enactment of the Weekly Day of Rest Law in 1924. In 1924, the government decided to apply this law to all workers and employees in both state and private sectors and both commercial and industrial enterprises. On the other hand, many exemptions in the law practically left a considerable number of workers without the right to a day of rest. This situation continued until the enactment of the National Days and General Holidays Law in 1935, which fixed the official weekend holiday as Sunday, and prescribed a paid weekend vacation for all waged and salaried people. However, many employers tried to avoid this law.¹²²³

The Shop Floor Environments

The shop floor environments were generally irritating, unsanitary and unsafe for the workers. Above all, especially for the workers, most of whom were the peasants,

¹²²¹ Mehmet Enver Beşe, “Safranbolu’da ve Köylerinde Aile,” *Halk Bilgisi Haberleri*, No. 44 (Jan. 12, 1934), p. 189. In addition, see BCA CHP [490.1/1444.26.1], 17.06.1933

¹²²² See Halûk Cillov, *Denizli El Dokumacılığı Sanayii* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi İktisat ve İktisaiyat Enstitüsü Neşriyatından-İsmail Akgün Matbaası, 1949), p. 129.

¹²²³ “İşçilere Yazık Oluyor,” *Tan*, 22.06.1935.

self-employed people or artisans who began to work in the newly established factories, the industrial work was not bearable. The separation of house from workplace made the work less amusing and satisfying and more depressing and grim for these workers. In addition, they experienced more impersonal and formal relations, strict discipline, several penalties for violation of the factory rules, exhausting rhythms of work, and a strict time-thrift, in contrast to their usual works and lifestyle. That is the reason why the large state factories suffered such a high rate of labor turn over during the period, which will be addressed in Chapter Nine.

The descriptions of some factories given by Linke vividly illustrate the working and living conditions of the workers. The men who worked on public construction projects were among the most destitutes. For example, in her visit to the building site of the most important railway project of the government implemented by the Simeryol Company in Sivas, Linke witnessed how each group of ten to fifteen workers had to live in one tent. These men worked so long in hard conditions that “after ten hours’ work, they don’t feel up to a great deal of nonsense.”¹²²⁴ As for their basic diet, “they live on rice or bread and a handful of dried olives.”¹²²⁵

In Mersin, as stated before, Linke visited the Mersin Textile Factory (Mersin Mensucat Fabrikası), which had shockingly bad and stressful working conditions. After this visit, she observed two private factories, which had more unfavorable conditions. One of them was an oil and soap factory. She described the harsh conditions in this factory as follows:

The work was much harder and unhealthier than at Mensucat Fabrikası, especially oil-press, where the heat and the intensity with which the work had to be carried out were so terrific that the men had continually to change between eight minutes work and eight minutes rest.¹²²⁶

¹²²⁴ Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, p. 189.

¹²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

Unquestionably, the riskiest and the most unsafe working conditions for the workers' lives were in the mining sector. In Zonguldak Ereğli Coal Mines Enterprise, for instance, the work accidents caused about 4000 casualties of which 282 were fatal between 1927 and 1932.¹²²⁷ In the Fethiye chrome mines, for instance, everyday there was a fatal accident but because the company gave bribes to the local officials and gendarme, they drew up a report affirming no responsibility of the company in these accidents. Hence, the company managed to escape from paying compensation to the relatives of the workers who died. In addition, the police took the identity cards of the peasant workers as hostage in order to prevent their escape from the mines. Along with this, the company did not pay their wages until the end of their third months in order to inhibit them from leaving the mines. If a peasant-worker left the work within three months, he could not receive his accrued wages.¹²²⁸

Like the mines, the printing houses also had harmful shop floor environments for the workers' health. According to a RPP inspector who investigated the working conditions in İzmir, the printing houses had the loudest and most stressful working environment. Along with the loud machines, the air inside shop floors was inevitably polluted with chemicals that caused lung diseases. Despite these heavy conditions, the workers received only 8 TL a week.¹²²⁹

The tobacco warehouses also had one of the most unsuitable and unhealthy working environment. In the warehouses, the employers generally ignored the basic hygiene measures. For instance, although the workers were employed only in spring and summer, these warehouses did not have ventilating systems to take out the hot air polluted with the nicotine inside the stores. In many warehouses, the employer

¹²²⁷ Çıladır, *Zonguldak Havzasının Tarihi Gelişimi*, pp. 118-119.

¹²²⁸ "Fethiye'de," *Orak Çekiç*, No. 9 (July 20, 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 427.

¹²²⁹ BCA CHP [490.1/1444.26.1], 17.06.1933

did not provide even the basic facilities for the workers such as clean water and nutritious food.¹²³⁰

Furthermore, the tobacco warehouse workers were seasonally employed for only five to six months in spring and summer. In the remaining parts of the year, they either remained unemployed or worked as casual laborers. Some of them also accepted to work at the big tobacco farms in Anatolian villages. Working in the remote villages of Bafra, Düzce and İzmit deprived the workers of even the minimum medical treatment, medicines and basic sanitary and hygiene conditions. Therefore, many women lost their babies especially during this village work. Since these workers were paid according to the kilos of tobacco that were baled, workers often had to work from the morning call-to-prayer to mid-night.¹²³¹

The conditions of those workers who worked at home were not so better than those of the factory workers. A foreign journalist who travelled every nook and cranny of Turkey towards the end of the 1920s, in the Kayseri stage of his tour, recorded the poor working conditions of women workers weaving silk carpets in their homes as follows:

The women made the carpets in their own homes, helped by the whole family, from the age of seven upwards, and were paid by the square foot at very poor rates. In another shed were a dozen looms –rough heavy wood structures hung with stones for weights- where a number of children and two women, cramped on to low benches before the looms, were knotting the pile on to the warp of large carpets, with amazing speed, concentration and dexterity. They worked from sunrise to sunset for a few pence only. Here was the beginning of the factory system, with all the problems of child labor.¹²³²

¹²³⁰ Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p.71, 78, 86, 89.

¹²³¹ *Ibid.*, p.16.

¹²³² Harold C. Armstrong, *Turkey and Syria Reborn: A Record of Two Years of Travel* (London: J. Lane, 1930), pp. 176-177.

Some female handloom weavers spent a lifetime making a kind of carpet.¹²³³ Bernard Newman, another American traveler in Turkey, also, mentioned these destitute families and female workers who devoted their lives to weaving carpets in their homes, which very size of their work kept them outside the scope of the labor laws.¹²³⁴

In handloom weaving centers such as Denizli, Aydın, Manisa, Isparta, many of families engaged in handloom weaving in their homes. The handlooms were run day and night. Children, women, men or aged grandfathers or grandmothers worked by turns with immense industry.¹²³⁵

In a report, Bekir Kaleli, the RPP inspector of Isparta, described the working conditions of the hundreds of women and children workers who were employed at the carpet-looms there in 1936. These people were working from sunrise to sunset everyday without break. They received between 10 and 30 piasters a day without any social facility.¹²³⁶ Another Isparta inspector, Osman Şahinbaş, also poignantly depicted the poor and low-paid women workers who were employed in their own and homes at carpet-looms and exploited by a sort of putting-out system:

There are 3,250 carpet-looms in Isparta in 1943. Nearly 10,000 people are working. The carpet looms are located in homes and all of the workers are female. Although these female workers have to work the great part of the day, their wages are very low and barely subsistence level.¹²³⁷

These handlooms were in general located in humid, dusty, and dark places. The masters generally preferred humid and dark rooms in order to increase the strength of the rope. In winter, the weavers did not heat the rooms in which they worked for

¹²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹²³⁴ Newman, *Turkish Crossroads*, p. 172.

¹²³⁵ Cillov, *Denizli El Dokumacılığı Sanayii*, p. 36.

¹²³⁶ From the RPP General Secretary to Provincial Chief of the RPP in Zonguldak, BCA CHP [490.1/726.485.1], 01.01.1936.

¹²³⁷ Report of Inspector of Isparta District and Representative of Edirne, Osman Şahinbaş, BCA CHP [490.1/662.215.1], 23.11.1943.

hours in order to decrease the costs and to maintain the humidity. Therefore, many masters and their family members suffered from rheumatic diseases. If they dyed the fabrics and ropes in the same place, the air became more humid and polluted with the smell of dye. The working rooms were generally moist and dusty places without sunlight and fresh air. Furthermore, the calorie intake of the family members who worked hard for hours fell dramatically. Many of them fed on only bread, cheese, and olive throughout the day. For this reason, they often suffered from rheumatic diseases, bone diseases, and sciatica. Furthermore, the working in the dark also harmed their eyes.¹²³⁸

Finally, the employment of children under age of 12 years of age was widespread in spite of the prohibitions of the Public Hygiene Law. The great part of the handloom weavers and almost all of the apprentices in small shops who were worked long hours in return for a few piasters were small children. Especially textile and cotton factories widely exploited the child labor. For instance, the employment of the children around 7 and 8 years old was common in cotton and textile factories in Adana. The factories generally paid them about 10 piasters a day for 12 hours in heavy and unsanitary working conditions.¹²³⁹ Similarly, the observations of Linke about a cotton factory in Tarsus that she supported with a photo, proves the common employment of children in unsuitable conditions:

I was led, though rather in haste, through the old part which had been in constant use for nearly fifty years, gloomy, depressing workrooms, stuffy and trembling with noise, and it was here that I found the children working, little creatures whom no one could believe to be twelve years or even older.¹²⁴⁰

¹²³⁸ Cillov, *Denizli El Dokumacılığı Sanayii*, pp. 132-133.

¹²³⁹ "8 Saat İşgünü," Orak Çekiç, 20.12.1935, No.1, quoted in Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 90.

¹²⁴⁰ Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, p. 268.

“Even the best of the social measures taken for the safety and health of the workers in Turkey is in primitive level.” “The measures about the workers’ health are horrific.” “The social insurance system was rare and covered only very limited number of people.” Thus wrote a group of foreign economists who investigated the Turkish economy in the early 1930s.¹²⁴¹ They were not Soviet experts; they were the experts of the American-led Hines-Kemmerer mission, whose charge was to advise to the government on economic matters and its industrialization program.¹²⁴²

Indeed, the great part of the low-income wage earners suffered the absence of basic social policies such as a social security system, social insurances, retirement funds, compensation mechanisms for the job-related accidents and diseases, paid-vacations, maternity insurance, and breast-feeding leave. Furthermore, there were not even the legal rules and principles of the hiring and firing processes and many similar social measures. Most of the workers were at the mercy of their employers.

Except for a few large public enterprises, most of the companies, which were required to employ doctors and establish infirmaries according to the Public Hygiene Law, did not have even one doctor. Given the very small number of doctors, pharmacists, health officials and nurses in the country,¹²⁴³ the medical treatment was in most cases was a privileges of the people who could afford it. For that reason, the doctors who were employed in factories did not actually work on the premises, but mostly worked in other places or in their own private office. Therefore, they did not

¹²⁴¹ See Hines, *Türkiyenin İktisadi Bakımdan Umumi Bir Tetkiki*, pp. 242-244.

¹²⁴² Marcie J. Patton, “The U.S. Advisory Aid to Turkey: The Hines-Kemmerer Mission,” *The United States & the Middle East: Diplomatic and Economic Relations in Perspective*, YCIAS Vol. III, 193, 34, pp. 46-47.

¹²⁴³ As of 1938, the number of doctors in Turkey was 1950, health officials 1450, nurses 360, and pharmacists 250. Rıdvan Ege, *Türkiye’nin Sağlık Hizmetleri ve İsmet Paşa* (Ankara: Türk Hava Kurumu Basımevi, 1992), p. 26.

serve the workers satisfactorily. Employers, seeing even minimum free medical services as a big cost, agreed with the doctors to fulfill the legal requirements of the Public Hygiene Law on paper. Consequently, workers did not receive free medical treatment or medical examinations in many factories. According to a RPP inspector's report on the working conditions of the industrial workers, "the employment of the doctors in factories was generally eyewash."¹²⁴⁴

The Turkish working class suffered most from the lack of an efficient social security system. There were no adequate and comprehensive social insurance systems, social assistance and retirement funds covering the great part of the workers in cases of disease, injuries, pregnancy, death, and retirement. Indeed, many of those industrial workers and civil servants who were exposed to work-related illnesses, accidents, or even to death, were assisted by neither their employers, nor the state.¹²⁴⁵ Especially those workers who were employed in risky sectors in unsanitary and unprotected conditions suffered most the lack of a compensation system against industrial diseases and injuries. In spite of the increase in work-related accidents due to the growing industrialization in the 1930s, there was no legal obligation for the employers to compensate the workers for damages.¹²⁴⁶

In spite of the increasing number of retirement funds established by the government in some public sectors from mid-1930s on, most workers and even a great part of low-income state employees were deprived retirement pension rights and retirement grants. The majority of them were not eligible for private or public pension benefits when it came to a point where they were not able to work any more.

¹²⁴⁴ BCA CHP [490.1/1444.26.1], 17.06.1933

¹²⁴⁵ For a general snapshot of the development of the social security institutions and social measures from the late Ottoman era to the early Republic, see Ferit H. Saymen, *Türkiye'de Sosyal Sigortaların Gelişme Hareketleri ve Yeni Temayülleri* (İstanbul: İsmail Akgün Matbaası, 1953).

¹²⁴⁶ Orhan Tuna, "İş İstatistikleri," *İş ve Düşünce*, No. 29 (1942), p. 344.

Many state officials who were retired due to disability did not receive any disability pensions.

As for these limited number of state officials who had pension rights, bureaucratic red tape impeded them from benefitting from such rights. Even those aged and mid-ranking state officials who had certain rights and retirement and mutual assistance funds hit the wall of the bureaucratic red tape. Many former state-officials who retired from a governmental institutions and who depended on a official social assistance and retirement fund, encountered many difficulties and long bureaucratic delays, often waiting for months or years to receive their retirement pensions or gratuities.

The widows and orphans of the workers and state officials who had died on the job because of work-related diseases or accidents were also deprived of efficient social assistance mechanisms. As for the veterans, and the widows and orphans of the martyrs, who were mostly poor people as a part of working-class; although they had the right to benefit from a war-disability allowances or other pension programs in theory, many poor veterans and the poor families of the martyrs never received their pensions or received too late and with great difficulties, as will be described in detail below.

Arbitrary Hiring and Layoff, and Lack of Redundancy Payment

During the period, the recruitment and layoff procedures were extremely arbitrary. The employers, factory managers, artisans and foremen were able to fire whomever they wanted without any redundancy payment. Again, the employers were able to dismiss a worker who was handicapped from a work-related accident or disease

without any work accident compensation.¹²⁴⁷ As reported by the RPP inspector who investigated the working conditions in İzmir, the owners of printing houses, textile factories, and the sulphur factory, and many other workplaces had an absolute right to fire any worker without paying any compensation.¹²⁴⁸ In the sulphur factory in İzmir, for instance, the factory refused to pay any compensation to six workers who went blind due to the sulphur dioxide within the previous year.¹²⁴⁹ As reported by the deputy of Samsun in 1936, the employers' absolute right to hire, fire or fine a worker in all tobacco stores and factories was beyond all questions.¹²⁵⁰

Not only two Anatolian provinces like İzmir and Samsun, but also in İstanbul and other provinces, the employers' absolute and arbitrary hiring and firing rights were unquestionable by workers. The foremen always wanted to hire those submissive workers who absolutely obeyed their authority. Furthermore, the employers could change the wages or paydays at will.¹²⁵¹

For example, there were no regular wage payment schedules, systematic recruitment or firing procedures, or fair penalty systems in tobacco warehouses and factories.¹²⁵² The foremen had a decisive role in recruitment and dismissal of workers. Thus, they had great authority over workers inside and even outside the workplaces. Additionally, their attitudes toward the workers were usually harsh and relentless on the shop floor. Furthermore, they as the representatives of the

¹²⁴⁷ "Tazminat Verilmiyor," *Son Posta*, 11.03.1932.

¹²⁴⁸ "İzmir'in Esnaf ve İşçi Teşkilâtında Bir Buçuk Senelik Mesâi ve Tetkikatıma Ait Umumî Rapor," BCA CHP [490.1/1444.26.1], 17.06.1933

¹²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵⁰ BCA CHP [490.1/1444.22.1], 07.02.1936.

¹²⁵¹ Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, p. 63, 67; Hikmet Akgül (ed.), *Şoför İdris: Anılar* (İstanbul: Yar Yayınları, 2004), p. 29, 45, 46, 50.

¹²⁵² Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 16.

employers in the warehouse usually sided with the employers in any dispute over wages or working conditions.¹²⁵³

The printing houses in İzmir, likewise, did not have a rule or procedure for hiring and lay off of the workers. In the textile factories, too, there were no systematic methods for the recruitment and layoff of workers. The penalties were applied arbitrarily.¹²⁵⁴ Absolute rights of the employers and foremen in hiring or firing processes allowed them to exploit female workers sexually. The sexual harassment of women and even very young female workers, which led many of them to prostitution, was common in textile factories.¹²⁵⁵ Another example for widespread sexual harassment of female workers was from the tobacco factories. According to the petition of the workers in a tobacco factory of the Monopoly Administration in İstanbul sent to the Minister of Custom and Monopoly, Ali Rıza Tarhan, the foremen and some factory managers sexually harassed the female workers.¹²⁵⁶

Bad Housing Conditions

Housing was another serious problem of the low-income groups in urban areas. Unsuitable housing conditions that stemmed from high rents, low wages, and the lack of adequate number of suitable houses forced workers to live in slums, which

¹²⁵³ Detailed information and examples about abuse, cheating, overexploitation, arbitrary wage freezes and cuts, beating, arbitrary lay off, and sexual harassment by foremen see Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 10, 11, 17, 86, 101-102; Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, p.66, 70, 78; Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, p.47, 48, 50, 53, 64, 99.

¹²⁵⁴ BCA CHP [490.1/1444.26.1], 17.06.1933.

¹²⁵⁵ BCA CHP [490.1/1444.26.1], 17.06.1933.

¹²⁵⁶ *Orak Çekiş*, No.11 (Oct. 1, 1936), quoted in Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, pp. 101-102.

they built themselves. Especially rents were too high and uncontrollable because most of the rents were not bound to formal contracts.¹²⁵⁷

In addition, there was no housing policy of the state and of the companies be they public or private. For example, even the large public enterprises run by Sümerbank did not provide enough housing facilities for its workers and officials. Even by 1940, the company admitted that only twenty percent of the workers and officials employed in Sümerbank benefited from housing facilities.¹²⁵⁸

Therefore, those who could not afford the high rents of the period were forced to choose between either living far away from the city or erecting a squatter-house near their workplace. In both cases, however, their living quarters did not have the necessary infrastructure, and they suffered the absence of electricity, heating and a sewage system. What is worse, the conditions characterizing these sites were, to be sure, hazardous from the point of view of health. Most of the workers in İstanbul lived in very bad conditions, in small, sunless and damp houses with single rooms, which did not have running water.¹²⁵⁹

A doctor, in an article published by *Belediye Mecmuası* (Municipality Periodical), called attention to the adverse effects of the housing problem on the people health.

In our country, the housing problem has not been solved yet. A state official who earns 100 TL a month, must spend one-fifth, that is to say, 20 TL of it on rent. Even this payment is a great burden for such a state official. When they live in suburbs in order to pay less money for rent, they have to live far from their workplaces; therefore, they lose much of their spare time in commuting.

¹²⁵⁷ Muvaffak Şeref, *Türkiye ve Sosyalizm* (İstanbul: Acar Basımevi, 1968), p. 167. Sexual harassment of female and child workers by employers, managers and foremen was probably not peculiar to the textile factories in İzmir or tobacco factories in İstanbul, but widespread in most of industrial plants throughout the country, and not only in Turkey, but also in almost all capitalist economies as a universal fact of industrial capitalism exploiting not only labor of women and children, but also their bodies and sexuality. For a brief information about the increasing sexual abuse of female and child workers by their employers with the industrial-capitalism, see Karl Marx, *Kapital*, Vol.1 (Ankara: Sol Yayınları, 2000), pp. 378-388.

¹²⁵⁸ Sümerbank, *Cumhuriyet'in 25'inci Yılı*, (İstanbul: Kulen Basımevi, 1948), p. 54.

¹²⁵⁹ Sabiha Sertel, "Sefalet Yuvalarında," *Son Posta*, 17.07.1935.

The houses in these places are generally wooden and old buildings. They do not get hot adequately. Therefore, we prefer to live in small apartments in close proximity to city-centers and jam into their two or three dark and sunless rooms.¹²⁶⁰

Indeed, those who lived far from the city faced the transportation problem; and in order to cut down on the transportation costs, they spent hours on their way to and from work. This daily commuting made the working day even longer. For instance, the workers who inhabited hovels and wooden shanty houses in Kurtuluş hit the long road between their houses and factories in Unkapanı, Kasımpaşa, and Cibali.¹²⁶¹

There were many single workers who lived in workplaces at which they were employed. In some small workshops, for example, in bakeries, those workers who were alone and did not have a house had to live in the shop. Some of the bread makers, dough kneaders, cooks and apprentices in bakeshops, for instance, took shelter anywhere inside the shop that was suitable for sleep. Some slept on the stands in shops.¹²⁶²

The housing conditions of the workers in coalmines were much worse.¹²⁶³ Almost all of the temporary peasant-origin workers and about the thirty percent of the permanent workers in the mines, who had relatively better conditions than the temporary workers, had to live in shacks near the mines in very bad conditions.¹²⁶⁴

The government decision to aid the lower-income state employees, primarily the teachers, fell short and remained unapplied during the period. In the face of the housing problem of the lower-income state officials, the government decided to give

¹²⁶⁰ Dr. Emin Kıcıman, "Sıhhat İşleri," *Belediye Mecmuası*, No. 180-181 (Jan., 1940), p. 13.

¹²⁶¹ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, p. 28.

¹²⁶² Enver Beşe, "Safranbolu'da Bir Köylünün Hayatı IV," *Halk Bilgisi Haberleri*, No. 93 (Sept., 1939), p. 198.

¹²⁶³ See Rozaliyev, *Türkiyede Sanayi Proleteryası*, p. 174.

¹²⁶⁴ Ahmet Ali Özeken, *Türkiye Kömür Ekonomisi Tarihi* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1955), p. 194.

rent aid to some lower income state employees including low-income teachers in 1932, but the most of the teachers did not receive this aid during the 1930s.¹²⁶⁵

Declining Crafts

Perhaps the most significant factor that worsened the economic standing and accordingly the mood of the artisans, which constituted the most crowded group within the working class in Turkey, was the Great Depression, the industrial drive and the competition of cheaper industrial products produced by the big factories or imported from abroad. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to generalize the artisans. They did have inner differentiations and tensions. Although some artisans benefitted from the slowdown in international trade with the Great Depression, this did not bring a substantial and general recovery in their economic status. The large part of this group, especially craftspeople and their workers in rapidly declining crafts, such as handloom weavers, tailors, carriage drivers, shoemakers, saddlers, felt makers, and small-scale tanners suffered from both the subsequent industrialization process and ongoing importation of the basic finished or semi-finished industrial goods.

The decline in foreign trade during the economic crisis and the following industrialization process of the 1930s based on the import-substitution model did not mean necessarily the protection of small craftsmen. First, the importation had gained a new momentum especially after the Lausanne Agreement between 1924 and 1929. Although the external trade of Turkey came to a halt in the first years of the 1930s due to the crisis, the importation not only in capital goods but also in semi-finished

¹²⁶⁵ “İlkokul Öğretmenlerinin Mesken Bedelleri,” *Tan*, 20.07.1943.

and finished ready-to-use products recovered in a short time between 1933 and 1938.¹²⁶⁶

On the other hand, the industrialization process and the state support the big industrial undertakings also stimulated the industrial serial production of many basic consumption goods, most of which had been produced and sold by artisans previously. During this process, artisans like shoemakers, tailors, saddlers, carpet weavers, small-scale tanners, felt makers and carriage drivers often complained about the importation of cheap finished and semi-finished goods from abroad and the adverse effects of the industrial drive on their traditional businesses. The establishment of the relatively big factories and the industrialization drive that marked the 1930s also caused frustration among them.¹²⁶⁷

Carpet and fabric weaving on handlooms was the primary business field that underwent a decline during the 1930s. The first shock came with the Great Depression. In fact, before the depression, the Turkish handloom weaving had already fallen into a decline because of the cheap carpets and clothes produced by industrial conglomerates in Europe. However, the Great Depression worsened the situation by unprecedentedly bringing down the prices. For instance, according to one carpet weaver, the buyers began to demand cheap carpets. Therefore, European carpets began to invade the markets in the Arabic countries. In addition, Armenians and Greeks in Syria and Greece also made fierce competition with the Anatolian weavers and traders. All these hit the Anatolian carpet weaving hard.¹²⁶⁸ Again, Russian and Japanese fabrics also invaded the market between 1935 and 1939. The

¹²⁶⁶ Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi*, pp. 115-116.

¹²⁶⁷ “Küçük Sanayicilerin Temennileri: Büyük Sanayi Erbabının Rekabetinden Şikayet Ediyorlar,” *Son Posta*, 26.05.1936.

¹²⁶⁸ Armstrong, *Turkey and Syria Reborn*, p. 176.

importation of these both high quality and economical fabrics hit the Turkish handloom weavers especially.¹²⁶⁹

Perhaps the main bases for handloom weaving in Turkey were the Aegean region and western Mediterranean regions. Uşak, Manisa, Balıkesir, İzmir, Denizli, Burdur and Isparta were among the primary centers for carpet, fabric and spinning manufactures based on handlooms. İzmir was also the export center for Turkish carpets.¹²⁷⁰ However, by 1934, especially the economic conditions affected the handlooms adversely by compelling most of them to limit or to halt production activities.¹²⁷¹ In fact, from the last century onward, importation of cheap goods on a liberal scale had caused the contraction of weaving and spinning with handlooms, but they had managed to survive until the 1930s in forms of home and small-scale manufacturing industry.¹²⁷² However, growing dependence on imported semi-finished intermediate goods and raw materials like some kinds of ropes, colored ropes and colorants, and the emerging big factories undermined this sector during the economic crisis especially.¹²⁷³

For example, according to a report dated January 1936 on carpet weaving in Isparta, both the number of handlooms and total output had sharply declined within the previous four years. Carpet weaving in Isparta had been a longstanding home industry. Its main labor force was approximately 3000 women between 12 and 40 years old. However, high custom tariffs of European countries and the United States had thrown this handloom production into a grave crisis causing a rapid decrease in the number of handlooms, workers, and the output per year. While the total output in

¹²⁶⁹ Cillov, *Denizli El Dokumacılığı Sanayii*, p. 152.

¹²⁷⁰ Şevket Süreyya [Aydemir] (ed.), *Ege Günü I* (Ankara: Milli İktisat ve Tasarruf Cemiyeti, 1934), p. 39.

¹²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

the region had reached to 200,000 square meters in 1927, the production levels of 1935 decreased to 60,000 square meters. Correspondingly, in the same time span, stagnation in the sector brought about a reduction in wages from 400 piasters to 200 piasters per one square meter.¹²⁷⁴ That is to say, the competition caused the reduction in carpet-weavers wages.

In addition, the Nazilli textile factory, that was installed in 1935 began to supply three-times more than the total demand of the region,¹²⁷⁵ and likely induced such reduction in the handloom production levels. Again, a new large textile plant of the Çolakoğulları family in Kula using high technology and employing about 300 workers went into operation. This further worsened the situation of the crafters and the home industry. Especially carpet weavers were so on the edge of devastation that many people formerly engaged in the handloom production at home flooded into the neighboring counties to look for jobs.¹²⁷⁶

As seen from the figures, even in Uşak, the heart of carpet weaving of Turkey, production levels reached their lowest levels during the mid-1930s. In comparison with the 450,000 square meters production and the 2,400,000 TL profit in 1927, the production levels and profits hit rock bottom in 1936 with barely 3000 square meters and 9000 TL.¹²⁷⁷ Indeed, as reported by one newspaper, there had been approximately a thousand carpet-weaving handlooms in Uşak formerly. On the other hand, only a hundred of them managed to survive until the end of the 1930s.¹²⁷⁸

¹²⁷⁴ BCA CHP [490.1/726.481.1], 21.01.1936.

¹²⁷⁵ Şevket Süreyya [Aydemir], *Ege Günü*, p. 64.

¹²⁷⁶ Summaries of the reports of Manisa deputies Asım Tümer, Faik Kurdoğlu, Hikmet Bayur, Hüsnü Yaman, Kani Karaosman, Kazım Nami Duru, Kenan Örer, Osman Erçin, Rudvan Nafiz Edgüder, and Yaşar Özey, BCA CHP [490.1/684.317.1], 15.12.1935.

¹²⁷⁷ Önder Küçükerman, *Batı Anadolu'daki Türk Halıcılık Geleneği İçinde İzmir Limanı ve Isparta Halı Fabrikası* (Ankara: Sümerbank/Sümerhalı, 1990), p. 21.

¹²⁷⁸ "Uşak'ta," *Son Posta*, 21.10.1932.

Table 27 - Carpet Production in Uşak Handlooms in Square meters and Profits in the Carpet Weaving in Turkish Liras, 1927-1938.

Years	Square meters	Profits (TL)
1927	450,000	2,400,000
1928	420,000	2,196,000
1929	400,000	1.150,000
1930	300,000	1,500,000
1931	225,000	500,000
1932	50,000	500,000
1933	35,000	110,000
1934	10,000	31,000
1935	5,000	15,000
1936	3,000	9,000
1937	9,200	27,000
1938	16,000	49,000

Source: Önder Küçükerman, *Batı Anadolu'daki Türk Halıcılık Geleneği İçinde İzmir Limanı ve Isparta Halı Fabrikası* (Ankara: Sümerbank/Sümerhalı, 1990), p. 21.

In some handloom weaving centers of eastern Anatolia, the situation was similar more or less. According to a contemporary observer, the mechanized textile factories springing in the 1930s around Gaziantep, for example, undermined handloom production in homes. In the late 1930s, the great part of the fabrics, clothes, and carpets began to be produced by the mechanized factories instead of handlooms.¹²⁷⁹

Likewise, handloom weavers in the Black Sea region were also in crisis due to the fierce competition of imported goods that came through the Black Sea. A newspaper reported in April 1932 that hundreds of handloom weavers and traders in Samsun, Ladik and Merzifon were at a loss in the face of the fierce competition of the cheap imported Japanese fabrics, haberdashery goods, and ready-to-wear clothes.¹²⁸⁰

Another craft hard hit by the industrialization was shoemaking. As reported at an early date like 1932, because of the newly established or mechanized shoe factories, the small-scale shoemakers had no work to do. An estimated 30,000

¹²⁷⁹ Mitat Enç, *Selamlık Sohbetleri* (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2007), p. 221.

¹²⁸⁰ "Samsun Tacirleri Japon Dampingi Karşısında Şaşırdılar," *Son Posta*, 02.04.1932.

shoemakers in İstanbul reportedly went out of business due to the fierce competition of the big industry and imported shoes within last a few years.¹²⁸¹ Mehmed Halid Bayrı, a prominent folklorist and keen observer of his time, noted in 1935 that whereas there had been 150 shoemaking shops in Balıkesir, a western Anatolian city, until a few years earlier, by 1935, about one-third of them had had to close their shutters.¹²⁸² The shoemakers held the rubber shoes imported from Europe responsible for their decline. Apart from the cheap imported shoes, they blamed the new factories such as Sümerbank Beykoz Shoe and Leather Factory for mass production of rubber shoes. They frequently complained about business stagnation up to the end of the 1930s.¹²⁸³

Indeed, rubber shoes were the main cause lying behind their loss of ground. These shoes were both imported from abroad and produced by the Beykoz Shoe and Leather Factory, and a few other big shoe factories. They were much cheaper and produced in larger quantities than the hand-made leather shoes. A pair of rubber shoes was 120 piasters, but a pair of the lowest quality leather shoes was between 2 or 3 TL. The cost of the imported Japanese rubber shoes to the Turkish shoe merchants was only 20 piasters in spite of the high custom tariffs. Therefore, they could import and market these cheap shoes with good profit margins. In the 1930s, even the peasants in Anatolian villages began to wear these cheap and ready-made rubber shoes.¹²⁸⁴

Tanning also had been one of the most profitable professions and a going concern in the past. However, although it was still alive, the old profits and prestige the profession had yielded in the past diminished considerably, except for a few big

¹²⁸¹ "Halkın Sesi," *Son Posta*, 02.05.1932.

¹²⁸² Bayrı, "Balıkesirde Pabuçculuk," p. 289.

¹²⁸³ Hüseyin Avni [Şanda], "Harp Senesi İçinde Fabrikalarımızın Faaliyeti Arttı mı Azaldı mı?" *İktisadi Yürüyüş*, No. 27 (Jan., 1941), p. 11; see also Bayrı, "Balıkesirde Pabuçculuk," p. 297.

¹²⁸⁴ Hüseyin Avni [Şanda], "Kauçuk ve Deri Meselesi," *Yeni Adam*, No. 24 (June 11, 1934), p. 9.

industrialists. First, the Great Depression affected the profession adversely as it had done to the other crafts. However, not only the Great Depression, but also the industrialization process and the mechanization in transportation unleashed by the Republican government undermined the tannery. Especially the expansion of railway networks and tramways, and the increasing number of motor vehicles such as cars, lorries, and buses caused a decrease in the number of carriage drivers, who were the primary customers of tanners. Increasingly going out of the business due to the growing number of motor vehicles being in demand for long or short distance transportation, carriage drivers were no longer the profitable customer group for tanners as they had been.¹²⁸⁵

Moreover, in the traditional labor of division, tanneries were the main suppliers of processed leather, which was the basic raw material for leather shoes. However, the importation and domestic production of rubber shoes devastated their profession as well as that of the shoemakers.¹²⁸⁶ In addition, due to the increasing growth of capital accumulation and installment relatively big leather factories began to conquer the market at the expense of small tanners. In the interwar years, there were 17 big and mechanized tanners, 113 small-scale traditional tanners in Kazlıçeşme, which was the center of tannery in Turkey in those years. These capitalist and small-scale tanners were in competition each other.¹²⁸⁷

Among the most prominent traditional crafts in Anatolia was felting (*keçecilik*). Felt makers had been supplying the felt carpets, felt pads, felt covers, felt bags, duffel coats, saddlecloths, felt cloth and several styles of felt caps for centuries. However, according to the observations of Bayrı, felting was in decline in Anatolian

¹²⁸⁵ Mehmed Halid [Bayrı], "Balıkesir'de Dabaklık," *Halk Bilgisi Haberleri*, No. 27 (Aug. 15, 1933), p. 65.

¹²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹²⁸⁷ "Rekabet: Dericiler Geçimsizliğe Başladı," *Son Posta*, 06.06.1932. Additionally see Hasan Yelmen, "Kazlıçeşme'de Dericilik," *Kazlıçeşme'de 50 Yıl*, Vol. 1 (İstanbul: Ezgi Ajans, 1998), p.245.

cities. In Balıkesir, where he drew examples from, the number of felting shops had decreased from 22 to 15 in recent years. Indeed, of these, 14 felt makers were tenants in their shops, while only one of them owned his shop.¹²⁸⁸

The sales of the imported or new industry-made rugs and other goods substituting the felt makers' hand-made goods at lower prices reduced the consumption of the traditional hand-made felt goods. Therefore, felt makers sometimes had to sell their products at 5 percent profits or at costs, or sometimes at a fraction of the costs.¹²⁸⁹ In addition, the hat reform made the matter worse for them. While before the hat reform they had produced and sold out a minimum of 1000 felt caps per year, after the reform, they were able to sell only 380 caps a year. From the reform onward, this huge demand gradually dropped about 40 percent.¹²⁹⁰

Carriage drivers were also among the victims of the industrialization, particularly from the increasing motor vehicles, cars, taxis, lorries, busses and railways. Although they survived throughout the period, the modernization of the transportation disadvantaged them.¹²⁹¹

The losses of carriage drivers brought losses for the saddlers. The industrialization process, especially the growing number of motor vehicles, undermined saddlery by decreasing the number of carriages as the basic customer of saddlers. In his observations on the Balıkesir saddlers in 1934, Bayrı stated that this craft also had declined in the recent years. The main reason for this was the change in transportation methods.¹²⁹²

¹²⁸⁸ Mehmed Halid [Bayrı], "Balıkesirde Keçecilik," *Halk Bilgisi Haberleri*, No. 29 (Oct. 29, 1933), p. 120.

¹²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

¹²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹²⁹¹ "15 Bin Kişinin Derdi," *Son Posta*, 07.02.1935.

¹²⁹² Mehmed Halit [Bayrı], "Balıkesirde Saraçlık," p. 237.

Undoubtedly, one important result of this trend was the growth of dispossession and consequently unemployment of craftspeople. Most of the craftspeople resisted to the dispossession in many ways and most of them survived in one way or another. A considerable number of them had to change their jobs or become unemployed. For instance, by 1935, not only carriage drivers, but also people in related professions such as blacksmithing and harness making, which had been employed up to 50,000 people, became unemployed or had had to get other jobs within last ten or fifteen years.¹²⁹³

¹²⁹³ “Atlı Arabalar ve Otomobil,” *Tan*, 05.02.1935.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE WORKING CLASS DISCONTENT

This chapter examines the working class opinion regarding social and economic matters ranging from the wages, working conditions, high cost of living to social policies, the Labor law, and professional associations. Rather than reducing the working class to the industrial workers, this chapter focuses on all of low-income wage earners including low-income civil servants, retirees, journeymen, and sales clerks, and the small-sized self-employed people, like craftsmen. This chapter suggests that the workers, generally thinking subjectively in their own terms and according to their own interests, were not deceived by the official nationalist and populist discourse. They were well aware of the fluctuations in their standard of living, violation of their rights, inequalities, exploitation, and insufficient social policies. Their personal experience of the Turkish economy, living and working conditions under the single-party regime led to a widespread criticism of both the economic conditions, capitalist classes, and the government. They often raised their voices and objections against the low, unequal and non-paid wages, long and exhausting working hours, terrific working conditions, bad treatment by foremen and employers, and lack of basic social policy measures. In addition to questioning the dominant discourse, they did not hesitate in invoking the regime's own ideological principles and claims against the government.

Discontent with Wages and Salaries

First, the main grievance of the low-income wage earners, especially workers in industries was the very low wages or wage cuts. Especially the complaints about the

low and unequal wages filled the pages of the newspapers during the period. When a newspaper correspondent interviewed low-income wage earners, they first mentioned the unsatisfactory wages in comparison with the high prices. With the Great Depression, many companies that came to a halt resorted to wage cuts and wage freezes in order to keep down the costs and to weather the crisis. As a matter of fact, not only in the economic crisis, but also before and after the crisis the employers often went to reduction of the wages according to the market conditions. Surely, the poor workers were the chief victims of these cuts in wages. In some instances, they were deprived of even their lowered wages from one to six months. Irregularity in payments of daily and weekly wages also frequently aggrieved them.

The discontent with the poor wages in return for hard work without any social protection played a primary role in the emergence of the strikes and walkouts during the 1920s and 1930s. As Zehra Kosova described in her memoirs, the workers were not satisfied with the quite low wages and therefore often grumbled about the wage levels in return for hard works during the single-party era.¹²⁹⁴ The memoirs of Şoför İdris confirm those of Kosova. He also described how the tobacco warehouse workers, along with all other workers, were widely discontented with the unsatisfactory wages. The low wages caused the workers' discontent, their objections to the employers, tumultuous incidents and walkouts several times in the tobacco warehouses. In one case, for instance, the workers of Mithat Nemlizados' Tobacco Warehouse in Ahırkapı collectively decided to demand a rise of 10 piasters in daily wage. The employer's negative response to the workers' demands led the workers to a walkout.¹²⁹⁵ Again, the low wages levels the Samsun Monopoly Tobacco Factory insisted on in spite of the workers demands for a raise also caused a walkout,

¹²⁹⁴ Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, p. 70.

¹²⁹⁵ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, p. 66.

attracting the public attention in 1936.¹²⁹⁶ It is possible to cite many examples of such workers' protests that were caused by the low wage levels, but I will discuss them in Chapter Ten.

During the 1930s, many daily wage earners in various sectors also complained about low wages and especially wage-cuts. Especially in the early 1930s, the frequent wage cuts because of the economic crisis angered especially the poorest segments of the working class. In 1930, a worker at the Yedikule Railway Depots, for instance, wrote the following to a newspaper:

In recent days, I was usually supposed to work overtime and my daily wage was cut by foremen and employers. Finally, I was fired from many factories. Now, I am working here but each worker I talked to were discontented with the employers and they said that their wages were cut suddenly in last days.¹²⁹⁷

Likewise, a ship-worker, pointing to his daily-wage of 20 piasters after the employer decreased the wage levels, asked how he could support his family on such a little money.¹²⁹⁸ In following years, the low-income workers' complaints about the wage cuts continued. In February 1934, for instance, Balya-Karaaydın miners complained about a 25 percent decrease in their wages in spite of their hard and unsafe working conditions.¹²⁹⁹

Irregularity in the payment of daily wages was a common problem of the lower classes especially during the years of economic crisis. For instance, in a letter to *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, a worker in Yumruzade Şakir Bey's factory in Karaağaç disclosed his grievance, which stemmed from a two and a half months delay in the

¹²⁹⁶ From the Chair of RPP Provincial Administration and the Samsun Samsun Deputy M. Ali Yörük to the RPP Secretariat-General, BCA CHP [490.1/1444.22.1], 07.02.1936.

¹²⁹⁷ "Complaint Letter by a carpenter named M. Z. working in the Yedikule Railway Depot," *Kızıl İstanbul*, No. 2 (July 17, 1930), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 227.

¹²⁹⁸ *Bolşevik*, No. 38 (1931), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 316.

¹²⁹⁹ "Yevmiyeler," *Köroğlu*, 07.02.1934.

payment of his wages.¹³⁰⁰ Likewise, in a letter to the same newspaper, a female worker from Defterdar textile factory of Sümerbank wrote that the workers were very angry, because, although they worked everyday from sunrise to sunset in return for 40 piasters a day, they always received this small amount of money quite late and not in full amount.¹³⁰¹

In 1932, the Navigation Company (Seyrisefain) in İstanbul, withheld the workers' accrued wages for months, spurred a reaction among all the workers and led them to remonstrate against the company management.¹³⁰² Similarly, Süreyya Paşa Textile Factory in Balat had not paid the wages for two months by March 1936. This caused widespread discontent among the workers and led them to protests the factory management.¹³⁰³ Similarly, in same year, Paşabahçe Brick Factory delayed the payment of wages for two and a half months. This created deep resentment against the factory management among the workers.¹³⁰⁴

Worst of all were some employers who preferred to pay the wages in kind such as bread, flour, cereals, tobacco, or oil at their will. For instance, railway construction workers in the building of the Niğde-Burgaz line, complained about the construction company that distributed only two kilos of bread and a packet of cigarettes as daily wage to the workers instead of cash money.¹³⁰⁵

There were many low-ranking state officials whose salaries were paid by the local governments. The local governments often were late to pay their salaries and caused a widespread discontent among the state officials. Of these state employees,

¹³⁰⁰ "Amele Gündeliğini Alamıyormuş," *Cumhuriyet*, 24.01.1930. According to this newspaper report, the workers in a factory in Karaağaç had sent a letter to the Cumhuriyet newspaper, complaining about the unpaid wages for two and a half months.

¹³⁰¹ "Bir İşçi Kadın Diyor ki!" *Cumhuriyet*, 09.03.1929.

¹³⁰² "Seyrisefain İşçileri İdareden Şikayetçidir," *Son Posta*, 13.03.1932.

¹³⁰³ "Süreyyapaşa Dokuma Fabrikası Grevi," *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 3 (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı; İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1996-1998), p. 109.

¹³⁰⁴ *Orak Çekiç*, No. 9 (July 20, 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 427.

¹³⁰⁵ *Kızıl İstanbul*, No. 35 (Jan. 3, 1932), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 288.

especially teachers and preachers, who were mostly aggrieved by late distribution of salaries, frequently raised their criticisms. Along with the low levels of their salaries, long delays in payment often put them in difficult financial positions. The government attached great importance to the teachers in the formation of the secular, nationalist and modern next generations. The teachers were supposed to shape the citizens by not only educating their children, but also being models to all citizens. However, in the face of economic hardships and inadequate wages, they could not help questioning the discrepancy between their high mission and their low economic status. They legitimately asked how they could be good role models of a modern life in these bad economic conditions, and how a teacher who had to support his family and his father and mother on a low wage of 40 TL and who was supposed to dress smartly in modern way could pay for new and clean clothes.¹³⁰⁶

According to the press, most of the teachers were grumbling because they had not yet received their salaries for two or three months. For instance, teachers in the Islahiye district of Gaziantep and in many districts of Konya complained of the difficult situation in which they were due to the lack of payment of the salaries for a long time.¹³⁰⁷ Likewise, teachers of the Kemaliye district of Erzincan frequently complained about the delays in the distribution of salaries for five months and demanded the immediate payment of their accrued salaries. Teachers in Urfa also wrote to a newspaper about how their poor families suffered from a severe subsistence crisis due to the long delays in distribution of their salaries.¹³⁰⁸

¹³⁰⁶ M. Ş. Erkson, *Muallimler Mecmuası*, XII, No. 38-39 (1935), p. 189; F. Osman, "Muallimlerin Mesken Bedelleri," *Muallimler Mecmuası*, XII, No. 38-39 (1935), p. 208.

¹³⁰⁷ Teachers sent letters and complained that their wages had not been paid for months. "Islahiye Muallimleri Maaş Alamıyorlarmış," *Son Posta*, 11.06.1932; "Muallim Aylıkları," *Köroğlu*, 12.08.1931; "Konya Muallimlerinin Maaşı," *Son Posta*, 24.05.1932.

¹³⁰⁸ "Kemaliye ve Urfa'da Muallimler 5 Aydır Maaş Alamıyorlar," *Cumhuriyet*, 14.09.1929.

In another case, a teacher, appointed from Artvin to Bursa four years ago, had not yet received for four years his last salary, which he was supposed to have been paid when he was in Artvin.¹³⁰⁹ In another example, teachers from Tekirdağ, deprived of their salaries for four months, also wanted the lump sum payment of their salaries immediately.¹³¹⁰ Although the government, which seemed to have favored the state officials over other social groups, decided to make extra payment to them, primarily to teachers, as housing benefit in 1932, teachers and many other low-salaried officials would not receive these small benefits during the 1930s.¹³¹¹

Another lower-income group who received their salaries from the local government was religious functionaries like *imams*, *muezzins* and *hatips*. Their loss of economic and social status was great after the secular reforms. In addition to the problem of having low salaries ranging between 10 to 20 TL per month, they also could not receive their salaries on a regular basis. Sometimes, like most of the teachers, they were not able to receive their monthly salaries for three to six months. They also wrote to the authorities and the press from time to time in order to make their voices heard.¹³¹²

As stated above, the great part of the taxes bore hardest upon the wage earners. Therefore, one of the most disturbing things regarding the wages was the deductions of some taxes from wages. For example, from the monthly wage of a worker who received 125 piasters per day, in fact, 262 piasters as the Income Tax, 42

¹³⁰⁹ Teacher of the İnegöl İsmetpaşa School Turgutcan, "Bir Muallimin Şikayeti," *Cumhuriyet*, 14.01.1930.

¹³¹⁰ "Muallim Aylıkları," *Cumhuriyet*, 29.01.1939.

¹³¹¹ "Öğretmenlerin Ev Paraları Ne Bu Yıl ne Gelecek Yıl Verilmeyecek," *Son Posta*, 04.08.1935. See also "İlkokul Öğretmenlerinin Mesken Bedelleri," *Tan*, 20.07.1943. According to the newspaper report dated 1943, although the government had already decided to distribute housing aid to the low-income teachers in 1932, there were many poor teachers who never received such aid for eleven years.

¹³¹² "Günah Be Yahu!" *Köroğlu*, 22.04.1931. According to the newspaper report, wages of the *müezzins*, *imams*, and mosque caretakers had not been given for two months. It was stated that these preachers had sent several letters to the newspaper. In addition, see "Halkın Köşesi," *Köroğlu*, 04.08.1934. A letter of complaint penned by the mosque caretakers receiving no wages for the past five months was published in this column.

piasters as the Economic Depression Tax, and 275 piasters as the Equalization Tax was deducted automatically per month. In 1935, the tax burden of an average worker increased with the Aviation Association Tax, an additional tax cut from the wages.¹³¹³

These deductions from these already very low-wages made things even worse. Workers at the tobacco warehouse of the Monopoly Administration expressed their anger against further decreases in their wages after the deductions of several taxes. They complained that although they worked hard a minimum 10 hours a day in a workplace without fresh air and breathing in air polluted by nicotine, the employers deemed proper only 100 piasters as a daily wage for them. Moreover, after the deduction of the taxes and other dues, there only remained 75 piasters a day. They frequently asked how the workers would feed themselves, support their children, and pay their high rents.¹³¹⁴

What is more, the saving and mutual assistance funds also constituted a burden for the most of the workers. Although they usually did not lend a hand to the workers, a monthly premium varying between 5 and 10 percent of the monthly wages were routinely cut from the wages of those workers who were affiliated with a saving and mutual assistance fund. Especially in the late 1920s and in the early 1930s, the government attempted to shape the existing occupational associations of the workers and artisans, and encouraged all segments of workers to organize according to the occupational basis under the auspices of the government and to found their own occupational social security networks. The financial sources of these funds were premiums that were cut from the wages of the members. Artisans were also obliged to subscribe to them and to pay annual membership dues and other fees

¹³¹³ Erişçi, "Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfının Tarihi," p. 112.

¹³¹⁴ *Bolşevik*, No. 28 (1931), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 315.

in order to receive official licenses and health records (*sağlık karnesi*). As mentioned below, these obligations also aggravated the situation of those poor people who funded these professional associations with their very limited incomes. As will be addressed below, these funds were of no avail in many cases.

Complaints about the High Cost of Living and the Poor Quality of Domestic Goods

Above all, the rise in the real prices of basic foodstuffs like bread caused widespread discontent among the working-class. The bread was the main problem of the lower classes in those years. Poor and low-income people mostly lived on bread and cereals in those years. During the 1920s and 1930s, bread prices fluctuated generally according to the wheat prices, wheat supply and harvest conditions. The wage earners and urban poor were very sensitive to bread prices. Therefore, they usually reacted to fluctuations in bread prices. In times when the prices moved upward, the low-income groups whose diet relied heavily on the bread and flour got more stressed. Even though the government occasionally fixed prices as a response to the rapid increases in bread prices, the bakers responded to these fixed prices with poor, half-baked and lower weight breads. Sometimes, protesting the fixed prices, they did not produce bread in enough quantity.¹³¹⁵

For that reason, the bread question maintained its first place in the daily struggle of the low-income groups. Workers often complained the high prices of bread and flaws of the fixed price policy of the government. During the entire period under consideration, access to cheap, sufficient, well-baked and healthy bread stood as the basic problem of the laboring people, mainly in the urban areas. Therefore,

¹³¹⁵ “Karaman’da Fırıncılar Ekmeğe Narh Konduğu İçin Fırınlarnı Kapadılar,” *Son Posta*, 21.07.1935.

people raised their voice against the poor quality, expensive bread, and unsatisfactory fixed prices.¹³¹⁶

Especially in the first years of the Great Depression, which hit the wheat producers hard, the people further expressed their grievances about the high real prices of the bread and other main foodstuffs. In the conversations of the RPP deputies with the ordinary citizens of İstanbul during the election district inspections in 1929 and 1930, the one of the most prominent complaints was high bread prices and the insufficient bread supply.¹³¹⁷

The unaffordable prices of meat, about 60-70 piasters per kilo in the mid-1930s, was another reason fuelling the public discontent in urban areas. The soaring rates of the Livestock Taxes in the late 1920s and early 1930s excessively increased the costs of animal husbandry, and accordingly, of the meat and meat products. Therefore, the low-income groups were deprived of meat in their diets, and accordingly demanded government intervention in meat prices.¹³¹⁸

Another basic foodstuff the people found expensive was salt. Since the government controlled salt production and marketed the salt at high prices, the people frequently criticized it and demanded the reduction of the prices.¹³¹⁹ Moreover, the sugar, which was produced in the factories that were almost in monopoly-status, was on the black-market and unaffordable due to the many taxes

¹³¹⁶ “Ekmek Meslesi,” *Son Posta*, 04.05.1932; “Ekmek Fiyatı Pahalıdır,” *Son Posta*, 04.06.1932; “Yine Ekmek Meselesine Dair,” *Son Posta*, 04.02.1933; “Ekmek 9 Buçuk,” *Köroğlu*, 06.06.1934; “Halkın Sesi: Gündelik Ekmeğin Pahalılığı,” *Son Posta*, 28.06.1935; “Ekmek Pahalı oluyor, Bir Çare Bulalım,” *Köroğlu*, 02.11.1935; “Ekmek Çıkıyor,” *Köroğlu*, 02.11.1935; “Samsunda Ekmek 12 Kuruş,” *Köroğlu*, 12.10.1935; “Bozuk Ekmek Çıkaranlar,” *Köroğlu*, 12.08.1935; “Ekmek Her Yerde Biraz Pahalıdır,” *Köroğlu*, 30.01.1937.

¹³¹⁷ In the meetings between İstanbul deputies and people, one of the most repeated demands raised by the people was the lowering of the prices of foodstuff, especially of bread. “Halkın Dilekleri,” *Cumhuriyet*, 07.09.1929; “Hayat Pahalılığı: Harpten Evveline Nazaran Hayat 15 Misli Pahalılandı,” *Cumhuriyet*, 05.01.1930.

¹³¹⁸ In the meetings between İstanbul deputies and people, the people complained of the high price of the meat. “Halkın Dilekleri,” *Cumhuriyet*, 07.09.1929.

¹³¹⁹ “Tuz Fiyatları Pahalı,” *Son Posta*, 14.12.1932; “Fatih’ten Mehmet Bey yazıyor: Tuzun kilosu 12.5 kuruş. Pahalıdır.” *Son Posta*, 14.12.1932.

added to the sugar prices. This also caused a public discontent among the people who were not able to afford it.¹³²⁰

Furthermore, the low-income people did not believe in the official discourse promoting the idea of the benefits and the merits of using the domestic products for the national favor. The high prices and low quality of domestic goods was one of the most mentioned complaints by the wage earners. The government, in accordance with its support the Turkish entrepreneurs, promoted the consumption of home products. In all public places, on walls, placards, in schools and on the pages of newspapers, the government propagated the consumption of the goods made in Turkey on behalf of the national interests. However, the lower classes, going beyond the nationalist propaganda, called the inequality created by the expensive and poor quality domestic goods as “cheating a friend” (*dost kazığı*).¹³²¹

Most of the domestic industrial goods produced in Turkey, mostly by the public enterprises were expensive as compared to their quality for lower-income people. The chairman of the İstanbul branch of the Association of National Economy and Savings (*Milli İktisat ve Tasarruf Cemiyeti*), Daniş Bey, admitted that most of the domestic goods were so overpriced in the market that the citizens frequently complained about their high prices to the Association.¹³²²

Especially, one of the most important intoxicating products such as cigarette and other tobacco products, especially cheaper brands that were produced for low-income consumers by the state monopoly, was a subject of public criticisms.¹³²³ A worker said,

¹³²⁰ “Şekerde Yine İhtikâr Var,” *Son Posta*, 09.04.1932.

¹³²¹ “Ayıp Şey,” *Köroğlu*, 20.01.1932.

¹³²² “Yerli Malların Satışında İhtikâr Vardır,” *Son Posta*, 18.02.1932.

¹³²³ “Halkın Sesi,” *Son Posta*, 22.07.1935. See also Turgut, *Atatürk’ün Sırdaşı Kılıç Ali*, p. 601.

We buy a pocket of tobacco, but it is full of beet slices of wood rather than tobacco. When you smoke, you have a coughing fit. As for cigarettes, they are not wrapped well, and when you hold them, they break easily.¹³²⁴

As for the prices of the cigarettes, the people found even cheaper brands very expensive. Therefore, the people preferred the smuggled tobacco and cigarettes during the period.¹³²⁵ Again, the some relatively cheaper brands of *rakı* produced by the Monopoly Administration for the low-income drinkers were both still unaffordable and of poor quality for low-income consumers. Likewise, coffee imported and marketed by the government was often on the black-market and was very expensive for low-income consumers.¹³²⁶

The high prices of such basic consumption goods and of some other items that cheered the ordinary people like cigarettes and *rakı* caused vehement public resentment against the government. Therefore, as stated below, the government had to lower the prices of these items, particularly salt, sugar, cotton textile, cigarettes, tobacco and *rakı* in the mid 1930s, albeit at limited rates.

Whereas the low-income consumers complained about the high cost of living, small shopkeepers, grocers, greengrocers, butchers, tobacco sellers, shoemakers and tailors complained about the stagnancy in their businesses due to the decline in purchasing power of their consumers. This common concern of the artisans and shopkeepers was illuminated in a letter sent from İzmir to the party secretary-general. This letter, penned in 1936 on behalf of two hundred small-scale shopkeepers in a main street of İzmir, declared that all the artisans and shopkeepers even in this central place of the city had been at loss for years because the people, whose purchasing power had shrunk considerably, could not sell anything. Therefore, the

¹³²⁴ "Halkın Sesi," *Son Posta*, 22.07.1935.

¹³²⁵ "Cigaralar Çok Pahalıdır!" *Köroğlu*, 12.12.1931; "Cigara Fiyatı Ucuzlamalıdır," *Köroğlu*, 04.11.1933.

¹³²⁶ "Kahve İhtikârından Şikayet," *Son Posta*, 11.05.1932.

artisans and shopkeepers had been in deep sorrow for a long time.¹³²⁷ In other words, the small-sized sellers shared the grievance of the low-income buyers regarding the economic hardships to some degree, albeit from a different standpoint.

Disgruntlement with Grueling Working Hours and Horrific Working Conditions

One important source of discontent among the workers was the grueling working hours; the other was horrific conditions in workplaces. Indeed, despite some modest pro-labor legislations such as the Weekly Day of Rest Law and the Public Hygiene Law, many companies went their own ways, disregarding these laws. On the other hand, lack of stringent and effective legal rules limiting the working hours and regulating the shop floor environment caused too long working hours in many factories without any safety and health measures. Therefore, too long working hours in unhealthy and insecure conditions stood out as the most widespread complaint of the wage earners, especially industrial and artisanal workers during the period. Especially the frequency and vehemence of the complaints rose with the adverse effects of the economic crisis on the economy and the industrialization policy of the government in the 1930s.

Many of them expressed their views via writing to the national press. For instance, in a complaint letter to a popular newspaper of the time, *Köroğlu*, chrome miners of Tavşanlı described how they were compelled to work more than 10 hours a day in very heavy conditions.¹³²⁸ Similarly, spinners in chrysalis factories in Adapazarı wrote how they sweat between 11 and 15 hours a day. Apart from their

¹³²⁷ “Alcoholic drink and tobacco dealer İsmail Hakkı Cibar writes on behalf of two hundred shopkeepers,” BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1], 08.04.1936.

¹³²⁸ “Amele 10 Saat Çalışmaz,” *Köroğlu*, 27.05.1936.

physical exhaustion, they felt great pain because their fingers got hurt due to spinning at a stretch.¹³²⁹

According to another letter from a worker in the Adana textile factory run by the Agricultural Bank, all of the textile workers were supposed to start work at a precise time without even a few minute delay; but the factory managers usually disregarded the exact time of the end of a shift. Hence, they overworked the workers 2 or 3 hours more than it must be even after the end of the shift. Therefore, the working hours in the factory always reached up to 13 or 14 hours a day. What is worse, the factory never paid overtime wages, not even one piaster, to the workers. Furthermore, there was not even a small place to sit down and have lunch inside the factory.¹³³⁰

The workers of the same factory did not cease to express their complains about the long working hours in the 1930s. Writing to *Köroğlu*, they criticized the 12 hours of exhausting work.¹³³¹ Again, tobacco warehouse workers, who had to work more than 8 hours a day in unsanitary conditions exposed to nicotine, questioned the long working hours exceeding 8 hours of hard work under bad circumstances and bad treatment by the foremen.¹³³²

In a similar vein, from the tobacco warehouses of the Monopoly Administration in İstanbul, workers complained that they were obliged to work overtime. The foremen usually threatened to fire anyone who did not want to do overtime.¹³³³ A tobacco warehouse worker complained that the employers paid only half of the daily wage on the first day of a new worker. In addition, the workplaces in

¹³²⁹ “11 Saat İş Başı,” *Köroğlu*, 21.11.1934.

¹³³⁰ “Adana Ziraat Bankası Mensucat Fabrikası Amelesi A.’nın Mektubu,” *Kommunist*, 1929, quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 178.

¹³³¹ “İşçi Kaç Saat Çalışır?,” *Köroğlu*, 30.06.1937.

¹³³² “Tütün Amelesi,” *Köroğlu*, 03.08.1932.

¹³³³ *Kızıl İstanbul*, No.6 (Nov. 30, 1930), quoted in Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 66.

which they were, so to speak, locked no less than 10 hours a day were very unhealthy and polluted with nicotine.¹³³⁴

Workers in drapery warehouses were also displeased with the working conditions. A group of drapery warehouse workers expressed their grievance about grueling working hours in unsuitable working conditions as common complaints of their colleagues. According to the Artisan's Professional Periodical (*Esnaf Meslek Mecmuası*), many drapery warehouse workers wrote their complaints of too long and exhausting working hours reaching 12 hours of hard work everyday in dark, sunless, and damp workshops on the basement floors.¹³³⁵ Again, about five hundred women workers of three factories in Adapazarı collectively wrote to *Köroğlu* complaining minimum 13 hours of hard work.¹³³⁶

The length of the working hours constituted a serious problem over which the workers frequently disputed with their employers. Indeed, the workers' objection to the unreasonably long working hours stood out a major cause of the labor disputes, walkouts, and strikes during the 1920s and 1930s, as will be addressed in detail in Chapter Ten.

Another factor that made the work in the factories intolerable was the unsanitary and unsafe shop floor environment. Despite the Public Hygiene Law, the most of the workplaces still were unsafe, unhealthy, stuffy, dusty, smelling damp and musty, and polluted with chemicals. Such shop floor environments continued to stand out as the main complaint of the workers. For instance, the awful working conditions of the Halkpınar Rope Factory, the Serge Factory, and the Acorn Factory in İzmir spurred widespread grievances among their employees. The workers of these factories frequently complained that they had to breathe the dirty and harmful

¹³³⁴ *Bolşevik*, No. 28 (1931), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 315.

¹³³⁵ "İş Kanunu ve Esnafımız," *Esnaf Meslek Mecmuası*, No.3 (1934), p. 2.

¹³³⁶ "Yerli Fabrika Sahiplerimizden Rica Ediyoruz 13 Saat Çalışılmaz," *Köroğlu*, 30.08.1933.

dust of cotton pieces because there was no ventilation system or small fans. In addition, the workers alleged that it was especially difficult to work in summer, because of the very high temperature in the factories. Apart from this, the changing rooms were not sufficient; and the toilets had no water. The lunch break was only about a half hour, too short to have some rest. Moreover, the workers complained that the factory doctors ignored the workers' health problems.¹³³⁷

Therefore, among the main demands of the workers during this period were shorter work-hours and the betterment of the shop floor environment. Indeed, in the wish lists of the RPP's provincial congresses, there were many items about shortening the working hours in industrial plants. The Çankırı RPP congress, for example, reported that the workers frequently demanded from the party administration to give warning to the industrial companies that forced them to work any longer than the legal maximum work hours prescribed by the Public Hygiene Law. The party congress in Samsun added to its wish list in 1931 that maximum 8 hours of work and betterment of the working conditions as frequent demands of the workers in the province. The wish list of the Zonguldak party congress also included the workers' widespread demand for shortening the work hours and the enactment of a labor law protecting the workers efficiently. One of the most important requests of the İzmir workers, according to the İzmir party congress, was the fixation of the work hours with the strict laws. In 1931, evaluating these wishes that came from the localities, the Minister of Economy, Mustafa Şeref Özkan, assured that all of these needs would be satisfied soon with the forthcoming labor law.¹³³⁸

In some workplaces, cruel foremen who tried to make up their bosses, exploited the workers as much as possible. Indeed, arbitrary, repressive, and ill-

¹³³⁷ Suad Derviş, "İzmir İşçileri Nasıl Çalışır, Nasıl Yaşarlar," *Son Posta*, 20.10.1936.

¹³³⁸ The Wish Lists of the Provincial RPP Congresses Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Agriculture, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1], 11.01.1931.

intended foremen were one widespread source of grievance among the workers. Especially after the economic crisis, companies, resisting the bankruptcy and slowdown in their transactions, heavily relied on the massive exploitation of the labor. This also aggrieved the workers, especially manual laborers, who lived from hand to mouth under hard working and living conditions during the period. Indeed, numerous letters penned by overexploited and downtrodden workers complaining of the brutal and harsh treatments and abuses by the foremen inundated the newspapers and the authorities during the 1930s.¹³³⁹ Publishing one of these letters, a newspaper wrote that:

The workers were often losing their jobs because of the arbitrary treatment of supervisors and foremen. We receive many complaint letters because of this reason.

One of the workplaces in which the workers, male or female, commonly were exposed to the arbitrary, unfair and sometimes vicious treatment and harassment of the cruel and rough foremen was tobacco warehouses. The most of the workers in tobacco warehouses hated the foremen so much that fights or quarrels between the workers and foremen were the main part and parcel of the shop floors in tobacco warehouses, as will be scrutinized in Chapter Ten.

Complaints and Demands about the Paid Weekend Holiday

Some supervisors and employers pressed their workers to work on weekends, in spite of the Weekly Day of Rest Law, which was applicable to all employees in both state and private and both commercial and industrial enterprises. However, many

¹³³⁹ “İşçi Hakkı,” *Köroğlu*, 16.05.1934. The newspaper wrote, “Every day many workers lose their livelihoods and jobs because of the arbitrary treatment by the foremen in almost all workplaces. We receive several complaint letters from the workers everyday about this problem.”

exemptions in the law practically left a considerable number of workers without a right to a day of rest. First, the law did not apply to those personnel who were employed outdoors, or who were seasonal and temporary laborers. In addition, the companies were entitled to cancel the weekend days off up to 15 times a year. Moreover, the law was applicable only to large cities and towns with populations of more than 10,000. Finally, the law did not impose a condition of payment of wages on the rest day.¹³⁴⁰

All these exemptions frustrated and discontented the workers who fell out of the coverage of the law. Exploiting such exemptions, many companies endeavored to evade the law. Many workers were acutely aware of the discrepancy between the rules and actual state, thereby discontented with the violation of their rights or the lack of the implementation of the law. The workers who did not benefit from the weekend holidays had already begun to murmur right after the enactment of the law in 1924. According to a police report dated 1924, the most of the workers, particularly tramway and railways workers, frequently complained about how they were not allowed to take a rest on Fridays. When they attempted to pursue their rights, the employers generally fired them. Therefore, they often criticized the government on grounds that the government did not impose sanctions on those employers who ignored the Weekly Day of Rest Law.¹³⁴¹

Partly due to such social discontent, the government legally fixed the weekend holiday together with the national days and official holidays through the enactment of the National Day and General Holidays Law (*Ulusal Bayram ve Genel Tatiller Hakkına Kanun*) (No.2739) in 1935. With this law, Sunday replaced Friday as a weekend rest day. The weekend holiday was determined as 35 hours starting

¹³⁴⁰ Makal, *Türkiye’de Tek Patili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, p. 334.

¹³⁴¹ TTKA SSJ-47, 25.11.1340 [1924].

from 1 pm on Saturdays. This law introduced the paid weekend vacation that was applicable to all wage earners.¹³⁴²

Although the weekend day off gained legal validity with this law, but many companies, disregarding the provisions of the law, continued to operate on Saturdays and even Sundays in full-time shifts. From İzmit, a tobacco worker, for instance, reported that all tobacco warehouse workers continued to be put to work even on Saturdays against the law, although they had informed this situation to the related authorities several times.¹³⁴³

In another instance, workers of Alpullu Sugar Factory asked why they worked full-time on Saturdays despite the laws granted them a part-time rest after noon on Saturdays. They wanted to work until noon on Saturdays as prescribed by the laws.¹³⁴⁴ Similarly, workers in Adana textile plants commonly asked how the textile companies dared to place the workers under the obligation of working from morning to night on Saturdays. They generally blamed the passivity of the government for the infringement of their right to have a paid weekend vacation.¹³⁴⁵

In August 1935, *Son Posta* newspaper also pointed out that the workers were widely discontented with the violation of their right to work part-time on Saturdays because their employers pressed them to work full time on Saturdays or even on Sundays. The most merciful employers and managers, who allowed their workers to take a rest from Saturday noon to Monday morning, also added half an hour or one hour to the work hours of each workday or paid only half of the Saturdays' wages to compensate for the part-time work on Saturdays.¹³⁴⁶ This also caused some raised

¹³⁴² Cahit Talas, *İçtimâî İktisat* (Ankara: A. Ü. Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1961), p. 103.

¹³⁴³ "Cumartesi Tatili Sözde mi Kalıyor?" *Son Posta*, 17.06.1935; for a similar newspaper report see "Tütün İşçileri," *Köroğlu*, 22.06.1935.

¹³⁴⁴ "Halk Ne Diyor, Ne İstiyor?" *Köroğlu*, 21.12.1935.

¹³⁴⁵ "Halkın Köşesi," *Köroğlu*, 09.05.1936.

¹³⁴⁶ "Hafta Tatili Şikâyetleri," *Son Posta*, 15.06.1935.

eyebrows. Dockworkers at the İzmir shipyard company, for instance, wrote a letter of complaint to a newspaper, raising their voice against the company management, which had added thirty minutes to each workday in order to reinstate the lost hours on Saturday afternoon.¹³⁴⁷

Similarly, workers of a foreign tobacco factory accused the factory managers of discriminatively underpaying Turkish workers in order to compensate their loss which stemmed from the compulsory weekend day off. Despite their repeated application to the factory managers, the employers had insisted on paying them half wage on Saturdays. The workers thought the factory management infringed on their rights.¹³⁴⁸

The daily *Tan* also admitted that it had received several letters of complaints about the lack of proper implementation of the Weekly Day of Rest Law. In these letters, as *Tan* reported, some workers argued that their daily wages had been cut because they worked half time on Saturdays. Some objected to the additional half-hour working in workdays in return for part-time work on Saturdays.¹³⁴⁹

By the way, the Weekly Day of Rest Law did not cover the employees of self-employed artisans and shopkeepers such as journeymen, apprentices and salesclerks who worked in shops, workshops, and large stores. For that reason, they also complained of working on weekends at low wages from sunrise to sunset. They also demanded the application of the laws to themselves. For example, those who were employed in hardware stores in the Galata district of Beyoğlu, complaining

¹³⁴⁷ “Vur Abalıya!” *Köroğlu*, 15.04.1936.

¹³⁴⁸ “Bir Küstah ve Herzeleri,” *Son Posta*, 09.07.1936.

¹³⁴⁹ “İşçilere Yazık Oluyor,” *Tan*, 22.06.1935.

about too long workdays and low wages, asked why the weekend holidays was not extended to them.¹³⁵⁰

Neither the Weekly Day of Rest Law nor the National Days and General Holidays Law covered home-workers such as handloom weavers or domestic servants. They also needed to have a rest on the weekends, but they did not have a legal right to demand such a rest day from the merchants and enterprises for which they worked. Therefore, they resented their exclusion from the law.

In 1937, a group of workers who were employed at weaving handlooms in their own homes, for instance, sued the textile company that forced them to work on Saturdays from morning to night. However, because the law exempted people who worked at home from the compulsory weekend holiday, the court dismissed the case. They appealed the decision of the local court, but the Supreme Court did not reverse the decision.¹³⁵¹ These people's anger at the government and the company is not apparent from the official resolution texts the courts reached, it not difficult to presume that such court decisions further disappointed them and deepened their discontent with the government.

Complaints and Demands about the Social Security

The lack of effective social security regulations and measures also distressed the workers and low-income majority of state officials. The bulk of the workers and the state officials were deprived of comprehensive and protective social security mechanisms. According to the existing laws, the great part of the workers and the state officials were not entitled to disability pension. Therefore, workers and even

¹³⁵⁰ "Galata Piyasasında Hırdavatçı ve Malzeme-i İnşaatçılar Yanında Çalışanlar Namına," *Tan*, 22.06.1935.

¹³⁵¹ *1937 Temyiz Kararları* (Ankara: T.C. Adliye Vekaleti Neşriyat Müdürlüğü, 1938), p. 89.

many low-ranking state officials who were victims of a work-related disease or a fatal work accident mostly were not assisted with a compensation or disability pension. The great part of the population had to pay out of pocket for health care due to the lack of free medical service. In addition, let alone the workers, even a great part of lower-income officials had no retirement pension rights or retirement gratuity. Unemployment was a nightmare for a wage earner in those years. A protective measure against unemployment like unemployment indemnity to compensate the losses of workers discharged from a workplace was not in effect. Apart from these, bureaucratic red tape and endless procedures impeded even those limited number of state officials and workers who were covered by occupational social security mechanisms to benefit from their imperfect social rights.

Therefore, the press of the time and the National Assembly Yearbooks are replete with the petitions and letters complaining of arbitrary lay-offs without compensation and the absence or limited coverage of basic social rights and protective social measures like the pension rights, retirement gratuity, unemployment indemnity, disablement benefits for industrial injuries or diseases, and the pension system for veterans, relatives of martyrs, and widows and orphans of the deceased employees.

One common complaint of the workers was arbitrary lay-offs or cancellation of labor contracts by employers without any unemployment indemnity. Many claimed compensation or demanded new job or reemployment on the grounds that they had been fired arbitrarily and undeservedly. Such arbitrary fires sparked also public outcry against the employers. For instance, many people strongly blamed the textile factories in İzmir that had fired about 900 workers in January 1935 without a redundancy pay. In an interview with a newspaper correspondent, a fitter named

Fahri Cemil criticized the employers who gave the slowdown of the transactions as a pretext for the dismissal of the workers. He attributed such easy lay-off of the workers without any compensation to the lack of protective social regulations. Another person put forward that such workers should have been paid a certain amount of unemployment indemnity after they had been dismissed. One of the interviewees also expressed his disapproval of this large-scale collective redundancy without any redundancy pay by asking how these people would feed their children.¹³⁵²

Undoubtedly, the dismissal of those workers who had been wrecked by a ruinous occupational disease or accident without any compensation also spurred reactions among the workers. For instance, together with coalmines, the cellulose and paper industries in İzmit were among the most disgusting and dangerous sectors. They had acquired a bad reputation for high incidence of industrial accidents and diseases. In these sectors, workers who lost their hands, arms, or legs in severe accidents were deprived of any protective work accident insurance. Employers did not hesitate to terminate their employment without any compensation or effective medical treatment. Workers in these sectors felt great anger in the face of this heartless and ignorant treatment.¹³⁵³

Indeed, among the petition summaries, there is a great quantity of petitions claiming compensation or permanent disability pensions. Because no provision was made for taking care of their needs, compensating their losses, and social assistance by both the institutions they worked and by the government, many workers and lower-income state officials who fell severely ill or had disabling accidents, sought

¹³⁵² “Halkın Sesi: İşçilerin Hakları ve Halk,” *Son Posta*, 26.01.1935.

¹³⁵³ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, p. 106.

the compensation of their losses.¹³⁵⁴ Furthermore, many demanded the government or the companies pay disability retirement pensions (*mâlulen emeklilik*) and disability pensions (*mâluliyet maaşı*) to them.¹³⁵⁵

In addition, the bulk of workers and low-income state officials were not eligible for retirement pension benefits when they came to a point where they were not able to work any more. The absence of retirement pension arrangements meant that most workers continued to work until death or were doomed to live on in poverty. However, in the age of industrial development and bureaucratic growth, it was not possible to work in a government office or an industrial factory past a certain age. Therefore, people left their jobs or employers or the government dismissed them from their posts due to incapacity or disability when they were aged. Many people, who faced extreme poverty and absence of social security and social assistance, claimed retirement pensions and gratuities. Indeed, short summaries of numerous petitions written to the authorities demanding retirement pension and/or gratuity confirm how the lower-income people were distressed by and reacted to the absence of this most basic social security requisite.¹³⁵⁶

¹³⁵⁴ A worker named Rıfat from İstanbul demands that his 95 Liras of compensation from the Balya Mining Company be paid as soon as possible (p. 344), *TBMM Yıllık 1930*. A worker named Yusuf from Balya demands that the Balya Mining Company should pay him compensation (p. 344), *TBMM Yıllık 1930*; Vehap from Eskişehir demands that the company he had worked should pay him compensation (p. 371), *TBMM Yıllık 1930*.

¹³⁵⁵ For some examples from the early 1930s and the mid 1930s, Ömer from Biga demands disability pension (p. 339); Şemsettin from İstanbul demands disability pension because he was disabled on duty (p. 342), *TBMM Yıllık 1930*. Kadir from Demirci district demands disability pension (p. 280); Mustafaoğlu Hakkı from Van, who worked as a guard, demands his disability retirement (p. 283); Yunusoğlu Mustafa from Kayseri demands disability pension (p. 284); Mehmedoğlu Hacı Veli from Söke demands his disability retirement (p. 268), *TBMM Yıllık 1935*.

¹³⁵⁶ Ahmet from Samsun demands premium as a reward of his service (p. 337); Mustafa from İzmir demands premium for his 35 years service (p. 344); Hıfzı from Nazilli demands premium writing that his retirement pension is little (p. 357); Sezai from Ankara demands that he is not deprived of the right of retirement (p. 391), *TBMM Yıllık 1930*. Nail from Ankara demands retirement pension (p.237); Ali Ekrem from İstanbul demands retirement pension (p.237); Official in the land office Ali Rıza from Bandırma demands retirement pension (p.235); Reşit from Kayseri demands retirement pension (p.239); Mehmet Efendi and his friends demand that their right to benefit from retirement law (p.238); Lütfi from Kars demands retirement pension (p.251); Tevfik from Sivas demands retirement pension and premium (p.252); M. Salif from Akçaabat demands retirement pension (p.266); İbrahim Efendi from İzmir demands retirement premium (p.266), *TBMM Yıllık 1934*. Official Nuri who had worked

The grievances of those people who were destitute of help and social aid in difficult times resonated among the RPP politicians, as it is evident from their reports. In one of their election district investigations in Ereğli, Zonguldak deputies had taken a short break in a coffeehouse frequented by coalmine workers. For a while, they had pricked up their ears to the conversation between the workers who were talking to each other about their problems and economic matters. One of the workers had criticized his cruel company. The deputies had noted in their reports what this poor-looking and helpless worker had said in grief in order to illustrate the mood of the coalmine workers in Zonguldak as follows:

“If you are a worker, you do not have as much value as an animal, because there is nobody who is interested in our problems. Nobody looks out for and protects our rights, and listens to our grievances. I have been asking 10 liras from my company as an advance on salary for three days. My child is very sick and has been taken to the hospital. My wife sent me a telegram asking me to send money urgently for the expense of the medical treatment. Although I showed this telegram to the administrators, they did not give me money. I said I resigned from my job and then you must pay me off. They did not pay me of.” Approved by his friends, worker swore like a trooper and cried out against the company by saying “What should I be, should I die?”¹³⁵⁷

Not only these unprotected workers, but also the most of the workers who were affiliated with their occupational retirement and mutual assistance funds or professional associations were unable to benefit from these funds or organizations. That is to say, the existing occupational retirement, saving and mutual assistance funds also did not satisfy the needs of the poor workers. For instance, 40 workers in a plug factory in Zeytinburnu who were laid off due to the economic crisis in 1930 complained about their mutual assistance funds. Although 4 percent of their wages

in state service for 30 years demands pension liability (p. 269); Court clerk Mehmet from Pötürge demands the right to benefit from retirement law (p. 282); Clerk Niyazioğlu Cevat from Gelibolu complains that his retirement is not accepted for his service at the Agricultural Bank (p. 282); İsmail Efendi from Aydın demands premium as he retired (p. 284); Teacher Habib Necati from Çankırı demands retirement pension (p. 301), *TBMM Yıllık 1935*.

¹³⁵⁷ Election District Reports of the Zonguldak deputies Raif Dinç, H. Karabacak, Esat Çakmak Kaya and Rıfat Kardaş, BCA CHP [490.1/721.464.2], 08.11.1937.

had been cut by this fund for a long time, they did not receive any assistance from it when they were laid off or in difficult times. The workers, writing to the government and *Cumhuriyet* objected to the violation of their rights.¹³⁵⁸

Some social security funds established in the late 1920s and early 1930s especially for military officers, military and some public factory employees, and some middle-ranking state officials dependent on the central budget by no means operated perfectly and satisfied even the basic needs of their members.¹³⁵⁹ Until the mid-1930s, the workers had to make do with these institutions along with the weak and ineffective mutual saving and assistance funds of the professional associations.

These funds were handicapped with several shortcomings. First, these occupational retirement and social assistance schemes did not cover a great part of the working class, because they were established on an occupational basis. This consequently caused widespread disappointment among those wage earners who were not covered by any social security system. People's grievances and demands for more effective and comprehensive social security measures did not cease during the 1930s. Many low-ranked state officials, especially officials employed in local administrations who were not covered by a retirement fund viewed this situation as inequality and asked why the government did not provide them a legal right to pension and gratuity.¹³⁶⁰ Again, the officials of the Monopoly Administration, who did not have a social security or any specific retirement fund, also complained about their deprivation from the basic social security measures, particularly the retirement

¹³⁵⁸ "Amelenin Hakkı Neden Verilmiyor?" *Cumhuriyet*, 19.11.1930.

¹³⁵⁹ First of them was the Law on the Military Production Safe-Deposit and Insurance Fund (*İmalatı Harbiye Teaviün ve Sigorta Sandığı Hakkında Kanun*), dated 1926. The second one was the Military and Civilian Retirement Law (*Askerî ve Mülkî Tekâüt Kanunu*), dated June 3, 1930, comprising all members of the military and civilian bureaucracy who were paid by the central budget, and their widows and orphans. See Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, p. 427.

¹³⁶⁰ For instance, see "Müstahdimler ve Memurlar," *Son Posta*, 02.02.1932. The letter writer wrote, "Some government officials have retirement rights and receive gratuity. The other government officials also should be granted with such rights." *Ankara Harita Umum Müdürlüğü Tamirhane Şefi*.

right. One of the RPP deputies addressed this matter in the National Assembly in March 1933 as follows:

In the Monopoly Administration, there are many qualified officials who graduated from the Military Academy (*Harbiye*) or Civil Service School (*Mülkiye*)... However, they do not have any retirement right. Nor are they covered by any social security system guaranteeing their future. They are complaining about this situation.¹³⁶¹

Apart from this, for those people who received retirement pension, the amounts of pensions mostly were not satisfactory. The great part of the retired officials received between 10 and 20 TL per month. For instance, by 1932, a lucky senior teacher, who had depended on the central budget and thus had a retirement right, was rewarded with only about 15-20 TL a month after 30 years of service.¹³⁶² Not only the poor retirees but also the retired government doctors (*hükümet tabibi*), district governors, or mid-ranking military officers also were dissatisfied with the low amounts of retirement pensions. Numerous petitions complaining about the unsatisfactory amounts of pensions and demanding a raise were an important indicator of the widespread discontent.¹³⁶³

Again, the low-ranking party administrators in localities also disliked the levels of retirement pensions. For instance, Osman Tan, the party secretary of the Kemalpaşa district of İzmir, penned a letter to the Party Secretary-General and complained that his retirement pension fell short of the needs of his family of seven, and then pleaded with the party to give him a small amount of retirement gratuity.

Emphasizing how he served the Young Turk movement in the Action Army (*Hareket*

¹³⁶¹ *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 29.04.1933, p. 132.

¹³⁶² “İşten Çekilen Memurlar,” *Köroğlu*, 10.12.1932.

¹³⁶³ İlyas from Düzce asks for a raise in his disability pension (p. 336); Hasan from Köprülü asks for a raise in his retirement pension (p. 339); Süleyman Sırrı from Kastamonu requests the government to increase his retirement pension (p. 341); Hilmi from Sapanca requests the government to increase his retirement pension (p. 347); İsmail Hakkı from Ankara asks for a raise in his retirement pension (p. 347); Memet from Kars asks for a raise in his retirement pension Kars’tan (p. 390); Ahmet from Kastamonu demands that his retirement pension be fully paid (p. 371), *TBMM Yıllık 1930*. M. Tevfik from Çorum asks for a raise in his retirement pension (p.267), *TBMM Yıllık 1934*.

Ordusu) and then participated in the National Struggle actively, he demanded a raise in his pension in return for his service.¹³⁶⁴

In a letter to the Secretary-General, a retired governor of the district named Haşim Yanbolu drew attention to the fact that despite his 27 years of service in the state bureaucracy in distant places like Dersim and Yemen and in difficult times of the Great War and the National Struggle, his toil was rewarded with only a small retirement pension. Poignantly telling about the difficulties of living on such a little money, he closed his letter by asking for a raise in his pension.¹³⁶⁵

Another group demanding the assistance of the government was those poor people who were qualified as veterans or the widow wives or orphaned daughters of martyrs. They also frequently complained of the government's negligence of themselves despite the great sacrifices they or their husbands, fathers and sons had made. Appropriating the nationalist rhetoric to justify their demands in their petitions to the authorities, they demanded to be granted pension benefits.¹³⁶⁶

Moreover, their grievances were reflected in the pages of the national press. In 1932, for instance, a wife of a Gallipoli martyr complained that she had not yet received the pension that was assigned to widows of war martyrs for about eight

¹³⁶⁴ BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1], 24.12.1935.

¹³⁶⁵ BCA CHP [490.1/47.189.2.], 24.01.1939.

¹³⁶⁶ Ayşe from İstanbul asks for a pension for her service in the National Service (p. 345); Şaziye from İzmir requests to be given a pension for his service for the nation (p. 345), *TBMM Yıllık 1930*. Fatma from Adana demands a pension as her son Yüzbaşı Rıfat is a war martyr (p.280); Zehra from Bursa demands a pension as her husband is a war martyr (p.282), *TBMM Yıllık 1934*. Ayşe from Balat demands a pension as her two sons are war martyrs (p. 269); Hesna from Topkapı demands a pension as her son is a martyr (p. 269); Refia Fatma from Saraçhane demands a pension as her husband is a martyr (p. 278), Mustafaoglu Hüseyin Fahri from Van demands remuneration because he had been disabled in combat during the National Struggle (p. 278), *TBMM Yıllık 1935*. Nafiye from Geyve asks for a pension as her husband Ahmed is a martyr (p.269); Gülüzar from İzmir asks for a pension as her husband is a martyr (p.276); Agah from Ankara ask for a veteran pension for his service in the war (p.276); Meneş from Trabzon asks for a pension as her son is a martyr (p.279); Maksude from Keşan asks for a pension as her sons are martyrs (p.279); Binbaşıoğlu Tahsin from Ankara asks for a veteran pension (p.280); Hasibe from Adapazarı asks for a pension as her son is a martyr (p.281); Nafia from Ankara asks for a veteran pension (p.281); Rasim from Trabzon asks for a veteran pension because he became disabled in the war (p.293); Abdürrahmanoğlu Sadık from İstanbul asks for a veteran pension because as he became disabled in the National Struggle (p.298), *TBMM Yıllık 1936*.

years despite her endless efforts.¹³⁶⁷ In June 1936, another old woman, whose husband had died in the front in the Great War, also complained that the government had not yet assigned a pension to her until that time in spite of her poverty-stricken situation.¹³⁶⁸ A poor orphan boy who had lost his father in the Great War and subsequently had lost his mother because of wartime hunger, stated that he had to work as shepherd in very difficult economic conditions. He argued that although he deserved an orphan pension, he had not yet received any payment for years by 1930.¹³⁶⁹

In addition, the widows and orphans of most of workers and low-ranking civil servants were also without protection. There were no established social security measures such as widow pensions or orphan pensions to protect the poor families of the workers and state officials after their death because of fatal work accidents or diseases. Only the families of a limited number of middle and high-ranking state officials or public enterprise workers, if they had social assistance and retirement funds, benefited such kind of protection.

However, as a matter of fact, the bureaucratic red tape made all these low-income people equal. Although the needy wives or children of the deceased state officials had a right to benefit from widow pension and orphan pension, the interminable bureaucratic procedures in putting someone on a salary took generally too long. Likewise, former state officials retired from a governmental institution having its own official social assistance and retirement fund also encountered many difficulties and long bureaucratic delays to complete the retirement procedures,

¹³⁶⁷ “Sekiz Senedir Maaşımı Alamıyorum,” *Son Posta*, 25.03.1932.

¹³⁶⁸ “Okuyucu Mektupları: Maaş Muamelesi Henüz Tamamlanmayan Bir Şehit Karısı,” *Son Posta*, 07.06.1936.

¹³⁶⁹ “Soruyoruz!” *Cumhuriyet*, 08.12.1930.

waiting for months or years to receive their retirement pensions, and retirement gratuities, if any.

The letters these people sent to the newspapers show the people's dissatisfaction with the limited and malfunctioning social security system. In February 1930, based on countless complaint letters sent by the indignant citizens, *Cumhuriyet* reported that a great number of old retirees, veterans, and orphans and widows of deceased state officials and martyrs were poverty-stricken because they were not protected by an efficient social security mechanism. Even if some were covered by a social insurance fund, it took too long a time to collect pension benefits due to the daunting and confusing procedures.¹³⁷⁰

For instance, a retired official after 36 years of service for the government complained that he was living in squalor because his retirement had fallen into abeyance for years.¹³⁷¹ Another retiree also expressed his grief by writing to a newspaper. Although he had served 30 years for the government and had become permanently disabled for the sake of his job, his retirement was still in abeyance for two years because of the official procedures. "In meantime," he wrote, "even a small amount of money, which will hardly cover my daily bread, was not paid." He had put several complaints in written form to the governorship several times, but his efforts had turned out to be inconclusive. Ultimately, he had had to request the newspaper draw the attention of the relevant authorities to his desperate situation. According to the newspaper, this letter, only one of those numerous letters that flooded into the

¹³⁷⁰ "Yetimler, Dullar ve Mütেকaidlere Maaş Tahsisi," *Cumhuriyet*, 02.02.1930.

¹³⁷¹ "36 Seneden Sonra Sefalet," *Cumhuriyet*, 11.07.1930. The letter writer woman stated that his son Tahir Efendi had participated in Mudanya Battle and died a martyr, therefore she had left alone desperately without any help.

newspaper, indicated the aged, disabled and needy people's widespread deprivation of their low amount of pensions.¹³⁷²

In another instance, writing a complaint letter to the government, a retired registrar, superannuated in 1928, complained that he and his family were starving because of the endless retirement procedures uncompleted for eighteen months after his retirement. For a long time, he had been suffering a serious pecuniary deprivation because he had sold all of his salable household goods and had nothing left to sell. He ended his letter by begging for mercy from the government.¹³⁷³

Indeed, the problem, which turned out to be severely chronic with the Great Depression, generated a flood of petitions to the government. Therefore, more helpful, perhaps, was the summaries of the petitions which were evaluated by the Petition Commission of the National Assembly. Numerous petitions criticizing the delays in assignments of the retirement pensions and retirement gratuities and demanding their immediate distribution invaded the government agencies.¹³⁷⁴

Likewise, those poor widows and orphans who were entitled to receive pensions were not able to collect their allowances. A wife of a deceased state official, who was unable to receive her widow pension for years due to long bureaucratic procedures, complained that she had been suffering poverty with her five children for

¹³⁷² "Dert Bir, Feryat İki," *Cumhuriyet*, 18.09.1930.

¹³⁷³ "Merhamet İstiyor," *Cumhuriyet*, 04.07.1929. Retired Registrar Hakkı demanded the completion of his retirement procedures as soon as possible.

¹³⁷⁴ Kaya from Balya demands that his retirement pension be assigned to him as soon as possible (p. 336); Tevfik from Sivas demands that his retirement pension be assigned to him as soon as possible (p. 337); Sadrettin from İstanbul requests that his retirement pensions are paid (p. 351); Fevzi from İstanbul demands that his retirement pension should be assigned to him as soon as possible (p. 388); Niyazi from İbradı demands that his retirement pension should not be cut (p. 388); Ahmet from İstanbul demands that his retirement pension should be assigned (p. 388), *TBMM Yıllık 1930*. Pensionary from Trabzon, named Nazmi B., demands the premium he legally deserved should be given as soon as possible (p. 235), *TBMM Yıllık 1934*; Yusuf from Balya demands that his retirement procedures should be completed as soon as possible (p. 254), *TBMM Yıllık 1934*. A retired officer named Şükrü from Gemlik complains that his retirement procedures have not been completed for one year because of red tape (p. 282), *TBMM Yıllık 1935*.

a long time because of preposterous procedures. For that reason, she blamed the bureaucratic red tape in a letter to *Cumhuriyet*.¹³⁷⁵

Another woman with four children, complained that although her husband, a military officer, had died five years earlier on duty, she had not been able to collect her widow pension despite her endless resorts to the Military Entrance Processing Commands in İstanbul.¹³⁷⁶

Again, in January 1930, the wife of a customs house guard in Trabzon who had died on duty two years ago expressed her amazement at how the government had not been able to assign her widow pension for two years. Stressing her immediate need of this pension for very survival of her family, she demanded the assignment of her widow pension immediately.¹³⁷⁷ Another woman, whose widow pension had not been not assigned for two years, sarcastically asked whether “the contemporary Republic” (*Muasır Cumhuriyet*) was not able to set these simple things right.¹³⁷⁸ One might cite several examples of these letters to the newspapers or the official authorities.¹³⁷⁹

The overly long and daunting bureaucratic procedures caused so much common public dissatisfaction that the İstanbul Party Congress in 1931 gave a chief place to this common public grievance and proposed the General Congress of the RPP to take the necessary measures urgently.¹³⁸⁰ In a similar vein, correspondences between the Prime Minister and the RPP Secretary-General also indicate that the

¹³⁷⁵ “Bir Maaş Tahsisi İçin Yıllar mı Geçmeli,” *Cumhuriyet*, 06.04.1930.

¹³⁷⁶ “Fazilet Değil Vazife İstiyoruz!” *Cumhuriyet*, 09.04.1930.

¹³⁷⁷ “İki Senede Bir Maaş Bağlanamaz mı?” *Cumhuriyet*, 29.01.1930.

¹³⁷⁸ “Vatandaşı Aç Bırakmak Hakkı Selahiyeti Kime Verilmiştir,” *Cumhuriyet*, 21.11.1930.

¹³⁷⁹ “İki Senede Maaş Tahsis Edilmez Olur Mu?” *Cumhuriyet*, 21.03.1930.

¹³⁸⁰ BCA CHP [490.1/500.2010.2].

authorities were well aware of this public discontent and tried to redress the grievances of the people and to cope with the red tape.¹³⁸¹

Indeed, as a result of the growing public grievances triggered by the social impact of the Great Depression, the government took further steps to expand the social security system by building new saving, social aid and retirement funds and by putting a protective labor legislation on its agenda from the early 1930s on. Under the pressure of the complaints and demands from the grassroots level arising from the lack of an embracing or well-functioning social security system, the government needed to establish new social security funds especially for the employees of municipalities, local administrations, and public enterprises. Having neither financial nor infrastructural power to organize and fund a central social security organization, the government especially took an initiative to organize a series of saving, social aid and retirement funds (*tasarruf, yardım ve tekaüd sandıkları*) on an occupational basis. In this direction, the Law About the Retirement Pensions of the State Officials and the Teachers Who Received Their Salaries from the Provincial Administrations (*Vilayet Hususi İdarelerinden Maaş Alan Memur ve Muallimlerin Tekaiüd Maaşları Hakkına Kanun*), The Law of Retirement of İstanbul Local Administration Officials and Ankara Central Municipality Officials (*İstanbul Mahalli İdaresi ve Ankara Merkez Belediye Memurları Tekaiüd Kanunu*) were passed in 1933. In 1934, the government granted the employees of the State Railways and Ports Enterprise and the officials of the Monopoly Administration some social insurance rights. In the next year, the social security and retirement status of the employees of the Postal, Telegram and Telephone Administration were regulated. In 1937, the employees of

¹³⁸¹ From the Prime Ministry Undersecretary to the RPP Secretary-General, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2010.2], 13.11.1933.

the Maritime Lines and Docks got the right of retirement. In 1938, the government gave retirement rights to the Agricultural Bank employees.¹³⁸²

Demands for the Labor Law

A labor law was one of the leading demands of the industrial workers since the beginning of the Republican era. In fact, many wage earners were doubtful of the implementation of a labor law, even if it had been enacted. Many people worried whether the government would ignore the labor law like the Public Hygiene Law and Weekly Day of Rest Law. Yet, the general tendency among the workers, especially the industrial workers, was in favor of the enactment of a protective and comprehensive labor law. Not only industrial workers, but also those wage earners who worked in small shops such as waiters, salespersons, journeymen, apprentices, and waged taxi drivers also demanded and welcomed the Labor law, some of whom had doubts about whether it would be implemented efficiently, though. Therefore, earlier in the beginning of the Republican period, in view of labor disputes, strikes, and widespread complaints about working conditions, wages, and lack of social security, the Republican government decided to submit a labor bill to the National Assembly in 1924.

In the first years of the Republic, probably the workers' sympathy with and concern about the PRP opposition also played a role in the RPP's reluctant interests in a labor legislation to gain popular support among the poor masses against the rival elite. Indeed, the social base of the PRP opposition consisted of mostly poor workers, retired state officials, and craftsmen in urban areas. According to an

¹³⁸² For a list of these funds, see Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, pp. 426-429.

intelligence report, in Bozok (Yozgat) province of central Anatolia, for instance, all porters, watermen, carriage drivers, laborers, and people who had lost their jobs with the establishment of the Republican administration had supported the PRP.¹³⁸³ In Sivas, likewise, the PRP organization attracted generally laboring men such as carriage drivers, coffeehouse owners, retired and unemployed persons, and poor refugees who had been settled in Sivas after the population exchange.¹³⁸⁴

Therefore, the RPP prepared a bill draft that introduced protective regulations for working conditions, workplace safety, and sanitation. This bill draft limited the workday to a maximum ten hours, recognized the right to organize labor unions and to strike, the conclusion of both individual and collective labor contracts, and introduced the labor inspectorates to enforce the employers to obey the laws. However, the disaccord and reserves about the bill draft among the RPP deputies who were composed of commercial, agricultural, and industrial interests unsurprisingly caused the rejection of the bill in the Assembly in 1925.

However, the strikes, labor disputes, and social demand did not cease and compelled the government to prepare two other labor law drafts in 1927 and 1929. Before being closed down, the Workers' Advancement Society also submitted an alternative law draft concerning labor in 1927, which was more encompassing and democratic. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, in the face of the continuing formal and informal labor disputes and people's grievances, the press and some RPP politicians began to stress the severe need for labor legislation. The press published several articles and news about the necessity of a law regulating the relations between labor, capital, and the state. In April 1927, *İkdam* newspaper took a poll and called the workers to send their opinions about the existing draft of the labor

¹³⁸³ TTKA SSJ-35-2, 1341 [1925].

¹³⁸⁴ From Sivas Governor Mümtaz to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, TTKA SSJ-26-2, 14.01.1341 [1925].

law and their own aspirations and demands. In April, the newspaper published several letters from workers who supported the enactment of a labor law as soon as possible, but not in its current form. Indeed, many workers from various sectors sent in their ideas of an ideal labor law, the imperative provisions and rules that a labor law should absolutely contain, the *sine qua non* principles on which a labor law should be based, its comprehensiveness, and the inspection mechanism for well implementation. They commonly criticized the government's draft of law dated 1927, and demanded more protective labor law that would satisfy their needs.¹³⁸⁵ *Akşam newspaper*, for instance, wrote in 1929 about the tramway workers' strike, stating,

The strike by the tramway workers demonstrates once again the need for labor legislation... Although we do not have large cadre of workers, we already are witnessing frequent conflicts between workers and enterprises. The rights and safety of capital are completely ensured by our laws. Let us try to ensure also the rights of labor, particularly of mass labor.¹³⁸⁶

Finally, the Republican leaders seemed to have realized that it would not be possible to curb the firm resistance and dissent of the workers, and accordingly took their demands and complaints into consideration. As a result, the Ministry of Economy proposed two drafts of a labor law in 1927 and 1929, respectively. The first one was not brought before the plenary session of the National Assembly due to the elections.¹³⁸⁷ The second one was withdrawn within a short time.¹³⁸⁸

¹³⁸⁵ "İş Kanunu Hakkında Anketimize Gelen İlk Cevap," *İkdam*, 20.04.1927; "Anketimize Dün Gelen Cevaplar," *İkdam*, 24.04.1927; "İş Kanunu: Anketimize Gelen Cevaplar," *İkdam*, 25.04.1927; "Amelemizin Anketimize Gönderdiği Cevaplar," *İkdam*, 26.04.1927; "Amelemizin Anketimize Gönderdiği Cevaplar," *İkdam*, 27.04.1927; "Amelemizin Anketimize Gönderdiği Cevaplar," *İkdam*, 28.04.1927; "Amelemizin Anketimize Gönderdiği Cevaplar," *İkdam*, 29.04.1927.

¹³⁸⁶ See Korniyenko, *The Labor Movement in Turkey*, p. 57.

¹³⁸⁷ About the 1927 Labor Law Draft, see Mesut Gülmez, "Amele Teali Cemiyetinin 1927 İş Yasası Tasarısına Karşı Hazırladığı 'İşçi Layihası'," *Amme İdaresi Dergisi*, XVI, No. 2 (June, 1983).

¹³⁸⁸ Selim İlkin, "Devletçilik Döneminin İlk Yıllarında İşçi Sorununa Yaklaşım ve 1932 İş Kanunu Tasarısı," *ODTÜ Gelişme Dergisi*, Special Issue (1978), p. 252.

Then, the government did not put the labor law on its agenda until the shocking rise of the FRP opposition welcomed by the working class with strikes and tumultuous protests.¹³⁸⁹ In the meantime, the government attempted to meet the partial needs of the workers by adopting an important law in April 1930, the Public Hygiene Law. It introduced important regulations concerning the health and safety of the labor force and offered free medical services in the large factories. In addition, it contained important protective measures for female and child labor, limiting the employment of children under 12 years old and shortening their working hours.¹³⁹⁰

However, in addition to the continuing strikes and tumultuous incidents in factories during the 1930s, the people's voices complaining about the lack of social policies, low wages, unpaid salaries, uncompensated work accidents, grueling work hours in unsanitary and unsafe shop floor environments, and unfair treatment of employers also contributed the increasing concern for labor legislation among the ruling circles. Apart from that, the people directly insisted on demanding labor legislation by writing to the newspapers and to the government. The press continued to give place to the workers' letters and interviews, which complained about the lack of a protective and effective legal regulation of labor relations and demanded the government ensure the rights of labor.

In 1932, the newspaper *Yeni Gün* conducted a poll regarding the opinion of the workers on the labor law. The great part of the participants was filled with longing for a labor law. The main complaints of respondent workers who took part in the poll were the long working hours, unsanitary working conditions, low wages,

¹³⁸⁹ About the workers' sympathy with the FRP, see Cem Emrence, *99 Günlük Muhalefet: Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006), pp. 93-100, 105; Çetin Yetkin, *Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası Olayı* (İstanbul: Karacan Yayınları, 1982), pp. 244-245.

¹³⁹⁰ Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Parti Döneminde Çalışma İlişkileri*, p. 342.

lack of social security, and competition of foreign workers.¹³⁹¹ In one of its issues in 1934, the Artisans' Professional Periodical also declared that many artisans, particularly journeymen, apprentices, and craftworkers, also demanded to be covered by a protective labor law. Those persons who were employed in small workplaces such as drapery stores, petty good shops and stores, wrote letters to each RPP deputy, the Ministry of Economy and the National Assembly about their request to be included in the forthcoming labor law.¹³⁹² In 1934, some workers in their letters to the *Köroğlu* asked why the labor law, which had been constantly discussed for a long time, had not yet been passed from the National Assembly. Letter writer workers asked when they would benefit from such a law.¹³⁹³

The provincial party congresses of the RPP and the reports of the RPP deputies also reflected the popular demands for an inclusive labor law and comprehensive social policy measures. According to the wish lists prepared in the RPP's provincial congresses, for instance, the most expressed demands concerning labor were the eight-hour work day, better working conditions, retirement pensions, retirement gratuity, free medical services, and inclusive social security facilities. In these congresses, instead of demanding labor legislation directly, many delegates expressed citizens' specific demands for several social measures and the rights of which only a comprehensive labor law could ensure. Sometimes the RPP delegates in the congresses directly demanded labor legislation. According to the wishes listed and submitted to the Secretary-General by the Provincial Party Congress of

¹³⁹¹ İlkin, "Türkiye'de Devletçilik Döneminin İlk Yıllarında İşçi Sorununa Yaklaşım ve 1932 iş Kanunu Tasarısı," pp. 267-277.

¹³⁹² "İş Kanunu ve Esnafımız: Manifatura, Tuhafiye ve Emsali Mağazalarda Çalışan Binlerce İşçilerimiz, İş Kanunundaki Bazı Mühim Maddelerin Kendilerine de Teşmilini İstediler," *Esnaf Meslek Mecmuası*, No.3 (Jan. 1, 1934), pp. 1-2.

¹³⁹³ "Halkın Köşesi," *Köroğlu*, 13.10.1934.

Zonguldak, for instance, the main request of workers was the legislation of a labor law.¹³⁹⁴

In a meeting held on 20 March 1933 in the RPP Provincial Organization of Balıkesir, the RPP deputies met with workers. During the long conversations, the workers repeatedly requested the enactment of a labor law. An urgent telegram sent by the Balıkesir deputy Hacim Muhittin to the RPP Secretary General on next day attracted the attention of the party leadership to the workers' stress on the immediate need to enactment of a labor law. In the words of the RPP deputy, "The most desirable request the workers begged of the party was the immediate enactment of a labor law." Underscoring the importance of this repeated and widespread demand, the deputy closed his telegram by saying "My lord, I beg for your order to pass this important law in this session of the National Assembly."¹³⁹⁵

At this juncture, the government prepared another draft of a labor law in 1932, but did not enact it once again. Finally, in the face of the social discontent and labor disputes, the government had to prepare a final labor law draft in 1934 and accepted this draft in 1936, albeit excluding the right to strike and to organize labor unions. During the discussions of the Labor Law among the government circles and after its enactment, some part of workers approached it warily. The discussions and eventual enactment of the Labor Law in 1936 undoubtedly made the great majority of workers very happy. However, many of them, including those who were pleased with the discussions about an impending labor law and the eventual enactment of it in 1936, approached the discussions and even its enactment with caution. Let alone the lack of right to strike or to form union, the workers were not sure whether its

¹³⁹⁴ The Wish Lists of the Provincial RPP Congresses Submitted to the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Agriculture, BCA CHP [490.1/500.2008.1], 11.01.1931.

¹³⁹⁵ From Hacim Muhittin [Çarıklı] to the RPP Secretary-General, BCA CHP [490.1/1438.3.2], 21.03.1933.

protective provisions would be implemented effectively. According to some letters sent to the *Son Posta* in November 1935, a female worker named Şerefür stated that she was not sure whether a labor law, discussed by the authorities, would actually protect the workers. The main cause for her doubt was how the Public Hygiene Law had been ignored for six years. She was happy, but pessimistic. According to her, the coming event had cast its shadow before.¹³⁹⁶ Another worker from Yedikule Railway Company pointed out the possibility of side effects of the labor law draft proposed by the government. This law, according to him, would lead the employers to downsizing and lay-offs to avoid this law, and thereby would possibly encumber the workers rather than the employers.¹³⁹⁷

After the passage of the Labor Law, many workers who had been looking forward to the Labor Law publicly expressed their happiness, whereas some had reservations. According to an interview of the *Son Posta* correspondent with workers about the Labor Law, one of them said, “We have been looking forward this law. How happy we are!”¹³⁹⁸ A stove factory worker also expressed his gratitude by saying “How can a worker not be happy when he hears about the enactment of the Labor Law?”¹³⁹⁹

A chocolate factory worker named Firdevs also was happy but, on the other hand, she was very cautious, as well. She said, “We all have been looking forward to the enactment of this law. On the other hand, before getting too happy, we must read and know which rights this law introduces to us and which protective provisions it brings.”¹⁴⁰⁰ A biscuit factory worker named Naime also expressed her reservations mixed with happiness about the Labor Law. The eight-hour workday

¹³⁹⁶ “Halkın Sesi: Yeni İş Kanunu Layihasına Ne Dersiniz?” *Son Posta*, 08.11.1935.

¹³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹⁸ “Halkın Fikri: İş Kanunu Çıktı,” *Son Posta*, 09.06.1936.

¹³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

made her very happy, but she was scared about the possibility that her boss might attempt to lower the daily wages in order to compensate for less work and costs of other facilities that the Labor Law obliged the employers to provide.¹⁴⁰¹ There is no doubt about that the workers, especially communist ones, did not find the Labor Law satisfactory, because it did not offered the right of unionization and strike.

Indeed, the worries of the cautious workers proved to be right. From the serious discussion of the labor law draft in the National Assembly, some factories had already begun to dismiss their senior workers, who were supposed to be bestowed with protective social rights. Some workplaces also tried to diminish the number of employees to evade the Labor Law, according to which the provisions were increasing in direct proportion to the number of workers employed in a factory. Another tactic deployed by the employers that allowed them to bypass the obligations set by the Labor Law was to divide the factories into several small workshops and firms on paper. There were many companies that evaded the Labor Law in such a way. For example, hundreds of companies in the Mahmutpaşa and Sultanhamam quarters of İstanbul evaded the provisions of the Labor Law by dividing their work into several firms. One furniture factory, for example, reorganized it work within five small firms. One of the firms cut the wood, others respectively sharpened, assembled, polished and painted. Thus employing less than ten workers in each firm, the owner of the company managed to circumvent the Labor Law.¹⁴⁰² Sometimes, by dismissing the workers on various pretexts, the

¹⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰² “Bazı Bölgelerdeki Fabrika, İşyerleri ve İşçilerin Genel Durumu Hakkında BMM Çalışma Komisyonundan Bir Grubun Hazırladıkları Rapor,” BCA CHP [490.1/728.495.5], 30.12.1947.

companies tried to discourage the workers from demanding social rights and services based on the Labor Law.¹⁴⁰³

However, as will be addressed in the following chapter, the workers also managed to appropriate the Labor law for their own causes against the companies, whether covered by the Labor law or not. In other words, even though it was implemented unsatisfactorily or it banned the strike and labor unions, it created a legal base and standards to bargain with the employers.

Discontent with the Professional Associations

Another sphere against which and sometimes over which workers struggled was professional associations. After closing down the Workers' Advancement Society (*Amele Teali Cemiyeti*) in 1928, the RPP took a direct initiative to reorganize the working class by establishing docile organizations comprised of both workers and employers at the same time on professional basis. In parallel with the populist discourse regarding Turkish society as "a classless and equal nation free from domination of any privileged class," industrial workers and artisans were reorganized alongside the professional groups in the early 1930s.

The official goals of these organizations were seemingly to seek to further a particular profession, the interest of individuals engaged in that profession and the public interest as well. However, the main motive behind the establishment of these professional organizations by the ruling party was to keep the laboring masses under the close control of the government and to divide and isolate different segments of workers from each other by grouping them into occupational societies. In addition,

¹⁴⁰³ Sedat Toydemir, "Türkiye'de İş İhtilaflarının Tarihçesi ve Bugünkü Durumu," *İktisat ve İktimaiyat Enstitüsü, İktimai Siyaset Konferansları Dördüncü Kitaptan Ayrı Basım* (İstanbul: İsmail Akgün Matbaası, 1951), p. 12.

by means of these bodies, the government aimed to kill two birds with one stone: to collect the taxes easily and to leave some basic social measures to the social assistance funds of these bodies financed with the premiums cut from wages and other fees paid by their members regularly.

Workers and artisans generally viewed some of these associations as useless organizations as puppets of the government.¹⁴⁰⁴ However, in many cases, they were turned into contestation realms by members at the grassroots level. First, their low-income members did not fully remain subservient to these organizations. Taxes deducted from wages and assignments of some part of wages to the associations prompted common criticisms of these associations among the lower-income workers and craftspeople. Furthermore, the widespread corruption and misuse of budgets by the administrators of the associations, and lack of effective social aids assured in return for premiums cut from wages frustrated those low-income members funding these associations.

What is more, the heterogeneous and cross-class composition of the membership of some associations (like the Drivers' Association) led to internal struggles and conflicts of interest between employees and employers within the same occupational organizations. In a conflict of interests between low-income members (like waged drivers) and well-to-do members (like taxi owners who employed waged drivers) in same association, the low-income members did not hesitate to question the cross-class characteristics of their organizations and to demand more class-specific associations. In other words, not all but many of them challenged the state-sponsored, cross-class professional associations not due to a leftist bias, but because of their experiences of interest conflict in everyday life.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Şehmus Güzel, *Türkiye'de İşçi Hareketleri (1908-1984)* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1996), p. 133; Kemal Sülker, *100 Soruda Türkiye'de İşçi Hareketleri* (İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınevi, 1973), p. 160.

There were also competing class-specific occupational associations that struggled with each other. These class-specific associations of low-income workers (like the Waiters' Association) sometimes challenged their employers' professional associations (like the Restaurateurs' Association).

In addition, the low-income members of both these cross-class or class-specific professional associations frequently objected to the high premiums and dues. They sometimes forced the administrations of their associations to make particular decisions in favor of themselves. Furthermore, these associations, under pressure of their members, managed to force the government to take into consideration some of their complaints and demands, albeit occasionally.

First, most of workers saw their heterogeneous occupational associations including both them and their employers as mostly an unfunctional apparatus of the employers and the government. According to an inspection report written by 1931, for instance, in the eyes of workers in the coalmines of Zonguldak, the Workers' Union of coalmine workers resembled a committee dominated and led by the employers and the RPP bureaucrats, which served commercial interests. Though a certain number of workers' representatives were present on its administrative board, they seemed to be obedient, qualified, and well-behaved workers selected by employers instead of being elected by the vote of the workers. Many workers argued, there was nobody who looked after the interests of the mineworkers in this so-called coalmine workers' organization.¹⁴⁰⁵

Therefore, most of the workers hated it because of both the lack of the effective support of the Union and of wage-cuts by the Union as monthly premiums. The coalmine workers thought that the Union's directors used the premiums cut from

¹⁴⁰⁵ Inspection Reports of Party Inspectors of Giresun, Ordu and Zonguldak, BCA CHP [490.01/655.182.1], 14.09.1931.

the workers' wages to pay the high salaries to the Union's officials and directors. For this reason, the workers petitioned the authorities asking why the union paid such high salaries as 200 or 300 TL whereas the association did not assist the needy workers. Because of widespread complaints, the Ministry of Economy leveled down the high salaries of the all officials and directors of the Union in June 1936.¹⁴⁰⁶

Similarly, the Drivers' Association, comprising both low-waged drivers and high-income taxi-owners at the same time, also looked a lot like an employer union. With its 4000 members, most of whom were employees of taxi-owners; the Drivers' Association was a good sample of cross-class association. However, this did not mean that the association managed to absorb the conflict of interest between its hard-up and well-off groups. Many drivers employed by taxi-owners and scraping a living in the İstanbul streets around 12 or 18 hours a day were well aware of the antagonisms between themselves and their bosses. Therefore, they thought about splitting away from the association.¹⁴⁰⁷ Rather than a union and solidarity, there was compartmentalization and competition between the taxi-drivers and taxi-owners within the association, indeed.

Drivers viewed the association not as a representative of their interests, but rather as an institution indifferent to the problems and demands of overworked poor drivers. The following statement of a driver reflects the tension between the taxi-owners and drivers inherent in the drivers' association:

The main thing of which I cannot make head or tail is our professional association. The powers that be in the association each have a dozen cars. Accordingly, they have been trying to compete with us, rather than looking for a solution to our problems.¹⁴⁰⁸

¹⁴⁰⁶ "Çok Şükür," *Köroğlu*, 03.06.1936.

¹⁴⁰⁷ "Şoförler Cemiyeti," *Son Posta*, 14.12.1935.

¹⁴⁰⁸ "Bir Dokun Bin Ah Dinle Bizim Şoförlerden," *Son Posta*, 17.07.1935.

According to another driver, there were rich capital owners having many cars from around fifteen to twenty or even to thirty in the association. Their main goal, the driver alleged, was to monopolize the sector. For that reason, they were trying to raise several difficulties for other drivers.¹⁴⁰⁹ Drivers in İstanbul argued that there was a serious dispute between them and the rich taxi-owners over the wages and the working-hours, although they unreasonably took place under the roof of the same association.¹⁴¹⁰

Workers from other sectors also had similar perceptions of their professional associations. In textiles, for instance, some workers objected to their involvement in the same associations with their employers. A person working in a store of fine muslin criticized that he had been forced to be registered in the Fine Muslin section of the Craftsmen's Association, though he was only an underpaid worker, but not a journeymen or an employer. He argued that workers like him needed a more specific organization comprising only workers in the sector, which shared their problems. This was the only way to pursue their own rights more successfully. Such a specific unit, the worker suggested, should deal with four essential matters vital to the workers' life, which were not on the agenda of the present association: to prevent the employers from firing workers arbitrarily whenever they wanted; to force the employers to pay compensation to the fired worker; to fix the opening and closing hours of the stores; and finally to build a mutual assistance and retirement fund.¹⁴¹¹

Tannery workers also found odd their membership side by side with their well-to-do bosses in the same association. For a tannery worker, in his memoirs, the Turkish Tannery Association seemed bizarre because the bosses, in his words,

¹⁴⁰⁹ "Halkın Sesi: Şoförlerin Şikayetleri Neymiş?" *Son Posta*, 19.09.1935.

¹⁴¹⁰ "Şoförlerin Durumu Fena," *Son Posta*, 12.12.1935.

¹⁴¹¹ Letter of Adnan Refik from the Fine Muslin section of the Craftsmen's Association, "Bir İşçimizin Dilekleri," *Esnaf Meslek Mecmuası*, No. 3 (Dec. 1, 1934), pp. 9-10.

“ağas” dominated and frequented the Association. Therefore, the workers, who did not expect any benefit from it, opted out of the activities of the Association.¹⁴¹²

Workers affiliated with the associations relevant to their occupations had to pay some dues to the association’s saving and social aid funds. These dues, which generally varied between 5 to 10 percent of the monthly wage, in most cases were cut automatically from the wages. Such wage-cuts or out of pocket dues also estranged the low-income workers from the associations. What is worse, the workers got nothing in return for these dues. The fact that the associations generally ignored the member workers in difficult situations came on the top of it. In addition, the workers found the benefits yielded by their associations quite unsatisfactory.

From the first month of 1935 on, the dockworkers in Zonguldak port began to complain that the Dockers’ Association did not take care of their problems at all. As far as the workers asserted, the revenues generated from the five percent dues that were cut routinely from their low wages went to the salaries of the executive board members of the Association.¹⁴¹³

In August 1935, the dockworkers officially wanted the association to pay back all the money collected from the workers for the last eleven years by suing the Association on grounds of its negligence of the members and the misuse of the budget.¹⁴¹⁴ In spite of the adverse decision of the local court, the workers did not hesitate to appeal for a reversal. In the end, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the workers.¹⁴¹⁵

Likewise, there were no friendly relations between the tobacco workers and the Tobacco Workers’ Association. Many tobacco workers were of the opinion that

¹⁴¹² Hasan Yelmen, “Yaşayan İlkler,” *Kazlıçeşme’de 50 Yıl*, Vol. 1 (İstanbul: Ezgi Ajans, 1998), p. 154.

¹⁴¹³ “Deniz Tahmil ve Tahliye Amelesi Şikâyet Ediyor,” *Cumhuriyet*, 23.02.1935.

¹⁴¹⁴ “Zonguldak’ta 200,000 Liralık Bir Dava,” *Son Posta*, 10.08.1935.

¹⁴¹⁵ “Kömür Ameleleri ile Birlik Arasındaki İhtilaf,” *Son Posta*, 14.05.1936.

the association neither protected the rights of the workers nor aided them financially in hard times. For instance, a female worker named Fatma argued that she had regularly paid the required dues and fees for two years. However, when she fell sick, the Association did not accept to bear the expenses of the medical treatment on the grounds that the Association was not responsible for covering such costs of the members registered in the association for less than 15 months. However, she raised an objection to this reason by showing the subscription receipts, but the Association insisted on its unjust claim and the woman perished before a medical examination. According to some tobacco workers, there was no doubt that a few people in the administration of Tobacco Workers' Association pocketed the money collected from poor workers on behalf of the so-called social assistance fund of the association.¹⁴¹⁶

Waiters were also not content with the work of their Cooks' and Waiters' Association. According to the allegations of the workers, the Association collected a certain amount of contribution from them each month. However, it was usually indifferent to the problems of its members in return. Also, the Association was, so they said, unconcerned with the requests for help of those members who were jobless or in severe need.¹⁴¹⁷

Finally, the Drivers' Association caused widespread dissatisfaction among the drivers, who paid monthly dues though they lived on bread. It was generally reported that the drivers disliked the apathy of the Association to their demands. Despite a large contribution around 20,000 TL of the drivers to the association every year, the Association, the drivers argued, let them down when they demanded help in hard times such as illness, accident or unemployment.¹⁴¹⁸

¹⁴¹⁶ Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 86.

¹⁴¹⁷ "Aşçılar ve Cemiyetleri," *Son Posta*, 19.06.1935.

¹⁴¹⁸ "Kari Mektupları: Şoförler Cemiyeti Hakkında," *Son Posta*, 10.05.1932.

Worst of all, the administrators of these associations became involved in corruption. Misuse of revenues coming from the low-income workers by a few association personnel was the last straw. The corruption cases frequently reported in the press confirm that there was chronic corruption in professional associations. In the Tailors' Association, for instance, inspectors uncovered many cases of fraud in the elections of the executive board. Moreover, a case of embezzlement of a great deal of money, around 80,000 TL, belonging to the Association was circulating in November 1937 on the grapevine. Again, drivers also were talking about 12,000 TL, which a clerk, a cashier, and an administrator had stolen from the safe of the Drivers' Association. It was reported that all of these corruption cases and news of which the low-income workers and artisans were well aware alienated them from these professional associations.¹⁴¹⁹

Therefore, workers and craftsmen frequently refused to pay some dues to their professional associations. In many cases, craftsmen fell out with their associations due to the disagreement about dues and fees. Consequently, although the municipality issued licenses and health records to craftsmen, the associations did not accept these licenses unless a person affiliated himself with their occupational association and submitted a subscription fee reaching sometimes large sums like 25 TL. According to the public opinion, these associations sought to feather their nests through the contribution of laboring people. This drove those who were making a living the hard way crazy.¹⁴²⁰

Likewise, most of the water carriers of İstanbul had not submitted the required dues and fees to the Water Carrier's Association for a long time by 1931. As a result, the Association attempted to disapprove the licenses of those who refused to

¹⁴¹⁹ "Esnaf Cemiyetlerinde," *Orak Çekiş*, No.12 (Nov. 7, 1937), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 451.

¹⁴²⁰ "Zorla Olmaz: Esnaf, Cemiyetlerden Usandı," *Köroğlu*, 23.05.1931.

obey to its rules. Moreover, it decided to collect 300 piasters from those who had not paid their monthly dues, prior to validating their health records. All of the water carriers, who were deeply discontented with their association, reportedly, took a stand against this decision collectively by complaining about it to the press and the related authorities.¹⁴²¹

Discontent of the Craftspeople with the Big Industry

Partly the Great Depression, but especially the industrial drive and ongoing importation of some economical and ready-made industrial goods despite the slowdown in international trade, hit the great part of the craftspeople hard during the interwar period. Without a doubt, all craftspeople were not affected adversely equally by these developments. The problems of the declining crafts like handloom weaving, tailoring, carriage driving, shoemaking, saddling, felt making, and small-scale tanning were different from those of others like bakery, which preserved their profits during the period.

The most significant factor that worsened the mood of the artisans was the competition of cheaper industrial products. As examined in the former chapter, the industrialization, new public and private factories, and the importation of cheaper industrial goods adversely affected many crafts. Therefore, craftspeople, particularly the hardest hit such as shoemakers, tailors, saddlers, carpet weavers, tanners, felt makers, and carriage drivers often complained about the importation of cheap

¹⁴²¹ “Ayıp Günah!” *Köroğlu*, 13.05.1931.

finished and semi-finished goods from the abroad and the adverse effects of the mechanization and industrial drive on their age-old businesses.¹⁴²²

Carpet and fabric weaving on handlooms was the primary business field that underwent a relative decline during the 1930s. The establishment of large and small textile factories throughout the country and the mechanization of the production techniques together with the importation cheaper and high-quality Japanese and Russian fabrics frustrated many handloom weavers. In a letter to the *Son Posta*, Denizli handloom weavers, for instance, argued that they were falling victim to industrialization. They added that the high tariffs on the importation of cheaper threads, aiming to protect the new industrial base, were dragging down the small home industry into a great loss by increasing the costs of raw material. The weavers closed their letter by saying that the industrial enterprises were putting the craftspeople to the sword.¹⁴²³ The same newspaper reported that hundreds of handloom weavers and other artisans in Samsun were also complaining about the fierce competition of the imported fabrics and haberdashery.¹⁴²⁴

Tailors also were displeased with the increasing production of the ready-made clothes by Sümerbank. Although some of them traded the industrial ready-made clothes, their profit from this trade was very small. The factories sold the fabrics at too high prices even to tailors, because there was almost no difference between wholesale and retail prices. As a result, these expensive fabrics increased the tailors' costs.¹⁴²⁵

Moreover, the factories were able to market the ready-made clothes at lower prices than the prices of that clothes the tailors sewed. This price mechanism

¹⁴²² "Küçük Sanayicilerin Temennileri: Büyük Sanayi Erbabının Rekabetinden Şikâyet Ediyorlar," *Son Posta*, 26.05.1936.

¹⁴²³ Muhittin Birgen, "İplik Derdi ve Dokumacılık Tezgahları," *Son Posta*, 29.11.1936.

¹⁴²⁴ "Samsun Tacirleri Japon Dampingi Karşısında Şaşırdılar," *Son Posta*, 02.04.1932.

¹⁴²⁵ See Cillov, *Denizli El Dokumacılığı Sanayii*, pp. 145-146.

inevitably hindered the people from going to tailors. An article in the *Son Posta* dated 2 February 1935, titled “From the Turkish Tailors to the Turkish Industrialists” (*Türk Terzilerinden Türk Sanayicilerine*) drew the attention of the government to the grievances of the tailors. Based on the information in a letter of a tailor, the article summarized how the newly rising Turkish textile and clothing industries harmed tailoring. The tailors thus perceived the cheaper clothes produced and marketed in a vast quantity as detrimental to their crafts and business. In the eyes of tailors, the ready-made clothing factories especially were taking the bread out of their mouths.

According to the letter writer tailor, it was impossible for the tailors to compete against the low prices of ready-made clothes produced by the textile factories. An industrial company marketed a dress at 23 TL. It was not possible to expect from a tailor to sew a dress at this low price. Furthermore, the tailors criticized how there was no differentiation between the wholesale prices and retail prices of the fabrics marketed by the textile companies. Therefore, the tailors did not prefer to use expensive fabrics made in Turkey. For them, to use the homemade fabric was equal to painting themselves into a corner.¹⁴²⁶

Shoemakers were another group of craftsmen who were discontented with the industrialization process and imports. As reported in 1932, because of the cheaper rubber shoes both produced by shoe factories and imported from Europe, the great part of the shoemakers in İstanbul became unemployed.¹⁴²⁷ It was reported that the situation was similar in Anatolia.¹⁴²⁸ In the 1930s, even the peasants in Anatolian villages began to wear the economical and ready-made rubber shoes.¹⁴²⁹

¹⁴²⁶ “Türk Terzilerinden Türk Sanayicilerine,” *Son Posta*, 28.02.1935.

¹⁴²⁷ “Halkın Sesi,” *Son Posta*, 02.05.1932.

¹⁴²⁸ M. Halid Bayrı, “Balıkesirde Pabuçculuk,” p. 289.

¹⁴²⁹ H. Avni [Şanda], “Kauçuk ve Deri Meselesi,” p. 9.

Indeed, the mass production of the domestic industry, together with the importation, shook the traditional shoemaking sector. Therefore, shoemakers suffered from and complained about business stagnation up to the end of the 1930s. They held the industry-made rubber shoes imported from Europe responsible for this slowdown in their business. Apart from these low-priced imported rubber shoes, they blamed the new factories such as the Beykoz Shoe and Leather Factory that made mass production of rubber shoes.¹⁴³⁰

The economic change, especially the industrialization process and the mechanization in transportation encouraged by the government, also hit the small-scale tanning. The first thing that the tanners perceived as detrimental to their profession was the outward expansion of automobiles from a few big cities to the countryside, and the growth of railroads networks throughout the country. The carriage drivers were perhaps the most important of their regular customers. However, the carriage driving underwent a decline in this period due to the new railroad networks and the growing number of motor vehicles, which decreased the customer base of carriages. This undermined tanning indirectly as well.¹⁴³¹

The second factor that triggered their discontent was the same thing that the shoemakers complained about: rubber shoes. Tanneries were the main suppliers of processed leather for traditional leather shoes. However, the fierce competition of the industry-made cheaper rubber shoes destroyed their profession as well as that of the shoemakers by decreasing the prices of leather. Therefore, they also took a dim view of the industrialization process.¹⁴³²

Furthermore, the relatively big and mechanized leather factories began to conquer the market due to the increasing growth of capital accumulation. Therefore,

¹⁴³⁰ H. Avni [Şanda], *Harp Senesi İçinde*, p. 11; Bayrı, "Balıkesirde Pabuçculuk," p. 297.

¹⁴³¹ M. Halid [Bayrı], "Balıkesir'de Dabaklık," p. 65.

¹⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

the growing domination of big and modern leather factories also aggrieved the small-scale tanners. However, they managed to resist them by processing cheaper imported inputs. Thus, the competition of the small tanners caused a further decrease in the prices of leather clothes and items, which led the big factories to demand higher taxes and tariffs on imported leather. The small tanners quickly responded to them by expressing their objection to such an increase in taxes and tariffs.¹⁴³³

Even in a remote part of the country like Diyarbakır, industry-made rubber shoes so invaded the market that both shoemakers and tanners reportedly suffered great losses. It was reported that many tanners in Diyarbakır were in the grip of unemployment due to increasing sales of cheaper and ready-made rubber shoes. The harsh competition of the industrial products resulted in a widespread discontent among shoemakers.¹⁴³⁴ In other words, the problem was not peculiar to shoemakers of western centers.

Felting (*keçecilik*), an age-old craft in Anatolia, was also in crisis during the period. The hat reform banning some felt-headgears, growing industrial production in textiles, and importation of new industry-made rugs and other goods substituting the felt-makers' goods reduced the consumption of hand-made felt goods. Therefore, felt makers sometimes had to sell their products at 5 percent profits or at costs, or even at a fraction of the costs. Therefore, they were among the losers of the new era and accordingly its malcontents.¹⁴³⁵

Saddlery also was hit by the industrialization, especially by the growing number of motor vehicles, as carriages had constituted the regular customers of the saddlers.¹⁴³⁶ During the 1930s, the saddlers complained about automobiles, lorries

¹⁴³³ "Rekabet: Dericiler Geçimsizliğe Başladı," *Son Posta*, 06.06.1932.

¹⁴³⁴ "Diyarbakır Debbağları Lastik Ayakkabıların Rekabetinden Mütteessir," *Son Posta*, 29.05.1935.

¹⁴³⁵ M. Halid [Bayrı], "Balıkesirde Keçecilik," pp. 125-126.

¹⁴³⁶ M. Halid [Bayrı], "Balıkesirde Saraçlık," p. 237.

and railways replacing the carriages. They also shared the hostility of the shoemakers, the felt makers, the carriage drivers, the tanners, and some other professions towards the mechanization of the transportation system, industrialization, and importation that damaged their businesses prospects and thwarted them.¹⁴³⁷

As mentioned above, carriage drivers, who were put on a disadvantageous position by the faster modernization and mechanization of the transportation during the period, were also among those who were restless, and opposed to the industrialization process. In 1935, it was estimated that there were roughly 15,000 people only in İstanbul engaged in carriage driving. For them, the small trucks posed a threat their profession.¹⁴³⁸ In addition, many carriage drivers viewed automobiles and rail transportation as detrimental to their business, and held the new vehicles responsible for the deterioration of their economic conditions. At this rate, they said, this process would lead them to starvation.¹⁴³⁹

Carriage drivers argued that their customers increasingly preferred to take a taxi or get on tram rather than get in the carriage to go anywhere. Again, pickup trucks and vans instead of carriages were also in great demand to transport a good or to move. Therefore, the Carriage Drivers' Association declared that the members of the profession were unable to earn money to meet their minimum financial obligations and that they were losing their jobs. Unemployment, as the association underlined had become unbearable among the members of the association.¹⁴⁴⁰ It was reported that more than 50,000 people in the side professions like blacksmithing and

¹⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹⁴³⁸ "15 Bin Kişinin Derdi," *Son Posta*, 07.02.1935.

¹⁴³⁹ Letter of complaint by the carriage driver Ahmet from Erenköy, carriage driver Hüseyin from Göztepe and carriage driver Hüseyin from Kadıköy, "Arabacılık Tarihe mi Karışıyor?" *Son Posta*, 26.05.1935.

¹⁴⁴⁰ "Arabacılık ve Arabacı Vatandaşlar Buhran İçinde," *Tan*, 26.11.1935.

harness making had lost their jobs or changed their professions within the previous fifteen years due to the decline in carriage driving.¹⁴⁴¹

However, carriage drivers underlined the contradiction of the government's propaganda for domestic goods. On the one hand, the government promoted domestic goods and encouraged the citizens to buy them instead of imported ones. On the other hand, although carriages were the best example of domestic goods made in Turkey in contrast to imported motor vehicles, the government did not protect them against the fierce competition of imported motor vehicles. For that reason, they argued that the national economy policy of the government in fact required protection of the homemade carriages against the domination of imported automobiles and trucks in the transportation sector.¹⁴⁴²

¹⁴⁴¹ "Atlı Arabalar ve Otomobil," *Tan*, 05.02.1935.

¹⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

CHAPTER NINE

THE EVERYDAY STRUGGLE OF THE WORKING CLASS

In the face of the adverse effects of the state economic policies and the economic conditions together with the state repression, working class groups displayed their reactions first and foremost in anonymous and more indirect ways. They applied to a wide range of informal forms of resistances and struggles in everyday life. A few daily formal means were also frequently used in their struggle against exploitation and oppression. Appropriating the ways, forms and opportunities very familiar to them in daily life was the primary strategy they followed in their life struggles.

They used diverse forms of cunning efforts including the covert acts of resistances yielding small but relatively very important economic advantages. By making the rest breaks longer, pilfering goods and money from the workplace, foot-dragging to time-thrift and strict discipline rules, and carefully sparing their strength, they, so to speak, reappropriated their overexploited labor sold cheaply. Briefly, they did not hesitate to use the tactics widely used in daily life as a part of their struggle for a livelihood by increasing their individual income or by reducing their material loss and exploitation.

In addition, they managed to make use of the rules and laws concerning them. Many workers, well aware of their limited rights in the unimplemented laws and regulations, individually or collectively pursued their rights. By petitioning their employers, the authorities and the press, they sought the redress of their complaints and demands. Moreover, it was not rare to step up from petitioning to suing against their oppressors and exploiters.

Finally, although the government reorganized the working class by dividing them along occupational lines, not all the state-sponsored occupational associations were the puppets of the government and employers. Especially the more class-specific associations comprising only the working-class members of an occupation often acted autonomously and safeguarded the livelihoods and rights of their members against the employers without any radical challenge to the system. The low-income members in heterogeneous cross-class associations comprising both rich-employer and poor-worker members of an occupation raised their voice against the administrators of the associations due to high premiums, widespread corruption, their indifference to the workers' problems, and lack of social assistances. They sometimes challenged the power-holders within the associations.

The main focus of this part is this mostly informal and sometimes formal everyday class struggle, i.e. the everyday forms and ways in which the workers appropriated, rather than the accomplishments or shortcomings of the working-class actions. As will be evaluated below, this everyday struggle was not inconclusive or without its rewards. Although in many instances it fell short of reaching the intended goals in the short term, it directly and indirectly transformed the employers' and government's approach to the working-class. Such everyday struggle, giving covert bargaining power to the resistant workers, compelled the employers and the government to compromise with them or to give incentives so as to create a more productive, stable, and disciplined labor force.

All these aspects of the workers' life experience and struggle have largely slipped under the radar screen of historical studies on the early Republican era inasmuch as the scholars only have focused exclusively on leftist, organized, well-aimed, well-programmed collective movements. In tracing how workers responded

to new economic pressures in daily life by drawing on every possible means familiar to them, this chapter explores the first hand and daily forms of working class politics without any organization, intellectual leadership, and high-political intent.

Small Acts of Resistance and Non-Compliance

Indiscipline

Although wage earners, especially industrial workers, resorted to more open and confrontational protests, the fact that the open strike carried the risk of punishment and of sudden counter attack by police led the most of the workers to employ more subtle and covert ways of resistance. One widespread way of such resistance was to slow down the work pace secretly at the worksite. In general, prolonging the rest breaks and lunches, spending longer time in the toilet than it must be or pretending to be ill, they tried to curtail the overwork. Although some of the tobacco factories wanted their workers to arrive at the factories at half past seven o'clock in the morning, the workers did not come before eight o'clock.¹⁴⁴³

Again, there were many complaints by the administrators about the lack of discipline among the workers. Undoubtedly, some of these complaints were the employers' tactics to keep the workers under pressure and discipline. On the other hand, admittedly, workers were prone to discard the labor discipline and frequently did so. The foremen in the tobacco warehouses often had to give warnings to the workers to complete their work fully without a decrease in output and not to pretend to be working.¹⁴⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴³ Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁴⁴ Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, p. 66.

The cigarette factories of the Monopoly Administration received many complaints from the smokers about the lack of quality caused by defective workmanship. Even expensive brands were the subject of public discontent because the workers did not pay attention to the quality of what they produced. Indeed, the low wages and bad working conditions went hand in hand with the rise in defective workmanship. Many workers whose wages were not able to meet their basic needs plodded away at work and went through the motions carelessly. Therefore, some cigarette packs included fewer cigarettes than they should have been. There were many cigarettes badly rolled and not well arranged into the packs. These cigarettes were broken instantly when the smokers held them. For this reason, the Monopoly Administration tried to discourage such apathy of the workers towards the work by instituting a control system according to which each worker would put a numbered paper inside each cigarette pack that identified the worker who prepared that pack.¹⁴⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the fact that the cigarettes of the Monopoly Administration continued to be the main subject of public criticisms during the 1930s demonstrates that such measures were not deterrent.¹⁴⁴⁶

The unsanitary and heavy working conditions of the cotton factories in Adana led the workers to passive resistance. They were apt to go slow when they were exhausted by the long working hours. As a keen observer of the time, Orhan Kemal, described vividly in his memoirs that workers in cotton factories often went slowdown by prolonging their toilet breaks more than usual. Smoking and having a chat with each other in the toilets out of the foremen's sight, they were able to get

¹⁴⁴⁵ Doğruel-Doğruel, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Tekel*, p. 223.

¹⁴⁴⁶ "Bey, Hanım!" *Köroğlu*, 27.09.1929. The cigarettes were so bad in quality that one reader of the *Köroğlu* newspaper wrote that he had bought a pack of cigarette which lacked three to four cigarettes. Another reader complained that he had bought a pack of cigarette which was filled with woman hair. "Ayıp," *Köroğlu*, 28.09.1929. According to this newspaper report, many peasants were complaining about the poor quality of the cigarettes.

away from the work altogether or to evade from the heavy work tempo. These informal breaks were so widespread at the work-sites that security guards regularly controlled the toilets in some factories. However, in spite of these control, the workers continued to spend their time in the toilets or other hidden places in the factory.¹⁴⁴⁷

Again, in the face of long working hours and heavy working conditions, many workers in the Sümerbank textile and clothing factories did their work by halves and procrastinated about doing their jobs. Even when they worked swiftly, most of them went through the motions. Therefore, in the market there were numerous examples of defective fabrics and clothes, failing to meet even ordinary standards. This also caused widespread complaints about the low quality and defective Sümerbank textiles among the people.¹⁴⁴⁸

With the modernization, industrialization, and urbanization of Turkey, especially in the Republican period, it became a common practice to construct reinforced concrete buildings, which instigated the need for more cement. Thus, the conditions under which the work was carried on also got harder for the workers in the cement plants. However, they also handled the situation by some small avoidance tactics. For instance, according to the service records of the workers filed by the managers of the Aslan Cement Factory in Gebze, the most common faults committed against the factory rules and discipline were the sleeping and napping on the job. Many workers were caught by the foremen when they were sleeping in a secluded place in the factory or on the job. According to the reports of the factory managers, since some workers were working at additional jobs, they were saving their energy by sleeping or napping during the job. The second common fault of the workers was

¹⁴⁴⁷ Orhan Kemal, *Avare Yıllar* (İstanbul: Epsilon Yayınevi, 2005), p. 14.

¹⁴⁴⁸ "Sümerbank İşçilerinin Bir Temennisi," *Son Posta*, 18.01.1936.

their indifference to the work. Workers who lay down on the job were caught when they were outside the factory chatting with each other and resting during the working hours.¹⁴⁴⁹

These behaviors were so common that the factory management needed to circulate a notice announcing several fines for such behavior.¹⁴⁵⁰ Nonetheless, neither warnings nor fines were enough to prevent such behavior. The factory was located in Gebze, a low populated and rural district of Kocaeli. The location of the factory further compelled the factory managers to turn a blind eye to the workers' disobediences because it was not easy to substitute a worker with another.¹⁴⁵¹

The taxi drivers of İstanbul also commonly resorted to covert slowdowns during the period. In İstanbul, by 1935, around 2000 taxi drivers were employed by well-off taxi owners. There was a longstanding tension between the drivers and car owners. The drivers often objected to being overworked up to 18 hours a day at low wages. However, the taxi owners insisted on overworking them from morning to morning at the same rates. Therefore, many drivers attempted to reduce the weekly working hours from a few hours to a few days in practice by breaking down the automobiles wittingly. Such mechanical failures provided them some breathing space.¹⁴⁵²

The low-income teachers, who were discontented with their low salaries or delay in the distribution of the salaries also had to engage in different jobs and income sources. Many teachers, therefore, remained indifferent to their jobs and did not "fulfill their responsibilities." Many village teachers did not care about whether the peasants sent their children to school or joined in the common sense of the

¹⁴⁴⁹ Emre Dölen and Murat Koraltürk, *İlk Çimento Fabrikamızın Öyküsü, 1910-2004* (İstanbul: Lafarge Aslan Çimento, 2004), pp. 123-126.

¹⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁴⁵² "Şoförler Meselesi," *Tan*, 26.12.1935.

national days. Since a teachers' peace in the village depended on the peasant's contentedness with the teachers, village teachers generally passed by their official duties. Therefore, they sometimes preferred to go to the town or city center on national days to shirk their duties like organizing and leading a ceremony in national days at the village school. They frequently had to close their eyes to the peasants' indifference to such public occasions or compulsory primary education.¹⁴⁵³ Especially female teachers, who were scared by the peasant's possible scornful attitudes or attacks as well as the hardships of village life, frequently obtained medical reports documenting their unsuitable health conditions so as to avoid working in the villages.¹⁴⁵⁴

Pilferage from Workplace and Petty Larceny

In the wake of the increase in working hours, intensified demands on the work force, increasing wage cuts and freezes, and the high cost of living, the poor wage earners struggled in mundane and surreptitious ways for their livelihood so as to compensate partly their high exploitation. Pilferage and petty larceny were the basic components of this struggle as anonymous, hidden and illicit solutions to their material misery, albeit palliative ones. In workplaces, taking advantage of their proximity to the money in safes, and several good and items that were convertible to money, many low-income laborers stole in small, but rarely in great amounts from their workplaces. Poorer people resorted to theft. By doing so, they strived to reappropriate their labor, which was extremely exploited by their employers and to lessen the burden of the high cost of living.

¹⁴⁵³ Karşı, *Köy Öğretmeninin Anıları*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁵⁴ *CHP 1936 İl Kongreleri*, p. 175.

The laws classified these acts of pilfering, stealing, and thieving as crimes against property. In other words, these illegal acts implied the existence of a conflict over the economic sources and the property. Stealing, thieving and pilferage were one of the major forms and anonymous tactics by which people fought over property for their everyday survival. Such daily “anti-property” crimes became so prevalent among the lower classes that the prisons were overflowed by those who committed these crimes.¹⁴⁵⁵

Especially during the years following the economic crisis, prisons were inundated by an upsurge in the number of prisoners. The total population of the prisons across Turkey doubled in 1932.¹⁴⁵⁶ According to a statistic, the number of the criminals in İstanbul prisons rose about threefold between 1929 and 1935, increasing from 1350 to 4000.¹⁴⁵⁷ In August 1932, a newspaper article titled “2500 Thefts in One Year” pointed out the huge number of thefts that had occurred within a year only in İstanbul.¹⁴⁵⁸ Similarly, thefts were on the rise in Adana, another industrial base, in 1932.¹⁴⁵⁹ Therefore, it was reported that the number of criminals in the prisons of Adana had increased sharply in the last years.¹⁴⁶⁰ The situation was similar in İzmir, the second industrial and trade center of Turkey. The capacity of the prisons was not able to absorb all these offenders. Given the limited capacity of the prisons, some were so overpopulated that İzmir prison with 800-person capacity, for instance, had 950 offenders in 1936, most of whom were thieves.¹⁴⁶¹

What is more striking is the class composition of the prisoners. They had mostly poor citizens. The urban dwellers among them were mostly poor individuals

¹⁴⁵⁵ “Adliye İstatistiklerine Göre Memleketimizde Cürümler ve Mücrimler,” *Polis Dergisi*, No. 10 (May 1, 1940), p. 39, 43.

¹⁴⁵⁶ “Mahkumlar Yüzde Yüz Fazlalaştı,” *Son Posta*, 16.02.1932.

¹⁴⁵⁷ “Hapishaneler Dolu!” *Köroğlu*, 08.04.1936.

¹⁴⁵⁸ “1 Yılda 2500 Hırsızlık,” *Köroğlu*, 20.08.1932.

¹⁴⁵⁹ “Adana’da Hırsızlıklar Son Günlerde Çoğaldı,” *Son Posta*, 03.05.1932.

¹⁴⁶⁰ “Adana’da Hapishanede Mahkum Miktarı Artıyor,” *Son Posta*, 09.02.1933.

¹⁴⁶¹ “İzmir Hapishanesi Dolu,” *Köroğlu*, 16.05.1936.

who came from such occupational backgrounds as industrial workers, porters, drivers, carpenters, butchers, shoemakers, grocers, tinsmiths, coffeehouse owners, tailors, fishers, low-income civil servants, and prostitutes, who were severely hit by the economic downturn in the early 1930s and the heavy economic policies of the government. As for the cause of imprisonment, the type of ordinary crimes, particularly theft, larceny, embezzlement, and pilferage overwhelmingly outnumbered the other crimes.¹⁴⁶²

A study on the crime map of İzmir during the economic crisis confirmed the close association between the decline of the economic standing of the working class and the escalating rates of crime. As underlined by this study as well, the main reason behind the higher crime rate in these years was the survival struggle of the lower classes and their reaction to the propertied classes.¹⁴⁶³

According to the statistics conducted by the Ministry of Justice, the growing crime rates among the poorest workers due to the ever-increasing economic problems did not lose ground in the second half of the 1930s. The number of the crimes, committed by the people with working-class background climbed from 5550 in 1935 to 9866 in 1937. Such criminals nearly doubled within two years. And the great part of the crimes committed was theft.¹⁴⁶⁴

The social impact of the Great Depression, the state economic policies and the industrial drive played important roles in the growth of such acts. The great portion of these offences reflected the intensification of the everyday struggle of the ordinary people to survive in these extraordinary times and partially their reactions to the propertied classes. Here what is especially relevant to our discussion is the

¹⁴⁶² “Mahkumlar Yüzde Yüz Fazlalaştı,” *Son Posta*, 16.02.1932.

¹⁴⁶³ See Emel Göksu, *1929 Dünya Ekonomik Buhranı Yıllarında İzmir ve Suç Coğrafyası* (İzmir: İzmir Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kültür Yayını, 2003).

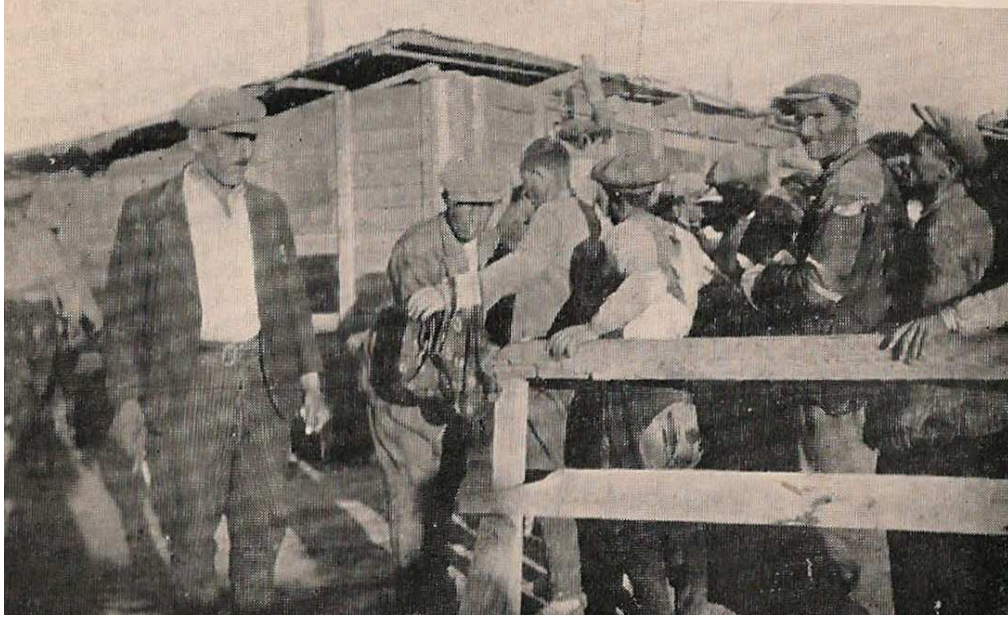
¹⁴⁶⁴ See “Adliye İstatistiklerine Göre Memleketimizde Cürümler ve Mücrimler,” *Polis Dergisi*, No. 10 (May 1, 1940), p. 39, 43.

increase in workplace theft and pilferage. Indeed, many low-waged people, both civil servants and workers, appropriating the goods or money accessible to them in their workplaces, strived to deal with the low wages they earned in return for grueling working hours in hard conditions. This was one of the ways to regain some part of the labor and energy that were already sold at low prices to the employers or the state, and to reappropriate some part of the money that was deducted from wages as premiums and taxes. They were, so to say, appropriators of their own labor already alienated from them. In some cases, workplace theft and pilferage were seen as one of the customary perks of the job, which were not paid by the employers.

There were three groups of “appropriators.” The first group consisted of those workers who pilfered goods from the factories where they worked. The second group was those wage earners working in shops who stole money or some goods from their shops. The third group was low-income civil servants who embezzled and stole money or some goods from their offices. One might see several examples of such everyday acts of the working-people in the daily newspapers. For example, in the Kayseri textile factory, one of the biggest problems the factory director underlined was the widespread pilferage of the factory goods and items by the workers. According to Linke’s observations:

Every evening the men had to be searched for stolen goods. During the past months they carried away everything that could be moved –nails, and pieces of wire, and parts of machinery which were not of the slightest use to them, odd tools, and empty sacks. Apparently, the men from Kayseri had given the lead. They were notorious all over the country for their cleverness and cunning in business, and it seemed to be one of their principles to help themselves to as much as they could.¹⁴⁶⁵

¹⁴⁶⁵ Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, p. 304.



Workers of Kayseri textile factory being searched after work for stolen goods. Lilo Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, (London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1937), p. 304

The Aslan Cement Factory workers also pilfered materials from the factory for resale. In addition to the above-mentioned behaviors of the cement workers, pilfering was another common behavior of cement workers to cope with the harsh economic conditions.¹⁴⁶⁶ The factory management detected that some workers had stolen ethyl alcohol and bags in 1939 for resale.¹⁴⁶⁷

Female workers were also involved in such workplace pilferage. In a silk factory in Mahmutpaşa, for example, the factory management had realized that there was a deficit in the total silk stocks produced in the factory. Therefore, the factory owner decided to tighten the control of the workers by searching them for stolen silk. Consequently, it was detected that some female workers had been stealing kilos of silk. They were caught in act at the end of night shift when they were about to leave the workplace after they called it a day. Two women had concealed the stolen silk by

¹⁴⁶⁶ Dölen and Koraltürk, *İlk Çimento Fabrikamızın*, p. 123.

¹⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

locking it up in a basket. According to the investigations, they had been selling the pilfered silks to another people for a long time.¹⁴⁶⁸

It is possible to follow numerous newspaper reports about pilfering by workers from their workplaces. According to court minutes, a female worker in a sugar factory was caught with a lot of sugar concealed under her clothes.¹⁴⁶⁹ A worker named İhsan in the stamp factory in İstanbul stole stamps worth of about 300 TL and disappeared into thin air.¹⁴⁷⁰ In some factories of the Monopoly Administration in İzmir, some workers, reportedly, stole alcohol, spirit and aniseed from the barrels and then filled in the barrels with water.¹⁴⁷¹ In other instance, the main target of the ship workers was passengers' luggage, packages and postal packets that were shipped from one place to another. Some ship workers frequently pilfered such luggages, packages, and postal packets or opened them and took whatever they found useful.¹⁴⁷²

Especially the workers employed in store departments of the factories made use of the opportunity of easily stealing the goods kept in stores. For example, a worker who was responsible for the store of the Karaağaç plug factory stole a grinder, drill, cap screw, and screws for resale them on the sly. An investigation by the factory administration in the store detected that some factory equipments had disappeared in recent days. At the end of a deeper investigation, the police found the missing equipment in the house of a storekeeper named Mehmet. He had stolen the items in the factory, and then his brother Halil, also a worker in the same factory, had sold the stolen items clandestinely.¹⁴⁷³ Another storekeeper in the Çubuklu fuel oil

¹⁴⁶⁸ "Fabrikadan İpek Çalan İki İşçi Kadın," *Tan*, 21.07.1936.

¹⁴⁶⁹ *1937 Temyiz Kararları*, (Ankara: T.C. Adliye Vekaleti Neşriyat Müdürlüğü, 1938), p. 303.

¹⁴⁷⁰ "Bir İşçi Yeni Paraları Aşırarak Kaçmış," *Son Posta*, 20.05.1935.

¹⁴⁷¹ "Anason ve İspirto Fıçılarına Su Dolduranlar," *Son Posta*, 31.08.1936.

¹⁴⁷² "Halkın Köşesi," *Köroğlu*, 15.08.1934.

¹⁴⁷³ "Bir Fabrika Ambarcısı Yakalandı," *Son Posta*, 01.02.1936.

depot of the Monopoly Administration stole fuel oil for himself and sold it to the fishermen.¹⁴⁷⁴ In a different case, a storekeeper and a worker stole cooperatively some goods from the store of a factory in the Kasımpaşa district of İstanbul after the end of the shift.¹⁴⁷⁵ Another storehouse clerk named Ahmet working at a large grocery store in Galata pilfered coffee, soap and some other items from the workplace for resale.¹⁴⁷⁶

Taxi drivers who were paid the least wages in return for the maximum work also reappropriated their “stolen labor” by the rich car-owners in similar manner. As mentioned above, some low-waged taxi drivers employed by well-to-do taxi owners had been demanding wage hike for a long time but had been usually refused. Therefore, they frequently attempted to appropriate some part of the profits of the taxi owners by understating the daily earnings instead of the face-to-face confrontation with their employers. In the face of pecuniary emergencies due to the low wages, this was a better way to deal with the economic difficulties.¹⁴⁷⁷

Those low-income people who worked at home or in small shops such as domestic maids, charwomen, nannies, cleaners, and those workers who were employed in workshops as journeymen, apprentices, sale assistants and clerks also frequently resorted to pilfering. Given the explanation of Quataert as to why the journeymen, apprentices, and sale clerks did not openly resist or riot against their masters, it seems safe to say that even during the early Republic the bonds of loyalty and affection continued to link them to their masters. Masters generally played a role similar to the father of these low-income laboring men. Apprentices and journeymen behaved as if their masters were their real fathers, and obeyed to their authorities

¹⁴⁷⁴ “Bekçi mi, Hırsız mı?” *Son Posta*, 04.04.1932.

¹⁴⁷⁵ “Çalıştığı Mağazayı Soymuş,” *Son Posta*, 24.01.1935.

¹⁴⁷⁶ “Yaman Bekçi,” *Son Posta*, 18.02.1932.

¹⁴⁷⁷ “Şoförler Meselesi,” *Tan*, 26.12.1935.

fully, in appearance at least. This relationship prevented any sharp hostilities between them. However, there were more covert and subtle negotiation forms between the staff of the artisans and their masters.¹⁴⁷⁸ In other words, these bonds did not preclude more indirect and secret forms of negotiation between the employees and their masters in small workshops, not by means of a wage rise, but by means of appropriation of the master's money or goods underhandedly.

Apprentices, who were generally the young sons of poor families between 7 and 20 years-old, were perhaps the most exploited and unprotected group of the laboring people. Most of them received only symbolic wages. Perhaps "the labor contract" between the employers and an apprentice comprised only following the Turkish idiom said by the father of a boy who would serve as the apprentice of a crafter, shopkeeper, or trader: *eti senin kemiği benim*, in English, "his meat is yours, his bones are mine." This idiom meant "at your disposal," and declared the domination, power, and authority of the master over the apprentice.

However, apprentices endeavored to defend themselves from this informal "labor contract" that rendered them to the status of a mere victim. Especially during the years following the economic crisis, many of them did not hesitate to pilfer their masters' goods and money. According to a newspaper, number of those apprentices who stole the money of their masters increased in recent years. The apprentices, as the newspaper wrote, extracted their pocket money for holiday (*bayram harçlığı*) in this way.¹⁴⁷⁹ In the Beyoğlu district of İstanbul, an apprentice of a butcher who frequently stole his master's money was caught in the act in the end.¹⁴⁸⁰ Another young person who served as apprentice in a restaurant stole 45 TL from the safe.¹⁴⁸¹

¹⁴⁷⁸ Donald Quatert, "Workers and the State during the Late Ottoman Empire," p. 27.

¹⁴⁷⁹ "Bayram Harçlığı," *Köroğlu*, 08.12.1937.

¹⁴⁸⁰ "Hayırlı Çırak," *Son Posta*, 30.06.1932.

¹⁴⁸¹ "Ekmek Kapısı," *Köroğlu*, 07.08.1937.

Several news articles regarding such acts of apprentices appeared in the newspapers of the time.

Another workplace in which pilferage took place was the home. Pilferage was the most common offense among the poor and mostly female domestic workers such as home maids, charwomen and cleaners. They were generally the most desperate and poorest segments of the working class. The state of starvation, hunger, despair, and question of barest survival drove them to steal money or goods from homes that they worked. Many of them attempted to steal money, food, cloth, shoe, or jewelry in the absence of the homeowners. A housemaid named Pakize in Bakırköy, for instance, stole clothes and shoes and ran away from the house she worked.¹⁴⁸² Likewise, in Adana, a poor woman who worked as charwoman stole food and some household goods from the house in which she worked.¹⁴⁸³ Another poor housemaid who involved in a relatively big deal stole 215 TL and jewelry worth of 2.5 TL.¹⁴⁸⁴

As for low-income civil servants, despite the popular perception of them as an affluent group supported by the government, in fact, most of them lived at subsistence level and without the protection of any social security program, except for a minority of high-ranked and well-salaried officials. The great majority of the state officials shared the same destiny as the workers lived. Therefore, they also resorted to “informal individual security methods,” or in moral terms, to “corruption” as a way to ameliorate their destitution.

Undoubtedly, bureaucratic corruption in Turkey was not a new phenomenon, but a long-standing problem that had taken root in the Ottoman Empire. In addition, there was no single pattern of corruption. It is possible to separate bureaucratic

¹⁴⁸² “Hayırlı Hizmetçi!” *Son Posta*, 27.05.1932.

¹⁴⁸³ “Bir Kadın Hırsız,” *Son Posta*, 03.05.1932.

¹⁴⁸⁴ “Hırsızlık Suçlusu Bir Hizmetçi Adliyede,” *Son Posta*, 06.05.1934.

corruption into two kinds: big deals by the higher bureaucracy to increase their well-being, and smaller-deals by the lower ranks to cope with the high cost of living. Undoubtedly, these two kinds sometimes corresponded to each other. How they boosted each other and their adverse effects that hampered public interests and justice are beyond the scope of this study. However, the reality is that for the low-salaried state officials the easiest way or sometimes unique formula to survive in the face of declining purchasing power was to appropriate the state's sources within their reach.

The most common types of appropriation of the undistributed, freezed and quite low salaries for the state employees were embezzlement, pilferage, and bribery. Bribery was especially widespread among both the high and low-ranked civil servants.¹⁴⁸⁵ As stated by Joseph Grew, the first American ambassador to Turkey, the corruption the great part of the Turkish civil servants took part in was caused by the low salaries. According to the Grew, the civil servants barely survived and supported their families on these salaries; consequently, they had to accept bribes.¹⁴⁸⁶

Shortly after the first wave of the economic crisis of 1929 reached Turkey, many embezzlement cases began to be reported in newspapers. An epidemic of embezzlement and pilferage cases involving low-income state officials continued during the 1930s. According to a newspaper article, 150 tax officials were jailed for several years and were fined for complicity in wrongdoings in 1928.¹⁴⁸⁷ Again, in 1931, the same newspaper reported that all of the low-ranking state officials working

¹⁴⁸⁵ "Kolay Değil," *Köroğlu*, 30.01.1929; "Para Almadan İş Gören Var mı?" *Köroğlu*, 02.12.1933. According to these newspaper reports, almost all state officials, in the grip of poverty, did not serve to the citizens without a bribe or gift. The bribery was an epidemic across the country. "Şıp Diye Enselendi," *Köroğlu*, 01.04.1936.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Grew, *Atatürk ve Yeni Türkiye, 1927-1932*, p. 127.

¹⁴⁸⁷ "Ah, Ah," *Köroğlu*, 16.01.1929.

in state offices, post offices and some other institutions stole money and state goods from these offices.¹⁴⁸⁸

The most common type of misappropriation was to steal money belonging to the state institution. Many tax officials, bookkeepers, treasurers, postal officers, bank officials, municipality officials, debt enforcement officials, personnel of semi-official organization such as the Red Crescent Society and the Turkish Aviation Society involved in stealing money from their offices. For example, in May 1932, a treasurer in the finance office (*defterdarlık*) of Cizre stole hundreds of liras. In April 1933, two state officials in Merzifon stole the money from their office. The news reported that a postal money order officer in Adana had stolen some money from the post office, but he had been captured within a short time. Another instance was related to a post officer in İstanbul, who had a deficit about 1300 TL in his cash account. Investigators detected that he had stolen that money. Some municipality officials in Arapkir had stolen 300 TL from the safe box of the municipality. The doorkeeper and some officials, who aroused suspicion in the security forces were prosecuted and ultimately taken to the court.¹⁴⁸⁹

In October 1936, a civil servant in the İstanbul Municipality was captured because he had stolen 17 TL belonging to the municipality. In his defense before the judge, he stated that hunger, deprivation, and despair had incited him to yield to temptation. He also pleaded for mercy in the court by pointing out his six children. In December 1938, a postal officer, who had pilfered some money from his cash, was caught in act and sent to the court. He admitted his guilt and pleaded for the mercy of the judge by putting forward his economic status as a reason. He asserted that

¹⁴⁸⁸ “Hırsızlık Resmi Dairelerde,” *Köroğlu*, 30.05.1931.

¹⁴⁸⁹ “16.000 Lira Çalan Bir Veznedar Mahkum Oldu,” *Son Posta*, 04.05.1932; “Eski Paralar Ne Olacak,” *Köroğlu*, 08.04.1933; “Çaldı Kaçtı Ama!” *Köroğlu*, 17.02.1934; “Şeytana Uymuş,” *Köroğlu*, 13.06.1936.

because he was not able to support his family on a 43 TL salary, he had had to yield to temptation in order to make ends meet. These are only a few examples that were reflected in the press of the time from which one might cite several examples.¹⁴⁹⁰

Another way for misappropriation of the public sources was to steal salable items from the government offices for resale. For example, a tax official pilfered tax declaration forms to sell them to the taxpayers. Another official who worked in the Monopoly Administration's store in Erzincan stole various monopoly goods and put them on sale in Giresun. Again, it was reported that in Ayvansaray, a municipality official stole gunnysacks from the depots of the municipality.¹⁴⁹¹

Some low-salaried employees of the public hospitals also pilfered the medicines for sale. For instance, a nurse in İzmir Country Hospital (*İzmir Memleket Hastanesi*) was caught in the act of selling the medicines that she pinched from the pharmaceutical depots of the hospital.¹⁴⁹² Finally, it was reported that some state officials forged documents to transfer money or goods to themselves or falsified the official documents to cover their theft and embezzlement.¹⁴⁹³

¹⁴⁹⁰“17 Lira İçin,” *Köroğlu*, 03.10.1936; “Hokkabazlık,” *Köroğlu*, 20.04.1938; “Şimdi Ne Olacak?” *Köroğlu*, 28.12.1938. In addition see, “Gün Geçtikçe Kabarıyor,” *Köroğlu*, 30.05.1936. According to this newspaper report, a bookkeeper in the Tobacco Monopoly pilfered some money from the safe box. “5 Yıl Yatacak,” *Köroğlu*, 01.08.1936. This newspaper report, again from Adapazarı, is about a finance office official named İsmal Hakkı who stole 240 TL from the safe box of the office. “Tahsildar Efendi Sandıkta,” *Köroğlu*, 01.07.1933. In this case, one of the tax collectors in Menemen, named Halil Efendi, was prosecuted because he embezzled money. “6 Yıl Hapis,” *Köroğlu*, 03.06.1936. In another case, the doorkeeper of the Aydın Court House named İbrahim was prosecuted because he stole some money from the safe box of the Debt Enforcement Office.

¹⁴⁹¹ “Kağıt Çalan Bir Memur Aranıyor,” *Son Posta*, 10.02.1936; “Çuval Çalan Memur,” *Son Posta*, 17.01.1936; “Tahsildarlar Nerede?” *Köroğlu*, 06.10.1937.

¹⁴⁹² “Aman Hemşire,” *Köroğlu*, 30.07.1938.

¹⁴⁹³ One of the tax collectors of the Bursa municipality embezzled the money he had collected, by arranging fake receipts. “30.000 Lira Çalan Bir Tahsildar,” *Köroğlu*, 07.06.1933. In another case, officials at the revenue office in Fatih embezzled money. “Anafor,” *Köroğlu*, 15.08.1934. Likewise, a warehouse keeper spent the money of the warehouse for his own needs, and another one falsified the accounts. “İki Memur Hak Yerine Gönderildi,” *Son Posta*, 11.06.1935.

Changing Jobs and High Labor Turnover

Changing jobs was another option for low-income people who were not satisfied with their insufficient wage-levels and exhausting working life in the new industries. During the interwar period, the workers frequently attempted to change their jobs when they were squeezed by their employers and dissatisfied with their wages. Admittedly, they did not have the luxury to discard a job whenever they disliked it. However, this did not mean that they were fully dependent on the jobs they held. As occasion served, they quit their jobs as soon as more suitable, high-wage or relatively easier job possibilities arose. In addition, the peasants who entered the factories when an agricultural crisis broke out or in the off seasons in order to save some money for the payment of taxes and debts left their jobs when they had saved the sufficient money.

Especially the strange nature of the working methods, hard working conditions, lack of social security, and low-wages in the newly rising industries disinclined their workers to work for long period at such disturbing and exhausting jobs. In the new industrial sectors, the industrial workers, most of whom were former wage laborers, peasants and artisans, were required to adapt themselves to the stranger and more grueling working environments and working style. This new working life was in general characterized by the new and faster rhythms of work, noisy and dangerous huge machines, strict work discipline, harsh fines, serious work-related accidents and diseases, bad treatment by the foremen who sought the maximum work with the minimum wage and absolute obedience of the workers to shop floor rules, lack of traditional solidarity, the more formal and impersonal relations with their employers contrary to what they were accustomed to in their

villages or towns. On top of them, the low-wages, lack of sufficient social security and medical facilities, high cost of living in urban areas, and epidemics plaguing all of workers severely disturbed the great part of the workers lacking basic medical facilities.¹⁴⁹⁴

However, they were not bystanders of this process. As experienced in other industrialized countries, they also adapted themselves to the industrial relations selectively and resisted it.¹⁴⁹⁵ Perhaps the most important indicator of the selective adaptation and resistance was the high labor turnover rates. They continued to work at their jobs as long as they more or less satisfied the wages and the conditions under which the work was carried on or until they saved some money for their agricultural works. However, they did not hesitate to leave their jobs they did not like especially when better job opportunities arose. That is to say, they adjusted themselves to their jobs and endured them to some extent, but not fully.

Scholars have treated this widespread practice of changing jobs as an unconscious floundering or anomaly of the hapless working class, its peasant character, and the prerequisites of the seasonal industries. There were some merits in these explanations. Especially it cannot be denied that the workers in seasonal sectors such as fig and sultana processing, sugar industry, tobacco industry, and cotton-ginning had to change their jobs against their will. It is true that many peasants

¹⁴⁹⁴ In fact, the main problems artisans and peasants faced in their transformation to the industrial work-force were more or less similar in all societies in transition from artisanal and rural economy to industrial one, albeit there were some important differences. For a similar approach to the relations between the peasants and the Soviet Five Years Development Plans, see David L. Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929-1941*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994). Especially see third and fourth divisions of the book. In addition, for the similar shocking experience of the German peasants and artisans with the industrial work in early stages of the industrial revolution, see Jürgen Kocka, "Problems of Working-Class Formation in Germany: The Early Years, 1800-1875," in *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*, ed. by Ira Katznelson (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 320-322.

¹⁴⁹⁵ See Murat Metinsoy, "Gündelik Yaşamda Sınıf Mücadelesi ve Direniş: Türkiye'de İkinci Dünya Savaşı Sonrasında Sosyal Politika Alanındaki Gelişmelerde İşçi Sınıfının Rolü," *İktisat, Siyaset ve Devlet Üzerine Yazılar: Prof. Dr. Kemalî Saybaşı'ya Armağan*, ed. by Burak Ülman and İsmet Akça (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2006).

worked in industrial plants for a while until they saved some money to pay their taxes or debts, left their jobs, and returned to their villages. All of these contributed to the high turn over rates. On the other hand, it is possible to consider some portion of the labor turnover as a labor strategy against the low wages and bad conditions and as the peasants' resistance to the sudden dispossession and proletarianization.

The main characteristic of changing the job was that it was a strategy of selective adaptation and an indirect bargaining technique. From the peasants' perspective, the industrial work was generally a temporary way to generate an income. In the face of the decline in agricultural prices, increase in debts and tax burdens, some peasants considered the industrial work as a palliative treatment of their acute economic difficulties. In other words, the temporarily engagement in industrial jobs was a strategy to cope with the economic depression. In that sense, the temporary industrial work enabled the peasants who were on the edge of dispossession and proletarianization to resist it.

Indeed, there can be several observations about how the peasants temporarily worked in industrial jobs and left their jobs after a short time for their own agricultural work. According to a report on the Turkish economy in 1933 and 1934, prepared by a group of American experts led by Walker Hines, the great part of the Turkish working class was composed of peasants who worked in industry a few months in order to save some money for their debts and taxes, and then returned to their villages.¹⁴⁹⁶

Cemil Çalgüner, who conducted a survey among agricultural workers, almost half of the workers at the Seyhan National Textile Factory (*Seyhan Milli Mensucat Fabrikası*) were small plot-holders who continued to engage in agriculture

¹⁴⁹⁶ Hines et al., *Türkiye'nin İktisadi Bakımdan Umumî Bir Tetkiki*, p. 238.

seasonally.¹⁴⁹⁷ In a late date, as a Turkish industrial expert said to an American traveler, “a peasant comes to work in a factory- but too often, after a few years, the call of the land gets too strong and he goes home to his village.”¹⁴⁹⁸ According to the observations of the traveler, since many Turkish laboring men preserved their ties to the village, they were apt to work as seasonal or casual workers in the factories. This was an important reason for the high labor turnover.¹⁴⁹⁹

Indeed, their multifarious ties to the land and the village community in the countryside allowed the peasants to work temporarily or leave their jobs whenever they did not want to work in strange, disciplined and highly exploitative circumstances of the industry. In other words, the industrial work was a sideline to their agricultural work, in which they occupied for the short term when they needed cash or when they wanted to work in their spare time in off seasons.

On the other hand, the workers’ continuing tie to the land was not the sole reason for their reluctance to work permanently in the industry. The main reasons that paved way for the climbing rates of the labor turnover were the repulsive conditions in the industry. The people’s ties to the land or village economy, I think, enabled them to avoid working in exhausting jobs in unsanitary and unsafe conditions for low-wages. In other words, their ties to the land and to the village community enforced their bargaining power with the industrial and highly exploitative capitalism rather than directly disinclining them from the working permanently in factories.

A report released in 1949 by the International Labor Office confirms this argument. According to the report, the primary cause of the high turnover rates in

¹⁴⁹⁷ Cemil Çalgüner, *Türkiye’de Ziraat İşçileri* (Ankara: Ankara Yüksek Ziraat Enstitüsü Rektörlüğü Yayını, 1943), p. 19.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Newman, *Turkish Crossroads*, p. 79.

¹⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Turkish industry were not only the seasonal labor movements between the large agricultural sector and industry, but also the poor working conditions, low-wages, housing problems, lack of social security system and of basic social services, and difficulties the workers encountered due to the lack of their technical knowledge.¹⁵⁰⁰ Only this last factor caused them to fall victim to the fatal industrial accidents frequently, which everyday filled the pages of the newspapers. What is worst, the bodily injuries were mostly uncompensated.¹⁵⁰¹

Therefore, leaving the job, from the workers' standpoint, was a resistance to the proletarianization, in other words, to the commoditization of their labor and to the arduous and unsafe living and working conditions in a strange environment far away from their families and relatives. In the eye of a considerable part of the workers, especially peasant ones, the temporary work in the industry offered a safer and more autonomous life than long-term employment. Therefore, the bureaucrats and employers, alarmed by such high circulation of the employees, often complained of the instability of the labor force.

Contrary to the idealization of working conditions and wages in some public enterprises by scholars,¹⁵⁰² most of public enterprises did not provide attractive and friendly working environment or sufficient social facilities and services. One of them was the Ereğli Coal Mines Enterprise run by the Etibank.¹⁵⁰³ A 1937 election district report of the Zonguldak deputies confirms how the bad treatment of the workers in Ereğli coalmines of Etibank troubled the workers and led them to quit the work

¹⁵⁰⁰ *Labour Problems in Turkey-Report of a Mission of the International Labour Office, (March-May 1949)* (Geneva: International Labor Office, 1950), p. 216.

¹⁵⁰¹ "Kesik Bacak Kopuk Kol," K ro lu, 07.12.1935; "Bir    i 10 Bin Lira  stiyor," *Son Posta*, 18.06.1935.

¹⁵⁰² Ahmet Makal, "T rkiye'nin Sanayile me S recinde," pp. 34-70; Y ldırım Ko , *T rkiye'de    i Sınfı ve Sendikacılık* ( stanbul: Ger ek Yayınevi, 1998), pp. 36-38.

¹⁵⁰³ For the detailed account of the working and living conditions of the coal-mine workers especially in the least years of the single-party period, see Murat Metinsoy, " kinci D nya Sava ı Yıllarında Zonguldak K m r Ocaklarında  cretli    i M kellefiyeti ve    i Direni i," in *Zonguldak Kent Tarihi Bienali'nden Se meler* (Zonguldak: ZOKEV & TMMOB, 2005), pp. 93-112.

whenever possible. One part of the report below vividly describes the main reason lying behind the high turnover rate:

It is understood from the slowdown in economic transactions in Zonguldak Port in comparison with the past and from several complaints of the workers that the cruel treatment of the workers by the Etibank officials decreased the number of the workers and accordingly the production levels day by day. A newly recruited worker in the mines, hopes to receive his wage on payday, but often gets disappointed by the long delays of payments or with the underpayments. The managers of the enterprise intend to increase the profits of Etibank by cutting the wages of the workers. Therefore, they cause some workers to quit their jobs and to leave the mines... The Labor Inspectors determined that the officials of this state-owned bank avoid applying the Labor Law by overworking the workers. This situation sets a bad example for other companies, too... The government must obey the Labor Law in order to supply enough number of workers vital to increasing production levels...¹⁵⁰⁴

Similarly, we know that the Sümerbank textile factories offered to their workers quite low wages under heavy working conditions without any social security. The report of Ağâh Sırrı Levend, the RPP Kayseri Region Inspector, depicts the wage policy of the Kayseri Textile Factory, run by the Sümerbank. Despite a limited number of qualified workers whose monthly wages reached 70 TL, the average wage of majority of the workers per hour was low, only 6 piasters.¹⁵⁰⁵ That is to say, they received around 15 TL monthly. Furthermore, the factories owned by the Sümerbank were not able to provide housing facilities to their workers and officials even at the end of the 1940s. In such conditions, how could a company expect its workers who received only 6 piasters per hour to live around the factory and not leave the factory as soon as they found higher pay? ¹⁵⁰⁶

Furthermore, diseases in epidemic forms also distressed the workers. For instance, a malaria epidemic that plagued Kayseri throughout the 1930s pushed the

¹⁵⁰⁴ Election District Reports of the Zonguldak deputies Raif Dinç, H. Karabacak, Esat Çakmak Kaya and Rıfat Kardaş, BCA CHP [490.1/721.464.2], 08.11.1937.

¹⁵⁰⁵ See BCA CHP [490.01/670.258.01], 15.04.1942.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Sümerbank, *Cumhuriyet'in 25'inci Yılı*, p. 54.

workers to leave the factory and return back to their villages.¹⁵⁰⁷ Likewise, the malaria epidemic in Nazilli also hit the workers of Nazilli Textile Factory. Therefore, many peasants and craftsmen came from the other districts of Denizli and surrounding provinces to the factory for extra income could not endure the working tempo and malaria and left the factory within a short time.¹⁵⁰⁸

Both Kayseri and Adana textile factories also suffered the instability of the labor force. Most of the workers, who still were in contact with their villages, left their jobs periodically for agricultural work. Especially in summer, they went to their vineyards to harvest grapes. For workers, this was one method to support themselves in the face of low wages in industry. In addition, working in their own land allowed them to give a break from the highly disciplined, exhausting, and mechanized tempo of the industrial work.¹⁵⁰⁹

In another large industrial undertaking, a big cotton factory in Tarsus, an employer complained of the workers' instability. This factory was owned by one of the richest entrepreneurs of the region. Despite the restoration of some departments of the factory, the other departments were composed of dark and depressing workshops, full of outmoded and unsafe machines making a deafening noise. Young children workers were subjected to violence by foremen for their undisciplined behaviors. Some foremen beat the young child workers who shirked their duties. Furthermore, the managers promised to give 4 piasters per hour to the workers, the net avails went down below 2.5 piasters sometimes.¹⁵¹⁰ Therefore, whenever they saved some money for their survival in the village or a better job opportunity arose, they left the factory, as the employer complained of below:

¹⁵⁰⁷ Donald Everett Webster, *The Turkey of Atatürk: Social Process in the Turkish Reformation* (Philadelphia: The American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1939), p. 250.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Cillov, *Denizli El Dokumacılığı Sanayii*, p. 149.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Mümtaz Faik, "Kayseri Kombinarı ve İşçi Buhramı," *Tan*, 02.10.1936.

¹⁵¹⁰ Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, p. 270.

Nothing could make them understand that it is a man's duty to work at least six days a week. The moment they had saved a few pounds –and because of their incredibly low standard of life that was easily achievable- they stayed at home in idleness. Of course, after a while they always had to come back if they did not want to starve. With tears in their eyes, they would beg to be allowed back into their old places. So what was the good of giving them better wages? It would only increase their laziness and spoil them altogether. And there could be such a thing as loyalty to one's employer had never even dawned on them. If there was a rumor that somewhere else they could earn five piasters more, off went the whole lot of them, as for instance now to those American women who were digging up a whole hill to find sole old stones.¹⁵¹¹

The situation was similar in the construction sector, especially railway construction. For instance, the railway-building project in Sivas carried out by the Simeryol Company suffered high labor turnover. The construction workers circulated very fast. According to the managers of the company, this was related to the workers' ignorance and peasant status, an argument that Turkish scholars also repeat today. A foreign expert working for the company complained about the high rate of absenteeism of the workers to Linke as follows:

They do not spend the tenth part on themselves. They save every piaster they can, and when they have enough to pay their taxes and buy a new suit for themselves and sugar and a few knick-knacks for their family, they say goodbye to us and go home again to their villages and fields.¹⁵¹²

However, this fast labor circulation was closely connected to the adverse working conditions and the low wages. Workers who worked for the company complained several times about the Simeryol Company's indifference to the workers' right and lives. Due to the heavy work in railway construction, workers were not contented with the daily wages, which ranged between 80 and 150 piasters per day. A party inspector reported in 1936 that most of the workers lived in excessive destitution and often complained about the low-wages, unsanitary conditions, too long working

¹⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 268-269.

¹⁵¹² *Ibid.*, p. 189.

hours and short rest breaks. The construction company delegated the housing and provisioning of the workers to another company in return for a six percent share of the profit. For that reason, the workers had to pay far more money for the accommodation and basic foodstuffs. In addition, putting the distribution of the wages back, the company paid the wages every forty days in order to burden the workers with debt to the provisioning company. This situation pressed the workers to work too hard. In short, according to the inspector, the workers hated the company and fled from the worksite whenever they could.¹⁵¹³

In the Aslan Cement Plant in Gebze, the first and biggest cement plant in Turkey, major problems that the factory management faced was absenteeism and high labor turnover. Workers were often absent from the factory without informing the management. According to the service record files of the workers, these were not sporadic cases.¹⁵¹⁴ There was high-speed traffic of workers in the factory. However, most of the workers did not quit their jobs permanently; but after a break for short or long intervals, they returned to the factory.¹⁵¹⁵

Despite the lack of the accurate and detailed figures about the overall labor turnover rates during the early Republic, it is possible to draw a general conclusion from some figures belonging to the public enterprises, which is argued to have had relatively better working conditions and higher wage levels.¹⁵¹⁶ For example, the total workers entrance into the Kayseri Textile Factory of Sümerbank was 19,761 from 1935 to 1950. This number was seven fold of the total number of workers.

¹⁵¹³ BCA CHP, [490.1/726.481.1], 1936.

¹⁵¹⁴ Dölen and Koraltürk, *İlk Çimento Fabrikamızın Öyküsü*, , 1910-2004, p. 126.

¹⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.110.

¹⁵¹⁶ High labor turnover rate began to take root in the industrialization process of the 1930s, and it skyrocketed during the first half of the 1940s due to the social impact of the World War II and the National Emergency Law. See Murat Metinsoy, "Gündelik Yaşamda Sınıf Mücadelesi ve Direniş: Türkiye'de İkinci Dünya Savaşı Sonrasında Sosyal Politika Alanındaki Gelişmelerde İşçi Sınıfının Rolü," *İktisat, Siyaset ve Devlet Üzerine Yazılar: Prof. Dr. Kemalî Saybaşı'ya Armağan*, ed. by Burak Ülman and İsmet Akça (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2006).

Again, within three years from 1937 to 1941, 11,272 workers had entered the Nazilli Textile Factory of Sümerbank. This number was about 3.5 times more than the total staff of the factory.¹⁵¹⁷ The turnover rates in the sugar factories reached up to 300 percent within 1940.¹⁵¹⁸ In the Etibank Ergani Copper Enterprise, the labor turnover was about 247 percent in 1941. In same year, this rate was 64.8 percent in the Bursa Woolen Cloth Factory.¹⁵¹⁹ The workers of the Defterdar Textile Factory of Sümerbank and Beykoz Leather and Shoe Factory of Sümerbank also frequently quit their jobs and left the factory without any permission.¹⁵²⁰ Because the working conditions were more adverse in the private sector, it seems safe to assume that the labor circulation in the private sector was probably higher than in the public sector.

Labor instability reached such acute levels that in September 1935, the State Railways Administration decided to sell tickets at a reduced rate for those passengers who would travel to seek a job in the industrial zones. For the long-distance travels, the ticket rate was reduced from 5 TL to 1.25 TL; and for the short-distance travels, the reduced ticket rate was determined as 1 TL instead of 3 TL.¹⁵²¹

Not only in big industry, but also in smaller sectors of the economic life, the wage earners quit their jobs when troubled by insufficient wages, unhealthy working conditions, and bad treatment of the employers. Indeed, there are several examples of how the people could be selective among different fields by changing their jobs. For example, it is understood from the Regulations of the Drivers' Associations that the drivers employed by taxi-owners in İstanbul were often forced to overwork up to 18

¹⁵¹⁷ Nusret Ekin, "Memleketimizde İşçi Devri Mevzuunda Yapılan Araştırmalar ve Ortaya Koydukları Neticeler," *İ.Ü. İktisat Fakültesi Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları*, 9-10-11. Kitap (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi, 1960), pp. 137-138.

¹⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹⁵²¹ "İş Arayanlar İçin," *Köroğlu*, 18.09.1935.

hours a day. Those drivers who did not like to work for that long left their jobs without informing the taxi-owners.¹⁵²²

Again, the changing the jobs or threatening their employers with leaving the job was strategies among the domestic workers such as cleaners, nannies and housemaids. Albert Eckstein, a German physician working for the Turkish government between 1935 and 1950, wrote in his memoirs that in their first years in Turkey their domestic servant Mehmet frequently threatened him to leave job and sometimes left the home to go to his village without permission for a few days or weeks. Therefore, they had been forced to increase his wage several times in order to keep him at his job. However, one day, after he had saved some money, he returned to his village and engaged in farming.¹⁵²³ This was not an exceptional case, but a common strategy of casual workers, who were in constant pursuit for more comfortable life.

The labor circulation especially in industry was so high that it reduced the productivity rates and production levels. Caused by the high labor circulation and low productivity, the industrial drive faced several problems. The newly established factories with very limited sources and foreign credits were doomed to the temporary novices instead of qualified and permanent labor force. Accordingly, the government could not achieve the targeted production levels of the First Five-Year Industrial Plan of 1934.¹⁵²⁴

Therefore, both the ruling circles and the industrialists often complained about the high inclination of Turkish workers to change their jobs or to return to their village after a short period of working. Indeed, the high turnover rates caused by the

¹⁵²² “Şoförler Meselesi,” *Tan*, 26.12.1935.

¹⁵²³ Nejat Akar, *Bozkır Çocuklarına Bir Umut: Dr. Albert Eckstein* (İstanbul: Gürer Yayınları, 2008), pp. 49-50.

¹⁵²⁴ İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu* (Ankara: Ortadoğu Teknik Üniversitesi, 1982), p. 189.

lack of bonds of affection between the workers and their workplaces worried the ruling circles. A speech delivered by Celal Bayar in the National Assembly in 1937, which addressed the workers' detachment from the work and the lack of permanent and qualified workers, confirms how much the high labor turnover rates startled the government.

In our country, the workers do not feel attachment to their jobs firmly. This may cause a great danger for the industry. A worker comes to the factory; we train him as apprentice by paying him in our factories; he starts to work in the factory; he works for two or three months perfectly; but one morning we see nobody at machine in shop floor; in this way many leave the factories and return to their villages in groups.¹⁵²⁵

In the rest of his speech, Bayar continued to underline what should be done in order to establish strong ties between the workers and the factories. According to him, social measures such as providing housing facilities, vocational education services, sanitary conditions were prerequisites for the stability of the workers and for the creation of a permanent labor force. This process, for Bayar, would further increase the costs in the short term, but yield very important social benefits in long term.¹⁵²⁶ As seen from these statements, the workers' apathy to their job, the high frequency of job changing and the resultant unsteadiness of employment forced the politicians and the employers to appreciate the importance of the social policies.

Similarly, alarmed by the workers' frequent leaving of jobs, the owners and managers of the textile factories located in Kayseri and Adana sought ways to attract the workers so as to stabilize the labor force. Therefore, factories strived to make the workers settle down and to prevent workers' instability by providing them additional benefits and services like accommodation including heating, electricity, laundry, bath

¹⁵²⁵ Özel Şahingiray, *Celal Bayar'ın Söylev ve Demeçleri, 1920-1953* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Yayınları, 1954), pp. 295-296.

¹⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 295-296.

and three hot meals a day. Furthermore, towards the end of 1936, the Kayseri Textile Factory decided to distribute a pair of shoes and cloth once a year to all workers.¹⁵²⁷

The Aslan Cement Factory had to retreat in the face of high labor turnover. In worker recruitment, the factory management hired preferably those workers who had worked previously in the factory but had left it for a while, due to their familiarity with the job. Moreover, in order to assure the labor stability, the factory management turned a blind eye to some of the faults of the workers. Even in some instance of pilferage, the management avoided to punish the workers or contended with some small fines instead of firing or heavy penalties. The management also avoided depriving those workers who had been fined earlier from benefits such as wage rises and social services. Briefly, the factory was in need of labor, and the existing labor instability made it more tolerant towards the workers.¹⁵²⁸

The high labor turnover rates would give a covert bargaining power to the working class by compelling the state and employers to take simple social measures, albeit limited. Some benefits, social services and social facilities especially in the public enterprises also can be seen as results of the push of high turnover rates. Especially the soaring labor turnover rates that emerged during the World War Two would force the government and many employers to adopt new social policy measures.¹⁵²⁹

In addition, some self-employed artisans hit by the industrialization process also tried to adjust themselves to the changing conditions by shifting their business to fields that are more feasible. They also benefitted from the advantages of changing jobs when their income was not able to make both ends meet. Upon the decrease in

¹⁵²⁷ Mümtaz Faik, "Kayseri Kombinarı ve İşçi Buhranı," *Tan*, 02.10.1936.

¹⁵²⁸ Dölen and Koraltürk, *İlk Çimento Fabrikamızın Öyküsü*, , 1910-2004, p. 110.

¹⁵²⁹ See Murat Metinsoy, *İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Türkiye: Savaş ve Gündelik Yaşam* (İstanbul: Homer Yayınevi, 2007), pp. 262-265; Murat Metinsoy, "Gündelik Yaşamda," pp. 67-106.

their transactions and profits, saddlers and shoemakers, for instance, engaged primarily in tinkering the used and broken leather accessories, goods, and shoes. The decline in the economic status of the artisans led many of them to engage in a different businesses ranging from livestock farming to running a coffeehouse or grocery.¹⁵³⁰

In 1934, the Artisan's Professional Periodical reported that changing job was a common practice among low-income workers and self-employed persons. Due to the high-cost of living, many workers and shopkeepers moved everyday from one job to another like checkers on a checkerboard in the pursuit of a living to augment their family income a little bit more. A restaurateur of yesterday was bagel seller of today or draper of today may be meatball seller (*köfteci*) or fisherman of tomorrow, and similar jobs.¹⁵³¹

One of the most preferable jobs during the years of the Great Depression was to open a small diner serving a few kinds of cheap and simple meals like soup, meatballs, white beans, rice and cracked wheat for low-income people. Declared by the İstanbul Municipality in May 1932, within the last five years from 1927 to 1932, the number of such diners in İstanbul had increased from 400 to 2200. It was argued that the main cause for this increase was the poor people's struggle with the growing impoverishment. Those people who went unemployed or impoverished recently due to the declining wages and incomes attempted to open such places with a small capital, a gas range, and a few dishes.¹⁵³² In this way, they tried to increase, albeit marginally, their incomes.

¹⁵³⁰ M.Halid [Bayrı], "Balıkesirde Saraçlık," p. 237.

¹⁵³¹ Osman Cemal, "Esnaf Arasında Köşe Kapmaca," *Esnaf Meslek Mecmuası*, No. 10 (Aug. 1, 1934), p. 16.

¹⁵³² "Beş, Altı Sene Evvel 400 Olan Lokantacı Dükkanları Tam 2200'ü Bulmuştur," *Son Posta*, 26.05.1932.

Engaging in Additional Jobs

Low-income working people frequently engaged in additional jobs when their existing jobs did not yield sufficient incomes for them or when they became unemployed. Shifting and diversifying their work-fields, they adjusted themselves to the current economic trends. Additional works they held were generally different, relatively simple and plain jobs requiring no qualifications, official licenses, or capital. Thus, they went beyond their declining purchasing power and resisted falling behind their minimum subsistence levels. Even though the additional jobs boosted their incomes marginally, the importance of such marginal additional income could not be underestimated for these people living in along a thin line differentiating between the hunger and satiation.

Elementary school teachers, for example, were among those low-income state officials. Late payments of salaries and lack of social security measures protecting them in their difficult times pushed them to look for additional income sources. As a contemporary village teacher noted in his memoirs, especially village teachers engaged in extra works together with the peasants in villages. Some village teachers, ignoring their teaching jobs, took up agricultural work and livestock farming as an additional source of income. Some left the villages to work in town centers.¹⁵³³ Though Sarkis Çerkezian's mother was a teacher in fact, she had to work also as a house cleaner and seamstress to supplement her family income effectively.¹⁵³⁴

Some low-income teachers in small towns and villages also dealt in the trade of schoolbooks and stationery supplies. These teachers bought some books and stationeries from the big cities in the mid-term breaks and summer vacations and

¹⁵³³ Karşı, *Köy Öğretmeninin Anıları*, pp. 21-24, 50.

¹⁵³⁴ Sarkis Çerkezian, *Dünya Hepimize Yeter*, ed. by Yasemin Gedik (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 2003), p. 97.

then sold them to the students after returning to the villages and towns. This practice was so widespread that some booksellers in the Anatolian towns complained of the teachers being traders of books and stationary supplies.¹⁵³⁵

Religious functionaries were another low-income group among the civil servants whose economic and social status declined during the Republican period. The average salaries paid to them were far from adequate on which to live. Therefore, they picked up additional money by performing funerals, religious rituals, and marriage ceremonies. Furthermore, in addition to their religious duties, some ran bookstores and sign-lettering business to make enough to live off.¹⁵³⁶ Among the religious functionaries, there were those who ran at the same time shops such as groceries. As a response to a readers' complaint about a *müezzîn* who ran a grocery store in İstanbul, the editor of *Köroğlu* newspaper responded, "This situation was not proper, but what should he do? The highest salary of a *müezzîn* is only 15 TL. Is it possible to live on this money?"¹⁵³⁷

Of course, the main additional job for them was to teach Arabic alphabets and religion to pupils clandestinely in return for some basic goods or a small amount of money they accepted traditionally as a gift.¹⁵³⁸ Some *imams* and *müezzîns* spent the entire day in a different job, delegating the recitation of the call-to-prayers to another person at the cost of a few piasters. It was reported that for this reason, in some places the call-to-prayers given by persons with untrained or rude voices were irritating the Muslim community.¹⁵³⁹ Finally, it can be said with all probability, the decrease in their economic standings with the coming of the secular regime led some

¹⁵³⁵ "Doğru mu?" *Köroğlu*, 16.10.1929; "Kitapçılar Şikayet Ediyorlar," *Köroğlu*, 23.10.1929.

¹⁵³⁶ Henry Elisha Allen, *The Turkish Transformation: A Study in Social and Religious Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), p. 181.

¹⁵³⁷ "Halk Ne Diyor, Ne İstiyor?" *Köroğlu*, 23.11.1935.

¹⁵³⁸ About the widespread existence of the Arabic instruction by the preachers see EGMA [13211-11], 22.07.1934; EGMA [13211-16], 1938. In addition see, İsmail Kara (ed.), *Kutuz Hoca'nın Hatıraları: Cumhuriyet Devrinde Bir Köy Hocası* (İstanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2000), p. 33-42.

¹⁵³⁹ "Ezan Sesi," *Köroğlu*, 25.05.1932.

of them to engage further in illicit side-jobs such as casting spells, breaking the spells, writing amulets, and faith-healing.¹⁵⁴⁰

Another way to earn extra money when low-wages were not satisfactory or to survive in the face of unemployment was street vending. On the İstanbul streets and pavements, it was estimated that roughly 50,000 people made a living by peddling.¹⁵⁴¹ The more purchasing power of wages eroded, the greater the number of street vendors expanded.¹⁵⁴² Unemployment also played a role in the increase in number of street vendors. When workers became unemployed, many of them adapted themselves to the street trading. Especially seasonal workers were able to deal in trade when their workplaces were closed. For instance, tobacco workers lived by selling some goods, peddling or other small business during the off seasons of the tobacco sector.¹⁵⁴³ Some workers, when the working conditions were unbearable or when their wages hit the bottom, earned their living by polishing shoe or trading sundries.¹⁵⁴⁴

As Zehra Kosova also noted in her memoirs, when the tobacco workers lost their jobs or previous wages during the Great Depression, some engaged in shoeshining; some worked as porters in Sirkeci.¹⁵⁴⁵ One time when Kosova and his family were in the grip of unemployment, she saw passengers disembarking from a ship at the port and she herself sprang up to carry a passenger's luggage. She earned 10 TL that day.¹⁵⁴⁶ Her husband worked for a while as shoeshiner when he went

¹⁵⁴⁰ "Muska 6 Papel," *Köroğlu*, 13.04.1935; "15 Liraya Muska," *Köroğlu*, 23.10.1935; "Üfürükçü Yakalandı," *Köroğlu*, 31.01.1931; "Üfürük!" *Köroğlu*, 21.12.1932; "Hala mı Yahu," *Köroğlu*, 31.01.1934; "Büyücü," *Köroğlu*, 11.01.1936; "Hacı Baba: Üfürükçü Nasıl Enselendi," *Köroğlu*, 17.10.1936.

¹⁵⁴¹ "50 Bin Satıcı," *Köroğlu*, 12.12.1934.

¹⁵⁴² "Peki Ama Ne İle Geçinsinler?" *Son Posta*, 29.04.1931.

¹⁵⁴³ Mihri Belli, *Esas Hadise O Kiraz Ağaçları* (İstanbul: Çiviyazıları, 2002), p. 85.

¹⁵⁴⁴ "Bühan ve Tütün Amelesi," *Kızıl İstanbul*, March 1934, quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 342; see also Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 83; "Bit Pazarında," *Köroğlu*, 06.04.1929.

¹⁵⁴⁵ Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, p. 60.

¹⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

unemployed in the early 1930s.¹⁵⁴⁷ Those protesting workers who were fired because of their involvement in walkouts or fights for rights in factories also held different jobs by running coffeehouses or diners or working as wage laborers and shoeshiners during the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁵⁴⁸

Likewise, the low-waged night watchmen also survived through engaging in additional jobs in the daytime. It was reported that since some night watchmen were working in other jobs during the daytime, they lay down on their jobs to rest or sleep at nights.¹⁵⁴⁹ Similarly, industrial workers also toiled at additional jobs at night after their shifts in the factories. Working in an additional job after the factory works was common among, for instance, the Aslan Cement Factory workers. Some of them showed signs of tiredness, due to working in two jobs, by frequently drowsing on the job.¹⁵⁵⁰

Pursuing a Right: Writing to the Newspapers, Petitioning, and Appropriating the Laws

The ordinary people of the early Republican period were diligent citizens in pursuing their rights. The repressive state machine could not dissuade them from seeking their rights. In the face of harsh working conditions, violations of their limited rights, the oppression and unfair treatment by the employers and the state administrators, the workers did not hesitate to pursue their rights in various ways. In the absence of organizational and directly political means, they often followed alternative routes for pursuing a right. The first method was to write to the national press in order to make

¹⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁵⁴⁸ TTKA SSJ-22, 1340 [1924].

¹⁵⁴⁹ “Tembellik Eden Bekçiler,” *Son Posta*, 10.02.1932.

¹⁵⁵⁰ Dölen and Koraltürk, *İlk Çimento Fabrikamızın Öyküsü, 1910-2004*, p. 125.

their voices heard and to publicize the infringements on their rights and infringers. That was one of the easiest ways to seek relief by drawing attention of the government to their problems and pressurize the capitalists and local authorities. The second step was petitioning the employers, local and finally the central authorities to persuade them to take action to redress their problems. The third and more formal step was to appropriate the existing legal structure by suing their oppressors and exploiters.

Writing to the Newspapers

In everyday life, people pursued their rights by writing to the newspapers and to the party and state authorities. In their letters, they not only complained of some problems such as the high-cost of living, low-wages, long delays in payments of salaries, long working hours, and lack of social security, but also demanded wage and salary raises, the payment of wages and salaries on time, and protective social measures.

Indeed, one efficient way to reach these goals through making the grievances and demands heard by authorities was to write to the newspapers. By doing so, a wide section of society expressed the problems they encountered in daily life, the sources of these problems and their demand for redress. Another function of writing to the newspapers was likely to ask for the newspaper's help and advice to solve these questions, which the letter writers themselves could not solve.

Despite the auto-censure and control mechanisms over the press and thus avoidance of direct criticisms of the government, the prestigious nation-wide newspapers with large circulation such as *Cumhuriyet*, *Tan*, *Son Posta*, *Akşam*,

Köroğlu, and *İkdam* gave place to the citizens' letters sent to the newspaper editors. Selected letters touching on important public grievances and demands were published under the title of "*Okuyucu Mektupları*" (Letters of the Readers), "*Halkın Sesi*" (The People's Voice), "*Halkın Köşesi*" (The People's Column), "*Karilerimizden Mektuplar*" (Letters from Our Readers), and "*Kari Gözüyle*" (With the View of Readers). Sometimes, they were published as specific news under separate titles and commented on by the editors generally in favor of the letter writers. These small divisions of the newspapers stood for the relatively free platforms of the ordinary people through which they expressed their voices and problems.

In that respect, publicizing a wrongdoing, misfeasance, and complaint through the press probably functioned as an intimidation weapon of the weak against the prestige of the employers and of the local administrators, and accordingly their business lives and positions. The following instance best exemplifies the effect of writing a diatribe about an entrepreneur to the press. When Mehmet Kavala laid off his tobacco workers in İzmit in winter without any unemployment pay, a worker objected. When Kavala and his men attempted to attack the worker, he and other workers prevented their attacks collectively and threatened Mehmet Kavala with writing a complaint letter to the national newspapers about this unfair and brutal treatment. Intimidated by this threat to his prestige, Kavala had to pay each worker additional money, enough to go on with a few months of the winter.¹⁵⁵¹

Moreover, the letter writers used a rhetorical language to convince the authorities of the validity of their complaints and demands. They sometimes openly adopted the government's principle of populism and "equal, classless, and a coherent

¹⁵⁵¹ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, pp. 103-105.

nation without privileged groups” and used it as a weapon against the authority to legitimate their criticisms of inequalities and economic problems. Seeming to have accepted the Republican principles of nationalism, populism, etatism, peasantism, equality, and classless society, they employed these concepts to articulate their complaints and demands in a rhetorical manner.

Many low-wage state officials and workers demanded the payment of their salaries or wages by means of writing to the newspapers. In their letters to *Cumhuriyet* in September 1929, for instance, many village teachers in Kemaliye and Urfa demanded that their salaries which had not been paid for the last five months be paid as soon as possible.¹⁵⁵² In May 1932, teachers of Konya also sent a letter complaining of long delays in payments of salaries and demanding the immediate distribution of the accrued salaries.¹⁵⁵³ One month later, a group of teachers from the Islahiye district of Gaziantep wrote that they had not received their salaries for the last six months.¹⁵⁵⁴

Religious functionaries experienced the same hardships. Many of them bombarded the newspapers with complaint letters. In August 1934, for instance, a group of religious functionary from Lapseki requested *Köroğlu* to publicize their affliction with the unpaid salaries for five months.¹⁵⁵⁵ In same dates, *imams* and *hatips* in Ermenek also wrote to *Köroğlu* that they had been waiting for their salaries for five months and requested the newspaper to call the attention of the related authorities to such a problem.¹⁵⁵⁶ Some state officials expressed their demand for salary rise by writing to the newspapers. For instance, a guardian in İzmir Akhisar

¹⁵⁵² “Bunlar da Hazirandan Beri Maaş Alamıyorlarmış,” *Cumhuriyet*, 14.09.1929.

¹⁵⁵³ “Konya Muallimlerinin Maaşı,” *Son Posta*, 24.05.1932.

¹⁵⁵⁴ “Islahiye Muallimleri Maaş Alamıyorlarmış,” *Son Posta*, 11.06.1932.

¹⁵⁵⁵ “Halkın Köşesi,” *Köroğlu*, 04.08.1934.

¹⁵⁵⁶ “Beş Ay Maaş Bekliyenler,” *Köroğlu*, 11.08.1934.

prison, in a letter on behalf of his colleagues, invited the government to increase their low-wages.¹⁵⁵⁷

Factory workers also raised their voices individually or collectively about the unpaid wages and shortchanges via writing to the newspapers. In his letter to *Cumhuriyet* in January 1930, a worker in a factory in Karaağaç, whose wages had not been paid for two and a half months, complained of this situation.¹⁵⁵⁸ Similarly, writing a letter to *Son Posta* in May 1932, the Seyrisefain Factory workers from Kasımpaşa asked complainingly why the factory had not given them their daily wages for two months.¹⁵⁵⁹

Likewise, in February 1934, workers in the Balya Karaaydın Mine Company reported to *Köroğlu*, how the company had cut their wages sharply.¹⁵⁶⁰ A few years later, the same workers once again complained about the company. Workers wrote to *Köroğlu* that they had been wrongfully shortchanged more than a hundred percent. Although the company had promised them to pay 140 piasters on a daily basis, they had received only 60 piasters. They demanded intervention in this blatant violation of their rights.¹⁵⁶¹

Sometimes workers collectively penned letters and submitted their letters to the editors and chief editors of the newspapers by visiting the newspaper offices personally. By doing this, they probably aimed to augment the effect of their letters. For instance, 14 workers of the Bakırköy Textile Factory went in person to the office of *Son Posta* and submitted their complaint letter about the unpaid perks of the

¹⁵⁵⁷ “Halkın Köşesi,” *Köroğlu*, 06.07.1929.

¹⁵⁵⁸ “Amele Gündeliğini Alamıyormuş,” *Cumhuriyet*, 24.01.1930.

¹⁵⁵⁹ “Yevmiyelerimizi Niçin Alamadık?” *Son Posta*, 14.05.1932.

¹⁵⁶⁰ “Yevmiyeler,” *Köroğlu*, 07.02.1934.

¹⁵⁶¹ “Balya Madeninde İşçiler,” *Köroğlu*, 30.06.1937.

previous years. They probably poured out their troubles to the editors and asked them to lay stress on their problem in the newspaper.¹⁵⁶²

In addition, a newspaper reported that they had received numerous letters of complaint sent by those workers who had been fired by their foremen and employers without any reason.¹⁵⁶³ Some leftist workers opted to write to the illegal communist newspapers. For example, workers of the Çapa Tobacco Warehouse of the Monopoly Administration, aggrieved by being shortchanged by the administration, sent their complaint letters to the *Bolşevik* (Bolshevik).¹⁵⁶⁴

Some of civil servants had a pension right, but in practice, many of them were unable to receive their legally acquired pensions or gratuities. Many old and poor retired civil servants had not any pension right or retirement gratuity, which aggrieved them in the old age. Therefore, many old retirees who had not been able to receive their pensions or grants for months or years, or aged workers or civil servants, who demanded a retirement right or retirement bonus, relatives of the deceased civil servants or workers who requested pensions bombarded the newspapers with their emotional letters. As addressed in the former chapter, many old workers, civil servants, war veterans, and relatives of the martyrs complained about how they were ignored and cast aside by the state and the companies which they had served for years.¹⁵⁶⁵

Another topic about which the citizens complained the most in their letters was the working conditions. Many workers complaining of the hard work in the unsanitary and unsafe shop floor environment raised their voices via letters to the newspapers. Many complained of grueling working hours, dirty, dank, sunless, and

¹⁵⁶² “Bir İkrâmiye Meselesi,” *Son Posta*, 17.02.1932.

¹⁵⁶³ “İşçi Hakkı,” *Köroğlu*, 16.05.1934.

¹⁵⁶⁴ *Bolşevik*, No. 28 (1931), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 315.

¹⁵⁶⁵ “Ayda Dört Lira İle Geçinilir mi?” *Köroğlu*, 04.02.1931; “Sekiz Senedir Maaşımı Alamıyorum,” *Son Posta*, 25.03.1932; “Kaç Yıllık İş?” *Köroğlu*, 25.09.1935. See also Chapter Eight.

too hot or too cold workplaces. For instance, the workers of some textile factories in Adana who were worked hard up to minimum 12 hours a day wrote a letter to *Köroğlu* requesting it to call the attention of the authorities to their inhumane working conditions.¹⁵⁶⁶

In August 1932, the workers of the tobacco warehouse of the monopoly administration in Samsun collectively wrote a diatribe to *Köroğlu* criticizing the exhausting working hours and bad treatment of the workers at the hand of merciless foremen. They raised their objection ten hours of hard work a day in stuffy workrooms polluted with nicotine.¹⁵⁶⁷ A group of worker from chrysalis factories in Adapazarı also expressed their discontent with the eleven-hour workday that caused bodily injures through a letter to *Köroğlu*.¹⁵⁶⁸ Similarly, workers in Tavşanlı chrome mines declared concertedly their objection to the minimum of ten hours of very hard and dangerous work via a letter to the same newspaper.¹⁵⁶⁹

In another letter, sent to *Son Posta*, a worker in a textile factory in Ankara demanded protective measures against the risk of work accidents on behalf of himself and his poor worker friends in the factory.¹⁵⁷⁰ The Alpullu Sugar Factory workers, who thought that their employer violated their right to weekend rest by compelling them to work on Saturdays afternoons, penned a letter together to a newspaper. In this collective letter, they complained of such practice of the factory administration and demanded the respect of the administration for the laws.¹⁵⁷¹

Last, but still just one of numerous samples, was the collective objection of Mersin dockworkers to the wage payment system of the Dock Company. The

¹⁵⁶⁶ “İşçi Kaç Saat Çalışır?” *Köroğlu*, 30.06.1937.

¹⁵⁶⁷ “Tütün Amelesi,” *Köroğlu*, 03.08.1932.

¹⁵⁶⁸ “11 Saat İş Başı,” *Köroğlu*, 21.11.1934.

¹⁵⁶⁹ “Amele 10 Saat Çalışmaz,” *Köroğlu*, 27.05.1936.

¹⁵⁷⁰ “Ateşçiler Himaye İstiyor,” *Son Posta*, 20.02.1932.

¹⁵⁷¹ “Alpullu Şeker Fabrikasından Bir Grup Amelenin Şikayeti,” *Köroğlu*, 21.12.1935.

company did not pay wages in cash, but as gift vouchers. However, this system was at the disadvantage of workers because the contracted grocery stores near the Mersin Port took these vouchers at 10 percent less than their real value. Therefore, the workers, explaining the situation in detail through a letter to the press, objected to this system and wanted to be paid in cash.¹⁵⁷²

In parallel to its pronatalist policies giving priority to the growth of the population, the government had decided to make a one-off payment of 50 TL to families with more than five children. Therefore, demanding this multi-child benefit also constituted the main subjects of workers' letters to newspapers. Hundreds of such large families, sometimes attaching a photo of their children to the letters, asked how, when, and in what quantities they would receive this money. Some families strived to prove how much they deserved it by emphasizing the number of their children despite their economic difficulties. On the other hand, since the financial source allocated by the government to these benefits was limited, many families, though entitled to such benefits, did not receive the money. For that reason, many families questioned why they had been unable to receive it despite their endless efforts. In their rhetoric, stressing on their contribution to the growth of the Turkish nation and to the next generation, they demanded to be rewarded in return for their contribution.¹⁵⁷³

People who had been fired by their employers arbitrarily and without any unemployment compensation were also among the letter writers to the newspapers. Exposing the merciless employers and foremen who fired them arbitrarily, they tried to call the authorities' attention to their discontent via newspapers. Arbitrarily laid-

¹⁵⁷² "Halkın Köşesi," *Köroğlu*, 25.07.1934.

¹⁵⁷³ "Çok Çocuklular: Bay Ali Rıza'dan İkramiye İsteyen Analar," *Köroğlu*, 06.04.1935; "Çok Çocuklu Analar Para İstiyorlar," *Köroğlu*, 10.03.1935; "İkramiye Alan Kadınlar," *Köroğlu*, 14.09.1938; "Çok Çocuklu Yürekli Analar," *Köroğlu*, 17.04.1935; "Çok Çocuklu Analar Para İstiyorlar," *Köroğlu*, 29.03.1935; "Çok Çocuklular," *Köroğlu*, 30.03.1935.

off workers endeavored to use the power of the press in defending their rights and struggling against their employers as in the abovementioned case of the tobacco workers' resistance to Kavala Mehmet. In another case, a group of waiters, who had been employed in the bar section of the Taksim Municipality Garden were fired because of their objection at having been pressed into service in the other sections of the Garden arbitrarily by their foremen although they had been hired only as waiters in the bar. Upon their dismissal, they got *Tan* newspaper in no time flat with their written statement criticizing the unjust treatment of them by the Garden administration. Upon this, the newspaper published their letter with as comment supporting the waiters.¹⁵⁷⁴

Finally, some unemployed poor people also tried to find employment by attracting the attention of the employers and the official authorities via writing to the newspapers. For example, a wage-laborer named Mustafa from Balat had sent a petition about his bad financial situation to the Prime Ministry, but had not received a response. Upon this, he tried to reach to the authorities via writing to the newspaper. He wrote that although he had "eleven healthy and robust Turkish children" (*on bir sıhhatli ve gürbüz Türk çocuğu*), he was unemployed as a twist of fate. He also attached a photo of his poor ragamuffin children and his two wives to the letter.¹⁵⁷⁵ Again, a group of craftsmen from İzmir, suffering unemployment for a long duration also sent a letter to the newspaper *Köroğlu* with their photos. Giving brief information about their skills and professions, these young men demanded that the authorities find suitable jobs to them.¹⁵⁷⁶

¹⁵⁷⁴ "Taksim'den Çıkarılan Garsonların Şikayeti," *Tan*, 03.07.1935.

¹⁵⁷⁵ "11 Çocukla İşsiz Kalan Mustafa," *Köroğlu*, 11.11.1936.

¹⁵⁷⁶ "Resimde Görülen Gençler İzmir'de İşsizlikten Şikayet Ediyor..." *Köroğlu*, 01.09.1934.

Petitioning

In an authoritarian regime, petition was another common means of protest and request to which the ordinary people frequently resorted. Despite its strict control over the legal political realm, the Republican government guaranteed the right of the people to petition private agencies, the party, the local administrations, and the central government for redress of grievances. The discontented low-income people have often resorted to petitioning the relevant agencies, seeking more pay, fewer working hours, suitable work atmospheres, more fair treatment, medical facilities, compensation for their losses, and the more active intervention of the government in labor sphere in favor of the workers. Thus, the people strived to prompt the employers and the official authorities to take action in order to solve their problems and meet their needs.

Petitioning the Employers

Undoubtedly, concerning the economic and working problems, the first resort of the petitioner workers was the managements of their companies. When they faced any problem, they went up to the offices of the administrators to pursue their rights and to contest with them over their demands and complaints that they generally manifested through petitions. The issues about the wages and working conditions and terms were of paramount importance in these petitions.

In March 1932, for instance, some workers of the Navigation Company, who had not received their wages since January, declared through a petition to the Director Cemil Bey that they would not work unless their accrued wages had been

properly distributed. They alleged that the company applied double standard, paying the wages of other workers employed in other departments on time.¹⁵⁷⁷

Towards the end of 1935, the Haliç Company, another navigation company in İstanbul, faced a financial bottleneck. Therefore, first it decided to freeze the regular annual delivery of cloth and shoes to each worker in September. However, the economic crisis that captured the company led it to close itself down in November. The suspension of the company's activities indefinitely threw all of the employees of the company out of work without any compensation payment. However, the company personnel, first applying to the company directorate, objected to the cancellation of annual deliveries of social aid goods and claimed half of the actual cash value of these items at least.¹⁵⁷⁸ Second, especially the senior employees, who had worked for the company about 20 years, officially laid claim to unemployment compensation.¹⁵⁷⁹

Another example of pursuing a right via petitioning workplace administrators came from the security guards of İstanbul museums seeking a wage hike. Coming together, they collectively penned a petition and sent it to the İstanbul Museums' Directorate and asked for a raise. They argued that despite the importance and risks of their job, they were paid only 25 TL a month, which never met the needs of their families. They also asserted that because of the great responsibility of security of the precious historical artifacts, they should be paid better.¹⁵⁸⁰

Again, the service record files of the workers confirm that the workers of the Aslan Çimento Factory in Gebze also frequently gave petitions to the factory management about various issues. For instance, Burhaneddin Tezcan in a petition

¹⁵⁷⁷ "Seyrisefain İşçileri İdareden Şikâyetçidir," *Son Posta*, 13.03.1932.

¹⁵⁷⁸ "Haliç Şirketinde Bir İhtilaf," *Son Posta*, 02.09.1935.

¹⁵⁷⁹ "Haliç Şirketi ve Memurları," *Son Posta*, 21.11.1935.

¹⁵⁸⁰ "Müzelerde Bekçilik Yapanların Maaşları," *Tan*, 11.11.1935.

stated that he and his father had served to the factory for several years with great loyalty, but now he needed to be assisted by the factory with a small wage hike of about 2 piasters per hour. There were many similar samples of petitions to the factory management.¹⁵⁸¹

In the dispute of July 1935 between the İzmir Port Company and the dockworkers, the latter used petitioning as the primary way to resist the company. The dispute arose from the reductions in wages and the new piecework wage system in which each dockworker was paid a flat rate of 20 piasters for each ton of stevedoring. Discontented with these decisions of the company, hundreds of workers petitioned the company management collectively and objected to the reduction in their wages and the new unfavorable wage system.¹⁵⁸² The next day, the management declared that they would find a common ground that was satisfactory for both sides.¹⁵⁸³ Ultimately, the company found a compromise with the workers, but decided to lay off 300 of them to compensate the costs. Upon this, the dismissed workers collectively demanded layoff compensations, but the company refused this demand.¹⁵⁸⁴ The news about the labor dispute ended here in *Tan* newspaper as far as I could be seen. Therefore, it is not possible ascertain how this dispute eventually was ended. However, the relevant aspect of this dispute to the discussion at hand is how the dockworkers used the collective petitioning in their labor disputes in order to declare their grievances and demands.

¹⁵⁸¹ Dölen and Koraltürk, *İlk Çimento Fabrikamızın Öyküsü*, , 1910-2004, p. 111.

¹⁵⁸² “225 Kuruş Yevmiye Yerine 40 Kuruş,” *Tan*, 10.08.1935.

¹⁵⁸³ “İşçilerin İstedığı Olabilecek mi?” *Tan*, 11.08.1935.

¹⁵⁸⁴ “Liman Amelesinin Bir Kısım Çıkarılıyor,” *Tan*, 14.07.1935; “Liman İşçilerini Yeni Bir Haber Endişeye Düşürdü,” *Tan*, 16.08.1935.

Petitioning the Official Authorities

A great number of the low-income and poor wage earners directly contacted the government through petitions that they sent to the official authorities such as the National Assembly, the Republican leaders, the party secretary-general and other party organs, the ministers, and the governors. The number of petitions filed with the National Assembly Petition Commission each year far exceeded the number of petitions sent to any other institution. In any way, by their petitions, they invited the authorities to defend or boost their rights, implement the laws, keep their promises, take social policy measures, and redress their grievances. Below are some examples of how the working class used the petitioning practice for their cause.

Petitions to the leaders were sometimes so effective that the leaders often investigated the cases set forth by the petitioners. In one petition directly sent to Atatürk, a group of teachers in Kırşehir had complained about delays in the payment of salaries for several months. After heard about this situation, Atatürk asked the Minister of Education why these teachers had not received their salaries. Due to the Minister's vague reply, Atatürk suddenly decided to investigate the complaints of teachers himself right away and went to Kırşehir. In this central Anatolian province, he met and talked with the teachers himself.¹⁵⁸⁵

One common target of the petitions was the party leaders. The RPP was the most important touch of hope for low-income people who had incurred the wrath of their employers or experienced economic hardships. For instance, a porter in the Gemlik Customhouse was fired upon the complaints of the Gemlik governor and the head of the RPP Provincial Administrative Committee without taking his statement

¹⁵⁸⁵ Turgut, *Atatürk'ün Sırdaşı Kılıç Ali'nin Hatıraları*, p. 603.

in 1935. Therefore, the porter sued the administration but the local court dismissed the case rendering a verdict that the complainant had ignored his duty by leaving Gemlik frequently for İstanbul. Thereupon, in November 1935, the porter petitioned Recep Peker, the General-Secretary of the RPP With a nationalist rhetoric:

To the RPP General-Secretary Dear Sir Recep Peker,
I am one of your brothers who served the country in the National Struggle with heart and soul. Although there are many who know how much I worked for the nation in the darkest days of the nation, even the documents I have are enough to confirm my service (...). I do not expect anything from your Excellency in return for my service (...). On the other hand, since an unfair treatment I have been exposed to nowadays hurts the honor of my family, I request you to listen to me and to prevent the gross injustice I have suffered.¹⁵⁸⁶

The porter alleged that he had fallen victim to the personal wrath of some people because he had previously informed authorities about their abuses and corruption in the Gemlik Aviation Society. Therefore, they had slandered and then fired him. The porter demanded to be appointed to a position in İstanbul. Thereupon, Recep Peker sent an inspector to Gemlik to take the governor's and the RPP directors' statements. After the investigations, Peker decided that the porter should not have fallen victim to a slander and expanded the investigations. Meantime, he also ordered the reemployment of the porter immediately.¹⁵⁸⁷

In another case, the porters in Büyükada, who were exploited by the chief porter and some administrators of the Porters' Association, also resorted to the party Secretary-General by writing a petition in September 1936. They alleged that the chief porter named Hüsameddin had seized a certain amount of their profits though he had not work at all. Furthermore, his assistants Eyüp and Hızır, who were also salaried officials of the Porters' Association had not professed to be porters in any way. Eyüp ran a coffeehouse and Hızır had a restaurant on Büyükada. They treated

¹⁵⁸⁶ BCA CHP [490.1/538.2156.2], 21.05.1935.

¹⁵⁸⁷ BCA CHP [490.1/538.2156.2], 11.07.1935.

unfairly those porters who did not frequent their places. Petitioners requested the party to prevent the unlawful activities and oppressive actions of such people who administered the Porters' Association.¹⁵⁸⁸

The Sivas railway workers employed by Simeryol Company in unfavorable conditions, as mentioned before, also petitioned the party in the face of these adverse working conditions and unpaid wages, complaining about unsanitary conditions, bad housing, insufficient breaks, exhausting overtime work, and abuses of the company.¹⁵⁸⁹

In Konya, it was reported that many workers petitioned the party about their unpaid wages or too low wages. Some workers complained that their employers had not paid their wages for a long time. Expressing their frustration with this situation, they requested the party press the employers to improve both the payment schedules and the levels of the daily wages as soon as possible.¹⁵⁹⁰

Some workers petitioned the party for not only wage hikes or fewer work, but also for the opening of work fields for them as a solution to their acute problem of unemployment. For instance, when Zehra Kosova's family and many other Balkan refugees formerly engaged in tobacco were settled in Tokat, they resorted to the local party administration via a collective petition for the opening of a tobacco warehouse in which they could work. Taking such a petition of the refugees into consideration, the government decided to build a tobacco warehouse there within a short time.¹⁵⁹¹

In another case, right after the government took over the port monopolies in İstanbul and İzmir in 1936, a dispute broke out between the employees of the previous port companies and the government. The transfer of the ports to the

¹⁵⁸⁸ BCA CHP [490.1/1443.19.1], 07.09.1936.

¹⁵⁸⁹ BCA CHP [490.10/726.481.1], 1936.

¹⁵⁹⁰ BCA CHP [490.10/726.481.1], 1936.

¹⁵⁹¹ Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, p. 17.

government stirred up a controversy over the vested rights of the employees. During the transfer process, the government had ignored the vested rights of the port employees, especially of the dockworkers, by refusing the extension of the vested rights to the new enterprises owned by the government. However, in the face of the pressure of the İstanbul port employees, the government had to recognize their previous rights. But, the İzmir port administration firmly resisted the port employees' demands for approval of rights acquired previously. Therefore, the workers and officials of the İzmir port collectively petitioned the RPP Congress in Karşıyaka District. They demanded the local party administration to include the approval of their vested rights in the wish list of the local congress that would be submitted to the İzmir Provincial Party Congress and subsequently to the Secretariat-General of the RPP. In other words, the dockworkers tried to force the government to respect the vested rights of all of the employees, as it was the case in İstanbul. Ultimately, they achieved their goals by compelling the government to recognize their vested rights.¹⁵⁹²

Not only workers, but also self-employed weavers in Anatolia aggrieved by the big factories and imported fabrics and cloths looked for the help of the Party by petitioning. For instance, in petitions to the Party Secretary-General, the handloom weavers in Babadağ expressed their great trouble with the products of big industry and imported goods. Despite the low prices of their handicraft products, they were not able to compete with the big factories and merchants. Therefore, a family engaged in weaving could earn only 2 TL a week at most. They, in their words, "begged for the effective help of the party and the government."¹⁵⁹³ As will be addressed below in detail, the artisans and their occupational associations also often

¹⁵⁹² BCA CHP [490.1/475.1941.1], 16.04.1936.

¹⁵⁹³ BCA CHP [490.1/1452.16.1], 06.07.1939.

sought the protection and help of the party and the government in many issues by petitioning the governmental institutions.

Another official institution within the nearest reach of the people was the local governments and their specific offices. When they faced a problem, they resorted to the Governors or the Industrial Directorate (*Sanayi Müdürlüğü*) with a petition. In June 1932, a newspaper reported that the complaint petitions written by workers to the Industrial Directorate had significantly increased in recent times. Many of these workers complained of not having received their wages for a long time. Invaded by the petitions, reportedly the Directorate began to investigate the cases put forward by the petitioners.¹⁵⁹⁴

A petition signed by 500 workers of a tobacco warehouse of the Monopoly Administration in İstanbul, for instance, was submitted to the governorship by hand to prompt the immediate action of the authorities to protect workers from occupational exposure of unsanitary environment. The main demands of the workers were fewer working hours, better hygienic conditions, workplace safety, clean drinking water, more nutritious foods instead of a few olives and stale bread, and a ventilator to remove the polluted air in the worksites.¹⁵⁹⁵

Likewise, when some textile factories in İzmir laid off about 900 workers in January 1935 without any financial compensation, the fired workers collectively petitioned the concerned authorities in the İzmir Governorship, seeking the reemployment or an unemployment compensation. Thereupon, the Industrial Directorate took the employers' statement. In the end, the Directorate found the reasons given by the companies unsatisfactory and ordered them to reemploy the fired workers as soon as possible. In a public declaration made by these companies, it

¹⁵⁹⁴ "Amelelerin Yevmiyelerini Vermemişler," *Son Posta*, 26.06.1932.

¹⁵⁹⁵ *Kızıl İstanbul*, No.37 (1932), quoted in Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 71.

was stated that the workers would be rehired within a short time. Indeed, the companies gradually rehired the workers group by group.¹⁵⁹⁶

Unemployed peasants who came to İstanbul from the rural areas to look for jobs during the economic crisis years also resorted to the governors via petitioning. On May 24, 1931, through a petition, a group of peasants demanded that the governorship to give them official permission to work as porters in market places or on docks. The governorship did not accept this demand.¹⁵⁹⁷

One of the highest governmental institutions to which the workers petitioned in order to seek their rights and redress of their problems was the ministries. They wrote to the ministries related to the business fields in which they were employed. For instance, workers employed in the tobacco factories of the Monopoly Administration affiliated with the Ministry of Custom and Monopolies, complained of the ill-treatment of the factory workers by ruthless and immoral factory administrators to this ministry. Especially, in the face of the sexual harassment of the female workers by foremen and factory directors in the tobacco factory in İstanbul directed by the Monopoly Administration, the resentful workers sent a petition to Ali Rana Tarhan, the Minister of Customs and Monopoly, accusing certain foremen and administrators of sexual harassment.¹⁵⁹⁸

The railway workers also petitioned the Ministry of Public Works administering and supervising the railway constructions when they got into trouble with the companies or the ministry bureaucrats. Indeed, the railroad workers, together with the coal miners, were perhaps exposed to the worst working conditions. Construction companies tried to exploit their workers as much as possible. One of these companies forced the workers to sign a labor contract that was full of

¹⁵⁹⁶ “İzmir’de Bir Sanayi Meselesi,” *Son Posta*, 25.01.1935.

¹⁵⁹⁷ “Halk İş Bulamıyor,” *Köroğlu*, 27.05.1931.

¹⁵⁹⁸ *Orak Çekiç*, No.11 (Oct. 1, 1936), quoted in Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, pp. 101-102.

unfavorable terms and conditions. Workers called contracts of this sort as yellow cards (*sarı kart*), with regard to the color of the contract paper. According to these yellow cards, workers were regarded to have accepted the special demands and conditions of the company. Based on these cards, the company claimed that it had an absolute right to employ those workers who signed them without payment for months and to fire them without payment of accrued wages or any compensation whenever the company wanted. Considering the content of the yellow cards as unfair and inhumane, the workers petitioned the Ministry of Public Works and demanded that the ministry ameliorate their vulnerable situation and to disentail the terms and conditions in these contracts.¹⁵⁹⁹

In another case, the Ministry of Public Works declared that all money accumulated in the account of the mutual assistance fund of the nationalized Eastern Railways Company would be distributed among the company workers. However, not much later, the ministry dropped this idea. Workers did not hesitate to criticize this decision and to call Ali Çetinkaya, the minister, for the payment of such promised money by petitioning the ministry, but adding some fun to their criticisms as follows. They coined a phrase for this disappointing decision:

*Çok sevindik hayal kurdük bekledik aydan aya
Ümitlerimiz Boşa Çıktı Kaldık Bakın Hep Yaya
İkramiye Vaadi ile Cebimizdekini Harcadık
Halimizi Arzedelim Bari Çetinkaya'ya*¹⁶⁰⁰

We got very happy, we dreamt and waited from month to month
Our expectations came to nothing, see, how we all are stranded
With the assurance of bonus, we spent what we had in our pockets
Let us submit our situation to Çetinkaya at least

Again, in the dispute between Haliç Company and its workers erupted in November 1935 due to the wages and wage payment procedures, the company workers

¹⁵⁹⁹ "Sarı Kart Nedir?" *Köroğlu*, 25.04.1936.

¹⁶⁰⁰ "İkramiye Marşı," *Köroğlu*, 13.02.1934.

petitioned Ministry of Economy when their demands were refused by the company management. In their petitions sent by wire, they invited the ministry to defend their acquired rights.¹⁶⁰¹

Many poor people, retirees, war veterans and relatives of the martyrs also individually wrote to the RPP center, the GNAT, and President Atatürk. The Republican archives were full of such petitions. Again, the GNAT Yearbooks include thousands of summaries of the petitions evaluated by the Petition Commission. In these petitions, the demands of the mitigation of poverty and material needs through wage increases, financial help, employment, retirement pensions, and war veteran or martyr's relative payments were of paramount importance. The people often adorned their petitions with official discourse, principles of the RPP in order to justify and enhance their claims, complaints and demands. That is not say that the poor and low-income citizens were under the hegemony of the regime and its ideology. On the contrary, they challenged it from the inside without open confrontation by inviting the authorities to keep their promise and to be accordance with the principles they parroted. In other words, the language of the petitions was in itself a dynamic of the working class life struggle. They took advantage of the multifarious implications of a concept in language by appropriating the official discourse for their subjective causes.

For instance, some petitioners showed how they had sacrificed their family members in the Great War and especially in the National Struggle. For example, one old poor woman introduced herself as a woman of the motherland whose father and two sons had died martyr in the Great War and the National Struggle. Therefore

¹⁶⁰¹ "Haliç Şirketi ve Memurları," *Son Posta*, 21.11.1935.

arguing that she had already deserved a comfortable life in the rest of her short life, she pleaded with the government to help her financially.¹⁶⁰²

Another person, Nuri Aksel, who was a night watchman in the Depot of Gunpowder, demanded a social aid from the government because of his too low wage. He stated poignantly that although he had made sacrifices for the sake of his country in the National Struggle, he was not able to support his six children he was bringing up for the growth of the nation.¹⁶⁰³

An employee of the tobacco monopoly administration in Adana, named Ziya, pleaded with the Secretary-General Recep Peker to help him financially. In order to show how he had already deserved the assistance of the government, he described how he had contributed to the country by making sacrifices in the National Struggle and then by making several babies for the nation.¹⁶⁰⁴

In another letter, a previous official in a timber factory in Ayancık, named Şükriüoğlu Kemal complained about his employer who had fired him from his job in the timber company. According to the petitioner, although he was a Turkish racially, who had served the *Kuva-i Milliye* (the National Forces) in the National Struggle with immense industry, and therefore was tortured by the enemies, the employer of the timber company had dismissed him and hired an Armenian person instead of him. He requested the nationalist government to help him for his reemployment in his previous job in the timber factory.¹⁶⁰⁵

In a petition addressed to Atatürk and penned by a chef cook named Hacı from Nazilli, the letter writer wanted to be awarded with the Independence Medal owing to his service in the National Struggle. Moreover, Hacı pleaded with Atatürk

¹⁶⁰² EGMA [22552-39], 14.04.1937.

¹⁶⁰³ EGMA [22552-39], 27.12.1936.

¹⁶⁰⁴ CHP BCA [490.1/46.187.3], 23.08.1930.

¹⁶⁰⁵ CHP BCA [490.1/532.2132.2], 30.12.1934.

to find employment for his son in a bank as bank clerk. What is relevant to our discussion here is that he also did not forget to eulogize Atatürk expressing his great respect and love for him by calling on him “Worshipful” (*Mübeccel*) and “Honorable.” He closed his letter by same reverential words: “I wish you be everlasting for ever in the head of the nation.”¹⁶⁰⁶

Workers who were exploited and oppressed by their employers also resorted to Atatürk and government to prompt them to take corrective action against the unfair treatment by their employers. For this aim, they adopted or pretended to adopt the hegemonic discourse which glorified and exalted both the president and the government. For example, the Tramway workers in İstanbul went on the strike in 1928. The Tramway Company, rejected to meet the strikers’ demands, and finally managed to put down the strike with the help of the police and the strikebreakers. After the breakdown of the workers strike, the workers gave up the strike in 15 October and placed their hopes on, with their own words, “the People’s Government” (*Halk Hükümeti*) by writing a petition to the government. When the company dismissed some radical strikers and the government did not prevent this, thereupon, the discharged workers wrote to Atatürk by pleading with him to help them. For this aim, they did not make a point of give their props to Atatürk and the government stating how they trusted the “Great sublimity of Atatürk” and “the grant of the People’s Government.”¹⁶⁰⁷ One might cite further examples of such rhetorical statements that were mostly devised to augment the effects of their letters and to win authorities’ favor.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Letters written to Ghazi, BCA CHP [490.1/34.143.1].

¹⁶⁰⁷ “Ankara’da Halkın İman ve Vicdanı Reisicumhurumuz Gazi Hazretlerine, Grevci amele Hükümetin şefkatine iltica etti. Halk Hükümetine halkın muhabbet ve merbutiyetini gösterdi. Fakat bugün seksen ocak tütmüyor. Tramvay kumpanyası ameleyle açlıkla cezalandırıyor. Her şeyi sizden bekleyenler Hükümetin atıfından sizin büyük kutsiyetinizden ümidini kesmemiştir. Amele vatanda güneşden feyyaz ve rıhakar olan ilâhi varlığınıza hayat ve halas bekliyor. Galata Ünyon Han Amele Vekili Orhan Mithat.” See BCA NV [230.0/91.25.1], 08.11.1928.

Appropriating the Laws: Bringing a Lawsuit

Apart from these petitions that were used by the working people to draw the attention of the policymakers to their problems and to prompt the authorities to take immediate action to protect them from the cruel treatment of employers and overexploitation, workers did not hesitate to sue their employers who violated their rights. Thus, they took a further and more determined step to pursue their rights.

Zonguldak dockworkers insistently took several legal actions against the unjust treatment by their employers and their professional organization, the Coalmine Workers' Union, which deducted high premiums illicitly from their wages and did not live up to its commitment of protecting their interests. For instance, on 15 December 1932, a dockworker named Hüseyinoğlu Hüseyin Hasan objected to the premiums deducted from his wage by the Ereğli Coal Mines Enterprise and brought the Enterprise to court on the grounds that the deduction of such a premium from his wages was contrary to the laws. The plaintiff demanded the repayment of the total amount cut from his wages of 981 TL 84 piasters. The local court in Zonguldak dismissed the case. However, the dockworker and his lawyer filed an appeal. The Supreme Court reversed the judgment of the local court finding the appellant right.¹⁶⁰⁸

In April 1935, the resistant dockworkers of the Zonguldak port brought an action against the Coalminers' Union promoted by the government. For a long time, the workers had not liked the Union because it represented the interests of the mine-owners rather than those of the workers. The Union was so dominated by the business circles that the Union's report about the draft of a labor bill dated 1932, was

¹⁶⁰⁸ "Zonguldak Liman Amelesi Hakkında," in *Temyiz Kararları: Hukuk Hey'eti Umumiyesi, 1930-1934* (İstanbul: Halk Basımevi, 1935), pp. 265-266.

almost the same as that of the mine-owners. Furthermore, the Union's director was also the director of the Zonguldak Coal Mines Enterprise. Therefore, it remained fully indifferent to the problems of the workers.¹⁶⁰⁹

The dockworkers had long been complaining about the inadequacy of its social measures as compared to the total amount of its financial sources extracted from the workers' wages. They had been demanding that the Union should assist the workers much more efficiently. Therefore, they had objected frequently to the assignment of 8 percent of their wages to the Union. By the spring of 1936, a big dispute erupted between the Workers' Union and the dockworkers over the premiums. The main issue fuelling the dispute was contestation over the sources of the Union. In the past, there had been two workers' organizations, the Zonguldak Dockworkers' Association and the Zonguldak Ereğli Coalminers' Union. The first one had all along been collecting 8 percent premiums by cutting the dockworkers' wages. The second one had only been cutting 2 percent of the coalminers' wages.

However, although the first one had been abolished and merged into the second one a few years earlier, the Union had continued to cut 8 percent of the dockworkers' wages, whereas it cut only 2 percent of those of coalminers. The dockworkers claimed that this was not fair and the Union did not have a right to continue to take the 8 percent premiums from their wages. They also demanded that the premiums had to be lowered to 2 percent. So, they claimed that the Union had to pay all of the collected 8 percent premiums back to the workers.¹⁶¹⁰ The second problem was the advocacy of the Union for the government's economic policy

¹⁶⁰⁹ "Zonguldak İşçileri Cemiyetleri Aleyhine Bir Dava Açtılar, Fakat Reddedildi," *Son Posta*, 05.04.1935. By the way, the director of both the Coalminers' Union in Zonguldak and Zonguldak Coal Mines Enterprise was Kemal Galip Balkar. In addition, for the disagreement about the Labor Law Draft between the Union and the workers see Mesut Gülmez, "1932 İş Yasası Tasarısı Konusunda Amele Birliği'nin ve Madencilerin Görüşleri," *Amme İdaresi Dergisi*, XVII, No. 4 (Dec., 1984).

¹⁶¹⁰ Inspection Report of the Zonguldak Province by Mardin Deputy Edib Ergin, BCA CHP [490.1/721.464.2], 29.09.1936.

seeking to keep down the costs of the transportation of coal through the reduction of the dockworkers' wages. This was the last straw for the workers.¹⁶¹¹

Thereupon, the dockworkers, collectively retaining a lawyer, filed a lawsuit against the Union. According to the party plaintiff, the Coalminers' Union was not legally authorized to appropriate 8 percent of the dockworkers' wages and to use the savings of the preceding Zonguldak Dockworkers' Association because it had been abolished. The local court in Zonguldak dropped the case in favor of the Union supported actively by the Ereğli Coal Mines Enterprise, which probably lobbied for the Union.¹⁶¹²

The dockworkers, who were unhappy with the result, did not lose their determination and continued to challenge the Union and the Enterprise. The lawyer of the dockers immediately went for an appeal against the decision of the Zonguldak court. After deeper investigations of the case, the Supreme Court overturned the decision of the Zonguldak court in favor of the appellant and ordered the defendant to pay 1,000,000 TL to the dockers.¹⁶¹³

However, the Union passively resisted this order of the Supreme Court not paying this sum for a long time. Nor did the Union give up cutting 8 percent from the dockworkers' wages. Therefore, some 300 dockworkers, who aimed to draw the attention of the authorities and to enforce the Union to obey the order of the Supreme Court stopped working. However, the administrators of the Union and Enterprise threatened the resistant workers to give the push.

As a last resort, the dockworkers petitioned the Secretary-General of the RPP. Thereupon, the RPP charged two inspectors with the task of investigation of the

¹⁶¹¹ "Zonguldak İşçileri Cemiyetleri Aleyhine Bir Dava Açtılar, Fakat Reddedildi," *Son Posta*, 05.04.1935.

¹⁶¹² For the decision of the Zonguldak Court see BCA MGM [30.10/166.158.14].

¹⁶¹³ For the decision of the Supreme Court see BCA MGM [30.10/166.158.14], 25.03.1936. For the summary of the court ,see, "Kömür Ameleleri İle Birlik Arasındaki İhtilaf," *Son Posta*, 14.05.1936.

dispute between the parties.¹⁶¹⁴ Neither the official documents nor the press I looked at gives accurate information about which side won the case, but what is apparent is that the workers struggled for their legal rights fervently.

Apart from this, the coalminers and dockworkers in Zonguldak also struggled for overtime payments. The Ereğli Coal Mines Enterprise forced the workers to work overtime, but often ignored the payment of overtime wages. Therefore, many coalminers and dockworkers sued the Enterprise. Those workers who were injured because of the work-related accidents also sought compensation by bringing suits against the Enterprise. Even though the local court mostly dismissed the lawsuits brought by the workers, they did not hesitate to appeal against the decisions of the local court. Some of them managed to reverse the decisions.¹⁶¹⁵

Workers who worked in their own homes like weavers also sought their rights through legal means. In one case, a group of weavers working at handlooms in their own homes for a textile factory objected to the demands of the employer who wanted them to work on Saturday afternoons. They demanded that the employer take into consideration the Weekly Day of Rest Law, giving them one day off a week and part-time work on Saturdays. However, the employer did not accept the workers' such request. Consequently, the weavers sued the factory, but the local court reached the decision that the Weekly Day of Rest Law did not include those people who worked at handlooms in their homes. Thereupon, the weavers went to appeal, but the Supreme Court also affirmed the decision of the local court.¹⁶¹⁶

¹⁶¹⁴ “Kömür Ameleleri İle Birlik Arasındaki İhtilaf,” *Son Posta*, 14.05.1936.

¹⁶¹⁵ See Ümran Nazif Yiğiter [Zonguldak Milli Korunma Mahkemesi C.M.U. Muavini], *Kömür Havzasında Amele Hukuku* (Zonguldak: n.p. 1943), pp.25-56. In this book, Yiğiter, a contemporary Public Prosecutor in Zonguldak, described how the laws and regulations regarding the coalminers and dockworkers in the Ereğli were implemented and how the workers sought their rights based on the existing laws and regulations. He examined many lawsuits brought by the workers against the Ereğli Enterprise.

¹⁶¹⁶ *1937 Temyiz Kararları*, (Ankara: T.C. Adliye Vekaleti Neşriyat Müdürlüğü, 1938), p. 89.

Workers, who felt vulnerable to occupational diseases or accidents or who were fired without any reason and compensation, filed claims for damages against the companies for which they worked, too. A ship worker whose hands were severely damaged due to the defect in the crane of the ship, as reported by a newspaper, filed a claim for damages of 10,000 TL against the Haliç Company.¹⁶¹⁷ Similarly, a worker who was discharged by the İstanbul Tramway Company for no reason applied to the court by claiming that he had been forced to quit by threat and sued the company to redress his damages and losses.¹⁶¹⁸

Peasant-workers were exposed to the most exploitative and unfair treatment. Especially in the countryside, many employers preferred to pay wages after the completion of a work. In the beginning, when hiring the workers, some dodgy employers generally promised high wages. However, after they employed their workers for weeks or months in hard temporary jobs without any payment, they did not keep their promise and blatantly cheated them by paying a daily wage less than they had promised.

In one instance, an entrepreneur named Bandırmalı Faik had made a verbal wage contract with a number of wage laborers to employ them in his project in Ayvalık. Although they had agreed on 25 piasters per person a day and on a weekly payment schedule, the employer did not pay the laborers for three months. At the end of the three months, upon the increasing grumbling among the laboring men, he presented 20 piasters for each day with a *fait accompli*. Furthermore, he attempted to cut the costs of food and housing from this amount. In sum, reducing the wages about ten times, he attempted to give only 200 piasters to each laborer in return for

¹⁶¹⁷ “Bir İşçi 10 Bin Lira İstiyor,” *Son Posta*, 18.06.1935.

¹⁶¹⁸ “Bir Amelenin Davası,” *Son Posta*, 18.08.1932.

three months of exhausting work. Protesting this tenfold wage reduction, the laborers refused to take this sum and sued dodgy employers named Bandırmalı Faik.¹⁶¹⁹

Appropriating the Labor Law

After the enactment of the Labor Law, the workers did not hesitate to make use of its provisions concerning worker welfare and rights against the employers. The discontented workers frequently brought their complaints and demands to the Work Bureaus set up by due process of the Labor Law.

The Labor Law was enacted on 8 June 1936 and went into force about one year later, on 15 June 1937. According to the Law, the individual or collective labor disputes were to be settled through a reconciliation process led by the governmental organs. In general, the workers who had any complaints were supposed to discuss the problem with their employers through a committee of workers-representatives in the first stage; if no agreement can be reached, the following stages were the provincial and then the national arbitral boards of appeal.¹⁶²⁰ For the control and inspection of the implementation of the Law, the government began to establish Labor Bureaus directly linked to the Ministry of Economy right after the enactment of the Labor Law. In 1936 and 1937 Labor Bureaus were established in 15 provinces.¹⁶²¹

In their struggle with the employers, those workers who were covered by the Labor Law endeavored to make use of the formal advantages and opportunities provided by it. As soon as it came into force, they started to claim their rights against the employers. As a result, the factory owners complained that the workers

¹⁶¹⁹ *Orak Çekiş*, No. 9 (July 20, 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Sol Akımlar*, p. 427.

¹⁶²⁰ For more detailed information about the reconciliation process, see Labor Law, No. 3008, Date. 08.06.1936, Articles 78-83.

¹⁶²¹ Niyazi Acun, "Yeni İş Kanunu Tatbik Sahasına Girerken," *Yarım Ay*, No. 49 (1937), pp. 20-21.

who had been submissive before the enactment of the Law had begun to call them to account for the delays and insufficiencies in the implementation of the Law.¹⁶²²

Especially right after the enactment of the Labor Law, those workers who had been dismissed due to their pressure on the employers for the full implementation of the Labor Law began to resort to the Labor Bureaus.¹⁶²³ In addition, prior to the enactment of the Labor Law on June 1936, some factories had already begun to dismiss some qualified workers who were supposed to be bestowed with protective social rights. Some workplaces also tried to diminish the number of employees so as to avoid the coverage of the Labor Law, according to which the provisions increased in direct proportion to the number of workers employed in a factory. Among the workplaces that discharged some of their workers was a rubber factory, which showed its 10 qualified workers the door. However, this collective lay-off evoked a reaction among the workers and led them to pen a petition collectively in objection to this unfair act. Upon receiving this petition, as *Son Posta* announced, the government organs had begun to investigate the situation closely.¹⁶²⁴

The newspaper *Cumhuriyet* reported in December 1936 that since several complaints of workers who had been dismissed for the same reason had inundated the government, the Labor Bureau had begun to inquire into the companies that had dismissed their workers to evade some of the obligations of the Labor Law.¹⁶²⁵ The Labor Bureaus that were overwhelmed by the workers' frequent applications turned out to be inoperative within a short time.¹⁶²⁶

¹⁶²² Hüseyin Avni [Şanda], "İş Kanunu Nasıl Tatbik Ediliyor?" *Yeni Adam*, IV, No. 201 (1937), p. 4.

¹⁶²³ Toydemir, "Türkiye'de İş İhtilaflarının Tarihçesi ve Bugünkü Durumu," p. 12.

¹⁶²⁴ "Bir Lastik Şirketinden Şikayet," *Son Posta*, 19.08.1936.

¹⁶²⁵ "İş Kanunu Nedeniyle İşçi Çıkaranlar Hakkında İş Bürosu Tahkikat Açıyor," *Cumhuriyet*, 25.01.1936.

¹⁶²⁶ Toydemir, "Türkiye'de İş İhtilaflarının Tarihçesi ve Bugünkü Durumu," p. 12.

With the Labor Law, the workers accelerated their attempts to benefit from the legal procedures and demanded the employers regulate the working conditions in accordance with the laws. Just a few months after the effective date of the Law, the hundreds of individual or collective complaints to the Labor Bureaus came up by workers about the employers evading the Law. The Labor Bureaus had to accept more than a hundred of them. Accordingly, some of accused employers were taken to the court, and fined or forced to implement the rules of the Labor Law immediately.¹⁶²⁷

Lütfi Erişçi also recorded that thousands of the labor disputes were brought by the workers before the Labor Bureaus within one and a half years of the effective date of the Labor Law. Roughly 5000 of the individual or collective labor disputes flooded into the Labor Bureaus by March 1939. In view of the pressures of the workers' such widespread appropriation of the rights and provisions provided by the Labor Law, the Ministry of Economy had to issue Regulation about the Reconciliation of Labor Disputes and Arbitration (*İş İhtilafları Uzlaşma ve Tahkim Nizamnamesi*) on 11 March 1939.¹⁶²⁸

With this regulation, the government established reconciliation mechanisms and adopted bureaucratic procedures for the collective dispute settlement process. Following the promulgation of this regulation in March 1939, the first big collective labor dispute erupted at the İzmir Tramway and Electricity Turkish Joint-Stock Company. Because the company had cancelled in 1936 some of the social benefits such as a paid day-off every ten days and a paid leave of absence in the case of disease, the workers collectively decided to follow the procedures determined by the Labor Law. In the first stage, the workers and the company tried to solve the dispute

¹⁶²⁷ Hüseyin Avni [Şanda], "İş Kanunu Nasıl Tatbik Ediliyor?" *Yeni Adam*, IV, No. 201 (1937), p. 4.

¹⁶²⁸ Erişçi, "Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfının Tarihi," p. 104.

between each other, but the parties failed to reach an agreement. In the second stage, the relevant bureaucrats also failed to solve the disagreement. Therefore, in the third stage, the dispute was brought before the Provincial Reconciliation Committee (*İl Hakem Kurulu*). However, since both sides did not satisfy the decision of the committee, they carried the dispute to the High Reconciliation Committee in November 1939. This committee suggested a resolution which would satisfy the workers by accepting their demands partially such as a paid leave of absence, a paid day of rest and the shortening of too long working hours.¹⁶²⁹

The following case also demonstrates how the workers appropriated the Labor Law in order to legitimate their protests and secure themselves against the employers accustomed to call the police and set them against the workers even in a small protest. In a leather factory in Adana, some workers pursued their right by making use of the Labor Law. They demanded the betterment of the conditions under which the work was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the Labor Law, particularly the eight-hour workday. Because the factory management disregarded such demands, the workers decided to stop the work until the employer met their demands. The factory owner, claiming that the workers went on strike against the law, called the police. On the other hand, in accordance with the law, the Labor Bureau officials accompanied the police to investigate what was going on in the factory. After their investigations, they decided that there was no strike as defined by the laws in contrast to the employer's claim. Furthermore, the inspectors found the workers right by coming to the conclusion that the employer had

¹⁶²⁹ Bülent Nuri Esen, *Türk İş Hukuku* (Ankara: Maarif Matbaası for Ankara Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi, 1944), p. 157.

disregarded some provisions of the Labor Law. Finally, the Labor Bureau gave an official warning to the factory management.¹⁶³⁰

In another case, in April 1938, a group of egg workers, relying on the new Labor Law, demanded to be paid on piecework. They wanted to be paid at a fixed piece rate per each wooden crate of eggs they cleaned and arranged. The fixed piece rate for each unit they wanted was 75 piasters, regardless of the time required for this job. However, the egg producers and merchants did not accept the raising of all wages to a fixed rate of 75 piasters for each crate of eggs. Consequently, the workers went on strike, refusing to attend work and picketing outside the workplaces to dissuade other workers from working. Especially egg-exporters became very upset at this resistance and called on the police and demanded that the *Türk Ofis* (Foreign Trade Directory of the Ministry of Economy) warn the workers. Despite the warnings of the *Türk Ofis* and the police pressure, the egg-workers held their grounds persistently. The work stoppage was so effective that the export of eggs to Greece and Italy came to a standstill. As a result of slowdown in egg exports, the prices of eggs in the domestic market also dropped speedily, which caused great losses for the egg producers and merchants. Upon the firm resistance of the egg workers and the persistent rejection of the workers' demands by the employers, the parties of the dispute referred the case to labor arbitration for the resolution of the dispute according to the Labor Law.¹⁶³¹

Another example of appropriation of the Labor Law was a collective demand for right of the Flemenk Tobacco Warehouse workers in 1938. The Flemenk Tobacco Warehouse in Tophane was one of the biggest tobacco warehouses in İstanbul, employing roughly 800 workers. The workers lacked basic social rights and

¹⁶³⁰ Hüseyin Avni [Şanda], "İş Kanunu Nasıl Tatbik Ediliyor?" *Yeni Adam*, IV, No. 201 (1937), p. 4.

¹⁶³¹ "Yumurta İşçileri İşlerini Bıraktılar," *Son Posta*, 06.04.1938.

facilities and the general level of wages was too low. However, after the passage of the Labor Law, the curiosity about the social rights rose among the workers. Many of them talked more boldly to each other about the necessity of a wage hike and social services such as free lunches, paid vacations, paid days of rest, and the like. Consequently, the workers came together and listed their demands to submit to the management. The company managers accepted to negotiate with the representatives of the workers on the demand list. After the negotiation process, the management accepted most of the items demanded by the workers.¹⁶³²

Craftspeople's Resistance to the Big Industry
and
Struggle Against or Through Professional Associations

Although the associational life was not a dynamic of politics in early Republican Turkey, there were many professional associations of artisans and workers. Although the government exerted great effort to reorganize and control them, some of these bodies sometimes acted like small labor unions safeguarding the interests of their members. Despite the workers' discontent with their professional associations due to the fees, dues, insufficient social assistance, widespread corruption, and misuse of saving funds, some relatively class-specific professional associations petitioned the government and lobbied for the protection of the profession and its members. On the other hand, in some professional associations including both the employers and low-income workers at the same time, there was an interest conflict and ongoing contestation between well-to-do or employer members and low-waged employee members.

¹⁶³² Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, pp. 115-116.

First, especially the associations of some professions hit by the industrial drive and the imported European goods endeavored to affect the government to take immediate action to protect their business fields. Second, some cross-class associations comprising both well-off employers of professions and low-income members in the status of wage earner were not under full control of the wealthy members, who were mostly employers and affiliated with the ruling party. The low-income members struggled them for their own specific rights and interests inside the associations or in professional life. They sometimes did not hesitate to challenge to their own associations, which went counter to their interests. Third, class-specific associations such as the Waiters' Associations, the Bakery Workers' Associations or the Bread Makers' Associations, which did not include employers, defended more actively the rights of their members against their employers and the associations of their employers such as Bakers' Associations and Restaurateurs' Association.

Indeed, despite the fact the European industry affected the artisanal production adversely from 19th century onward, the craftspeople were not passive bystanders in this process. In the context of the late 19th century Anatolia, as Quataert has evidenced, the Ottoman craftspeople resisted and adapted to the economic penetration of the European capitalism into the Empire.¹⁶³³ Likewise, in the context of the late 19th century Egypt, as Juan Cole had emphasized, the artisans forced the government to take action in favor of their interests by massive petitioning campaigns.¹⁶³⁴ In a recent contribution, John Chalcraft also has shown an active

¹⁶³³ See Donald Quataert, *Ottoman Manufacturing in the Age of the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). In addition see, Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908: Reactions to European Economic Penetration* (New York: New York University Press, 1983).

¹⁶³⁴ Juan Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 164, 188.

response of the craftspeople and other segments of the working class to the invasion of European capitalism in the late 19th century Egypt.¹⁶³⁵

Turkey had long been a center of handicraft production. However, starting with the second half of the 19th century, traditional artisanal production underwent an initial decline due to competition of cheaper foreign products. In the 1930s, especially the rise of the domestic industry under the auspices of the government and ongoing integration with the world capitalism, albeit slowed in these years, hit the craftspeople hard once again. I do not mean that the artisans were swept aside by the industrialization and international trade, but they obviously faced important problems with the industrialization and importation. However, as this section has shown, they actively responded to this process by both integrating to it and safeguarding themselves.

During the interwar period, not only Turkey, but also other parts of the pre-industrial world invaded by the imported finished or semi-finished goods of the Europe and Japan, witnessed rising discontent among the artisans. For one thing, 50,000 people in Aleppo in the 1930s demonstrated in front of the office of the high commissioner against competition from Japanese textiles. In the footwear industry, workers and artisans all protested the importation of ready-made items from the Czechoslovak firm Bata.¹⁶³⁶

¹⁶³⁵ See John T. Chalcraft, *Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories: Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863-1914*, (New York: SUNY Press, 2004). Especially see the third chapter titled "Petitions and Protest under Ismail," pp. 67-104.

In fact, even in the heart of industrial society in Europe, the artisans resisted the industrialization because it entailed prolaterianization. For the context of England, see E.P. Thompson, *The Making of The English Working Class*, see especially Chapter Eight titled "Artisans and Others." For the context of France, see Johnson Christopher, "Economic Change and Artisan Discontent: The Tailors' History, 1800-1848," in *Revolution and Reaction: 1848 and the Second French Republic*, ed. Roger Price (London: Croom Helm, 1975), p. 87-114.

¹⁶³⁶ Elisabeth Longuenesse, "Labor in Syria: The Emergence of New Identities," in *The Social History of Labor in the Middle East*, ed. by Ellis Jay Goldberg (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), p.105.

In Turkey, although the artisans did not launch such big demonstrations, they resorted to the petitioning in pursuit of their goals and strived to alter the regulations in favor of themselves. Artisans' associations played a key role in this regard. In spite of their weakness, these organizations were not "merely passive administrative units" that served the state or the public by collecting taxes, supervising the urban labor and maintaining the professional standards. Sometimes, they formed the basis of resistance to the adverse effects of the industrial production and the penetration of manufactures imported from abroad by attempting to protect their own members.

As in Syria, Turkish footwear sector, particularly small shoemakers, suffered from the competition of the imported industry-made shoes that were cheaper than handmade shoes. Different from Syria, along with the competition of imported shoes, Turkish shoemakers faced a further competition of the domestic industrial mass production of cheaper leather and rubber shoes by the Beykoz Leather and Shoe Factory of Sümerbank and a few other big factories in the 1930s.¹⁶³⁷ Therefore, it was difficult to mount a massive resistance and protests against the big industry, which was by and large owned, directed and supported by the government zealously.

However, Turkish shoemakers hated both the Sümerbank factory items and imported shoes, which gradually pushed them out of business.¹⁶³⁸ According to the chair of the Shoemakers' Association, the factories producing cheap leather and rubber shoes were damaging the Turkish economy by undermining not only the small shoemaking sector, but also the tanneries and saddlers because they processed the raw material of the shoes and many other leather items. According to the

¹⁶³⁷ According to the chair of the Shoemakers' Association, there were twelve factories producing rubber shoes. Chairman of the Shoemakers' Society A. Vahdi, "Lastik Ayakkapların Yerli Sanayie Verdiği Zararlar," *Esnaf Meslek Mecmuası*, No. 7 (May 1, 1934), p. 14.

¹⁶³⁸ Indeed, there were many unemployed shoemakers, who complained about the low-priced rubber shoes imported from Europe and produced by the Beykoz Leather and Shoe Factory. "Halkın Sesi," *Son Posta*, 02.05.1932.

Association, many poor shoemakers had already left their jobs; at this rate, the shoemaking and other related crafts also would probably have died completely, if no immediate measures were taken.¹⁶³⁹

Accordingly, the Shoemakers' Association lobbied and petitioned the relevant government agencies for the protection of shoemakers against the cheaper industrial and imported products. In June 1932, the Shoemakers' Association, together with the Saddlers' Association demanded that the Ministry of Economy stop the importation of rubber waistbands, carton and rubber suitcases and bags, and other things made from rubber. Moreover, they complained about the unjust competition of the big industries producing the cheaper footwear, too.¹⁶⁴⁰

As a result of active lobbying and petitioning, they managed to force the government to take protective measures to a certain extent. It was reported in 1934 that the Ministry of Economy decided to levy a Consumption Tax of 150 piasters per kilo of rubber shoes.¹⁶⁴¹ On the other hand, in April 1935, the Ministry of Economy decided to diminish the Consumption Tax on rubber from 250 piasters to 150 piasters per kilo so as to compensate the burden of the Consumption Tax on rubber shoes levied in 1934. However, the Shoemakers Association officially raised an objection to this tax reduction.¹⁶⁴²

The craftspeople did not give up the struggle against the industrial products. Although the mass and cheaper production of the big industries resulted in the unemployment of thousands of them, it was reported that about 20,000 shoemakers in İstanbul endeavored to compete with the industrial and imported products by producing much cheaper shoes through keeping down the costs with immense

¹⁶³⁹ A. Vahdi, "Lastik Ayakkapların Yerli Sanayie Verdiği Zararlar," pp. 14-15.

¹⁶⁴⁰ "Kunduracılar Hariçten Gelen Mukavva Eşya İçin İtiraz Ettiler," *Son Posta*, 24.06.1932; "Türk Kunduracıları Himaye Etmeli," *Köroğlu*, 27.06.1934.

¹⁶⁴¹ "Kunduracılar ve Dericiler Toplandılar," *Esnaf Meslek Mecmuası*, No. 9 (July 1, 1934), pp.16-17.

¹⁶⁴² "Kunduracıların İsteği," *Son Posta*, 14.04.1935.

industry. Furthermore, a few factories in some İstanbul had to go out of business in the face of this zealous competition of craft production.¹⁶⁴³

An article titled “Struggle between Factory and Handicraft” (*Fabrika İle El İşçiliğinin Mücadelesi*) published in the Artisans’ Professional Periodical pointed out that many shoemakers could successfully put all of their efforts into their jobs to compete with the industrial products. If the need arose, they did not hesitate to take the work home and to put their wives and children to work from morning to night. The craftsmen’s struggle was so vibrant and effective that it led to four shoe factories going bankrupt in 1934.¹⁶⁴⁴

Another group of craftsmen who were aggrieved by the relatively low-priced imported goods was blacksmiths and nailers. Especially in Anatolia, they lost the important portion of the market due to the cheaper European horseshoes and nails. Therefore, they also demanded protection against the entry of cheaper products from abroad. For instance, complaining about the low-tax rates applied to imported horseshoes and nails, the Blacksmiths’ Association and Nailers’ Association in Bursa petitioned the relevant official agencies to raise the tariffs on the imported horseshoes and nails.¹⁶⁴⁵

15,000 carriage drivers also constituted an occupational group that did not like the industrial drive and the entry of European industrial products, specifically motor vehicles such as cars, buses, and trucks. These new motor vehicles began to increasingly dominate transportation and set the stage of decline of the carriages. Therefore, the Carriages’ Association also invited the government agencies to obviate immediately the imminent termination of the carriage profession. For this aim, the carriage drivers demanded the government to promulgate a regulation about

¹⁶⁴³ “El Emeği,” *Köroğlu*, 13.01.1934.

¹⁶⁴⁴ “Fabrika ile El İşçiliğinin Mücadelesi,” *Esnaf Meslek Mecmuası*, No. 3 (Jan 1., 1934), pp. 18-19.

¹⁶⁴⁵ “Taşra Esnaf Cemiyetlerinde,” *Esnaf Meslek Mecmuası*, No. 8 (June 1, 1934).

minimum and maximum road ranges and the load capacities of the pickup trucks, lorries and porters by banning the lorries from carrying less than a minimum authorized weight in traffic and the porters more than a maximum weight.¹⁶⁴⁶ Furthermore, they persistently objected to the new regulation of the Ministry of Economy ordering that registration plates be attached to the rear of each carriage and that wood cartwheels be replaced with rubber wheels.¹⁶⁴⁷

Another group of low-income people in transportation service was taxi drivers. The great part of them was also poor wage earners who were forced to work up to 18 hours a day by car owners. Their occupational organization was the Drivers' Association. In 1920s, before the Workers' Advancement Society was closed down, the association was not under the hegemony of the rich car owners. On the contrary, the low-wage drivers outnumbered the car owners in the association. Therefore, the Drivers' Association was affiliated and in a close solidarity with the Workers' Advancement Society. For instance, when the İstanbul drivers had gone on strike in the mid-1920s, the Society had supported the striking drivers actively by contributing 4000 TL to the strike fund.

However, after the RPP began to penetrate the professional associations by liquidating the Society, the Drivers' Association also, like many other associations, began to be controlled by the well-to-do and RPP-sided members of the profession, most of whom were taxi owners. Therefore, by 1935, there was still no betterment in the conditions of the drivers. Taxi owners continued to make their drivers to work about 18 hours a day. Therefore, the drivers frequently came into conflict with the taxi owners over wages, working hours and the weekly rest day. Thus, the low-wage drivers became convinced that the association was not of use for their interests.

¹⁶⁴⁶ "15 Bin Kişinin Derdi," *Son Posta*, 07.02.1935.

¹⁶⁴⁷ "Arabacılık ve Arabacı Vatandaşlar Buhran İçinde," *Tan*, 26.11.1935.

Therefore, many of them thought that they needed a more class-specific organization that would struggle for their own specific goals.¹⁶⁴⁸

Yet, the drivers did not go with the flow or passively accommodate themselves to these conditions. Not did they leave the association to the car owners. Instead, they contested over the association. In the 1935 especially, by means of an effective petitioning, wage-earner drivers compelled the Drivers' Association to take some limited protective measures such as less work and a paid day of rest a week.¹⁶⁴⁹ The waged drivers' inner association activity was so efficient that, as a newspaper reported, because of the increasing disagreement within the association, the taxi owners were planning to establish a different association free from the drivers' pressure.¹⁶⁵⁰

The Tanneries' Association was also not free from internal conflict of interests. The Association included two antagonistic groups. On the one hand, there was a limited number of large-scale capitalist tanners who had managerial control. On the other hand, more than a hundred small-scale traditional tanners named Black Tanners (*Kara Tabaklar*) outnumbered these elite tanners, but they were not so strong in the administration. In business life, upon the fierce economic competition of the small-scale tanners who took advantage of processing the cheaper imported inputs, which caused a significant decrease in the prices of leather by 1932, the capitalist tanners, who headed the Association, called the government to raise the tariff rates on not only leather products, but also all inputs used in leather processing. Undoubtedly, the protection against the cheaper European goods and especially against ready-made leather products and rubber items was to the benefit of the small-scale tanners, but an increase in custom tariffs on cheap inputs was absolutely

¹⁶⁴⁸ "Bir Dokun Bin Ah Dinle Bizim Şoförlerden," *Son Posta*, 17.07.1935.

¹⁶⁴⁹ "Şoförler Meselesi," *Tan*, 26.12.1935.

¹⁶⁵⁰ "Şoförlerin Durumu Fena," *Son Posta*, 12.12.1935.

contrary to their interests. Therefore, the proposal of the Association sparked a debate among tanners. Although the small-tanners did not like the imported products and especially cheap rubber, they objected to this proposal of the Association.¹⁶⁵¹

There were some class-specific professional associations that protected their members against the employers. For instance, the Waiters' Association was relatively a more class-specific and homogenous professional organization. Indeed, it headed and actively supported the low-income waiters, especially in their struggle against the restaurant owners who seized tips collected by waiters. In June 1935, a sharp dispute aroused between the restaurant owners and the waiters over wages, to be more specific, the tips left by clientele. The Waiters' Association actively launched a campaign against the restaurant owners. The chair of the Association, Recep Kibaroglu, raised a question regarding the seizure of tips of the waiters by the restaurant owners. Conventionally the waiters always got 10 percent from each bill as tips; but the restaurant owners had begun to seize these tips in recent times. Therefore, Kibaroglu personally and officially petitioned the government and the press by declaring that the restaurant owners had unjustly appropriated about 40 percent of each tip left by the clientele. According to the calculations of Kibaroglu, the total amount of the seized tips was about 59,000 TL per year.¹⁶⁵²

On the other hand, the Restaurant Owners' Association objected to this argument of the Waiters' Association on the grounds that the restaurant owners had cut only 20 percent of the tips. The restaurant owners argued that they cut such 20 percents in order to provide the waiters with hot meals and to share a small portion of the tips with the other personnel who did not have the opportunity to get tips.¹⁶⁵³

¹⁶⁵¹ "Rekabet: Dericiler Geçimsizliğe Başladı," *Son Posta*, 01.06.1932.

¹⁶⁵² "Garsonlarla Lokanta ve Gazino Sahipleri Arasında Bir Anlaşmazlık," *Son Posta*, 11.06.1935.

¹⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

After the opening of the debate, many waiters declared their views and presented their deep grievance to the press and the local government about the infringement of their right to get tips. According to them, the argument of their employers was false and misleading. According to one waiter, the restaurant owners did not permit the waiters to keep the 10 percent tips they got from the clientele in return for their satisfying service and smiling faces. The employers saved these tips on the pretext that they would barely compensate with this money the losses of the restaurant such as broken glasses and dishes in small accidents caused by the waiters. According to the waiter, this was only a pretext. Another waiter also accused the restaurant owners of appropriating the tips the waiters collected. Finally, one of the waiters underlined that even though some employers allowed their waiters to save the tips they got, most of them cut a great portion of the tips for the cost of broken equipment. He also stated that this was explicitly unfair treatment.¹⁶⁵⁴

Similarly, the associations of the bakery workers in İzmir and İstanbul were also more class-specific organizations and tried to defend actively the basic economic and social rights of the workers against the bakeshop owners. Bakery workers were mostly forced to overwork by their bosses up to 16 hours a day. The wages were also disproportionally low. Many dough kneaders (*hamur karıcı*) and cooks (*pişirici*) received between 5 and 15 TL a week. As for apprentices, they were perhaps the most helpless of them, who came up the hard way. They worked generally 16 or 18 hours a day in return for a few loaves of bread and a few piasters. Many years of hard work and disciplining under the authority of the master was the key to the young apprentice's education and learning process. None of them had

¹⁶⁵⁴ “Garsonların Yüzde 10 Hakkı,” *Son Posta*, 19.06.1936.

social guarantees; they were left to the mercy of fate in case of destruction or mutilations.¹⁶⁵⁵

Bakery workers in İstanbul and İzmir had their own class-specific associations, like the above-mentioned Waiters' Association. Thus, they often defended the rights of their members. For instance, in November 1935, the İstanbul Bread Makers' Association, petitioning the press and the official agencies, publicly declared that because of low wage levels and poor working conditions, the bakery workers urgently needed help. As declared by the Association, the first step for this was higher wages and better working conditions.¹⁶⁵⁶

The İzmir Bread Makers' Association went beyond an official petitioning and public declaration of their demands by discussing to going on a general strike for one day at the soonest time. On 11 May 1933, the Association brought the strike option up for discussion among the members and called for a strike vote. A sit-down strike, which would leave the people short of bread for a day thereby, would draw the attention of the public and the government to the workers' problems, sounded plausible to many poor workers. However, during the seven-hour debates, the warnings of the RPP inspector who was present at the meeting about the possible risk of a police attack, legal prosecution, and eventual dismissal dissuaded the bread makers from going on strike at the last minute. According to the RPP inspector,

¹⁶⁵⁵ Beşe, "Safranbolu'da ve Köylerinde Aile," pp. 188-189. "Fırın işçileri muhtekir ve haris fırıncılar elinde birer esirdirler. Saat 16'da işe girerler gece yarısından sonra saat 6'ya kadar 14 saat çalışırlar ve saat 8'den sonra sırtlarına birer küfe veya sandık yüklenerek öğleye kadar sokaklarda kapı kapı dolaşarak ekmek satarlar. Hamurkar 100 kuruş, pişirici 75 kuruş, yardımcılar 50 kuruş, çıraklar iki ekmek alırlar (...). [İstanbul'da] Fırınlarda çırakların vazifesi fırın yakmak, küfe taşımak, ekmek dizmek, pasa çekmekten ibarettir. Bu işler pek güçtür. Bu fırında bir çırak asgari günde hiç durmadan on sekiz saat çalışır. Çırak yavaş yavaş kapakçı olur. Kapakçının vazifesi hamurkâr yardımcısına yamaklık yapmaktır. Bunlar hamur odasından pasa verirler. Bu devre dört beş yıl sürer. Hamurkâr yardımcısı olur olmaz ekseriya köylerine dönüp evlenir ve dönerler (...). Hamurkâr ekmeği eline aldığı zaman neden bozuk olduğunu ve noksanlarını derhal teşhis eder (...). İstanbul fırınlarında iyi ekmek çıkarmasının sebeplerinden birisi ve hatta birincisi fırın patronlarının ucuz amele kullanarak yetişmiş hakiki mütehasıs hamurkâr kullanmamalarından ileri gelmektedir (...). Halen on beş lira haftalıkla çalışan hamurkârlar olduğu gibi beş lira alanlarda da vardır."

¹⁶⁵⁶ "Fırıncılardan Şikayetler," *Son Posta*, 11.11.1935.

unless the government relieved the pain of these workers, they would go on strike sooner or later. Although they gave up the idea of strike, as noted by the party inspector, they firmly decided to continue the struggle for their rights.¹⁶⁵⁷

The same inspector reported also widespread grumbling against their bosses among the apprentice printers in İzmir, which was expressed openly by the Printing House Workers' Association. As the printers suffered hard conditions, deprived of even one rest day a week and often receiving rather low wages, came to resent their employers. In the first months of 1933, a few disputes arose between the workers and printing house owners. In the end, the Association came to a decision not to work in those printing houses which maltreated their workers and grudged them a paid day off a week. The Association decided to report such printing houses to the government. Furthermore, they also put the strike onto the agenda and decided to take a vote on the strike. Relying on a cost-benefit analysis of a strike, they changed their mind in a meeting in 14 May 1933. However, as the party inspectors underlined, their struggle for the humane working terms and conditions would not end with this retreat, but would continue as long as these miserable conditions remained unchanged.¹⁶⁵⁸

Resistance to the Employment of the Foreign Workers: Not Xenophobia, but Survival Struggle

The worldwide economic downturn and the resulting unemployment brought about hostility towards foreign workers. This was partly an expression of popular mood, the fear of losing their job or need of job, and partly a strategy designed to seize the jobs of the foreigner or non-Muslim-Turkish workers. The government, as a way of

¹⁶⁵⁷ BCA CHP [490.1/1444.26.1], 17.06.1933.

¹⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

partly relieving the unemployment and partly distorting the real causes of the unemployment problem, exploited this hostility. Thus, in 1932, the government banned the employment of foreign workers in certain occupations.

Contrary to oversimplifying arguments connecting the matter to the full hegemony of the nationalist ideology over the working class and the nationalist-capitalist conspiracy of the Turkish government designed to “incite enmity among the proletariat so as to weaken the unity and solidarity of the working class,”¹⁶⁵⁹ the main reasons behind the working class hostility towards the foreign and non-Turkish workers and the government’s decision banning the employment of foreigner workers in certain occupations seem not so simple.

First of all, the workers had already begun to desire a ban on the employment of foreign and non-Muslim-Turkish workers in the early 1920s so as to create employment opportunities for Muslim-Turkish workers. Second, after the government banned the employment of foreigners in some occupations in 1932, it was the working class that supported and defended this law and appropriated it against the government, when some government agencies and companies attempted to employ foreign workers and experts, who were more qualified. When the government sometimes ignored or bent the rules restricting the employment of the foreign workers, the Turkish workers frequently criticized the government and demanded the more effective implementation of the ban on the employment of foreign workers not because of their nationalistic bias, but because of their own self-interests.

¹⁶⁵⁹ For a similar simplistic comment, see Korniyenko, *The Labor Movement*, p. 58. For a similar interpretation which connects the issue to the nationalist conspiracy and project of the Turkish government, which were imposed from above, see Ayhan Aktar, *Türk Milliyetçiliği, Gayrimüslimler ve Ekonomik Dönüşüm* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2006).

In fact, the Turkish workers had already had an eye on the jobs of foreign workers. In the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, the foreigners together with Armenian, Greek and Jewish minority groups had constituted a qualified and educated segment of the labor force. Their status and wages had been relatively higher than those of their Turkish-Muslim counterparts. Furthermore, they had received relatively preferential and privileged treatment by the companies, especially in those owned by minorities or by the foreign capital.

This structure of the imperial labor force continued on into the Republican Turkey, although a great part of these people left Turkey during the Great War and after the establishment of the Republican regime. Nonetheless, at the beginning of the Republic, there still existed a large number of non-Muslim foreign workers in Turkey. A great majority of them were from Russia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Italia, Greece, and Bulgaria. Therefore, in conjunction with the economic collapse caused by the war and unemployment as well as the establishment of a new nationalist regime, the Muslim-Turkish workers began to raise their voice against the employment of these foreign workers in order to replace them. At the İzmir Economy Congress, the representatives of the workers proposed the replacement of the foreign workers with the Muslim-Turkish ones. In 1923, a meeting held by the workers of İstanbul Tramway and Tunnel Company, demanded the immediate dismissal of all foreign and non-Muslim workers. According to a report by the secret police who recorded the conversations of workers in İstanbul coffeehouses in 1924, an immediate elimination of the foreign and non-Muslim workers from the labor market accompanied the other demands of the poor laborers.¹⁶⁶⁰

¹⁶⁶⁰ TTKA SSJ-44, 22.11.1340 [1924].

These demands continued to appear in the following years. For instance, before the ban on the employment of foreign workers in certain sectors, some workers' and artisans' associations such as the Waitress' Association, Shoemakers' Association demanded the inclusion of their occupation to a possible law banning the working of foreigners.¹⁶⁶¹ Therefore, in fact, the law banning the employment of foreign workers was a response of the government to a widespread demand by the Turkish workforce and to the rising unemployment with the economic crisis.

For this aim in June 1932, in accordance with the public opinion, the National Assembly passed the Law Concerning the Trades and Services Assigned to Turkish Citizens (No. 2007).¹⁶⁶² This law determined several professions, trades and posts that were forbidden to foreign citizens. Despite a lack of exact figures about the workers who left Turkey after the legislation of this law, by 1935, it is estimated that 15,000 Hungarian, 6000 Greek and about 1000 Russian citizens and overall 21,000 foreign workers had to leave Turkey.¹⁶⁶³

In the face of the restrictive laws and social reaction to the employment of the foreigners, though many foreign workers left the country, some managed to continue to perform their jobs by circumventing and curbing the laws. For instance, some of them did not hesitate to adopt Turkish citizenship and the Islamic religion in order to avoid any possible restriction and pressure from society, employers and the official authorities.¹⁶⁶⁴

Many workers complained of this situation by pointing to the existence of many foreigner and non-Muslim workers and crafters who acquired Turkish

¹⁶⁶¹ See Güler (ed.), *Açıklamalı Yönetim Zamandizini*, p. 320, 323.

¹⁶⁶² "Türkiye'de Türk Vatandaşlarına tahsis Edilen Sanat ve Hizmetler Hakkındaki Kanun," Law No. 2007, Date.11.06.1932.

¹⁶⁶³ Ahmet Gündüz Ökçün, *Yabancıların Türkiye'de Çalışma Hürriyeti* (Ankara: Doğu Matbaacılık, 1962), p. 75.

¹⁶⁶⁴ "İşsiz Kalınca Tabiyetimize Girmek İstiyorlar," *Tan*, 30.07.1937; "Ecnebi İşçilerin Dalaveresi," *Son Posta*, 06.02.1932.

citizenship to have a right to work in Turkey. Some barbers and carpenters wrote to the newspapers that foreign carpenters and barbers took the lead in changing their citizenship. It was reported that this situation made many Turkish shopkeepers and workers very upset and disappointed with the promises of the government.¹⁶⁶⁵

Furthermore, well aware of the severe need for a qualified workforce, the government itself sometimes bent the rules and permitted the employment of some foreign workers and experts in specific jobs with the Law of Public Auction and Auction by Underbidding (*Müzayede ve Münasaka Kanunu*) in 1934. By this law, the government restricted the employment of foreign workers but left the door open by authorizing the official authorities to permit the employment of foreign worker.¹⁶⁶⁶

Therefore, the government's flexible and inattentive attitude towards the implementation of the law caused public reactions and complaints. Many jobless people during the 1930s appropriated the nationalist discourse and the 1932 law against foreigner workers and journeymen, not due to their attachment to the nationalist ideology, but for their own struggles with unemployment and with their more talented foreign counterparts. Complaining about and informing frequently the illegal employment of foreign workers to the authorities at every opportunity, they demanded the application of laws as soon as possible. Furthermore, they criticized the government with reference to this law. Underscoring the gap between the actual situation and the law, they asked how and why the foreign workers were able to continue working in Turkey despite the law.

In September 1934, some Turkish workers in Burgaz, for instance, wrote to the newspaper *Köroğlu* and declared that many construction companies employed

¹⁶⁶⁵ "Türk Esnaf Şikayet Ediyor," *Son Posta*, 04.06.1935.

¹⁶⁶⁶ Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, p. 351.

Bulgarian workers instead of Turkish workers.¹⁶⁶⁷ In the same year, another group of workers from Zonguldak complained that Italian and French workers continued to be employed at higher wages in the coalmines.¹⁶⁶⁸

In another case, some construction workers and foremen declared in June 1935 that the continuing employment of foreign workers even in Ankara and in public construction works saddened them. The workers and foremen, aggravated by this illegal situation that occurred even under the government's very nose, demanded from the authorities lay off the foreign workers and employ Turkish workers as soon as possible.¹⁶⁶⁹

One month later, in July 1935, many workers in Ankara and İstanbul began to complain that foreign workers continued to work in Turkey freely counter to the law. The fact that some companies did not comply with the law forbidding the employment of foreign workers in certain sectors, as a newspaper declared, caused a disappointment and complaints among the workers.¹⁶⁷⁰

Another instance was a collective complaint of a group of bakery workers in İstanbul. Suffering unemployment for a long time, 600 bakery house workers sent a complaint letter to *Cumhuriyet* asking, "How on earth can Bulgarian, Greek and Yugoslav workers who were prohibited from working in bakeries be employed in bakeries, whereas we are jobless?"¹⁶⁷¹ In March 1936, a group of Turkish workers from Samsun informed the authorities and the press about how the foreign workers continued to work freely as before even in occupations restricted to them. They demanded the firing of such workers immediately.¹⁶⁷²

¹⁶⁶⁷ "Halkın Köşesi," *Köroğlu*, 05.09.1934.

¹⁶⁶⁸ "Halkın Köşesi," *Köroğlu*, 08.08.1934.

¹⁶⁶⁹ "İşçilerimiz Haklarını İstiyor!" *Son Posta*, 25.06.1935.

¹⁶⁷⁰ "Bir Kanun ve Tatbikatı," *Son Posta*, 03.07.1935.

¹⁶⁷¹ "600 Hamurkâr, Pişirici ve Tablakârın Şikayeti," *Cumhuriyet*, 27.05.1935.

¹⁶⁷² "Samsun'da Ecnebi İşçiler," *Köroğlu*, 18.03.1936.

CHAPTER TEN

VIOLENCE, TUMULT, AND WALKOUTS

In the spectrum of patterns of the working class action, the last stage was open contentions with the employers and administrators, i.e., intimidation, verbal and physical attacks, beatings, fights, and spontaneous and unplanned walkouts, which generally resulted in tumultuous incidents and melees. In a period when the laboring masses hardly displayed organized, well-programmed, formal and open strikes, they often resorted to such practical, daily and spur-of-the-moment methods. These methods ranged from individual verbal and physical attack on the employers, managers and foremen to unplanned collective actions such as work stoppages, walkouts and tumultuous incidents.

Mostly, the workers sought to overcome the difficulties they faced through individual endeavors. Intimidation and physical attacks, which sometimes caused serious wounding or murder of an employer or foreman through stabbing or shooting were widespread forms of self-defense or self-expression of the desperate laboring men in the face of the excessive oppression and exploitation. The immediate causes of these acts were generally wage-cuts, underpayment, delays in wage payment, lay offs without any unemployment pay, and the extra demands of the employers that increasingly distressed the working class during the period.

On the other hand, in spite of the ban on strikes, the workers went on strike informally or took some actions resembling a strike collectively. The most characteristic forms of collective action by workers in the 1920s and 1930s were spontaneous and unplanned work stoppages and walkouts not led by an organization or party. Stopping the work without any predetermined decision, quarrelling with

employers, then coming to blows with the employers and foremen, subsequently walking off the jobs suddenly or staging protest marches to the party and government buildings, fighting with the police as well as the men of the employers were the main part and parcel of the industrial workplaces of the early Republic.

In some of the cases, when the decisions of the employers aggrieved them or the employers disregarded their demands about the wages or working conditions, they assembled in fronts of the factories or marched in the streets to express their grievance without any fight in the workplace. However, discontented workers often collectively glowered at the factory administrators and employers, who disregarded their demands or complaints. Thus, they tried to intimidate them. Even when they tried to keep their nerves under control, they frequently did not play safe and got involved in furious hand-to-hand struggles with the employers, the workplace guards, or the police in and around their workplaces. In many instances, workers, tired of being treated unjustly and badly, redirected their wrath toward the foreman, managers or employers' men on the shop floors by attacking them. Such actions often quickly grew into rows and melees between protesting workers and managers, workplace guards, employer-sided workers. Often the police also got involved in these fights on the side of the employers. Such incidents generally generated large demonstrations of workers who assembled around the workplaces or in public places. As a consequence of such fights, many left the workplace and quit the work as an act of protest.

All these collective actions were different from formal strikes in that they occurred spontaneously, and need not necessarily all the workers present. In a few cases, although the workers previously decided to stage a walkout if their demands were not met, these were also not prepared by leftist organizations for political goals.

These actions came from the bottom for more concrete and practical reasons such as a wage hike, fewer working hours, better working conditions and social facilities. And these violent outbursts stemmed mainly from the economic deprivation of the workers and the new demands on labor, which might be ascribed to the development of industrial capitalism under a single-party regime.

Briefly, often the evidence offers no indication of direct political intent behind the working class actions. However, these acts were not parochial or ineffective. All these individual or collective acts of intimidations, altercations, physical attacks, beatings, fights, murders, protests, and walkouts were kinds of “weapons of the weak,” a means to contest the exploitation and oppression. In other words, they were gauges of the popular contention caused by primarily economic reasons that traced indirect, informal, and anonymous expressions of resistance to the capitalist and industrialist interests, which would eventually grow into and paved the way for formal actions and movements of the Turkish working-class in later decades. In other words, this period was not “a pre-history” of “silenced” working class; on the contrary, it was an era of working class struggle and resistance in disguised forms under extraordinary political climate.

This chapter scrutinizes first these never-before-studied individual or collective violent acts, and then collective protests, work stoppages and walkouts, which generally resulted in violent incidents and melees, as the last weapons of the weak. All these aspects of the working class history which have been undervalued so far indicate, I think, the prevalence of a vigorous struggle of the workers for their rights and survival even under an authoritarian-capitalist regime and even in more anonymous and spontaneous ways. These acts and the resulting tumults can be seen as the best gauge of the socioeconomic conflict in urban areas.

Threatening and Attacking the Foremen and Employers

Scholars have generally mentioned how the capitalists set security forces against protesting workers and how the state and employers violated the lower classes. Admittedly, such endeavor is of crucial importance for understanding the oppression and exploitation of labor. However, how the working class used violent methods against their employers remains unknown. As a matter of fact, threat of violence and violence were important and widespread resistance methods of poor workers against their exploitative and oppressive employers. During the early Republican era, many individual or collective verbal and physical attacks took place against employers or their men inside or outside the workplaces. Especially workers who had been fired or badly and unjustly treated redirected their wrath toward their employers. The primary targets of the outraged workers were especially foremen and workplace managers. Sometimes the workers targeted directly company owners when they were directly involved in disputes between workers and establishments.

There were three reasonable causes for the violent attacks of angry workers on these people. The foremen and workplace managers were those men who hired and fired the workers, mostly at their sweet wills. Especially foremen were the most hated group among workers. They had several manager-like roles, responsibilities, and powers, possessing nearly an absolute authority to hire and fire. Generally, they tended to hire their acquaintances, relatives, and to fire a worker or a number of workers arbitrarily without any reason. Again, they favored workers who were docile and obedient, and they did not like and mostly fired demanding and headstrong workers. In addition, because of their key role in recruitment, they were able to

impose unfavorable employment contracts, heavy working conditions, and very low starting rates on the job applicants. Moreover, it was foremen who were responsible for the productivity of employees in their departments. Therefore, they were also given the power to regulate working hours and other payroll issues according to the workers' productivity and devotion to the job. They generally demanded the highest outputs at the least wages. For these reasons, in the eyes of rank and file, they were representatives of the well-to-do capitalists and loyal to them.¹⁶⁷³

Accordingly, a great number of workers often sent letters to the newspapers, complaining about the bad treatment by the foremen. Based on these letters of workers, *Köroğlu* newspaper reported that in many work places, workers had lost their jobs because of the arbitrary, oppressive and unjust behaviors of foremen.¹⁶⁷⁴ As Kosova stated, workers viewed the foremen as the greedy servants and pawns of the capitalists, who wanted the workers to further work and imposed fines and penalties on them at every opportunity. They showed the door to anyone who objected to their decisions and orders.¹⁶⁷⁵

In the recruitment process, foremen played a decisive role by giving priority to those workers who were their acquaintances, relatives, adulators, and denouncers of contestant workers. In addition, they generally championed the interests of the employers. In the eyes of workers, as Mustafa Özçelik, another contemporary worker also wrote, foremen were generally dishonest and ass-kisser agents of the employers.¹⁶⁷⁶ Since they were also paid better than other workers, they did not see

¹⁶⁷³ About the general characteristics of foremen in the eyes of the workers, see Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, p.66, 70, 78; Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, p.47, 48, 50, 53, 64, 99; Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 10, 11, 17, 86, 101-102,

¹⁶⁷⁴ "İşçi Hakkı," *Köroğlu*, 16.05.1934.

¹⁶⁷⁵ Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, p. 70.

¹⁶⁷⁶ Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p. 17.

themselves in the same category with low-paid workers.¹⁶⁷⁷ Among them were adherents of the RPP, who denounced any opponent workers to the police or employers in order to collect a reward from the official authorities.¹⁶⁷⁸

Consequently, there broke out many brawls and fights between the discontented workers and the employer-sided foremen or their men. Especially disputes over working hours, wages, unjust firing, and bad treatment of workers spurred such incidents. Most of them ended in police stations.¹⁶⁷⁹ Such workplace contentions were so common that some workers taught each other boxing tactics and how they could guard themselves in a fight.¹⁶⁸⁰

Not only using violence, but also intimidating the employers and foremen with probable use of violence by showing their anger and readiness to fight were also tactics used by workers to frighten foremen and employers and thereby to compelled them to compromise. To this goal, workers deliberately used symbolic body language and gestures such as the clenching fists, knitting brows, giving dirty looks, and glaring, thereby showing their resentment, rigidness, angriness, aggressiveness, and inclination to furious clashes.¹⁶⁸¹

It is possible to follow such fights and brawls from the memoirs of some tobacco workers. For instance, upon the firing of twenty workers from a tobacco

¹⁶⁷⁷ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, p. 29.

¹⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 37. In addition see Özçelik, *Tütünçülerin Tarihi*, p.10. Özçelik writes, “In the evening, the foremen also were beaten by the workers. It was not possible to get a job without fight. The workplaces in those days, such as Mehmet Kavala’s tobacco warehouse in Tophane, Nemlizades’ warehouse in Ahırkapı, Abdülfuats’ warehouses in Boğazkesen and Beşiktaş, Sedenko Company in Ortaköy and Austro-Turk Tobacco Company in Beşiktaş were not strange to these incidents.”

¹⁶⁸⁰ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, p. 32.

¹⁶⁸¹ İdris Erdiñ, alias Şoför İdris, pointed out the aggressiveness as a main component of the body language of the protesting workers as an intimidation tactic and expression of displeasure in those days: “In contrast to the present day strikes, there was no folk dances, games or clapping during the work stoppages in those times. Everybody knitted their eyebrows angrily and scowled furiously.” Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, p. 38.

factory for no reason, a fist fight occurred in front of the workplace after work. Workers beat up the foremen and their men.¹⁶⁸²

Workers were especially responsive to the bad treatment of the female workers by the foremen. When female workers arrived late to the workplace, some foremen fined or assaulted them verbally. In these cases, some male workers did not hesitate to take a stand against such cruel foremen.¹⁶⁸³

In Bursa, some tobacco workers beat their foreman, who had disturbed and insulted the workers, especially the females.¹⁶⁸⁴ Female workers sometimes themselves came down like a ton of bricks on the merciless foremen, when push came to shove. For instance, the foreman of the tobacco warehouse of Bordalı Ahmet Bey in İzmir banned drinking water during the work-time. However, kicking a pregnant Kurdish woman, who had drunk some water secretly, the foreman spurred the reaction of all the female workers in the warehouse. As soon as they saw the kicked woman tumbling down to the floor, some female workers assailed the foreman with blows and beat him. Even after the dust had settled, some Kurdish women left the warehouse and continued their protests by shouting together in streets.¹⁶⁸⁵

Indeed, especially peasant-origin workers in state factories hated the strict industrial discipline. Therefore, they frequently attacked the foremen who strived to discipline them via penalties and fines. The director of the Kayseri textile factory told Linke how the workers were infuriated by the factory discipline and therefore

¹⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁶⁸⁵ "Tütün Depolarında Kadın İşçinin Vaziyeti," *Bolşevik*, (Aug. 10, 1932), quoted in Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar*, p. 321.

they attacked some officers overseeing them. As the director said, “there was not a single day without a riot.”¹⁶⁸⁶

Workers who were unpaid or underpaid also attacked those foremen and employers who aggrieved them. Adnan Binyazar recorded in his childhood memoirs, for instance, how in a small glass factory where he worked for his board, some angry workers who had for several months been unpaid gave the employer, directors and foremen a beating in the factory. After beating them up, they quit their jobs.¹⁶⁸⁷

Sometimes, workers threatened the foremen to either hire them and their worker friends or face dire consequences. Their threats were quite functional in reemployment of themselves or their poor worker friends, who were fired by the foremen. Indeed, many foremen and factory managers who were scared of a possible physical attack had to hire them even when they did not need additional workers.¹⁶⁸⁸

A glance at the newspapers published during the period confirms up to what extent the workers used the method of intimidation and violence against the foremen and employers as an anonymous tactic. Mostly poor fired wage earners, when their demands of reemployment were declined, had chosen such ways as a last resort. Of course, the first step was to intimidate the foremen and employers. For instance, as soon as he heard about his dismissal, a low-income clerk in the Agricultural Cooperative in Sındırgı named Hasan raided the workplace of the cooperative director and beat him up.¹⁶⁸⁹ In another case, a low-wage official who had lost his job intimidated the director of the workplace.¹⁶⁹⁰

Many workers, going beyond intimidation and beating, resorted to much more serious and fatal physical attacks, in legal terms, “voluntary manslaughter”

¹⁶⁸⁶ Linke, *Allah Dethroned*, p. 305.

¹⁶⁸⁷ See Adnan Binyazar, *Masalını Yitiren Dev* (İstanbul: Can Yayınları, 2003), pp. 103-104.

¹⁶⁸⁸ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, p. 43.

¹⁶⁸⁹ “Katip mi, Pelvan mı?” *Köroğlu*, 04.06.1938.

¹⁶⁹⁰ “İşsiz Kalan Bir Memur İzmir’de Amiri’ni Tehdit Etti,” *Son Posta*, 08.12.1935.

(*taammüden cana kast*). Such cases seem to have increased in frequency during the Great Depression, the main burden of which fell hardest upon the working class. For instance, in Beyoğlu, a coal heaver named Aziz caused the death of a foreman İbrahim by wounding him severely because the foreman had understated his wage.¹⁶⁹¹ In a factory, a worker named Hüseyin stabbed the foremen named Halil and Muhittin because they fired him.¹⁶⁹² In a tobacco factory, two tobacco workers severely wounded the tobacco warehouse owner David Efendi in İstanbul because of a disagreement in the workplace.¹⁶⁹³ In another case, foreman at the Hasır Seaport in İstanbul had fired the chief-porter, Pötürgeli Mustafa. However, since the porter had not found another job, after a while, he had begged the foreman Ahmet Ağa for reemployment, but he had not listened to him. In the end, Mustafa first threatened the foreman with death, but when the foreman disregarded him, Mustafa stabbed and killed him.¹⁶⁹⁴

During the 1930s, indigent workers continued to resort to such intimidating self-defense methods, which sometimes resulted in murder. A worker named Kürt Memet after being fired went hungry and persistently applied to the company from which he had been fired not so long ago to restart the work. However, all of his applications were decidedly declined. Therefore, he demanded 10 TL from the foreman of the company in order to return to his home city. Being refused again and affronted as well by the company administration, he shot the foreman dead.¹⁶⁹⁵

Likewise, in İzmir a worker who was fired by his company followed his boss one day secretly and learnt where he lived. He bided his time to take vengeance for

¹⁶⁹¹ “Bir Amele Cinayeti,” *Cumhuriyet*, 05.06.1929.

¹⁶⁹² “Bir Amelenin Marifeti,” *Cumhuriyet*, 16.12.1929.

¹⁶⁹³ “İki Amele Patronlarını Yaraladılar,” *Cumhuriyet*, 08.09.1930.

¹⁶⁹⁴ “Bir Hamalın Cinayeti,” *Cumhuriyet*, 12.02.1930.

¹⁶⁹⁵ “Bir Fabrikada Cinayet,” *Son Posta*, 15.12.1935.

the rebuff he had suffered and finally stabbed him to death near his domicile.¹⁶⁹⁶ Another worker, named Abdullah, who had been fired from the Armament Plant in Ankara also objected to his discharge. Because the factory director persistently dropped his objection, the worker stabbed him to death.¹⁶⁹⁷ In another case, a worker named Ziya in a tobacco warehouse in Kantarcı was dismissed. Because he could not find a job in elsewhere, he again and again requested from his previous foreman, Ahmet Efendi, to reemploy him, but Ahmet Efendi denied him persistently. Upon this, infuriated by the firmness of Ahmet Efendi, Ziya went mad and murdered Ahmet Efendi.¹⁶⁹⁸ The story of a tobacco factory worker named Mehmet was similar. Distressed by unemployment and poverty, he shot to death the foreman of Geri Tobacco Factory named Recep on the grounds that the foreman had rejected his job applications several times.¹⁶⁹⁹

In a different instance, a small group of workers attempted to blow up the factory management with all the plant and equipment sky-high. Three tobacco workers named Rahmi, İbrahim and Nebi working in the tobacco factory of the Monopoly Administration in İstanbul planned to dynamite the factory engine with the factory administration. However, they were caught in the act. According to the statement they gave at the police station, the main reason lying behind their very dangerous and fear-provoking attempt was to pay the merciless factory management back for imposing unfair penalties on them.¹⁷⁰⁰

¹⁶⁹⁶ “Akıllan Bakalım,” *Köroğlu*, 21.12.1935.

¹⁶⁹⁷ “Böyle Olmaz,” *Köroğlu*, 30.05.1931.

¹⁶⁹⁸ “Bir Cinayet,” *Son Posta*, 31.05.1932.

¹⁶⁹⁹ “Ustabaşayı Vuran Amele,” *Köroğlu*, 10.04.1935.

¹⁷⁰⁰ “Yüzlerce İnsanı Öldürecekti,” *Son Posta*, 07.05.1935.

Informal Strikes: Workplace Fights and Walkouts

In spite of the gradual increase in the state coercion from the mid-1920s onward, the working class did not hesitate to go on informal strikes mostly in a spontaneous manner. Admittedly, the number of open, planned and predetermined strikes led by leftist groups decreased with the gradual consolidation of the single-party state, which brought about the liquidation of the opponent political ideologies and groups, primarily the left. However, this did not mean that the workers gave up the collective struggle; instead, they adjusted their actions to the realities of the current political structure.

Under the authoritarian capitalist regime, which gradually ruled out all opponent and challenging working-class organizations and actions, the discontented workers preferred to stage walkouts and protest against the employers spontaneously when push came to shove. In many factories, tumultuous incidents triggered by the discontented workers occurred frequently. In other words, the workers conveyed the field of battle to their own front, in everyday life, by going on unannounced, unorganized, and sudden informal strikes, due to the sociological realities of the Turkish working class, the lack of organizational infrastructure, the state repression, and the setback of the working-class movement on international level under the rising authoritarianism and nationalism.

Until now, the conventional accounts have generally argued that the strikes and walkouts that broke out in the mid-1920s and late 1920s were products of the communist worker leaders and leftist organizations of the workers. According to such approach focusing on the role of the leftist intellectuals and organizations,

workers' collective actions came to a halt in the 1930s in parallel with the repression of the left, except for a few incidents.¹⁷⁰¹

This approach, based on the narrow meaning of the strike in the sense that it is organized, preannounced, voted on by workers, directed by a committee, and supported and led by a leftist political organization or a union, cannot grasp the everyday and informal form of strikes that appeared in the type of spontaneous and tumultuous protests and walkouts. However, if we use the term of strike in this broader meaning, it is possible to see many examples of informal strikes in the 1930s, which were not organized, preannounced, or led by the leftist workers or organizations.

From this broader viewpoint, it is possible to say that the working class struggle did not come to a halt in the 1930s after the elimination of the communist intellectuals and the Workers' Advancement Society. As a matter of fact, even many of the strikes occurred in the mid and the late 1920s were not organized and directed by the left. It is true that especially the Turkish Socialist Party in the early 1920s and the Workers' Advancement Society in the mid-1920s produced or supported many workers resistances, but most of the working class action developed spontaneously and free from any organizational support.

The government often labeled these workers resistances as the intrigue of the communists in order to delegitimize the working class resistance. What is more, the communist left accepted such allegations for propaganda purposes to claim how influential and strong among the workers it was. In fact, the fate of the workers' protests was not fully depended on the weak leftist organizations, which were

¹⁷⁰¹ For one example of such institutionalist approach, see Yavuz, "Sanayi'deki İşgücünün Durumu, 1923-40," p. 172. See also Koç, *Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık Tarihi*, p. 37.

handicapped with the weakness and polarization of the Communist Party of Turkey (CPT).¹⁷⁰²

An intelligence report prepared by the American intelligence agency, for instance, noted that the strikes in 1927 of İzmir tobacco workers and Adana Railway workers were not intrigues of the communists.¹⁷⁰³ In addition, although some contemporary Soviet experts like Korniyenko emphasized the role of the communists in the strikes of the late 1920s and early 1930s, the communists were even unaware of many incidents that took place in factories. For example, regarding the walkout of the Defterdar-Feshane Textile Factory workers in 1932, the *Kızıl İstanbul* (Red İstanbul), the newspaper of the CPT, admitted that neither the CPT nor the communist workers could and did not manipulate and lead such movements.¹⁷⁰⁴

Likewise, neither a leftist organization nor leftist workers took part in the bargemen's resistance to the İstanbul Port Monopoly Company in January 1927, the bloodiest clash between the workers and capital in the interwar period. According to the investigations of the police, there was no "any agitation or provocation" in the emergence of this firm resistance that lasted several weeks and caused several casualties among the bargemen and the police. In other words, let alone any organizational support, the left did not even agitate or encourage the bargemen for resistance.¹⁷⁰⁵

¹⁷⁰² Tunçay has argued that the labor actions, especially in the second half of the 1920s, were not produced by the leftist groups because the left, under the police surveillance and repression, was not able to organize or manipulate such working class actions. See Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar*, Vol. II, p. 21.

¹⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁷⁰⁴ *Kızıl İstanbul*, No. 35 (Jan. 3, 1932), quoted in Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar*, p. 289.

¹⁷⁰⁵ From Minister of Internal Affairs to the Prime Ministry, BCA MGM [30.10/88.579.27], 15.01.1927.

Major Strikes and Walkouts of the 1920s

Even from the beginning of the National Struggle to the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, Turkey had witnessed a strike waves periodically, many of which had been led by the Turkish Socialist Party between 1919 and 1922.¹⁷⁰⁶ The strike waves continued, albeit limited, right after the establishment of the new Turkish republic. The strike movements unfolded in the mid-1923 in İstanbul, İzmir, Zonguldak and other cities. The coalmine workers in Ereğli went on strike three times in the summer of 1923. The Bomonti brewery workers followed them in the first days of August. In same days, hundreds of Oriental Textile Factory workers and 4000 fig-processing workers in İzmir stopped work and walked out. The walkout of İzmir-Aydın Railway workers owned by a British company followed these strikes. In September, printing house workers and textile factory workers mounted a resistance for their vital interests and rights. Then workers of the French-owned Eastern Railway Company set a strike in November for a list of rights such as wage rise, shortening of working hours, improvement of working conditions, paid vacations and free medical facilities. Many of these strikes forced the authorities and management of the companies to accept some demands raised by the strikers. Under the pressures of such strikes, the government put on its agenda the labor legislation and prepared a draft bill.

Some of these strikes were opposed by the existing labor unions and associations. For example, during the İzmir-Aydın Railway workers' strike, the president of the Aydın Railway Workers Union tried to prevent the workers resistance. Again, in the strike of the printing houses workers, the İstanbul Labor

¹⁷⁰⁶ Güzel, *Türkiye'de İşçi Hareketleri*, p. 110.

Union opposed to the strike on the grounds that they were paid much better than the workers in other sectors.¹⁷⁰⁷

The collective protests and struggles of workers continued in the next year. In 1924, the blacksmiths in Adana protested the heavy taxes collectively. Cocoon processing workers went on strike for three days demanding an increase in their wages. Both the blacksmiths and cocoon processing workers succeeded in reaching their goals.¹⁷⁰⁸ In July 1924, some tramway workers in İstanbul protested the dismissal of their worker friends; then, postal workers went on strike for higher wages.¹⁷⁰⁹ Around the same dates, female tobacco workers in Ortaköy protested the unsanitary working conditions. In August, a further conflict arose between railway workers and the Eastern Railway Company. In November, workers of İstanbul municipality demanded a paid day off a week.¹⁷¹⁰

This strike waves compelled the ruling circles to make some concessions to the workers. Indeed, in 1924, the government promulgated the Weekly Day of Rest Law, which applied to all employees of the entire public and the private enterprises in districts with a population of 10,000 or more. According to the law, workers in specific large enterprises had the right of a day off on Friday every week.¹⁷¹¹

In 1925, the worker resistance continued without any organizational support or effect. Indeed, as Tunçay also has shown, the communist and leftist movements were not effective due to the police repression over even the modest leftist

¹⁷⁰⁷ Korniyenko, *The Labor Movement in Turkey*, pp. 48-51.

¹⁷⁰⁸ “Çukurova’da İşçi Hareketi ve Sendikacılık,” *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 1 (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı; İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1996-1998), p. 249.

¹⁷⁰⁹ “1924 İstanbul Tramvay İşçileri Grevi,” *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 2 (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı; İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1996-1998), p. 69.

¹⁷¹⁰ Yavuz, “Sanayi’deki İşgücünün Durumu, 1923-40,” p. 170.

¹⁷¹¹ Makal, *Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, pp. 333-334. This population criterion limited the coverage of the law because by 1924 only about 16 percent of the population had been living in places with population of 10,000 or more.

intellectuals especially after the Maintenance of Order Law.¹⁷¹² At the beginning of 1925, the tramway workers, the flourmill workers, and the workers of the gas companies of İstanbul came out on several walkouts demanding higher wages, fewer working hours, better working conditions, a paid weekend holiday and vacation.¹⁷¹³ Again, in July and August, there were several protests and work stoppages of telegraphers in Samsun, Adana and Erzurum.¹⁷¹⁴ Then the slaughterhouse workers in İstanbul also stopped work for one day.¹⁷¹⁵ Again, within the same year the workers in the private ferry company Şirket-i Hayriye in İstanbul went on strike.¹⁷¹⁶ In Zonguldak the coalminers staged about ten strike within 1925, in which about totally thousands of workers participated.¹⁷¹⁷

Among the strikes of 1925, there was a walkout of the tobacco warehouse workers in Tokat. Workers, dissatisfied with their low wages, took strike action in the spring for higher wages. They had to fight against the police, the foremen, and the strikebreaker workers. One of the workers was shot in the leg by the guards of the tobacco warehouse. Although the tobacco warehouse remained closed for a few days after this fight, it restarted production by accepting the workers' wage rise of about fifty percent.¹⁷¹⁸

In 1926, the rate of workers resistance decreased with the increasing application to the Maintenance of Order Law. In the summer of 1926, the Soma-Bandırma railroad line workers took a strike action. About 2000 workers collected

¹⁷¹² Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar, 1925-1936*, p. 21.

¹⁷¹³ Korniyenko, *The Labor Movement in Turkey*, p. 52.

¹⁷¹⁴ "Çukurova'da İşçi Hareketi ve Sendikacılık," p. 249; "Türkiye'de Grevler," *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 1 (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı; İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1996-1998), pp. 492-493.

¹⁷¹⁵ Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar, 1925-1936*, p. 21.

¹⁷¹⁶ Zafer Toprak, "Şirketi Hayriye Amele Cemiyeti ve 1925 Grevi," *Toplumsal Tarih*, No. 30 (June, 1996).

¹⁷¹⁷ Erdal Yavuz, p. 170.

¹⁷¹⁸ Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, p. 17.

12,000 signatures supporting their own cause and submitted them to the government. After ten days of strike, the workers ended the strike with a wage rise.¹⁷¹⁹

Turkish workers entered the year 1927 with the new collective actions. In January 1927, bargemen of İstanbul ports refused to work under the management of the İstanbul Port Company and went on strike. Especially the İstanbul Port Company's wage-cut of 15 percent of those workers who would be employed in the company provoked a widespread backlash among the bargemen. 3000 of them besieged the scows belonging to the Company and did not let them operate and also rejected to work for the company. The protestors hindered all operations of the Port Company so such a degree that the strikebound transportation ships could not made cargo-handling operations.¹⁷²⁰

The director of the Company, Ahmet Hamdi (Başar), noted in his memoirs how he had felt helplessness in the face of the bargemen's resistance and how he had set the police against them. Indeed, more than a hundred police had assaulted and clashed with the striking bargemen who were lightly armed with their equipments such as hooks. The police forces, which faced the strikers' firm resistance, were reinforced with the additional forces of gendarme and firefighters. The strong resistance of the bargemen was ended with the police fire into the crowd at the end of the third week of the strike.¹⁷²¹ As a result of police intervention, 15 bargemen and 5 policemen died and many were wounded. The police arrested 320 persons.¹⁷²²

In another instance, more than 3000 tobacco warehouse workers in İstanbul came out on a strike in May 1927. Due to the fear of the authorities that the strike

¹⁷¹⁹ Korniyenko, *The Labor Movement in Turkey*, p. 54.

¹⁷²⁰ "İstanbul Liman İşçileri Grevi 1927," *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 2 (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı; İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1996-1998), p. 61.

¹⁷²¹ Ahmed Hamdi Başar, *Ahmet Hamdi Başar'ın Hatıraları: Meşrutiyet, Cumhuriyet ve Tek Parti Dönemi*, edited by Murat Koraltürk (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2007), pp. 240-245.

¹⁷²² "İstanbul Liman İşçileri Grevi 1927," *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 2, p. 61.

would also encourage the workers of other public enterprises, it was decided to meet the strikers' demands. The workers' daily wages were increased about 20 piasters. In addition, the wage for work on holidays was determined as 200 piasters.¹⁷²³

Only one month later, the railway workers of Adana submitted a detailed demand list to the Eastern Railway Company and the official authorities, including an eight-hour workday, one paid day of rest a week, and a paid vacation, the conclusion of collective contracts, free medical service, control over production, and a labor legislation. Upon the refusal of such demands, on August 9, the workers' delegates called a strike. In its first move, the government proposed the workers cancel the strike and let the dispute be settled by due process of law. Although the strikers suspended the strike in the hope of the acceptance of their demands by the company, the negotiations proved to be fruitless for the workers. Thereupon, the workers decided to continue the strike on August 11.

During the strike, the workers coolly showed the best examples of appropriation of all possible means for the sake of their own cause. They laid themselves on the rails to hamper the operations of the trains; they faced the police attacks several times and had to fight with them and the representatives of the company frequently. The workers did not hesitate to show a limited but frightening violence against the strikebreakers, the company representatives, the state officials, police, and gendarmes.¹⁷²⁴

As another strategy, the demonstrators had their wives lay on the rails together with themselves. The involvement of their wives, other family members and neighbors in the strike made things more difficult and delicate for the security forces.

¹⁷²³ Korniienko, *The Labor Movement in Turkey*, p. 54.

¹⁷²⁴ Şeyda Oğuz (ed.), *1927 Adana Demiryolu Grevi* (İstanbul: TÜSTAV, 2005), pp. 43-44, 49-50, 55-59.

They could not be as hard on these women as they were on men.¹⁷²⁵ When the security forces tried to force the women to remove from the rails, the strikers made use of the power of the rumor about the abuse of women, which spread like wildfire to the villages and caused many more village women and men to take part in the protest against the company and the government.¹⁷²⁶

Moreover, as a stratagem against the company, they appropriated the official nationalist discourse by asserting that they were Turkish workers struggling for Turkish people's right against the exploitation of the foreign capital and employment of non-Turkish workers. Furthermore, when the security forces offended them, the women shouted slogans like "Long Live the Republic!" "May God be Pleased with the Republic!" to show their commitment to the government and make them to understand how legitimate their actions were.¹⁷²⁷ Finally, the strikers built solidarity with other groups of workers in Adana and received the financial assistance of the other discontented laboring people such as shoemakers, blacksmiths, printing house workers, and carpenters.¹⁷²⁸

However, this worker resistance did not yield the desired results in the short term. On those days, the government started a new campaign against the communists in order to divert the public attention from the workers' firm resistance and their economic problems and to discourage all the workers from any further attempt to go on strike. Finally, the railway workers accepted a small wage rise and other conditions proposed by the company.¹⁷²⁹

In 1928, several walkouts by car-body workers in Adapazarı, tramway, textile and tobacco workers in İstanbul, and the Eastern Railway Company workers took

¹⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-58,

¹⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44, 57, 60.

¹⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63, 68.

¹⁷²⁹ İlhan E. Darendelioğlu, *Türkiye'de Komünist Hareketleri*, Vol. 1 (İstanbul: Toprak, 1961), p. 48.

place. Some of them resulted in the full or partial success of the workers.¹⁷³⁰ Especially the İstanbul tramway workers' strike, which was supported by the Workers' Advancement Society, gained widespread public attention. On August 26, the tramway workers declared and delivered to the Governorship and the Tramway Company a detailed Demand List (*Metalib Listesi*), consisting of 16 articles, including a 50 percent raise, a bonus payment each year, an eight-hour work day, overtime payment, paid vacations, unemployment compensation for dismissed workers, no pressure over ticket collectors when they had a deficit, free medical treatment of workers and their families, building toilets and water fountains in terminal stations, and special clothes.¹⁷³¹

The company accepted to negotiate the demands of the workers. However, upon the breakdown of negotiations between the representatives of the workers and the company, the workers staged a strike against the company and marched in the streets on October 7.¹⁷³² From the beginning of the strike on, the strikebreakers weakened the power of the strikers. According to the police reports, despite the strike, the tramways continued to operate without any interruption, owing to the loyal workers who did not participate in the strike. Indeed, the company supported these "loyal" workers with several social facilities and financial aids to break the workers' resistance.¹⁷³³

¹⁷³⁰ Korniyenko, *The Labor Movement in Turkey*, p. 56. In addition see Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar, 1925-1936*, p. 65.

¹⁷³¹ For a detailed information collected by the police about the strikers' names, duties and roles in the strike, see "İhraç Olunan Atelye ve Hutut Amelesinin Cetveli," BCA NV [230.0/91.25.1], 06.11.1928.

¹⁷³² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³³ "Nafia Müdüriyeti Umumiyesi Canibialiyesine, Maruzu acizanemdir, Grevin mevcudiyetine rağmen seyrüsefer devam etmektedir (...) Şirket çalışan müstahdimine sureti muntazamada ve bir kaç türlü olarak sabah, öğle, akşam yemeklerini mebzul bir miktarda ve meccanen ita eylemekte olduğu gibi müstahdemini mezkûreye çift yevmiye vermekte ve depolarda yatanların temini istirahatı için battaniyeler tevzi etmekle beraber vazifelerinin hitamından sonra hanelerine gitmek isteyenleri de hususi otobüslerle göndermektedir. Bundan maada müstahdemine geçen gün beşer lira ikramiye tesviye edilmiştir. Hülasa müstahdeminin temini irtibatı ve binnetice seyrüseferlerin haleldar olmaması için şirketçe her türlü maddi fedakarlıktan çekinilmemekte olduğu maruzdur ef. Tramvaylar, Tünel ve Rıhtım Ser Komiseri M. Nazım, 06.11.1928." BCA NV [230.0/91.25.1].

Consequently, the Tramway Company rejected the strikers' demands and succeeded at putting down the strike with the help of the police forces and the strikebreakers. In the face of the stiff resistance of the company, the workers gave up the strike on 15 October and placed their hopes on, with their own words, "the People's Government" (*Halk Hükümeti*). However, the company reemployed some of the strikers, but refused to employ 66 workers who worked more vigorously for the strike than did other workers. Thereupon, employing the nationalist and populist discourse of the regime and showing their respect to the president as a soul of the people, the discharged workers petitioned Atatürk and pleaded with him to help them.¹⁷³⁴

As stated above, most of the work stoppages in 1928 ended with higher wages and other small or large concessions. On the other hand, these collective actions paved the way for the closure of the Workers' Advancement Society, which played a role in some of these worker resistance movements. Alarmed by its contribution to the struggle of the working class especially to the strikes by tramway workers and the Eastern Railway Company workers, the government banned the activities of the Society and closed it down ultimately towards the end of 1928. In fact, already its leftist members had been reduced by a series of trials since the autumn of 1927. Furthermore, the government continued to stage new communist trial in 1928 in order to both liquidate the left and dissuade the workers from pursuing their rights.¹⁷³⁵

¹⁷³⁴ "A Letter from Workers' Representative Orhan Mithat in Galata Ünyon Han to Ghazi, 08.11.1928," See BCA NV [230.0/91.25.1].

¹⁷³⁵ During the late 1920s and the early 1930s, the government launched the most encompassing prosecution campaigns against the communist left and the opponent people who were labeled as communist. See Kerim Sadi, *Türkiye'de Sosyalizmin Tarihine Katkı* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1994), pp. 709-715.

This, however, did not put a stop to the worker resistance. In 1929, in a tobacco warehouse in Beşiktaş, some workers pursuing their rights, particularly a wage rise, overtime payment and shorter working hours, had to fight with the foremen and some workers sided with the employer. The employer called out the police and the protesting workers were taken in police station.¹⁷³⁶ Upon this, the workers met in the Tobacco Workers' Association and put out a verbal declaration demanding labor legislation and the right to strike. In the same years, some printing house workers in Ankara refused to work until their wages and working conditions had been improved.

Worker Protests and Walkouts in the 1930s

The workers' protests and collective resistance did not cease during the Great Depression years. Especially the establishment of a more libertarian-looking opposition party gave great expectations to the working class. The arrival of the opposition party leader Fethi Okyar to İzmir, the second big economic center, created a civil disturbance and several walkouts in the city. Fig processing workers and vineyard laborers in İzmir went on strike in August and September. İzmir dockworkers staged a walkout on September 6 for better wages and working conditions. The police and the gendarmes dispersed the demonstration of the dockworkers who gathered in front of the Port Company. Thereupon, about 2000 workers marched in the main street and gathered in front of the hotel, in which the opposition leader stayed. Chanting slogans against the port company, the demonstrators headed towards Alsancak to participate in the mass meeting of the

¹⁷³⁶ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, p. 35.

opposition party.¹⁷³⁷ During the travel of Fethi Okyar through western Anatolia, he was welcomed with cheers by workers and peasants.¹⁷³⁸

In İstanbul, those workers who saw news about the formation of an opposition party as a harbinger of good days also took to the streets. During Fethi Okyar's visit to İstanbul, tobacco workers, tramway and railway workers, dockworkers, bargemen, and some other worker groups walked along İstiklâl Avenue shouting slogans like "Long live Fethi Bey!" "Let him establish his party!" and "Let workers establish their own party!"; but they did not ignore the Republican discourse in order to legitimate their claims shouting, "Long live the Republic!"¹⁷³⁹

Within three months, the FRP dissolved itself under the pressure of the RPP politicians' unfair and harsh criticisms and accusations. The closure of the FRP left the RPP as a single-party government that would eliminate all other rival political groups and intensify its authoritarian single-party rule over the country. Nevertheless, the consolidation of the single-party regime during the late 1920s and especially the early 1930s did not hold the working class resistance at bay.

In July 1931, the tobacco workers of Ortaköy tobacco factories took a strike action. The Galata tobacco warehouse workers followed them in August. In December 1931, when the Defterdar Textile Factory attempted to implement wage-cuts for senior workers in order to pay the wages of the newly hired apprentices, the workers protested the factory administration. Wavering between going on strike and

¹⁷³⁷ İbrahim Sırrı Topçuoğlu, *Savaş Yarısı: Anılar ve Hikayeler* (İstanbul, 1977), pp.19-21. See also *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 2, p. 176. About the tumultuous incidents during the Fethi Okyar's visit to İzmir see also Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *Serbest Fırka Hatıraları* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1994), pp. 29-64.

¹⁷³⁸ For the great interest of the workers in the FRP and Fethi Okyar in the western Anatolian centers see Emrence, *Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*, pp. 93-100, 104-105, 115; and see Yetkin, *Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası Olayı*, pp. 244-245.

¹⁷³⁹ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, pp. 40-41.

collective petitioning, workers came up with the idea of taking their concerns and demands to the factory administration collectively.¹⁷⁴⁰

By the beginning of 1932, tobacco warehouse workers staged a walkout in İzmir. In İstanbul, the resistance of the Seyrisefain Company workers, particularly the engine department workers, lasting from March to May, followed the incidents in İzmir. Caused by the withholding of the workers' wages, the workers petitioned the company administration in March, but their efforts came to nothing.¹⁷⁴¹ Thereupon, on April 12, the workers of three steamships decided not to work and refused to return to work until the distribution of their wages. However, the company quickly attempted to break the resistance by hiring new workers. In the course of the strike, six workers who allegedly tried to impede the working of new workers were arrested by the police.¹⁷⁴² However, petitioning the newspapers and the authorities, the workers continued to pursue their rights. Finally, notwithstanding the endless efforts of the company and the strikebreakers, the striking workers attained their desire and obtained their accrued wages.¹⁷⁴³

In the face of such working-class struggle and working class discontent, the press gave place to the workers' letters and interviews, complaining about the heavy working-conditions, long work-hours, unpaid wages, and bad treatment by the employers, and demanding the government assistance, particularly a protective labor law. At this juncture, the government also somewhat softened its stance and tried to pour oil on troubled waters. That is to say, the workers' struggles and dissent forced the ruling circles to adopt a more attentive stance to the working class. Upon the strike waves of the mid and late 1920s, the government had to prepare two labor law

¹⁷⁴⁰ "Hak Yenmesin," *Köroğlu*, 23.12.1931; Yavuz, "Sanayideki İşgücünün Durumu," p. 173.

¹⁷⁴¹ "Seyrisefain İşçileri İdareden Şikayetçidir," *Son Posta*, 13.03.1932.

¹⁷⁴² "Seyrisefain'in Bazı Ateşçileri İşlerini Terketti," *Son Posta*, 12.04.1932.

¹⁷⁴³ "Yevmiyemizi Niçin Alamadık?" *Son Posta*, 14.05.1932.

drafts in 1927 and 1929. The first one was not even brought before the plenary session of the National Assembly due to the elections.¹⁷⁴⁴ By early 1929, the government submitted another draft bill concerning the labor law to the State Council (*Danıştay*), but withdrew it again within a short time.¹⁷⁴⁵

However, the government attempted to meet the partial needs of the workers by adopting the Public Hygiene Law in April 1930. It offered important regulations concerning the health and safety of the labor force and introduced medical services in the large undertakings. In addition, it contained important protective measures for the female and child labor, limiting their work-hours and job fields.¹⁷⁴⁶

In addition, in the parliamentary elections held in 1931 the RPP made some attempts to create a worker-friendly image. For that purpose, the ruling circles permitted the inclusion of a few workers in the list of candidates.¹⁷⁴⁷ The newly elected worker deputies were invited to several occasions of the RPP and the government. Moreover, Atatürk delivered a speech highly honoring and putting the workers ahead and promised them that the government would work for their interests and welfare.¹⁷⁴⁸

At the Third Congress of the RPP, the ruling circles, taking into account the resistance of the working class, adopted an ideological and discursive strategy overlooking class-differences and substituting it with occupational differences. The second article in the second section of the new party program separated the citizens to five professional groups, that were small-farmers, manufacturers and craftsmen,

¹⁷⁴⁴ About the 1927 Draft of Labor Law see Mesut Gülmez “Amele Teali Cemiyetinin 1927 İş Yasası Tasarısına Karşı Hazırladığı ‘İşçi Layihası’,” *Amme İdaresi Dergisi*, XVI, No. 2 (June, 1983).

¹⁷⁴⁵ İlkin, “Devletçilik Döneminin İlk Yıllarında İşçi Sorununa Yaklaşım ve 1932 İş Kanunu Tasarısı” p. 252.

¹⁷⁴⁶ Makal, *Türkiye’de Tek Parti Döneminde Çalışma İlişkileri*, p. 342.

¹⁷⁴⁷ “Yeni Mecliste Amele Partisi de Bulunacak,” *Cumhuriyet*, 30.03.1931; “Çiftçi ve Amele Mebuslar,” *Cumhuriyet*, 18.04.1931.

¹⁷⁴⁸ “Gazinin Beyannamesi,” *Cumhuriyet*, 21.04.1931. “The nationalist Turkish workers are the most valuable components of the Turkish community, and therefore, the rights and interests of the manual laborers [*amele*] and workers [*işçi*] will be observed.”

laborers and workers, self-employed people, and industrialists, landowners and merchants.¹⁷⁴⁹

Furthermore, a new draft of labor law was reluctantly submitted to the National Assembly. The new law draft prescribed a 48-hour workweek and introduced many protective measures regulating the payment of wages and the conclusion of labor contracts. What is more, it recognized the right to strike and to organize labor unions. In order to enforce the implementation of the law, a labor inspection system would be established. However, this new draft was left aside due to the ouster of the bureaucrat who prepared and supported, Mustafa Şeref, the Minister of Economy. Celal Bayar, the new Minister of Economy in 1932 took into consideration the opposition of the business circles to the main provisions of the labor law draft, like the right to strike and the right to establish trade unions, and accordingly put it aside. In addition, such a democratic labor law would not serve the industrialization purpose of the government.

Finally, as a precaution against the working class demands as well as other causes, the government increased the dose of repressive measures as well as the populist discourse. However, neither the populist discourse deceived the workers, nor did the consolidation of the single party regime and state repression avert the workers' protests and collective resistance. Many labor disputes erupted even during this most authoritarian period of the Turkish history. Surely, there was much for working people to complain about during the 1930s, marked by an industrial drive and police repression. However, the collective protests and walkouts of the workers in more informal and spontaneous ways did not cease during the decade.

¹⁷⁴⁹ CHF *Nizamnamesi ve Programı* (Ankara, 1931), p. 32.

In 1933, the Balya-Karaaydın mineworkers, demanding better working conditions and wage rise, for instance, attempted to take strike action. In the same year, as Orhan Kemal described in his memoirs, ginneries in Adana witnessed several tumultuous incidents caused by rejection of the wage rise demands of the workers by the employers. Most of these incidents ended with the police intervention.¹⁷⁵⁰

In the same year, as Kosova described in her memoirs, a worker resistance occurred in a tobacco warehouse where she worked. Those workers who heard of an English company's rush order of tobacco delivery from their warehouse did not hesitate to turn this foreign demand into an opportunity. In a short time, they began to grumble about the low wages and long working hours. News of work stoppage circulated from mouth to mouth among the workers in the warehouse. The following morning, at the beginning of the shift, the workers who came to the warehouse refused to work. Aware of the odd situation in the warehouse, the chief-foreman informed the warehouse owner. Since the last thing the warehouse owner needed was interruption of the production process, he accepted to negotiate with the workers. After an hour of bargaining in the office of the employer, the workers achieved to get a rise of 10 piasters in their daily wages. As soon as they heard the good news, the workers ended the work stoppage.¹⁷⁵¹

By September 1934, in Halkpınar Serge Factory of the Orient Carpet Company in İzmir, the change of wage payment schedule, which caused about a 30 percent decrease in wages, spurred a reaction among the workers. 105 of 600 workers collectively petitioned the factory management demanding a return to the previous payment schedule. Moreover, the workers objected to the dismissal of one

¹⁷⁵⁰ Orhan Kemal, *Avare Yıllar* (İstanbul: Epsilon Yayınevi, 2005), p. 19.

¹⁷⁵¹ Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, p. 70.

worker without any reason. Upon the refusal of their demands, they went on a sit-down protest and occupied the factory for 9 hours. After the police forces entered the factory and attacked the protestors, the workers managed to escape from the police, and then went to the local RPP building to ask for help of the party administration. Demonstrations and tumultuous incidents inside and outside the factory lasted one week. During the resistance, the workers blocked the operations of 100 weaving looms for a week.¹⁷⁵²

In March of 1935, the dockworkers at the coal depot in Kuruçeşme demanded wage hike for their 12 hours of hard work a day. The depot management's rejection of these demands provoked the walkout of the workers. However, since the police were informed about the involvement of some communists in the dockworkers' walkout, the resistance proved to be stillborn and some workers were put in prison.¹⁷⁵³

In the same month, the dismissal of 40 workers from the tobacco warehouse in Tophane owned by the Adapazarı Turkish Trade Bank caused grumbling among the workers. On March 28, a walkout took place soon after management had announced the dismissal of the workers on the grounds that the dismissed workers were not qualified. Some of the workers, asserting that all these dismissed had been working for the company up to ten years, insisted that the dismissal should be revoked as soon as possible.¹⁷⁵⁴

In the summer of the same year, as Şoför İdris vividly described in his memoirs, a firm worker resistance occurred in the Mithat Nemlizades' Tobacco warehouse in Ahırkapı quarter of İstanbul, which grew into a mass demonstration in

¹⁷⁵² Bülent Varlık, "1934 Yılında Bir Grev," *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, XVI, No. 143 (May, 1992), p. 31.

¹⁷⁵³ Korniyenko, *The Labor Movement in Turkey*, p. 71.

¹⁷⁵⁴ "Bu İşçiler Niçin İşten Çıkarıldı?" *Son Posta*, 29.03.1935.

Sultanahmet Square. The employer's negative response to the workers' demands of a 10 piasters raise in daily wages and of advance payment led the workers to refuse to work and to go on a sit-down strike in the warehouse. Just after the beginning of the strike, the police surrounded the warehouse. Before the police intervention, foremen, warehouse guards and other workers sided-with the management had already attacked the striking workers. About 2000 workers came to blows each other inside the warehouse. The fight with stones and sticks lasted for one hour. Female workers also fought tooth and nail. Then about 500 policemen intervened in the fight and broke it up with heavy hearts. However, workers who were dispersed by the police decided suddenly to gather in Sultanahmet Square to protest their company. In the square, there also broke out ugly brawls between the workers and the police. A group from the striking workers came up with the idea of taking their concerns in person to Yunus Nadi, the editorial-writer of the newspaper *Cumhuriyet*. Finally, in the face of the stiff resistance of the workers, the employer had to compromise with them on some of their demands.¹⁷⁵⁵

During the 1930s, perhaps the most active year in respect of the working class struggle through walkouts and collective protests was 1936. During this year, several labor disputes erupted, many of which resulted in walkouts or violent incidents. The government's unwillingness to improve effectively the adverse conditions of the working class led to mass walkouts and demonstrations. The new year began with the resistance mounted by the workers of the Samsun Tobacco Factory in January and continued with further walkouts and demonstrations by the Süreyyapaşa Textile Factory workers in March; tobacco workers protests and walkouts in tobacco warehouses of Nemlizados, the Herman, the Seden Kolar and the Flemenk

¹⁷⁵⁵ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, p. 66.

companies between March and November; the protests of the Yedikule Gas Company workers in April; the resistance of the porters to the İstanbul Governorship's ban on back-carrying in the same month; and the Paşabahçe Glass Factory workers' protests in July.

The walkout by the workers of the Samsun Tobacco Factory owned by the Monopoly Administration was one of the most important acts of collective resistance during the 1930s, even though it did not yield good benefits for the workers in the short term. During the resistance, the workers displayed many tactics to defend their rights.

The main factors that provoked the worker resistance were the material deprivation and bad treatment of workers by the foremen. Workers had long been complaining about the working conditions, unsatisfactory wages, and bad treatment by the foremen, especially the scornful and offensive behavior of the chief foreman, Erol Raif. Some workers had already taken him to court for infringement on the honor of the workers.¹⁷⁵⁶

On January 22, upon the workers' demands for higher wage, the chief foreman had scolded the workers angrily and insulted them once again. In the wake of the ensuing quarrels between those workers who protested such insulting attitudes of the foreman, 22 workers were fired from the factory.¹⁷⁵⁷

On the following day, the dismissal of those workers who had defended the workers rights against the foremen and simultaneous rejection of the wage rise demands by the factory management stirred up most of the workers and prompted them to go on a work stoppage. Upon this, the factory administration declared that

¹⁷⁵⁶ From the Minister of Customs and Monopolies Rana Tarhan to RPP Secretary-General, BCA CHP [490.1/1444.22.1], 18.01.1936.

¹⁷⁵⁷ BCA CHP [490.1/1444.22.1], 07.02.1936.

the department in which the strikers worked would be closed down and the workers of this department would be dismissed henceforth.

However, the workers did not leave the factory and continued the sit-down strike. Therefore, the factory administration first set the guards and some other workers sided with the foremen against the strikers. This caused a clash between these two groups of workers. Then the management asked the police support against the protesters. In the face of the intervention of the police force, women and child workers thrust themselves to the forefront in order to show how they were tightly knitted to each other and to prevent a possible physical violence of the police force.

After the police emptied the factory building coercively, hundreds of workers spontaneously marched to the main street and gathered in front of the building of the provincial party organization. Shouting their demands together here, the strikers argued that the factory, declaring a lockout illegally, aimed to punish the workers. After they had submitted a petition complaining about the factory administration and listing their demands to the party chair of Samsun, the workers ended the mass demonstration. However, investigating the responsible persons for the incidents, the police placed 14 workers under arrest that night.¹⁷⁵⁸

In the morning of January 24, as soon as they heard about the detention of their friends by the police, a crowd of hundreds of workers including women and children again marched in protest and gathered in front of the Samsun governorship. The number of the protesters increased to 2000 with the participation of other workers and some artisans' discontent with the big industry and the government such as blacksmiths, shoemakers, tanners and saddlers in the crowd.

¹⁷⁵⁸ The number of the workers who participated in the street demonstrations is indefinite. According to the correspondances among the official authorities, the number of protesting workers was about 400. BCA CHP [490.1/1444.22.1], 05.02.1936. On the other hand, Özçelik mentions about 1500 workers based on the information in a communist newspaper *Orak-Çekiç*. Özçelik, *Tütüncülerin Tarihi*, p. 92.

In the face of such protests, the governor of Samsun had to sit down at the negotiation table with the protesters. First, the governor accepted the release of the arrested workers. Second, the workers forced him to mediate between the workers and the Ministry of Customs and Monopolies by transmitting their demands to the ministry in the same day. However, the Ministry right away gave a negative response to the Samsun governorship on the following day.¹⁷⁵⁹

Furthermore, the factory insisted on closing down one of the factory departments and dismissed about 300 workers, all of whom were strikers. However, the workers did not give up pursuing their right by petitioning the party and the government. Under the pressure of the workers' petitions, the Ministry of Customs and Monopolies argued that the monopoly administration had to dismiss such workers because of the sharp decline in tobacco demand by the international buyers.¹⁷⁶⁰

Yet, by November 1936, one-third of the dismissed workers were reemployed by the monopoly administration. The Ministry ensured the workers that another one-third would be rehired within a short time. According to the correspondences between the local and central authorities, it seems that the second one-third also was rehired. As for the rest of the dismissed workers, the party general secretary Recep Peker requested the monopoly administration in November 1936 to reemploy the last one-third as soon as possible.¹⁷⁶¹

Another big work stoppage took place about two months later in İstanbul. On 16 March 1936, the Balat quarter witnessed a walkout, and the following protest

¹⁷⁵⁹ From the Ministry of Customs and Monopolies to the Samsun Governorship, BCA CHP [490.1/1444.22.1], 25.01.1926.

¹⁷⁶⁰ From the Minister of Customs and Monopolies Rana Tarhan to RPP Secretary-General, BCA CHP [490.1/1444.22.1], 29.06.1936.

¹⁷⁶¹ From RPP Secretary-General to Samsun RPP Provincial Administration, BCA CHP [490.1/1444.22.1], 28.11.1936.

marches and tumultuous incidents by workers of the Süreyyapaşa Textile Factory and melees between the workers and the police. The main reason lying behind the workers' resistance was the delay in the wage payment for two months. For this reason, some discontented workers had complained collectively about the factory owner to the authorities. Their efforts did not yield a fruitful conclusion. On the other hand, because of the broken shuttles, the factory management had fined each worker, cutting 37.5 piasters from the wages.

This became the last straw that led the workers to the strike. On the night of March 16, 650 workers on the night shift stopped the operations of all machines and shuttles by taking strike action. The workers stayed at the factory and did not permit the strikebreakers' activities. Those workers who came for day shift also joined the strikers. The factory owner endeavored to convince the strikers that he would deliver the wages as soon as possible if they started working, but failed to break the strike. Thereupon, he called in the police. Reinforced by the municipal police force, the police circumvented the factory and tried to empty the factory building. The workers neither left the factory nor permitted the strikebreakers to start work. Thereupon, the police force raided the workers and emptied the factory building.

The police intervention set the stage for further vengeance. In the ensuing brawls between the workers and the police officers around the factory, three strikers were arrested. Nevertheless, the workers immediately came together in front of the factory and protested the detention of their friends. Suddenly the protesting workers determined to go together to the Fener Police Station in order to save their friends. Hundreds of vengeful workers raided the police station, but could not find three workers there. Then, they decided to be divided into two groups to go to other two

nearby police stations. One of these groups marched to Fatih Police Station and found their friends there, but the police did not release the detainees.

Then, all the striking workers met in Sultanahmet Square and rallied a mass demonstration in front of the İstanbul governorship, shouting, “We want our wages!” “We are hungry!” “The police torture our friends, let them free!” “We want our bread!” A group of workers’ representatives talked to the governor in person. The governor first ensured them that the detained workers would not be beaten by the police and would be released within a short time. Second, he convinced the workers that he would talk to the factory owner in person in order to pay their wages as soon as possible. Believing the governor, the workers ended the walkout. However, the factory owners did not pay the accrued wages for a long time; and 50 workers were fired because of their active roles in the strike.¹⁷⁶²

Towards the end of March and during April 1936, several conflicts arose between the tobacco workers and the employers in Herman, Seden Kolar and Flemenk tobacco companies due to the dismissal of some workers.¹⁷⁶³ In July, a dispute over the payment schedule erupted between the Paşabahçe Brick Factory and its workers. Workers, who had received no wages for two and a half months, constantly articulated their complaint of this situation, but in the end, the delay in payment of the wages made them run out of patience and led them to protest the company. The workers met in front of the factory door and stated that they would not leave the factory unless they were paid. However, aggravated by the workers’ protests, the factory owner called in the police, which triggered brawls between the police and the workers. Thereupon, the brick factory, by halting the production,

¹⁷⁶² “Süreyyapaşa Dokuma Fabrikası Grevi,” *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. 3 (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı; İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1996-1998), p. 109.

¹⁷⁶³ “İşsiz Kalan Tütün Amelesi,” *Cumhuriyet*, 03.04.1936; “Patron ve İşçi İhtilafları,” *Son Posta*, 01.04.1936.

declared that the factory no longer needed such workers. However, the workers did not give up pursuing their rights by petitioning the authorities.¹⁷⁶⁴

At the beginning of November, the tobacco workers of the Nemlizados Tobacco Company staged a strike against the company's new regulations detrimental to the interests of the workers. The owner of the company, Mithat Nemli, was one of the most prominent merchants of İstanbul and the chair of the İstanbul Chamber of Commerce at the same time. The managers of his tobacco warehouse in Ahırkapı preferred to pay the wages every ten days instead of on a weekly basis. Workers, who were discontented with such system for a long time, declared that they needed to be paid on weekly basis. Along with the weekly payment system, the workers demanded also a wage rise, more healthy working conditions, clean drinking water facilities, and a ventilating system in the warehouse.

Let alone their demands regarding the working conditions and wage rise, the management did not take into consideration their demands about the payment system. Consequently, the workers decided not to leave the warehouse after the end of the shift at the end of a week, and demanded their weekly wages. The managers of the warehouse reluctantly had to accept the workers' demand, but subsequently laid off 800 workers as retaliation for the workers' insistence on their demand.

Frustrated by such unfair treatment by the warehouse management, hundreds of workers, gathered in front of the warehouse to protest the layoffs. The workers alleged that this was a kind of lockout, which was contrary to the law. The company owner set the police and the gendarme against them. Upon the attack of the security forces on the workers, a furious fight broke out between the workers and the security forces. Some female workers who had nervous breakdowns were taken into

¹⁷⁶⁴ *Orak Çekiş*, No. 9 (July 20, 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar*, p. 427.

hospitals. Although many workers were wounded by the police forces, they managed to stand against the police and the gendarme by engaging in a hand-to-hand fight against them.¹⁷⁶⁵

The police intervention was not able to deter the protesting workers from seeking their rights. On the following day, many of the workers continued to protest the company by gathering in front of the tobacco warehouse. Once again, the police dispersed the protesting crowd after a tumult.¹⁷⁶⁶

In the face of the endless protests of the workers, the company owner, avoiding the intensification of the dispute, declared that the company would reemploy the workers within a short time, except for those few workers who had agitated the other workers. Indeed, one week after than the incidents, the company accepted to rehire most of the workers. Although the workers did not achieve their other goals, they forced the company to accept the weekly payment system at least.¹⁷⁶⁷

Another walkout and conflict between the employers and the dockworkers occurred at the Zonguldak Ereğli coalmines. As addressed above, the dockworkers objected to 8 percent deduction from their wages by the Coalminers' Union and claimed rights on the entire collected amount until that time. Consequently, they sued both the Ereğli Coal Mines Enterprise and the Union.

In the course of this contention, they did not hesitate to hold a protests demonstration in order to show their commitment to this dispute and their anger against the Enterprise. In the first week of April, many dockworkers came together in Zonguldak port and held a public demonstration against the wage cuts, the Ereğli Coal Mine Enterprise and the Union. During their demonstration, they used their

¹⁷⁶⁵ "Bir Tütün Deposu 800 İşçisine Yol Verdi," *Son Posta*, 06.11.1936.

¹⁷⁶⁶ "İşsiz Kalan 800 Tütün Amelesi Neticeyi Bekliyor," *Tan*, 08.11.1936.

¹⁷⁶⁷ "Ameleden Bir Kısım İşe Başladı," *Tan*, 13.11.1936.

barges for a while. Informed about the demonstrations, the police arrived at the demonstration place and tried to take the workers to police station. Although some of them were hauled off to jail, the firm resistance of the workers against the police forced the police chief to set the jailed workers free within 24 hours. In the end, as mentioned in the former chapter, they won their legal struggle with the decision of the Supreme Court.¹⁷⁶⁸

After the entry of the Labor Law into effect in June 1937, the labor disputes, workplace fights, and walkouts continued as before. The workers tried to appropriate the protective provisions of the law to pursue their rights. In 1937, for instance, the tobacco warehouse workers in Beşiktaş objected to the quality of the lunch given to the workers by a tobacco company. Following one worker's protest of the very tasteless and innutritious meal, most of the workers started to protest the meals of the company. In the face of such protests, there broke out a fight between the workers and foremen, which was finally intervened by the police and turned into a clash between the workers and the police. The clash continued in the streets of Beşiktaş, at the end of which some workers who were seen as responsible for triggering the incident were arrested and brought before the court, but set free after a short trial.¹⁷⁶⁹

Subsequently, there was a labor dispute in Deli Zühtü's tobacco warehouse in Beşiktaş. The workers demanded a wage hike, but the company refused without bargaining. As a consequence of the insistence of the workers, the company owner imposed a lockout to put pressure on the workers. Declaring that the lockout was illegal according to the Labor Law, the workers spontaneously flared up and attacked the managers and foremen. Especially, a foreman called by the workers as Dalkavuk

¹⁷⁶⁸ Orak Çekiç, No.7 (Apr. 1, 1936), quoted in Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar*, pp. 415-416.

¹⁷⁶⁹ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, pp. 93-97.

Yaşar (Cringing Yaşar) was beaten up by the workers. However, the workers incurred the wrath of the police at the end of the incident.¹⁷⁷⁰

Not all labor disputes turned against the striking workers. Some workers managed to exploit the Labor Law to seek their right with collective action. One of such cases was the resistance of the egg workers. Towards the end of 1937, relying on the new Labor Law, the egg workers in İstanbul demanded to be paid by piecework. Upon the refusal of their demands, they decided to stop the work and did not permit those workers who did not participate in the work stoppage to work. Despite the warnings of the *Türk Ofis* and the police pressure, the workers did not step back from their demand.

The workers' resistance was so effective that the export of egg to Greece and Italy came to a standstill. As a result of slowdown in egg export, the price of eggs in domestic market dropped, which caused a great loss of the egg producers and merchants. Upon the firm resistance of the egg workers and the persistent rejection of the workers' demands by the employers, the parties of the dispute referred the case to labor arbitration for the resolution of the dispute according to the Labor Law.¹⁷⁷¹

In another case around the same dates, the workers of a leather factory in Adana pursued their right by making use of the Labor Law. They demanded the improvement of working conditions in accordance with the regulations of the Law, particularly the 8 hours workday. Because the factory management disregarded their demand, they decided to stop the work until the employer met their demands. Claiming that the workers went on strike against the law, the employer called in the police to the factory. However, in accordance with the law, the Labor Bureau officials accompanied the police to investigate what was going on. After their

¹⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁷⁷¹ "Yumurta İşçileri İşlerini Bıraktılar," *Son Posta*, 06.04.1938.

investigations, they decided that the employer had disregarded the Labor Law in many respects and gave an official warning to the factory.¹⁷⁷²

In 1938, the tobacco workers in the Flemenk Tobacco Warehouse in Tophane drew up a list of their basic needs and demands by referring to the Labor Law. This tobacco warehouse was one of the largest ones in İstanbul, employing roughly 800 workers. The workers lacked basic social rights and facilities and the general level of wages was quite low. However, after the passage of the Labor Law, there was a curiosity about their social rights among the workers. Many workers talked to each other about the necessity of a wage hike and social services such as free launch, free medical service, paid vacation, paid weekly day of rest, and the like. Consequently, the workers came together and listed their demands to submit to the management, and then stated that they would not start working unless their demands were met. The company managers accepted to negotiate with the workers on the demand list. After the negotiation process, the management accepted most of the items demanded by the workers.¹⁷⁷³

In the next year, a tobacco workers' protest occurred in Mehmet Kavala's tobacco warehouse in İzmit. Due to the seasonal characteristics of the job, Kavala threw all of his workers into the street in the coldest time of the winter without any redundancy payment. When he himself delivered the last wages of the workers, one worker, referring to the Labor Law, objected to the dismissal of the workers in the winter without any severance pay. And then, he threatened to complain about the company to the İstanbul newspapers, which would ruin the company's reputation in the eyes of its foreign partners. Although Kavala and his men attempted to attack the worker, all other workers backed him. The next day, the workers demanded

¹⁷⁷² Hüseyin Avni [Şanda], "İş Kanunu Nasıl Tatbik Ediliyor?" *Yeni Adam*, IV, No. 201 (1937), p. 4.

¹⁷⁷³ Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, pp. 115-116.

severance pay by operation of Labor Law through a petition they submitted to the employer collectively. One day later, the company had to pay the workers not only the wages, but also additional money in compensation for their dismissal.¹⁷⁷⁴

¹⁷⁷⁴ Akgül, *Şoför İdris*, pp. 103-105.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The early Republican period was a difficult time for the low-income groups, primarily the industrial workers, low-income state officials and artisans. Undoubtedly, after the devastating war years, they found relative peace, but they had to wage another war for survival against exploitation and oppression under an authoritarian capitalist system. The state economic policies, economic conditions, the Great Depression, and the subsequent industrialization-drive adversely affected all segments of the poor and the low-income people including the majority of the industrial workers, artisans, casual laborers, and low-income state officials. They suffered from the high cost of living, decrease in the purchasing power of their wages and salaries; cuts, freezes, delays in wages and salaries; high taxes deducted from their low wages and salaries; hike in working hours, heavy demands on the labor force; and unhealthy and unsafe working conditions.

Most of these people, including even the lower-ranking civil servants, were deprived of basic social policy measures like health insurance, work accident or illness compensation, retirement rights, gratuity, and severance pay. Even those who had been granted such rights often faced bureaucratic red tape and malfunctioning, consequently they could not benefit from such rights for months or years. The entry of industry-made cheap goods to the domestic market continuing even after the Great Depression and especially the industrialization-drive resulted in pauperization and unemployment of many artisans. On the top of all these, the economic policies and conditions were undergirded by state repression.

These aspects of the working class experiences have become recurrent themes in labor history studies. Scholars generally have overemphasized the state

repression and control over the working class, the adverse living and working conditions, and the abortive efforts of the organized labor and left. The conventional literature generally portrayed the working class groups as victims of the capitalist economy and the state repression. Due to the exclusive focus on organized labor and institutional politics, the great part of the literature depicted early and the mid-1920s as a relatively more active period marked by the resistance movements of labor organizations and socialist intellectuals. The late 1920s and especially the entire 1930s have been seen as periods in which the working class were atomized and silenced due to the lack of organized efforts.

In addition, because what the scholars generally mean by the term “working class” is only industrial workers in large undertakings, the other segments of the working class like artisans, casual laborers, low-income civil servants, retired people, widows and orphans of deceased workers and state officials, war veterans, and the relatives of martyrs have been ignored. Because the working class has been generally reduced to industrial labor, the number of which was relatively small, the working class has been assumed to be underdeveloped during this period. Furthermore, working class groups such as peasant-workers and self-employed artisans have been seen as the remnants of the pre-industrial world, which would be progressively dispossessed and swept aside by the industrial capitalism. Therefore, deeming them unconscious and backward groups, the scholars studying the history of Republic have excluded their life experiences from the historical account of Turkish labor.

In view of such gaps in the literature, this part attempted to discuss and draw attention to these previously unnoticed aspects of the working class experience. The first argument of this part is that the working class were not an unconscious mass atomized and silenced under the state hegemony and coercive power. On the

contrary, they thought autonomously according to a subjective sense of self. In the face of such conditions, they were not passive or deceived by the official promises, Republican rhetoric about “classless and unified society” or, “rising standards of living under the Republic.” They were acutely aware of the fluctuations in their standard of living. They frequently followed the economic trends relevant to them at the micro-level and compared prices with wages. Consequently, they did not feel that they were getting any personal benefit from the economic policies of the government. Their personal experiences, autonomous and subjective perceptions derived from their self-interests led them to criticize the economic system, the capitalist classes, and especially the government.

The state economic policies engendered numerous negative remarks among the low-income groups. To make their voices heard, to pursue their rights, and to prompt the authorities to take corrective action, they petitioned the local and central authorities, the newspapers, and their employers. They voiced many criticisms about various matters ranging from the low wage levels, wage cuts and freezes, and delays in distribution of wages, the high cost of living to long and grueling work hours, unsafe and unsanitary working conditions, and violation of their rights by the employers.

Many complained of the lack of basic social measures and demanded social insurance, free medical treatment, compensation for work-related accidents and illnesses, retirement rights, and labor legislation recognizing their basic rights. Those people who had the right to retirement benefits and to war veteran, widow or orphan pensions also raised their discontent because of the bureaucratic red tape and malfunctioning that made them unable to receive their pensions for months or years.

Many artisans hit by the imported ready-made items and industry-made cheaper goods criticized the importation of low-priced finished items and the fierce competition of big industry. They frequently complained that their business increasingly slacked off due to the competition of the imported items and goods produced by the emergent industries.

Going beyond the complaints and criticisms, working people struggled for their survival and rights. The worker struggle and resistance continued during the late 1920s and the entire 1930s. There was no discontinuity between the 1920s and the 1930s. The forms and means changed from open, organizational and formal to more informal, everyday and mostly unorganized ones; but the struggle and resistance continued beneath the surface. Under a single-party system that barred the workers from organizing and acting formally and publicly, they adapted their struggle to the existing circumstances. They resorted to a large reservoir of everyday resistance including more subtle, mundane, covert or indirect acts in order to curb or circumvent state economic policies, economic difficulties, and the capitalist exploitation. In other words, the lack of organizational and socialist orientation does not indicate necessarily their passivity.

Many workers resorted to micro acts of resistance providing small advantages and benefits, mostly saving the day. Even though the legal political domain was closed to them to pursue their rights via collective and formal struggles and strikes, they did not hesitate to use existing legal channels by suing individually and collectively the government and the companies which violated their rights.

Their widespread use of the major components of the official discourse does not imply their attachment to the political power and official ideology. On the contrary, both in their petitions and talks to power-holders, another strategy they

adopted was to use the official discourse, but in different connotations and for their specific and subjective goals. Many low-income wage earners employed the nationalist and populist discourse to legitimate their arguments and persuade the authorities. In addition, by using the official discourse and promises, they demanded that the authorities should live up to their commitments. Similarly, they used the nationalist discourse to struggle with the unemployment and competition of highly qualified foreign workers by calling on the government to ban the employment of non-Turkish workers.

Again, the professional associations were neither puppets of the employers and the RPP, nor were they homogenous entities free from internal conflict and tension. The lower-class members of some heterogeneous professional associations challenged the well-off administrators who sided with the employers and the ruling party. Again, many people criticized their associations for being employer-sided, passive, useless and corruptive, and pressed their associations to work for the benefits of the low-income members. On the other hand, some lower-class professions such as waiters, bakery workers, porters, and the like struggled against their employers and the government through their class-specific associations.

Finally, in spite of the decrease in organized and formal protests and strikes from the late 1920s on, when push came to shove, workers individually or collectively rose against their employers in several ways ranging from intimidation tactics, physical attacks to collective protests, work stoppages and walkouts. The pages of the contemporary newspapers are full of the news about those workers who wounded or killed their employers. In addition, it was not rare that the aggrieved workers spontaneously marched in the streets and fought with the foremen and security forces. During the period under consideration, the tumultuous incidents such

as workplace brawls, and big clashes in shop floors, around factories or in streets between the workers and the police forces were not exceptional cases.

The everyday politics of the working class was not inconclusive. Apart from the large and small concessions and rights, they obtained in everyday life, their individual and occasionally collective demands and resistance compelled the government and some capitalists to compromise, albeit to a limited degree, through several social policy legislations. In the wake of these mostly individual, occasionally collective, but cumulatively massive complaints, demands and resistant acts, the government had to consider and adopt several social and economic measures.

First, the strikes in the early and mid-1920s forced the government to put labor legislation on the agenda and to prepare the first labor law draft in 1924, which was not enacted. From that time on, in the face of serious need for the basic social policies arising from the laboring people's discontent, the labor law discussion did not lose its popularity and a series of labor law drafts were prepared and discussed in 1927, 1929 and 1932. During this period, the rulers frequently promised the enactment of a labor law at every opportunity.¹⁷⁷⁵ Finally, the government had to enact the Labor Law in 1936. Although this law did not grant the rights to organize labor unions and to strike, it introduced several protective provisions. Undoubtedly, its implementation was problematic; but it provided legal opportunities, which the workers made use of against their employers and the government.

Similarly, the working class activism must have played a role in the acceptance of the Day of Weekly Rest Law in 1924. Especially widespread discontent with the working conditions and the absence of a labor law compelled the

¹⁷⁷⁵ See Selim İlkin, "Türkiye'de Devletçilik Döneminin İlk Yıllarında İşçi Sorununa Yaklaşım ve 1932 iş Kanunu tasarısı," *ODTÜ Gelişme Dergisi* (1978 Special Issue).

government to adopt the Public Hygiene Law in 1930. It introduced protective provisions for child and female labor and regulated workplace sanitation. Faced with widespread public outcry and dissent that were revealed with the working people's support for the Free Republican Party in 1930, the government needed to give a populist image to itself by nominating a few workers as candidates for deputy in the 1931 elections and had they elected as RPP deputies.

In addition, the ruling circles introduced several legal and institutional measures in response to the laboring people's persistent demands and growing discontent during the 1930s, albeit the implementation of such measures was open to question. In June 1932, the employment of foreign workers was restricted in many jobs. This law partially increased the employment opportunities for native workers. The National Days and General Holidays Law regulated the paid weekend holiday in 1935. In December 1935, the government issued a regulation about the Provision of the Sanitary Needs of the Ereğli Coal Basin Mine Workers.

From the early 1930s onward, the government accelerated the establishment of occupational social assistance and retirement funds in many sectors. In 1933, the government regulated the retirement rights of low-income officials depending on local governments. In 1934, a retirement fund was established for the employees in the State Railways and Seaports. A retirement fund for the employees of the Postal Service, Telegram, and Telephone Administration was established in 1935. One year later, a retirement fund was established for the employees of the state monopoly administration. In 1937, the State Maritimelines and Seaport employees were granted a retirement fund. Agricultural Bank employees received the retirement right in 1938. In 1939, a social assistance and retirement fund law for military factory

employees was enacted.¹⁷⁷⁶ Private enterprises also granted some social rights to their workers. For instance, the Şirketi Hayriye established a retirement fund for its employees.¹⁷⁷⁷

Apart from these, the government lowered 16.6 percent the Income Tax rate deducted from salaries and wages in May 1936.¹⁷⁷⁸ Another symbolic but important step that indicates how far the government took the mood of the working class into account was the adoption of May 1 as a holiday in 1935, albeit under the title of “Spring and Flower Holiday.” Undoubtedly, by this regulation, the government probably planned to create an image of populist and benevolent state of the workers. However, the critical question here is why the rulers needed to create such an image. The answer, this part argued, lies in the popular contention that took place in everyday life, and pressure of the social discontent.

Working class have been seen by scholars having been as ineffective in the emergence of these social regulations, which generally were seen as the project of the government, which aimed at only reproducing the labor force, imposed from top to bottom without any social pressure. Therefore, these social measures generally have been overlooked. However, why the government needed to reproduce and regulate the labor force is a valid question. Again, it is a valid question whether it is possible to equate the reproduced thing with its former form. I think one of the most important factors alongside others that compelled the state to resort to social policy legislations in order to stabilize the labor force and supply productive labor was the direct or indirect pressures of the working class. The government’s need for “the

¹⁷⁷⁶ For these legal and institutional regulations, see Ferit H. Saymen, *Türkiye’de Sosyal Sigortaların Gelişme Hareketleri ve Yeni Temayülleri*, (İstanbul Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Mecmuasının 1952 Yılı Cilt:XVIII- Sayı 3-4 Nüshasından Ayrı Bası) (İstanbul: İsmail Akgün Matbaası, 1953), pp. 13-23; in addition, see Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye’de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, pp. 419-429.

¹⁷⁷⁷ Murat Koraltürk, “Şirket-i Hayriye Tekaüd Sandığı,” in *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, Vol.3, p. 127.

¹⁷⁷⁸ “Kazanç Vergisi’nde Değişiklik,” *Son Posta*, 20.05.1936.

reproduction and regulation of the labor force” was created by the social dissent, dissatisfaction, widespread demands and acts of resistance by the working class, which resulted in instability of labor force and decrease in productivity and profits.

Even though it is not possible to exaggerate these social measures as the victory of the working people, it is possible to see them as a result of the unintended and unplanned consequences of the survival struggle of the working class. Moreover, in a society in which marginal economic advantages, earnings and a loaf of bread created big differences, these limited social policy measures and the small advantages yielded by everyday politics of the working class should not be underestimated.

CONCLUDING POSTSCRIPTS

The standard histories of the early Republican period still focus on the legal political domain and modernizing elite's perceptions, discourse and projects. Most of the studies emphasize how the people were exploited and oppressed through the "coercive-bureaucratic state" isolated from the society. This classical approach deeply ingrained in both nationalist-developmental and critical histories has been intrinsic to all of the accounts of working class and peasantry. Perhaps the most important reason for this has been the standard narrow conceptualization of politics as a legal and institutional domain.

This study, drawing on the more nuanced and broader sense of politics and zeroing in on the praxis and the social underpinnings of the high politics, attempted to deepen the understanding of the early Republican period and to complicate the oversimplified depictions of political life under the single-party regime. Discussing how the ordinary people, more specifically the poor and low income peasants and urban labor, responded to the single-party state's social and economic policies in both two interconnected levels of opinion and workaday action, and how they affected politics through different avenues of participation by voicing their opinions and by resisting to their oppressors and exploiters in unusual, mundane and more informal ways, this study explored the undercurrents of politics of the period.

Since the everyday politics of people appeared in conjunction with the state politics and intervention, this is not only a history of the society from below, but also a history of the early Republican state in its everyday interaction with the social realm. In other words, given that everyday politics affected official politics indirectly whether or not people intend it to do, this dissertation attempted to grasp the

everyday politics of the people not as isolated from the official high politics, but as an indirect and informal layer mediating between the state and the society. In that respect, this work adds a major caveat to the conceptualization of the state and society purely in dichotomous adversaries by throwing light on the junctures the state and the society interacted with each other.

This research examined the everyday politics of the ordinary people and its interaction with the high politics on two thematic levels. The first level was the rural contention, that is, poor peasants' and small farmers' discontent with socioeconomic conditions and economic policies, their complaints and demands, and their resistance to rural exploiters, oppressors, the abusive state agents, and heavy state impositions in everyday life, which, I argued, curbed and circumvented the exploitation, oppression and the state policies. Along with other factors at work, the everyday politics of the peasants compelled the state to adopt peasantist discourse, redress the peasants' complaints and problems, soften the economic policies towards the peasantry to assuage the peasant discontent.

The second level which this study scrutinized to gauge the popular contention and its effects on the politics was the critical opinions, grievances, and active responses of the poor and low-income wage earners in urban areas to the state economic policies, economic conditions, and the capitalist exploitation. Here this study touched on the uncharted terrain of the working class history of early Republican Turkey by focusing on the covert, indirect, spontaneous and daily forms of activisms and struggles of the working class in a manner fitting to the extraordinary character of the 1920s and 1930s. Again, this part also underscored the cumulative effects of the dynamism of the working class politics on the state

policies, which prompted the state to adopt a more populist tone in official discourse and social policy measures, albeit in a limited manner.

As this research shows, one of the main common points of the ordinary people's experience and everyday politics was that there were competing, dissonant, opponent views and voices expressed through more informal and covert ways. The official discourse and state's monopoly over the ideas, news, opinions were not uncontestable or without alternative. Society did not conform to this monopoly, and broke it frequently. There were many, so to speak, "smugglers" of alternative, opponent and subversive opinions and talk.

Even when the ordinary people seemed to adopt the official concepts and nationalist rhetoric, they often utilized official ideology to advance their claim and to affirm the validity of their arguments. Despite the official sanctions, enough evidence was found to prove that there exists in the early Republic an important system of critical and subversive informal and unofficial communications through daily talk, word of mouth, and finally disgruntled petitions and letters to the authorities and newspapers.

Beyond the critical and dissenting discourse and opinions, they displayed active acts of resistance, stratagems, and manipulation and avoidance strategies, which curbed and circumvented the state impositions and the economic exploitation in the routine of the daily life. The people who were excluded from the legal political domain tried to cope with the state policies, their oppressors and economic difficulties in their fronts, i.e., everyday life. Furthermore, rather than solely responding to the state policies, they displayed several self-generated and self-seeking activities to survive, to minimize the losses, or to maximize the gains.

All these critical views, voices, and the resulting workaday acts generated an informal and occasionally formal process of interplay between the state and the people. Although the single-party state closed the doors of the high politics to the people's participation, the people managed to open smaller doors in the system so as to make their voices, wishes and aspirations heard. Indeed, the social discontent and everyday resistances compelled the rulers to modify some of their policies, and consequently produced a more flexible polity responsive to the social needs and demands, rather than a bureaucratic and rigid polity indifferent to the social realm.

Undoubtedly, the regime did not undergo a radical change until after World War Two. However, a systematic effort was made to adjust the policies and discourse in the light of feedback from the grassroots. In other words, the state modified its policies, albeit generally in a minor way, by granting small or large concessions to peasants and urban wage earners to redress their grievances. Ordinary people's everyday complaints and demands, combined with their everyday acts, influenced debates among the ruling circles and their decisions about how to improve the disgruntled people's economic status.

As the first part shows, the peasants, the absolute majority of the population, did not remain unresponsive in the face of the state economic policies and their exploiters and oppressors either. Although they did not use the legal political domain to pursue their rights and interests, they made use of a variety of methods appropriated within the everyday life. They frequently drew on the resources and several stratagems from the everyday life and popular culture to manifest their dissatisfactions and resist the state impositions and the rural power holders. That is to say, the lack of any open and legal peasant action in high politics or massive peasant

rebellions did not mean they were ignorant and submissive masses succumbed to the single-party state.

As for the poor and low-income groups in the urban areas, as the second part of the study deals with, they were neither passive bystanders of the economic trends, policies, and capitalist exploitation, nor under the full hegemony and manipulation of the nationalist regime. Thinking subjectively according to their own individual needs and interests, they always raised their voices, criticisms, and demands in all possible ways familiar to them. They developed several resistance tactics to reappropriate their extremely exploited labors, generally without taking any risk of open confrontation with security forces. The workers, who had no right to go on strike, spontaneously rose against their exploiters and oppressors even in the strictest phase of the single-party regime. In short, this study allows the addition of a major caveat to the canonized labor history, which focuses exclusively on organizational movements and denies the self-activity of the working people by portraying them as atomized and silenced under the single-party regime.

The everyday politics of the peasantry and working class was not isolated from high-politics. Although most of people's acts targeted short-term benefits, thereby saving the day, these acts brought unintended cumulative effects in medium or long term. Everyday politics was so important and influential for the ruling circles that it did not fall off their radars. It forced the power-holders to give large or small concessions to the people.

Here, what I mean is not that it generated positive consequences in the short term. Sometimes the people yielded daily and short-term benefits, but sometimes they faced repression and fines; but in total and especially in the medium or long terms, their constant demands, dissent, nonconformism and noncompliant acts

resulted in the reshaping of the state's specific policies and engendered small but important concessions, rights or advantages for the people.

For example, the peasant's everyday politics generated tax reductions, tax and debt relief programs, economic measures such as wheat purchase at prices above market-levels in the early 1930s, discounts in the price of many basic consumption goods for which they mostly paid, and the land distributions even though not in a comprehensive manner. Sometimes, without any government action, the daily acts of resistance yielded large and small advantages for them. In a similar line, the labor law discussions among the ruling circles, official populist discourse, and many of social policy measures like establishment occupational social security funds were to an important extent the repercussions of the everyday politics of the working class.¹⁷⁷⁹

Despite its huge volume enriched with new data drawn from several archives, many topics that were examined here, especially the informal or formal daily interplay between the state and the ordinary people deserve more analysis. In addition, this work, because of its particular focus on socioeconomic level, did not touch on the everyday response of the ordinary people to the secular reforms, one of

¹⁷⁷⁹ Although the general conclusion I draw here can be redolent of the David Easton's political system model, on the contrary, my research does not support this functionalist and institutionalist political system theory. Easton's conception of politics is restricted to governmental system centered upon the machinery of government practiced in high political realm by professional politicians. In addition, in his political system analysis model, the inputs enter into the system through some legal organizations. Main functions of these organizations is to refine the people's complaints and demands and then submit them to the system. Then these refined demands and complaints as inputs were processed and used in decision-making process by the political power. In this process, the inputs shape the outputs of the political power generate. These outputs in turn reshapes the next inputs. Let alone this model's conceptualization of the political parties and associations as solely passive information channels and public opinion refineries, this model is based on the functioning of the usual institutional political means and tools as main conveyers of the demands to the government. It does include neither the everyday politics nor other more indirect official interactions such as petitioning, suing mechanisms. In short, the political system theory excludes the contact points between the state and the society in daily life. In addition, it views the entrance of the inputs into the political system as a function of the political system, but not as a result of a struggle. In that respect, the system theory assumes no struggle between the society and the political power. It overlooks the class struggle within the society, and tensions between the state and populace. For the political system model, see David Easton, *A System Analysis of Political Life* (New York: John Wiley, 1965), p.32.

the crucial questions of the early Republican history, which has not yet been addressed. Approach of this work can be applied to the ordinary people's response to the secular reforms. Here, the question is how the ordinary people responded to the secular reforms in daily life and how far this response reshaped the Republican secularism and modernization process in short and long terms. I think such an inquiry provide important insight into the historical origins of the current problems of Turkish secularism and the historical antecedents of the rising conservatism in today's Turkey.

However, one of main prerequisites of such an analysis is, I think, the close examination of the material conditions, problems and struggles of the people, which this study attempted to make. This is necessary to go beyond one-dimensional appraisals of both modernist-secularist and conservative-Islamist approaches, which viewed the people's negative response to the secular reforms from a culturalist perspective by rendering the issue into the conflict between tradition and modernity or between the people's cultural-spiritual integrity and westernist-secularist reforms of the Republican elite, we needed to learn about the socioeconomic factors that led a considerable number of people to take a dim view of the secular reforms.

I think, it is most likely the matrix of social and economic struggles between the people and the power holders that underpinned the people's detachment, opposition or dislike of the RPP elite and their secularist ideology. Rather than the culturalist identity politics, in my opinion, it was the socioeconomic contention and the everyday interaction of the ordinary people with the secular practices that can give us more convincing reasons setting the stage for the conservative backlash and social apathy against secular reforms during the single-party period and the ensuing decades.

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