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LAND REFORM

in

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by

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Land Reform in Turkey

Introduction and Summary

The land reform undertaken so far in Turkey has a number of special features: 1) land redistribution has been going on gradually since the establishment of the Republic and especially since 1945, when a land reform law was enacted, rather than being compressed into a short time span; 2) the amount of land involved has been relatively modest, the cumulative total of land redistributed since 1945 not exceeding 10% of the country's total arable land; 3) distribution has involved mostly land held by the state and religious foundations (vakif) and land of no known ownership and has encompassed virtually no expropriation and breaking up of large private holdings.

Land redistribution has thus not been a major element in the gradual transformation of rural Turkey which has been underway during the post-war years. The creation of an integrated national highway system to which farm-to-market roads are now being linked, the virtual doubling since the late 1940's of the area cultivated at the expense of meadows and pastures, the spreading use of farm machinery, the expansion of area under irrigation, continuing high price supports for the major crops, the rapid rise in fertilizer consumption in the 1960's, the introduction of improved varieties (notably in cotton and Mexican wheat), and the increasing production of specialty crops (fruits and vegetables) for the urban and foreign markets have been more conspicuous aspects of the gradual and still far from complete conversion of Turkish agriculture which has been proceeding gradually over the past quarter century. In Turkey it is not meaningful, therefore, to speak of pre and post land reform periods or to attribute major changes in the structure of agriculture to any redistribution of land.

In part because of the very limited scope of the redistribution which has occurred, and especially the avoidance hitherto of breaking up large holdings, substantial inequalities in land holding exist, although the situation differs very much from region to region. Public awareness of and dissatisfaction with these discrepancies is growing somewhat and on both economic and socio-political grounds pressure for land reform is on the increase. The land question, although not the most crucial problem confronting Turkey, is therefore of considerable importance.

The History of Land Reform and the Land Reform Law of 1945

Efforts at land reform in Turkey go back to the early days of the Republic. Following the adoption of the Swiss Civil Code in 1926, which legally ended the surviving feudal practices but did not eliminate the large holdings which persisted, especially in the South and East, land redistribution laws were enacted in 1927 and 1929. Little land was actually distributed, however; much of the limited distribution which did take place was in the East where the government used land redistribution as a device to break the power of the tribal chiefs who led the Kurdish uprising of 1925 as much as to promote social goals.

Ataturk continued to advocate land reform and additional legislation was enacted in 1934 and in 1938. Only limited transfers of land actually took place, however.

The Land Reform Law of 1945 was essentially a social reform measure adopted with a view to improving the position of the peasantry in line with the principle of populism which had been incorporated into the Constitution. It called for the transfer to landless and land-poor peasants of

sufficient land to provide them and their families a living. It seems to have been visualized that some four million hectares, slightly more than one fourth of the area then cultivated, would be transferred and that about one million peasant families, or one third of the farm population would benefit. Turkey would be transformed into a nation of independent peasant small-holders.

The land to be distributed was held by the state, by pious foundations (vakif), by municipalities, by no known owners and by large land-holders. Private holdings in excess of 500 hectares could be expropriated. Land owners were to be compensated by 20-year government bonds on a sliding scale: the more land they owned, the lower the rate. A bitterly contested article of the law provided that in regions where these sources did not provide sufficient land for redistribution smaller private holdings could be broken up. This provision of the law was never implemented and was annulled in 1950.

The law was implemented by land commissions which visited villages, surveyed land use and ownership, tried to establish land titles, and received applications for land from poor peasants. Peasant families receiving land were required to cultivate it for at least twenty-five years during which they could not sell or share-crop it. They were also not to divide it among heirs.

The amount of land distributed in accordance with this act (but excluding pasture land, some of which was also distributed, and land given to immigrants) is shown in table 1. Between 1947 and 1960 1.8 million

hectares were transferred and about 370,000 peasant families benefitted -- less than half of the target both in terms of land area and number of recipients. In all, about 7% of the nation's cultivated land had been affected.

In the early 1960's the process of land redistribution came to a virtual halt and was not resumed until 1967. These results are ironical because in the period following the 1960 coup land reform became a more prominent public issue than it had been in the 1950's. The Committee of National Unity, the group of officers who overthrew the Democratic Party Government of Adnan Menderes in 1960, strongly advocated land reform. A technical committee was established in the Ministry of Agriculture to prepare a report. The State Planning Organization viewed land reform as one of the important structural reforms which must be undertaken if Turkey was to achieve its economic and social development objectives and a special annex to the Plan was prepared on the subject. Opposition from politically powerful landowners, including some cabinet members, nullified these efforts toward land reform and resulted in the deletion from the Development Plan of any reference to it.

The widespread expectation at that time that a more far-reaching and fundamental approach to the land question was about to be undertaken may explain the suspension of the slow and partial redistribution which had been taking place in the previous decade. The resumption of modest land distribution in 1967 reflects the decision of the Justice Party Government, which came to office late in 1965 with a conservative land policy, to proceed with land distribution of the sort practiced in the 1950's but to eschew any fundamental measures such as the expropriation of large holdings.

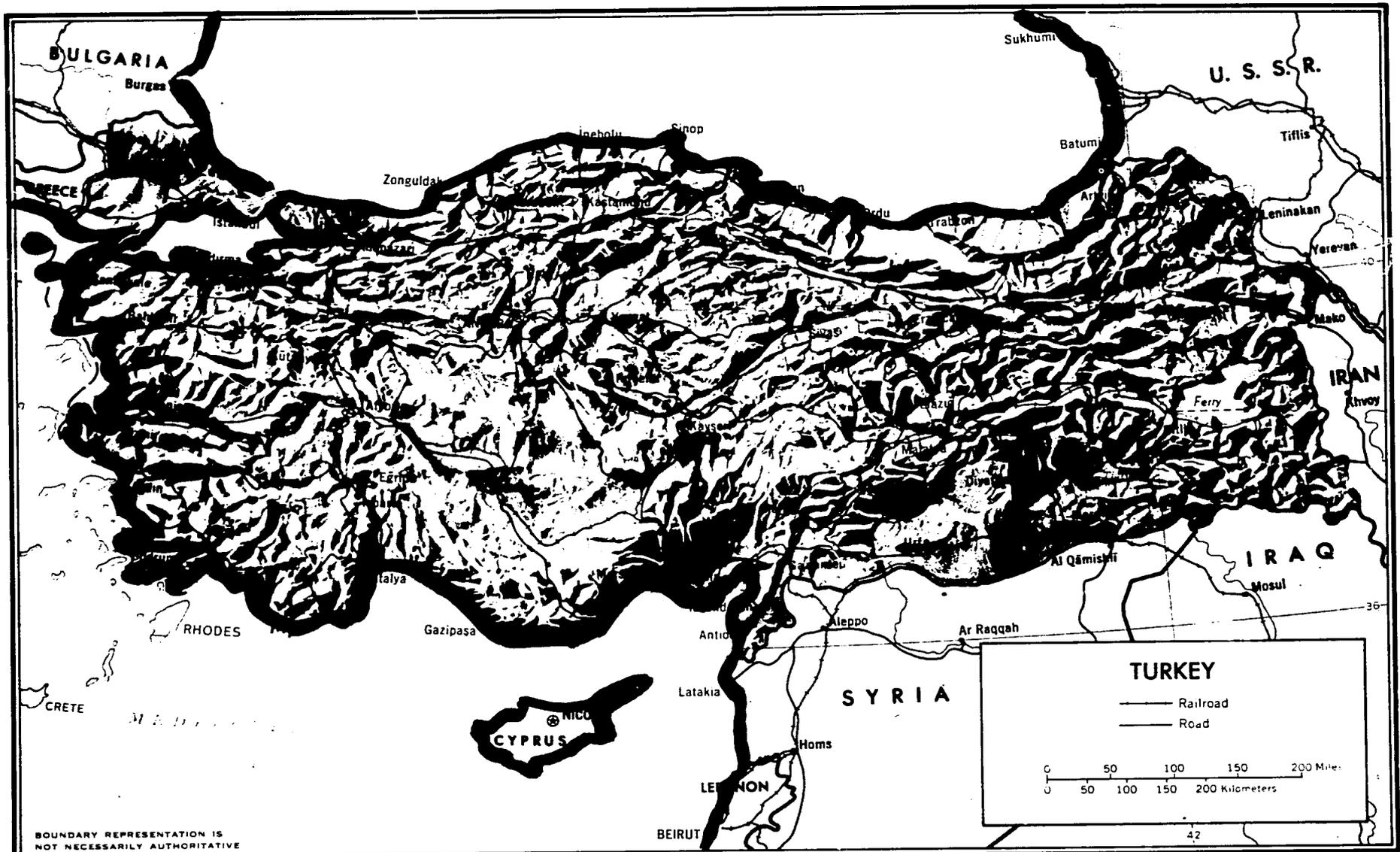
Table 1
Land Distributed to Peasants by Land Commissions*
1947-67

Year	Land Distributed (1,000 ha)	Number of Families given
		Land (1,000)
1947	5	1.4
1948	24	4.3
1949	39	8.4
1950	82	18.6
1951	103	19.0
1952	166	39.2
1953	210	39.2
1954	242	43.5
1955	181	36.0
1956	195	35.5
1957	153	29.8
1958	148	35.5
1959	126	27.8
1960	125	30.5
1961	6	.4
1962	2	.3
1963	1	.4
1964	.5	.5
1965	10	1.2
1966	16	1.4
1967	154	28.1
Total	1,984	401.0

Total: Cultivated area (including fallow and orchards/
vineyards) is 26 million ha less than 8% of
cultivated land was affected in 20 years..

*Excludes 1.) pastures and 2.) land distributed to
immigrants.

Source: Türkiye İstatistik



The Present Landholding Situation

The existing land-holding situation in Turkey is far from clear. Title to much of the land has not been registered and the cadastral survey is proceeding very slowly. The most recent comprehensive data on land distribution, that contained in the 1963 Census of Agriculture, is suspect because of internal inconsistencies, because the estimate of total area in farms falls short by one third of the area generally accepted as being cultivated, and for various other reasons. Of the different types of Census data, however, that on land tenure seems more plausible than that on land ownership and is therefore presented in table 2. Whatever its limitations and inaccuracies, it gives some picture of the distribution of farm units by size although it probably understates large holdings more than small ones. The Census findings, if correct, show that the number of large holdings -- 491 over 500 hectares and an additional 981 in the 250-500 hectare range -- is smaller than is usually supposed. Under-reporting by the holders of large units may be a partial explanation -- and, as noted above, the total land area/^{reported}in the Census falls short by one third of the generally accepted figure for area under cultivators. In addition in the Southeast, at least, where very large ownership units are generally believed to be numerous, both the distribution of rights within the family and the wide-spread practice of share-cropping may reduce the size of the units reported in the Census.

The 1963 Census shows that there were 3.1 million farm units occupying 16.7 million hectares. (Land under cultivation, including orchards, vineyards, and fruit and vegetable gardens is generally placed at

Table 2
Distribution of Land Holdings by Size

Size of Unit (ha.)	Number of Units (1,000)	% of Units	Land area (1,000 ha)	% of land area
0.1 - 0.5	399	12.8	114	0.7
0.6 - 1.0	375	12.1	317	1.9
1.1 - 2.0	495	16.0	745	4.5
2.1 - 3.0	349	11.2	870	5.2
3.1 - 4.0	291	9.4	1,024	6.1
4.1 - 5.0	223	7.2	1,009	6.0
5.1 - 10.0	562	18.1	3,995	23.9
10.1 - 20.0	292	9.4	3,973	23.8
20.1 - 50.0	100	3.2	2,842	17.0
50.1 -100.0	11	0.4	755	4.5
100.1 -250.0	2.9	0.1	370	2.2
250.1 -500.0	1.0	.04	314	1.9
500 +	.5	.02	406	2.4
	3,101		16,734	100.1

Source: Türkiye İstatistik Yilligi, 1964-65, p. 242

26 million hectares so, as noted above, the Census underestimated total cultivated area by about one third). The Census data thus indicated an average farm unit of 5.4 hectares and a median one of just under 3 hectares.

In table 3 the data from table 2 is regrouped to divide the land area (roughly) into quartiles. This breakdown indicates that the 69% of farm units which consist of less than 5 hectares constitute not quite one quarter of all farm land; that the 18% of farm units which fall in the 5-10 hectare range account for almost an additional quarter; that the 9.4% of farms in the 10-20 hectare bracket account for almost a third quarter; and that the 4.8% of the farms of 20 hectares or more account for somewhat more than a quarter (28%). This breakdown excludes the 408,000 hectares occupied by 97 state farms. It also excludes, of course, landless laborers, who are placed by the Census at 300,000. ^{figure for landless laborers} This/seems very small compared with the findings of empirical studies in various parts of the country. On the other hand, the almost 400,000 units of less than half a hectare found in the Census are probably too small to support a farm family; members of these virtually landless farm families are probably obliged to seek employment as farm laborers, as are probably the holders of many of the 375,000 additional farm units of less than one hectare.

The foregoing data reported for the nation on an aggregate basis conceals significant differences between regions. In the fertile and generally well-watered alluvial plains created by the rivers flowing into the Aegean and in the Çukurova/^{at}the northeastern corner

of the Mediterranean large land holdings, many of them operated along modern lines by improving landlords, are numerous. These regions have the most productive, innovative and commercialized agriculture in Turkey. At least in the short run, land reform in this region would be likely to depress output. Much would depend, however, on how land redistribution was effected including the size of the new units, the availability of credit, marketing and other supporting services, and whether improving landlords were permitted to retain larger holdings than traditional, and especially absentee, landlords. Breaking up of the larger holdings would undoubtedly affect the pattern of agriculture, including the selection of crops, and would encourage more labor intensive practices, which is of major importance in view of the rapidly growing rural population and the migration to the cities in search of jobs which do not exist in sufficient quantity. In the dry Southeast, ownership units are also large, often running to several villages, and absentee landlords are numerous. The agriculture practiced here is mostly traditional with much of the land farmed on a share-cropping basis. Present tenure arrangements in this region are undoubtedly a barrier to innovation and to raising agricultural productivity; land reform in this region should both raise output and contribute to a more viable social and political order. Around the Sea of Marmara and along the Black Sea Coast, land is generally owned in smaller units of more nearly equal size. On the Anatolian plateau there is also believed be relative equality in land ownership but large units do exist.

Table 3
Landholdings by Quartiles

Quartile	Size of Unit (hectares)	% of all Units	% of all land
1	0.1 - 3.0	52.1)	12.3)
	3.1 - 5.0	16.6)	12.1)
2	5.1 - 10.0	18.1	23.9
3	10.1 - 20.0	9.4	23.8
4	20.1 - 50.0	3.2)	17.0)
	50 + above	0.6)	11.0)
		68.9	24.4
		4.8	28.0

Source: Based on data in Table 2

Another aspect of the land problem is fragmentation. In most of Turkey land holdings are badly fragmented as a result of inheritance practices. According to the 1963 Census more than 90% of all farm units consist of two or more parcels of land, more than 50% of 6 or more parcels, and 25% of 10 or more parcels. These parcels are often very small and located in different directions from the farmer's village. This makes for much waste of time and effort and inhibits the introduction of improved practices. Consolidation of these fragmented holdings is needed.

Land Reform as a Current Public Issue

The limited scope of the land reform which has taken place, the relatively high rate of population increase in the rural areas (almost 2% per year since 1950 after allowing for migration to urban centers) and the consequent over-crowding on the land, the progressive fragmentation of holdings into uneconomically small units as a result of inheritance practices, and the persistence of a number of large holdings many of them in the hands of local notables who exercise extensive social and political as well as economic power over the local peasantry, have all contributed to focussing attention on land reform. The leadership of the People's Republican Party, the major opposition grouping, advocates land reform but the forcefulness of its approach to the issue has been diluted by the fact that the party still relies to a degree on the support of large landowners, although not so much so as it did in the past. The Turkish Labor Party, a small left-wing group of Marxist outlook, has been attacking the Justice Party Government for its indifference to the land problem,

but some observers feel that the TLP regards land reform as no more than a way station to collectivization. The JP, which numbers many large landholders among its supporters, has responded that what it advocates is agricultural reform, not just land reform. By this the JP spokesmen seem to mean that their policy is to raise agricultural production by assuring seeds, fertilizer, irrigation water and other inputs and the related credit, extending plant protection, and improving marketing rather than to providing a farm for every peasant family which wishes to practice agriculture. This debate has been going on in Turkey since the Land Reform Bill of 1945 was introduced into Parliament. The likelihood is that focussing on the technical and marketing aspects of agriculture will benefit large farmers more than small farmers, who generally enjoy inferior access to the resources required, including credit, and who can less well afford to take the risks inherent in the adoption of new practices. Attention to technical improvement coupled with neglect of the land question is therefore likely to produce growing inequalities in the rural sector.

Advisers from A.I.D. and its predecessor agencies over the years have tended to ignore the entire question of land reform in Turkey; what attention they have given to land tenure questions has gone to the problem of consolidation. In part this neglect is attributable to the political nature of land reform. In part, however, it may be explained by the preoccupation of US advisers with raising productivity and the fact that many of the farmers most receptive to innovation came from among the relatively large landowners. Whatever its cause, the lack of interest in land reform on the part

of US advisers and the inference it has conveyed that land reform is not a high priority problem for Turkey has probably contributed to official inertia and in effect strengthened the position of the opponents of land reform.