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The Village Institutes Experience in Turkey

M. ASIM KARAÖMERLIOĞLU*

ABSTRACT *This paper sheds light on the Village Institutes experience in Turkey from the late 1930s to the mid-1940s. The Institutes have given rise to many academic and political controversies, and have remained an issue of confusion. This was owing partly to the lack of understanding of the real nature of the growing interest by the Kemalist elite in rural issues in the 1930s, and partly to the way that the power and importance of peasantist ideology had been underestimated, especially as it had gained wide currency amongst the governing elite in the 1930s and 1940s. This article begins by analyzing the historical and intellectual context of the period, and moves on to the development of the concept of the Village Institutes, assessing its most important and controversial characteristics. Finally, a new theoretical interpretation is offered within a critique of existing, widely-held explanations that have dominated the theoretical literature on the issue for so long.*

Introduction

The Village Institutes embody an educational attempt made in Turkey between 1937 and the mid-1940s to transform the Turkish countryside.¹ There were many expectations from these institutions for the development of rural Turkey. Some of them were to modernize the social relations, to bring an end to poverty and ignorance among the peasants, to create peasant intellectuals, to increase agricultural productivity and to help spread the Kemalist Revolution in the countryside. Though there was a consensus in the beginning among the ruling circles as to what should be the goals of the Institutes, the actual historical experience turned out to be extremely controversial. The Village Institutes became one of the major foci of political and ideological debate in Turkey,

*Department of History, The Ohio State University. I would like to thank Dr Carter V. Findley and Dr İlhan Başgöz for their critiques and suggestions as well as sharing their sources with me. For their suggestions and encouragements for choosing this topic, I would like to thank Dr Engin Akarlı, Dr Halil Berktaş, Dr Kenneth Cuno, Dr Jane Hathaway, Dr Viktoria Holbrook, Dr Cemal Kafadar, Orhan Koçak, Dr Sevkettin Pamuk and Dr Zafer Toprak. Needless to say, all the mistakes are mine.

¹ Officially, it began in 1940 although experimental studies started in 1937. The Institutes continued until the early 1950s, but the original phase of the Village Institutes ended in 1946 with the withdrawal of H. A. Yücel from the Ministry of Education and I. Tonguç from the administration of the Elementary Education. For Fay Kirby, who wrote the most comprehensive history of the Institutes, the post-1946 practices actually achieved the opposite of the original intentions. See her *Türkiye'de Köy Enstitüleri* (Ankara: İmece Yayınları, 1962), p. 6.

especially in the 1950s and the early 1960s. Most leftist-oriented Kemalists saw in the Village Institutes the embodiment of Kemalist populism at its highest point,² whereas many right-wing politicians and intellectuals condemned the Village Institutes and made them the scapegoats for their political ambitions and anti-communist hysteria.³ On the other hand, some socialists such as Kemal Tahir, a famous Turkish novelist, criticized the Village Institutes as being fascistic institutions by which the Single Party regime aimed to spread its ideology.⁴ Such a diversity of opinion exemplifies the need for further study in order to understand the Village Institutes. This paper, in part, is an attempt to shed light on this problem. Moreover, through the analysis of the Village Institutes experience the paper also aims to contribute to a better understanding of the social and intellectual climate in Turkey from about the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s.

The Historical and the Intellectual Context

The crucial first step in order to elucidate the Village Institutes experience is to construct the historical context within which it was born. This is very important since many discussions regarding the Institutes have been pursued without paying enough attention to the historical and intellectual context. For instance, many scholars failed to grasp the real nature of the Institutes since they have not taken into account the peasantist ideology which formed the intellectual background for the Village Institutes. Similarly, it is impossible to contextualize this experience without understanding the historical developments in the 1930s related to the rural population.

Two major necessities seemingly directed the attention of the ruling circles and the intelligentsia towards the peasants in the 1930s. On the one hand, the growing necessity to broaden the mass base of the political regime throughout the country became more acute during this decade.⁵ In this respect, the Village Institutes experience is part of a whole series of attempts, like the People's Houses, whose aim was to reach the hearts and minds of the people, 80% of

² See for instance Oya Baydar. 'Sınıfsal Açıdan Köy Enstitüleri,' in *Yeni Toplum*, Kuruluşunun 36. Yılında Köy Enstitüleri, Special Issue, No. 5. April 1976, pp. 19–20, and Engin Tonguç, *Devrim Açısından Köy Enstitüleri ve Tonguç* (İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1970), p. 33.

³ See the many articles in *Köy Enstitüleri ve Koç Federasyonu İçyüzleri*, no author (Ankara: Ayyıldız Matbaası, 1966).

⁴ E. Tonguç, *Devrim ...*, p. 532.

⁵ For the noticeable lack of support for the Kemalist regime by the rural population of Turkey in its early years of administration, see Carole Rathbun, *The Village in the Turkish Novel and Short Story 1920 to 1955* (Paris: Mouton. 1972), p. 14. According to Başgöz and Wilson, 'as the State began to take an increasingly active role in economic self-development in the 1930's, the leaders began to realize the importance of the peasantry and of rural development.' See İlhan Başgöz & Howard E. Wilson, *Educational Problems in Turkey, 1920–1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1968), p. 134. For the changing nature of the political coalitions with the rural classes see F. Birttek & Ç. Keyder, 'Agriculture and the State: An Inquiry into Agricultural Differentiation and Political Alliances: The Case of Turkey,' *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2 (July 1975), p. 452 and p. 458 especially.

whom were living in the countryside.⁶ On the other hand, the enthusiasm for the 'revolution' among the intelligentsia was declining, too. For instance, two prominent Kemalists of the time, Falih Rifkî Atay and Yakup K. Karaosmanoğlu complained about the lack of interest among the intelligentsia, arguing that even fashion exhibits interested the ruling elite more than the crucial problems of the country.⁷ Therefore, it was not only the attention of the masses but also that of the elites that had to be drawn to the Kemalist ideals.

The problem of how to reach the hearts and minds of the people was especially acute in the mainly Kurdish speaking area. In this region, educational and economic reform in agriculture appears to have been essential in order to 'Turkify' the region.⁸ To this end, the land reform attempt of 1937 aimed, first and foremost, to crush the political power of the Kurdish landowners and tribe leaders,⁹ thereby increasing the hegemony of the young Turkish nation-state.¹⁰

In addition, the overall economic conditions, particularly in agriculture, continued to deteriorate owing to the global negative effects of the Great Depression.¹¹ Had it not been for the poor financial climate at that time, mechanization might have been a solution to improve agricultural production. The abundance of diversely located petty-production units in the countryside, however made the implementation of this option more and more difficult.¹² According to many contemporaries, the easiest and perhaps the cheapest solution

⁶ Until the mid-1980s Turkey had possibly been one of the most agrarian countries in Europe and the Middle East. As Eric Hobsbawm illustrates, 'Only one peasant stronghold remained in or around the neighbourhood of Europe and the Middle East—Turkey, where the peasantry declined, but in the mid-1980s, still remained an absolute majority.' See his *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), p. 291. One of the World Bank publications confirms Hobsbawm's observation: The World Bank, *Workers in an Integrating World, World Development Report 1995* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 222–223.

⁷ See Korkmaz Alemdar, 'Basında Kadro Dergisi ve Kadro Hareketi ile İlgili Bazı Görüşler,' *Kadro*, I (1978) (reprint) p. 26; and Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, 'Moda ve Sakarya,' *Kadro*, 28 (1934), p. 103.

⁸ An astute American observer of the time, Donald E. Webster, notes the relationship between the rural reform and the Kurdish issue: 'In the spring of 1937 it was necessary to subdue another rebellion in the Kurdish region, this time in Tunceli, south of Elaziz. When the first news of it was published (15 June 1937), it appears that the revolt had been in progress for two months or more but was then under control. The Government announced that it would increase its application of reform measures, including modernization of agriculture and promotion of education, in the recalcitrant region.' See Donald Everett Webster, *The Turkey of Atatürk, Social Process in the Turkish Reformation* (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1939), pp. 111–112.

⁹ In the early 1930s the famous *Kadro* periodical which aimed to theorize Kemalism and revive the enthusiasm for it advocated the idea of a land reform in order to solve the Kurdish question. See İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, 'Türk Köylüsünü Topraklandırmalı. Fakat Nasıl?', *Kadro*, 23 (1933), pp. 35–36.

¹⁰ According to Yahya Tezel, who wrote one of the most comprehensive economic histories of the 1923–1950 period, one of the strategic aims of the land reform was related to the conditions in the region. However, it was impossible to accomplish this goal without pretending to cover the whole country and within a single region whose boundaries have never been certain anyway. See Yahya Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi* (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1982), p. 347.

¹¹ 'It is probable that the date of the change also had great significance—in 1933 many nations, especially exporters of raw materials, suffered from the disastrous collapse of world markets resulting from the depression, and resolved to be less dependent on private trade in the future. Autarchical controls grew rapidly not only in Turkey but throughout the world.' For this see Max W. Thornburg, *Turkey, An Economic Appraisal* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1949), p. 35.

¹² For a discussion of the Ottoman origins of the dominance of small farming in the Ottoman countryside, see Şevket Pamuk, 'Osmanlı Tarımında Üretim İlişkileri,' *Toplum ve Bilim*, 17 (1981), pp. 22–24.

to this problem was to teach the peasants better techniques to promote production. Of course these historical necessities stimulated the intellectual debates about how rural life could be transformed. These debates led to the emergence of a widespread peasantist rhetoric in Turkey especially after 1932.¹³ In a sense the Village Institutes can be seen as an embodiment of the peasantist ideology. It is therefore necessary to look briefly at the ideas that were circulating before the formation of the Village Institutes.

In the 1930s in Turkey, as in many parts of the world, peasantist ideologies flourished¹⁴ as the following observation illustrates:

Today even the leading industrialized countries take all kinds of precautions by jealously preserving peasant life against the proletariat, which shows the internationalist and revolutionary trends, and against the political currents which desire to pull the peasants into the cities and evacuate the countryside. In order to do so, they consider villages and village life the abundant and clear resource of national life and the instrument for social stability. They have been forced to engage in this endeavor owing to recent developments in world affairs. Today everywhere there emerges a politics of ruralism because of the gradual closing of the open markets for exchanging men and commodities. Due to political and social security concerns, regimes attempt to attach people, who are unemployed and cannot migrate anywhere else in the urban and rural areas, to land in order to guarantee the production of foodstuffs in case of war ... In this way, the ideologies of the middle and rural classes have found an appropriate ground and have begun occupying a central place in the internal politics of the states.¹⁵

Barkan's assessment reflects a changing intellectual orientation of his times. In the 1920s and 1930s there emerged a vast literary and intellectual concern about rural life. Several examples are depicted. In Germany in the late 1920s, Walter Darré, who later became the Minister of Agriculture under the Nazi regime, wrote two best-selling works in which he championed and upheld 'the virtues of the peasant and the need to re-organize society through rural corporations.'¹⁶ In 1921, the great Russian agrarian economist V. V. Chayanov in his science fiction novel envisioned a prosperous peasant society in which each farmer owns an airplane and attends classical music concerts.¹⁷ Likewise, the British colonial plans in the 1930s frequently regarded the ideal of the small farmer as the basis of the nation.¹⁸

¹³ Turkish peasantism has a longer history, of course. In the Ottoman Empire a concern for the peasants began during the Second Constitutional Period (1908–18), especially on the pages of *Türk Yurdu*, but it gained its real momentum after World War I. After the War, 15 medical doctors established *Köycüler Cemiyeti* (Peasantist Association) and decided to go 'to the people' in order to recruit them for the War of Independence. For the Ottoman origins of peasantism see Füsun Üstel, 'Köycüler Cemiyeti,' *Tarih ve Toplum* (December 1989), pp. 12–16.

¹⁴ In an obituary to Kemal Atatürk who died in 1938, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the official organ of the Nazi Party wrote that both Turkey and Germany have the same political goals, i.e. peasantism ('Türkiye'de ve Almanya'da kuvvetli bir köycülük millî kuvvetin tükenmez bir kudretidir. İki milletin aynı politik gayeleri mevcuttur'). Quoted in 'Atatürk Hakkında Dünya Neşriyatı,' *Ülkü*, 12:79 (1938) (December 1938), p. 354.

¹⁵ Ömer Lütfi Barkan, 'Harp Sonu Tarımsal Reform Hareketleri,' *Siyasal Bilgiler Okulu Dergisi*, No. 55 (1935), reprinted in Ömer Lütfi Barkan, *Türkiye' de Toprak Meselesi, Toplu Eserler I* (İstanbul: Gözlem, 1980), p. 26.

¹⁶ Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Walter Darré and Hitler's Green Party* (Buckinghamshire: Kensal, 1985), p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

In the industrialized world, peasantism was mainly a reaction to the disintegrating and malevolent consequences of industrialization and urbanization. Many intellectuals, particularly in Europe, saw rural life and the peasantry as the stronghold of the traditional and the national values. This reaction was partly due to 'the degeneracy, meaninglessness, and emptiness of bourgeois life in *fin-de-siècle* Europe'.¹⁹ For many, the materially oriented lifestyle, the commercialization of the material and spiritual world, and the mechanistic view of the universe paved the way for a life in which values such as novelty, emotion, intuition, passion, adventure, romanticism and the like began to disappear. Deep cultural pessimism spread all over Europe and the United States from intellectuals to both the lower and the old upper classes, the first undergoing a deep frustration with their poor lives, and the latter dreaming of a golden age in the distant and rural past.²⁰ In the economically 'backward' world, however, the interest in rural life and peasants stemmed from the necessity not only to incorporate the rural population into the modernization project of the nationalist elites but also to find a mass base for new regimes or social revolution.²¹

It is no wonder, then, that this period witnessed the flowering of so-called 'peasantism' in Turkey, too. In the Turkish case, one can find the impact of most of the causes that characterize both developed and developing country peasantisms. Interest in village life, the contradictions between urban and rural life, anti-intellectualism, how rural populations prosper, the fear of a fully-fledged industrialization, the measures that could be used to overcome natural disasters in the countryside and the like were among extensively discussed issues of this decade.

A large volume of peasantist literature appeared in many books and journals of the 1930s,²² particularly in *Ülkü*, the influential semi-official journal published by the Ankara People's House. According to Köymen, the editor of *Ülkü*, who took the last name Köy-men (village-man) in 1934, the new era was characterized by a clash of values and lifestyles between cities and villages.²³ He argued that the Great Depression had proved that urban life gave rise to poverty, hunger, unemployment, all kinds of corruption and consumptionism, economic failures, and the deterioration of human values and morals.²⁴ He maintained that the ideas and values based on village life should be taken as a point of departure for the

¹⁹ Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity, Technology, Politics, and Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 12.

²⁰ Hugh Seton-Watson, 'The Age of Fascism and its Legacy,' in George L. Mosse (ed.) *International Fascism: New Thoughts and New Approaches* (London and Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979), p. 360.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 361–366.

²² Zafer Toprak, 'Popülizm ve Türkiye'deki Boyutları,' in İstanbul Öğretim Üyeleri Derneği (ed.), *Tarih ve Demokrasi Tarık Zafer Tunaya'ya Armağan* (İstanbul: 1992).

²³ Nusret Köymen, *Köycülük Esasları* (Ankara: Tarık Edip Kütüphanesi, 1934), pp. 6–9; See also İ. Hakkı Tonguç, *Canlandırılacak Köy*, 2nd edn (İstanbul: Remzi, 1947), p. 83.

²⁴ Köymen, *Köycülük* ..., pp. 19–20; For similar points see Aptullah Ziya, 'Köy Mimarisi,' *Ülkü*, 7:5 (1933), p. 37. According to Tütengil, the exploitation of the rural areas by the urban ones became a social theme in Turkish literature at the time. See Cavit Orhan Tütengil, *Kırsal Türkiye'nin Yapısı ve Sorunları*, 2nd edn (İstanbul: Gerçek, 1983), p. 56.

future of Turkey.²⁵ This was because the peasantists believed that rural life was far superior to urban life in many respects. The Turkish advocates of peasantism, for instance, thought that workers would lose their personalities owing to the harsh division of labour brought about by industrialization.²⁶ Agricultural activity, on the other hand, was very vibrant since wage labour could hardly be employed in agriculture. In the countryside the family unit had prevailed as the basic unit of production, which many believe was socially a better means of employment. In this respect, the family as the production unit rather than wage labour was considered to be one of the most important advantages of rural life.²⁷ In other words, the peasantists glorified the countryside for not having a working class. Although village life was superior to city life, it was believed that the villages had been exploited by the power of the cities.²⁸ According to Köymen and Tonguç, the 'unproductive' cities had access to economic, administrative, cultural and civilizational power which enabled the city dwellers to exploit the 'productive' village people even though the wealth of the cities was dependent on the sacrifices of the villagers.²⁹

Although many peasantist ideologues in the world expressed contempt for industrialization, in Turkey it was urbanization that formed the most significant characteristic of peasantism.³⁰ This does not mean that there was no hostile attitude towards industrialization. Many intellectuals feared that industrialization created a division of labour in which man was reduced to a mere extension of machines.³¹ But the peasantists made a distinction between the terms 'industrialization' and 'industry,' endorsing the latter and rejecting the former. The theory was that Turkey ought to have industries without passing through an industrialization process,³² but the question was what kind of industries Turkey ought to have. The peasantists believed that Turkey could have industries in the countryside for the well-being of the peasants, and that immigration into the cities could be prevented. However, such a system could have impeded the formation of the working class which itself was an urban phenomenon to be avoided.

The writings of Köymen and many others in the 1930s pointed out that villages were the places where the pure culture of the nation was preserved. The conservatism of the peasants, according to Köymen, was the 'social insurance' against the moral and ethical deterioration of the cities.³³ Such an idea, of course,

²⁵ Köymen, *Köycülük* ..., p. 23. Likewise, *Ülkü* in its first issue asked its leaders to submit works focusing on the 'negative effects of migration into the cities and the harm caused by the concentration of intelligentsia in the cities'. See 'ÜLKÜ'nün Yazı Bölümleri,' *Ülkü*, 1:1 (1933), p. 93.

²⁶ Köymen, *Köycülük* ..., p. 18.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁸ For an example supporting the existence of such a discriminatory exploitation of the rural people, see Fikret Madaralı, *Tonguç İşçi*, no further information, p. 107.

²⁹ Köymen, *Köycülük* ..., p. 13, Tonguç, *Canlandırtılacak* ..., p. 83 and Kirby, *Türkiye'de Köy* ..., pp. 99–100.

³⁰ For a good example in this regard see Nusret Köymen, 'Sanayide Yayıncılık', *Ülkü*, 7:39 (1936), p. 175.

³¹ Ömer Lütfi Barkan also called attention to the double effects of industrialization. On one hand, it created a world polarized within metropolises and colonies and on the other hand, it led to unfavourable working conditions for the growing number of working classes. See Barkan, 'Harp Sonu ...', p. 27. See also Köymen, *Köycülük* ..., p. 25), and Sait Aydoslu, 'Ökonomik Devridaim III,' *Ülkü*, 4:23 (1935), p. 357.

³² Sait Aydoslu, 'Köycülük Esasları', *Ülkü* 4:22 (1934), p. 300.

³³ Köymen, *Köycülük* ..., p. 30.

is reminiscent of Nazi methods to find the pure German race in the countryside in the 1930s.³⁴ As a matter of fact this idea of ‘pure cultural traits preserved in the countryside’ had a long history in the Turkish nationalist ideology. Many nationalist ideologues stressed such a notion of pure cultural traits that could be found among the villagers as early as the 1900s.³⁵

The Road to the Village Institutes

The support for peasantry meant that education in the countryside was widely acclaimed as a means of not only reaching the hearts and minds of the people but also of improving the quality of life of the village population. In the 1930s we witness lively discussions on how to improve elementary and adult education in general and the agricultural education in particular. In order to solve the problems of rural education, the Kemalist governments began focusing on the issue. Reşit Galip, who became the Minister of Education in 1933, showed special interest in making ‘the Ministry a part of the dynamic resurgence of populism as applied to village development.’³⁶ One of his first acts was to form a Village Affairs Commission, including in its membership representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture and Health.³⁷ Likewise, ‘At the Fourth General Congress of the Party in 1935, special attention was paid to village education.’³⁸ More importantly, however, İsmail Tonguç was appointed as the General

³⁴ See the striking similarity of even the phrasing: Hitler in *Mein Kampf* saw the rural population as the ‘best defence against the social diseases that afflict us’; See Gustavo Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants: Agrarian Policy of the Third Reich, 1930–1939*, translated by David Kerr (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), p. 19 and compare with Köymen, *Köycülük* ..., p. 30. According to the Nazis, the peasants represented freedom, loyalty, hard work, pure race, healthy upbringing and the like. For the peasant, ‘land is more than a means with which to earn a living; it has all the sentimental overtones of *Heimat*, to which the peasant feels himself far more closely connected than the white collar worker with his office or the industrial worker with his shop’. Likewise, the famous Agricultural Minister Darré saw ‘a causal relationship between German “peasantness” and Germany’s national survival and creative capacity.’ He believed that were it not for the contact with the urban and mercantile lifestyles, German peasants would be much better off. In his view, the peasants were the only people to supply the ‘best blood’ which had been declining due to warfare and lower birth rates. For these views see Bramwell, *Blood and Soil* ..., pp. 8, 62, 68 and 203; Barrington Moore, Jr, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy—Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 449–450.

³⁵ See Francios Georgeon, *Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri: Yusuf Akçura, 1876–1935* (Ankara: Yurt, 1986), p. 71. Although this romantic perception of the countryside as the reserve of the national flavour permeated the contemporary writings of the intelligentsia, those same people also viewed the peasants as the least ‘nationalized’ group of the people. This is borne out by the fact that the national project was more of an urban phenomenon. Given the necessity to spread the nationalist ideology to the countryside, the same Köymen writes: ‘There are some villages in which a foreign language is spoken although they are often racially Turkish and have been living in this country for centuries; and there are even some villages in which people speak Turkish but do not adhere to Turkishism sufficiently.’ See Nusret Köymen, *Köycülük Programına Giriş* (Ankara: Tarık Edip Kütüphanesi, 1935), p. 20.

³⁶ Başgöz & Wilson, *Educational Problems* ..., p. 137. For a detailed presentation of Galip’s interest in rural affairs and his educational policies on rural education see Ahmet Şevket Elman, *Dr. Reşit Galip* (Ankara: Yeni Matbaa, 1953), pp. 47–63; see also Tonguç, *Canlandırılacak* ..., p. 417.

³⁷ Tonguç, *Canlandırılacak* ..., pp. 417–418. The interesting story of this Commission can also be found in Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *İkinci Adam*, Vol. II (İstanbul: Remzi, 1968), pp. 374–376. Aydemir himself became a member of this Commission like Dr Reşit Galip who in 1925 as a member of the extraordinary *İstiklal Mahkemesi* Court convicted Aydemir of his communist activities for 10 years.

³⁸ Başgöz & Wilson, *Educational Problems* ..., p. 150.

Director of Elementary Education (*İlköğretim Genel Müdürlüğü*) in 1935,³⁹ a person known for his peasantist leanings.⁴⁰

The ideological impetus coming from the peasantist leanings complied with the crisis in education, especially with that in rural education.⁴¹ For instance, the Village Aid programme of the People's Houses, which was 'purely philanthropic in character', had been a total failure.⁴² This crisis appears to have been indicative of a more serious malaise in education and a major factor in the emergence of the concept of Village Institutes:

The first attempts of the Ministry of Education to handle village education in a fundamental way were inspired by neither populism nor peasantism, but by the objective failures of the newly established educational system in universities and secondary schools.⁴³

According to Kirby, secondary education at that time produced more graduates than the public and private sectors could employ. More important, however, was that these graduates had not acquired the necessary practical skills to benefit the economic life of the country. The students were taught neither practical nor managerial skills but instead received an education that only enabled them to replace the older, less qualified bureaucracy. Within this context of an education at odds with the daily necessities of the economic life, the only option for these graduates was to be employed in the governmental institutions. Students were financed by the state and paid their debt by their compulsory employment in the public sector. This bizarre situation seems to have created a vicious circle that produced an idle and unproductive workforce.⁴⁴ In sum, although the impetus for the village education project could never be attributed simply to the crisis in education as Kirby pointed out, it became a significant stimulus for attempts at village education.

The idea of founding Village Institutes officially arose in 1937 though the notion had been discussed by the intelligentsia and the ruling elite in the early 1930s. After a three-year experimental period, they were officially founded in 1940.⁴⁵ In a nutshell, the aim of founding the Village Institutes was to educate the peasant youth in technical matters necessary to benefit the agricultural economy. The graduates of these schools were eventually recruited as teachers who would work in their own villages.⁴⁶ This was planned as a solution to the

³⁹ E. Tonguç, *Devrim* ..., p. 272.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 52. He was called 'peasant İsmail' by his friends while he was working in the Ministry of Education before he took the office of General Director.

⁴¹ See Başgöz & Wilson, *Educational Problems* ..., p. 130.

⁴² Başgöz & Wilson, *Educational Problems* ..., p. 156, note the following: 'A village aid program purely philanthropic in character with its major emphasis on social welfare could not succeed in a country where eighty percent of the population lived in small, impoverished villages, eking out a meagre living from an exhausted soil with primitive farm techniques. The village aid program of the People's Houses further demonstrated the necessity for governmental programs of basic economic, agricultural and social reform.'

⁴³ Kirby, *Türkiye'de Köy* ..., p. 58.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 58.

⁴⁵ Elmire Canboğa, *Rural Education in Turkey: The Village Institute System (1937-1954)*, Unpublished MA Thesis (Long Beach: California State University, 1980), p. 31.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

failures of the former village teachers who had been recruited from urban areas. Many believed that it was the alienness and indifference to village life of those students that accounted for their failure.⁴⁷ Even though the broad objective of the Village Institutes was quite simple, in reality the Village Institute experience was multi-faceted and highly controversial. Both for its advocates and opponents, it was far more than an educational undertaking. Therefore, the following discussion highlights many of the more complex political and ideological aspects of the Village Institutes.

An Additional Departure from Economic Etatism

One of the most interesting characteristics of the Village Institutes is that they mark an additional departure from the idea of economic étatism (*iktisadî devletçilik*) that prevailed during the 1930s.⁴⁸ This was because the Village Institutes project was designed to minimize the financial burden on the state.⁴⁹ Establishing such a public project *without* major financial help of the state was one of the most important aims behind the idea of the Village Institutes.⁵⁰ This was hardly surprising given the financial constraints of the time.⁵¹ However, the role and power of economic étatism have been exaggerated in Turkish history.⁵² Not only did it lose momentum after 1939,⁵³ but its existence had already been challenged during the 1930s. According to the famous *Kadro* journal which championed a leftist version of Kemalism, étatism in Turkey was no more than a simple rhetoric and was not really endorsed by the regime.⁵⁴

To meet the financial necessities, the Village Institute project aimed to utilize

⁴⁷ For Tonguç, for example, the Village Institutes had to create leaders for the villages from the villages. See İ. Hakkı Tonguç, *Mektuplarla Köy Enstitüsü Yılları (1935–1946)*, 2nd edn (İstanbul: Çağdaş Yayınları, 1990), pp. 9–10.

⁴⁸ As a matter of fact, new studies inspire a challenge to the conventional historiographical views regarding state support for Turkish peasants *even* during the time of high étatism of the 1930s. According to Şevket Pamuk, for instance, the state intervention for agricultural prices remained limited in the 1930s contrary to the conventional views of this period. See Şevket Pamuk, 'İkinci Dünya Savaşı Yıllarında Devlet, Tarımsal Yapılar ve Dönüşüm,' in Şevket Pamuk & Zafer Toprak (eds) *Türkiye'de Tarımsal Yapılar (1923–2000)* (Ankara: Yurt, 1988), p. 92.

⁴⁹ M. Rauf İnan, *Bir Ömrün Öyküsü*, Vol. 2 (Ankara: Öğretmen Yayınları, 1988), p. 2; Mahmut Makal, *Köy Enstitüleri ve Ötesi: Anılar, Belgeler*, 2nd edn (İstanbul: Çağdaş Yayınları, 1990), p. 28. According to Kirby (*Türkiye'de Köy ...*, p. 56) étatism in the narrow sense was never employed in the field of education anyway.

⁵⁰ See the Village Institute law quoted in Cemil Koçak, *Türkiye'de Milli Şef Dönemi (1938–1945)* (İstanbul: Yurt Yayınları, 1986), pp. 238–239. On this issue see also Kirby, *Türkiye'de Köy ...*, pp. 207–208; and Kemal Türkler's comment on Village Institutes in *Yeni Toplum*. Kuruluşunun 36. Yılında ..., p. 110.

⁵¹ Kirby, *Türkiye'de Köy ...*, p. 8.

⁵² For a discussion on the exaggerated role of étatism in agriculture see Pamuk, 'İkinci Dünya ...', p. 92. For similar views see Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *İkinci Adam*, vol. II (İstanbul: Remzi, 1968), p. 411.

⁵³ See Korel Göymen, 'Stages of Etatist Development in Turkey: The Interaction of Single-Party Politics and Economic Policy in the 'Etatist Decade', 1930–1939', *METU Studies in Development*, 10 (1976), p. 90. See also Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye'de Devletçilik* (Ankara: Gerçek Yayınları, 1974) for a similar periodization of the étatism policies in Turkey.

⁵⁴ See these pages in the following articles in *Kadro*: Vedat Nedim (Tör), 'Niçin ve Nasıl Sanayileşmemiz Lazım', *Kadro*, 6 (1932), p. 16; Vedat Nedim (Tör), 'Devletin Yapıcılık ve İdarecilik Kudretine İnanmak Gerekir', *Kadro*, 15 (1933), pp. 16–18; *Kadro* (editorial), 'Words, Words and Words!', *Kadro*, 28 (1934), p. 4; Şevket Aydemir, 'Programlı Devletçilik', *Kadro*, 34 (1934), p. 6; İsmail Hüsrev (Tökin), 'Beş Senelik Programın Manası', *Kadro*, 27 (1934), p. 27.

first and foremost a labour-intensive method which forced the people from the nearby villages and the students of the other institutes to work in the construction of the new institute buildings.⁵⁵ The literature published by the Ministry of Education about the Village Institutes or written by their graduates is full of stories about how most of the Village Institutes were constructed by the heroic work of the teenage students with only the barest construction materials and transportation facilities.⁵⁶ Whether the students willingly participated or not, there is evidence to suggest that the peasants resented their obligations to provide land and to help build the Village Institutes. Although President İsmet İnönü supported the idea, noting that ‘building the village schools by contractors and businessmen instead of building them together with the peasants was more expensive and time consuming,’⁵⁷ there were widespread rumours claiming that peasants were discriminated against. The fact that İnönü had to acknowledge the rumours shows the extent of the resentments:⁵⁸

Such statements as ‘the schools were built in the cities by the state whereas in villages the peasants built these schools by themselves. It is a good thing to establish primary schools, but poor peasants do that?’ are among some of the things that I have heard. There will always exist these type of men who enjoy making propaganda against the government policies. I would like to make my citizens aware of these deceptive poisons. If they are careful enough, they will immediately see that this propaganda comes from ... persons who benefit from the ignorance of the peasants.⁵⁹

Further evidence of widespread discontent amongst the peasants may be seen in Kirby’s observation that:

(they) correctly asked why they had to pay and work while the city dwellers get all kinds of better educational opportunities for free.⁶⁰

According to the Village Institute law, peasants had to work 20 days a year on the construction of the institute buildings.⁶¹ Furthermore, it was the duty of

⁵⁵ İ. Safa Güner, *Köy Enstitüleri Hatıraları* (İstanbul: Kervan Matbaası, 1963), pp. 34 and 53.

⁵⁶ An incident exemplifies the situation. When the truck of one of the institutes was out of order, the teacher asked the students to go to the village on foot and carry the lumber with their hands. See M. Lütfi Engin, ‘Hasanoğlan Köy Enstitüsü Çalışmaları’, in *Köy Enstitüleri*, 2 (İstanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1944), p. 182.

⁵⁷ From İsmet İnönü’s speech on the occasion of the commencement of the new primary school semester, 5 May 1945, cited in Abdullah Özkücur, *Hasanoğlan Yüksek Köy Enstitüsü* (Ankara: Selvi, 1990), p. 361.

⁵⁸ See Cevat Geray, *Planlı Dönemde Köye Yönelik Çalışmalar* (Ankara: Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1974), p. 6. Under the Single Party regime, there was ruthless censure on the media. For this reason, we can normally guess that these rumours were so widespread as to require an explanation from the President. A prominent journalist, who was an advocate of the regime, wrote that ‘the situation of our press in the summer of 1939 can be summarized as follows: To criticize the “National Chief,” government, and the Republican People’s Party was forbidden. The general attitude of the government could not be criticized in any case.’ See Nadir Nadi, *Perde Aralığından* (İstanbul: Cumhuriyet Yayınları, 1964), p. 21. İsmet İnönü’s son-in-law, Metin Tokat, says in his memoirs that the press was forced to write the news in a certain way, and that even the comments about the news were directly imposed by the government especially during the World War II. According to him, all the newspapers were forced to publish large photographs of the ‘National Chief’. Metin Tokat, cited in Çetin Yetkin, *Türkiye’de Tek Parti Yönetimi* (İstanbul: A, 1983), pp. 163–164.

⁵⁹ İsmet İnönü, ‘İlköğretimde Çalışmalar’, *Köy Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 5–6 (February 1946), p. 3.

⁶⁰ Kirby, *Türkiye’de Köy* ..., p. 287.

⁶¹ E. Tonguç, *Devrim* ..., pp. 210, 233.

the village council to find land to be used by the Village Institutes.⁶² These obligations probably explain why the peasants regarded the Village Institutes with suspicion.⁶³ A female student recording her observations in the village laundry at Hasanoğlu for the *Köy Enstitüsü Dergisi* (Village Institute Journal) noted that the village women continued to articulate their difficulties because some of their land had been forcefully given to the institute but in return they had been waiting a long time to receive payment for it.⁶⁴

A New Perspective in Turkish Education: “Learning by Doing”

Until the mid-1930s the Kemalist educational system ignored vocational or practical education.⁶⁵ In other words, an education based on general and abstract knowledge rather than the practical necessities of the workplace had overwhelmingly prevailed during the first years of the Republic. In a sense, this choice was understandable. From the early 1920s onwards, the new regime had been attempting to consolidate itself; and for that, an education that appealed to the hearts and minds of the people commanded priority. By the mid-1930s, however, the need for a qualified labour force, particularly in the countryside, became pressing. An educational programme focusing on work, therefore, became an important objective, and the Village Institutes were set up to achieve this goal. While the principle of ‘education for work’, or ‘education for production’ became the main motivation, the method of ‘learning by doing’ accompanied it. In all the memoirs of the graduates of the Village Institutes and in all the institute publications, we see that the method of ‘learning by doing’ was one of the most highly emphasized principles.⁶⁶ Theoretical support for ‘learning by doing’ could be found, for instance, in Kerschensteiner, who strongly influenced Tonguç and others, and emphasized that the source of culture is not books but work.⁶⁷ However, we find that an important part of the appeal of practical education, as far as education in the countryside was concerned, was related to the characteristics of the rural people. Webster observes that:

conservative as have been many of the influences in the life of the Turkish peasant, he

⁶² For examples of the Village Institutes’ attempt to get their lands, see Hürrem Arman, *Piramidin Tabanı: Köy Enstitüleri ve Tonguç. Anılar* (Ankara: İş Matbaacılık ve Ticaret, 1969), pp. 292–299; Tonguç, *Mektuplarla ...*, p. 197.

⁶³ One indication of their dislike could be that in the 1950 election, the Democrat Party which attacked the Village Institutes was successful also in the villages where Village Institutes were located. Güner, *Köy ...*, p. 141, notes that ‘it was understood the next day that the results of the election were in accordance with the whole country’.

⁶⁴ See Nazife Tuncay, ‘Hasanoğlu Çamaşırhanesi ve Köy Toplumundaki Önemi,’ *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi*, 5–6 (February 1946), p. 12.

⁶⁵ Kirby, *Türkiye’de Köy ...*, p. 47.

⁶⁶ To see the emphasis on ‘learning by doing’ in the work of the architect of the Village Institutes see İ. Hakkı Tonguç, ‘Köy Eğitim ve Öğretiminin Amaçları’, *Köy Enstitüleri*, 2 (İstanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1944), pp. 1–76. One other persistent advocate of this perspective was Rauf İnan, who was a major figure in the formation of the Village Institutes and later in the administration of several Village Institutes. See İnan, *Bir Ömrün ...*, and Arman, *Piramidin ...*, p. 249.

⁶⁷ M. Sabri Taşkın, ‘İş Okulu ve Evrim Tarihi Etrafında,’ *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi*, 5–6 (February, 1946), p. 135.

is quick to learn with his eyes if the lesson be written in objects rather than Arabic or Latin characters.⁶⁸

Though the necessity of ‘learning by doing’ in rural education seems clear in retrospect, it should not be assumed that at the time everybody believed in it; for instance most professors of İstanbul University, which was then still the only university, despised the idea.⁶⁹ According to Kirby, these people illustrated the urban bias by insisting that physical labour does not have any value. Even the peasants were convinced by the city intellectuals to accept the inferiority of their physical labour.⁷⁰ However, the strong emphasis on work in preference to intellectually stimulating courses led to harsh criticisms although intellectuals such as Cavit Orhan Tütengil, who himself was an Institute teacher, argued that in the first years it was normal to focus on constructing the infrastructural necessities of the Institutes. He noted that during the War producing wheat was more important than reading books.⁷¹ Whatever the role of the historical conditions, the Village Institutes were repeatedly accused of neglecting the cultural development of the students. Even many teachers of the Village Institutes complained about the poor quality of courses which failed to improve the intellectual abilities of the students.⁷² Tonguç and many other teachers despised learning abstract things. In fact, a great deal of anti-intellectualism was evident in the Village Institutes at that time.⁷³

Educating the Peasants by the Peasants

For the educational undertaking in the countryside, the principle of work was not enough in itself. It had to be accompanied by the availability of teachers who knew the realities of peasant life and especially the regions where they were employed. As a matter of fact, one of the most important goals of the Village Institutes was to educate peasant youth so that they could go back to their native regions as village teachers. The pedagogical superiority of this perspective is clear. As rightly pointed out at the time, it was impossible to teach the peasants even the basics without knowing their mentality or understanding their ‘language’.

The transformation of the villages by the village people cannot be perceived

⁶⁸ Webster *The Turkey of Atatürk* ..., p. 268; cf. Tonguç, *Canlandırılacak* ..., p. 73.

⁶⁹ See İnan, *Bir Ömrün* ..., pp. 172–175, and Ahmet Emin Yalman, *Yarının Türkiye'sine Seyahat* (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1990), first published in 1944, p. 139.

⁷⁰ Kirby, *Türkiye’de Köy* ..., p. 162.

⁷¹ Cavit Orhan Tütengil, *Köy Enstitüsü Üzerine Düşünceler* (İstanbul: Berksoy, 1948), p. 14.

⁷² Tonguç, *Mektuplarla* ..., p. 101; İnan, *Bir Ömrün* ..., pp. 122–123.

⁷³ Tonguç’s *Canlandırılacak Köy* embraces a lot of anti-intellectualism. See especially pp. 16–18, 20 and 23. For Tonguç’s hostile attitude towards the intellectuals see Niyazi Berkes, *Unutulan Yıllar* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1997), pp. 95–96. We also have to keep in mind that during the 1930s and 1940s, anti-intellectualism was rampant in many totalitarian states, especially in Nazi Germany. For detailed information on anti-intellectualism in the Third Reich see I. L. Kandel, *The Making of Nazis* (New York: Columbia University, 1935), p. 59, and Hitler’s anti-intellectual bias in *Mein Kampf*, discussed in Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany, A New History* (New York: Continuum, 1995), p. 348.

as merely a pedagogical attempt, though. It was also part of the peasantist and populist attempts to reach the hearts and minds of the peasants. This, however, necessitated raising awareness of the realities of rural life, but most of the Turkish intelligentsia knew nothing about rural life. In the 1920s and early 1930s, there were serious attempts to achieve this goal which apparently failed because of the ignorance of the realities of rural life.⁷⁴ Even Köymen who wrote extensively about the peasants only saw the villages when he was travelling from İstanbul to Ankara.⁷⁵ Kirby gives a very clear description of how the Turkish intelligentsia approached the peasants:

None of the people who wrote on the 'village issues' could dare to stay even one night in a Turkish village. When those intellectuals intended to go to the villages—as exemplified in the campaign for peasantism organized by Ankara People's House in 1933—they did so as if they were foreign tourists or like travelers who try to discover the dark corners of Africa.⁷⁶

The Village Institutes, then, could hopefully fill the gap between the peasants and the elite by creating elites from amongst the peasants. As we saw, this approach would also make it easier to accomplish what the peasants necessitated in their economic and social life: a productive and social labour trained in the work process or, to put it differently, gaining meaningful skills by the method of 'learning by doing.'

Turkish 'Stakhanovism'?

However hard the working conditions were, one cannot deny how enthusiastically the students participated in the daily routines of the institute work, as can be seen in all the memoirs and publications of the Village Institutes. Indeed, some parallels may be drawn between the work ethic and discipline that characterized the Village Institutes, and that of Turkish 'Stakhanovism.' In the 1930s in Soviet Russia, Stakhanov, a miner from the Donbass region, continuously broke production records; and the Stalinist regime strove to spread the phenomenon called 'Stakhanovism' throughout the Soviet Union.⁷⁷ This was based on an expectation of producing miracles in productivity from physical

⁷⁴ This deficiency on the part of the intelligentsia was a well known reality and the Republican Party made attempts to recruit militants of rural origins as early as 1931. As one of the RPP documents shows, 'the public speakers especially who will talk to the peasants should resemble the people to whom they are talking to in terms of their clothes and accent. These public speakers must memorize the Party principles that have been mentioned ... Our friends who will talk to the peasants and the people who have simple ideas must talk in a simple and concise way'. Instructions for the Public Speakers' Organization of the Republican People's Party, cited in Mete Tuncay, *Tek Parti Yönetiminin Kurulması (1923–1931)* (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1981), p. 547.

⁷⁵ Toprak, 'Popülizm ...', p. 59.

⁷⁶ Kirby, *Türkiye'de Köy* ..., p. 60; For the campaign mentioned see 'Köycüler Bölümü,' *Ülkü* 2:7 (1933), p.63.

⁷⁷ Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System, Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), p. 38. This book contains probably the most interesting approach to Stakhanovism in the USSR. For a detailed account of this phenomenon see Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

labour by relying merely on moral and ideological campaigns in an era of technological backwardness. In a way, the expectations from the Village Institutes very much resembled the situation. Faith in the power of human will, voluntarism, and work with enthusiasm, devotion, diligence, and passion were perceived as the panacea to solve the problems of rural Turkey, particularly the problem of low productivity.⁷⁸ The following anecdote from the story of the construction of the Hasanoğlu Village Institute exemplifies the situation. One night when everybody was sleeping, some students secretly went out to continue the construction of the institute road and when other students heard their noise they woke up and joined them. The teachers had a hard time convincing them to return to the dormitory and sleep.⁷⁹ Likewise, a story of a boy from a Village Institute working with other men is exemplary of the stereotype of an industrious workforce. While he was working, the other workmen complained about the fast pace of the student, but the boy insisted on doing his job on time and as perfectly as possible.⁸⁰ Viewed in this way the intent was more or less to create a capitalist 'Protestant work ethic' in Turkish agriculture.

In an era of objective restrictions and structural backwardness the expectations from The Village Institutes, as in Stakhanovism, were high in terms of human factors such as discipline and commitment. This can be characterized as a voluntarism which in fact is a common characteristic of most of the peasantist and populist ideologies. Many peasantist-oriented people believed that there was nothing that the power of human agency could not achieve. A peasantist with Nazi leanings, Said Aydoslu,⁸¹ who contributed articles on economics to *Ülkü* argued that there was no historical necessity as such, and that human voluntarism could produce many social changes.⁸² In an article entitled 'Voluntarism and Peasantism,' Köymen argued that people should regard their own lives with an anti-urbanist and peasantist perspective and should not allow their lives to be determined by the course of events and history.⁸³ However, he failed to realize that human factors such as enthusiasm, hard work and a strong belief in voluntarism could not alone solve the historical, social and structural problems of Turkey. This was because what the Turkish rural economy lacked was not

⁷⁸ In the emphasis on human will and voluntarism, we find common characteristics of most of the Populist movements of the late nineteenth century, particularly that of Russian Populism. The populists gave considerable significance to the role of intellectuals and leaders in transforming society. The theories on critically-thinking individuals, bypassing the capitalist stage, using a Kantian subjectivity rather than Hegelian or Marxian determinism and the like, all point to the voluntarist and subjectivist nature of the populist movements. Faith in transforming the Turkish society with educational leadership very much resembles such a mentality. See two original sources by two prominent Russian populists on the issue discussed above, Peter Lavrov, 'Historical Letters', in James M. Scanlan & Mary-Barbara Zeldin (eds), *Russian Philosophy*, Vol II (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994), pp. 123–169, and N. K. Mikhailovsky, 'What is Progress', in Scanlan & Zeldin (eds), *Russian Philosophy*, Vol II, pp. 177–187.

⁷⁹ Engin, 'Hasanoğlu ...', p. 181. For similar stories regarding the industrious and ambitious working conditions in the Village Institutes see, İnan, *Bir Ömrün ...*, pp. 100–103.

⁸⁰ Hasan Lökcü, 'Yaz Tatilim', *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi* (April 1945), p. 433.

⁸¹ Berkes, *Unutulan ...*, pp. 73–74.

⁸² Sait Aydoslu, 'Köycülük Esasları', *Ülkü*, 4:22 (1934), p. 298.

⁸³ Nusret Kemal, 'İradecilik ve Köycülük', *Ülkü*, 4:21 (1934), p. 236. See Köymen, *Köycülük Programına Giriş*, p. 10 for Köymen's critique of historical materialism.

hard work and enthusiasm in itself but a hard work supported by a notion of time, discipline and consistent productivity.

Many intellectuals, though, criticized the Village Institutes as being the core of an educational system of 'coerced' labour in the countryside. As is well known, all the peasants living in the regions where the Village Institutes were located had to work for the Village Institutes 20 days a year. This work was compulsory and for this reason the state was accused of recruiting free labour. As a matter of fact, such an experience was not unique to Turkey. In the 1930s and during World War II, many governments all over the world attempted to legislate laws in order to use 'coerced' labour.⁸⁴ The term 'coerced' may be a little strong, and for sure no government presented it as such. But how could they? They sold the idea as a national work campaign to develop the nation. However, when the social and political circumstances of the Great Depression and World War II are taken into account, there is enough evidence for one to label these experiments as 'coercive.'

In Turkey, the Village Institutes formed the core for organizing and disciplining rural labour along the same lines. Whereas in many countries such work campaigns were extended to the whole nation, in Turkey only the rural people, not the city dwellers, were forced to take part. This inequitable situation drew harsh criticism, and critiques raising the question of discrimination against the rural population were rampant.⁸⁵

One of the most famous critics in this regard is the novelist Kemal Tahir, who wrote novels using themes from Ottoman and Turkish history which provoked several interesting controversies. Tahir's *Bozkırdaki Çekirdek* focuses on the Village Institutes and in the back cover of the book he says:

Given the social and political circumstances in our country, the Village Institutes would only have resulted in a cruel exploitation of the peasant students in the most difficult tasks, and by making them endure the worst economic and social conditions. As a matter of fact, this experience proved that we, the intelligentsia, do not feel sorry for the people, rather we are hostile towards them.⁸⁶

Very few observers have been critical of the way in which students were forced to work in the agricultural activities of the institutes. As is well known,

⁸⁴ It is no coincidence that İsmail Tonguç, the architect of the Village Institute system, studied similar policies employed in other countries, especially in Bulgaria and Germany. In Bulgaria of the 1920s, people were forced to work at least eight months of their life in public works (four months for women). The idea behind it was to organize the labour force of the country and accomplish public works which were supposedly for the benefit of the people. In addition to work in labour camps, Bulgarians had to learn how to read and how to be good citizens. In Germany, a similar law was passed in 1936 under Nazi rule. German youth, between the ages of 18 and 25 had to work for the government for at least six months. The aim was much the same, but in Germany an intensive Nazi propaganda also constituted a significant part of this endeavour. For all this see E. Tonguç, *Devrim ...*, p. 209. During the same years, the labour camps in the USSR and the *Civilian Conservation Corps* (CCC) experience in the United States of the New Deal can also be counted as similar practises which aimed to benefit from the labour force in a time when capital was scarce. For a brief reference to these experiences, see Kirby, *Türkiye'de Köy ...*, pp. 55–56. See E. Tonguç, *Devrim ...*, p. 86 for a discussion on the CCC as an example.

⁸⁵ E. Tonguç, *Devrim ...*, p. 211.

⁸⁶ Kemal Tahir, *Bozkırdaki Çekirdek* (Ankara: Bilgi, 1972).

each Village Institute had lands on which the students and teachers cultivated crops and raised animals. These lands were bought from the villagers at very low prices. A considerable revenue of the Village Institutes came from the agricultural activities performed on their own lands. Most advocates of the Village Institutes praised the discipline and hard work of the institute students, seeing in them the industrious and aggressive human stereotype for a developing nation. In their opinion, the students were willing to do heavy work. But one can find evidence that the students were overworked. For instance, some peasant women who observed the way the students worked could not help being sorry for them.⁸⁷ A petition written to Tonguç complained about the excessive work demands in Çifteler Village Institute. According to the students, the administration's 'only concern was to make the students work and get the benefit of their physical labor.'⁸⁸ The photographs of the students verify how young the boys were who actively participated in the construction of the Village Institute buildings.⁸⁹

The Power Struggle Against the Aghas (Ağalar)?

Most advocates of the Village Institutes argued that one of the reasons which led to the abandonment of the Institutes was that they challenged the social and political relations in the countryside. In their opinion, the Village Institutes threatened the aghas, the big landowners.⁹⁰ According to this scenario, it was the power of the aghas among the ruling bloc which ended this progressive and unique experiment, maybe the first and most important of its kind in modern Turkish history. In other words, the big landowners who supported the right-wing politicians declared war on the Village Institutes.

Whether the aghas felt threatened or not by the Village Institutes should not be confused with the real problem here, which is whether the Village Institutes challenged the aghas during their original phase, namely until 1946. The aghas might well have considered them as 'potential' threats in the long run, but whether the Village Institutes actually challenged them is a different question. The literature that we have examined did not offer any significant evidence that there existed a struggle against the aghas. Probably, the contrary is true. The Village Institutes cooperated with the aghas. In the first place, the locations of the Village Institutes indicate that they were built in places where most of the peasants had small landholdings, as opposed to places where aghas predominated. In Hasanoğlu village, for instance, most people had between 30 and 200 dönüms of land, which means that small farming rather than wage labour in big estates predominated in the region.⁹¹ Rauf İnan's memoirs are full of examples

⁸⁷ For an account of the village women complaining about the overwork of the institute students see Nazife Tuncay, 'Hasanoğlu Çamaşırhanesi ve Köy Toplumundaki Önemi', *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi*, 5-6 (February 1946), p. 12.

⁸⁸ Tonguç, *Mektuplarla* ..., pp. 32-33.

⁸⁹ See one of those striking photographs in *Köy Enstitüleri*, 2 (İstanbul: Maarif Matbaası, 1944), p. 199.

⁹⁰ See Cemil Çakır, 'Köy Enstitüleri Üzerine', in *Yeni Toplum*, Kuruluşunun 36. Yılında ..., pp. 34-35 for an example of such a viewpoint.

⁹¹ *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi*, 1 (January 1945), p. 36.

about the aghas. İnan mentions aghas who helped in supplying bread for his institute⁹² as well as aghas who endorsed the Village Institutes. A landowner who owned 550 hectares of land in the Diyarbakır region would have liked the idea of Village Institutes because education in the institute would lead to the employment of skilled labour on his land.⁹³ Likewise, an institute director in eastern Turkey where the aghas had significant political and economic power advised the new graduates to come to terms with the aghas.⁹⁴

We should mention that many of the architects of the Institutes shared the view that the underdevelopment of rural Turkey was not attributable to social relations such as the exploitation of the peasants by the aghas, nor production relations, but to the incompetence of the peasants in their struggle against the rural environment. The slogans such as ‘controlling and exploiting nature,’ ‘increasing productivity,’ ‘developing technology,’ ‘being rational,’ and the like in fact reflect such a mentality.⁹⁵ The theme of ‘struggle against nature’ can be observed in all the Institute publications and in the books published at the time related to the Institutes. For instance, the early Tütengil in 1948 thought that the backwardness of the peasants lay in both the ignorance of the peasants and the primitivity of the production forces.⁹⁶ There were quite a few publications which emphasized the importance of changing social relations. In sum, despite the image depicted in the 1960s with regard to the struggle against the aghas, the impetus for the transformation of rural life was believed to be in the struggle against nature, not in the struggle with social relations surrounding the peasants.

Consolidating Turkish Nationalism

Alongside the attempt to create a different lifestyle within the peasant population, the Village Institutes aimed to spread the nationalist ideology in the villages. In the first decades after the War of Independence, Kemalism failed to gain the hearts and minds of the peasants on a mass scale.⁹⁷ It was in the towns and cities that Kemalism found its supporters easily. As was pointed out at that time, ‘in all revolutions, it is the villages which are most resistant to the changes brought about by the new regime.’⁹⁸ Therefore, the problem of how to reach the

⁹² İnan, *Bir Ömrün ...*, pp. 37–38.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁹⁴ I.e., in the speech delivered to the graduates by the director Şerif Tekben from Malatya Akçadağ (Eastern Turkey) Institute. Note that those aghas were also from the Kurdish speaking region which should have been more dangerous if there were a real problem with the aghas: ‘While talking on the employment of the new graduates, the director ended his speech pointing out that it was time for cooperation and conciliation with the aghas who were controlling some of the regions’, *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi*, 1 (January 1945), pp. 161–162.

⁹⁵ For the emphasis on the struggle against nature see Tonguç, *Canlandırılacak ...*, p. 13; Makal, *Köy Enstitüleri ...*, p. 55; and Arman, *Piramidin ...*, pp. 261–262.

⁹⁶ Tütengil, *Köy Enstitüsü ...*, p. 6.

⁹⁷ ‘Kemalism had brought the revolution to the towns and townspeople of Turkey, but had barely touched the villages.’ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 2nd edn. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 479. See also Fikret Madaralı, *Tonguç Işığı*, p. 61.

⁹⁸ Aydemir, *İkinci ...*, p. 320.

peasants remained, but the ruling elite saw the opportunity to use the Village Institutes to solve this problem.

In many of his writings, the architect of the Village Institutes project and the director of Primary Education, İsmail Tonguç, summarized the necessity of having people who were both loyal to the state and helped to spread Turkish nationalism.⁹⁹ To Turkify the village population was a vital task for the new regime. In some regions people talked Kurdish, Arabic, Circassian, etc., and there were even villages named in Kurdish, Laz or Arabic.¹⁰⁰ Many writers emphasized the significance of the Village Institutes in Turkifying the peasants, who did not embrace enough loyalty to Turkish nationalism.¹⁰¹ In this respect, statements such as “Village Institutes are the first and last means ‘to create a nation’ ”¹⁰² can be understood. The Village Institutes did not represent an *aggressive* nationalism, however, as we saw in the urban parts of Turkey during the same period. One does not find many racist arguments in the Village Institute publications,¹⁰³ although Nazi-inspired racism was rampant among significant segments of the ruling elite during the early 1940s especially.¹⁰⁴

Despite the clear ideological expectations from the Village Institutes, Kirby maintained that the Village Institutes project was not a partisan attempt that could be attributed to a specific party or minister. She further argues that there was no vested political interest in the Village Institutes.¹⁰⁵ She seemed to overlook that the era we are talking about witnessed a single-party regime; and it is somewhat naive to believe that such a huge project could have nothing to do with the interests of the Republican People’s Party (RPP), which at the time was an integral part of the state. She repeatedly argues that the Village Institutes were the embodiment of the Kemalist principles in the educational sphere.¹⁰⁶ She seems to regard Kemalism not as a particular ideology but rather as *the* ideology

⁹⁹ ‘Today we have 16,000 villages whose population is less than 250. If we do not go to these villages, if we do not have people loyal to our state, these villages will be full of criminals and bandits. If the people we educate as the hand of the state go there, our flag could be put there at least in national festivals and weekends.’ Tonguç quoted in Özküçür, p. 133.

¹⁰⁰ Köymen, *Köycülük* ..., p. 21.

¹⁰¹ ‘Never forget that while in every region and village the majority of the people have Turkish blood, we often encounter people who actually are Turks but because of lack of historical knowledge and ignorance of the previous periods, chose another nationality with such names as Kurd, Circassian, Laz, and the like. It is obvious that making this whole peasant community accept Turkism without making them aware and without insulting them is not an easy task. Whereas it is really very easy for an urban citizen to prove with historical documentation ... that there is no difference between them, for a peasant ... it is not ... Therefore, the Village Institutes must first of all make every peasant accept that they are Turkish and they must teach the history of the Turk; eventually they have to inject national consciousness and education which is appropriate for a Turk.’ Danis R. Korok, *Cumhuriyet Köye ve Köycülüğe Doğru* (İstanbul: Türk Neşriyat Yurdu, 1951), p. 23 (originally written in 1943).

¹⁰² M. Sabri Taşkın, ‘İş Okulu ve Evrim Tarihi Etrafında’, *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi*, 5–6 (February 1946), p. 139.

¹⁰³ An exception is a translated text in the *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi* by an Institute teacher in which it is stated that some races are inferior and that this inferiority is genetic. See Mustafa Sarıkaya, ‘İnsan ve Çevresi,’ *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi*, 5–6 (February 1946), p. 63 (no mention of the original author).

¹⁰⁴ See Koçak, *Türkiye’de Milli* ..., for a presentation of the Nazi impact on Turkish intellectuals and officials.

¹⁰⁵ Kirby, *Türkiye’de Köy* ..., p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Kemalizm prensiplerinin ve onun eğitime uygulanmış bir şekli olan Köy Enstitülerinin ...’ Kirby (1962), p. 8. Likewise she says: ‘Halbuki Köy Enstitüleri, bir defa çalışma yoluna girdikten sonra, modern Türk tarihinde şimdiye kadar görülmedik bir işi, Türk toplumunun büyük kitlesine Kemalizm devriminin özleyişlerine göre, tesir etme işini, inanılmaz bir hızla gerçekleştirmede sonuçlar vermeyi başardı.’ Ibid., p. 248.

of the nation over and above all other political interests. In reality, the Kemalist regime in general, and the RPP in particular, had a vested interest in the Village Institutes. In fact, the recruitment of militants for the Party ideology from among the peasants of the Village Institutes was quite normal practice.¹⁰⁷ Hürrem Arman who actively took part in the Village Institute project from the outset makes this point clearly. In 1944, in a conversation with Hasan Ali Yücel, the minister of Education at the time, President İnönü, asked whether the graduates of the Village Institutes would support the RPP against political rivals of his party in the future.

As a witness to this conversation, Arman believed that İnönü and some other leaders of the RPP hoped that the graduates of the Village Institutes would be the militants of the Party, or at least support the Party in some way.¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, in the 1946 election, Tonguç sent letters to the administrators of the Village Institutes asking them to support the RPP by all means.¹⁰⁹ The controversies in the late 1940s and 1950s which we shall now consider also vindicate the political and ideological nature of the Institutes.

The Conflicting Interpretations

The Village Institutes were shut down in 1950 by the same Party and leaders who had founded them.¹¹⁰ The reasons for the closure of the Village Institutes have triggered a major controversy in Turkish history and, without doubt, are related to the nature of the Kemalist movement and to the specific historiographical stand that one takes. To conclude this paper, we shall assess this controversy in broad terms, and attempt to elucidate the real nature of the Village Institute phenomenon. Let us start with the right-wing critique which became quite influential during the late 1940s and 1950s.

The main critique of the right-wing politicians against the Village Institutes revolved around their supposedly communist activities. It seems that the Turkish right-wing politicians, including the ones in the RPP, were in no way inferior to the American Senator Joseph McCarthy of the 1950s. For instance, they accused İsmail Tonguç of being influenced by one of the prominent Turkish leftists Ethem Nejat, who was killed with his comrades in Trabzon in 1920. Some time after 1910, at the time when Tonguç came to Eskişehir for his education, Ethem Nejat had been a well-respected teacher there and had been known for his ideas on educational reform. Tonguç certainly knew about Nejat, although we do not have any evidence that they talked to each other. First of all, just because Tonguç knew Nejat does not prove that he was a communist. Second, Nejat

¹⁰⁷ What was also at stake were the political interests of the Republican People's Party. One of the goals of the Institutes included the recruitment of the militants who would favour and endorse the party', see, Yılmaz Elmas, 'Tonguç ve köy Enstitüleri, in *Yeni Toplum, Kuruluşunun 36. Yılında ... 1976*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁸ For Arman's comments along the same lines see Hürrem Arman, *Piramidin Tabanı: Köy Enstitüleri ile Başlatılan Büyük İmece*, vol. 2 (İstanbul: Arkın Kitabevi, 1990), p. 274.

¹⁰⁹ E. Tonguç, *Devrim ...*, p. 214.

¹¹⁰ Aydemir, *İkinci ...*, pp. 380–381; see also Doğan Avcıoğlu, *Türkiye'nin Düzeni* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1968), p. 239.

accepted the communist ideas in the last years of his life, so at the time he was not even a communist.¹¹¹ Along the same lines, Tonguç's political ideas came under attack because of the anti-communist hysteria. He was accused of being a leftist, if not a communist. As a matter of fact, the leftist and left-Kemalist scholars also underlined Tonguç's leftist and populist political views.¹¹² However, Tonguç was an ardent follower of the Kemalism of his day. Moreover, if he has to be labelled as something, he belonged to a political ideology which had deeper roots in the late Ottoman Empire and in Turkey—corporatism. Tonguç envisioned a society based on the division of labour on the basis of professions.¹¹³ In this respect, he follows the tradition of Ziya Gökalp and the solidarism ideologues of the Second Constitutional period.

Some Turkish anti-communists argued that because there were similarities between the Turkish and the Soviet educational system, the Village Institute project was a communist conspiracy. It is true that Tonguç examined closely the Soviet educational system in order to adopt the best of it.¹¹⁴ But we have to remember that Tonguç and his colleagues scrutinized not only the Soviet system but also that of many other countries, especially Germany and Bulgaria. Likewise, they held a deep respect for prominent American educators¹¹⁵ like John Dewey and Booker T. Washington.¹¹⁶ Moreover, the Soviet system was probably one of the least appropriate to follow given the overall value-system of the Soviet regime of the 1930s. During the 1930s the Soviets went through a harsh and catastrophic collectivization, during which the image of the urban working-class was praised and exalted at the *expense* of the rural, 'backward,' 'kulakized' peasants. In this respect the accusation that the Village Institutes were an imitation of the Soviet practice is unfounded.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ For the communist accusation based on Tonguç's admiration of Ethem Nejat see F. İsfendiyaroğlu, *Havadis*, 29 September 1960, republished in *Köy Enstitüleri ve Koç Federasyonu İçyüzleri*, pp. 82–83 (see note 4 above). For Nejat's influence see Elmas, *Tonguç* ..., p. 63 and E. Tonguç, *Devrim* ..., pp. 61–65.

¹¹² Arman, *Piramidin* ..., p. 327.

¹¹³ Although Tonguç's son argues that he was quite leftist because he applied class analysis in understanding societies, his father appears to have been much more like a corporatist. See E. Tonguç, *Devrim* ..., pp. 151–155, 163, and 606 for the description of his father's political ideas concerning corporatism (*meslekçilik*).

¹¹⁴ Elmas, *Tonguç* ..., p. 64.

¹¹⁵ In 1932 and 1933 the Ministry of Education sent students to the United States to study rural education and agricultural economy. They returned in 1936 and 1937. See E. Tonguç, *Devrim* ..., p. 559 and Kirby, *Türkiye'de Köy* ..., p. 74. According to Kirby (pp. 53–54), most of them were influenced by the principles of 'Young Farmer' and '4 H' Club.

¹¹⁶ Dewey was one of the most important intellectuals of the 20th century in the United States. In 1924 he was invited to Turkey to prepare reports on the Turkish educational system. In the 1920s, he published three articles in the *New Republic* about Turkish education. Dewey's report prepared for the Turkish Ministry of Education was generally accused of ignoring the realities of Turkish society. Yalman, *Yarının* ..., pp. 134–135; Kirby, *Türkiye'de Köy* ..., pp. 34–37. As for Booker T. Washington, 'in 1881 (he) established an industrial and agricultural school at Tuskegee, Alabama. Its debut was far from auspicious. The Tuskegee Institute opened in a log shack with 30 students and a single instructor.... Above all, Washington sought economic self-improvement designed to reach common black folk in fields and factories.' J. W. Davidson *et al.*, *Nation of Nations, A Narrative of the American Republic*, 2nd edn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), p. 797.

¹¹⁷ Some more sophisticated right-wing critics continued to argue for a possible link between the peasants and socialism. As Sayılğan says: 'I would like to give those people who cannot reconcile peasantism with communism the example of Mao Zedung.' Aclan Sayılğan, 'İnkâr Fırtınası,' 1962, republished in *Köy Enstitüleri ve Koç Federasyonu İçyüzleri*, p. 118.

The accusation of communism that came from right-wing opponents may also be attributed to some of the writings in the publications of the Village Institutes, and the books that could be found in Village Institute libraries, and so forth. Closer scrutiny of the Village Institute literature, however, shows that this accusation is not appropriate. Among many articles in the *Köy Enstitüsü Dergisi*, only two of them might be characterized as leftist at all. One of them is a book review of Harold Laski's *Democracy and Socialism*,¹¹⁸ in which the author neither praises nor commends the book, but summarizes it *without* criticizing it. The second one is an article written by a Village Institute teacher about the role of music which seems to adopt the method of 'class analysis' to understand music.¹¹⁹ As for the books in the Village Institute libraries, it is impossible to argue that the Village Institute students were reading socialistic or communistic books. By today's standards, most of them could be considered quite liberal.¹²⁰ Last but not least, the number of Institute students convicted of extreme political views is so insignificant that it could never justify the allegations of the anti-communists. According to Şevket S. Aydemir who was very active in the bureaucratic and intellectual circles of the time, the number of students convicted of extreme political views was four out of 20,000, which is even smaller than the same rate in the military schools.¹²¹

The Village Institutes were also accused of being disrespectful to the army and the local state officials. According to the critiques, in the Village Institutes the students were provoked against the army;¹²² but this seems to be a totally unfounded argument. As a matter of fact, if we are to believe the information in the *Köy Enstitüsü Dergisi*, the students liked things related to the military.¹²³ More interestingly, it has been argued that in theatrical and literary works,¹²⁴ the local officials were criticized and attacked. One incident is a theatrical performance in which some local state officials take bribes. This play constitutes the most convincing evidence that the Village Institute students were raised in a mood of opposition to the state!¹²⁵

The rumours about the relationships between the girls and boys also contributed to the devaluing of the Village Institutes in the eyes of the Turkish

¹¹⁸ Harold Laski, 'Demokrasi ve Sosyalizm,' *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi*, 4 (October 1945), pp. 589–596.

¹¹⁹ Şükrü Arseven, 'Alaturka, Alafranga ve Halk Müziği,' *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi*, 5–6 (February 1946), pp. 163–170.

¹²⁰ Here is the list of the books which were considered as communist: *Uyandırılmış Toprak, Ekmek ve Şarap, Ana* (Pearl Buck), *Şahika, Reaya ve Köylü, Sarı Esirler, Aclan Sayılğan, Gölgele Ordusu, Ninka Abla, Sünger Avcısı, Fantomare, Resim Öğretmeni, Değişen Dünya.—İnkâr Fırtınası*, 1962 republished in *Köy Enstitüleri ve Koç Federasyonu İçyüzleri*, p. 139. Also bear in mind that the books the Village Institute libraries got were censored to a large extent. For a description of the censorship see *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi*, 1 (January 1945), p. 169.

¹²¹ Aydemir, *İkinci* ..., p. 382.

¹²² F. İsfendiyaroğlu, *Havadis*, 23 July 1960, republished in *Köy Enstitüleri ve Koç Federasyonu İçyüzleri*, p. 12 (see note 4 above).

¹²³ See the photographs of the students' quasi-militaristic campaigns in *Köy Enstitüleri*, 1 (İstanbul: Maarif Matbaası 1941), pp. 60–63.

¹²⁴ For a poem entitled 'Yeter' (enough) which talks about the hardships of the peasants and attracted severe criticism later from the conservative commentators since the poet seems to advise the peasants to resist those who had exploited them, see Cesarettin Ateş, 'Yeter,' *Köy Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 2 (April 1945), p. 313. For a conservative critique of this poem, see İsfendiyaroğlu (19 September 1960), p. 42.

¹²⁵ İsfendiyaroğlu (19 September 1960), p. 37.

public. Claiming that there were lots of incidents in which moral values degenerated, the Village Institutes were presented as places where moral decay flourished.¹²⁶ However, Ahmet Emin Yalman, who at the time was an ardent supporter of the Village Institutes, observed many Village Institutes and argued that the high moral values and relationships between boys and girls deserved to be appreciated and that they did, in fact, set a good example for the rest of the society. Likewise both Kirby and Güner argue that in relation to the number of students in the Village Institutes such ‘wicked’ incidents are exceptions to the rule and statistically insignificant compared to the rest of the school system.¹²⁷

Another important characteristic of the Village Institutes that bothered many right-wing intellectuals was a secular attitude driven by a critical approach towards religion and superstition. For instance, many preferred the term ‘tanrı’ (God) to ‘Allah’, as is documented in the Village Institute publications.¹²⁸ Likewise, many conservative intellectuals accused the education system of the Village Institutes of promoting contempt for religion.¹²⁹

The leftist interpretation of the Village Institute phenomenon is more complex and of course completely different from the right-wing critiques. According to many, the Village Institute experience turned out to be the victim between the two factions within the Kemalist movement. That is to say, the ruling elite which led the Kemalist ‘Revolution’, sometimes mistakenly conceptualized as a ‘bourgeois democratic revolution’, consisted of two factions, one progressive and the other conservative, with the former trying to push the revolution towards a more leftist position. More specifically, the progressive faction was made up of the petty bourgeois faction, whereas the grand bourgeoisie and the landowners stood at the other end of the ruling bloc. This viewpoint perceives the whole history of the first two decades of the young Republic as a struggle between these two functions. The Village Institute project, in this scenario, is conceptualized as an effort of the progressive faction of the Kemalist movement, which was led by Kemal Atatürk and İsmet İnönü.¹³⁰ The closure of the Village Institutes in this case is explained by the defeat of the progressive faction within the ruling power bloc.

This viewpoint is also supported by a particular understanding of the role of the peasants in the making of the ‘Kemalist Revolution’, in which, the peasants in Turkey actively participated in the ‘Revolution’¹³¹ but the predominance of the landowners in the ruling bloc prevented the endorsement of the peasants by

¹²⁶ *İsfendiyaroğlu* (23 July 1960), p. 7.

¹²⁷ Yalman, *Yarının ...*, pp. 164–165; Kirby, *Türkiye’de Köy ...*, pp. 177–187; and Güner, *Köy Enstitüleri ...*, p. 129.

¹²⁸ See for instance the discourse in a book review about the issue, 2 (April 1945), pp. 302–303.

¹²⁹ *İsfendiyaroğlu* (29 September 1960), pp. 66–67. See also Kirby, *Türkiye’de Köy ...*, p. 175.

¹³⁰ Such a theoretical stand can be found in the following studies: E. Tonguç, *Devrim ...*, pp. 31–32. Kirby, *Türkiye’de Köy ...*, *passim*, characterizes the factions as ‘Anadoluculuk’ vs ‘real Kemalism’. See especially pp. 47, 142, 224 and 330–333. See also Baydar, ‘Sınıfsal ...’, especially pp. 19–20.

¹³¹ Feroz Ahmad shows that the peasants in Anatolia were quite indifferent to the War of Independence. See Feroz Ahmad, ‘The Political Economy of Kemalism’, in A. Kazancıgil & E. Özbudun, (eds) *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1981), p. 155.

the Kemalist state.¹³² In this connection, the Village Institute project has been seen as an attempt by the progressive faction to return to the original supporters and makers of the 'Kemalist Revolution'.

This prevailing interpretation of the Village Institutes is quite flawed. In the first place, Kemal Atatürk, according to this paradigm, must be considered to be against Kirby's 'real Kemalism', since he himself held virtually all power. Second, in 1937 Atatürk appointed Celal Bayar as the Prime Minister, who later became the leader of the Democrat Party, a party which strongly and relentlessly attacked the Village Institutes. Thirdly, the big landowners until recently have occupied a very powerful place in the ruling bloc; and, as we have argued above, although the Village Institutes *might* have threatened them in the long run, the original experiment did not witness a significant struggle against the big landowners. The struggle against the big landowners by the Village Institutes should be considered as a myth cultivated by the leftist literature in the political climate of the 1960s and 1970s. In the same vein, many intellectuals during this time period fabricated a theory which perceives Kemalism as a variant of Socialism or Social Democracy. In fact, the RPP leaders, up until the mid-1960s, never used the term 'left' for themselves; and all kinds of leftist movements in Turkey during the single-party era faced severe punishments.

Towards an Interpretation of the Village Institutes

If the critiques of the right-wing conservatives are irrelevant and reflect no more than an anti-communist hysteria, and if the 'left-Kemalist' and some Socialist viewpoints are quite flawed, what better interpretation can we offer? Why do we have so many different and conflicting interpretations? Why did the very leaders who founded the Village Institutes put an end to this original experience in Turkish history?

Contrary to widespread opinion, it was not the struggle between the different factions within the RPP that led to the demise of the Village Institutes, since there was not initially a wide range of viewpoints in the Party. In fact, there had been a general consensus on the necessity for such an enterprise. Emin Sazak, who was a big landowner in Western Anatolia and later became a prominent Democrat Party leader, strongly endorsed the project. For the most part the Village Institute project was initially regarded as an attempt at education, nothing more. The only significant objection came from some deputies such as Kazım Karabekir, who expressed his suspicion concerning a possible rift between the urban and rural people, because the Village Institutes could only recruit students from the villages. In his opinion, this might, in the long run, create two big classes; one living in the urban areas and the other in the countryside; but this ceased to be an issue. This aside, in fact, it can be said that by and large the ruling elite of the time endorsed the Village Institutes.

Probably one of the most important factors in creating confusion about Village Institutes is that with time, the Institute experiment evolved in such a way that

¹³² Engin Tonguç, for instance, believes in such an idea. See Tonguç, *Devrim* ..., p. 595.

the consequences contradicted the original expectations. First of all, the populism of the Village Institutes exceeded the expectations of the ruling elite. As long as populism remained a matter of rhetoric alone, in other words, as long as the distinction between the elite and the people could somehow be preserved in reality, there was no problem. The populism of the Village Institutes, however, showed indications of going from discourse to reality, as we can see in a quotation from a peasant telling Rauf İnan his views about the way the Village Institute teachers and students approached the people:

Look, until today no official came to us talking like you did. They never considered us as humans. They called us to their place, gave orders or sent gendarmes. So now we understand that we are also humans. You showed us this!¹³³

As is well known, under the single-party regime where elitism was so rampant, respect for the people would have meant a lot for the peasants, who were spoken of as ‘the masters of the nation’ but yet in reality were always despised! However, thanks to Tonguç’s personal efforts especially, more respect for the peasants led to an increase in their self-esteem, which, in turn, might have challenged the privileged position of the elites.

The second unexpected consequence is that the education in the Village Institutes began to create a type of student who happened to be *too* disobedient and self-confident despite the mainstream norms of the single-party regime. This was probably because the students were given more initiative¹³⁴ compared to their counterparts in mainstream schools, since they were ‘learning by doing’ which required initiative. The literature concerning the Village Institute is full of stories in which students, when they left the schools on vacation or for some other purpose, caused problems with the authorities because they were too eager to object to any kind of injustice.¹³⁵ This type of person ran contrary to the ideal character of the single-party regime. This was probably one of the reasons why many graduates of the Village Institutes represented a peasantist and populist outlook and took part in progressive organizations and trade unions in the late 1960s and 1970s.¹³⁶

The third unexpected consequence was that the Village Institute students, by living, working and learning together, paved the way for developing a sense of collective mentality. In so doing, more radical populist ideas, which have historically tended to stress the significance of collective action and goals, could well have appealed to the Village Institute students.¹³⁷ This was seen as a potential threat. As a matter of fact, if one considers the political leanings of the Village Institute graduates in the 1960s and later who have actively taken part

¹³³ İnan, *Bir Ömrün ...*, p. 196.

¹³⁴ For a similar comment see Yalman, *Yarının ...*, pp. 19–20 and 164–165.

¹³⁵ For an example of how they challenged the ideas of a sociology professor see *Köy Enstitüleri Dergisi*, 2 (April 1945), p. 203. For troubles caused by some of the Village Institute students to the local bureaucrats, see Yalman, *Yarının ...*, pp. 175–177.

¹³⁶ Mehmet Bayrak, *Köy Enstitüleri Yazarlar* (Ankara: Doruk, 1978), p. ix; Pakize Türkoğlu, *Tonguç ve Köy Enstitüleri* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1997), pp. 551–555.

¹³⁷ The Village Institute students told Yalman that their main goal was the collective development of the nation rather than individualism. See Yalman, *Yarının ...*, p. 92.

in the intellectual life of the country, one can find evidence to support this argument. If potential threat, namely the development of any kind of collectivist mentality, were to have increased, it would clearly have been at odds with the traditional conservatism and elitism of the ruling elite.

The fourth unexpected consequence is that the Village Institutes began to open up the little world of the peasants to the globe. By building roads, bringing electricity, introducing the radio,¹³⁸ and so forth, the Village Institutes were rightly perceived by many of their opponents as widening the horizons and increasing the mobility of the peasants. These contradicted one of the most important original aims of the Village Institutes, which was to hold the peasants in their villages or, to put it differently, to prevent them from migrating into the cities, and increasing the numbers of working class and creating class conflicts.¹³⁹ Of course this development was something that the corporatist state greatly feared.¹⁴⁰ In the same vein, Engin Tonguç argues that one 'of the aims of the Village Institute enterprise was to cultivate a peasant intelligentsia who would not and could not break from its own class' and 'who would never give up advocating the interests of the class from which it came'.¹⁴¹ Events developed differently, however.

Finally, one must consider the changing world conditions that affected Turkish politics. Internal and external conditions changed so dramatically after 1946 that the Village Institute experiment as discussed in this paper could hardly survive under the new conditions. With the defeat of Nazism and fascism and the US emphasis on democracy together with the growing political influence of the US on Turkish politics, many Turkish intellectuals and bureaucrats sensed a new era¹⁴² in which Turkey could no longer manage with a single-party regime. Under these conditions, institutions designed within the parameters of such a political regime faced different pressures. As İsmet İnönü later said about the Institutes, 'it was impossible to continue such a project under the multi-party regime'.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ İnan, in his memoirs, mentions how his institute offered the nearby region a platform of discussion about current political events, particularly the news of the Second World War by listening to İnan's radio. İnan, *Bir Ömrün ...*, p. 96.

¹³⁹ Note the case of a Village Institute student explaining his aims of preventing the transformation of the peasants into workers in his village after his graduation. See Yalman, *Yarının ...*, p. 73. Similar approaches can be found in the educational principles of Nazi Germany: 'The peasant, too, because he feels that he raises food for his people, is the true patriot, and his close association with the soil develops in him a love for his home which again is the basis of true patriotism.... it is attached to the soil: it has often been settled on the same land for centuries; it should be discouraged from migrating to the overpopulated cities ...' Kandel, *The Making of Nazis*, p. 82.

¹⁴⁰ While the Village Institute law was discussed in the Grand National Assembly Bingöl Deputy Feridun Fikri welcomed the law for its promise to maintain the peasants in their villages: 'But this enterprise has nothing to do with bringing the peasants into the cities. It was achieved in order that the peasants would work in their villages, where they should be attached to their village and land with love.' See Mustafa Ekmekçi, 'Mecliste Köy Enstitüleri Nasıl Açıldı, Nasıl Kandı?', in *Yeni Toplum*, Kuruluşunun 36. Yılında ..., p. 51. In the same session, Manisa Deputy Kazım Nami Duru endorsed the law for exactly the same reasons. See Koçak, *Türkiye'de Milli ...*, p. 240.

¹⁴¹ E. Tonguç, *Devrim ...*, p. 56. He says that 'granting land and providing ways of extra revenue apart from salaries to the teachers and attaching them to the village are examples of this.'

¹⁴² According to a prominent Turkish intellectual of the time, post-World War II signalled a new era, and a new world order. Even the title of his book, 'Turkey and the New World' suggests the sense of a new era. See Ahmet Hamdi Başar, *Türkiye ve Yeni Dünya* (İstanbul: Barış Dünyası, 1943).

¹⁴³ İnönü quoted in Koçak, *Türkiye'de Milli ...*, p. 206.

The new RPP governments between 1946 and 1950 made substantial changes in the Village Institutes, so marking the end of the Institutes as they had been originally known. It was an era of a new kind of politics. Interestingly, however, there was no substantial reaction to the attacks against the Village Institutes until the 1960s. It was probably the lack of support from the peasantry, the RPP leaders and the bureaucrats¹⁴⁴ that explains the silent disappearance of the Village Institutes.

Regarding the place of the Village Institutes in Turkish history, we need to underline the following fact: the Institutes also became the victim of the inconsistent policies of the single-party regime, a characteristic that can be seen in many aspects of social and political life during this period. Under the single-party regime, many attempts were made regarding the main issues of Turkey, but none was handled in a consistent, persistent and radical way. Uncertainty and ambiguity became the norm of this regime.¹⁴⁵ For instance, the Kemalist elite feared industrialization and urbanization and often preferred a peasantist rhetoric, but were unable to show any decisive action to achieve a radical rural transformation. Similar indecisive and inconsistent attitudes may be seen, for instance, in the way that the regime aimed to make a land reform, but did not pursue it in the radical manner that such an attempt would necessitate. They became content with distributing the state lands and hardly involved themselves in anything that could threaten the social relations in the countryside. In the case of the Village Institutes, such contradictory attitudes also appeared. For example, the Kemalist elite aimed to transform the countryside, but mistakenly believed that education was the tool to reach this goal. More important was the wavering approach to gaining political and ideological control of the countryside. The Village Institute project could certainly have helped to consolidate the power of the nation-state in the countryside. For the new Republic and also for the Ottoman Empire, to control the countryside had been a difficult task. To use an analogy from the Ottoman Empire, the Village Institutes, in our opinion, may well be seen as an effort to bring back to rural Turkey the control of the 'Tımarlı Sipahi' in the form of the Village Institute teacher. In other words, it was an attempt to restore and consolidate the *direct* power of the state. A former Village Institute teacher, Asiye Eliçin, who was accused of being a leftist and was forced to leave her Institute, later harshly criticized the Institutes for aiming to expand the control of the state and increase productivity so that the state could increase its tax base.¹⁴⁶ The direct exercise of power would require a direct representative of the state. Teachers trained in accordance with the Kemalist mentality who were ambitious enough to transform the countryside would be promising agents of the state. In the eyes of many, the Village Institute law, which granted economic, technical, and administrative privileges to Village Institute teachers, was proof of the intention of the bureaucracy to extend its

¹⁴⁴ Kirby, *Türkiye'de Köy* ..., p. 304; Arman, *Piramidin* ..., p. 277.

¹⁴⁵ Many articles can be found in *Kadro* presenting the ambiguity of the Kemalist principles. See especially Aydemir 'Programlı ...' p. 6 and *Kadro* (editorial), *Kadro*, 3:34 (1934), p. 4.

¹⁴⁶ See Arman, *Piramidin* ..., p. 462 and E. Tonguç, *Devrim* ..., pp. 565–162.

power into the countryside. For example, teachers were granted free land, a house, seeds and some agricultural equipment. Whoever created trouble for the teachers would face severe punishment under the law.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, the teachers and students in the Village Institutes collected data relating to economic, geographic and social conditions in their regions and reported back to Ankara either by reports or by publications. Even a brief survey of the Village Institute publications substantiates this point. State control required information, and the Village Institutes were instrumental in gaining this information. However, the consequence of such a restoration of direct power would eventually clash with the power of the landowners in the long run,¹⁴⁸ and would necessitate a consistent and ambitious policy towards the aghas which the RPP lacked. In this respect, the uncertainties and ambiguities of the Kemalist regime also paved the way for the failure of the Village Institutes.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ E. Tonguç, *Devrim* ..., pp. 229–230.

¹⁴⁸ It would be naïve to think that the landowners did not feel threatened by the Village Institute enterprise. This feeling may also explain the intense opposition of the landowners as soon as the Village Institutes began consolidating themselves during the mid-1940s.

¹⁴⁹ These ambiguities and uncertainties may well be explained by the organic relationships of the RPP elite with the ruling classes.