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NATIONAL ISSUES IN THE “ARAVOT” PERIODICAL OF THE REORGANISED HUNCHAK PARTY

Abstract

In April 1910, in Constantinople, Misak Suryan, a member of the Reorganised Hunchak Party, founded the weekly newspaper “Aravot” (*Morning*). From its inception, the newspaper adopted a staunchly oppositional stance, which led to its prohibition by the Young Turk government after only a few issues had been published. The publication of “Aravot” resumed in April 1919, serving as the unofficial mouthpiece of the Reorganised Hunchak Party. Between March and October 1921, it functioned as the Constantinople organ of the party. The newspaper addressed a range of issues, with particular emphasis on the First Republic of Armenia, the Armenian Question at the Paris Peace Conference, the activities of the Armenian delegation, Russo-Armenian and Armenian-Entente relations, as well as the improvement of internal Armenian national affairs.

After the Sovietisation of Armenia, “Aravot” maintained its national-liberal orientation. While rejecting Bolshevik ideology, it nonetheless advocated for the defence of the Armenian State and conducted a broad campaign in support of Soviet Armenia.

Following the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the periodical found itself unable to continue on its ideological path and ceased publication in 1924.

Keywords: “Aravot” newspaper, national-liberal ideology, Armenian statehood, Republic of Armenia, Russia, United and Independent Armenia, Paris Peace Conference.

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National Issues in the "Aravot" Periodical of the Reorganised Hunchak Party

Introduction

The periodical press has played a crucial role in the study of Armenian social and political thought since the beginning of the 20th century. In this context, party publications reflected the perspectives of Armenian political forces on historical events and international-political developments of the time, as well as their proposed solutions to the Armenian Question.

This article examines the "Aravot" weekly newspaper, published in Constantinople by the Reorganised Hunchak faction, which has not been the subject of independent research thus far.

The early 20th century marked a period of vigorous public activity for the Reorganised Hunchak Party. During this era, various periodicals emerged, including "Vasn Hayrenyats" ("Voice of the Fatherland") in Boston, "Aragats" in New York, and "Azat Bem" ("Free Stage") in Alexandria. In May 1910, "Aravot" was launched in Constantinople as a "national weekly." Misak Suryan, a key figure in the Reorganised Hunchak Party, was the licence holder of the newspaper. Initially, "Aravot" served as the unofficial organ of the Reorganised Hunchak Party. However, due to its sharp criticism of the internal policies of the Young Turk's government, the newspaper was banned after only three issues had been published.

Publication of the periodical resumed on 28 April, 1919. From 1920 until 28 March, 1921, it was issued as the "National-Liberal Newspaper." Between March and 10 October, 1920, "Aravot" also functioned as the organ of the Constantinople branch of the Liberation Party (now Reorganised Hunchak – G.H.).

Following the merger of the Azatakan and Ramkavar parties on 1 October, 1921, that resulted in the formation of the "Armenian Democratic Liberal Party" (ADL), the ideological orientation of "Aravot" was aligned with that of the ADL. However, the newspaper did not become the official organ of the newly established party and continued to be published as "a national, political daily" until 22 December, 1924. The final issue of the newspaper (N° 198) was released on 22 December, 1924.

The content of "Aravot" was diverse. In addition to addressing various national issues, the newspaper's "Last Hour" section covered contemporary international-political events, with particular emphasis on the Turkish-Greek War of 1920–1922.

In the issues from 1919 to 1922, articles addressing the Armenian Question were of central significance. The newspaper also reported on the activities of the Constantinople branch of the Reorganised Hunchak Party.

The “Sought” section featured statements from relatives of survivors of the Armenian Genocide and those who had been separated. Occasionally, the satirist Yervand Otyan published chronicons in the newspaper, which were more political satire than mere ridicule.

Among the active correspondents of “Aravot” were Hrach Yervand, Vahan Shahrman, Mihran Svazlyan, and other notable figures of the Reorganised Hunchak Party, as well as Misak Suryan, the newspaper’s licence holder and director.

Markos Natanyan, P. Akhikyan, K. Karmiryan, and N. Azguni were known for their incisive journalistic articles.

The First Period of “Aravot”

The inaugural issue of “Aravot” was published in May, 1910. During its first year, only a few issues were released. Regrettably, only the issue of May 19, 1910 (Issue 3) has survived, but it sufficiently demonstrates the newspaper’s assertive and oppositional stance. In the editorial article “When Measures Will Be Taken,” the newspaper protests against the Ottoman government’s inaction, highlighting that, despite the Young Turk revolution, “the destructive activities of the reactionaries in the interior provinces of Anatolia are still continuing.”¹ The periodical expresses indignation that, rather than being held accountable, many reactionary officials from the Hamidian era are honoured and awarded by the newly appointed provincial governors.²

The article “Voices from Bodrum” addresses the plight of a group of Armenians who, after attempting to defend themselves during the 1909 massacre in Adana, were convicted of murder and imprisoned in Bodrum. Despite numerous appeals, they received no relief. The convicts appealed to the Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople to have them transferred to the Adana prison, as “the sickness and the dampness are oppressing them.”³

¹ “Aravot,” Constantinople, 1910, issue 3, May 19.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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In the "Literary" section of the newspaper, the poem "The Wounded Crane," by an author from Izmir, signed as "Varazhnuni," dedicated to Armenian refugees, was included. The poem "Nightingale," by Arsen Yerkat, is dedicated to spring and the tiller of the soil. The issue also featured the famous writer Gogol's story entitled "The Terrible Revenge," addressing human greed and divine punishment. The periodical's criticism of the Turkish authorities ultimately led the government to ban "Aravot" after only a few issues had been published.

The Second Period of Publication of "Aravot."

The Theme of the Paris Peace Conference in the Periodical

The victory of the Entente in the First World War created favourable conditions for the Armenian press as well. On 28 April, 1919, the first issue of the second year of "Aravot" was published in Constantinople, with M. Suryan as the licensee. In the 1919 issues of the periodical, under the heading "Collection...", the barbarities committed by the Turks during the Armenian Genocide, described by the newspaper as "born from the Turkish mind," are presented. Horrific scenes of the massacres of Armenians are vividly described.⁴ The author (M. Suryan), in the article titled "Exile and Massacre," details the atrocities committed by the Turks and the mass murders of Armenians in the Enkyuri vilayet and during the Ayaghu war. Specific individuals, including state officials, military personnel, and policemen, are identified as the perpetrators of these crimes.⁵ Markos Natanyan also contributed articles to the newspaper, providing hard evidence of the massacres of the Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire.⁶

In January, 1919, the Peace Conference opened in Paris, and two Armenian delegations were invited to participate in its proceedings. During this period, publications on the Armenian Question became of critical importance to "Aravot." The 1919 issues of the periodical regularly featured reports on the work of the Peace Conference in Paris as well as the activities of the National Liberation movement led by Poghos Nubar.⁷

⁴ "Aravot," Constantinople, 1919, issue 11, June 16.

⁵ "Aravot," 1919, issue 1, April.

⁶ "Aravot," 1921, issue 51, March 14.

⁷ "Aravot," 1919, issue 11, June 16.

Yervand Otyan also addresses the subject of the Paris Peace Conference. In the chronicon "The New Tower," he compares the peace conference to the mythical Tower of Babel. "And here President Wilson proposed to raise a tower of the League of Nations to serve as a bulwark against future wars," Otyan writes. However, despite all participants welcoming Wilson's initiative, according to Otyan's figurative comparison, "a gentle breeze came up and confused the languages..." As a result, "the construction of the tower of the League and the peace of nations was divided into difficulties..." In this chronicon, the satirist expresses hope that this initiative of US President W. Wilson will not turn into a "New Babylon" but will instead become a tower of hope for the realization of the dreams of all nations.⁸

As mentioned earlier, "Aravot" was ideologically aligned with the Reorganized Hunchak (from 1918, Libertarian) Party. Consequently, the views of the party's figures on the Armenian Question and Armenian statehood were prominently featured in the newspaper's pages. For instance, in the article "Notes and Impressions," Mihran Svazlyan argues that the "liberation movement of the unliberated lands of Armenia should continue until holistic Armenia comes true." In his view, "Armenian lands" include Western Armenia, Cilicia, and the territories of the First Republic of Armenia.⁹

The Treaty of Sèvres, signed on 10 August, 1920, initially caused great excitement among Armenians. While generally sharing in that enthusiasm, "Aravot" exercised some caution. In the editorial article "The Signature of the Treaty," the newspaper advises Armenian delegations not to be overly optimistic and to avoid "the bad habit of necessarily seeing things rosy."¹⁰

Alas, the caution of "Aravot" was not misplaced. The events following the Treaty of Sèvres demonstrated that the rosy illusions of Armenians about a united and independent Armenia were not to materialise. The fall of the Republic of Armenia, alongside the Moscow and Kars conferences, confirmed this reality. Under these circumstances, what solutions did the Reorganized Party members propose to address the situation.

In his leading article "We are not an impulse, this is the reason...", Hrach Yervand writes that both the London and Kars Conferences "gave new reasons

⁸ "Aravot," 1919, issue 4, May 19.

⁹ "Aravot," 1920, issue 12, June 14.

¹⁰ "Aravot," 1920, issues 21, August 16.

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for dream deceit" to the Armenian people, as "the transformation of the "Free and Independent Armenian State Issue Resolution" into the "Independent National Home Resolution" remains incomprehensible." The article further examines the non-ratification of the Treaty of Sèvres, the Armenian delegation's demands for an Armenian mandate at the Kars Conference, and the Russian-Turkish military-political alliance. Towards the end of the article, when Yervand asks why the resolution of the Armenian Question perpetually eludes grasp, he answers: "That is why we do not see an impulse from international politics." To gain the support of foreign powers, Armenians must prove that they are "a force... The right of nations to exist, as well as issues of political friendship, are, unfortunately, tied to this reality," he observes.¹¹

The publicist's conclusion is unequivocal: until the Armenian people awaken, they are "doomed to remain delusional."¹²

In the 1919–1921 issues of "Aravot," the topic of Cilicia and the plight of Cilician Armenians is a frequent subject of discussion. After the Entente forces occupied Cilicia at the end of 1918, there was a significant return of displaced Armenians to their homeland in Cilicia, leading to a revival of social life. Among the Armenian national parties, the Reorganized faction resumed its activities in Cilicia, where they began publishing the newspaper "Cilician Messenger" in May 1920.¹³

Especially, the 1919 and 1920 issues of "Aravot" include regular appeals for assistance to the Armenians of Cilicia, as well as fundraising announcements.

The Topic of Armenian-Russian Relations in "Aravot"

The periodical discusses both Soviet and Tsarist Russia's policies towards the Armenian people. In a leading article published on 12 July, 1920, the activities of Jim Changalyan, a military figure of the Reorganized Hunchak Party in Van-Vaspurakan during 1915–1916, are highly valued. However, it is noted that Changalyan's departure from Van-Vaspurakan was due to "the despicable Russian political manoeuvres." The article highlights how Russian authorities maintained friendly relations with Kurdish chieftains, many of whom not only

¹¹ "Aravot," 1921, issues 28–80, October 3.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Aravot," 1920, issue 10, May 31.

had fought against the Russians but were also infamous for their misdeeds against the Armenians, Russia's supposed allies.¹⁴

In the article "London Conference and Today's Armenia," the author makes no distinction between "Russia of yesterday, today, and tomorrow," arguing that Russian policies remain consistent across eras.¹⁵ The periodical advances the view that no significant changes have occurred in Russian national policy, with the rights of smaller nations consistently violated.¹⁶

Particularly notable are Hrach Yervand's reflections on the situation in Soviet Russia, as expressed in the article "Starving Russia and its Lessons." Yervand critiques the vision of "Red Russia," which promised economic welfare and political freedom, but failed to deliver, as Bolshevik Russia resorted to violence in every aspect of life. He especially draws attention to the lessons that starving Russia provides for humanity. According to Yervand, revolutions and the ideologies that are their theoretical basis "can appear so beautiful on paper," but when implemented, they lead to great misfortune and remain impractical.

Citing the example of Soviet Russia, Yervand warns the Bolshevik authorities in Armenia, urging them to avoid bringing about bloodshed in their endeavours.¹⁷

In the poem "Caution," the author (N. Azguni) depicts the Bolsheviks' insidious and conspiratorial nature, suggesting that "the conquest of Karabakh by Soviet Russia and Azerbaijan also contains the terrible facts of the Bolshevik conspiracy." The author calls upon the leadership of the Republic of Armenia to exercise vigilance and caution.¹⁸

"Aravot" also raises concerns about the anti-Armenian policies pursued by the authorities of the First Republic of Georgia between 1918 and 1920. It points to the pro-Turkish policies of Odoshelidze and Chkhenkeli, which inflicted significant losses on the Armenians.¹⁹

¹⁴ "Aravot," 1920, issue 16, June 12.

¹⁵ "Aravot," 1921, issue 52, March 21.

¹⁶ "Aravot," 1921, issues 22–74, August 22.

¹⁷ "Aravot," 1921, issues 23–75, August 29.

¹⁸ "Aravot," 1920, issue 27, September 21.

¹⁹ "Aravot," 1921, issue 50, March 7.

The Theme of the First Republic of Armenia in "Aravot"

The topic of the First Republic of Armenia holds a significant place in the publications of "Aravot." The editorial article "The Third Anniversary of Armenia's Independence" demonstrates that the restoration of Armenia's independence was not a chance occurrence. The author, N. Azguni, highlights the fighting spirit and resilience exhibited by the Armenian people during the heroic battles of May. "Vehip Pasha's threats to pulverise the Armenian resistance were not fulfilled," the author writes, "and the Armenian fighting force was engaged in battle, inflicting significant losses on the Turks, who were compelled to accept the reality and recognise the independence of Armenia, though with the intention of reconsidering it after the success of the Baku programme."²⁰

The article praises Andranik's activities and rejects the notion of division between Eastern and Western Armenians, dismissing such rumours as fabrications. The author emphasises that the Armenian people "from Ararat to Cilicia are one and indivisible."

One editorial in "Aravot" criticises the activities of the Armenian Bolsheviks, viewing them as detrimental to the Republic of Armenia. The article stresses that in the difficult circumstances facing the republic, when the country is in a state of disintegration, and "we have lands that are not yet attached to the republic... the pursuit of socialist goals is nothing but blindness and madness."²¹

Reflecting the views of the Reorganised Hunchak Party, "Aravot" emphasised the necessity of forming a coalition government in the Republic of Armenia. On this subject, the periodical published a separate editorial, stating that the newspaper "represented an opposition current to the government of Armenia."²²

The editorial outlined the key points of disagreement. As mentioned, one issue was the creation of a coalition government in Armenia with the participation of Western Armenians, while another was the question of which territories should be included in the Armenian State. The Liberals advocated for the inclusion of Cilicia as part of a united and independent Armenia.

²⁰ "Aravot," 1920, issue 10, May 31.

²¹ "Aravot," 1920, issue 12, August 16.

²² "Aravot," 1920, issue 27, September 21.

Additionally, the Liberal Party opposed a government composed solely of members from one party (referring to the ARF Bureau-Government – G.H.).

Despite these disagreements, the editorial prioritised Pan-Armenian interests and the strengthening of the Armenian State. In line with this perspective, the article called for support of the initiative to provide a loan to the Republic of Armenia, urging the Armenian people to demonstrate to the world that they had closed the humiliating cycle of relying on the charity of others and of remaining on their feet only with the help of others.²³

Intra-National Problems in "Aravot"

"Aravot" pays particular attention to internal issues, exploring the reasons why they remain unresolved. In its publications, the periodical rightly concludes that the Armenian people's failures in the international political and diplomatic arenas are linked to the mentality and regressive phenomena within national life. In the article "Why do not our national affairs succeed?," Vahan Shahrman observes that time has shown little progress in Armenian national activities, with history repeating itself and causing further disappointments.²⁴ He concludes that we cannot have "a unified national direction until the causes undermining our national activity are removed."

Otyan's chronicon, published under the title "The Day's Fantasy," follows this line of thought, with the satirist's tweaks aimed at the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople and the rich local Armenian people.²⁵

Among the political, diplomatic, and other factors for achieving national goals, the periodical stresses the importance of encouraging the people and inspiring them with the heroic deeds of their ancestors. The editorial article "The Path of Glory" reflects this sentiment, hoping that "what diplomacy could not achieve in solving national problems, the bayonets of Armenian braves will do."

The idea of national solidarity is discussed in the editorial article "Our Creed." It is suggested that the lack of a unified approach in Armenian national life and among political forces compels Armenians to always pursue the goal of

²³ "Aravot," 1920, issue 27, September 21.

²⁴ "Aravot," 1921, issue 52, March 21.

²⁵ "Aravot," 1919, issue 3, May 12.

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"promoting understanding and cooperation among all bodies and currents from Yerevan to Paris."²⁶

The issue of intra-national solidarity is also addressed in the article "Wake up Armenian people and get ready." Here, the February 1921 uprising in Armenia is discussed with a heavy heart, as the fratricidal conflicts claimed thousands of lives.

The article "The Need for Patriotism" puts forward the notion that the supremacy of patriotism, its importance, and its instillation in the people are crucial conditions for the perpetuation of the Armenian State. Drawing on examples from the histories of Italy, France, and Germany, the author (Q. Karmiryan) argues that a homeland alone cannot ensure the survival of the people "as a nation-state." According to the author, if the people lack patriotism, they are ultimately doomed to lose both their nationality and their homeland. Patriotism, the article asserts, is as essential to the defence of the homeland as weapons and an army: "What the soul is to the individual, patriotism is to the people." The article concludes with the statement that if Armenians wish to honour the "blood of hundreds of thousands of martyrs given during the loss of the state to be worth something, it is necessary to feel patriotism stronger in ourselves, always keeping in mind the idea that without patriotism, the motherland would not be able to maintain its existence."

Reflecting on these issues, we can confidently assert that the ideas discussed remain relevant today.²⁷

The Question of the Primacy of the Idea of Statehood in "Aravot" Weekdays

In the summer of 1991, Soviet Armenia became a political reality, and the attempt to overthrow it failed. Under these conditions, political forces and various organisations outside Armenia had to respond to this new reality, whether willingly or not. The editorial article "Towards Today's Armenia" addresses this issue. It puts forward the idea that, just as those who distrusted the government during the First Republic of Armenia were labelled anti-state by the ARF Dashnaktsoutyoun, the same could be said for those who distrust the government of Soviet Armenia. The article emphasises that, despite opposition to Bolshevik ideas and practices, the interests of Armenian statehood require

²⁶ "Aravot," 1921, issues 20–72, August 8.

²⁷ "Aravot," 1921, issues 5–57, April 25.

that “we approach today’s Armenia with a true understanding of statehood, show the willingness to fulfil all our civic duties, and actually carry them out.” It concludes that the idea of statehood is paramount, and thus the interests of the Armenian people and Armenian statehood demand that all Armenian public and political organisations adopt the slogan of trust in Soviet Armenia and its government.²⁸

“Aravot” also published the appeal of the Armenian Relief Committee (RAC) to support Soviet Armenia, and prominent Reorganised Hunchak figures, such as H. Yervand and V. Shahriman, sought to justify through their articles that colonial Armenians should back the representative of Armenia, D. Shahverdyan, who had arrived in Constantinople for this purpose.

The success of the Turkish nationalists in 1922–1923 altered the situation in Turkey, marking a turning point for “Aravot” as well. In the issue of 22 December, 1924, M. Suryan’s name was no longer mentioned. The front of the edition bore the phrase: “Serving the political and economic interests of the Turkish motherland.” Two out of four pages of that edition were published in Turkish using the Arabic script.

In the article “The Turkish Republic and Minorities,” the new editor of “Aravot,” Vezir Oglu Eomer Aziz, attempted to argue that the national question no longer existed in Turkey. The author hypocritically claimed: “The elements living in our country have lived peacefully and happily in every aspect until now,” and “raising the issue of national minorities should be seen as a political trick by foreign states.”

This was the final issue of “Aravot.”

We believe that the cessation of “Aravot” was brought about by the establishment of the Republic of Turkey and the strengthening of the military-political position of the Kemalists. In light of these new realities, the periodical could no longer continue to be published while maintaining its nationalist-liberal orientation.²⁹

Conclusions

“Aravot” played an important role in strengthening the moral spirit of the nation, fostering a fighting spirit, and uniting the Armenian people around

²⁸ “Aravot,” 1921, issues 11–63, June 6.

²⁹ “Aravot,” 1921, issues 11–63, December 6.

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national issues. The periodical drew the attention of the Armenian society to the notion that the reasons for the nation's international diplomatic, military, and political failures should be sought not only outside Armenia and the Armenian people but also within. It stressed that negative internal factors hindering the resolution of foreign political problems should be eradicated.

The promotion of the primacy of national statehood occupied a central place in the pages of "Aravot." Advocating for the idea of a strong national state, "Aravot" rejected the path of social development adopted by Bolshevism. However, in recognising the fundamental importance of national statehood, it urged the support and strengthening of Soviet Armenia.

Despite its relatively short publication period, "Aravot" left a significant mark on the development of Armenian social and political thought, as well as public discourse.

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ԳԵՂԱՄ ՀՈՎՀԱՆՆԻՍՅԱՆ

Ամփոփում

1910 թ. ապրիլին Կ. Պոլսում Վերակազմյալ Հնչակյան կուսակցության գործիչ Միսաք Սուրյանը հրատարակում է «Առաւօտ» շաբաթաթերթը: Սկզբից նեթ թերթը բռնում է Օսմանյան կայսրությանը ընդդիմադիր ուղղություն, որի պատճառով մի քանի համար լույս տեսնելուց հետո երիտթուրքական կառավարության կողմից արգելվում է: «Առաւօտի» հրատարակությունը վերսկսվեց 1919 թ. ապրիլին: Այն Վերակազմյալ հնչակյանների անպաշտոն խոսափողն էր, իսկ 1921 թ. մարտ-հոկտեմբերին՝ այդ կուսակցության Կ.Պոլսի օրգանը: Իր էջերում թերթն արձարծել է բազմաթիվ հարցեր, որոնց շարքում առաջնային տեղ են գրավում Հայաստանի առաջին հանրապետության, Փարիզի վեհաժողովում Հայկական հարցի արձարծման, հայկական պատվիրակության գործունեության, ռուս-հայկական, Հայաստան-Անտանտ փոխհարաբերությունների, հայ ազգային ներքին կյանքի բարելավման խնդիրները:

Հայաստանի խորհրդայնացումից հետո «Առաւօտը», պահպանելով իր ազգային-ազատական ուղղվածությունը ու մերժելով բոլշևիզմի գաղափարախոսությունը, այնուամենայնիվ կանգնեց Հայոց պետության պաշտպանության դիրքերում և ծավալեց Խորհրդային Հայաստանին սատարելու լայն քարոզչություն: Թուրքիայի հանրապետության ստեղծումից հետո պարբերականն այլևս չէր կարող շարունակել իր որդեգրած գաղափարական ուղին, և 1924 թ. դադարեց լույս տեսնելուց:

Բանալի բառեր՝ «Առաւօտ» թերթ, ազգային-ազատական գաղափարախոսություն, հայկական պետականություն, Հայաստանի հանրապետություն, Ռուսաստան, Միացյալ և անկախ Հայաստան, Փարիզի վեհաժողով: