

# Agrarian Politics in Interwar Greece: The Stillborn ‘Peasant’ Parties (1923-1936)

Spyridon G. PLOUMIDIS\*

**Keywords:** *agrarian politics, agrarianism, peasant parties, agrarian economy, interwar Greece*

**Abstract:** *My article will examine the role played by the agrarianist ideology in inter war Greek politics. Political interest in the rural population dates back to the early nineteenth century. Radical land reform and the emancipation of the peasantry had become part of the modernizing liberal government programmes since 1910. Yet it was not until 1923 that an agrarian party was founded in Greece. The emergence of the peasant as an active factor in the political and social life was a striking phenomenon in the history of Greek politics between the two world wars. However, factional misgivings, the petite - bourgeoisie's aspirations of the Greek peasant masses as well as the clientelist networks of the established bourgeoisies parties left very limited ground for its success.*

*Yet, agrarianism exerted a far greater intellectual influence on interwar Greece's hegemonic ideology than the electoral sway of the Agrarian Party of Greece (which actually hardly ever exceeded 6%). To this end, I will investigate the origins and identity of the agrarian political personnel, and their parliamentary career. Similarities and differences between the right-wing and the left-wing agrarianist agenda will be highlighted. State intervention and protectionist measures in agriculture will be revisited. Last but not least, the influence of agrarian populism on the discourse of Greek nationalism will also be briefly considered.*

## Introduction

The emergence of the peasantry as an active factor in the political and social life of Europe, particularly in the agrarian East, was a striking phenomenon in the social history of the Continent between the two world wars.<sup>1</sup> Agrarianism, whose the underlying notion is the idea that agriculture and those whose occupation involves agriculture are especially important and valuable elements of society<sup>2</sup>, certainly was not a novel ideological phenomenon of the twentieth century. Since the late nineteenth century, agrarian parties, which intended to elevate the peasantry to a determinant socio-political position, were established throughout Central and Eastern Europe. However, it was not until after the First World War that agrarian politics came to acquire a prominent place on the political agenda. In the aftermath of World War I, radical land reform and the emancipation of the peasantry became part of the modernizing government programmes even of highly conservative regimes in the area<sup>3</sup>. In Central and Eastern Europe, where the greatest part of

---

\* Lecturer of Modern History Faculty of History and Archaeology, University of Athens, Greece (sploumid@arch.uoa.gr; sploumidis@yahoo.com).

<sup>1</sup> David Mitrany, *Marx against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism* (New York, 1961), 31.

<sup>2</sup> James A. Montmarquet, *The Idea of Agrarianism: From Hunter-Gatherer to Agrarian Radical in Western Culture* (Moscow, Idaho, 1989), VIII.

<sup>3</sup> Ivan T. Berend, *Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2001 [1998]), 287-289, 292.