

Chapter II Debating over Land Reform: Egypt in the Late Parliamentary Era, 1945–1952

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Introduction

This paper aims to examine the public debate on agricultural land reform in Egypt from the end of WWII to 1952, one of the most pressing social issues of the period. It adopts the perspective of intellectual history, paying attention, in particular, to lively discussions and the exchange of opinions expressed by participants through various channels such as newspapers, journals, books, and parliamentary debates.

The last decade prior to the 1952 coup in Egypt witnessed political deterioration, which instigated ardent public debates on internal and external politics. The public debate was not confined to politics but extended to social issues. The worsening of political and social conditions compelled the public to speak out, often criticizing government policies and the government itself.

Several factors characteristic of the period contributed to the flourishing of the public debate. First, a new generation called “*al-jīl al-jadīd*” emerged, which grew up in the post-WWI liberal age and obtained modern higher education. They developed critical minds and were increasingly politicized as the external and internal political situation worsened. Second, a variety of conflicting ideological and political trends that simulated public debate emerged, ranging from liberalism, socialism, communism, and Islam, to militant nationalism. However, lively public debates would not have occurred without an active publishing business. In this relatively free era, the publishing business in Cairo, a center for publication in the Arab region for several decades, reached its peak and provided participants with various means for expressing their opinions, despite occasional government crackdowns.

It should be noted that the participants in public debate addressed in this paper constituted a limited number of politicians, government officials, journalists, writers, social critics, and scholars. They were surrounded by a larger public, mostly urban-educated male that was interested in contemporary political and social issues. They were indirect participants in the debate, buying and reading newspapers and magazines, listening to news, and talking and expressing their opinions privately. A great majority of Egyptian peasants living in rural areas were excluded from the public debate, despite the fact that the very topic of land reform would affect their lives in the future. Barely making ends meet and suffering from a high illiteracy rate, they had little, if any, access to press and books and no channel through which

to express their opinions.

Social issues that occupied the minds of Egyptians during the period were summarized in “poverty, ignorance, and disease,” the phrase circulated widely in the press. Among the three issues, poverty, particularly that of rural areas, was considered essential. Analyses of the grave situation of rural poverty and its solutions were discussed tirelessly in press, books, and lectures.

Among the proposals aimed at ending rural poverty, limiting large landownership was the most controversial. At the same time, in its comprehensive effects upon the socioeconomic structure, it was considered potentially one of the most effective for achieving an equitable distribution of wealth. The proposal directly touched the vested interests of the large land owning class in Egypt, which had long dominated not only politics but also the national economy, and enjoyed special honor and prestige. The reaction of such large landowners should be understood in light of Egypt’s particular notion of land possession. In Egypt, the possession of land is more than merely the possession of a secure means of wealth. It is also an ultimate symbol of prestige and honor and the key to entering the elite classes. Thus, those who possess wealth but not land hasten to buy an estate in order to be recognized as a full-fledged member of the elite.¹ Heavy investment in scarce land resources reached such a degree that it was once remarked, “The land is a bottomless sink for Egyptian capital.”² The negative impact on the economy and society became undeniable. Under such circumstances, the proposal to limit landownership naturally collided with the vested interests of large landowners and implicitly challenged their political power. Inevitably, it instigated a heated public debate and encountered strong opposition from the large landowning class.

Several Egyptian and foreign works substantially addressed the debate during the pre-revolutionary period on the limitation of large landownership, along with numerous works mentioning the issue briefly.³ Most works stress the unshakable opposition the proponents faced from ruling political elements, either the government or major political parties and leaders. In order to counter this ruling group, they usually cite favorable minority opinions voiced by either well known moderate social reformists or oppositional groups such as communist groups, Young Egypt, and the Muslim Brothers.

This account is not completely wrong. But it is a rather simplified description of the debate that misses crucial points characterizing public sociopolitical discourse in the postwar era. First, even among the political elites their views with regard to limiting landholdings were not necessarily monolithic. As seen subsequently in the

¹ Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt’s Liberal Experiment: 1922–1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 16.

² This is the title of an article by A. Abdel-Hamid Nazmy in *L’Egypte contemporaine*, nos. 218–19 (March–April 1944): 239–41.

debate on Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb's bill in the Senate, while there were politicians who verbally opposed it without any compromise, at the same time a small number of politicians expressed their supports. Between the two camps were a majority of senators who showed various shades of attitude. At any event, avoiding rejecting it outright, the Senate turned it over to another committee under the pretext of further investigation.

One of the reasons for this disingenuous act was their calculation of a strong public reaction, especially from the oppositional press. This leads to a second point: a large portion of the Egyptian public, including those who were unexpected, increasingly approved of land reform or at least were compelled to do so. By the early 1950s, public opinion about the rural issue had become particularly radical, as it became clear in their eyes that the government was incapable of handling it effectively.

Conventional studies overlooked another point. They only paid attention to well-known political leaders, critics, and oppositional groups, and entirely disre-

³ For example, Gabriel Baer, *A History of Landownership in Modern Egypt 1800–1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), chap. 6; 'Azza Wabbī, *Tajribat al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-Lībīrālīyya fī Miṣr* (The experience of liberal democracy in Egypt) (Cairo: Markaz al-Dīrāsāt al-Siyāsīyya wa-l-Istrāṭījīyya bi-l-Ahrām, 1985), 214–31; Ṭāriq al-Bishrī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Siyāsīyya fī Miṣr 1945–1952* (The national movement in Egypt 1945–1952), 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1983), pt. 3 passim; Ḥilmī Aḥmad 'Abd al-'Āl Shalabī, "Al-Ḥayāt al-Barlamāniyya fī Miṣr (1936–1952)" (Parliamentary life in Egypt 1936–1952) (PhD diss., Ain Shams University, 1981–82), 276–92; 'Abd al-'Azīm Ramaḍān, *Al-Ṣīrā' al-Ijtīmā'ī wa-l-Siyāsī fī Miṣr mundhu Thawrat 23 Yūliyū ilā Nihāyat Azmat Māris 1954* (The social and political struggle in Egypt from the July 23th revolution to the end of the March crisis of 1954), 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1989), 69–73; 'Āṣim al-Dasūqī, *Kibār Mullāk al-Arāḍī al-Zirā'iyya wa-Dawruhum fī al-Miṣrī, 1914–1952* (Large agricultural landowners and their role in Egyptian society) (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa al-Jadīda, 1975), 307–16; Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Random House, 1968), 64–68; Eunkyung Lee, "The Idea of Land Reform in the Egyptian Parliament 1942–1952" (M.A. thesis, the American University in Cairo, 1996), 38–85; Aḥmad al-Shirbīnī, "Fikrat al-İslāḥ al-Zirā'ī fī Miṣr fī al-Arba'ināt: Dirāsa fī Mashrū' Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb" (The idea of agrarian reform in Egypt in the 1940s: A study of the bill of Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb), *Majallat Kullīyyat al-Ādāb* (Jāmi'at al-Qāhira) (The bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University) 58, no. 4 (1998): 277–313. Baer points out two types of advocates calling for limiting landholdings: one is "a group of Intellectuals, moderate reformers, whose proposals were to be carried out within the existing social and political framework," and the other, those who "insisted on more extreme measures, including the confiscation of large estates and their redistribution among the fellahs" (Baer, *A History of Landownership*, 211, 213). But he states that those who advocated real reform were "limited to a small circle of intellectuals" (Ibid., 204). Wabbī discusses a number of both moderate and radical proponents demanding the limiting of landholdings. However, she does not closely examine the proponents (or the opponents) and their discourses. The same is true for most of other works cited above.

garded the opinions of less prominent socially conscious professionals and citizens. These less known journalists, teachers, professionals, and students nonetheless expressed a variety of opinions on this topic and helped shape public opinion.

1. Proposals for the Limitation of Large Landownership in the Mid-Forties

The idea of limiting large landownership did not emerge in a vacuum. It took shape slowly, starting in the mid-forties in the public debates on poverty, the rural problem, and the national economy. Opinions on such issues had been voiced by a wide range of educated Egyptians of various political and ideological persuasions. During its course of the debates, different ideas and opinions often collided, while at the same time crossing boundaries, influencing one another, and occasionally merging. The fact that by the mid-forties, several similar proposals on land reform had emerged was a likely result of this dynamic interaction of different ideas and perspectives. Most advocated the limiting of large landownership, whatever their differences in method and ultimate purpose.

Minor and isolated proposals aside, the earliest and most sensational proposal to limit large landownership was, as indicated earlier, that of the Sa'dist senator Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb, first submitted to the Senate in December 1943.⁴ In this bill, Khaṭṭāb proposed to prohibit anyone who possessed 50 feddans or more from acquiring additional land except through inheritance. The proposal was carefully designed to achieve the limitation of landholding up to 50 feddans within a few generations through the practice of inheritance without harming current possessions or entailing government expense. It is said that the Sa'dist senator owed the formulation of his proposal to Marxist groups; he is reported to have frequented the House of Scientific Research (Dār al-Abḥāth al-'Ilmiyya), a legal organization run by the

⁴ 'Abd al-'Āl Shalabī, "Al-Ḥayāt al-Barlamāniyya fi Miṣr (1936–1952)," 279. Although this is a minor point, it should be made clear. There is confusion over the date of Khaṭṭāb's submission of the proposal to the Senate, probably because the bill underwent a long and complicated process at the Senate. Baer cited it as the end of 1944 (Baer, *A History of Landownership*, 202), while Ramaḍān gives February 1944 (Ramaḍān, *Al-Ṣirā' al-Ijtimā'ī wa-l-Siyāsi fī Miṣr*, 69). Ra'ūf 'Abbās says early 1944, so does Abdel Malek. Ra'ūf 'Abbās, *Jamā'at al-Nahḍa al-Qawmiyya* (The National Renaissance Association) (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1986), 80; Abdel Malek, *Egypt: Military Society*, 64. Shalabī's date (29 December 1943) is most likely correct because he directly cited from Parliamentary Records. Ramaḍān's date is actually when the bill was turned from the Committee of Proposals and Petitions in the Senate after examining it over to its Committee of Social Affairs. *Maḍābiḥ* (Egyptian parliamentary records) the Senate, 15 February 1944, 330).

members of the communist group *Iskra*.⁵ The close contact and the exchange of ideas between a young Sa‘dist senator and communists were not unusual during this period.

In 1945, two influential books on the subject of rural problems and their solutions were published. Although they were written from distinctively different perspectives, coincidentally, both the books included in their proposals the issue of limiting large landownership. One of them, Mirrīt Ghālī’s book on agrarian reform, indicates a considerable shift in Ghālī’s thoughts on socioeconomic reform in Egypt since his earlier book *Siyāsat al-Ghad* (The policy of tomorrow), published in 1938. Although he discusses socioeconomic problems at some length in the earlier book, he clearly downplays the significance of the distribution problem, stressing, instead, overpopulation and the poverty of economic resources.⁶ However, less than a decade later, Ghālī focused primarily on the rural social structure and distribution of land.⁷ He concluded that in order to revitalize the national economy, it was necessary to create a small, independent peasantry and divert rural capital, which was heavily invested in landed properties, to industry and trade. Large landownership had produced an increasing number of landless and near-landless peasants who could not support themselves and are required to be restricted. Such a shift in thinking arose from his reassessment of the role of the state in socioeconomic affairs. Ghālī abandoned the idea of restraining the state from socioeconomic affairs and assigned it a vital role in agrarian reform.⁸

It is in this context of changing ideas that Ghālī presented a proposal of limiting large landownership in his book, *Al-Isḫāḥ al-Zirā‘ī* (Agrarian reform) published in 1945. In a chapter entitled “The Restriction of Large Landownership,” Ghālī identifies the goal of such restriction: the fair distribution of land and the diversion of capital. On the fair distribution of land he writes:

One tract of large landed property deprives hundreds of rural families from attaining the economic independence and social stability that they are entitled to have... Therefore, landownership has to remain within reasonable limits so

⁵ Abdel Malek, *Egypt: Military Society*, 64, 398. The House of Scientific Research was founded in 1944, but how exactly this group influenced Khaṭṭāb is not clear. According to Abdel Malek, Khaṭṭāb often saw Shuhdī ‘Aṭīyya al-Shāfi‘ī and ‘Abd al-Ma‘būd al-Jubaylī in the house.

⁶ Mirrit Boutros Ghali (Mirrīt Buṭrus Ghālī), *The Policy of Tomorrow*, trans. Isma‘il R. el Faruqi (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1953), 49.

⁷ The reasons for Ghālī’s shift are not clear. Ra‘ūf ‘Abbās, however, points to the deepening of poverty during WWII and general awareness on the issue of distribution. ‘Abbās also indicates that Ghālī republished *Siyāsat al-Ghad* as late as in 1944, in whose introduction Ghālī hinted a slight modification in his thoughts. ‘Abbās, *Jamā‘at al-Nahḍa al-Qawmiyya*, 82.

⁸ Ibid.

that a large tract of land is not concentrated in the hands of a small group and that the space is available as much as possible for middle and small landownership.⁹

For Ghālī, the restriction of landholding cannot be completed without the diversion of capital:

It is inevitable that those possessing capital are discouraged from seeking large agricultural properties and encouraged to invest it in industry and trade; thus our economic culture will advance and we will overcome this obsolete mentality that real wealth is land alone and that all that can be accumulated has to be used for expanding izbas and estates.¹⁰

To achieve this goal, Ghālī presents two approaches: fixing a maximum limit to landholding and imposing a progressive tax on large landed properties. By pursuing social change within the existing liberal framework, Ghālī's proposal clearly reveals his group's moderate, reformist character. In his words, "The importance in this is that we do not want revolution but reform."¹¹ With regard to both its goals and the method by which it established the maximum amount of landholding, Ghālī's proposal shows a remarkable resemblance to that of Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb. By prohibiting the acquisition of new land above a certain limit, with the exception of inheritance, both adopt a gradualist method that postpones the achievement of land restriction into the future. The only difference is that Ghālī's ceiling is 100 feddans, while Khaṭṭāb's is 50 feddans. Both intend to encourage the activities of individual middle-range owners, who constitute the backbone of rural life. Indeed, Ghālī refers to Khaṭṭāb's bill in his book and expresses his support. "It was really proposed in parliament in early 1944; and the bill is still reviewed by the special committee. We can only urge the parliament to make a quick decision on the bill, so that it will take a course toward approval and implementation."¹² It is difficult to define the exact relationship between the two proposals. But judging from his remark that "public opinion has already begun to consider the restriction of agricultural property as a matter of course and reform inevitable,"¹³ Ghālī was mostly likely influenced by Khaṭṭāb's proposal in the parliament and encouraged by increasing public support for it. Ghālī saw that this proposal was a natural product of current social circumstances, firmly supported by the public.

⁹ Mirrīt Buṭrus Ghālī, *Al-Iṣlāḥ al-Zirā'ī: al-Milkiyya, al-Ījār, al-'Amal* (Agrarian reform: Landownership, rent, and labor) (Cairo: Dār al-Fuṣūl, 1945), 57.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹² *Ibid.*, 62.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Another book that addresses the restriction of large landownership is *Mushkilat al-Fallāḥ* (The problem of the peasant) by Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd, a leading member of a Marxist group, al-Fajr al-Jadīd (New Dawn); it was also published in 1945. It was a coincidence that Ghālī and Ṣādiq Sa'd presented proposals for limiting large landownership in the same year. However, the proposals reflect unmistakable differences in their goals and methods. Ṣādiq Sa'd criticizes Mirrīt Ghālī's approach to the peasant problem as fundamentally flawed in its avoidance of larger political and social issues. In Ṣādiq Sa'd's view, the central problem lies in the monopolization of one means of production by large landowners, which also entails a monopoly on political and social influence.¹⁴ Ghālī would not have been persuaded by Ṣādiq Sa'd's purely theoretical argument, since his practical approach does not surpass the liberal framework, whereas Ṣādiq Sa'd, as a communist, tends to link every issue to the problem of the existing political framework and its legitimacy.

Ṣādiq Sa'd devoted the final chapter of his book, entitled "The First Stage in Reform," to a discussion of solutions to the peasant problem, proposing a maximum limit of up to 50 feddans of land and the distribution of excess land to poor peasants. Following this proposal is another one increasing production through cooperative societies and enacting legislation aimed at protecting the peasant class.¹⁵ Unlike Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb and Mirrīt Ghālī's moderate proposals, which do not affect the current land system right away, Ṣādiq Sa'd's proposed reduction is immediate. He also objects to compensating the affected landowners, because, as he says, "a plot of 50 feddans of agricultural land produces more than 1,000 pounds a year in net profit and this is quite sufficient for paying the necessities of an ordinary family under the present circumstances."¹⁶ His is certainly one of the most radical proposals to emerge in this debate. On the other hand, by communist standards, it is mild in comparison to the Soviet experiment of nationalization of agricultural land. Its mildness could be explained as tactical, but it could also be an indication of his relatively realistic thinking wherein he analyzes conditions in Egypt carefully in regard to the application of his theory. His implicit expression is evidenced in the chapter title "The First Stage of Reform," although there is no further reference to what would ensue after the first stage.¹⁷

¹⁴ Wahbī, *Tajribat al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-Lībīrāliyya fī Miṣr*, 218.

¹⁵ Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd, *Mushkilat al-Fallāḥ* (The problem of the peasant) (Cairo: Dār al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn li-l-Nashr, 1945), 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁷ Ṣādiq Sa'd considers large scale production to be more productive and better than small scale production (*Ibid.*, 65). In order to solve the problem of small scale production, he proposes cooperative production by combining individually owned land for efficiency. He states that "we think that the idea of redistribution of landed property without encouraging peasants to be united under the cooperative societies for production is a defective idea" (*Ibid.*, 67).

2. Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb's Bill in the Senate

Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb first submitted his bill to the Senate at the end of 1943, a moderate bill that prohibited the acquisition of greater than fifty feddans of new land. Before its final rejection in the Senate on 16 June 1947, it went through several stages, provoking heated debate both on the floor of and outside the Senate. Khaṭṭāb's bill is customarily described as being so premature for its time that it was rejected by powerful senators with direct connections to large landowners.

Previous studies convey the impression that the entire spectrum of politicians belonging to the established political machinery was uniformly opposed to the bill. It is true that many older, more influential senators were opposed to it and behind the scenes, there was considerable pressure exerted to discard the bill. However, we should not overlook the fact that the actual reactions of the senators varied greatly. In fact, most avoided openly opposing the bill for fear of public criticism, and many were critical of those who were openly against it. A few senators expressed their support for the bill.

Moreover, the implications of the following points needed to be newly examined. First, Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb was not a radical minority politician, but a member of a mainstream political party, the Sa'dist Party. He was hardly an exception with regard to his views. It was not only radical youth but reform-minded young politicians as well, who were in favor of land reform. Second, the committee in charge of examining the bill before the plenary discussion unanimously agreed on the principal of the bill. Third, Khaṭṭāb's bill was not rejected outright in the plenary session, where those who wished to do so encountered objection from other senators; however, it was eventually sent to another committee on the pretext of further investigation.

After Khaṭṭāb submitted the bill to the Senate, it turned the bill to over the Committee for Social Affairs and Labor in February 1944 for further investigation. As mentioned above, the bill was supported by all members of the committee. Although the names of the committee members at the time were not listed on the report submitted to the Senate,¹⁸ from 'Āsim Dasūqī's work, certain members of the

¹⁸ The members of the Committee for Social Affairs and Labor as of 30 January 1945 are listed in Parliamentary Records. They are: Aḥmad Hamza, Aḥmad 'Abduh, Bahjat al-Sayyid Abū 'Alī, Jalāl Fahīm, 'Adhīr Jibrān, 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Rāfi 'ī, 'Azīz Mirḥām, Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb, Muḥammad 'Abd al-Laṭīf, and Muḥammad 'Aṭīyyat al-Nāzir. It is interesting that the prominent writer, al-'Aqqād, and the celebrated historian, al-Rāfi 'ī are included (*Maḍābiḥ*, the Senate, 30 January 1945, 37). 'Azīz Mirḥām was a Wafdist labor leader from a wealthy Coptic landowning family. Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882–1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 181.

committee were likely to be large landowners.¹⁹ If this was so the case, in mid-forties even large landowners began to examine the status-quo of instances involving large landholding. The committee report asserted its principal support for the bill and summarized its positive effects:

The committee unanimously agreed on the principle of the bill which set a limit on the increase of large properties... The proposal is considered as a good step toward the spread of small landownership in the future... The committee noticed that this proposal will indeed create domestic capital from the income of large properties. The capital will be prohibited from purchasing new agricultural land unlike the current practice. The committee sees that the creation of this domestic capital is an effective move in the present situation in which the country is by all means to realize social justice and to raise the living standard of the great majority of the population.²⁰

From early 1944 to June in 1945, the committee held eight meetings and conducted full investigations on the bill. On 25 June 1945, the special committee, chaired by Jalāl Fahīm, finally presented its report to the plenary session in the Senate, where the first discussion of the bill was held. In the report, the committee expressed its principal support for Khaṭṭāb's bill, except for the recommendation for increasing the ceiling on the legal possession of land in the future from 50 to 100 feddans. Despite no word-for-word record of how committee discussions went on or how the agreement reached, the report summarized the discussions of certain meetings attended by representatives from two different governments, one headed by Muṣṭafā al-Naḥḥās and the current government of al-Nuqrāshī.

One meeting was held in March 1944 attended by Aḥmad Ḥusayn, the director of the Fellaḥ Department in the Ministry of the Social Affairs in al-Naḥḥās government. Ḥusayn argued that limitation of large landholding could be realized by three alternative projects studied by the Fellaḥ Department: the sale of state land to poor small peasants, the government's involvement in the purchase and distribution of the land in the market, and the imposition of progressive taxation on landowners. He suggested that Khaṭṭāb's proposed bill would not be necessary if these projects were implemented. The committee, which supported Khaṭṭāb's bill, responded negatively to Aḥmad Ḥusayn's proposals on two points: first, such projects were

¹⁹ The exact percentage is not available, but according to al-Dasūqī, in the period of 1931–34, the percentage of large landowners in the Committee of Social Affairs and Labor was 55.5 percent and the year 1936 the percentage was 44.4 percent, whereas, the percentage of the same committee in the Chamber of Deputies during 1945–49 was 28.4 percent. However, the number of large landowners in the Senate was usually higher than that of the Chamber of Deputies (Dasūqī, *Kibār Mullāk al-Araḍī al-Zirā'iyya*, 214–16).

²⁰ *Maḍābiḥ*, the Senate, Supplement 88, 25 June 1945, 173.

not likely to evolve into legislation, due to objections either from the government or parliament; second, even if they became law, they were unlikely to restrict large landownership.²¹

After current al-Nuqrāshī government was formed in early 1945, it sent the minister and other representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs to a series of committee meetings. The report stressed that those officials did not disagree with the principal of the bill, though they said that the way the bill proposed to implement was premature and other methods should be attempted first.²²

The senators discussed the bill for the first time on 25 June 1945. In the second session, on 2 July they decided to turn the bill over for further investigation to a special joint committee comprised of members of the Social Affairs, Finance, Justice, Agriculture, and Public Works Committees. Their decision can be understood as the result of behind-the-scenes maneuvering for the practical termination of the bill, but in a way that would not arouse sharp public criticism. It seems true that many of the senators hoped for a quick decision to reject the bill, but they soon became aware of the danger of opposing it outright. By the mid-forties, it was unwise, even for those who wanted to maintain the status quo, to openly dismiss any reform agenda. This situation demonstrates the deep concern of the public, particularly the press, with the issue of rural poverty and the maldistribution of wealth. Furthermore, as I have already pointed out, the minutes of both sessions reveal varied reactions to the bill. Some senators loudly insisted on its immediate rejection, but they were clearly a minority in the session and got little support. They were even criticized by other senators for their disgraceful and intransigent attitudes. Irrespective of the senators' real intentions, many supported further investigation or at least praised the idea of proposals that seriously addressed social problems. There were also senators who firmly supported the bill.

At the 25 June session, a tense atmosphere reigned from the outset. The session began with a speech by Prime Minister Maḥmūd Fahmī al-Nuqrāshī, who also happened to be the leader of Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb's party, the Sa'dist Party. In his speech, al-Nuqrāshī declared his government's opposition to the bill and presented alternative policies: "The government thinks that the aims intended by the proposal can be gradually achieved by other means. These alternatives should be exhausted before considering such a risky proposal as this bill; otherwise far-reaching consequences will befall us."²³

Immediately after the speech, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, the president of the Senate and leader of the Liberal Constitutionalist Party, directed the session to dis-

²¹ Ibid., 174.

²² Ibid., 174–75.

²³ *Maḍābiḥ*, the Senate, 25 June 1945, 429.

cuss a motion proposed by Ṣabrī Abū ‘Ālam,²⁴ leader of the Wafdist opposition in parliament and secretary general of the Wafd Party. The motion proposed turning the bill over to another special committee. (A year later, Abū ‘Ālam disclosed the untold story of tacit understanding between him and Haykal.²⁵) Following Abū ‘Ālam’s motion, ‘Abd al-Salām al-Ghaffār, one of the hawkish senators, insisted on the immediate rejection of the bill: “we must finish the subject tonight once and for all and I assure you that the mood of the parliament and the mood of the country are against the bill. (applause)” Abū ‘Ālam eloquently countered al-Ghaffār’s statement and reiterated the importance of further investigation.

Honorable senators, the bill submitted before you tonight is one of the most important bills presented to this respected parliament. The idea revealed here is the one that we must take seriously for further investigation... It is the right and duty of this parliament to study this bill entirely and compare it... to the plan that the government wants to present in the face of social circumstances which urge the honorable Senate to study the proposal and to submit it [to parliament]. It is true that he made a praiseworthy effort in the study of his subject and in the preparation for it. I have examined some of the minutes of the committee and I understand that he prepared a lot of documents and other things that justified him. On that account I do not think it proper that we block his way nor the way of the government. If you think that this subject should be given a special care, the care that I recommend is to form a special committee for examining it.²⁶

²⁴ He was a lawyer by profession and the minister of justice in the al-Naḥḥās government in 1937 and 1942–44. He then became the secretary general of the Wafd until his death in 1947.

²⁵ Al-Bishrī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Siyāsiyya fī Miṣr*, 219. For details, see note 26.

²⁶ *Maḏābiḥ*, the Senate, 25 June 1945, 430. It is noteworthy that al-Bishrī reveals the ambiguous attitude of the Wafd Party towards the bill. Abū ‘Ālam was the secretary-general of the Wafd Party at the time. Al-Bishrī says that “the Wafd has sympathy with this bill.” This remark suggests that the conventional interpretation that the established political parties simply rejected land reform needs modification. For example, Gabriel Baer says that “[t]he most striking feature of the attitude of the political parties was their common opposition to any reform in the distribution of land” (Baer, *A History of Landownership*, 205). According to al-Bishrī, Abū ‘Ālam said that the Wafd could not reach a unanimous agreement on this subject at the meeting. But Abū ‘Ālam eventually agreed with Haykal to defeat the bill by turning it over to another committee (Al-Bishrī, *al-Ḥaraka al-Siyāsiyya fī Miṣr*, 218–19). What went on at the Wafd Party’s meeting and what Abū ‘Ālam had on his mind are worth exploring. Abū ‘Ālam possessed 500 feddans of land, but *Rūz al-Yūsuf* once said that he favored radical socialism. Donald M. Reid, “Fu’ad Siraj al-Din and the Egyptian Wafd,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 4 (October 1980): 730, 742. Also Abdel Malek says that he and Makram ‘Ubayd are “genuine representatives of the lower middle class urban intellectual and profoundly liberal and democratic” (Abdel Malek, *Egypt: Military Society*, 20).

After another exchange, this one between a supporter of al-Ghaffār and Abū ‘Ālam, Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb began to talk. Frustrated by the reaction of some senators, he suggested the withdrawal of the bill.

As the one who submitted the bill and also as a reporter for the committee, I have the right to speak as I want. If you wish to reject the proposal without discussion, I am ready to withdraw it. However, I do not believe that the Egyptian Senate—it is the greatest legislative body in this country—prevents me from speaking. However, its opinion was expressed before it listens to what I am going to say... [The bill] concerns three-fourths of the population of Egypt. It concerns their lives, livelihood, food, and shelter. It is up to you to accept it or reject it... If you want to delay it or turn it to another committee, I am ready to withdraw the bill now.

“Withdraw it!” One of al-Ghaffār’s supporters shouted. A little later, another conservative, Muḥammad Maḥmūd Khalīl,²⁷ made an official proposal to reject the bill that was submitted. This rapidly built up tension between Khalīl and Khaṭṭāb. Khaṭṭāb’s next remark was so inappropriate that the president interrupted, “No, no, no, it is not right to say that.” The exchange was greeted with noisy shouting. The president ordered clerks not to write down what Khaṭṭāb had said in the record.²⁸

After a while, order was restored. Subsequently, the senators that wanted to defend Khaṭṭāb from this outright rejection and were willing to listen to him began to speak. For example, Ḥusayn Muḥammad al-Jindī appealed to the president, “I would like the President to protect the reporter who also submitted the bill from those boycotters, so that he is able to deliver his speech.” Another senator, ‘Abd al-Qawīy Aḥmad,²⁹ said, “I think that my friend Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb Bey, the author of this bill, engaged in a quick war and I would say that it indeed failed. This bill has to be presented to parliament in another way.” Aḥmad continued, giving Khaṭṭāb sympathetic advice yet distancing himself from Khaṭṭāb’s proposal. At the same time, he sharply criticized the position adopted by al-Ghaffār and Khalīl.

I urge my friend Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb Bey to carry out a wide campaign for his bill in professional groups such as the Society of Economy and Legislation

²⁷ He was born in 1895 and was a parasitologist by profession and professor of medicine. He was also a large landowner and director of several joint stock companies. He became the minister of agriculture in the al-Naḥḥās government in 1937, and was also a director of Bank Misr in the late forties.

²⁸ *Madābiḥ*, the Senate, 25 June 1945, 431.

²⁹ He was the minister of public works in the governments of ‘Alī Māhir in 1939–40, Sirrī in 1940–41, and Ṣidqī in 1946 and the minister of civil protection in the government of Sirrī in 1941–42.

and the Association of Engineers and other professional organizations outside the parliament, so that he will learn from public opinion what he can use to arm himself against this sweeping attack from some of the members of this parliament... Regarding the rejection of the bill as submitted, we are disgraced by this rejection. I am not pleased with the rejection. We do not deserve the name of the greatest legislative body in the country [because of it]. (applause)³⁰

Another senator, ‘Abd al-Mājid Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ,³¹ stated that this bill was one of the first to seriously address social problems and, pointing to the current polarization of opinion on the social issues, urged the senators to be open-minded and examine the bill from various points of view:

This bill—to my mind—is not so defective as to merit the resistance it had encountered. Rather, it is a bill that the committee studied for a full year and agreed with more or less unanimously. I think that it deserves to be presented to you. In my opinion it is one of the first social bills which try to remedy some of our economic and social diseases. We have not been ready to enter into these sorts of studies, although the world around us is divided into two camps... We must begin with the study of these issues seriously so as to know which way we will follow and which school of thought we will take. For all these reasons I think that it is our right as well as duty to allow the members of the committee of social affairs and its reporter to inform us of all of their points of view. Then we should open our minds to the words of their opposition... We do not pay attention to solely fulfill the desires and concerns of one or two classes, but we must take a wide view in order to be able to benefit the entire society.³²

With the support of these speakers, Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb was finally allowed to explain his bill in the session and he embarked on a long speech. First, he stressed the increasing awareness, voiced both inside and outside the country, of the maldistribution of land and quoted some of these voices. In particular, he mentioned the speech recently delivered by the Minister of Finance Makram ‘Ubayd in the Chamber of Deputies on the maldistribution of agricultural land in Egypt. After the lengthy criticism of the alternative proposals offered by the government, Khaṭṭāb addressed the basic principles of the proposal, which had become increasingly popular worldwide during the war: “the government and parliament are not created for

³⁰ *Maḍābiḥ*, the Senate, 25 June 1945, 432.

³¹ He was a minister of state in the Ḥasan Ṣabrī government in 1940, the minister of transportation and supply in the Sirī government in 1940–41, and the minister of public works in the al-Nuqrāshī government in 1946–48.

³² *Maḍābiḥ*, the Senate, 25 June 1945, 432–33.

the service of part of the country but the entire country”; “the first duty of the government and the parliament is to protect the lives of individuals. Everyone should enjoy the maximum share of the necessities of life.”³³ These principles, Khaṭṭāb remarked, were supported by the United Nations and were actually implemented in countries like Britain.

Next, he reminded the senators that influential figures such as al-Naḥḥās Pasha, Makram ‘Ubayd Pasha, ‘Alī al-Shamsī, as well as foreign advocates “agreed that the extensive large landownership in Egypt is the reason for the poverty of a great majority of the people.” Before ending his speech, referring to the general criticism that the bill was communistic, he affirmed that “this bill is far from even moderate socialism,” and continued:

The government says that it is a risky bill, but I affirm that its content does not go further than to symbolize our liberation from the old mentality that dismisses anything indiscriminately and our start to move on to the direction that the world is heading.³⁴

When Khaṭṭāb completed his speech, the president of the Senate immediately directed the session back to a discussion of the procedure for the bill. ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād,³⁵ an influential literary figure serving as a senator at the time, encouraged Muḥammad Maḥmūd Khalīl, who had urged rejecting the bill as submitted, to explain his reasons. By this time, the tide had turned against Khalīl’s extreme position. Khalīl tried to avoid the spotlight, but when he found himself no longer able to do so, he simply stood up and left the floor.

Soon after, the president tried to close the session and resume the following week. However, one of the senators insisted on hearing opinions against the bill. When the president agreed to allow one opinion from the opposition, a group of supporters of the bill shouted: “An opinion of the supporters too.” One of them, Lūyis Fānūs, spoke: “I have requested to speak. I am a supporter of the bill,”³⁶ but his speech was ignored. The opinion that Khalīl, who had officially proposed to reject the bill, should explain his position in the next session prevailed. The first session was thus closed.

The second session on 2 July was different in many ways.³⁷ It was brief and there was no major debate; discussion was directed toward giving the bill to the special joint committee. There is no record of Khalīl’s opinion and most likely

³³ Ibid., 435.

³⁴ Ibid., 436.

³⁵ He was an independent member in the Senate and, as mentioned in the earlier note, he was most probably a member of the committee that had approved the bill.

³⁶ *Maḍābiḥ*, the Senate, 25 June 1945, 437.

³⁷ Ibid., 449–50.

Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb was not present either. Another peculiar fact was that the chairman of the Committee of Social Affairs ordered the senators to return the report of the committee to him. It is easy to imagine that considerable pressure and maneuvering went on behind the scenes between the two sessions. Ibrāhīm Bayyūmī Madkūr, a close associate of Mirrīt Ghālī in the Society of National Renaissance, who appeared himself to present a similar bill to the Senate in 1948,³⁸ asked only a procedural question during the sessions. His silence in the debate was rather conspicuous, since he may have had ideas similar to Khaṭṭāb's by this time.

Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb had resigned from the Sa'dist Party in May 1945 when the party leader, al-Nuqrāshī, disapproved the bill. When his term in the Senate was completed, the al-Nuqrāshī government refused his reappointment. Khaṭṭāb ran again in 1947 but was unsuccessful because of government interference.³⁹

The new committee was not convened until Khaṭṭāb left the Senate. The first meeting was held in May 1947. On 16 June 1947, the report of the rejection of the bill by the committee was submitted to the session of the Senate. After a brief statement by the reporter of the committee wherein alternative policies by the government were stated, the bill was rejected by the senators.⁴⁰ The committee report explaining the reasons for the rejection of the bill was completely different from the previous report submitted in 1945. The new committee was chaired by Fu'ād Sirāj al-Dīn, a Wafdist, who had been newly elected as a senator and a member of one of the largest land-owning families. The report focuses on the unfairness of targeting only large landowners to solve the problem of maldistribution, and emphasizes that it is unlikely that the prescribed goals will be achieved by means of this proposal:

Agricultural wealth alone is not everything in Egypt. There are other areas of wealth whose importance is no less than that of agricultural wealth. The richest people in Egypt are perhaps not among agricultural landowners, as is known to all. Thus, it is obviously unfair to the one class to restrict only agriculturists by setting the maximum holding. Our deep-rooted social problem is not only a problem of the distribution of agricultural wealth, but of the lack of justice in the distribution of wealth in general, and a problem of the greatest majority of the nation being deprived of a decent human life and protection from permanent disease and ignorance.⁴¹

Thus, four years after it was first introduced, Khaṭṭāb's bill was finally rejected in the senate. However, during this period, the bill's impact on the public debate was

³⁸ Wahbī, *Tajribat al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-Lībirāliyya fī Miṣr*, 225.

³⁹ Al-Bishrī, *Al-Ḥaraka al-Siyāsiyya fī Miṣr*, 195–96.

⁴⁰ *Maḍābiḥ*, the Senate, 16 June 1947, 1098.

⁴¹ *Maḍābiḥ*, the Senate, Supplement 188, 16 June 1947, 827.

immeasurable. It served as a concrete model that greatly inspired many who were concerned with the issue of maldistribution of land. Khaṭṭāb's proposal, even after its demise in the senate, continued to be talked about. The discussions in the Senate also demonstrated to the public the inability of the existing political machinery to solve serious social problems. The debate on the limitation of large landownership itself continued to grow, despite the temporary setback, until an agrarian reform law was issued in September 1952 by the revolutionary government.

3. Debates on Khaṭṭāb's Bill outside the Senate

A public debate on Khaṭṭāb's bill began before the June 1945 session of the Senate. In early April *Al-Ahrām* ran a series of articles on the issue. The article that touched off the debate, "Al-Maṭā'im al-Sha'biyya fī al-Qurā: Khayr 'Ilāj li-Mushkilat al-Fallāḥ" (Soup kitchens in the village: The best remedy for the problem of the peasant), was written by Murād Wahba.⁴² Khaṭṭāb and others immediately responded to the article, and Wahba replied in his own defense.

In his article, Murād Wahba lays out his doubts regarding the argument that the maldistribution of land is a primary cause of the problem that the peasants encounter. Implicitly dismissing the redistribution of land as a solution, he mentions the oft-cited fact: "if the wealth of landed properties is distributed equally to the entire population, the share of one person is no more than eight qīrats."⁴³ He attributes the problem of the peasants to their primitive methods of land cultivation and their ignorance "which leads [them] to neglect cultivation, and this in turn results in the spread of poverty."

Although he admits the benefits of other long-term solutions, Wahba believes that a practical, more immediate solution is urgently needed. He proposes setting up soup kitchens.

In my opinion this project [of setting up soup kitchens] is one of those to which large landowners must urgently pay attention from a humanitarian point of view. If providing meals to their peasants makes their bodies stronger and raises their living standard, their productivity will be doubled.

He then explains the details of the project. According to his plan, daily meals will be provided for free to those who need help and at half the cost to those who can

⁴² *Al-Ahrām*, 8 April 1945. He was a high court judge and "independent" politician. He became the minister of agriculture in 1937–38 and then the minister of trade and industry in 1938 in the government under Muḥammad Maḥmūd. He was also a director of Bank Misr in the late forties.

⁴³ One feddan is twenty-four *qīrāṭs*. Therefore, eight *qīrāṭs* is one-third of a feddan.

afford to pay. Wahba expects the donations from large landowners and other wealthy Egyptians to cover the initial costs, along with government help. The annual expense of this project, he says, will be covered by a new tax of 10 piasters per feddan on the landowners holding over 10 feddans, which he estimates would yield the total sum of about a third of a million pounds a year. In defending the benefits of this project, he says: "We will save a lot of money that we spend in the futile fighting of their diseases, for there is no use in hoping to cure a sick person who does not find food upon recovering from his illness."

On 9 April, the following day, the reactions of Khaṭṭāb and two others to Wahba's proposal were reported in an article entitled "Al-Maṭā'im al-Sha'biyya wa-Mushkilat al-Fallāḥ" (The soup kitchen and the problem of the peasant).⁴⁴ In an interview with *Al-Ahrām*, Khaṭṭāb emphasizes "the awakening of the public conscience" over the plight of the peasant and points out the inadequacy of Wahba's project:

The reform of rural life will not be achieved by isolated solutions; it must be a product of a study or comprehensive studies. If Murād Wahba Pasha thinks that "the problem of Egyptian peasants has multiple dimensions because they suffer from various diseases in addition to hunger and ignorance," I cannot agree with the Pasha on the solution he proposed.

Khaṭṭāb categorized Wahba's project as one of those that were heard often since he presented the bill to the Senate, all of which he considered to be partial solutions. On the other hand, Khaṭṭāb claimed that his bill touched upon the real rural problems.

The same article reported the response of two others to Wahba's article. Both address the negative consequences of the proposal. The first, Ṭaṭṭāwī Muḥammad Ṭaṭṭāwī, is an army captain with a degree in economics and finance. In his letter to *Al-Ahrām*, he rejects Wahba's remedy in that it is not only ineffective in alleviating poverty, ignorance, and disease in the countryside, but that it "will spread meekness and lethargy among the laboring class in the country." The second, 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Zayyāt, a specialist in the Fellah Department in the Ministry of Social Affairs, expresses a similar view. Wahba's proposal will eventually create "a new generation of individuals who do not rely on themselves." In addition, at the practical level, the project "will cost us what we cannot afford." According to his estimate, the plan will require a total of forty million pounds for four million needy peasants.

The third article, which appeared on April 10, is *Al-Ahrām*'s interview with the secretary of state at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Muḥammad Sa'īd Luṭfī Bey,

⁴⁴ *Al-Ahrām*, 9 April 1945.

and it addresses the two previous articles.⁴⁵ Sa'īd Lutfī is critical of both Murād Wahba and Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb. He thinks that Wahba's proposal is limited because its approach involves charity. Recognizing the merit of charity, he claims that it will not solve the basic problem because "soup kitchens will relieve the poor but they will not eradicate poverty." The same is true of Khaṭṭāb's proposal: "it does not prohibit one of the landowners from purchasing from one to fifty feddans of land under the name of his sons and relatives." He also points out that limiting landholding will cause a decline in the price of landed properties, while the price of other kinds of properties such as stocks, will soar.

Asked about his own solution, the secretary of state frankly admits that he does not have an effective idea. He only makes several conventional suggestions, including increasing agricultural production by raising the level of the Aswan dam, selling state land, selling parts of large agricultural estates, and adopting a practical approach to education.

On 11 April, *Al-Ahrām* ran a fourth article on the subject, "Al-Mushkilat al-Fallāḥ..." (The problem of the peasant...). This time Murād Wahba defended his proposal in response to the criticisms of Khaṭṭāb and others.⁴⁶ He declares that "despite the objections they made to the proposal, I am determined to push the project [soup kitchens] through to the end, because I believe that fruitful work is urgently needed." Denying Khaṭṭāb's allegation that he rejected Khaṭṭāb's bill, he tries to avoid further discussion. Instead, he asserts that, while it will take a time for research on poverty to produce effective solutions, his proposal will benefit the peasants in urgent assistance.

To answer Tantāwī's concern regarding the spread of lethargy among the laboring classes, Wahba replies, "How different the two matters are, because I limited my proposal to those who are not capable of earning." Responding to al-Zayyāt's criticism that the project would create a dependent generation and is financially unfeasible, Wahba reminds al-Zayyāt that it is essentially humanitarian. That is, beneficiaries are limited to those selected by a committee of donor and government representatives, and thus, there is no need to fear the emergence of a dependent generation.⁴⁷

On the same day, Muḥammad Mandūr's article "The Problem of the Peasant" commenting on the Wahba-Khaṭṭāb debate run in *Al-Wafd al-Miṣrī*.⁴⁸ Mandūr, who

⁴⁵ *Al-Ahrām*, "Muḥāribat al-Faqr: Ḥadīth li-Wakīl al-Shu'ūn al-Ijtimā'iyya" (The combating of poverty: A conversation with a secretary of state at the Ministry of Social Affairs), 10 April 1945.

⁴⁶ *Al-Ahrām*, 11 April 1945.

⁴⁷ One year later Wahba proposed a new project to large landowners: setting up elementary schools for "mental nourishment" (*Al-Ahrām*, 16 June 1946).

⁴⁸ *Al-Wafd al-Miṣrī*, 11 April 1945, in Muḥammad Mandūr, *Ṣafaḥāt min Ta'rīkh Miṣr al-Mu'āshira: Maqālāt fī al-Siyāsa wa-l-Iqtisād, 1941–1948* (Pages from contemporary Egyptian history: Articles on politics and economy, 1941–1948) (Cairo: Dār al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabī, 1993), 57–58.

was the editor of the Wafd Party's daily newspaper, was also the leader of the Wafdist Vanguard, the left-wing faction of the Wafd, which was influenced by Marxists. In the mid-forties, the Wafdist Vanguard had especially close ties with one Marxist group, al-Fajr al-Jadīd.⁴⁹ While Mandūr supported Khaṭṭāb's proposal, combined with other solutions, he opines that the real solution lies not in charity but in giving everyone "a means of production," so that all can earn their own living on the principles of justice. To Wahba's claim that a person receives only one-third feddan as a result of the equal redistribution of land, Mandūr responded that "this is a pretext much repeated despite the danger of simplification," which ignores the contribution of other sectors of the national economy as important as agriculture. Turning to Khaṭṭāb's bill, he expresses his basic support. Although he recognizes the importance of the growth of national production in solving the problem of poverty, poverty "is most strongly connected to the problem of distribution; therefore, we must support the proposal that the honorable senator Muḥammad Bey Khaṭṭāb presented to the Senate." In addition, he proposed the implementation of other proposals that introduce legislation on minimum wages for workers and peasants, social security, and progressive taxation.

Following the Senate decision to turn Khaṭṭāb's bill over to a special committee, a number of social critics voiced support for the bill. Despite certain basic political differences, those who favored the bill shared the conviction that such serious and effective reform policies were urgently needed. One of them, Muḥammad Zakī 'Abd al-Qādir, was a member of the Society of the National Renaissance and the owner of the society's publishing house. In an article in *Al-Ahrām*, 'Abd al-Qādir defended Khaṭṭāb from the accusation that he is a communist and asserted that his position is, on the contrary, based on the liberal principle of the individual right of landownership: "Needless to say, the bill has nothing to do with communism and could not be further from the [communist] principle. Those who hastily believe this should renounce it."⁵⁰ To prove his point, he cites similar policies carried out in Europe, and asserts that the limitation of large landownership does not bring fear but the assurance of protection. Urging immediate public action, he concludes, "Social evils increase as time goes by and the preparation to meet them halfway is better than waiting."

Immediately following the second session of the Senate, Muḥammad Mandūr again wrote an article in *Al-Wafd al-Miṣrī*.⁵¹ In this article, entitled "Taḥdīd al-Milkiyya wa-l-Niẓām al-Ḥizbī" (The limitation of landownership and the party system), he discusses a flaw in Khaṭṭāb's bill: the concession that leaves the holdings

⁴⁹ Roel Meijer, *The Quest for Modernity: Secular Liberal and Left-Wing Political Thought in Egypt, 1945–1958* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 1995), 126–27.

⁵⁰ Muḥammad Zakī 'Abd al-Qādir, "Al-Milkiyya al-Zirā'iyya" (Agricultural landownership), *Al-Ahrām*, 1 July 1945.

⁵¹ *Al-Wafd al-Miṣrī*, 3 July 1945 in Mandūr, *Ṣafahāt min Ta'rīkh Miṣr al-Mu'āṣira*, 68–69.

of current landowners and their heirs intact. Although Mandūr understands Khaṭṭāb's tactics, he disagrees with this compromise, attributing it "to the desperate hope that the parliament will approve this moderate law." To reinforce his position, he points out that many large estates in Egypt were not obtained by means of owner's efforts, but given as gifts.

Mandūr then links the failure of the bill to the current party system in Egypt, which does not allow political party members to vote on their own: "it is no doubt that Khaṭṭāb Bey's bill cannot be successful unless each party decides to leave the members free in voting for his bill."

Soon after, Aḥmad Ṣādiq Sa'd expressed his views on Khaṭṭāb's bill in his journal *Al-Fajr al-Jadīd* under the title "Mulākhiẓāt 'alā Taḥdīd al-Milkiyya al-Zirā'iyya bi-Munāsibat 'Araḍ Mashrū' Khaṭṭāb Beeh 'alā Majlis al-Shuyūkh" (Notes on the limitation of agricultural landownership on the occasion of the submission of Khaṭṭāb Bey's bill to the Senate).⁵² Similar to Mandūr, Ṣādiq Sa'd also focused on the bill's moderate nature and the role of the party system in preventing its passage. Since there were close contacts between Mandūr's Wafdist Vanguard and *Al-Fajr al-Jadīd* group in the mid-forties, their similarity is no surprise.

Although Ṣādiq Sa'd is critical of the limited measure of the bill, he recognizes its positive psychological impact on the Egyptians:

It proves to the Egyptian mass classes that the current monopolistic situation is not something sent from the sky which they can never—nor are allowed to—change. On the contrary, representatives of the people can set a limitation on the right to sacred landownership according to the needs of the people themselves.

He also points out that the party system constitutes an obstacle to the bill's passage. Dividing the opponents to the bill into two groups: "one group voices directly the interests of large landowners and the other group rejects the bill for fulfilling the narrow purposes of the party system [*ḥizbiyya*]," he argues that if senators could have voted freely, without being restricted by their party's decision, support for Khaṭṭāb's bill would have greatly increased. The criticism of the rule of party binding on votes expressed by Mandūr and Ṣādiq Sa'd suggests the existence of potential supporters of the bill in the Senate.

Although the debate over agricultural landownership seemed to slow down during the late forties, it continued in some sectors. Rāshid al-Barrāwī, who would

⁵² *Al-Fajr al-Jadīd*, 16 July 1945, 2 and [?].

⁵³ The text of the lecture is included in Rāshid al-Barrāwī and Dalāwir 'Alī, *Mushkilātūna al-Ijtimā'iyya: al-Faqr, al-Fallāḥ, al-Ta'mīm, al-'Ummāl* (Our social problems: Poverty, peasantry, nationalization, and labor) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Naḥḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1948), 25–39.

be directed by the Free Officers to draw up a land reform program a few weeks after the coup in 1952, discussed the issue of landownership in a lecture given at the office of the Egyptian-European League in Alexandria in March 1948.⁵³ One part of the lecture, "The Problem of the Peasant," addresses the maldistribution of agricultural land and proposes restriction on landownership. Here, we obtain a glimpse of al-Barrāwī's early ideas, which were to develop into the well-known land reform program issued in September 1952.

"This system [the distribution of agricultural land]," he states, "is greatly in need of modification guided by the principles of justice as well as public interest."⁵⁴ Listing people who support such modification, such as Aḥmad Ḥusayn of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb, and non-Egyptian authors including Charles Issawi and Alfred Bonné, al-Barrāwī expressed his own conditional support for Khaṭṭāb's proposal because of "the idea he presented, not because of the specifics of his plan or the method of implementing it." He also referred to the international support for land redistribution; the United Nations proposed a reexamination of the issue not only in Egypt but in the Middle East in general.

Before presenting his own ideas on land reform, al-Barrāwī strongly condemns "enemies of any reform," mentioning the oft-quoted criticism that one person would receive only a one-third feddan in such a redistribution of agricultural land. He calls it "false propaganda" and asks "who could distribute land equally?" Discussing such things, he suggests, "is far from being sound minded, in other words, it is insane."⁵⁵

He sets the maximum landholding at fifty feddans, and claims that reclaimed land, waqf land, and land collected from large landowners be redistributed to the three-quarters of a million small landowners who own less than five feddans, and, in particular, those who hold two feddans or less.⁵⁶ Each peasant selected, who is a productive worker, would be given four feddans. However, he does not mention in his description of the problem as well as in his proposed solutions, the landless peasants who constituted a large segment of Egyptian peasants. Despite this, his plan for proposing the immediate limitation of landholding, similar to that of Ṣādiq Sa'd and Mandūr, was a radical solution compared to Khaṭṭāb's.

Although it is difficult to assess public opinion toward Khaṭṭāb's bill, an opinion poll will serve as a rough indicator. The January 1946 issue of the journal *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* carried the results of a poll of university professors and students.⁵⁷ One of the questions was "Do you agree with Khaṭṭāb Bey's bill concerning the limitation of landownership?" A majority of both professors and students, eighty-five percent of the former and seventy percent of the latter, said yes. This simple opinion poll provides no information on how participants were selected or

⁵⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 30–31.

⁵⁷ *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, "Mādhā Yaqūl al-Jīl al-Jādīd" (What does the new generation say?!) 12 January 1946, 19.

the details of the procedure. However, it still provides an idea of the public opinion on this question.

4. The Fatwa of the Mufti of Egypt on Landownership

The debate on the limitation of landownership slowed down after the virtual rejection of Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb's bill in the Senate in July 1945. Indeed, the country was preoccupied by external issues such as the Palestine War and the negotiation with Great Britain, as well as severe internal political upheavals that overshadowed internal social concerns. When the Wafd government returned to office in 1950, the debate became lively once again. However, as al-Barrāwī's 1948 lecture suggests, the discussion of landownership restriction did not stop in the late forties.

On 12 April 1948, the mufti of Egypt, Shaykh Ḥasanayn Muḥammad Makhlūf,⁵⁸ issued a fatwa regarding private landownership at the request of the Ministry of the Interior in response to the contents of a circular entitled "Our Internal Problems in the Light of the Islamic System." The preface of the fatwa does not identify the source of the circular, but according to J. Heyworth-Dunne, it was produced by the Society of Muslim Brotherhood.⁵⁹ Its basic demand constituted the restriction of large landownership, but argued from the Islamic point of view. Despite its Islamic rhetoric, the influence of secular leftist ideology is clear in its contents and vocabulary. According to the words of the fatwa, the circular claimed that "Islam does not permit any one class to monopolize wealth and the first economic problem to be considered is that of the distribution of agricultural properties." It went on to claim that "private ownership of land should be restricted to that which the individual is able to cultivate himself,⁶⁰ the excess to be distributed among those who are landless, and that no land whatsoever should be exploited by lease of hire"; it concluded with the statement that Islam disapproves of "capitalist

⁵⁸ Born in 1880, he twice served as the mufti of Egypt, in 1946–50 and 1952–54. Skovgaard-Petersen describes him as "a royalist, anti-Wafd and anti-Communist." Makhlūf's belief in the right to property was so strong that he again issued a fatwa for its defense. In the late 1950s, he protested confiscation and nationalization of private properties in a letter to Nasser. But Makhlūf's son was married to the daughter of Ḥasan al-Hudaybī, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Ḥasan al-Bannā used to visit Makhlūf's home. Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dar al-Ifta* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 170–73.

⁵⁹ J. Heyworth-Dunne, *Religious and Political Trends in Modern Egypt* (Washington D.C.: privately printed, 1950), 51.

⁶⁰ This argument is similar to Young Egypt's slogan: "Land is the property of those who cultivate it by themselves." See below for Young Egypt's view of limiting landownership.

⁶¹ *Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files, Egypt, 1945–1949*, 883.52/6–848, 8 June 1948, 3 (Legal fatwa in English translation).

feudalism,” which encourages unlimited land ownership.⁶¹

As was to be expected, the fatwa refutes all such points. It affirms without reservation the individual right to unrestricted landownership. To balance the approval of unconditional landownership, it emphasizes the fact that Islamic law guarantees social justice through almsgiving. The fatwa barely touches on pressing socioeconomic conditions, the starting point of the circular’s argument. Instead, the fatwa claims that Islam “permits the absolute ownership of property by individuals” as long as the rich perform their duty and give alms to the poor. Islam “enjoins the wealthy to discharge certain obligations toward the poor, the humble and the needy and to expend a certain amount of the income from their property for the general good, thus benefiting society as a whole... This constitutes the financial pillar of Islam.”⁶²

The fatwa guarantees the right of owners to protect and expand their property, which would be incongruous with any enforced restriction of ownership. Each individual “is entitled the right to defend it, as he would be entitled to defend his life and possessions, even though this should lead to the death of the aggressor.”⁶³ To support this point, the fatwa cites a verse from the Qur’an to validate the argument that differences in property holding should exist.

He has said: “And do not be jealous because God has preferred to give some of you more than He has given others...” This teaches that the fact that some are favored over others in matters of property should not be the source of hostility or envy, for it represents a portion which has been decreed by a wise and knowing Deity.⁶⁴

Those who insist otherwise, according to the fatwa, deviate from the right path:

There are certain minds in this day and age which have been blinded by overwhelming injustices; this has cut them off from the light of truth, ...In this state of confusion they have been seized upon by human devils who have deceitfully inspired them with seemly words and aroused in them vain hopes and false dreams.⁶⁵

The fatwa then categorically denies the existence of any monopoly in current landholding and refutes any claims that the practice of sharecropping or land leasing is illegal.

Immediately after the announcement of the fatwa, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī

⁶² Ibid., 5.

⁶³ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

wrote a series of eight articles on landownership and related topics, which were published in the weekly *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn* between mid-April and June in 1948. These articles, entitled “Ta’ammulāt fī al-Dīn wa-l-Ḥayāt: Mabda’ al-Milkiyya bayna al-Taḡyīd wa-l-Ittilāq” (Reflections on religion and life: The principle of landownership between restriction and free reign), constitute response to the mufti’s fatwa on the issue. If the circular was indeed produced by the Society of Muslim Brotherhood, it is likely that al-Ghazālī was involved because of his interest in this topic. Furthermore, their opinions and their basic line of thinking show similarities.

Al-Ghazālī directly challenges the fatwa in the last article in the series, subtitled “Ārā’ fī Taḡyīd al-Milkiyya” (Opinions on restriction of landownership).⁶⁶ Here, al-Ghazālī bases his argument upon his firm conviction that Islam is not associated with capitalism. To counterattack the mufti’s defense of capitalism, al-Ghazālī claims that capitalism that created the grave situation is incompatible with religious ethos, and questions the basis on which Islamic leaders support it.

The capitalist system is the most antagonistic to the spirit of religion. The very proponents of this system are themselves now beginning to shy away from it and even cushion it with all kinds of buffers that would lighten its grave effect on the poor. How can the representatives of Islam defend such a system? Are we then to fight the untruth of communism with another untruth that is no less shameful? In what circumstances do we push for this defense, circumstances in which we have witnessed its worse aspects and its cruelest blows and in which the majority of the people have fallen prey to the perilous trinity, the trinity of poverty, ignorance, and disease?⁶⁷

Al-Ghazālī defended the principle of restriction of properties, claiming that Islam supports this principle if it is of public necessity: “Islam does not object to the restriction of properties. If any government considers the welfare of people to be restricted, Islam will support the government that places restriction on properties.” Regarding the fatwa’s position that Islam respects the right of ownership, al-Ghazālī argued that it depended on circumstances. “As for the fact that Islam respects the right of ownership, it is true. However, it is also true that it permits a ruler the right to restrict ownership. At times, it even enjoins him to restrict it if circumstances require it.” To prove that the present circumstances require the restric-

⁶⁶ Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, “Ta’ammulāt fī al-Dīn wa-l-Ḥayāt” (Reflections on religion and life), *Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*, 5 June 1948, 6–9. Al-Ghazālī had already expressed the same view, that the state had a right to restrict ownership, in another book: Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Al-Islām wa-l-Awḍā’ al-Iqtisādīyya* (Islam and the economic affairs) (Cairo: Dar al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī bi-Miṣr, 1952), 115–17.

⁶⁷ Al-Ghazālī, “Reflections,” 7.

tion of landownership, al-Ghazālī mentioned the unlawful nature of land acquisition and investment as currently practiced in Egypt.

But which properties does Islam respect? The possession and investment of properties are supposed to be implemented by lawful means; however, are there any religious and secular scholars who examine the history of agricultural holdings in Egypt and the current practice of investment and dare say that they comply with the spirit of Islam? The grand mufti does not mention this abuse and is content to enjoin the owners to defend their rights of possession and investment, although no one can ignore the fact that four-fifths of large landowners are enriched by illegal possessions. That is, the land is not their land.⁶⁸

Al-Ghazālī's words become more vehement as he described the ways in which the peasants were exploited.

The minister of social affairs explained in his talk that the Egyptian peasant did not share even one-tenth of the crops the land produces, although this land is irrigated by his sweat and the fruits do not ripen without exhausting his nerves, and although the landowner devouring nine-tenths of the crops does not have any connection with the land except the fact that he inherited it from an ancestor who put his hand on it by force after the original owner dispossessed it who probably would have died from the loss!⁶⁹

Thus, al-Ghazālī squarely confronted the decision of the fatwa, and the exchange indicates the sharp division of opinion that prevailed within Islamic circles over the issue of the restriction of landownership.

5. Debates in the Early Fifties

After the return of the Wafd government in January 1950, as the debate on internal problems again gained momentum, that on the limitation of landownership also resurfaced, but with certain new features. First, there was the general support for the idea of limiting landownership. Second, as public awareness of socioeconomic injustice, including the maldistribution of agricultural land, increased, the public showed less confidence in the government's ability to respond to the problem. As some started to predict that the restriction of landownership would be inevitable,

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the government exposed its inability to handle even moderate reforms.

In March 1950, two bills proposing the limitation of landownership were coincidentally presented to the Chamber of Deputies, one by Mirrīt Ghālī and the other by Ibrāhīm Shukrī, the only Socialist Party (former Young Egypt) member in parliament.⁷⁰ Ghālī's proposal was based on his book, *Al-Iṣlāḥ al-Zirā'ī*, published in 1945, which set the limit at 100 feddans. As in Khaṭṭāb's bill, the proposal did not touch current holdings and would go into effect in the future through the mechanism of inheritance. The reaction of the Chamber of Deputies to Ghālī's bill was no better than that of the Senate to Khaṭṭāb's. At the end of March, the Chamber of Deputies accepted the suggestion of the Committee of Proposals and Petitions to turn the bill to the Committee of Economic Affairs. There were no further developments.

Given the fate of Ghālī's bill, no one could be surprised when Shukrī's bill met a similar end. Shukrī's proposal, which followed the official Socialist Party policy, was far more radical than Ghālī's. The content of the proposal had already been revealed in "Barnāmij Ḥizb Miṣr al-Ishtirākī" (The program of the Socialist Party of Egypt) in *Miṣr al-Fatāt* (Young Egypt) in December 1949.⁷¹ Under the slogan "land is the property of those who cultivate it by themselves," it stipulated that landholdings exceeding fifty feddans were to be transferred to the government in exchange for government bonds, which would be redeemable for twenty-five years with yearly interest. The land the government obtained thus would be sold to those peasants who possessed less than five feddans on easy terms.

Aḥmad Ḥusayn, the leader of the Socialist Party, explained its official policy in an article published in August 1950.⁷² He first referred to the issue of the limitation of landownership: "We consider this the cornerstone in our socialist struggle. We do not accept in this matter any bargaining, negotiation, and discussion. We do not compromise with a government that does not recognize this right, nor are we silent to anyone who does not accept this right." Although he makes it clear that the party respected private landownership, the party's basic principle on this issue, as manifested in its slogan, was that only those who actually cultivated land could possess land.

A sense of frustration, even crisis, over the government's inability to handle social issues gradually permeated the mood of conscientious reformers within the ruling political circle as radical discourse increased. Even in early 1950, it was obvi-

⁷⁰ *Al-Ahrām*, 27 March 1950. Wahbī, *Tajribat al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya al-Lībirāliyya fī Miṣr*, 225–27; 'Abd al-'Āl Shalabī, "Al-Hayāt al-Barlamāniyya fī Miṣr," 288–92.

⁷¹ *Miṣr al-Fatāt*, 12 December 1949.

⁷² *Miṣr al-Fatāt* (al-Ishtirākīyya), 18 August 1950. *Miṣr al-Fatāt* had already published an article, written by an engineer, advocating the restriction of agricultural landownership in January 1948. Badrakhān Yūnis Raslān, "Al-Ṣinā'a wa-Athruhā fī al-Iṣlāḥ al-Ijtimā'ī" (Industry and its influence on social reform), *Miṣr al-Fatāt*, no. 142, 12 January 1948, 12; no. 143, 19 January 1948, 13, 17.

ous in the context of the debate on landownership.

For example, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biyālī, who opposed the limiting of landownership, nevertheless expressed his frustration in *Al-Ahrām*. In an article entitled “Al-Milkiyya al-Zirā‘iyya...” (Agrarian landownership...), written a few weeks after Ghālī’s and Shukrī’s bills were discussed in the Chamber of Deputies,⁷³ he expressed the restless mood of established politicians in the face of radicalism:

These days, the apprehension and anxiety of those in responsible positions over radical tendencies have intensified. The poisonous propaganda is tireless in exploiting our troubled social conditions and our sinking standard of living. “Bold” legislative measures and preventative economic measures are mentioned repeatedly.

Al-Biyālī, a conservative reformist, painfully expressed the hopelessness that existed in the country, with regard to the implementation of social reform and the management of radical challenges.

At first we must have been far-sighted, fearing reform less and being more receptive to those who called for reform, in order not to aggravate problems and lose control over them, and in order to be on the safe side and avoid the impression of being “backward.” But those who called for reform did not receive any sympathy; rather, they were accused of being radical. External symptoms continued to prevent us from seeing essentials, and appearances distracted us from the goals, so that we were about to be overwhelmed by circumstances. Then people in responsible positions woke up only after it was too late.

Another example is Aḥmad Ḥusayn, the minister of social affairs in the Wafd government. Known within the ministry for his long-term commitment to the issue at hand, he revealed his frank opinion of land reform in a conversation with the U.S. labor attache in mid-1950.⁷⁴ During the conversation, he asserted that land reform was the key in saving any nation from the communist threat. The dispatch to the U.S. State Department recording the conversation reported that he “felt very strongly that the [main] issue in the cold war in all but a few countries is land reform.” The dispatch quotes Aḥmad Ḥusayn’s remark that “America must not deceive itself by dealing with governments; one Pasha with 1000 landless families on his estates would be a feeble ally if someone else promised the 1000 families the pasha’s

⁷³ *Al-Ahrām*, 16 April 1950. Al-Biyālī wrote two more articles for *Al-Ahrām* on the same topic, one on 31 January 1951, and the other on 18 February 1951.

⁷⁴ *Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files, Egypt, 1950–1954*, 774.00/8–350, 3 August 1950.

land.” After mentioning the great appeal of North Korea’s manifesto to underprivileged people about liberation and land reform, the dispatch cites that in any developing country in Asia, including Iran and Arab countries:

all political questions, technical assistance and development, the revival of Islam and especially the issue between communism and the western powers, reduced to a single question; from which side will land reform come? This question, the minister felt, will be decided within the next ten years.

It should be remembered that Aḥmad Ḥusayn was against Khaṭṭāb’s bill and pleaded for alternative policies to the first Committee of Social Affairs in the Senate in 1944. He maintained his official position opposing land redistribution even in 1950, when the above conversation occurred. A report written under his supervision, *Social Welfare in Egypt*, published by the minister of social affairs in 1950, declares that “It is believed that this [other measures mentioned earlier] would render it unnecessary to issue a legislation on the restriction of large ownerships.”⁷⁵ The contradiction here was most likely a result of the difference between his personal opinion and his official position. His conversation with the American official indicates that after six months as the minister in the Wafd government, he no longer hid his personal opinion. A year later, in the summer of 1951, frustrated by conservative power that thwarted his other social policies, Aḥmad Ḥusayn resigned from the government.

By the early fifties, general support for limiting landownership had spread widely. Khālīd Muḥammad Khālīd published a book entitled *Min Hunā Nabda’* (From here we start) in 1950, which became immensely popular, explicitly supporting the idea.⁷⁶ Such support is one of the important components of his “socialism.” “Our socialism also begins with limitation of the extent of agricultural property and such transformation of the present feudal system as would enable the serfs to liberate and save themselves.” Regarding Khaṭṭāb’s proposal, “we even have a ready-made scheme, laid down by Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb Bey, the honorable senator, and once presented to parliament with the best possible defense that any scheme has ever had.” He expressed his conviction that this reform would eventually be realized: “It is absolutely necessary to liquidate those feudal estates by government

⁷⁵ The Royal Government of Egypt, Ministry of Social Affairs, *Social Welfare in Egypt* (Cairo, 1950), 40.

⁷⁶ Khālīd Muḥammad Khālīd (1920–96) received *‘Ālimiyya* from al-Azhar in 1947 but soon departed from it and searched for a new direction under the influence of western philosophy. This book was sought after wildly upon the lift of banning publication. According to an article in the journal, *Al-Ishtirākīyya*, published by Young Egypt, it was reprinted three times in three months and the popularity was such that a pirate version also appeared (“Min Hunā Nabda’: Al-Marra al-Ukhrā” [From here we start: Once again], *Al-Ishtirākīyya*, 28 July 1950).

action. We firmly believe that their liquidation is definitely coming.”⁷⁷ The enormous popularity of Khālid’s book indicates that the idea of limiting large landowners was widely accepted by the Egyptian public in the early fifties.

The support for limitation also came from unexpected quarters. Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī,⁷⁸ the editor of *Majallat al-Azhar*, which was an authority on Islamic learning, was one of them. Although he critically reviewed Khālid Muḥammad Khālid’s book in a series of eight articles in the journal over the period 1950–51, Wajdī suggested his support for limiting landownership. As the title of his articles, “Not From Here We Start,” indicates, he attempted to refute a number of points in Khālid’s argument. He continued to be critical in his seventh article, which was devoted to the issue of large agricultural properties; for example, he criticized Khālid’s exaggerated language and his notion of “radical socialism.”⁷⁹ But Wajdī certainly, if subtly, recognized the need for land redistribution. After referring to the problem of the dispossession of peasants and the European experience of encouraging peasants to own land, he says:

I do not think that it will take a century before peasants who hold their own land become a majority. [When this happens,] the state of economic affairs will be in harmony and the social need will fulfill its natural goal. But I do not think that this can be done without the limitation of landownership.⁸⁰

Returning to the European experience, he remarks that Europe has attained the most advanced stage in restricting ownership and ensuring the distribution of land. He believes that in Egypt too, this scheme will be realized eventually: “we would say that it will not arrive soon to establish the stable legal principles for distributing land to those who engage in agriculture, but the march towards it is a matter of course and does not entail too long a wait.”

If the editor of *Majallat al-Azhar* could predict the eventual limitation of landownership, it is certainly no surprise that Sayyid Quṭb strongly affirmed the redistribution scheme. Sayyid Quṭb was not yet a member of the Society of Muslim Brotherhood in 1950 when he published *Ma‘rakat al-Islām wa-l-Ra’smāliyya* (The

⁷⁷ Khālid M. Khālid, *From Here We Start*, trans. Isma‘il R. el Faruqi (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Learned Society, 1953), 103.

⁷⁸ Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī (1878–1954) was the editor of *Majallat al-Azhar* for about ten years, until shortly before his death. He had previously been a publisher and also wrote many books and articles. These included books which criticized Qāsim Amīn’s *Al-Mar’a al-Jadīda* (The new woman) and Tāhā Ḥusayn’s book on the pre-Islamic poetry. Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, ed., *Al-A‘lām: Qāmus Tarājim li-Ashhar al-Rijāl wa-l-Nisā’ min al-‘Arab wa-l-Musta‘ribīn wa-l-Mustashriqīn*, 7th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li-l-Malāyīn, 1986), 6:329.

⁷⁹ Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, “Laysa min Hunā Nabda” (Not from here we start), *Majallat al-Azhar*, Sha‘bān 1370 (1951): 687–90.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 689.

battle of Islam and capitalism), yet his interpretations of the issues of maldistribution of agricultural land and the limitation of landownership in this book are similar to those of Muḥammad al-Ghazālī.

In a chapter entitled “Sū’ Tawzī‘ al-Milkiyyāt wa-l-Tharwāt” (The maldistribution of properties and wealth), Sayyid Quṭb comments on the general public consensus on the issue: “One no longer disputes that the distribution of agricultural properties in Egyptian society is seriously bad and that an action to amend it is immediately needed.” For him, the central question is with regard to how to solve it. Because he rejected capitalism—like al-Ghazālī—he disagreed with both Khattāb’s ideas and the government’s proposals. In Quṭb’s view, Khattāb’s proposal is based on “conscious capitalist thinking,” which “does not go beyond transferring the inflated wealth of landed properties to the inflated wealth of mobile properties.”⁸¹ With regard to government policies such as progressive taxation and distribution of state land, “these are flimsy steps that do not appear to have any impact, because the present circumstances have already reached a repulsive point where these soft touches with velvet gloves do not solve it!”⁸²

In principle, Quṭb agrees with Islamic scholars who have asserted that Islam protects the principle of individual ownership. Yet like Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, he also poses a question as to what kind of individual property Islam approves and protects” To answer the question, he relies on the notion that “Islam considers labor as the sole means for possession and acquisition,”⁸³ a position that leads him to disapprove of capital itself. In this sense, the acquisition of land by capital is illegitimate, and by implication, restricting the acquisition of land thus, is legal. Another reason for supporting the limitation of landownership is that Islam endows the state as the representative of society—the authority to respond to urgent needs and prevent anticipated harm. Therefore, “it is up to the state to take away a certain portion of properties and wealth, all that is necessary to amend the circumstances of society, or to meet necessary additional expenses to protect society from epidemics: epidemics of ignorance, disease, dispossession, luxury, conflict between individual and society, and other epidemics to which societies are subject.” Sayyid Quṭb even confirms that the state has the right to confiscate any property and wealth that were sanctioned by Islam if necessary and distribute them according to a new principle.⁸⁴

By the early fifties, notable figures in society, upholding different ideologies and political positions, such as Aḥmad Ḥusayn, Khālīd Muḥammad Khālīd, Farīd Wajdī, and Sayyid Quṭb, realized that placing limitations on large landownership was inevitable. There were also those such as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Biyālī, a politi-

⁸¹ Sayyid Quṭb, *Ma‘rakat al-Islām wa-l-Ra‘smāliyya* (The battle of Islam and capitalism), 8th ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982), 38.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 43–44.

cal insider, and Sayyid Qutb, a representative of the opposition, who asserted that the government had failed to address serious social problems. A vague sense of sociopolitical impasse had emerged in the debate on the maldistribution of land and the controversial proposal to restrict large landownership, which coincided with a feeling of general instability. As the U.S. ambassador recorded in the fall of 1950, "A vague but decidedly noticeable atmosphere of uncertainty and instability has gradually been building up in Egypt recently."⁸⁵ There were other contributing factors, but the immediate one, fundamental socioeconomic problems, certainly played a part. In the following year, external and internal political upheaval began to dominate the minds of Egyptians with the abrogation of the 1936 treaty and the armed struggle in the Canal Zone. The political situation deteriorated rapidly in 1952, with the burning of Cairo, the end of Wafd government, and a series of short-lived replacement governments. Yet politics cannot be entirely separated from internal social and economic issues, although the relationship is not always direct. In 1951–52, when internal socioeconomic issues were once again pushed to the background, they were not forgotten. They dramatically resurfaced when the Free Officers announced the law of agrarian reform several weeks after their takeover.

Concluding Remarks

Agricultural land reform became one of the most pressing national issues in post-WWII Egypt and instigated intense public debates. The debates attracted a wide range of Egyptian participants. In addition to politicians, they included government officials, social critics, and scholars with a variety of ideological and political tendencies, both well- and lesser-known. After an examination of the public debate, several points ought to be discussed.

First, a wider range of participants in the debate approved limiting agricultural landownership. In addition to communists, liberal reformers, socialist scholars, oppositional Islamists, and members of Young Egypt, those who were supposedly a part of the establishment, such as Farīd Majdī, the editor of *Al-Azhar*, and Aḥmad Ḥusayn, the minister of social affairs, acknowledged the need for the initiative towards the end of the period.

Furthermore, a large segment of the Egyptian public also seems to have increasingly supported it. Ghālī mentioned that the public sensed that the restriction was a matter of course in his book published in 1945. The opinion poll conducted by the Muslim Brotherhood indicated the approval of the majority of those who put forth their opinions. The enormous popularity of Khālīd Muḥammad Khālīd's book

⁸⁵ *Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files, Egypt, 1950–1954*, 774.00/10–650, 6 October 1950.

constitutes yet another testimony. Each testimony may be scattered or brief, but a picture of general public support emerges from these findings. Finally, the prompt implementation of land reform by the Free Officers only several weeks after the takeover of the regime also suggests that popular supports for land reform had prevailed at that time.

Second, although a majority of established politicians did not support the idea of limiting landholding, as seen in the discussion at the Senate, most of them were not single-minded opponents. Instead, they were careful not to present themselves as such. Some of them chided the senator who wanted to reject it immediately; others praised Khaṭṭāb's efforts and stressed an urgent need for effective reform measures. In addition, one cannot ignore the presence of supporters for the bill among the senators, whether they were vocal and passive. Some were the members of the committee in charge of the bill, while others briefly expressed their support at the plenary session. Moreover, as Mandūr and Ṣādiq Sa'd pointed out, if it had not been for the rule of party binding, Khaṭṭāb would have gained more supporters.

Third, the boundaries of the contemporary ideological and political trends in the debate were often blurred. Participants from different backgrounds influenced each other and borrowed new ideas freely. Muḥammad Khaṭṭāb, a Sa'dist senator, had close contact with Marxists and developed the bill of land reform. Muḥammad Mandūr, the Wafdist, was influenced by Maxists and formed the leftist wing in the party, the Wafdist Vanguard. As for the Islamic circle, while Khālid Muḥammad Khālid departed from the Islamic tradition and adopted western philosophy, one could also trace the influence of socialism in the writings of Muḥammad al-Ghazālī and Sayyid Quṭb, for example, in regard to their views on capitalism. The free exchange of ideological and political thoughts inevitably created the tension within the established political and religious circles such as the Wafd Party, Sa'dist Party, and al-Azhar.

Ideological and political stances were not the sole indicators that divided opponents and supporters. During the period, as the popular phrase "*al-jīl al-jadīd*" indicates, the division between generations constituted an important factor. Many supporters for land reform belonged to the new generation who grew up in the liberal, chaotic inter-war period. They witnessed the crumbling of political and religious authorities, and by trying and combining various ideological and political trends, they struggled to formulate their own solutions for rescuing the country.

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