

LABOR RESISTANCE AGAINST NEOLIBERAL CHALLENGES TO THE  
TRADITIONAL TRADE UNIONISM IN TURKEY: 1986-1991.

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## Tez Özeti

Mustafa Görkem Doğan, “Labor Resistance Against Neoliberal Challenges To The Traditional Trade Unionism In Turkey: 1986-1991”

It is a well established tendency to depict the aftermath of the military intervention of 1980 as an era devoid of any significant labor mobilization. This study aims to shed light on the last important cycle of protest led by the organized labor movement spanning from the mid eighties to the beginning of the nineties. This last process of mobilization contains two of the most noteworthy episodes of labor protest, spring actions and the great march of miners to be exact. These two instances from that overlooked era were usually accounted as spontaneous reactions to the deteriorating living conditions of the workers.

This study claims that the second part of the eighties witnessed a protest cycle led by the unionized workers and the dynamics of the mobilization can be understood using the political process model of the social movements’ literature. It also argues that the main factor instigating the workers to act was a perceived assault on the moral economy of the industrial relations’ regime of Turkey, existing mostly in the public sector.

This moral economy is constructed historically and in a mutual interaction between the state, workers and related political developments in three subsequent periods of the Turkish Republic. Firstly, the late thirties set the pattern of the state led industrialization and the ideological mainframe of the industrial relations; secondly the transition to multi-party politics also determined the circumstances of acceptable union activities and appropriate government responses and finally the introduction of import substitution enlarged the place of the organized labor within the political system. The neoliberal transformation implemented under the Özal administration targeted this moral economy among other things and trade unions mobilized in these circumstances creating one of the most illustrious moments of the Turkish labor history.

## Tez Özeti

Mustafa Gökem Doğan, “Labor Resistance Against Neoliberal Challenges

To The Traditional Trade Unionism In Turkey: 1986-1991”

1980 sonrası Türkiye’de genellikle işçi hareketinin gerilediği bir devre olarak betimlenir. Bu yaklaşıma göre 1961 anayasasının ardından oluşan siyasi ve sosyal atmosferde gelişen sendikal hareket 1980 darbesi ve sonrasında oluşan yasal kurumsal çerçeve içinde sürekli küçülmüştür. Oysa ki özellikle seksenlerin ikinci yarısı Türkiye sendikal hareketinin en etkili iki eylemlilik sürecine tanık olmuştur. Büyük Madenci Yürüyüşü ve 89 Bahar Eylemleri bu çerçevede reel ücretleri düşen işçilerin otomatik bir tepkisi gibi anlatılır.

Bu tez seksenlerin ikinci yarısının başını sendikal hareketin çektiği bir protesto döngüsüne tanık olduğunu, bu protesto döngüsünün toplumsal hareketler literatürünün siyasal süreçler analiziyle açıklanabileceğini ve bu döngüyü yaratan işçi mobilizasyonunu tetikleyen ana etmenin Özal hükümetinin sendikalara ve kamu sektörüne yönelik siyasetinin sendikal işçilerin ahlak ekonomilerine yönelik bir saldırı olması olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Özal hükümeti uluslararası finans kurumlarının önerileri doğrultusunda yürüttüğü neoliberal dönüşüm siyasetinin köşe taşlarından biri olarak devlet, sendikalar ve siyasi partiler arasındaki çalışma ilişkileri düzenine dair varolan yerleşik norm ve uygulamaları hem fiilen, hem de söylem düzeyinde yıkmaya çalışmıştır.

Özal hükümetinin hedef aldığı ahlak ekonomisi cumhuriyet tarihinin üç önemli evresinin dolayımında oluşmuştur. Bunlar sırasıyla otuzlardaki devlet eliyle sanayileşme dönemi, kırkların sonundaki çok partili hayata geçiş dönemi ve 60 sonrasındaki ithal ikameci dönemdir. Hem sendikal hareket, hem de onun ahlak ekonomisi tarihsel olarak bu dönemlerde işçiler, sendikalar, siyasi partiler ve hükümetler arasındaki ilişkilerin sonucunda biçimlenmiştir. 1980 sonrasındaki siyasi ve ekonomik gelişmelerin bu ahlak ekonomisini tehdit etmesi sonucunda sendikal hareket tarihinin en etkin kitlesel protestolarına imza atmış ve Özal döneminin sona ermesinde belli bir rol oynamıştır.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

From the mid seventies onwards the global economy began to experience growing difficulties that indicate the ultimate demise of the post war settlement, which means the international structure of political economy configured in the aftermath of the Second World War, and the accompanying ideological premises favoring policy objectives such as full employment, public regulation of markets or extending welfare measures, this whole composition began to crumble. This deep and thorough transformation of the global capitalism and its political ramifications overhauled the established patterns of policy making and policy priorities along with the regime of industrial relations in diverse national contexts. In this respect, one of the obvious losers was the trade unions which concretized the political power of the organized labor that was targeted everywhere in order to clear the way for these reforms to be implemented without any significant challenge.

The last and only time when a Turkish prime minister canceled his entire daily schedule and traveled to a remote town to meet a trade union leader was in 1990, and the last time when the opposition of the working class to the governing party dominated the electoral agenda was in 1991. The end of the eighties witnessed a lively period of working class protest that seems improbable today given the severe legacy of the bloody coup d'état that occurred in 1980. It is puzzling today to conceive the militancy and the ingenuity of the organized labor that cave in when the

military intervened a few years ago. The trade unions took the streets then while some of the worst practices of the coup period were still intact, yet they demobilized in the nineties while the opening up of the regime accelerates and this constitutes the research question around which this study is constructed.

The Özal administration of the eighties with its emphasis on the replacement of the existing terms of industrial relation's regime in state economic enterprises, its insistence on installing the market rationality and profit maximizing behavior in these establishments instead of their entrenched developmentalist and populist mode of operation was a part of the global offensive of conservative politics armed with liberal economic convictions based on market efficiency and unregulated competition. However, in the Turkish case, and maybe elsewhere these policies were also targeting the moral economy of the public enterprise workers, or other workers employed in industrial sectors that are considered as strategic such as coal mining, since such industries were founded as developmental institutions rather than as profit maximizing firms. In most cases the new mentality of the neoliberal turn contradicts with the founding principle of these enterprises.

Another and more crucial aspect of this transformation though concerned the very foundation of the Turkish organized labor movement. The Turkish trade unions are accustomed to primarily relying on their organizational basis in the state economic enterprises. These establishments are generally big industrial units in which all of the stipulations of the labor code and other relevant regulations benefiting the employees were observed. Moreover, except for a few early instances, the unionization efforts in these factories were supported rather than hampered by the government authorities after the promulgation of the law on trade unions in 1947. Throughout the following decades these work places became the bastion of the

Turkish organized labor and set the standards for the union activities. Therefore their renovation also affects the impact of the organized labor over the Turkish society and politics, and its place in the political landscape of the country.

The politics promoting the complete transformation of the working of the economy, a bunch of policies labeled under the heading of neoliberal transformation, are not unique to Turkey as already cited; indeed these were the basic tenets of structural adjustment programs that the international financial organizations promote in the indebted Third World countries during the eighties. These policies also garnered widespread political support from the middle class and lower middle class voters in the countries such as the United States and the Great Britain around the same period. A shift in the mode of articulation of the national economies of the developing nations to the global capitalism from import substitution to the export promotion constitutes an essential part of this process. This means a retreat in the importance of domestic markets and an increase of the necessity to curb down the cost of labor in these countries. Both objectives signify catastrophic consequences for the organized labor and a considerable deterioration in the living conditions of the wage earners with fixed income. In many countries the protest movements with differing motives and actors simultaneously developed against these measures and attained varying results.<sup>1</sup> In the Turkish case the main actor was the organized labor and the main motive was the perceived or actual assault on the moral economy of the unionized laborers.

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<sup>1</sup> The austerity measures imposed by the international financial institutions unleashed a reaction in some cases yet these occurrences are especially rare after the mid eighties. See John Walton, Charles Ragin, "Global and National Sources of Political Protest: Third World Responses to the Debt Crisis," *American Sociological Review*, vol.55, no.6, (December 1990), pp. 876-890. Moreover, the reactions are not confined to the Third World especially Great Britain became the scene of important industrial battles up until the mid eighties.

By “moral economy” I refer to an institutional arrangement and understanding between the Turkish governments and the trade unions concerning the conduct of the regime of industrial relations and the relevant decision making process and procedures, established on the basis of a different rationality than the market principles as a result of the historical trajectory through which the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy regulating the regime of industrial relations and the Turkish trade unions themselves developed. The unionized workers, their immediate representatives in trade union locals, and the higher echelons of union bureaucracy constitute a privileged segment of the Turkish working class and in this capacity they both enjoyed a privileged relationship with the political system and contributed to the general improvement of the social and economic conditions of the workers that are employed in the formal sector in general. This study will argue that the government altered its attitude and discourse towards this segment of the Turkish society in the aftermath of the 1980 in line with the global trend cited above. Just like the Thatcherite two nations’ politics, the new Turkish conservatism pitted the unionized worker against an imaginary hard working middle class member, denigrating the former due to its alleged unfair privileges. Once the political situation turned to be more opportune as the worst practices of the coup era receded and the threat posed by the neoliberal transformation became obvious this segment of workers reacted, creating the last episode of mass protests of the Turkish labor history.

The history of the organized labor in Turkey is often told in relation to left wing organizations.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the studies produced by the Turkish labor history are

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<sup>2</sup> For a recent example see Mahmut Üstün, “Türkiye İşçi Sınıfına Bakarken,” *Praksis*, no. 8, (Fall 2002), pp.227-254.

strikingly similar to each other in more than one respect.<sup>3</sup> The development of institutional arrangements conditioning its moral economy on the other hand is generally overlooked. That is why apart from the radical era of the late sixties and the seventies the bulk of the institutional development of the trade unions and the institutional context surrounding its path of development remains obscure.

Conversely, a more mundane approach also seems feasible in the study of the Turkish labor movement and its unionization efforts, one that puts emphasis on the relationship between the establishment parties, rather than socialist ones, and the organized labor; an approach that would not overlook the significance of the incorporation of the local level union leaders and their supporters into these political connections to accommodate themselves and their trade unions in the establishment politics, an approach that would not dismiss the interaction between establishment politics and the organized labor in constructing the legal institutional context that limits and conditions the labor movement and its representatives.

Especially after the legalization of the trade unions the governing parties showed a keen interest in attracting working class organizations to the confines of the political order in order to carve out a popular electoral base for themselves from among the workers. The newly established trade unions eagerly accepted the rules of this political game of patronage. Therefore, one must look into the interconnections between the governing parties and the organized labor movement and the specific pattern of the capitalist mode of production that mediates the legal institutional context within which the political and economic agenda of the trade unions were

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<sup>3</sup> The repetition of findings of one study in others without reference is so wide that some errors turned to be established truths due to their extensive circulation. A notorious example is the case of *Amelperver Cemiyeti*, a Masonic society of craftsmen which is considered as the first worker organization since Lütü Erişçi mistranslated its name from Ottoman Turkish and mentioned it as *Amelepervver Cemiyeti*. The correction was made only in the late sixties. See Lütü Erişçi, *Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfının Tarihi (özet olarak)*, Kebikeç Yayınları, Ankara, 1997, p.4; and for the correction see Oya Sencer, *Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfı Doğuşu ve Yapısı*, İstanbul: Habora Kitabevi, 1969, p.155.

furthered and their organizational strategies were implemented. Definitely, these relationships are also decisive in shaping the labor movement and its moral economy, and they are more useful as explanatory devices in accounting for the widespread protest movements led by trade unions, such as the one occurred during the late eighties.

The organized labor was a more or less important player of the electoral politics of the multi party era beginning in the aftermath of the Second World War in Turkey, not only because of their weight in the polls, which is not that significant anyway, but also for the sake of including the working class, thought to be susceptible to the subversive communist agitation, into the political game. The trade unions constitute the primary link in this respect, in most cases Turkish trade unions were not established by the state, but the local officials of the parliamentary parties rapidly offered the benefits of their support to these initiatives or the local union founders were already party members or sympathizers thus afforded the risks of such undertakings. Once became entrenched, the trade unions continued their institutional development in interaction with the political establishment and the legal institutional context designed by this establishment, indeed, it almost became a norm for the chairs of the biggest trade unions to serve in the parliament while holding their union's posts.

One of the defining features of the story of development of the Turkish organized labor movement was what we might call *the dual approach* of the political class to the unionization efforts. The government did not prioritize profit maximization in state economic enterprises and that is why the endeavor of the organized labor to campaign for social rights, the easing of legal barriers impeding unionization and amelioration of the working conditions, safety measures etc., found

themselves a safe haven in state economic enterprises. These establishments turned out to be the power base of the organized labor and conditioned the organizational blueprint of the trade unions. However, the same politicians were never keen to impose the same regulations into the private businesses in line with their tendency to cajole the national bourgeoisie, and hence the public servants responsible to oversee the implementation of such regulations are either lacking the necessary means or the will to duly perform their duties.

The trade unions, on the other hand, preferred to accept this dichotomy and operate accordingly. Rather than militating in their workplaces they relied on their lobbies in Ankara both to attain national goals of promoting their interests and also to resolve local problems with factory managers or private employers. Furthermore, the said dichotomy is not limited to the domain of labor code, the welfare measures and the social security system also exhibits a dual feature. Only those employed by the state and the big private companies enjoy the coverage of the system, the remaining majority are either totally ignored or recorded in the system very erroneously.

These features nevertheless are not outside of history and thus did not remain intact once established. They were renegotiated at every important historical turn and reformed accordingly. For instance, when after the 1960 military intervention Turkey opted for import substitution and central planning, the private businesses especially in metal and chemical industries afforded to pay higher wages. In a context of a more tolerant regime of industrial relations and a growing sympathy for socialist ideals, this new framework created a rift in local union practices resulting in the rise of workplace militancy. Without overtaking or challenging the mainstream tendency emphasizing the union's lobby in Ankara, the spontaneous characteristics of the labor movement manifest in the formative periods, found for themselves another



outlet. The representatives of these more radical movements also served in the parliament while leading their trade unions. A reticent trait of the Turkish organized labor movement discovered the possibility of development once suitable environment arose. The path that the organized labor movement chose pretty much determined or conditioned its later reactions to the changing national political context.

### The Political Transformation and the Labor Reaction

The economic package proclaimed in the January 24, 1980 and the ensuing military coup altered the articulation of the Turkish economy to the global markets by changing the regime of accumulation based on import substitution to export orientation. These developments, as expected, left their marks on the institutional texture of the trade unions. Presently, it is a well established tendency, not only among the scholars<sup>4</sup> but also among those interested in Turkish recent history, to trace the demise of class based popular opposition back to the 1980 coup d'état. They tend to ignore the rising labor protests of the second part of the eighties simply because these protests did not seem to fit into the overall pattern.

Almost all periodization of Turkish history cites 1980 as a breaking point. The unanimity disappears though when it comes to defining what is broken at that year. Nevertheless, the point made by İlkey Sunar can be safely repeated on this issue: "The populist state was to be exchanged for a small but strong neo-utilitarian

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<sup>4</sup> Apart from those who discard the possibility of lower class agency in Turkish history, even left winger academics share this tendency. See for instance, Yüksel Akkaya, "Yeni Yasaların Kıskaçında Sınıf Örgütleri" paper presented to the first symposium of Class Studies, TÜSAM (14-16 October 2004).

one.”<sup>5</sup> Populism both in its authoritarian and more or less democratic versions must incorporate some degree of patronage networks<sup>6</sup> through which the popular classes not only get unequal rewards from the system but these networks also provide a shaky basis for political participation by these classes. In the Turkish case this provides a link between the labor and state through the trade unions, this link had to be broken and replaced by the rational considerations of the accounting standards and the labor market, at least in the level of the ideological discourse promoted in the officialdom and the mass media.

Turkey is not unique in witnessing the rise of free economy/strong state<sup>7</sup> type of politics known as neo-conservatism to the detriment of populism. The regimes of the southern cone in Latin America that survived a coup in the early seventies witnessed a more or less comparable experience.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, in that respect one must not focus solely on the regimes with fragile political democracies, for instance in the United Kingdom a thorough transformation is also realized, though through a different form of authoritarianism. In the more entrenched democracies, where trade unions were far more powerful, more vigilant policing of social protest is also a policy choice that the governments resort to in order to implement their political

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<sup>5</sup> İlkey Sunar, “The Politics of State Interventionism in ‘Populist’ Egypt and Turkey”, ISS/POLS 93-02, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Lynn A. Hammergren, “Corporatism in Latin American Politics a Reexamination of the Unique Tradition,” *Comparative Politics* (July 1977), pp. 443-461; or James A. Morris and Steve C. Ropp, “Corporatism and Dependent Development a Honduran Case Study” *Latin American Research Review* 12, no.2, (1977), pp. 27-66.

<sup>7</sup> The term is first used by Andrew Gamble, for an evaluation of neo-conservatist government of Thatcherite Britain See Andrew Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: the Politics of Thatcherism*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1988. For a comparison of new-conservatism in Great Britain and the policies of the Motherland Party in Turkey see Muharrem Tünay, “The Turkish New Right’s Attempt at Hegemony,” in A. Eralp, M. Tünay, B. Yeşilada (eds.) *The Political and Socioeconomic Transformation of Turkey*, Praeger, London, 1993, pp.11-30.

<sup>8</sup> Hector E. Schamis, “Reconceptualizing Latin American Authoritarianism in the 1970s from Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism to Neoconservatism” *Comparative Politics*, vol. 23, no.2, (January 1991), pp.201-220.

agenda of structural transformation. The Thatcher government realized such reforms during the early eighties by widening the scope of police interference in industrial disputes. These may be not analogous fully, yet they provide hints for the relationship between economic restructuring periods and change in the regulation of interest representation and mediation practices. More importantly these cases illustrate the need to subdue the organized labor and its representatives in order to achieve the objectives of neoliberal transformation. This suppression, whether achieved through state violence such as in the coup d'état in Chile or through a symbolic defeat in a decisive strike such as the defeat of the miners strike in Great Britain<sup>9</sup>, demonstrates that the political actors of the neoliberal politics almost always targets the backbone of the organized labor because that is the bone that breaks first under the neoliberal transformation. If they failed in subduing the trade unions, the governments might fail to implement their policy of transformation.

Although during the late seventies and the eighties most governments observed the terms of the Washington Consensus,<sup>10</sup> the policy package promoted by the international financial institutions to implement neoliberal agenda, the reactions against these measures followed a divergent progress. The eighties were calm mostly in the Latin America and Europe, in contrast to Turkey, the nineties on the other hand was quiet in Turkey and ripe with protest movements nearly everywhere. This discrepancy is worthy of attention and its analysis can contribute to the research program of the social movements literature by shedding light on the diverse conditions leading to the emergence and the decline of the cycles of protest. The

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<sup>9</sup> This strike especially inspires the main argument of this dissertation since Edward P. Thompson once describes this strike as the clash of the moral economy of the miners with the ideology of the Thatcher government; see the relevant part below in the first chapter, pp. 39-40.

<sup>10</sup> For the original study by John Williamson where he defines the Washington Consensus see <http://www.iie.com/publications/papers/paper.cfm?researchid=486> retrieved in 2009-09-07.

policies pursued by the Turkish military regime and the following civilian government headed by Turgut Özal eradicated the basis of the populist politics to an important extent.

The neoconservative Motherland Party government instigated a political assault against the organized labor in order to complete the adjustment of the Turkish society, on the basis of the legal institutional framework created under the junta administration and destroyed whatever political leverage the trade unions enjoyed previously. Moreover, it managed to establish the supremacy of the anti-populist discourse in the ideological field. It successfully demonized the organized labor and the state economic enterprises, its bastion of activity, by blaming them as the reason of the inefficiency of the Turkish economy that undermines its international competitiveness. Within these circumstances the protest movement emerged.

Structural transformation of the economy in order to be competitive internationally involves destroying some existing institutions in order to clear space for new ones. In the cases cited above, this means destroying deliberately the populist vestiges of the old regimes and also some aspects of the participatory democracy, especially those aspects related to the regime of industrial relations. This neoliberal project though is not applied in an uncontested manner. The trade unions, and more importantly the employees of the public sector did not cave in while their social status is deteriorated. One of the most important eras of the popular resistance movements occurred at the end of the eighties as a direct reaction against these policies of transformation, and succeeded to trim or slow down some aspects of the original venture designed by the Motherland Party government by 1991, when a new ruling coalition constituted to take over the task.

What triggered this staunch and unprecedented resistance led to some extent by the establishment of the Turkish trade union leadership is the crucial question here. If what is at stake was simply the declining purchasing power of the unionized workers or new regulations disadvantageous to the trade unions, a compromise might have been negotiated, and an outcome, even one largely victimizing the labor's interest could be reached without any large scale disturbance. Yet the intent of the government leaves out any possibility of compromise, since it threatens the rationale of existence of the trade unions as they were. This rigid ideological stand, foreign to the established practices of Turkish governments when dealing with trade unions, created uproar among the workers and triggered a cycle of protest.

The first indices of the discontent date back to the mid 1986 and coincide with the initial attempts to erase some excesses of the legacy of the military intervention. Every year after 1986, until the general elections of 1991, witnessed instances of labor unrest both in the private and public sector. The unionized workers were leading this movement defying the repressive political climate of that era. However, the trade unions retreated to a quasi political insignificance during the nineties and became completely sterile vis-à-vis the reforms introduced after the financial crisis that hits the country in 2001. The newly elected coalition government of 1991, although adopted the neoliberal agenda of its predecessor to some extent, did not embrace its ideological zeal and confrontational rhetoric, thus pursued a more appeasing method in government reminiscent of the earlier ways of patronage towards the trade unions. It can be argued that once the old populist rhetoric used in dealings with trade unions was restored, the inflammatory atmosphere reigning among the unionized workers waned and their leadership reinstated business as usual, eventually losing even the terrain upon which they operated.

The policies of the Özal government did trigger widespread popular unrest with the trade unions at the forefront, despite the exceptionally faint climate of democratization of the latter part of the eighties compared to the subsequent era. These protests contributed to the electoral setbacks of the Motherland Party both in the 1989 municipal elections and the 1991 general elections. Therefore, it is only normal to assume that the opposition put forth by the trade unions themselves in that era is related to an intense indignation toward the government. It is argued here that the reason behind this ire of the Turkish unionized workers is a breach of their moral economy, established in the specific context of the previous era symbolized by populism, goals of national development and modernization through industrialization.

Therefore, this introduction will be followed by a chapter evaluating the relevance of the moral economy argument for a cycle of protest led by the trade unions in a modern industrialized economy. To this end, first the social movement literature will be introduced in order to situate the contours of the protest of the second part of the eighties into the wider context of collective action. Secondly, in order to differentiate the moral economy argument from essentialist biases, the literature of historical institutionalism is addressed for stating a historically constructed model of moral economy through the intermediation of the political events and institutions. The second chapter is devoted to the process tracing of the trajectory of the development of the trade unions in Turkey and the formation of the moral economy of the unionized workers in a parallel course. The final part of the study deals with the in-depth analysis of the political events of the eighties and the peculiarities of the protest movement spanning from the last days of 1986 to the fall of 1991. The aftermath is briefly touched upon in the concluding chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND CONTENTIOUS POLITICS

From the nineteenth century onwards the masses and their opinions became a political force to be reckoned with and this development not only transformed the dynamics of the political systems but also the scope of interest of political sciences. The peasant rebellions and food riots of the past era shifted to the new forms of mass protest and contentious politics, and gained a new meaning and significance in the context of the capitalist mode of production. Marc Bloch once argued that for the historian the peasant revolt is inseparable from the feudal regime as the strikes to the big capitalist business,<sup>11</sup> yet the impact of the modern mass movements over the modern polities is much wider to the extent of creating a distinct focus of study. How the collective action by workers shape the political processes and it is shaped by these processes in return; and does this interaction matter in determining the broader issues of the political system? What is the exact working of this interaction? All of these questions constitute legitimate starting points for diverse research programs. That is why collective action and social movements are subjects of scholarly debates for a long time.

This researcher tries to interpret the dynamics of the protest movement against the policies of the neoliberal transformation in the second part of the eighties in Turkey. The actions of the unionized workers made headlines at that time and the

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Rodney Hilton, *Class Conflict and Crisis of Feudalism*, Verso, London, 1990, p.49.

opposition of the trade unions to the governmental policies aiming at transforming the regime of industrial relations concerning the state economic enterprises and big private businesses dominated the political agenda. Turkish labor movement was the main actor of this protest yet it declined eventually to obscurity during and after the nineties when it reached some of its avowed goals at the end of the eighties.

Obviously, this movement constitutes also an experience comparable to, but not identical with the wider global resistance to the neoliberal transformation that emerged sporadically in different parts of the world and took a durable content only after the mid nineties onwards. The emergence and decline of social movements are not random incidents, indeed mass movements generally emerge as systemic phenomena following well patterned cycles. Resorting to collective action to voice social demands or political support is an essential part of the political processes that is why “the analysis of the political awakening of past groups may contain clues for our own understanding of current political situations and behavior”.<sup>12</sup> The rationale behind collective action, the dynamics of social movements, if discerned, can provide hints for interpreting the present and even intervening in it.

The sixties and the seventies, rather than the eighties, are normally considered as the period worthy of the interest of the students of social movements in Turkey, especially those interested in the labor movements. This era is marked by exceptionally vibrant social mobilization and the workers were leading the way. The unionization rates grew consistently throughout these two decades. Many important strikes and other forms of protest and resistance were organized by the laborers or their trade unions. The labor organizations established during the late forties and survived their first experience of confrontation, struggle and institutionalization in

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<sup>12</sup> Suzanne Desan, “Crowds, Community, and Ritual in the work of E. P. Thompson and Natalie Davis” in Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History*, University of California Press, London, 1989, p.56.



the fifties, blossomed in the course of these two decades. In comparative terms though, similar developments also took place elsewhere. The seedbed of the new social movements like the peace movement or the second generation women's movement is the sixties,<sup>13</sup> the labor movement, on the other hand, the old social movement, seems to be brisk especially in the developing countries where the suitable circumstances materialized due to the policies of import substitution. The industrialization contributed to the success of the organized labor in the sixties around the developing world. This success, though ultimately resulted in military interventions that were realized, among other reasons, to curb down the political impact of the labor in some of the Third World countries under different guises, from the end of Nasser era in Egypt to the toppling down of the first elected Marxist president in Chile. Turkey was no exception to this pattern.

Turkey, nevertheless, was an exception in the eighties. Most of the developing countries that Turkey was compared above did not witness a widespread mass upheaval led by the trade unions in that period, apart from Brazil and South Korea, two countries that received a large amount of foreign direct investment. However, even in these two cases their governments, some of which were outright military dictatorships, managed to adjust the working of the economy to put it in line with the suggestion of the international financial institutions without endangering their domination in these countries. They were so successful in that respect that most of them opted for opening up of their regime in the early nineties without the fear of social mobilization. It seems that the absence of social protest encouraged the political elite for democratization. Some researchers studying the transition to democracy and its prospects argue that the reestablished democracies would exclude

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<sup>13</sup> For an evaluation of the challenge brought by the legacy of the mass actions of the 68 see Clauss Offe, "New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics," *Social Research*, vol. 52, no. 4, 1985, pp. 817-868.

the domain of economic decision making from the interference of popular politics as a compromise for limited democratization, indeed the absence of popular mobilization demanding democratization allow constructing such restrained regimes through elite pacts. Especially the transition literature focusing on the experience of the Latin American countries put forth such arguments.<sup>14</sup> This point of view was also influential in the analysis of the establishment of free market regimes in Eastern Europe. All of these ideas and developments can be considered as an indication of the lethargy in the labor resistance in these countries.

The consequence of these approaches dictated the end of a specific form of political participation and claim making, and it is suggested that this contributed to the transition to democracy. For instance, Brian Loveman argues that the domain of economics is outside of the scope of the political debates in mid nineties in Latin America while the extent of the democratization process widened,<sup>15</sup> since the management of the economics is considered the privilege of the technicians. However, from the mid nineties onwards a new cycle of protest engulfed the world. In Latin America, popular movements toppled down the governments pursuing neoliberal political agendas from the end of the nineties onwards.<sup>16</sup> In Europe the integration process created a backlash especially among the small farmers and unionized workers and public servants beginning with the French resistance against the public sector reform in 1995. The 1999 convention of the World Trade

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<sup>14</sup> For the original arguments of the transition literature see Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, Laurence Whitehead (eds.), *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986.

<sup>15</sup> For a depiction of the Chilean political situation prior to the first democratic elections after the coup see Brian Loveman, "Protected Democracies and Military Guardianship: Political Transitions in Latin America 1978-1993," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 36, no. 2, (Summer 1994), pp. 105-189.

<sup>16</sup> For an overall political evaluation of the Latin American experience during the cited era see Masis Kürkçügil (der.), *Latin Amerikanın Kaynayan Damarları*, İthaki, İstanbul, 2004.

Organization failed to convene due to large scale mass protests later dubbed as the “battle of Seattle”. The protest against neoliberal globalization also increasingly involved workers and employees, especially from the public service.<sup>17</sup> Today the sum of these protests is analyzed under the general heading of “Global Justice Movement”.

Meanwhile the exceptionally vocal Turkish labor movement of the late eighties was silent, apart from certain spontaneous instances of collective action led by self employed or petty employer small craftsmen. In a nutshell, it can be asserted that where the social movements were more or less silent in the countries that shared a similar trajectory of economic hardships triggering mass movements followed by structural adjustment under the supervision of military dictatorships, the Turkish organized labor became a hub of protest, yet right after the change in government it became inert during the nineties and the following era, while social protests made headlines globally. This divergent timing can shed light on the social and political dynamics of the mobilization process behind mass movements. If the factors specific to the Turkish trade unionism can be isolated from the other factors external to the immediate social experiences of workers and trade unions, the analysis of the rise and the eventual fading of the labor protest against the neoliberal agenda of the Özal administration can contribute to the literature on social movements.

To this end, the particular traits of the Turkish organized labor movement and its strategic choices during this period must be analyzed in terms of the research agenda of the social movement’s literature such as its organizational background, its earlier experiences of protest and resistance, the political opportunity structure in

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<sup>17</sup> Donatella Della Porta, “Multiple Belongings Tolerant Identities and the Construction of another Politics: Between the European Social Forum and the Local Social Fora,” in Sydney Tarrow Donatella Della Porta (eds.), *Transnational Movements and Global Activism*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2005, pp.175-202, p.181.

time of mobilization and the interaction of the movement with the political actors.

The following chapter deals with this objective. The main point of interest seems to be the clarification of the circumstances under which the workers show the aptitude to act as a class, in the sense that mobilizing with a discourse stressing the unity and uniqueness of all workers and in order to defend their material interests arisen from their social place in the physical reproduction of their societies. This is a distinguishing point since the workers did not often tend to overlook their other social identities in order to act collectively as a class.

Moreover, when the workers mobilize in order to either defend their already existing rights and privileges or reclaim new ones, they did not act out on the same motivation. This difference can reflect the disparity between defensive and offensive strategies of labor protest respectively.<sup>18</sup> In both instances, workers act on their class identity yet in the former we can allude to a class for itself and in the latter to a class in itself. It seems that in general the resistance against the neoliberal transformation that is mentioned here is largely a defensive action against the penetration of market relations deep into the social relationships of production. It is less likely a movement animated by the working class ideology to emerge and threaten the governments after the demise of the existing socialist regimes, anyway. Therefore, the last wave of resistance labeled under the heading of the Global Justice Movement is led by a social coalition not necessarily representing a class based political agenda. In this vein, Ayşe Buğra claims that mostly the resistance against commodification and further entrenchment of the market rationale deep into the social relationships cause

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<sup>18</sup> Beverly Silver in a recent study based on the World System approach points to similar classification see Beverly Silver, *Emeğin Gücü: 1870'ten Günümüze İşçi Hareketleri ve Küreselleşme*, Yordam Kitap, İstanbul, 2009.

mass actions on the basis of a general class identity without differentiating between the alternative roles of this identity.<sup>19</sup>

This remark is compatible with the case studied here, where the unionized workers were targeted by a government pursuing a neoliberal policy agenda, which aims to transform the Turkish economy according to the needs of a more direct articulation to the global markets. This objective constituted an actual threat against the moral economy of the Turkish unionized workers concretized in the words and deeds of the Özal administration. However, it must be noted that in the Turkish case the threatened social segment is a small and privileged group within the larger community of wage earners, although their gains improve the conditions of the wage earners through largely indirect dynamics, the popularization of the protests to the social groups outside the immediately affected sectors can not be taken for granted. The nature of the leadership of the movement and the specific traits of the cited moral economy itself might be a factor in this respect. Therefore, their making must also be analyzed in order to comprehensively study the protest against the Özal administration led by trade unions, but first the basic points in the study of a social movement must be illuminated.

### The Development of the Social Movements Literature

Social movements have been defined as movements composed of networks of groups and activists, with an emerging identity, involved in conflictual issues, using mainly nonconventional forms of participation.<sup>20</sup> The emergence of organized mass action

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<sup>19</sup> Ayşe Buğra, "Sınıf ve Siyaset" *Toplum ve Bilim*, (2008), no. 113, pp.9-20.

<sup>20</sup> Donatella Della Porta, Mario Diani, *Social Movements: an Introduction*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1999, pp.1-32.

always stimulated research and theoretical work. Some tries to reason on this “anomaly”, some others want to build universal ways to investigate such actions, especially when they accumulate in particular periods. Revolutions are obvious cases of study, yet phenomena less momentous than revolutions, cycle of protests to be exact, also preoccupied both political scientists and sociologists. Individual anxiety over similar issues tends to coalesce to form social unrest that may turn to mass movements representing itself in collective action or else wider social concerns and specific political contexts may increase the tendency of individuals to act collectively. Therefore social protest usually comes in periodic sets. Indeed scattered events are hardly noticeable both in history and also in actual newspaper headlines.

Generally, the analyses assume that collective action shows the cumulated effects of past experience, overlooking their connection to the modernization processes.<sup>21</sup> What creates this impression is their embeddedness into the popular traditions of claim making, avoidance from authorities and resistance. One of the important links between past struggles and the present movement is the repertoire of collective action, the toolkit of protest. People usually do not improvise to demonstrate their opposition to an authoritative incursion into their daily lives or to further a cause that they hold dear, they rather rely on a limited set of routines that are learned through past struggles or transferred from another domain of the daily life, shared in the community over the generations and acted out collectively. In the era of modern communication technology the international demonstration effect can also enlarge this tool kit when a publicized form of protest from a particular part of the world adopted elsewhere thanks to this mass media visibility. The repertoire of action although constituting a means of exposing the social protest and popular

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Tilly, “Introduction” in Louis A. Tilly, Charles Tilly (eds.) *Class Conflict and Collective Action*, Sage Publications, London, 1981, pp.13-25, p.16.

claims to the authorities and to the public in general, also molds the political message that it carries. A particular choice from this tool kit by linking the present action to the past adds to the political message of that act. For instance, Turkish trade unions mention marching to Ankara in mass only to signal they are serious.

The study of mass movements became an object of study at the end of the nineteenth century. The earliest accounts of the mass movements focused on the irrationality of the crowds and treated their collective action as an anomaly. For instance, Gustave Le Bon, who held racist views and whose work is widely known in Turkey, related the crowd behavior to the unconscious mind and underlines its irrationality. Indeed mass actions, which means the methods that the underprivileged sectors of the society had to resort for the sake of claim making, interest protecting or furthering, such as peasant rebellions, food riots and worker upheavals, were considered as abnormal by the scholars, who had mostly elite origins, reporting them at the time. Nevertheless, such points of view also reflect the general mood of the interwar period in Europe, and lost their appeal after the disastrous results of the nationalist and racist solidarist ideologies.

Some other studies, on the other hand, follow an intuitive approach to the problem and drew on the grievances of the masses caused by strains or the experiences of relative deprivation.<sup>22</sup> According to this view, for instance, food riots occur since rural poor aggrieved because of the famines. However since not every widespread famine results in large scale disturbances, it can be asserted that the existence of a legitimate grievance provides a very vague motivation for social movements to thrive. Other factors must also be present in order to translate the grievances into concrete political acts. The essential question then must be what

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<sup>22</sup> See for instance Neil Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*, Free Press, New York, 1962.

allowed for or facilitated the translation of their grievances into acts of protest<sup>23</sup> and what determines the structural limits of this protest movements in the conceptualization of its actors. The approach of the later inquiries, especially after the rise of the civil rights movement in the United States, allows the students of social movements to focus on these other factors affecting collective action.

The modern scholarly study of collective action and social movements began in the sixties when Mancur Olson challenged the existing approach based on the assumption of the irrationality of the crowd behavior. Relying on the individual rationality assumption of the classical economics and methodological individualism of the same school, he argued that people calculate cost and benefits of participating into mass actions when they are victimized by the social, political and economic circumstances surrounding them. Hence crowds did not possess an irrational attitude of acting separate from the cumulated sum of the interest arithmetic of the individuals constituting the crowd.<sup>24</sup> On the ground that not every anguished citizen act on its grievances, he argues that the individuals involved in such actions are calculating the costs and benefits of their moves and what the students of these actions must account for, are the parameters of those cases in which those involved act on their grievances apart from the great pile of other cases where those who are victimized silently accepted their fate. Thus he gave a focus for study to every researcher to rationalize when and under which conditions the under privileged sectors of the society act on their demands in the guise of mass actions and protest movements.

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<sup>23</sup> James E. Cronin, "Strikes and Power in Britain, 1870-1920," in Leopold Haimson, Charles Tilly (eds.), *Strikes, Wars, and Revolutions in an International Perspective: Strikes Waves in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2002, pp.79-100, p.89.

<sup>24</sup> For the now classic study see Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Rational Choice*, Harward University Press, Cambridge, 1965.



However, the selfish motives of profit maximization are insufficient to account for many instances of great cycles of protest when in solidarity with the underprivileged many people sacrificed even their lives for a just cause. Sydney Tarrow illustrates this by referring to the civil rights movement in the United States during the sixties when thousands “struck, marched, rioted and demonstrated on behalf of interests other than their own.”<sup>25</sup> This apparent shortcoming did not discredit the rational choice model based theories among the academic circles, yet it contributed to a shift in focus of the researchers to the process of mobilization behind collective actions and social movements. The greatest contribution in this respect is the introduction of the resource mobilization theory which focuses on internal structures and strategies of the social movements in their attempt to reproduce themselves and mobilize resources.<sup>26</sup> The main interest of the resource mobilization research program lies in the mobilization process and the formal organizational manifestations of these processes. This means the main question that this research program deals with is how do instigators of social movements rally their cohorts and promote their causes with the best available strategies given limited cognitive and material resources available to them. In this respect, this approach shifted its focus from the individual rationality to the collective one.

The main focus of study of the resource mobilization research program are the social movement organizations, in a sense the rationally calculating individual of Mancur Olson was replaced by the machinations of an organization trying to further its cause by recruiting more people, collecting more money and canvassing more

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<sup>25</sup> Sydney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p.16.

<sup>26</sup> See John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” in John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald (eds.), *Social Movements in an Organizational Society*, Transaction, New Brunswick, 1987, pp.15-48; or Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movements*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1973.

decision makers. Therefore, the organizational strategies became the center of attention in this approach, inspired by the neoclassical economics' assumptions on the working of firms. The social movement organizations, though, do not operate in void. The shortcoming of this approach is its inability to evaluate the external factors influencing the development trajectory of the social movements since it narrows down its analysis to the organizational strategies and internal mechanisms of the social movement organizations. These weaknesses of the resource mobilization research program were supplanted by a new generation of studies that included the political context and the interaction of the social movements with this context into the analysis, without leaving out the basic tenets of the resource mobilization approach. Indeed, these new studies are realized by those already working in the tradition of the resource mobilization research program.

One of the pioneers in this respect was the study of the civil rights movement in the United States by Doug McAdam.<sup>27</sup> The key analytical tool of this approach is the depiction of the political process in which the incipient movement recruits members, mobilizes resources and in its turn affect or try to affect the political context. The technical term used to denote this context is the political opportunity structure. Political opportunity structures are comprised of specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others.<sup>28</sup> The initiative of the movement organizers becomes consequential mostly in opportune political environment. The late studies

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<sup>27</sup> Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982.

<sup>28</sup> Herbert P. Kitschelt, "Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies," *British Journal of Political Science*, vol.16, no.1, (January 1986), pp.57-85, p.58.

by McAdam in collaboration with Charles Tilly and Sydney Tarrow<sup>29</sup> are devoted to surpass the inadequacies of their research program by focusing on more dynamic type of social relationships and the later stages of the mobilization processes. They also tried to incorporate cultural aspects of these processes into their theoretical schemes. These scholars also point to the threats created by political transformations to some specific sectors of the society thus, save the concept from merely describing opportune moments for social mobilization. This means the analysis of the political opportunity structure shed light on the answer of the question *why* movements emerge *when* they emerge, but the political process model developed by Tilly, McAdam and Tarrow also tried to figure out and analyze their later trajectory and institutionalization.

The political opportunity structure<sup>30</sup>, although it affects the choice of protest strategies and the impact of social movements on their environments, cannot determine the course of the development of the movements, yet it can account for the variation between different cases of mass actions built over similar cases of unrest or conflict, like the penetration of market relations into the social texture fostered by the global neoliberal onslaught. This means it can be useful in the analysis of the divergent trajectory that diverse social movements with similar motives followed that is cited above concerning the Turkish protest against the neoliberal transformation. The analysis into the political process surrounding the mobilization and the demobilization provide a useful theoretical starting point. Defining the political opportunity structure available to the organizers of a specific movement along with

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<sup>29</sup> See for instance Doug McAdam, Sydney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

<sup>30</sup> For an evaluation of the concept of context structure see Dieter Rucht, "The Impact of National Contexts on Social Movement Structures: A Cross-movement and Cross-national Comparison" in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald, (eds.) *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements Political Opportunities, Mobilising Structures and Cultural Framings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 185-204.

the description of the actual social mobilization are the basic tenets of this study of the protest movement that engulfed Turkey in the second part of the eighties.

The recent contribution to the theory of collective action stresses the importance of *framing* in processes of mobilization. The concept of framing points the discursive attempt to give meaning and tag the topology within which the efforts to recruit members and to mobilize resources occur. An individual grievance, a sectoral claim remains inconsequential unless it is framed to correspond to a particular social boundary, and translated to a political discourse recognized as legitimate by a significant faction of the society. Indeed, “the capacity to mobilize cannot be derived automatically from grievances; they first have to be mobilized, and there is often a social and institutional network behind collective action”<sup>31</sup> that rendered this grievance to socially identifiable patterns. The success of the instigators of an incipient movement in that respect largely determines the fortune of the movement. However, the first examples of the political process approach focused only to the opportunity structures and ignored these identity formation processes. To remedy this deficiency, the later studies of the political process research program included the “formation of political identities, mobilization of different actors, fragmentation or coalescence of collective action, and mutation of the paths taken by ongoing struggles”<sup>32</sup> into their explanatory schemes. Recently, the political process research program argues that explanations for movement activism needed to incorporate awareness about background structural conditions, insight into changing political opportunities, the availability of resources, and the cultural or framing

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<sup>31</sup> Katarzyna Gajewska, “The Emergence of a European Labor Protest Movement?” *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol.14, no.1, (2008) pp.104-121, p.105.

<sup>32</sup> Doug McAdam, Sydney Tarrow, Charles Tilly, (2001). p. 32.

processes whereby activists made sense of these.<sup>33</sup> However, the analysis of the political opportunity structure is still a crucial part of any endeavor to make sense of the development and decline of the process of mobilization.

We must unpack the concept of political opportunity in order to prevent it from degenerating into a factor encompassing every condition and circumstance encircling a social movement, moreover we must also take into account that social movements themselves create or shift political opportunities.<sup>34</sup> “Political opportunity structures comprised of specific configuration of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others”<sup>35</sup> is a key variable in developing the incipient movement, a simple social or economic grievance, an attempt by a loosely organized group of people, into an actual social reality. Changes in the political opportunity structure affect the ease or difficulty of mobilization, the costs and benefits of collective claim making, the feasibility of various strategies of action available to the movement organizers in pursuing their goals, and the choice of a specific form of claim making from the repertoire of action in line with the actual circumstances surrounding the movement.<sup>36</sup>

The concept of political opportunity structure, however, does not chart a diagram of governmental leniency towards the incipient movements. It is a well known fact that the repressive regimes are not invulnerable to the large scale social

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<sup>33</sup> Brian Mello, “Political Process and the Development of Labor Insurgency in Turkey, 1945-80,” *Social Movement Studies*, vol. 6, no.3, 2007, pp. 207-225, p. 208.

<sup>34</sup> For such an attempt see William A. Gamson, David S. Meyer, “Framing Political Opportunity,” in Doug McAdam, et al (eds.), 1996, pp.275-290, p. 277.

<sup>35</sup> Herbert P. Kitschelt, “Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-nuclear Movements in Four Democracies,” *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 16. no.1 (January 1986), pp.57-85, p.58

<sup>36</sup> For an in depth analysis of these issues see Charles Tilly, Sydney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, Paradigm Publishers, Boulder, 2006, pp. 45-67.

mobilization processes amounting to or threatening to amount to political revolutions. What matters is the convenience of the political context to successfully recruit members, mobilize resources for a newcomer to the political establishment to challenge a status quo in this establishment. The power of the authorities responsible for maintaining the order as well as the coalition put together by the organizers of the challenge is relevant in this respect, alongside the perception of threat by the movement organizers directed to themselves and the social group that they represent. How they frame themselves and the challenged so as to demonstrate themselves as a legitimate social force representing a significant portion of the society against a small coalition of interest that tries to maintain an illegitimate goal, and actually how much of this mainframe corresponds to the actual political reality, all influence the outcome of the mobilization attempt and its ultimate fate. The political process model incorporates all of these factors into its explanatory scheme.

The definition of the “legitimate” for a social group is obviously normative and contextual all at once and depends on the historical developments, cultural understandings and the contemporary expectations in the relevant social domain. In this respect, the disruption of time-honored social arrangements between the parties to the industrial relations regime is a case in point. When a government or an employer deliberately breaks the established patterns of employment, claim making by the employee or the measures of working conditions and wage levels, the bond of contextually and intersubjectively conceived legitimacy encircling the relationship between the parties is compromised. For instance the Thatcher government which wanted to impose the criterion of efficiency in determining the miners’ wage by bypassing the trade union’s authority created uproar in the union circles; or else the

introduction of new machinery to cut jobs<sup>37</sup> is known to create backlash under various forms. A similar situation can occur, for instance, when the moral economy of the workers is broken deliberately by their governments.

That is why a thorough analysis of the political process leading to the emergence of a social movement must consist of a thick description of the historical precedents for the mass actions realized by the similar sectors of society, available tool kit of protest to the instigators of the movement organizations, institutional habits of claim making prevalent in the polity and the organizational blueprints of the associations involved in the mobilization process as well as the legal institutional setting concerning the social claims and demands the social coalitions, the propensity of the political actors to accommodate or to repress the means of claim making, and the interaction among these actors. Without such a framework it is hard to make sense, for instance, from the seemingly spontaneous unionization movement emerged in Turkey in 1946 right after the withdrawal of legal ban over the establishments of class based societies. The emergence of favorable political conditions in the aftermath of the Allied victory over the Nazi Germany paved the way for the worker militants to foster their interest in trade unions, yet their rapid success, in the context of the general anxiety of the political class from the Soviet threat, prompted the government to interfere into the working of these trade unions.

This example also illustrates that once the incipient movements began to recruit members and mobilize resources they interact with the political and social settings hence transform them to some extent and create new experiences to add on the existing historical precedents and the established tool kit of social protest so as to alter the political environment within which the movement gathered momentum in

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<sup>37</sup> For an illustration of cases of machine breaking in the Ottoman Empire see Donald Quataert, "Machine Breaking and the Changing Carpet Industry of Western Anatolia, 1860-1908" *Journal of Social History*, vol. 11, (Spring 1986), pp.473-489.

the first place. The conflictual relationship between the claim-maker organized groups and political authorities, in addition to their internal organization, available tangible and intangible means and cumulated experience of these groups shape the trajectory of the social movements. Nevertheless, apart from the immediate economic and political situation surrounding the movement organizers deeper structural dynamics such as state formation, urbanization or market creation also conditions the circumstances under which the initiation and demobilization of the social movements occurs. This wider context though affects the political opportunity structure through more indirect means hence such impacts can be evaluated in the historical development that movements and especially their organizational forms undergo during their lifetime.

### The Historical Trajectory of Collective Action

State formation is a continuous process that shape and reshape the social and political environment within which social actors, including the organized labor, operate. That is why the process of state formation constitutes a significant portion of the political opportunity structure. Charles Tilly, among others, analyzes the impact of the structural transformation of the state organization over the tool kits, political mainframe and the discourse of social movements, for instance the strike behavior of the trade unions; such analysis require large chunks of time periods such as half a century. Sydney Tarrow argues that the most fruitful way of studying political opportunity structures is the analysis of state making in a dynamic process of interaction with social movements.<sup>38</sup> However, putting too much emphasis on

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<sup>38</sup> Sydney Tarrow, "States and Opportunities: The Political Structuring of Social Movements," in Doug McAdam, et al (eds.), 1996, pp.41-61.



structural processes can diffuse the role of the social actors in determining the course of social movements. The studies of Tilly and others are widely criticized from this respect.

The eventful sociology as baptized by Sewell<sup>39</sup>, tries to conceptualize historical events as dislocations and transformative rearticulations of structures. In that he does not overlook the historical constraints brought by the structures. However, the structural context surrounding the event is a necessary, but not a sufficient cause to transform any incident to an epoch making historical event; the conjunctural features must also be present. This means that when the underlying social structures changed, for instance a transformation in the cultural schemas attributing power to some intangible qualities, the conceptualization of particular events also shifts. A food riot, an event using the repertoire of a food riot to be exact, can be perceived as the constituent occasion of a revolution, and its timing, particular details and consequences will have a non negligible impact over the course of the following developments. Therefore, it would be misleading and deficient to explain solely the structural transformation when the trajectory of the mobilization and demobilization process is accounted for. Visible social and political events of this process, which are the eruption of this structural configuration in the surface, must also be recorded. These events cannot be considered as epiphenomena since they have genuine influence over the deeper and mostly invisible social patterns.

According to Sydney Tarrow, the recent work by Charles Tilly narrowed the gap between the two approaches since, although a structuralist, he began to offer more elaborate historical narrative describing events illustrating the deeper structural transformation of the society as well as the more traditional precursors of

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<sup>39</sup> William H. Sewell, jr. "Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology" in Terrence J. McDonald (ed.), *The Historic turn in the Human Science*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1996, pp. 245-280.

transformations in the mode of production or state building processes such as the statistical data on strikes or riots spanning over long periods. Tarrow compares the earlier *The Contentious French* to the later *Popular Contention in Great Britain* to depict this transformation and cites the latter study as the best available work using both approaches.<sup>40</sup> It seems that the students of social movements and collective action must take into account both the longer time frame during which the deeper transformations reflect themselves and instantaneous developments during which the precise effects of these deeper transformations are played out and mediated for future stages of the historical trajectory.

The study of the mobilization process of a specific sector of society is not independent from the wider structural determinants of that polity. For instance, the process of capital accumulation and the articulation of a local economy to the global markets condition the chances of the organized labor to successfully further its cause. Between 1960 and 1980 while the central developmental strategy was based on import substitution the overall political impact of the labor organizations were stronger, more confrontational methods of claim making were preferred by the trade unions, and the propensity to wage mass actions, some even involved violence, is higher. On the contrary, during the eighties when the capital accumulation strategy of the industrial bourgeoisie was more export oriented these indicators were reversed. The process of nation building also influences the lot of organized labor in many ways. For instance, the transfer of capital to the nascent Muslim bourgeoisie by the Young Turks also contained a loose policy of reserving some industrial jobs for Muslim workers. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why the nationalist discourse turned out to be a key part of the repertoire of action of the Turkish organized labor.

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<sup>40</sup> Sydney Tarrow, "The People's Two Rhythms: Charles Tilly and the Study of Contentious Politics, A Review Article," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol.38, no.3, (July 1996), pp. 586-600.

Nevertheless, the great events in the historical trajectory of the development of the social movements also matters. The perception of success or defeat in the crucial confrontations between social actors, the learning process that it triggered, conditions the repertoire of action, the tool kit of social protest. These struggles also provide the main frame for the social actors taking part in new struggles. The organizers relied on these past experiences to define “us” and the “other”, what is legitimate and illegitimate. This is especially true for social actors such as the organized labor that more or less preserved its political existence throughout decades. Turkish trade unions, for instance, are keen to link their demands to the national developmental goals of the country, and define their claims in these terms. The textile workers’ trade unions demanded relentlessly protectionist measures to save their jobs during the late forties and the early fifties despite the warnings from the governments to not interfere in the political debates in the parliament. The union’s efforts and the reaction from the political parties at the time influenced the later rhetoric concerning the employment and the defense of jobs by the trade unions. That is why the thick description of events is crucial in deciphering the key aspects of the mobilization process and in our case it is vital in exposing the historical precedents conditioning the time frame under scrutiny and the path of development of the Turkish organized labor movement which constitutes its repertoire of action and its propensity to act collectively and resist relying on this tool kit.

### The Working Class Movement

The labor movement is the definitive mass movement of the industrial era. From the emergence of Chartism to the eight hours work day campaign, the labor movement

set the standards of the collective action for the modern age. In time, its institutionalization made the labor movement an established political force in national politics, especially in the industrialized countries workers were demobilized and the trade unions participated in the conventional political processes as their representatives after the Second World War. Consequently, the organized labor lost its traits of a lively social force especially in the industrialized countries yet it became a significant political force. Some fringe political groups tried in these countries to revitalize the organized labor as a movement with alternative strategies to no avail. Meanwhile, a new social force gathers strength throughout the sixties and erupted into the political scenery in 1968 and afterwards. The new student led radicalism and their counter culture challenged the establishment and triggered a new cycle of protest based on the resistance against diverse aspects of the capitalist society, yet their ideas also clashed with the productionist bias of the actually existing socialist regimes.

This development paved the way for a new cycle of protest to emerge and last from the late sixties until the early eighties. At first this cycle coincided with hard labor battles led by trade unions as a reaction to the economic crisis of the seventies especially in the United Kingdom and Italy. However, when the organized labor was subdued by the new conservative politics symbolized by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, what was remained are issue based social struggles. Some scholars dubbed these social movements which represent to some extent the legacy of the student radicalism of the sixties as new. According to their point of view these movements represent a break with the old social movements such as labor movements, national movements or national liberation movements since they possess distinguishing characteristics. The involvement in these movements is strictly

optional for individuals and usually they were focused on diverse topics and single issues, lacking the nationally unified tenets of the old social movements.

Indeed, this desire to draw a dividing line between old and new social movements is based on a new social theoretization attempting to break with the modernist legacy and all of its ramifications. Alain Touraine, one of the famous scholars in this respect, claims that societies are still conflict ridden, however presently they are not divided along the lines of the ownership of the means of production as in industrial societies, but along a different axis and maybe multiple axis. This, he called technological societies, in these circumstances the labor becomes a movement from the old era. These “new” social movements were mainly built in a post-materialist main frame,<sup>41</sup> in that the activists of these movements, unlike the militants of the old social movements do not identify themselves on the basis of their position in the production process, rather they underline their identities or individually motivated preferences. These movements, as the claim goes, are richer in content and emphasize solidarity more compared to the narrowly economist demands of the old labor movement.

The students of new social movements, following the lead of Touraine, often tend to discover innovative aspects in these new movements to delineate their subject field from the social movements that they attribute the adjective “old”. They often ignore the history of the labor movement prior to the Second World War, or the national liberation movements during their oppositional phase when their organizations were not part of the establishment. The labor movement, for instance, never limited itself to the narrow industrial interests of its components and militated for various issues that hurt the underprivileged sectors of society, from prejudice

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<sup>41</sup> Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movement and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia. 1989.

against the migrants to the oppression of women. The theoreticians of the new social movements desiring to break with the modernist (or progressive) legacy distort or ignore such historical evidence.<sup>42</sup> The organized labor both in its movement form and also in its more institutional form did not have a fundamental difference at least in its organizational strategies from the allegedly new social movements. Its explicit political character, the main cited difference, is not a generic feature of the labor movement but the consequence of the success of the socialist parties, or maybe the failure of the global capitalism as illustrated by the Great Depression. New economic crisis can result in a similar wave of politicization among the workers.

Actually, this expectation proved to be valid and the increasing hardships created by the neoliberal transformation caused openly materialist demands of masses to reenter the scene of politics in some parts of the world. With the emergence of the global justice movement materialist values related to the ownership of the means of production return right in the core of the social question.<sup>43</sup> The interest based demands of collectivities and social mobilization around these demands are far from being extinct and these developments falsified the forecasts of scholars such as Touraine. The main agitation creating the Global Justice Movement took place among the public servants and workers employed in state economic enterprises especially in Europe. However, the movement successfully incorporated demands of other groups victimized by the neoliberal transformation.<sup>44</sup> It brought

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<sup>42</sup> Y. Doğan Çetinkaya, "Tarih ve Kuram Arasında Toplumsal Hareketler," in Y. Doğan Çetinkaya (ed.), *Toplumsal Hareketler: Tarih, Teori ve Deneyim*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2008, pp.15-61.

<sup>43</sup> For the agenda and the basis of Global Justice Movement see Donatella Della Porta, Lorenzo Mosca, "Global-net for Global Movements? A Network of Networks for a Movement of Movement," *Journal of Public Policy*, vol.25, no.1, (May 2005), pp.165-190.

<sup>44</sup> Prior to the WTO Ministerial Conference that would convene in Seattle American trade unions cooperated successfully with single issue groups such as environmental groups to the dismay of experts who in line with the post materialist theoretizations expected that the narrow minded labor

together the demands of indigenous groups, landless peasants and the urban poor around the opposition against the penetration of market relations deep into the social fabric. The success of this movement rejuvenated academic interest towards the social movements and the post materialist rhetoric on this domain of study significantly retreated.

The return of the social, the decline of the welfare state, the penetration of the market relations deep into the social texture enable the organized labor movement to bounce back and one can argue that it necessitates this. Various strategies were suggested to that end, from constituting coalitions with other movements to destroy national barriers separating international working class,<sup>45</sup> to less innovative methods such as selection of a more militant leadership. The trade unions tried to make their voice heard in the public space and the organized labor movement shows signs of rejuvenation in some places, though not in Turkey. The higher echelons of the organized labor remained silent while many important reforms hurting their interest were legislated. It is apparent that the institutional wing of the movement is in shambles and incapable of canvassing for the support of the laborers and recruit new members into its ranks.<sup>46</sup> The last time it was able to do so was in the latter part of the eighties under unhelpful political circumstances when its moral economy was threatened by the neoliberal agenda of the Özal administration.

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movement cannot coalesce around wider social issues. The labor movement remained loyal to its historical legacy of transcending its narrow interest.

<sup>45</sup> For an overview of these debates see Lucio Baccaro, Kerstin Hamann, Lowell Turner “The politics of Labor Movement Revitalization: The need for a Revitalized Perspective,” *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, (2003), vol.9, no.1, pp.119-133.

<sup>46</sup> For a recent evaluation of the organizing capacity and political power of the organized labor movement see Metin Özuğurlu, “Türkiye’de Muhalefet Krizi: Ulusalçılık Örgütlü Emek Hareketi ve Sol,” in Nergis Mütevellioğlu, Sinan Sönmez (eds.) *Küreselleşme Kriz ve Türkiye’de Neoliberal Dönüşüm*, Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2009, pp.335-356.

## The Moral Economy Argument

The concept of moral economy was introduced by E. P. Thompson in order to account for English and Welsh food riots that took place during the middle and late eighteenth century when the market relations began to permeate provisioning patterns of the countryside.<sup>47</sup> Later the same term was used by James C. Scott in a very different context. Thompson wants to demonstrate that the food riots were not the results of an instinctive behavior, hunger to be exact, but rather a legitimate reaction against a new political economy that did not establish its rationales as the definition of the rational and the legitimate yet. Scott, on the other hand, used the term to denote the seemingly non-rational behaviors of the Southeast Asian peasants, who constructed the productive relations of their villages around the conception of the right to subsistence of every member of that peasant community.<sup>48</sup> The study by Scott is mainly a debate with the rational choice perspective. The prevalence of the rational choice model among the mainstream academics made the Scott's position a rallying point for the critique of this model and a controversy erupted, indeed his book caused the publication of some other works refuting his claims.<sup>49</sup>

The moral economy argument is based on the assumption that the economy is shaped by the wider social relations that surround the relations of production and distribution. Therefore, before the construction of the "natural" order of a specific domain of the production relations, there existed another order, which is conceived as natural by a broad segment in any polity. "This in its turn was grounded upon a

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<sup>47</sup> Edward P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* no.50, February 1971, pp.76-136.

<sup>48</sup> James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979.

<sup>49</sup> See for instance, Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1979.



consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community, which, taken together, can be said to constitute the moral economy of the poor.”<sup>50</sup> Although, Thompson, limits this definition to the food provisioning practices in Great Britain before the penetration of the market relations, the idea that there existed a shared view about the social rules and mutual duties concerning the proper functioning of the economy constitutes a strong starting point to criticize the imposition of the market relations to specific domains of the social relations of production and used thereof.

The classical economics indeed assumes the independence of the human economic behavior from other social considerations and even claims that if such considerations interfere into the working of the economy they only result in market distortions. Parallel to the rise of neoliberal market ideal from the seventies onwards the methodology of neoclassical economics also augmented its impact over the social sciences. Yet, this ascent is not unchallenged<sup>51</sup> and this line of thought opened a new front of attack to the rationally calculating individual assumption of the modern social sciences stemming from the works of the early theorists of “possessive individualism”<sup>52</sup>. In the domain of anthropology and development economics thus, following in the footsteps of James C. Scott, the term of moral economy turns to be a banner for a non-Marxist critique of the market economy and the theories banded together under the label of rational choice.

Following the studies by Scott a research agenda was instituted where every instance of rebellion against the imposition of the modern economic structures and

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<sup>50</sup> Edward P. Thompson, (1971), p.79.

<sup>51</sup> See for instance Mark Granovetter, “Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 91, (November 1985), pp. 481-510.

<sup>52</sup> For the term of possessive individualism see Crawford B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: from Hobbes to Locke*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1967.

commercial markets into the traditional polities, especially peasant revolts with a non-capitalist ideological discourse, began to be analyzed with a dichotomy among the moral economies and commercial economies. This research program assumes a rift between the self regulating, autonomous market that permeates every other human relations in the societies that it was introduced, a process called commodification, and the traditional economies shaped by the unchanging social moralities. Evidently, according the followers of this approach the idea of the moral economy belongs to the latter sphere. They used the concept of moral economy to denote the non-market features of traditional economies. The mainstream scholarly debate thus disregards the conceptualization by Thompson and started a debate around the morality of the market mechanisms and the merit of the economic rationality assumptions. One must note that contrasting and favoring traditional societies to the modern ones does not ameliorate our understanding of resistance against commodification processes; moreover, it has a very loose connection to the Thompson's original theory.

Due to the well established nature of the rationality assumption and all of its theoretical ramifications, this debate remained confined to a narrow group of social scientists. Especially, those in the discipline of the political science, unlike the anthropologists and economic historians do not prefer to introduce the concept of moral economy in their analysis of resistance against market structures. Considering the advantages of this concept this attitude is perplexing. William James Booth cites these advantages as follows. First of all, it offers a model for transition from traditional settings to the present. Secondly, it offers a critique of rational choice based theories of human behavior; moreover it can contribute to the critical appraisal

of the rights based argumentation of the normative economic theorizing.<sup>53</sup> Yet those who referred to the term either to refute or to defend it or as in the case of Booth in order to tweak its theoretical use recreate the cited dichotomy between the modern and traditional economies. Obviously, the moral economy terminology is vulnerable to misuse due to the highly normative connotation of the term. All of those who widen the employ of the term as an antithesis of the market economy in general, in the sense of an exact opposite of the capitalist mode of production, ignore the capacity of the capitalist social form that can preserve non-market social relations as an auxiliary in order to extend its reach over distinct domains of social relationship, the superimposition of commercial agriculture over the latifundia holdings in Latin America where wage labor did not become the norm is a case in point.

Furthermore using the concept of moral economy concerning exclusively the cases where the modern economic relations meet the traditional societies disregard those instances where resistance against further commodification occurs in an already capitalist society. In those cases too the “consistent traditional view of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community” is breached. The moral economy argument is not relevant only for a traditional form of social relationship, it also entails a specific form of social practice and/or regulation existing within the capitalist social form that is distinct from and even prohibitive to the prevailing market mentality based new institutionalized set of norms and practices. When this latter tries to extend itself onto the moral economy, in line with the pervasive nature of market structures, the social group victimized by this transformation may resist, even violently, for preserving its pattern of survival.

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<sup>53</sup> William James Booth, “On the Idea of Moral Economy,” *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 88, no. 3, (September 1994), pp. 653-667. p. 653.

Thompson used the concept of moral economy to denote the introduction of the market relationship in Britain and Wales, to the rural food provisioning practices substituting the existing patriarchal mentality. He wanted to demonstrate that the reaction of the crowd against the imposition of the market principles in the system of food provisioning was not driven by physical instincts of hunger yet rational in a specific sense. This was not an economic rationality preached by the liberals but a conscious attempt to defend the existing nexus of social relations of consumption and their status in it. Consequently, he seems to approve the use of the term of moral economy when it denotes a motive for mobilization by a disadvantaged sector of society to defend a social norm supporting their social well being.

That is why, though with extreme caution because of the reasons cited above, he acknowledges the applicability of this term to other fields of study. Apart from the above cited studies of anthropology, “writers on the US labor movement have portrayed unions as instruments for implementing a moral economy of the working class.”<sup>54</sup> This means the achievement of past struggles of the trade unions create a favorable institutional arrangement for the unionized workers and their organizations functions to defend this set of arrangements. Especially, during the two decades following the Second World War the governments drafted legislation to include these gains of the working class into the institutional outlook of the political systems. This institutionalized resolution between the government, the employers and the organized labor set the norms and obligations of the proper economic functions of the respective parties.

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<sup>54</sup> Carl Gersuny, Gladis Kaufman, “Seniority and the Moral Economy of US Automobile Workers, 1934-1946” *Journal of Social History*, no. 18-3, (Spring 1985) pp.463-475. p.463

In this vein, Thompson cites the great miner's strike of 1985<sup>55</sup> against the Thatcher government as one of the last confrontations between the market economy and the moral economy of British workers.<sup>56</sup> That government, the standard bearer of the market ideals at the time, conducted this industrial battle as the mean to demolish the existing union practices that inhibits the penetration of the market relations not only into the mining businesses but also in every unionized industry. Thompson, unlike the anthropology oriented scholars, does not compare two modes of social relations of production, but rather he underlines the possibility of existence of a popular consensus about the legitimate economic practices that was rooted in the past of a society, this past is not necessarily a distant past but for instance in the miners' case it is the result of the struggles of their grandfathers if not their fathers, and this shared understanding is capable of inspiring resistance when breached by imposed norms of economic activity based on another rationale. Thus, he is not arguing that the market mechanism is immoral<sup>57</sup>, yet when first introduced they lacked a socially accepted legitimacy that may trigger violent reactions against its imposition. Over time the old moral economy would lose its hold over the populace and the rationale of the new political economy would take root. The new political economy, though, would imply a deeper penetration of the market mechanisms into the public sphere, a profound monetarization of basic social services and extreme alienation of the individuals from the process of production. Its normalization contributes to the fall of politics and the retreat of the political impact of the working class.

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<sup>55</sup> For an evaluation of the strike by British labor union officials see "The Miners' Strike: A Balance Sheet," *Marxism Today*, (April 1985), pp. 21-27.

<sup>56</sup> Edward P. Thompson, *Avam ve Görenek, İngiltere'de Popüler Kültür Üzerine Araştırmalar*, Birikim Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2006, p.424, footnote 208.

<sup>57</sup> It must be noted that some scholars use the term to differentiate between a moral form of economy and immoral capitalist economy, see for instance Andrew Sayer, "Moral Economy and Political Economy," *Studies in Political Economy*, no. 61, 2000, pp.79-104.

This is what Thompson conceives as the moral economy, and that is why he cautions against the abuse of the term. It is not difficult to see the relevance of this analysis for understanding every instance where established local patterns of subsistence and make a living were threatened by the globalizing system of trade and investment<sup>58</sup>. Other students also point in the same direction. For instance, Thomas Clay Arnold, referring the idea put forth by Thompson, points to the cases where although existing within commercial societies the communal ethic of some social groups or local communities can be an effective base to resist prevailing market mechanisms that transformed the patterns of gaining their living. His example came from Owens Valley California where the residents involved in acts of sabotage over an issue of rights to ground water. According to him, “The grounds for politically significant moral indignation do not lie only even predominantly at the level of clashing economies or cultures,” rather it lies “at the intersection of the nested sets of meaning and value called into question by equally specific changes in circumstances.”<sup>59</sup> A similar remark was also made by a follower of Scott. In a recent study about the Vietnamese peasants, Pamela Mcelwee found a resilience of subsistence oriented attitudes among the village communities of the region where Scott conducted his research,<sup>60</sup> even though presently the agriculture in Vietnam is largely commercialized due to the recent, and for some successful, transformation in this country aiming the introduction of market institutions.

These cases demonstrate that the moral economy is not necessarily useful in the analysis of modern capitalist societies, if the concept is conceived merely as a

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<sup>58</sup> Andrew Calabrese, “Communication, Global Justice and the Moral Economy,” *Global Media and Communication*, 2005, vol.1, no.3, pp. 301-315, p. 309.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Clay Arnold, “Rethinking Moral Economy,” *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 95, no. 1, (March 2001), p. 85.

<sup>60</sup> Pamela Mcelwee, “From the Moral Economy to the World Economy: Revisiting Vietnamese Peasants in a Globalizing Era,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 2007, vol. 2, no. 2, pp.57-107.

critique of morality directed against modern market mechanisms from the vantage point of more traditional values. However, the concept becomes more useful when accounting for resistance against the elimination of a mode of subsistence, which is considered as vital to the sustenance of the social ties that bind a polity. According to Arnold, “Moral economy is embedded in concrete ongoing social relations, not in generalized, mechanical moralities or romanticized pasts,”<sup>61</sup> though such pasts may inspire resistance against the imposition of the market rationality. A moral economy embodies the main rationale of subsistence of a given polity, and hence is deeply interwoven in culture, so that any threat against it is indeed a hazard for the survival of the said polity. In such circumstances peoples tend to organize themselves in order to defend the very basis of the social reproduction of their polities.

### The Moral Economy of the Unionized Turkish Worker

The pathway through which the Turkish organized labor movement developed made the public enterprises the primary locus of trade union activity. Indeed, minor villages that existed around these establishments turned out to be middle sized cities because of the employment opportunities that they created. Moreover, the backbone of the membership of the Turkish trade unions was the employees of these establishments. The most important aspect of their existence though is their impact on setting a standard for the regime of industrial relations. The legislation concerning the working conditions, safety measures, social insurances and the wages were mainly implemented in the public enterprises that constituted the bulk of the Turkish industry up until the late eighties. This made the workers employed in these

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<sup>61</sup> Thomas Clay Arnold, (2001), p. 94

establishments a privileged minority among the wage earners. During the import substitution era, the workers employed in big private industrial establishments also joined more or less this segment of the industrial workers thanks to their own struggle rather than government fiat. However, it must be noted that these two are not separate entities, the recruitment efforts in private businesses was largely based on the financial means and organizational know how gained in the public enterprises. This means the existence of this privileged segment and its moral economy contributes indirectly to the well being of the workers in general.

The mere presence of these establishments somewhat thwarted the deterioration of the working and living conditions of the laborers in more than one way. Firstly, as already cited they provided a firm manpower and financial source for the trade unions on the basis of which they can operate in private businesses with differing success. Secondly, their work environment and safety measures establish a standard that can not be easily broken down in the private sector and small businesses. Last, but not least they connect politicians in Ankara to the labor organizations since in the Anatolian cities where public enterprises exist, the trade unions can more or less influence the polls, may contribute to the founding of local party organizations and become a hub of political claim making. Indeed, during the sixties most of the chairmen of the big trade unions were members of parliament at the same time. This practice, first adopted in the important 1950 elections, made the parliament an important stage of debates concerning the organized labor.<sup>62</sup>

Therefore, Turkish trade unionism relies on the public sector to survive and thrive; it is permeated by the establishment parties through its organization in the state economic enterprises and this entire edifice rests on the definitive character of the

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<sup>62</sup> This practice was abolished by the 1980 coup when the trade union managers were obliged to resign from their post in order to run for parliamentary seats.



public sector as developmental institutions rather than profit maximizing firms. Thus it can easily be assumed that moral economy of the Turkish worker employed in the public sector was indeed an actuality.

Nevertheless, this actuality is not a traditional feature or an essential characteristic of the Turkish organized labor, rather it was constructed in time spanning from the mid thirties to the late sixties, through institutional schemes and political practices of the various governments and the workers reaction and organizational efforts vis-à-vis these schemes and practices. Just like the British miners who refer to the struggles of the older generations and the practices of the earlier governments to define the norms and obligations of the proper economic functions of the parties to the regime of industrial relations, Turkish workers employed in the public sector developed an understanding of these norms and practices constituting their moral economy. This moral economy, an ultimate institutional arrangement and understanding between the Turkish governments and the trade unions concerning the conduct of the regime of industrial relations and the relevant decision making process, did not arise at once *deus ex machina*. Rather it is built through subsequent institutional designs starting from the establishment of the first state economic enterprises as a result of the first five years plan, and the relevant Labor code of 1936, passing from the establishment of the first trade unions during the late forties and matured in the context of the import substitution of the sixties. This process itself deserves analysis and this is the subject of the next chapter.

The transformation that entered the political agenda in the aftermath of the coup d'état of 1980 threatened the rationale of the existence of the public enterprises as economic institutions with developmental objectives rather than profit maximizing companies. In that it also endangered the survival of the moral economy as defined

above. In this respect, the moral economy argument is a useful metaphor both to describe the seriousness of the change in the industrial relations regime in terms of the total destruction of the populist discourse, if not the actual practices, the institutional and informal mechanisms of union participation in decision making related to the regime of industrial relations; and the resistance all of these triggered taking the forms of direct action by the workers. It is possible thus to argue that for instance the experience of the British miners are roughly comparable to the laborer's mass actions that took place during the late eighties in the fact that both involved organized resistance by the unionized workers demanding the safeguarding of some crucial elements of the old system in the face of a thorough transformation of the system determining their economic and political lot in the regime. One must remember that as cited above Thompson labels the miners' strike as an instance of moral economy in action in a capitalist setting.

One aspect of the moral economy argument demonstrates that the efforts to preserve the traditional relationships of paternalism that provided a safety net for the unionized workers during an earlier era, is untenable in front of structural transformations necessitated by the arising needs of capitalist relations of production. Thompson mentions this point, yet some other students of the field made this a plain argument.<sup>63</sup> Obviously, the reaction of the victimized crowds against the imposing norms of the political economy provides very little real backing to construct a viable political alternative against the developments fostered by the concrete structural changes.

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<sup>63</sup> See for instance Ayşe Buğra, "Bir Krize ve Bir Ahlaki Ekonominin Çöküşüne Dair," *Birikim*, no. 145, (May 2001), p. 53. Although her concern dates to a later period, a period when the trade unions are already demobilized after the restoration of some features of the old order, the dynamics in force are similar.

Similar analyses are also made in different but comparable contexts. For instance, Marsha Pripstein Posusney argues that a moral economy approach is the best possible analytical tool if one wants to make sense of the waves of the labor unrest in Egypt.<sup>64</sup> She asserts that the Egyptian workers resort to collective action when what they perceive as their entitlements in the developmental state established by the Nasserist regime were violated by the government, their biggest employer, or other private employers. She compares then the predictive advantages of such an approach to what she defines as the rational choice theory and Marxism<sup>65</sup>. Although attempting to explain every instance of strike wave or similar unrest by the same rationale is, to say the least, dubious, her intuition pointing to the patron-client relationship existing between workers and state which makes the Third World the scene of moral economy related labor activity whenever this link is threatened, broken or transformed seems sound. However, one must note that her equation of the existence of a moral economy triggered labor resistance to an underdeveloped country may reflect the conceptualization of the term that relates it to the dichotomy between modern and traditional, which is refuted above. After all the point of departure here is a comment made on a miners' strike by Edward Thompson who first used the term for food riots in rural Britain.

Posusney made another valuable remark on the disposition of the laborers' unrest when triggered because of a perceived violation of the moral economy of the industrial relations. In such circumstances, Posusney asserts, the collective action by the workers is almost always "restorative" in nature. This means, rather than

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<sup>64</sup> Marsha Pripstein Posusney, "Irrational Workers: The Moral Economy of the Labor Protest in Egypt," *World Politics*, vol. 46, no. 1, (October 1993), pp. 83-120.

<sup>65</sup> She relates rational choice approach to a calculus of costs and benefits to resort to collective action largely determined by the macro economic conditions. Her description of Marxist accounts, on the other hand, is a caricature of a teleological and mechanic progress of the class consciousness.

demanding a shift in the established working of industrial relations either in order to better riposte the transformation in the social organization of the production process or to pursue a revolutionary political agenda, the labor movement is inclined to maintain the recognized patterns of interaction between private employers, government and the workers. She seems to underestimate the possibility of a labor resistance in the developing countries that aims to alter the tenets of the political regime to the advantage of the working class. Apart from the conservative connotations of such remarks she has a point and this can be the reason why that sort of collective action tends mostly to result in failure, or rather turned to be inconsequential in the long run, especially when the necessities of the global political economy condemn the existing moral economy to oblivion. The memories of such protests may fail to resist the test of time.

The restorative collective action pattern can be the consequence of a special kind of relationship existing between the state and the organized labor. The developmentalist aims coupled with a patrimonial political culture may create in some late developed nations, such as Egypt, a particular kind of industrial relations regime where the state, the biggest employer, establish a bond to the workers under its payroll that can have some repercussions for the whole of the working class. Turkey can also be considered as a case in point. In such circumstances the organized labor would have a stake in maintaining the state sponsored regime of industrial relations especially against the uncertainties of a possible thorough transformation. However, in this case the institutional background, that is to say the historical path of development of the organized labor, and its relationship with the state and employers that created the existing moral economy of the public enterprise workers must be

analyzed in order to prevent the moral economy argument to degenerate into a buzzword describing every collective action by the workers in a Third World setting.

Such a sound analytical model was suggested by Christopher Alexander in an article on the labor militancy in Algeria between the years of 1970 and 1990.<sup>66</sup> To begin with, Alexander made a more realistic categorization of the analytical approaches existing within the literature to account for the variations in labor militancy. He differentiates between a macro economical stand and a moral economy stand. The former focus on the convenience of the general economic and political situation prompting collective action by the workers in order to further their causes, the latter on the other hand concentrates on the state policies that assail on the established rights of the workers. Alexander, however, introduces the impact of diverse institutional designs launched to regulate the industrial relations regime as another significant factor in determining the occurrence and the specific profile of a protest cycle instigated by the organized labor. His analysis on Algerian labor militancy demonstrates the shortcomings of a line of reasoning based on a generalized conceptualization of the moral economy argument for the analysis of the temporal patterns of the intensity of the collective action by the workers. His critique is not that the moral economy as an explanation is wrong, but it is too blunt when used without an apposite definition. Moreover, he also refers to its inadequacy to account for the patterns of collective action with a politicized demand for transformation rather than restoration of the existing industrial relations regime. When the labor waged protest actions to reform the existing industrial relationships the moral economy may be a futile analytical tool.

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<sup>66</sup> Christopher Alexander, "The Architecture of Militancy: Workers and the State in Algeria, 1970-1990," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 34, no. 3, (April 2002), pp. 315-335.

Because of the normative connotations of the term and the more prevalent attitude to equate it with the traditional subsistence economies the term moral economy becomes a loose and vague concept referring any practice defying the rationale of the self regulating markets and the motive of profit maximization. Its definition must be concretized to be rendered applicable to the modern contexts, which is what Thompson himself hints to in his reference to the miners' strike. The contribution by Alexander is useful in this respect. Christopher Alexander refers to the new institutionalist research agenda to demonstrate the impact of different modes of regulating relations between the state and the workers over the frequency of the cycles of collective action among the Algerian working class. The new institutionalism provides an inspiring tool kit in that endeavor, because it emphasizes the endogenous nature of the reproduction and the transformation of political institutions and the fact that they are socially constructed. Political institutions are after all collections of structures, rules and standard operating procedures that have a partly autonomous role in political life. Therefore, the research into their working and constitution reveals important and insightful observations for the student of social sciences. Industrial relations and their specific institutional forms "are also outcomes of historical processes where the present is linked with the past and can only be fully understood against the canvas of history."<sup>67</sup>

The impact of institutions in shaping the actual outcomes such as a period of labor unrest is not foreign to the Turkish students of social sciences. For instance, Taha Parla suggests that the stipulations of the constitutional documents should be considered as a part of the social reality as long as they represent the institutional traditions of specific political regimes and must be taken into account as such in

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<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Rigg, "Money, Morals, and Markets: Evolving Rural Labour Markets in Thailand and the Lao PDR," *Environment and Planning A*, vol. 36, pp.983-998, p. 991.

social analysis.<sup>68</sup> In this vein, here it is argued that the moral economy is not a general understanding about how should be the industrial relations organized, but a historically developed set of institutional arrangements, norms and practices between the Turkish governments and the trade unions concerning the conduct of the regime of industrial relations and the relevant decision making process. Tracing back the pathway of the subsequent institutional schemes relevant to the industrial relations among the government, employees and employers, legislation concerning labor organizations and the toolkit of protest of the labor movement can save the moral economy argument from being a loose and vague conceptualization about what existed prior to the last push of market forces, an umbrella concept with little explanatory value obscuring the dynamics of the social relationships of production.

### The Industrial Relations Regime and the Institutions

Institutions in the sense of formal establishments and organizations were the subject matter of the old political science yet a broader and explanatory use of the concept is also devised. Henceforth the interest in studying institutions is in the rise throughout the disciplines of social sciences. Especially from the eighties onwards thanks to studies by scholars such as Theda Skocpol, Dietrich Rueschmeyer or Peter Evans the study of institutions became central for our understanding of the dynamics of social relations. Institutions are “the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy. They can range from the rules of a constitutional order or the standard operating procedures of a bureaucracy to the conventions governing trade union

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<sup>68</sup> Taha Parla, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Rejimi 1980-1989*, İletişim, İstanbul. 1995, p. 16.

behavior or bank-firm relations.”<sup>69</sup> There are many other suggested definitions it must be remembered that the common tenets of this plethora of definitions are centered on the following remark: institutions both empower and constrain social actors in an unequal manner and impose them prescriptive code of conducts.

Therefore, “the analysis of the creation and destruction of political institutions might thus serve as a bridge between ‘the men who make history’ and the circumstances under which they are able to do so.”<sup>70</sup>

The labor studies often focus on the formal organizations; especially the Turkish labor history either focus on the state as the single most important actor in defining the workers’ perception of the social and political reality that surrounds them or on the trade unions and the militancy that they foster. The most recent trend in this domain though concentrates its efforts in unearthing the daily lives of ordinary workers moving beyond the institutional preoccupations.<sup>71</sup> Although their efforts are noble, ignoring the involvement of state into the regulation of the labor force or assuming an ontological divide between workers and their organizations does not ameliorate our understanding of the making of a class out of these individual stories. The class formation is relational and unfolds through a chain of historical development. Edward Thompson warns us on this subject when he asserts that: “Class is a social and cultural formation (often finding institutional expression) which cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationship

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<sup>69</sup> Peter Hall, Rosemary C.R. Taylor, “The Political Science and Three New Institutionalisms” *MPIFG Discussion Paper* 96/6 (June 1996), p.6-7.

<sup>70</sup> Bo Rothstein, “Labor Market Institutions and Working Class Strength,” in Kathleen Thelen, Sven Steinmo and Frank Longstreth (eds.), *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, New York. 1992, pp. 33-56, p.35.

<sup>71</sup> For an exposition of this debate from the perspective of new labor history see Touraj Atabaki, Gavin D. Brockett, “Ottoman and Republican Turkish Labor History: An Introduction,” *International Review of Social History*, no. 54, s.17, 2009, pp. 7-8.



with other classes; and, ultimately the definition can only be made in the medium of time – that is action and reaction, change and conflict.”<sup>72</sup>

The transformation and the reproduction of political institutions stand where social structures and social processes as unfolded in chain of events intersect. Therefore, the methodological choice of studying a political institution aims to demonstrate the interaction and relationship between systemic tendencies and contingency of political events<sup>73</sup> in order to expose the existence of the general in the development of the particular on a sound understanding of the dynamics of the human polities. Institutional arrangements also constitute a central part of the political opportunity structure and their historical development hints to the path that the concerning parties define themselves and their counterparts.

Peter Hall differentiates between three distinct levels of the institutional planes.<sup>74</sup> According to him, on top there are general norms ruling the daily transactions such as the property rights, then there are the specific regulations in line with these general norms including the rules on industrial relations such as trade union legislations. Finally, at the grassroots the informal code of conduct managing the everyday working of the public agencies and the other public bodies exists. All of these instances play their part in conditioning the social relationships that they devised to regulate. In their widely known study on the interaction between labor movements and regime types in Latin America, David and Ruth Collier,<sup>75</sup> while

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<sup>72</sup> Edward P. Thompson, “The Peculiarities of the English,” in Ralph Miliband and John Saville (eds.) *Socialist Register 1965*, London, 1965, pp. 311-362. p. 357.

<sup>73</sup> Contingency can be defined as “the inability of theory to predict or explain, either deterministically or probabilistically, the occurrence of a specific outcome” see James Mahoney, “Path Dependence in Historical Sociology” *Theory and Society*, 29, (2000) pp.507-548, p.513.

<sup>74</sup> Peter Hall, “The Movement from Keynesianism to Monetarism: Institutional Analysis and British Economic Policy in the 1970’s” in Thelen et All. (1992), pp. 96-97.

focusing on the process of institutionalization of the governmental regulation of industrial relations, they also point to systemic level factors and structural reasons, but argue for an interaction among these, rather than a simple one way determination. However, it must be asserted that the new institutionalism research program is vehemently arguing for the multiplicity of causal factors when pointing to the impact of either the relations of production at large or the effect of economic relationships.

Obviously, the choice of the specific institution to track for the account of the studied social transformation is related to the axiomatic assumptions on the working of human politics, rather than a methodological choice. Needless to say, the subject at hand definitively plays a role in this selection. For instance, Hall chooses to study the change in the regulation on the issuance, selling and circulation of government bonds in order to track the rising importance and decisiveness of financial markets over the governments in the late eighties.<sup>76</sup> This augmenting influence, continuing to the present day, is a hallmark of the neo liberal era. The cited study shows how the increasing needs to borrow by the British government due to its deteriorating fiscal situation, in the unstable global financial context of the shock ridden seventies triggered the drafting of a new set of rules empowering the City, the financial center of England situated in historical London, over the government through some unintended consequences. These consequences also had repercussions in different aspects of social life, even including financial reporting by daily newspapers, and hence create a feedback mechanism further underpinning the supremacy of the financial markets over the government. This brilliant and insightful study represents how an institutional transformation comes about by the necessities of systemic

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<sup>75</sup> Ruth Berins Collier, David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1991.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Hall, (1992), pp.99-103.

requirements and how the opportunities created in such instances are used by redundant political groupings climbing to prominence. It also shows the transpiring of a general global trend in the development a specific case and the mechanism where various interacting factors, overlapping independent causalities, including contingent events and unintended consequences are at play. The accounts of all of these factors add up to constitute a narrative about the rise of neoliberal politics to the point of thoroughly transforming the society where in each different case a different aspect of the big picture is analyzed and connected to the main frame.

In a similar vein, the regulation of the organizational rights of the workers, the level and the form of involvement of the state in the economic activities are relevant institutional developments for the constitution of the moral economy of the unionized workers in Turkey. These institutional arrangements were the scene of important shifts in some historical turning points of the recent history. The demographic change in Anatolia and the corresponding exclusion of the religious minorities and foreigners from the Turkish economy in the first years of the republic, the state led industrialization of the thirties, the introduction of the competitive elections into the political regime and the corresponding democratization in the organizational rights of the workers from late forties onwards, and the import substitution based industrialization of the sixties and the seventies, all contributed in the formation of the organized labor as a movement with a specific understanding of what constitutes a moral order of the parameters of the industrial relations' regime.

The new institutionalism is known for its specific emphasis on the particular development trajectory of different institutional designs. The cumulated past with the choices, processes and developments that it contains constrains the present in a certain way. History must not be regarded either as the home of pure contingency or

the theological unfolding of an unchallenged social and political project. The history matters since important aspects of the social reality can best be understood as sequential developments. According to this viewpoint, it is not the past per se but the unfolding of processes over time that is central theoretically.<sup>77</sup> The particular historical trajectory, although contingent, is a factor influencing the outcome in itself and its narrative reflect the historical development as an open ended process determined by sequential progress of social conditions and historical possibilities illuminating the chain of causality.<sup>78</sup>

The methodological procedure that aims to connect the phases of the policy process and enable the investigator to identify the reasons for the emergence of a particular decision through the dynamic of events is labeled as process tracing.<sup>79</sup> Henry Brady and David Collier define process tracing as the “analysis of process of change that seeks to uncover causal mechanisms and causal sequences.”<sup>80</sup> Peter Katzenstein, who is considered as one of its prominent practitioners in his studies of comparative politics, more than once describes his methodology as depicting how structure and process interact in politics and showing how historically shaped structures make possible a particular social, political or economic strategy and thus in their turn how these strategies affect those very structures.<sup>81</sup> This means the narrative of the historical development, the sequence of events building the labor movement is

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<sup>77</sup> Paul Pierson, “Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and Study of Politics” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol.94. no. 2, (June 2000), pp.251-267, p.264.

<sup>78</sup> Beverly Silver, (2009), p.49.

<sup>79</sup> Sydney Tarrow, “Bridging the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide in Political Science” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol.89. no. 2 (June 1995), p.472

<sup>80</sup> Henry E. Brady, David Collier, *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools Shared Standards*, (Glossary), Rowman Littlefield, Lanham, 2004, p. 300.

<sup>81</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, *Corporatism and Change Austria Switzerland and the Politics of Industry*, Cornell University Pres, Ithaca 1984, pp. 11, 12.

not a simple act of story telling but an analytical tool for its scholarly study since history “is made up of episodes, and if we cannot get inside these we cannot get inside history at all.”<sup>82</sup>

The historical process, the sequencing of events, choices made at critical points in time, all leave their marks on the present state of affairs, the political opportunity structure available to social actors, in a well defined structural frame. The accessible choices and lines of action at present, and even the actual chosen strategy are not independent from the accumulation of the past choices and trajectories. This is not merely arguing that history matters, since this is obvious. It is more than that, in a sense history as the cradle of sedimented past decisions conditions the present so as to allocate differing probabilities to the existing alternatives of possible lines of action and also plays a part in determining the extent of the possible, it conditions the possible. That is the very reason why unearthing of the historical roots of the present has utmost importance in understanding of the current choices of strategy of the social actors, their selections from their toolkit of action, and reactions against these by the political authorities. The institutional analysis must try to show the link between the systemic changes and the specific cases under scrutiny by depicting that the mechanism of the link also mediates the final policy outcome.

All in all the past creates an institutional blueprint that determines the organizational affinities and tendencies of the present day establishments. The trade unions are no exception in this respect. Their organizational blueprint<sup>83</sup> that was

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<sup>82</sup> Edward P, Thompson, (1965), p.338.

<sup>83</sup> Dennie Oude Nijhuis refers to the organizational blueprints of the trade unions as an explanatory factor in their different positioning over the issues related to welfare measures. See Dennie Oude Nijhuis, “Revisiting the Role of Labor: Worker Solidarity, Employer Opposition and the Development

formed as a result of the specific historical process which molds the organized labor throughout large chunks of time skews both their present reflexes and conscious decisions in a certain way. For instance the Turkish trade unions tend to target the political apparatus in Ankara rather than shop floor struggles in order reach their objectives. This is the consequence of the built-in characteristics of the Turkish labor movement and its organizations. This and other similar traits are results of the governmental policies in the sense that the past legal-institutional frameworks constituted by the political power and the consequences of the choices made by the organized labor in some critical junctures within this context. This does not mean that the external factors are inconsequential over the course taken by the Turkish organized labor. Apart from the economic and demographic factors that are beyond the impact of direct human agency thus unfit to include an analysis concerning shorter time spans, the influence of other actors that are external to the local political scene such as the agencies of United States like USAID or American labor organizations are well documented,<sup>84</sup> yet one must remember that these influences were only possible because of the government connivance and the consent of trade union leaders. That means, an approach that focuses on the interaction between the government and the labor, does not exclude the effect of such external factors.

That is why, in order to make sense of the developments that took place in the second part of the eighties, the trade union led mobilization against the policies of the Özal administration, a rebellion which is argued here to be triggered by the breach of the moral economy of the unionized Turkish workers, the exact components of this

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of Old Age Pensions in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom,” *World Politics*, vol. 61, no. 2, (April 2009), pp. 296-329.

<sup>84</sup> Alpaslan Işıklı quotes Bruce H. Millen, the officer charged with labor issues in the United States embassy during the early sixties, underlining the huge influence of American unionism in Turkey. See Türk-İş, *Batı Ülkelerindeki Uygulama Örnekleriyle İşçi Politika Sendika Parti İlişkileri*, Türk-İş yayınları no. 92, Ankara, 1976, p. 147.

moral economy must be defined. This set of institutional arrangements, norms and practices that constitute the moral economy are shaped through a historical development process that can be traced back to the mid thirties, first attempt at industrialization through state economic enterprises and the concerning legal institutional context which is essentially formed on the basis of the first labor code of the republic. The following eras also added up onto and transformed this scheme through labor struggles, political interference and further legal institutional arrangements. Important dates in this respect will be the late forties when the first trade unions were established and the sixties when the organized labor movement blossomed under the import substitution strategy. Furthermore, the same historical development also witnessed the formation of the organizational capacity, the mainframe and toolkit of action of the Turkish labor movement. Thus, a process tracing analysis will also expose its definitive features.

On the whole, the historical process of the institutional development constrains the trade unions to act in certain way under specific circumstances. It may constitute a framework of reference that the organized labor movement judges every political transformation by comparison laying the foundation of its moral economy. It can define the contours of a particular political opportunity structure that the organized labor tries to profit from. In these respects, the study of the historical process contribute to the grasping of the strategic choices made by the labor movement at the critical junctures and to the clarification of the social, economic and political circumstances surrounding the course of mobilization and demobilization for that matter. The absence of such an analysis undermines the integrity of the argument.

## Recapitulation of the Theoretical Argument

One of the definitive features of the capitalist era is the emergence of the labor as a social and political force in the public domain. The unionization efforts of the workers, their attempts to register themselves as voters, their campaigns to back legislation ameliorating the conditions of work and social welfare measures all add up to constitute a formidable social movement in the period preceding the Second World War. The labor movement rapidly institutionalized itself and after the war it became a part of the political establishment especially in the industrialized countries and lost its liveliness and zeal typical for social movements. In the industrializing countries on the other hand, the delegates of the organized labor are met with contrary strategies by governments and employers either including them into the decision making processes or excluding them from the sphere of politics.

From the mid seventies onwards this state of affairs began to change. The international crisis undermined the credibility of the post war settlement and a defiant liberal creed preaching the merits of unregulated markets composed among the conservative political groups. These groups and their ideas invaded first the global financial institutions and then national governments. This shift in mentality weakens the political and social position of the organized labor. Trade unions' membership base narrowed down and their political representatives cave in vis-à-vis the preachers of unregulated markets and their demands concerning labor flexibility. These policies triggered protest movements and labor unrest. One of the earlier instances of such a protest movement led by the trade unions took place in Turkey during the second part of the eighties.



Turkish economy experienced a deep economic crisis in the late seventies aggravated by widespread political turmoil. The mobilization of the workers by the trade unions organized at the private businesses involved heavily in these social disturbances.<sup>85</sup> The military putsch of 1980 aimed also at demobilizing these workers and achieved its objectives. In line with the global trend of neoliberalism, the government established after the return of the civilian rule though had a more ambitious agenda of transformation threatening the very foundation of Turkish trade unionism. The normally submissive trade union centers eventually undertook an unexpected act of defiance against this political agenda. During a period when the radical elements thought to be purged from the organized labor, a massive protest movement emerged and even backed by the traditional trade union leadership.

Turkish trade unions confronted with the Turkish variant of the neoliberal surge in the guise of the Özal administration reacted to this assault against the way of earning their livings, their moral economy, by demanding the restoration of the populist state, by resisting the attempts to reform the public sector and by working quasi openly to discredit Turgut Özal and his close entourage. In order to make sense of this protest movement we must first trace the historical development of Turkish organized labor movement to highlight its definitive features and to analyze the constituent elements of its moral economy. Only then the answer to the questions concerning why a privileged worker pushes its trade union to strike or why a trade union chooses to leave the established norms of union activity for more radical methods, in some precise episodes, becomes clearer.

The social movement literature deals with the specifics of the mobilization process, the political opportunity structure enabling the organizational efforts to

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<sup>85</sup> For an analysis of this specific labor mobilization in conjunction with the political developments of the era see Brian Mello, (2007).

become fruitful and the framing of identities of the parties to a contentious social event. Generally the analysis of an event that seems to contravene our expectations contributes more to enrich our knowledge about a specific kind of social phenomena. This dissertation argues that even under the relatively unfavorable circumstances succeeding a repressive military interregnum the weakened organized labor achieved to uphold a relatively successful opposition movement, an achievement that they could not repeat. What motivates them is an actual or perceived assault against their moral economy which is a set of institutional arrangements, social norms and obligations practices between the Turkish governments and the trade unions concerning the proper conduct of the regime of industrial relations and the relevant decision making process. If we evaluate the process through which the organized labor movement and its moral economy developed historically then it will be possible to make sense of the political opportunity structure within which this unlikely labor mobilization and contentious episode occurred. Thus the next chapter will deal with this process of development before the account of the actual contentious event itself.

## CHAPTER 3

### A FRAME OF REFERENCE FOR A SOCIAL FORCE IN MAKING

The emergence of the working class as a concrete social force is mostly narrated in relation to some deeper structural changes such as the articulation of the local economy to the global capitalism or the industrialization and urbanization processes. Some other accounts establish a direct and causal relationship between the industrial revolution and factory worker citing the latter as the first offspring of the former and “from the beginning to the present day formed the nucleus of the labor movement.”<sup>86</sup>

Edward Thompson challenges this argument on the grounds that factory worker emerged at a later stage of the industrial era and borrowed most of their organizational and political strategies from the earlier struggles of the declining craftsmen against the ravaging consequences of the new mode of production.<sup>87</sup> Deep structural changes paved the way and set the scene for the emergence of the modern labor and the labor movement, while the modern laborers inherited to some extent the notions of legitimacy from the living memories of the past generations.

However, even if those changes occurring in longer time frames constitute the basis for the materialization of the labor movement, ultimately, all social movements are built by living people who shape these processes, and in their turn whose are shaped by them. This means simply that “circumstances make men just as much as

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<sup>86</sup> Friedrich Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England*, Penguin Books, London, 1987, p.65.

<sup>87</sup> Edward P. Thompson, *İngiliz İşçi Sınıfının Oluşumu*, Birikim, İstanbul, 2004, pp.245-248.

men make circumstances.”<sup>88</sup> Thus any historical narration that overlooks the visible events and institutional parameters is inadequate to provide a satisfactory account of the development of that specific social movement because the experience cumulated in these great events of protest and struggle constitutes the tool kit of protest of the laborers and the institutional setting alongside the reaction of the organizations of the workers to these regulations composes a popular understanding about the legitimate practices, norms, obligations and rules arranging the relevant domain and social relationships. This latter makes up the moral economy of the labor which is reflected also in the way of functioning of the organizations representing the cause of labor including the trade unions.

This chapter and the following two aim to narrate the emergence of the Turkish organized labor movement along with the making of its moral economy. Indeed, these two develop in relation to each other and hence shape each other mutually. In this respect, rather than the industrialization and the urbanization processes triggered by the articulation of the local economy to the global commodity markets and financial centers, the emphasis must be put on the institutional developments that conditions the strategic choices available to the organized labor movement during the era of transformation of the eighties when the neoliberal politics was pursued by the Özal administration. However, this approach does not necessitate the exclusion of the analysis of the larger time frame and structural changes. In this vein, the chapter begins with a general and brief description of the Ottoman economy as a result of the penetration of the market forces in the nineteenth century. Then, it analyses the situation inherited by the young republic. However, the main focus of the study starts with the deliberate governmental attempts to

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<sup>88</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Alman İdeolojisi (Feuerbach)*, Sol Yayınları, Ankara, 1999. p. 68.

industrialize the country during the thirties, in the context of the Great Depression. These attempts from their start onwards tried to deal with the labor issue in an institutional manner that is the reason why that era denotes the beginning of the making of the moral economy along with the formation organized labor movement. Each episode adds up onto the preceding era through the important developments of the institutional setting that defined the Turkish industrial regime in conjunction with the changing state of the articulation of the national economy to the global markets and molds both the organized labor and its moral economy in a specific way. Their sequential analysis contributes to our understanding of the essential traits of the moral economy of the Turkish organized labor.

### The Emergence of Labor as a Modern Social Category

The articulation of the Ottoman economy to the global capitalism begins during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The Anglo-Turkish treaty of 1838 eliminating state monopolies and removing tariff barriers was a step in this direction.<sup>89</sup> One must also cite the 1839 and 1856 reform decrees that break with the established norms of Ottoman social and political practices and the 1858 Land Law that changes radically proprietorship in farming land. All of these institutional changes interact mutually with structural trends to reshape the Ottoman social and economic constitution to render it more suitable for the necessities of a capitalist economy that is integrated to the global whole.

The era beginning at the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century did not only witness the diffusion of capitalist relations to the Ottoman economy but also

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<sup>89</sup> Şevket Pamuk, *Osmanlı Ekonomisi ve Dünya Kapitalizmi (1820-1913): Ticaret, Sermaye ve Üretim İlişkileri*, Ankara, 1984, Yurt Yayınevi.

it saw the emergence of an indigenous labor force in the sense of a “factory or workshop based free waged laborers outside the guilds.”<sup>90</sup> According to Paul Dumont, there were approximately two hundred fifty thousand industrial workers in the Ottoman Empire in 1908.<sup>91</sup> This figure stands for approximately one per cent of the total population. The typical worker of the period does not solely or even primarily rely on wage to survive.<sup>92</sup> These are peasant workers who need wage in the form of hard currency to pay tax or debts. For instance, the majority of the Ereğli area coal miners were of this nature. The wage earner dependent laborers of the Ottoman Empire were industrial workers, service sector workers, miners, construction workers, agricultural workers,<sup>93</sup> wage earners in peasant household who are involved in putting out type manufacture systems and public servants.<sup>94</sup> Obviously, not all of these categories were primarily considered at the time as workers. First of all public servants constituted a privileged social segment, besides for some dependent labor was not a defining trait of their social existence since their subsistence most often still depends heavily on their traditional occupations. It is also well known that ethnic cleavages and geographical remoteness separates laborers in seemingly insurmountable ways, still, wage earning dependent laborer is a valid category to delineate a social group within the nineteenth century Ottoman lands.

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<sup>90</sup> This is the definition provided by Yavuz Selim Karakışla. See his “The Emergence of the Ottoman Industrial Working Class, 1839-1923” in Donald Quataert, Erik J. Zürcher (eds.), 1995, pp. 19-34.

<sup>91</sup> Paul Dumont, “A Propos de la Classe Ouvrière Ottomane à la Veille de la Revolution Jeune-Turque,” *Turcica*, 1977, p.240.

<sup>92</sup> Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881-1908: Reactions to European Economic Penetration*, New York University Press, New York, 1983, p.61.

<sup>93</sup> Most of the peasants were not wage earners but subsistence farmers producing very little surplus, yet in some regions like Cilicia where cash crops such as cotton cultivated, seasonal wage work did exist.

<sup>94</sup> Ahmet Makal, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Çalışma İlişkileri: 1850-1920*, İmge Yayınevi, Ankara, 1997, p. 132.

The 1845 police regulation is the first legal document referring to labor unrest in this new era.<sup>95</sup> Some labor historians consider this merely as a simple confusion due to direct translation of a foreign regulation,<sup>96</sup> because the 1845 regulation is known to be adopted from a French legal text dating back to the Napoleonic era. In any case the inclusion of such a clause<sup>97</sup> in this police regulation can neither be dismissed as a simple mistake nor be accepted by its face value as a clear sign of the existence of labor militancy in that era. The only recorded labor unrest degenerating into violence prior to the 1845 regulation, are instances of machine breaking occurred in Macedonian provinces anyway.<sup>98</sup> Such events would increase in the second half of the nineteenth century and spread to the other parts of the Empire.

The Ottoman state did not only try to quell possible labor militancy, it also tries to standardize working conditions, in some cases. For instance, in order to ensure the labor supply needed for the pits in the mining basin of Ereğli, the first recorded legal document prepared to arrange industrial relations on an individual basis was produced in 1867. This document popularly called *Dilaver Paşa Nizamnamesi*, while stipulating compulsory labor in the pits for the inhabitants of the surrounding region, it also included some clauses on the healthcare of the workers and provided for their shelter.<sup>99</sup> Evidently, the authorities wanted to make available a

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<sup>95</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, “1845 Tarihli Polis Nizamı, Sansür, Tatil-i Mesalih, Toplantı, Ziham ve Cemiyetler” *Süreç* 1981/4 v.2, no.8, pp. 22-39.

<sup>96</sup> Mesut Gülmez, “Polis Örgütünün İlk Kuruluş Belgesi ve Kaynağı,” *Amme İdaresi Dergisi*, vol. 16, no. 4, (December 1983), pp. 3-15.

<sup>97</sup> The first student of the field who mentions this clause is Lütfü Erişçi, as a rule Turkish labor historians prefer the circular use of such references that is why most of the later scholars followed his lead in making similar arguments. See Lütfü Erişçi, *Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfının Tarihi (özet olarak)*, Kebikeç Yayınları, Ankara, 1997.

<sup>98</sup> Oya Sencer, *Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı Doğuşu ve Yapısı*, İstanbul: 1969, Habora Kitabevi, p.69.

<sup>99</sup> For a witness account of the daily lives of Ottoman miners see Donald Quataert, Yüksel Duman (eds.), “A Coal Miner’s Life During the Late Ottoman Empire,” *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 60, (Fall 2001), pp.153-179.

dependable labor supply to the mines by caring for the welfare of the enforced peasants. Two years later, in 1869, another regulation was promulgated in order to lure peasants into the mines.<sup>100</sup> The scope of this latter regulation was not restricted to a specific area, thus demonstrates that the mining sector became interesting enough for the government to devote a special administrative text to deal with.

The genuine industrial strikes came only as the twentieth century approached. Yavuz Selim Karakışla dates back the early event that can be labeled as a worker strike to 1863. The event took place in the mining region of Zonguldak.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, as cited earlier the first known social legislation concerning working conditions that includes some clauses advantageous for workers, is issued for this mining region in 1867. The next decade witnessed the growing protests by employees of public enterprises who could not get their salaries for months due to the bankruptcy of the state treasury. This created walkouts amounting to strikes more than once according to the news published at the time. The Ottoman press began to cover regularly the strike news in the aftermath of 1872.<sup>102</sup> The news included strikes by Beyoğlu post office workers, Croatian construction workers employed in the İzmit sector of the Anatolian railway project, and the strike in January 1873 at the Haliç shipyard.<sup>103</sup>

The 1908 marks the birth of modern politics in Turkey as well as the end of the prehistory of the Turkish labor movement, indeed, the first legal document regulating strikes and labor organizations dates back to this era. The reason for its promulgation was the spontaneous labor actions that engulfed the major Ottoman

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<sup>100</sup> Mesut Gülmez, “1936 Öncesinde İşçi Hakları” paper presented to the symposium on *Worker Rights in the Fifteenth Anniversary of the Labor Code*, (22-24 May 1986), pp.20-21.

<sup>101</sup> Yavuz Selim Karakışla, (1995), p. 20.

<sup>102</sup> Oya Sencer, (1969), pp.132-134.

<sup>103</sup> Lütfü Erişçi, (1997), p.4. Some dates this strike to 1872, yet it seems that they mistranslate the Islamic calendar.



industrial cities in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. In fact, it is already cited that during the first constitutional period also many labor actions were noted either because of lessening of censure or the libertarian climate that foster the public expression of labor grievances. Obviously, benign political opportunity structures gave workers chances to voice their demands.

In 1909 the Ottoman Parliament debated this issue and ratified the law on industrial strikes, which remained at force until 1936. Although almost all of the documents related to these two legal texts are present the ambiguity in its clauses paves the way for different interpretations of its meaning. Beyond any doubt, the general aim of these legal regulations is to restrict or even raze worker militancy.<sup>104</sup> Establishing trade unions in companies providing public services is banned and those that were already founded were closed down. In these very sectors a compulsory bargaining process involving an arbiter is also stipulated. If a unanimous agreement is reached then it is forbidden to strike, if not then the worker can walk out, yet they cannot organize collective actions to prevent others from working.<sup>105</sup> Not only the law but also the attitude of the authorities made quite impracticable to be involved in labor actions and organizations. Indeed, a newly discovered diary<sup>106</sup> of a legal strike that was implemented in Adana railway line operated by a French firm proved that strikes are not clandestine events yet in public services striking is extremely and purposefully hardened. That is the very reason why, except for the three years period comprising 1919-1922 when the occupied İstanbul witnessed a wave of strikes, the

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<sup>104</sup> The lawmakers were not silent on their intentions anyway. The full texts of the debates in the parliament were quoted in Gündüz Ökçün, *Tatil-i Eşgal Kanunu 1909: Belgeler, Yorumlar*, Ankara Üniversitesi, Ankara, 1982.

<sup>105</sup> I followed mostly the explanation offered by Güzel. See M. Şehmus Güzel, “Tatil-i Eşgal Var mı?” *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, no.77 (February-March 1985), pp.37-43.

<sup>106</sup> Şeyda Oğuz (ed.), *1927 Adana Demiryolu Grevi*, İstanbul: 2005, TÜSTAV yayınları.

workers were mostly calm after the immediate aftermath of the 1908 revolution when the new bylaw effectively suppressed worker militancy.

The avowed economic objective of the Young Turks organized in the Party of Union and Progress is to marginalize the share of Christians and Jews in the economy in order to create a national economy based on a Turkish Muslim middle class,<sup>107</sup> which Feroz Ahmad denotes as a “nascent bourgeoisie”.<sup>108</sup> However, the industrial labor force was also mostly made up of by the non Muslims. According to the figures provided in 1915 census of industrial establishments benefiting from the government support, only fifteen percent of the dependent laborers in manufacture were Muslim.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, during the 1908 strikes Muslim workers were in some cases eager to get the help of the Unionists rather than their colleagues from other religious communities. The demand to privilege the Muslim workers over non Muslims existed among both the Unionists cadres and some workers such as those employed in the railway companies operated by the foreign monopolies. Thus it can be asserted that not only the entrepreneurs but also the employees ought to be nationalized, yet this seemed to be a secondary objective. The social and economic circumstances of the World War along with the deliberate governmental policies enabled the government to realize the most of their objectives in this respect.<sup>110</sup> Through complacency in profiteering they nurtured the newly created Turkish Muslim bourgeoisie. For the transformation of the ethnic composure of the labor force on the

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<sup>107</sup> Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de 'Milli İktisat' (1908-1918)*, Ankara, Yurt Yayınları, 1982, p. 351.

<sup>108</sup> Feroz Ahmad, “Vanguard of a Nascent Bourgeoisie: The Social Economic Policies of the Young Turks 1908-1918” in Osman Okyar, Halil İnalcık (eds.), *Türkiye'nin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Tarihi (1071-1920)*, Ankara, 1980, Meteksan, pp. 329-350.

<sup>109</sup> The figures are quoted in Yüksel Akkaya, “Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık-1” *Praksis*, no.5, (2002), p.136.

<sup>110</sup> Ahmet Emin Yalman, *Turkey in the World War*, New Haven: 1930, Yale University Press, pp. 157-168.

other hand, the mass population transfers both during and after the war did the necessary correction.

### The Workers and the Young Republic

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War brought its end practically, yet its dissolution did not create much disaster for its population than the war itself. A political entity emerged in Ankara and achieved to prevent the partition of the Anatolian heartland of the Empire through warfare and diplomacy. A cycle of labor protests occurred in İstanbul until the rule of Ankara is firmly established over there. There were two motives that propelled normally silent objections by workers into mass actions. One was nationalism; since most of the employers were foreign translating the oppression and exploitation into terms of national conflict was rather easy and safe.<sup>111</sup> The government and the workers had an untold understanding of nationalizing the economy that is why in certain limits Ankara supports worker demands against foreign employers. The other motive was political leadership. It is a well known fact that the early twenties is the era where the roots of Turkish communism were situated.<sup>112</sup> That movement initiated some attempts to organize workers with differing success up until late twenties especially in İstanbul yet during the occupation another political organization led the İstanbul workers. However, prior to the communists a group organized around an enigmatic figure of the history

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<sup>111</sup> Yüksel Akkaya, “Korporatizmden Sendikal İdeolojiye, Milliyetçilik ve İşçi Sınıfı” in Tanıl Bora (ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce: Milliyetçilik*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001, pp.829-840.

<sup>112</sup> Yavuz Aslan, *Türkiye Komünist Fırkasının Kuruluşu ve Mustafa Suphi: Türkiye Komünistlerinin Rusya’da Teşkilatlanması*, Ankara, 1997, Türk Tarih Kurumu.

of Turkish left, namely Hüseyin Hilmi, achieved to realize strikes in the occupied İstanbul.<sup>113</sup>

After the independence nationalistically motivated strikes were organized especially against foreign employers. In some cases, workers even demanded the exclusive hiring of Muslim Turks. Even while the actual warfare continued, the Parliament in Ankara promulgated a law regulating the working conditions in the Ereğli mining region, which is considered as the first social policy measure adopted by the new Turkey.<sup>114</sup> One must not forget that the majority of the employers in Ereğli coal mines were foreigners, particularly French; in July 1924 Ereğli region witnessed a minor miners strike in the pits owned by the French firm.<sup>115</sup> This strike was also another incident where nationalism and resistance against oppression and exploitation were mingled. The foreign employer did not insist on defying modest worker demands and a fair settlement was brokered according to the law on strikes.

Although the labor question was not among its main concerns the Ankara government intended to prevent the establishment of an independent body representing workers. To discuss and design the economic strategy of the young republic a congress, which reflects a corporatist understanding of social division of labor,<sup>116</sup> was convened in İzmir in 1923. In the congress, the workers group, which also includes non workers and presided over by a pro-government journalist, prepared a list of thirty four demands. The demands included the shortening of the

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<sup>113</sup> See Yusuf Doğan Çetinkaya, Foti Benlisoy “İştirakçi Hilmi” in Murat Gültekingil (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce: Sol*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2007, pp. 165-183.

<sup>114</sup> Cahit Talas, *Türkiye’nin Açıklamalı Sosyal Politika Tarihi*, Bilgi Yayınları, Ankara, 1992, pp.79-85.

<sup>115</sup> For the details of this strike see Turgut Etingü, *Kömür Havzasında İlk Grev*, Koza Yayınları, 1976, pp. 78-98.

<sup>116</sup> Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye’de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1946*, İmge Yayınları, Ankara, 1999, pp.139 -142.

working day, the institution of yearly paid holidays and measures for safety and healthcare in workplaces and the legalization of trade unions in public services. In fact, the congress was an example of how the government tried to act as the sole legitimate representative of the Turkish workers, though especially İstanbul workers had their own organizations. The most important among them, Society for the Ascent of Laborers (*Amele Teali Cemiyeti*) was established in 1924 and influenced the pro-labor circles in the city. It aspired to reach to Anatolia and established a branch in Adana<sup>117</sup> with limited success.

None of the independent labor initiatives, whether they are inspired by socialist ideals or not, survived the late twenties during when the Ankara tuned down all the political liberties in order to crush all forms of political opposition. In order to counter the attempts to organize among workers; the government supported some worker societies over others or played the role of arbiter among them, or intervened in industrial disputes, especially through Numan Usta a sympathizer of the Union and Progress and a master craftsmen from Zeytinburnu, the unique worker deputy of the Ankara Parliament.<sup>118</sup> A similar strategy would later be implemented to control the first legal trade unions. The governing party also set up mutual trust funds along solidarist lines in places such as İzmir and Zonguldak under its control.<sup>119</sup>

The protest actions and strikes organized by workers also died down. 1928 seemed to be the last year when strikes took place. İstanbul tramway workers who were very active and loud against their employers during the occupation of İstanbul and Çukurova railway workers participated in such contentious events. The first

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<sup>117</sup> Kemal Sülker, *Türkiye’de Sendikacılık*, Vakıf Matbaası, İstanbul, 1955, p.45.

<sup>118</sup> Oya Sencer, (1969), pp.288-290.

<sup>119</sup> See for instance, M. Bülent Varlık, “İzmir İşçi ve Esnaf Birlikleri Genel Bürosu Nizamnamesi.” *Kebikeç*, no. 5 (1997), pp. 201-205.

decade of the republican period was a continuation of the aftermath of 1908 in more than one respect, indeed the 1909 law on strikes was still in force. Nevertheless, the governing party made plain its intention of tutelage over the organized labor mostly in order to counter the effect of a possible communist agitation among the workers. It must be also said that the government when saw it feasible did not refrain from acting as the guardian of the Turkish workers against their foreign employers, just like the unionists before them. However, such instances were not plenty and the developmental goals were observed rather than the demands of the workers. This attitude was continued into the later periods in general, yet the direct public ownership in the industry will change the equation of this earlier era.

### The State Led Industrialization and its Social Impact

The Kemalist government did not preoccupy itself with the workers up until the mid thirties. The labor question emerged from time to time when workers openly expressed their grievances so as to endanger the working of the economy; moreover it was mainly handled as an issue of internal security centered on the deterrence against any possible attempts of communist infiltration. This lack of interest and politically consequential relationship disappeared when the government had to directly invest into the economy through the establishment of the public enterprises due to the Great Depression. The industrial complexes built and run by the state made the government the employer of its citizens in increasing numbers. For the modernizing Kemalist cadres these establishments also provided a hub of connection to the ordinary people living in provinces. The government can no more act solely as a night watchman emphasizing the harmonious development of the capital

accumulation process; it has to interact with its employee-citizens in order to reach certain objectives such as national development, industrialization and social solidarity.

In this vein, following the first five year plan that stipulated the construction of first large industrial plants some specific set of institutional arrangements were ordained to regulate the relationship between the workers and the employers and especially the state, the biggest employer. These regulations over time and sequentially constructed a viewpoint of social norms and obligations, of the proper economic functions of the parties to the regime of industrial relations through an indirect political and social negotiation between the state and the workers. The ultimate institutional arrangement and understanding between the Turkish governments and the organized labor concerning the conduct of the regime of industrial relations and the relevant process of decision making, which is defined in this study as the moral economy of the unionized workers, developed through time in distinct episodes and hand in hand with the advance of the organized labor movement. The first episode in this process of reciprocal development can be traced back to the mid thirties when the first attempts at industrialization took place and first bills concerning the labor question were drafted and promulgated.

The thirties constitute an incomparable period in Turkish recent history since it set the standard for the Kemalist one party rule. That is why, some political, social and economic traits of the country that still persist dates back to this very era. The era starts with a tumultuous opening because of the influences of the Great Depression that totally altered the available policy setting for the young republic. Moreover, in line with the developments in Europe at the time and because of the growing popular

unrest caused by the economic hardships that surfaced during the short lived Free Party experience, the Kemalist regime lurched toward authoritarianism.

Because of the depression the international trade flows collapsed in general and the countries opted for autarchy. Nevertheless, Turkey needed to find an outlet for its agricultural products<sup>120</sup> in an era when the international trade practically vanished. Turkey can not either sell its produces or import its basic needs. These circumstances imposed by the international situation, along with the success of the Soviet experience with planning, led the Turkish policy makers decide on to take the matters in their own hands. In the absence of any major source of capital, promoting the industrialization via state investments and planning, namely *étatisme*, became the key economic policy line giving its distinctive traits to the decade. In fact, this policy choice corresponded to the global trends in this respect.

Regarding the workers and the labor regulations, this period is constitutive in more than one respect; the impact of the norms that were established during the thirties had a long lasting effect upon the later developments concerning labor and industrial issues. This era diverges from the preceding decade regarding the economic policies pursued, because the government intervention into economy became more visible due to various reasons and the drop in laborers political activity that receded to far below of the twenties during which the government condoned workers action especially those that were organized against the foreign employers. The economic strategies of the thirties is considered definitive for the *étatist* traits of the Kemalist regime that left its imprint on the following political, social and economic structure of the country, that is why it deserves further analysis.

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<sup>120</sup> Haldun Gülalp, *Gelişme Stratejileri ve Gelişme İdeolojileri*, Yurt Yayınları, Ankara, 1987, pp.25-30.



## The Ideological Peculiarities of the Thirties

The unique opportunities created by the depression coupled by the economic hardships stemming from it, and the inadequacy of the social transformation that the new republic achieved so far resulted in the search for a new and stern ideological orientation to the one party government in the early thirties. Naturally, these searches were parallel to the political transformation that continental Europe went through during the decade. The liberal democracy discredited everywhere due to the total collapse of the self regulating market ideal, this paved the way for the rise of authoritarian regimes of some sort everywhere. The solidarist ideological mainframe put forth by Ziya Gökalp, which constituted the backbone of the Young Turk discourse especially during the First World War, was adapted in the thirties according to the necessities of the fragile one party government vying to strengthen its position<sup>121</sup>, and shaped the later approaches of the Turkish elite to the problems related to the labor issues and its contentious nature. Moreover, solidarist discourse seems to be somehow efficient in isolating the discursive effects of the working class ideologies both among the labor force and the populace in general.

The solidarist ideology affirmed itself through the doctrine of populism, one of the six principles constituting Kemalist creed. The practice and ideological content of the principle of populism suggests that its Kemalist version was closer to French solidarism rather than Russian Narodnism or similar variants of left wing populism. This is a fact admitted even by the theoreticians of the party. In a propaganda

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<sup>121</sup> For an evaluation of the impact of Ziya Gökalp over Turkish nationalism and the comparison of his approaches to later official policies pursued by the Kemalist governments see Taha Parla, *Ziya Gökalp, Kemalizm ve Türkiye’de Korporatizm*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1989.

pamphlet written by İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, published in 1946<sup>122</sup> the c-section of the fifth article of the program of the Republican People's Party was referred to as the reflection of the solidarist perspective of the Party. This is the very section in which, under the heading of "Populism," (*halkçılık*) this principle was exposed. Moreover, their conception of solidarism was not uniquely confined to populism. Tökin asserted that, "the solidarist world and society perspective dictates the pattern of practice of these six principles."<sup>123</sup> Obviously the term solidarism in itself suffices to convey the idea that the rulers of the Republican People's Party rejected the notion of conflicting interests within their "nation".

İsmail Hüsrev is one of the five ideologues that published the *Kadro* Journal between 1932 and 1934, attempting to formulate the étatist policies and authoritarian political regime into a coherent ideological frame. Three among them, namely İsmail Hüsrev, Vedat Nedim and Şevket Süreyya are influenced by bolshevism earlier, then disserted to Kemalism.<sup>124</sup> According to their approach, as a newly independent ex-semi colonial country Turkey had the opportunity to industrialize, avoiding the formation of the class conflicts by a state led developmental policy, and to be the pioneer of a new type of state, that is to say, independent, self reliant, and holistic nations that would compose, following the Turkish independence experience, the new family of world states. Obviously, in line with the corporatist schemes prevalent throughout Europe at the time, these ideas suggest a similar alternative.

It must be noted that the Kemalist government did not undertake the large scale construction of corporatist political bodies based on professional

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<sup>122</sup> İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, *C.H. Partisinin Dünya ve Cemiyet Görüşü (Genel Esaslar)*, Ülkü Basımevi, Ankara, 1946.

<sup>123</sup> İsmail Hüsrev Tökin, (1946), p. 25.

<sup>124</sup> Their worldview is summarized in a book see Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, *İnkılap ve Kadro*, Remzi Kitabevi, İstanbul, 1990.

representation. Some minor attempts were made such as the Supreme Assembly of Economy (*Al-i İktisat Meclisi*), which was established in 1927 and abolished in 1935. This body possessed only symbolic powers, and not all of the parties involved in the economic production were represented, workers were among the excluded. Over time it became a mere instrument to convey the demands of the government supported private sector to the cabinet, and criticized in the Assembly due to this very reasons.<sup>125</sup> Some other limited and local attempts at corporatism were also undertaken,<sup>126</sup> though they were inconsequential. All in all, the solidarist social philosophy of the government party stops short of building a full scale corporatist scheme since it is blended with ideas of unitary government and parliamentary supremacy inherited from Jean Jacques Rousseau and the application of his ideas during the French Revolution.

In a speech delivered during the Fourth Congress of the Republican People's Party with the intention to clarify the principles underlying the program of the party, Recep Peker, the general secretary of the Republican People's Party, touched upon the subject of the regulation of the industrial relationships. Giving his reasoning about the ban on the strikes and lockouts and after stressing the solidarist nature of the system, he moved to defy the claims for corporatism by stressing the ban on cartels and trusts, hence corporations. Peker compared corporatism to Marxism in the sense that both created or furthered the divisions existing among the nation. Marxism divides the people into the classes while corporatism divides between producers and consumers. Peker finished the related part of his speech by repeating the commitment

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<sup>125</sup> For an account of its deeds, see Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, Savaş Yayınları, Ankara, 1982.

<sup>126</sup> For an evaluation of attempts at corporatism during the one party period and their overall assessment see Ahmet Makal, "Türkiye'de Tek Parti Dönemi ve Korporatizm Tartışmaları" *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 93, (Summer 2002), pp.173-199.

of his party to prevent the creation of cleavages within the Turkish nation.<sup>127</sup> This approach on the one hand prohibited the formation of any independent organization representing workers on the other it loosely assign the state to protect their welfare. This vague mission found its practice in time mainly for those workers employed in the public sector as the institutionalization of the relevant bureaucratic apparatus grew stronger.

### The Economic Orientation of the Thirties

Generally, the economic policies of the Young Republic are analyzed under two distinct periods. The former is the *laissez faire* era of the twenties that span from the convention of the İzmir Congress of Economy to the end of the ban on imposing tariffs on foreign trade stipulated by the Lausanne treaty. Korkut Boratav, prefers the term “promoting private capital accumulation under the conditions of open economy” to denote that period.<sup>128</sup> There were no trade barriers due to the cited prohibition existing in the Lausanne Treaty; hence the economy was bound to be open until 1929. The policies pursued during this period were aimed to ease the fiscal burden of the peasants, pave the way for the capital accumulation in the hands of a local and loyal entrepreneurial class to which the objective of national development would be conferred, and maintain a conservative budgetary frugality. Indeed, Haldun Gülalp denotes two principles as the defining factors of the period. First, was the

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<sup>127</sup> The party published this speech as a pamphlet. Recep Peker, *C.H.P. Dördüncü Büyük Kurultayında R. Peker'in Söylevi*, Ankara, 1935.

<sup>128</sup> Korkut Boratav, “Devletçilik ve Kemalist İktisat Politikaları” in Nevin Coşar (ed.) *Türkiye’de Devletçilik*, Bağlam Yayınları, İstanbul: 1995, pp.117-118.

primacy of the private sector, second, was free trade. He also adds that the former also holds for the so called étatist period, namely the following decade.<sup>129</sup>

The economic policies of the period 1930-1939 were identified as étatism and protectionism by most scholars.<sup>130</sup> These years witnessed the first industrialization period of the young republic. Boratav cites three domestic causes, together with the world crisis to account for the economic policy shift: First of them is the perceived failure by the ruling elite of the liberal policies and the belief that the private sector can bring about industrialization. The others were the monetary crisis of 1929, and the unexpected success of the short lived opposition party, namely the Free Party of 1930 municipal elections.<sup>131</sup> Some scholars cited other causes like the end of the Lausanne prohibition of the tariff changes, the influence of the successful Soviet experience and the ideological trends among the Turkish ruling elite.<sup>132</sup> It seems that the debate is centered on the main cause of the policy shift though contradicting the two policy choices of these two distinct eras could be misleading.

Boratav put emphasis on the world crisis over the domestic causes to explain the adoption of the étatist and protectionist policies. The declining export earnings, forced the government, like many other foreign governments at the time, to implement a controlled import policy. Throughout the world, barter and clearing methods were the rule of the day in the international trade. The simple citation of the facts would not improve our understanding of the real motives behind the policy

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<sup>129</sup> Haldun Gülalp, (1987), pp.21-22.

<sup>130</sup> See for instance Faruk Birtok, “Devletçiliğin Yükselişi ve Düşüşü 1932-1950” in Nevin Coşar (1995), pp.143-172; Yakup Kepenek, Nurhan Yentürk, *Türkiye Ekonomisi*, Remzi Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1994; but Boratav separates the period comprising 1930-1932 as a distinct era in which protectionism was applied along with the promotion of private capital accumulation see Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi, 1908-1985*, Gerçek Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1995.

<sup>131</sup> Korkut Boratav, (1995), pp.127-129.

<sup>132</sup> Yakup Kepenek, Nurhan Yentürk, (2001).

change. Haldun Gülalp<sup>133</sup> looks for the answer of a simple question “who profited from the new policy choices?” The objectives of the First Five Years Development Plan were the following: The industrial units must be based on the regional agricultural production and natural resources; the priority must be given to the substitution of the imported basic consumer goods, especially textiles; and the industrial investments must be close to the raw material and labor sources. According to Gülalp, the first two of these objectives decipher the position of the state vis-à-vis the classes. This means, since the Great Depression resulted in the decline of the prices of the Turkish traditional export commodities, the most seriously damaged sectors would be the trade bourgeoisie and the agrarian elite who produced cash crops like tobacco and cotton. In order to compensate the losses by these sectors, especially the agrarian elite that was the main economic pillar of the regime, the government began to invest money in industrial establishments that will process these cash crops. A similar point was also made by Korkut Boratav, though more implicitly when he computed the cotton prices in comparison to industrial prices between 1933 and 1939.<sup>134</sup> He accepted that this pricing policy reflects a pattern favorable to large scale commercial farmers.

Approximately, fifty percent of the investment share of the first plan was reserved for textiles, and almost all of this investment was related to cotton products. Thus, the conditions deteriorating due to the collapsing international markets for the cotton producers, who are mostly big commercial farmers, were corrected by the étatist policies. The wheat production, on the other hand, which is mainly on the shoulders of the small peasantry, was not subsidized by any of these policies. In

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<sup>133</sup> The following argument is from Haldun Gülalp, (1987), pp.25-30.

<sup>134</sup> Korkut Boratav, “1923-1939 Yıllarının İktisat Politikası Açısından Dönemlendirilmesi” in *Atatürk Döneminin Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarihiyle İlgili Sorunlar*, İstanbul Yüksek İktisat ve Ticaret Mektebi Mezunları Derneği Yayını, İstanbul, 1977, pp. 39-52.

general the policies of government led industrialization cost dearly to the peasant almost everywhere but in Turkey not all the peasants did pay the cost, actually those who are involved in commercial activities, namely the bigger farmers gained from the étatist industrialization process. The rural structure consisting of the small peasantry in wheat production, and the bigger farmers focusing in cash crop cultivation remained untouched during the period. Factual data supports this argument. If the wheat to industry price proportion index is fixed at 100 for 1924, then it would be 68 in 1939, after a sharp decline to 59 in 1931. However both cotton and tobacco indexes surpassed slightly 100 of 1924 in 1939.<sup>135</sup> Thus, the beneficiaries of the étatist period would be the commercial bourgeoisie who marketed the products of the petty peasantry, and the bigger ones who could reach the market directly.

The data concerning wage earners in industry is harder to get. Most of the data came from the establishments that are subsidized according to the law on promoting industrial enterprises promulgated in 1927, thus not exhaustive. Relying on that data, Boratav for instance provides an analysis of the relative changes in income of some of the occupational groupings during the thirties. According to his analysis, if the real wages were fixed at 100 in 1932, which is the official date for the implementation of the étatist policies, then it would be 88.1 in 1939,<sup>136</sup> but this was not a steady decline because of mild fluctuations over the period, and considering decreasing wheat prices and enlarging workforce, the consumption level of the urban workers might not be deteriorating. However the profits of their employers, whether state or private, surely rose. Moreover, although the government pursued a policy of industrialization energetically, it did not crowd out the private industry. The share in

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<sup>135</sup> For the complete data see Korkut Boratav, (1995), p.134; and Haldun Güllalp, (1987), pp.117-132.

<sup>136</sup> Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908-1985*, Gerçek Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1988, p.60.

gross national product of those subsidized firms remained intact during the period. Boratav argues that the private sector industrial investments replaced the declining small manufacture due to the governmental preference.<sup>137</sup> Besides, the share of profits within the GNP rose steadily throughout the period according to the figures provided by Korkut Boratav who based his calculations on the data provided by Tuncer Bulutay and his colleagues.<sup>138</sup> Estimations on the salaries of civil servants, on the other hand, points to a fluctuated pattern with possibly a small drop in their purchase power compared to workers. Similar findings also exist in other studies. Şevket Pamuk,<sup>139</sup> for example, uses data comprising a larger time frame and argues that the real wages drop fifteen percent from the beginning of the First World War to the eve of the Second World War.

It seems that the government spending directed at industrialization was financed by the small peasants, especially wheat producers, and the primary beneficiaries of the period were purveyors who were enjoying government contracts whether as sellers of raw materials to state economic enterprises or retailers of these state monopolies. Urban wage earners, on the other hand, had a more or less stable income and consumption level throughout the period. The era of the Second World War though would witness a more extensive deterioration in their income levels. All in all, during the étatist period the government did not aim to suppress the private sector. Celal Bayar who was the minister of economy pursued swiftly a policy favorable to the dominant class fraction within the bourgeoisie, namely the notorious “affairists”, a term use at the time to denote those who conducted their businesses

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<sup>137</sup> Korkut Boratav, (1988), pp. 57; 59.

<sup>138</sup> Korkut Boratav, (1988), pp. 58.

<sup>139</sup> Şevket Pamuk, “Ücretlerin Gelişimi,” Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi, vol. 3, Kültür Bakanlığı ve Tarih Vakfı Yayını, İstanbul: 1998, pp.457-460.



through İş Bankası, and labeled this policy as étatism.<sup>140</sup> The nationalizations of the period were largely directed to the foreign privileges remaining from the Ottoman era. Thus the nature of the policies implemented during 1930-1939 period was capitalist in both essence and form. Boratav argues that the energy created by the étatist development policies were preferable for the private sector to a possible recession caused by the world depression. With the moderation of the international crisis in 1937, the quota regulations were withdrawn. The law on State Economic Enterprises, adopted in 1938, allowed the private sector to possess shares in these establishments. The beginning of the Second World War distorted any attempt to pursue a coordinated economic policy. The concerns of the military mobilization which has its own peculiar logic dictated its logic to the economic decision making.

The industrialization efforts of the one party government aim primarily to create the industries to process the nationally produced raw materials and some consumer goods. The logic of public enterprises required large scale enterprises this means a concentrated mass of workers, however the government was afraid of the possible consequences of a large scale concentration of the workers especially around urban areas. One result of this concern was to scatter the plants around the countryside. Nevertheless, the government can no longer perceive the labor question as mainly related to the worries over national security. The workers employed in the public sector must also be an example of the welfare brought by the new regime to the laboring people since the state became directly the employer of its citizens.

The thirties was also a decade when the new regime, as it penetrates deep into the Anatolian heartland, confronted more and more the problems of establishing its legitimacy in order to realize its agenda of modernization. The labor force of the

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<sup>140</sup> Selim İlkin, “Devletçilik Döneminin İlk Yıllarında İşçi Sorununa Yaklaşım ve 1932 İş Kanunu Tasarısı”, *ODTÜ Gelişme*, special issue (1978), pp. 251-348, p. 290.

publicly owned industrial establishments can be also instrumental in this respect. All the same, in order to reach all of these objectives the government undertook the labor question and its regulation seriously. The Labor Code, which was always postponed in order to not hamper the capital accumulation process of the private sector, was drafted by the higher echelons of the party and introduced as an organic regulation of the regime. From this point onwards began the construction of the institutional domain and political understanding upon which the workers and their state interact with each other. This particular context will evolve with further arrangements and bargains between the relevant parties and within this context the labor movement and the governmental institutions concerning labor force and its welfare would develop.

### Worker Organizations during the Thirties

The thirties is not a particularly significant decade for the labor movement. Most of the attempts at mobilization seem to be related either to the governing party or to the communist militants. Although no formal bans were imposed on labor activities such as strikes or establishment of societies to promote solidarity among workers, the climate of repression that began after Peace and Order Bill that remained in force until 1929, continued into the era. Indeed, at the end of the decade, in 1938, the law on societies was amended so as to outlaw all societies based on social classes.

Nevertheless, the economic hardships that began in the aftermath of 1927 and worsened between 1929 and 1933<sup>141</sup> prompted some worker militants in İzmir and

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<sup>141</sup> Gülten Kazgan argues that the Turkish economy underwent a process of deflation-depression between 1927 and 1935 caused both by external economic conditions and economic reorganization that the government undertook; see Gülten Kazgan, “Türk Ekonomisinde 1927-35 Depresyonu, Kapital Birikimi ve Örgütlemeler”, in *Atatürk Döneminin Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarihiyle İlgili Sorunlar*, İstanbul Yüksek İktisat ve Ticaret Mektebi Mezunları Derneği Yayını, İstanbul, 1977, pp.231-274.

İstanbul to undertake attempts to establish trade unions in order to alleviate the social and economic conditions engulfing the laborers. It seems that members of the illegal communist party were active in them, and especially in İzmir they were involved in the local organization of the Free Party that was established in 1930 in order to constitute a parliamentary opposition that would not challenge the Kemalist leadership.<sup>142</sup> These attempts were swiftly repressed by the one party government.

In order to appease the labor unrest the Republican People's Party invented its own scheme of organization for the laborers in regions where the grievances were at its peak. One of these attempts was the establishment of the İzmir Union of Workers and Craftsmen Institutions. This organization, in a way reminiscent of the craftsmen organization of the Unionists in İstanbul, brought together all the employees and the employers of the İzmir province and worked mostly for social aid purposes under the supervision of the İzmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The governor of İzmir, Kazım Dirik, published a decree in 1934 for its establishment, but the actual administrative organs of the Union were constituted during the following year.<sup>143</sup> Şehmus Güzel relates the establishment of this body to the increasing activity among the workers in the region.<sup>144</sup> The Union clearly aimed to redress the grievances of the employees, but it did not include only wage earners but also self employed artisans and craftsmen. This is another instance where the government tries to avoid the emphasis on the class nature of production relations. Another organization, a mutual trust fund was established in Zonguldak around the same time. Indeed, the government party made some attempts to establish societies

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<sup>142</sup> For a detailed insider account of one such attempt from İzmir see İbrahim Topçuoğlu, *Türkiye'de İlk Sendika Sarıkışla'da, 1932*, Öncü Kitabevi, İstanbul, 1975.

<sup>143</sup> See M. Bülent Varlık, (1997), for the text of the regulation of the Union.

<sup>144</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, "1930'larda İşçi Örgütlenmesi" *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, n. 83, (September 1986).

bringing together craftsmen and workers such as Blacksmiths Society.<sup>145</sup> Apparently, these organizations were thought to be associations that are premised upon an organic conception of harmonious social division of labor.

Compared to the previous decade, the thirties also witnessed a drop in the strikes. The ban on trade unions was not new, and the pressure on worker organizations established on the basis of Law on Societies dated back to the mid twenties. However, the first decade of the Ankara government was familiar with strikes; even it was complicit in some of them. The leniency towards strikers began to fade as the number of foreign firms decrease. This coincides with the turn of decade after which the strikers were considered as a nuisance to developmental goals and more importantly solidarist ideals of the Kemalist leadership. Furthermore, one of the primary demands of the Muslim workers, namely the exclusive access of Muslim workers to employment in some professions, was met by Ankara in 1932. This seems to be a significant development since even a procommunist worker militant, İbrahim Topçuoğlu, cites that in his memoirs as a positive change to the benefit of workers, although that does not mean that labor unrest was resolved through this regulation.

Republican People's Party tried to seduce the laborers to its cause through a variety of means. For instance, during the 1931 general elections it nominated several craftsmen, small businessmen with petty artisan backgrounds and some workers to be elected as members of parliament. This move apparently devised to establish a link between laborers who supported Free Party during its brief existence and the governing party. The allegations of communist infiltration among the ranks of the Free Party show that the likelihood of materialization of class politics in the

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<sup>145</sup> Fritz Walter Weiker, *Political Tutelage and Democracy in Turkey: The Free Party and its Aftermath*, Brill, Leiden, 1973, pp.168-183.

midst of the parliament was alarming for the governing circles.<sup>146</sup> Besides, it felt the need to coopt the workers into its own ranks in order to legitimize its discourse of social harmony and its claim of acting for all the sectors of the Turkish people.

Most of these worker parliamentarians were not wage earners at the time of their election anyway, but it must be noted that a similar strategy was pursued in 1919 by the Ottoman government when the Assembly was convened under the pressure of revolts throughout the Anatolia against the occupation. At that time the Unionist militants in İstanbul who strived for the national liberation nominated and then elected one of their comrades, a master worker from Zeytinburnu, Numan Usta, to the Assembly to quell the growing socialist agitation among the İstanbul workforce that were receptive to political propaganda due to hardships related to the occupation. Numan Usta later fled to Ankara and worked to mobilize the workers in line with the aims of the Ankara government during the twenties. Similar parliamentarians with worker origins were nominated to the assembly later on. These deputies were always considered as the legitimate spokesperson for the labor and some of them did genuine efforts to voice the workers' demands in Ankara. All in all, the government made some arrangements to draft the workers into their ranks, though the main step in that direction is the promulgation of the Labor Code.

### The Attempts to Promulgate a Labor Code

The legislation concerning the worker rights and the regulation of industrial relations was insufficient up until the mid thirties. The 1909 law on labor walkouts was still in

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<sup>146</sup> Fethi Okyar complains from these allegations during his speeches at the parliament. In one instance he pointed to the hypocritical attitude by the government that cites the danger of class antagonisms for any organization dealing with labor problems other than themselves; see *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 1930, vol. 22-24, pp. 36-37.

force, and industrial relations were regulated by the stipulations of the civil code and the law of obligations. There were some attempts to draft a labor code; none of them reached maturity to be promulgated, except the one in 1932 by the then minister of economics Mustafa Şeref,<sup>147</sup> yet this endeavor cost dearly to him. He lost his seat in the cabinet in the very same year and replaced by Celal Bayar, who will overlook the effort by his predecessor and initiate a work for a totally different draft.

From 1921 onwards the labor questions was a current issue in parliamentary circles. Most of the ruling elite influenced, amazed and felt threatened by the October Revolution, were aware of the need to regulate the social question by parliamentary decree. Indeed, the new republic did promise something in return to every social sector that supports the national cause and it did want to preempt a possible communist stir among the labor force that constitutes a significant segment in urban centers. However, the issue is not that simple since the government on the one hand wanted to tackle the social question and coopt the workers, on the other hand the necessities of the capital accumulation dictates otherwise. That is why the attempts to legislate a labor law which began in 1921 culminated in only 1936 and caused the dismissal of a minister.

The first preparations for a draft began in 1921, though that motion never reached the floor of the parliament and frozen in the Ministry of Economy up until 1924 when the strike of railway workers made the social question current again. The bill that was heavily debated in the parliamentary commission on trade headed by the illustrious Young Turk ideologue Yusuf Akçura and achieves to reach the floor after major revisions. These revisions seem necessary since the first draft was indeed inappropriate legally and needed major reassessment, yet the revisions were not

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<sup>147</sup> Cahit Talas, (1992), pp.98-101.

restricted to technical problems but also reorient the approach of the bill. Basically, the bill stipulates the establishment of a labor bureau within the organization of the Ministry of Economy to supervise the application of the law and the employment issues in general. The parliament debated the bill for two years and six other parliamentary commissions were entrusted with its improvement, in a sense the majority of the parliament blockaded this legislation due to their concerns about promoting unregulated opportunities for capital accumulation, which was mostly labeled as industrialization. In the end the ministry took back the bill and sent another in 1927, which was became null and void since new elections were called for the same year.

In 1929 a new attempt to draft a bill was scheduled by the Ministry which was also marred by grave deficiencies, for instance it did not contain a section on insurances. The government forecasting more unavailing debates did not go any further and withdrew it. On the whole, all of the attempts to legislate a Labor Code were frustrated by endless debates in parliamentary commissions that reveal the reluctance of the government to establish a regime of legal protection for wage earners, which would encroach onto the liberty of the employers over their enterprises. The parliament renown for legislating very radical measures at once, shuddered over social policy issues that might infringe upon the local Muslim bourgeoisie.

The year 1932 on the other hand, witnessed the most resolute attempt to legislate a viable Labor Code. The minister of the economy at the time Mustafa Şeref, who was also responsible for the protectionist measures adopted to cope with the effects of the Great Depression, took the social question that made its existence known during the brief Free Party experiment, seriously. The government

implemented various measures to secure the support of the wage earners. Some of these such as the establishment of local front organizations among laborers or the election of some worker representatives into the parliament were already cited. Indeed, the Republican People's Party reconfigured its policy stand as mild étatist right after the Free Party experiment. This policy orientation involves governmental involvement in industrial investments and planned development. It seems that this atmosphere deemed conducive for drafting a Labor Code. The result was the most comprehensive bill on social policy ever prepared by the young republic.

The minister of Economy, Mustafa Şeref, was personally involved in the designing of the motion that also contains an elaborate scheme of social insurance in its first version. However, the usual mechanism that frustrated earlier attempts to legislate such a law was set in motion anew. This time the failure of the motion will also bring about the demise of the minister himself. Mustafa Şeref Özkan had to quit his job since the Labor law that he pushed through the unwelcoming channels of the legislative was not popular among the nascent bourgeoisie that was nurtured by the government sponsored İş Bankası. Indeed, the reason for his dismissal is his refusal to allow İş Bankası to establish a paper factory in İzmit since he thought that public sector must invest in this sector. The *Affairist* circles that were extremely influential over the government achieved to replace this stubborn étatist by one of their peers, namely Celal Bayar, and ironically Bayar implemented étatist policies with his close ties to business circles that were carefully nurtured by the one party government.

Celal Bayar, as a minister also restarted the process of legislation for the Labor Code and created a new team of experts responsible for its drafting, by appointing the ones responsible for the Mustafa Şeref's draft elsewhere. Celal Bayar exposed his expectations from a Labor Code during an interview by the following



remarks: “We will build harmony between capital and labor. This is the task of the labor code and as such the cost of employment which is was crucial for the industry will always be stable.”<sup>148</sup> However, the draft at hand was prepared with a different mentality, which is why Bayar wanted that to be reviewed by neutral specialist including the representatives for the chambers of commerce and a committee of American experts headed by Walker D. Hines. The committee argued that social legislation must be gradual and follow parallel developments in industrialization, that is to say capital accumulation directed to industrial investments.<sup>149</sup> The argument implies that social policy must not impede the requirements of the capital accumulation process, the essence of bourgeois political economy as a result the 1932 draft was recalled and a completely new preparation set under way. The result was the Law no. 3008, the Labor Code that was promulgated in 1936 as a main pillar of the Kemalist regime and remained in force up until 1971.<sup>150</sup>

Amazingly, the debate over the draft was very short considering the fate of the earlier attempts and the lengthy discussions that they provoked. This time the parliamentary work was completed in three sessions spanning to six days, thus an objective seemed unattainable during the previous ten years was achieved rather easily. This is another sign of the importance attached too this bill by the top brass of the Republican People’s Party. Obviously, the labor code was the answer by the governing party to the necessities of a stable industrialization process and dangers created by the proletarianization.

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<sup>148</sup> The interview was published in October, 7, 1932 issue of *Cumhuriyet*; it is quoted in Selim İlkin, (1978), p. 287.

<sup>149</sup> Walker D. Hines et al., *Türkiye’nin İktisadi Bakımdan Umumi Bir Tetkiki*, book 3, vol. 5-7, Köy Öğretmeni Basımevi, Ankara, 1936, p.246.

<sup>150</sup> For the text of the debates on the floor of the parliament see T.C. *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Vol. 12, 1936, session no. 73, 74, 75, (3; 5; 8.6.1936) pp.23-85.

The one party government promulgated the Labor Code in a time when the public sector became a major industrial employer in its own right. The large factories owned by the state are not only productive units but also media of social transformation and a hub for diffusing the impact of government and its strict ideology in the countryside. However, apart from the ideological reasons the economic requirements related to a stable labor supply also dictated the need to guarantee the basic welfare of the employees in the public sector. The state economic enterprises experienced labor problems since most of the workers perceived industrial employment as transitory and quit these jobs once their urgent cash needs to pay taxes and their other monetary obligations. The factory employment had to be seductive in order to lure the villagers from the surrounding area into the state economic enterprises.

Social legislation was mainly conceived for the public sector. The government does not intend to interfere to the private entrepreneurs; rather it aims to regulate the mass of workers under its payroll. During the final debate, Ali Rıza Türel who spoke on behalf of the commission made this point clear. In order to refute the claims that workers employed in the national defense efforts should be kept outside the scope of this code, he asserted that the industrialization drive is led by the state and big industrial enterprises would be governed by the state; with this code the state more than any other institution put itself under control. All of the measures stipulated in this code are the responsibilities that the state took upon itself.<sup>151</sup>

In line with the political climate prevalent in Europe at the time the labor code, the law no. 3008, conceives a system of industrial relations on the basis of state

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<sup>151</sup> T.C. *T.B.M.M. Zabut Ceridesi*. Vol. 12, 1936, session no.74, (5.6.1936), p.58.

tutelage and arbitrage, indeed the fascist Italy was claimed to be its inspiring source. The labor power of the individual workers was considered as a part of the national wealth rather than a disposable property of each worker.<sup>152</sup> During the debates one parliamentarian, Ahmed Ulus from Ankara, argued that the labor potential of every member of the Turkish nation belongs to the Kemalist revolution.<sup>153</sup> However, this law deserved the adjective of patrimonial rather than corporatist since the articles regulating workers' rights vigorously denied producer groups the right to organize even under the supervision of the government, hence did not fit in the basic definition of corporatism. It aims to nurture the idea of growing as a nation rather than underlining class divisions according to Recep Peker, who labels that legislation as basic law of the new regime. According to him this code will erase every possibility of the surge of class consciousness in the country. The code, on the one hand, aims to destroy the vestige of liberal state that the republican government inherited from the old regime and on the other lays the building blocs of national unity against the possible internationalist tendencies of the working class.<sup>154</sup>

It is noteworthy that a law always caused lengthy debates in the parliament was promulgated only after very mild debates in the floor. Only, Emin Sazak opposed the bill in its entirety and some parliamentarians wanted to exclude enterprises related to the national defense from the capacity of the code. The latter objection was surpassed, as already cited by asserting that the code is primarily concerned with all kinds of state projects and institutions without exception. Emin Sazak, on the other hand, who voiced the logic of contractual freedom in the disguise

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<sup>152</sup> For an elaboration of this see Koray Çalışkan, "Organism and Triangle: A Short History of Labor Law in Turkey" *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 15, (Fall 1996), pp. 95-118.

<sup>153</sup> T.C. *T.B.M.M. Zabut Ceridesi*. Vol. 12, 1936, session no. 73, (3.6.1936) p.24.

<sup>154</sup> T.C. *T.B.M.M. Zabut Ceridesi*. Vol. 12, 1936, session no.75, (8.6.1936), pp.83-85.

of practicability of the stipulated measures, was silenced by underlining the fact that the code is indeed drafted to establish balance between employees and employers, which was not achieved under the regime of contractual freedom. Obviously, he was on shaky ground in a time when bashing liberal ideas was widespread not only in Turkey but also in continental Europe.

The Labor Code banned strikes altogether and brought penal measures for the instigators. Up until that legislation Turkish workers had to surpass very complicated schemes devised to restrict strikes since The Law on Strikes, which confined strikes to specific sectors and restricted them through elaborate legal details, was in force until the enactment of Labor Code in 1936. The government perceives any type of cleavage especially those based on class differences as a threat to the national development ideal. That is the very reason why the labor code prohibits strikes and lock-outs while granting some basic social rights individually, it denied even banned collective rights of wage earners. While in some respects it contains measures ahead of its time like stipulating an eight hour work day, it was generally below the established standards since it denies the right to organize negating many of its advantages. In practice, on the other hand, because of the deficiencies of the work place inspections and absence of a labor ministry, the measures advantageous for workers were generally ignored; all in all as it is asserted earlier the government does not intend to impose these regulations for the private enterprises. It is also deficient in respect of insurance measures, its few articles on the subject is insufficient compared to the 1932 draft. Although it stipulated the establishment of an inadequate insurance scheme in one year, only after the end of the Second World War the government began to legislate on the social insurance issue. Another crucial law that was promulgated during this decade is the law on societies of 1938 that banned the

establishment of any organization on the basis of social classes. As a result the workers have left with one type of organization, namely the mutual trust funds.

In practice the Labor Code was not implemented due to the National Protection Law (Milli Korunma Kanunu) which was promulgated because of the break out of the Second World War in September 1939. The government pressed by the necessities of a general mobilization did not afford even the slim generosity of the Labor Code. The implementation of the law was deficient even prior to its suspension due to the lack of control and the habits of the managers to disregard the well being of the workers for the sake of production and profitability. The measures stipulated in the National Protection Law allowed for unpaid overtime shifts and forced labor in some sectors, especially coal mining, hence aggravated already miserable circumstances.<sup>155</sup> As a result, the material conditions of the war years aggrieved the wage earners including those employed in the public sector. Moreover, some of these measures remained in force for some time after the war and created opportunities of profiteering for employers by over exploiting their employees. All of these will contribute to the unionization desire and thrust of the second part of the forties.

The thirties was an era during which the first serious steps were taken toward industrialization and when the primary building blocs of the legal framework of the industrial relations regime were put into place. Parallel to the process of industrialization and capital accumulation, the transformation of peasant workers to industrial laborers also began in this decade. The legal framework constructed during the thirties is the forerunner of the later similar schemes in its understanding of the

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<sup>155</sup> For an evaluation of the compulsory work in the coal mining industry during that period see Nurşen Gürboğa, "Compulsory Mine Work: The Single Party Regime and the Zonguldak Coalfield as a Site of Contention, 1940-1947," *International Review of Social History*, no. 54, s.17, 2009, pp. 115-142.

society. The solidarist social philosophy stressing the harmonious working of the social division of labor in which every sector of society possessed duties vis-à-vis each other, coupled with a dose of nationalism are the corner stones of this understanding.

As the Labor Code marks the indices of the regime of industrial relations that the one party government wanted to construct, the grievances of the industrial jobs created in the state economic enterprises and the public sector, especially the hardships related to the war years nurtured the idea of protecting the rights of the employees vis-à-vis the factory managers and the greedy employers. The roots of the unionization thrust beginning from the 1946 onwards and the legalization of the trade unions in 1947 extended to the late thirties and the early forties though the specific character of these legal trade unions is mediated through the institutional arrangements which in their turn reflect the conflict between the scheme government and the desires of the workers. All of these developments were played out during the tumultuous era of the forties.

### The Period of the Second World War

Turkey did not take part in the Second World War, but she augmented the size of her army to more than one million. According to figures, furnished by Yakup Kepenek and Nurhan Yentürk<sup>156</sup>, the government financed the war economy by printing money and through domestic borrowing. Almost all of the hardships typical to war periods such as the rationing of bread and some other basic commodities, skyrocketing prices due to the shortages and bottlenecks, hyperinflation caused by

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<sup>156</sup> Yakup Kepenek, Nurhan Yentürk, (1994), p.59.

increased money supply, profiteering through black markets, requisitioning of private property by the government authorities, forced labor, and the levying of extraordinary taxes struck the wage earner Turkish citizens, small peasantry and non Muslim bourgeoisie.

The first war measure adopted by the government was the Law of National Protection of January 1940, enabling the administrative authorities to demand compulsory work from the citizens, to purchase some commodities at preset prices, to forbid some commercial activities and more importantly to suspend some articles of the newly promulgated Labor Law when the danger of war arises. As a result the Labor Law, especially its stipulations regarding worker rights, came really in force only after the war. As expected, the GDP declined steadily and dramatically until 1945, when it stood at 35 percent below its pre-war level.<sup>157</sup> The agricultural production declined because the draft that took away the man and animal power from the farmlands. In an economy where machinery is inadequate to substitute for drafted men and beasts of burden, the calamities of the draft, coupled with the inadequacy of the transport facilities which did not permit the transfer of the surplus wheat from regions where the harvest was better, to places where scarcities occurred, were responsible of the food shortages, rising prices and black marketing.

The government adopted bread rationing to provide a fair distribution of food among the city populace. In the countryside the government tried to transfer the produce to the urban markets with reasonable prices, without allowing to scarcities or black marketing. However this policy failed; the agricultural production dropped while the prices rose steadily. The black market prices proved to be attractive for the peasants who were able to reach the urban markets illegally, those who were unable

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<sup>157</sup> Roger Owen, Şevket Pamuk, *20. Yüzyılda Ortadoğu Ekonomileri Tarihi*, Sabancı Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002, p. 39.

to do so prefer to hide their cereals for private use rather than delivering to government at unreasonable prices. As the failures of the government policies continued<sup>158</sup>, the prices in the urban area rose to the levels unattainable for the fixed income city dwellers. Ultimately the government caved in and legalized the market transactions of the commercial farmers. This new policy hurt the small peasantry lacking any marketable surplus since they were forced to deliver the quarter of their produce even if they were unable to subsist with the rest; the commercialized farmers, on the other hand, achieved to gain unimaginable sums that they previously realize through smuggling.

The historians providing the account of the era underlined that those who were benefited from the misery that the country was passing through, were the big landowners, the traders and the officials who were charged with the distribution of government promotions and licenses to the private sector. While some segments of the populace enriched themselves through the opportunities related to the war time circumstances and the measures adopted by the government, the wage earners were the direct victim of these very opportunities. Both their working and living conditions deteriorated steadily. Considering the harsh conditions that the workers experienced coupled with the abuse by their foremen and managers even in recently established state economic enterprises such as Sümerbank and Etibank,<sup>159</sup> it can easily be inferred the callous circumstances that the workers elsewhere had to bear in order to survive.

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<sup>158</sup> For an analysis of the governmental policies of provisioning during the war see Şevket Pamuk, "War, State Economic Policies and Resistance by Agricultural Producers in Turkey, 1939-1945", in F. Kazemi, J. Waterbury (eds.) *Peasants and Politics in the Modern Middle East*, 1991, pp.125-142.

<sup>159</sup> For a vivid description of these hardships see Can Nacar, "Our Lives were not as Valuable as an Animal Workers in State Run Industries in World War II Turkey," *International Review of Social History*, no. 54, s.17, 2009, pp. 143-166.



The picture for some segments of the bourgeoisie was very favorable though. The fiscal policy choices made by the government and its intense direct involvement into the economy greatly enhanced private capital accumulation processes.<sup>160</sup> The government extended the working day from eight hours to eleven hours in many sectors by decree, it introduced the compulsory labor moreover it was unable to conduct an effective inspection in order to prevent the abuses of such regulations that were vulnerable to the manipulations by the employers. For the workers, the net result of the war years was a radical drop in their purchasing power, the worsening of the working conditions to the limits of humane ways and the illegitimate profiteering of some through government connivance. It seems that all of these fueled the anger of the workers and contributed to the spontaneous unionization efforts that would take place once the governing party loosened the political regime after the war.

### The Aftermath of the War

“In terms of Turkey’s national and international politics, 1945 stands out as a turning point.”<sup>161</sup> Not only did the postwar world offer a deeply changed international context, but also the war had exacerbated the internal situation undermining the popular credibility of the single-handed reign of the Republican People’s Party. Turkey pressed hard to take her place in the emerging post-war settlement among the countries that fought against the Axis Powers. The national political context transformed itself swiftly. The first sign of change came in 1945 during an important presidential address in which the president of the republic, İsmet İnönü made clear

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<sup>160</sup> Yakup Kepenek, Nurhan Yentürk, (1994), pp.58-59.

<sup>161</sup> Cem Eroğul, “The Establishment of Multiparty Rule 1945-71” in E.A. Tonak and I. C. Schick (eds.), *Turkey in Transition, New Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1987, p.102.

that the most salient political restrictions would be eased off.<sup>162</sup> The consequence of this declaration for the workers was a decision reached at the extraordinary congress of the Republican People's Party, held in May 1946 which abolished the infamous twenty-second article of the party program concerning the establishment of organizations. Among other restrictions, this article banned the constitution of class based organizations. In the first day of the Congress İnönü made another speech.<sup>163</sup> This rather long statement by the National Chief enumerated the projected changes and the reasons behind them. Among these, the abolition of the twenty second article was mentioned only within a short paragraph composed of a few sentences and the president made clear that their party is still supporting the organic conceptualization of society and solidarity among the professional groups, they only permits the establishment of organizations with different point of views on that subject.

The aftermath of the Second World War did not merely bring about political change; the socioeconomic texture of the country was also changed. The peasantry was gravely affected by the governmental policies designed to overcome the wartime food shortages, the workers on the other hand was hit hard due to roaring food prices in urban centers, bottlenecks, and lack of any meaningful legal protection against exploitation by their employers including the state. This period also witnessed the creation of the needed structural conditions for capital accumulation and the establishment of a sizeable industrial workforce on a permanent basis. Furthermore, Şehmus Güzel claimed that the profiteering of the war years and the perpetuation of extraordinary measures in some industrial sectors into the peacetime, contributed to

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<sup>162</sup> Not only scholars such as Kemal H. Karpat and Erik J. Zürcher or memoir writers like Metin Toker, but also novelists who directly witnessed the era including Rıfat Ilgaz in his *Karartma Geceleri*, admitted the change in political climate following this presidential address.

<sup>163</sup> The full text of this speech was provided in "C.H.P. Olağanüstü Büyük Kurultayında Cumhurbaşkanımız Milli Şef İnönü'nün İrad Buyurdukları Tarihi Nutku," *Ayın Tarihi*, no. 150, (May 1946), pp. 32-37.

the emergence of a consciousness about their social situation especially vis-à-vis the private entrepreneurs among the working masses.<sup>164</sup> He argues that the workers who were employed in private businesses were subjected to inhumane working conditions and poverty because of the labor legislation based on the infamous National Protection Law<sup>165</sup> that remained in force until into the mid 1947.

Kemal Karpat maintains that during the Republican era in general, Turkey witnessed a slow, but steady acquisition of capital in private hands, and this trend boomed during war years. The tax system, which was based on gross earnings rather than net income, contributed to this process.<sup>166</sup> There existed two distinct sources of capital accumulation. First thanks to its neutrality, Turkey augmented its exports in considerable amounts.<sup>167</sup> Those who were involved in the exporting business, legally or illegally, made great fortunes. The other source was the marketing or black marketing of state produced basic necessities. The income transfer mostly from salaried citizens to the procurers of basic necessities through hoarding and profiteering was so apparent that even in the Assembly the grievances of the lower

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<sup>164</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, “İkinci Dünya Savaşında İşçiler ve Sermaye” *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, no. 150, (December 1992), pp. 31-41; and his “1940’larda İşgücünün (İşçilerin) Özellikleri,” *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi* no. 119 (May 1990), pp. 18-22.

<sup>165</sup> Güzel based this remark on Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye’de Devletçilik Savaş Yayınları*, Ankara, 1982). The data about the reaction against widespread profiteering from various sources including memoirs, press reports and also speeches by statesmen does prove the existence of a hostility, yet it was also well known that this reaction was manipulated in order to transfer wealth from non Muslim bourgeoisie. Hence, the appropriateness of connecting the hostility against wartime profiteers to any sort of class-consciousness is arguable.

<sup>166</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, *Turkey’s Politics the Transition to a Multi-Party System*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1959, p. 92.

<sup>167</sup> According to T. Bulutay, Y.S.Tezel, N. Yıldırım, *Türkiye Milli Geliri (1923-1948)* SBF, Ankara, 1974 the export earnings reached 196.7 million dollars in 1943 whereas the figure for 1938 was merely 99.6 million dollars.

classes were reported in the speeches of the parliamentarians.<sup>168</sup> The growing accumulation of wealth empowered some sectors of the Turkish society.

The new situation meant a shift in the class coalition that was formed during the War of Liberation and led the country thereafter. Some students of Turkish recent history cite this shift as the precursor of the political transformation that will occur during the fifties. According to their perspective, in the aftermath of the Second World War both because of the alienation of the moneyed sectors due to the governmental policies harming their interests, such as land reform and wealth tax to mention a few, and their reliance on their newly acquired proper power, the bourgeoisie composed a power alternative under their leadership.<sup>169</sup> This new political force concretized itself in the Democratic Party formed from within the ranks of the governing party in the early 1946. This new party, which did not challenge the key premises of the Turkish political regime, would also draw support from the workers and small peasants alienated by the two decades of the one party rule and it became a credible governmental alternative within a very short time span.

### The Transformation of the Economic Orientation

The economic and political international conditions, alongside with the financial needs of the Turkish government, forced a change in the basic tenets of its developmental economic policies in the aftermath of the Second War. The treasury was able to keep an important amount of gold reserve thanks to the wartime trade,

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<sup>168</sup> The press and the parliament especially raised their voice against these inequalities in support of the Wealth Tax. For a brief evaluation of this, see Ayhan Aktar, "Varlık Vergisi Nasıl Uygulandı?" *Toplum ve Bilim*, no.71 (Winter 1996).

<sup>169</sup> See for instance Çağlar Keyder, "The Political Economy of Turkish Democracy," *New Left Review*, no.115, (May-June 1979), pp.3-44 and Çağlar Keyder, *Türkiye'de Devlet ve Sınıflar*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, (1990).

and the ruling party looked forward to basing its developmental efforts on this source.<sup>170</sup> The first economic plan draft of the peace era was reminiscent of the thirties with its emphasis on industrialization. However, Turkey had to devalue its currency and liberalize its trade in order to join the new international economic order by subscribing to the Bretton Woods agreement.<sup>171</sup>

On September 7, 1946, these economic measures were officially adopted. As a result the reserves of the treasury were decreased.<sup>172</sup> This date echoes the January 18, 1940, the date of the ratification of the National Protection Law, in its influence on the social and economic developments of the following period. From this date on foreign trade ceased to be based on barter and clearing agreements, and securing foreign fiscal assistance and borrowing in order to finance governmental spending became permissible, even obligatory. Turkey wanted to be part of the Marshall Plan to finance its economic development, yet the mainstream economic philosophy of the new era was based on comparative advantages and private initiatives. That is why Turkey altered the priorities of the new plan from industrialization to the investments related to the marketization of agriculture. As a result, the aid that was denied by the American experts in the OEEC conference convened in the summer of 1947 became accessible to the Turkish government in the early 1948. Furthermore, the spread of state owned factories to the Anatolian backwaters was delayed until the following decade when the Democratic Party launched an industrialization drive at the

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<sup>170</sup> Bilsay Kuruç, in the preface of his book argued that financing government spending through taxing was impossible since this capacity was overexploited during war years. See Bilsay Kuruç, *İktisat Politikasının Resmi Belgeleri*, Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi, Ankara, 1963.

<sup>171</sup> Haldun Gülalp, (1987), pp. 38-39.

<sup>172</sup> To follow the reasoning of the government circles on this new path of economic policy, see Hürriyet Konyar, *Ulus Gazetesi, CHP ve Kemalist İlkeler*, Bağlam Yayınları, İstanbul 1999, pp. 134-135.

countryside by establishing plants processing cash crops or producing agricultural inputs in order to subsidize the big farmers, its primary constituency.

The hotly debated issue of this era was confining the principle of *étatisme*, which was criticized from every angle. As the end of the decade approached, the mainstream views in the incumbent party on that subject were similar to the newly established opposition, which supported more keenly the priority of private investments, with the exception of privatization of state enterprises, yet the ruling party did not write off this Kemalist principle completely. The content of the term though survived a slight drift in meaning. Its emphasis from industrial investments through public entrepreneurship was coupled by an invented social substance which was composed of state intervention in the regulation of the social circumstances of the production process and the social condition of the work force. Thus *Etatisme* turned out to be, among its other meanings, state benevolence towards labor in determining the social and economic conditions of industry. During the years to come, this theme became the backbone of their electoral politics vis-à-vis the working masses. The Republican People's Party would underline this aspect of the principle of *étatisme*, and cite the social legislation promulgated during the last five years of their reign alongside their generous tangible or intangible aid to the nascent trade unions. For instance, in a propaganda pamphlet published in 1958 the first five years of the Labor Ministry, during which eighteen laws concerning social insurance, amendments in the labor law, and worker rights were promulgated, was described as "the period of great foundations in the domain of social policy."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Rebi Barkın, *İşçiler İçin*, CHP Genel Sekreterliği Araştırma ve Dokümantasyon Bürosu yayın no: 2, Ankara, 1958. This pamphlet was written by Dr. Rebi Barkın who continued to be the most important specialist of the party related to labor affairs even in 1958 because of his first hand involvement in the establishment of most of the trade unions operating in the state sector.

These foundations began to be laid at the end of the war immediately. It seemed that the semantic slide in the meaning of the principle of étatism was not devoid of any content. The foremost important law in the area of industrial relations was obviously the one concerning the establishment and the functions of the Labor Ministry, Law No. 4763 promulgated on 22 June 1945. Law No. 4841 later amended this law in 1 January 1946. The first social insurance laws covering work related diseases and accidents, and also motherhood, as well as the law founding the Establishment of Workers' Insurance were both passed in July 1945. The following year Law No. 4837 founded the Employment Agency in January. February of 1947 witnessed both the promulgation of the first law that legalized the trade unions in this country, and the enlargement of the scope of the social insurance. Meanwhile, some of the international standards concerning labor were adopted and the labor courts were also established.

In such a short time span the condition of labor, mostly its legal institutional aspect, was profoundly altered. The pace of the change was incomparable to the preceding periods, and it did not continue in the following decade. In this sense, the latter part of the forties can be labeled as institutional in respect to industrial relations, yet this was not the sole effect of this era on the later social political and economic developments. The second half of the forties set the pattern in most respects for social and political events in the following quarter century in Turkey. The aftermath of 1945 also brought about a watershed period in relation to the proliferation of class associations, indeed many important Turkish trade unions date back to this era either directly or indirectly. However, the period following the late forties witnessed a steady decline in the percentage of increase in the number of class-based associations while the quantity of industrial workforce increased very

modestly.<sup>174</sup> Thus it can be safely asserted that the working class efforts of unionization mostly took place during the original democratization period dating to the second part of the forties and preceding the replacement of the government that took place in 1950, the fifties witnessed rather the institutionalization of the existing trade unions.

The woeful social condition of the working class, which remained almost unchanged during the two years following the end of the war, supplemented with the official retreat of the principle of étatism in the face of the heavy criticisms, triggered a new and, as already cited, more social conceptualization of the principle of étatism in some circles within the governing party.<sup>175</sup> The plundering of the lower income groups both socially and economically was made possible mainly through the application of the articles of the National Protection Law suspending the newly adopted Labor Code of 1936, yet for obvious reasons the worst effects of these regulations emerged in private businesses. The parliamentary commission of labor, which toured the industrial cities of the country during the summer of 1947, made public their observations reflecting the inhuman social condition of the workers especially employed in private enterprises.<sup>176</sup> These measures and their extension even into the peacetime estranged the workers from the governing party. It must be noted that this unease among the workers contributed to the liberalization of the regime and especially played a part in the enactment of the organizational liberties.

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<sup>174</sup> Roberto Bianchi, *Interest Groups and Political Development in Turkey*. Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 157-158.

<sup>175</sup> Some argued that the overexpansion of state sector with its bureaucratic nature was the real problem discrediting étatism in the eyes of the public. Actually the public opinion seemed to be interested rather in this aspect of the debate. For such a revaluation of étatism see Tekin Alp, "İktisadi Kalkınmamız ve Yeni Devletçiliğimizin Umdeleri" in Nevin Coşar (1995) pp. 71-93. To follow the debates on étatism in both social and liberal conceptualization of the term see Hürriyet Konyar, (1999), pp. 119-166.

<sup>176</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, June 8, 1948.



The grassroots initiative by the workers and some political groups interacted with governmental schemes to establish the dynamic behind the unionization drive that will condition the emergence of the organized labor movement and its relationship to the establishment parties and the state.

## CHAPTER 4

### ORGANIZING THE WORKERS IN UNIONS AS PARTY CLIENTS

The second part of the forties is the period when the Turkish organized labor movement was born. Despite the solidarist ideals of the early era, the grave hardships of the war years that did not spare even the employees of the public sector created the necessary impulse for mobilization. The last required factor was provided by the liberalization of the political regime in line with the global trend of the time. This episode supplied the second input in the composition of the moral economy of the unionized workers namely a specific organizational structure that generates certain constituent traits of the movement through the accumulation of historical experience. The development that this organizational structure went through and the political circumstances that surround these developments were consequential in the formation of this moral economy.

After the necessary amendments to the Law on Societies were made, a swift unionization movement emerged. Obviously, the hardships and bottlenecks of the war years created a deep resentment and impoverishment among the workers.<sup>177</sup> The unionization efforts are created by two distinct sources. First of all, there are the two leftist parties with communist leaning that organized workers, then there were older labor organizations such as mutual aid fund in Zonguldak that renamed themselves as labor societies or some new organizations preferring the label of society

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<sup>177</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, “1940’larda İşgücünün (İşçilerin) Özellikleri,” *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, no. 119 (May 1990), pp. 18-22.

appeared.<sup>178</sup> Indeed, the organizations that prefer to have warm relationships with the one party government prefer to call themselves societies rather than trade unions. The regulations of such societies include clauses that stipulate the augmentation of production, close collaboration with the labor ministry and the education of workers for better qualifications. The Ereğli Coal Field Miners Society even declares its aim as to establish order among the workers of the region.<sup>179</sup> The trade unions, rather than societies alarmed the governmental circles although they were not involved in any militant activity, let alone strikes. However, their insistence on using the term trade union rather than society established the legitimacy of this term even for the governing party; furthermore their attractiveness for the workers led a closer involvement of the Republican People's Party into the organized labor movement.

#### 46 Unionism

The unionization thrust that occurred immediately after the lift on class based associations is known as the 46 unionism. The initiative of intellectuals and workers with socialist or communist inspirations constituted the leading cadres of this movement. The trade unions established as a result of this movement had deep divergences of perspective from the existing worker societies, apart from their choice of name as trade unions or societies. The most essential cleavages concerned subjects such as aims of class based organizations or the nature of the relationship between the workers and their employers. These differences were reflected in their basic formative documents. For instance, the regulation of the Textile Workers Trade

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<sup>178</sup> Kemal Sülker, *Türkiye'de Sendikacılık*. İstanbul: Vakıf Matbaası, 1955.

<sup>179</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, *Türkiye'de İşçi Hareketi 1908-1984*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul, 1996, p.152.

Union of Turkey<sup>180</sup> in its part devoted to the enumeration of the duties of the organization did not cite anything like collaborating with the government, developing the morality of the workers, or resolving the grievances of the employers about their employees. Such remarks would be found both in the statutes of the older type mutual trust funds and contemporary worker societies. These trade unions emphasized rather the need for solidarity and fraternity among the textile workers, and any reference to national objectives or national solidarity is completely absent. Moreover the leaflet attached to the regulation of that trade union was entitled as “All the Textile Workers of Turkey Unite”; the connotation of this motto was reminiscent of the appeal made at the end of the Manifesto of the Communist Party. However, one must not think that these unions are mere fronts for political parties. Their objectives also include typical union functions such as financial aid to needy members and the amelioration of the social and economic status of the workers; indeed without these they would be hardly attractive for the workers in general.

The 46 Unionism emerged especially in a few industrial cities triggered by the efforts of worker and intellectual militants who had an earlier acquaintance with the secretive Communist Party of Turkey, which was defunct at the time except for a brief anti-Nazi propaganda during the Second World War led by a provisional leadership.<sup>181</sup> The Communist Party that remained inactive in the second part of the thirties achieved to protect and keep alive its relations among some segments of

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<sup>180</sup> This union supported the Socialist Party of Turkey, according to Sülker who claims that trade unions with this political affiliation had the word “Turkey” in their names. He cites the name of that Union on page forty yet gives no further information. From the account of the related paragraph it can be asserted that this union was established in early fall of 1946. TMİS, *Türkiye Mensucat İşçileri Sendikası Program ve Nizamnamesi*, Nam Basımevi, İstanbul, 1946. It was found in Mehmet Alkan’s personal archives.

<sup>181</sup> For a brief history of the Turkish Communist Party see Yusuf Doğan Çetinkaya, Mustafa Görkem Doğan, “TKP’nin Sosyalizmi(1920-1990)” in Murat Gültekingil (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce: Sol*. İstanbul: 2007, İletişim Yayınları, pp. 275-338; for its impact at the time see Zafer Toprak “1946 Sendikacılığı *Sendika* Gazetesi, İşçi Sendikaları Birlikleri ve İşçi Kulüpleri,” *Toplumsal Tarih* no.31, (July 1996), pp.19-29.

workers, especially migrants from Bulgaria who were employed mostly in tobacco factories and university students thanks to its brief resurgence during the Second World War. However, one must note that there were two distinct currents within the 46 unionism. One branch aims to establish nation-wide unions in all industrial sectors and a confederation to unite all these nation-wide trade unions. This current is organized around the Turkish Socialist Party that was founded immediately after the liberalization of the political regime.<sup>182</sup> It seems that they achieved to establish a few sectoral trade unions, including the already cited Textile Workers Trade Union of Turkey. The trade unions established by this party in fact existed only in İstanbul and in İzmir like the political party that was behind these unionization attempts.

The other current is centered on the Turkish Socialist Laborers and Peasants Party of Şefik Hüsnü, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Turkey, which was founded a month later. The newspaper *Sendika* was their publication.<sup>183</sup> According to their scheme of unionization the trade unions must be local. A separate trade union can be established at each factory, and then these separate unions can organize themselves nationally via a federation. They also accept the necessity of establishing craft unions in sectors where typical enterprises were small to support a separate union in each enterprise such as shoemakers or smiths. Their most important suggestion was the establishment of city-wide trade union associations. A national confederation that would bring all trade unions together was also on their agenda. Both currents undertook unionization efforts according to their suggested schemes and established trade unions at various places. The latter party even achieved

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<sup>182</sup> Özgür Gökmen, “Çok-Partili Rejime Geçerken Sol: Türkiye Sosyalizminin Unutulmuş Partisi”, *Toplum ve Bilim*, 78 (1998), pp. 161-186.

<sup>183</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, “Sendikal Basında Sendika Gazetesi Örneği”, *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 60, December 1988, pp.46-50.

creating citywide trade union alliances in places such as İstanbul and Kocaeli.<sup>184</sup> It seems that their influence was much wider compared to the former current.

The difference between these two points of view about unionization are underlined and emphasized by the publications of the two parties in order to demarcate the two similar political organizations from each other. The historical accounts concerning their establishment alluded to the existence of personal feuds between some militants of the defunct Communist Party of Turkey, which possibly led to the founding of two distinct entities.<sup>185</sup> However, these personal controversies must not shadow the existence of a disagreement over the method to adopt in order to organize Turkish working class. These differences correspond to distinct approaches to the organizational problems.<sup>186</sup> Indeed, although the political lifespan of the 46 unionism did not pass beyond its year of birth, the schemes of organization that they suggest and put into practice did have an influence over the future of the Turkish trade unionism. Most importantly, a İstanbul Trade Unions' Alliance was set up in 1948, using the same name with the one that the party had established, and remained as the primary voice of Turkish working class up until the very early sixties when Türk İş gaining its financial independence thanks to money from USAID marked its impact over its affiliate trade unions.

The 46 unionism thrived rapidly among the working populace of the major industrial cities of Turkey that are very few at the time anyway. Especially İstanbul, where the headquarters of these two parties and the mentioned journals reside was the bastion of working class activity. The agitation among the working class alarmed

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<sup>184</sup> The regulation of the Kocaeli Trade Unions' Alliance is quoted in Zafer Toprak, (1996), pp.23-24.

<sup>185</sup> See for instance İbrahim Topçuoğlu, *Neden iki sosyalist partisi 1946: T.K.P. kuruluşu ve mücadelesinin tarihi, 1914-1960*, Eser Matbaası, İstanbul, 1976.

<sup>186</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, (1996), pp.147-154.

the government and the national security apparatus. In the December of 1946 both parties and the affiliate trade unions were closed down. As already cited the governing party initiated a rash of social legislation in the second part of the forties, in order to appease the urban wage earners who were alienated from the ruling elite during the war years. Moreover, the introduction of electoral politics forced the Republican People's Party to reach the sectors of society that were not included in the ruling elite up until that time. Both the need to carve out a popular power base for the governing party and the necessities of the effective implementation of the new social legislation required worker organizations. That is why organizing the labor force was an objective for the government, anyway. However, the onslaught of the 46 unionism not only speeded up the legal institutional preparations made by the labor ministry, but also modified the content of these preparations to some extent.

Before the involvement of the Republican People's Party though there existed other attempts of unionization, indeed some of the trade unions established in 1946, those which were not identified as procommunist by the authorities, survived the December of 1946 and even obtained the benevolence of the governing party from 1947 onwards. However, prior to the direct involvement of RPP the worker societies seemed to be the progovernment voice within the organized labor. On July 1946, immediately after the lifting of the ban on class organizations, the Society of Turkish Workers was established.<sup>187</sup> The Society proclaimed that it would strive to provide for both the tangible and intangible needs of the workers without pursuing a political cause. The third article of the regulation declared the three main objectives of this society: providing for the material and spiritual well being of the workers, cultivating

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<sup>187</sup> The exact date was quoted in Kemal Sülker, *Türkiye'de Sendikacılık* Vakıf Matbaası, İstanbul, 1955. The rest was quoted from the statute and regulation of the Society published as a pamphlet (it was found in Mehmet Alkan personal archives). It seemed that besides personal memories, Sülker also used the same source.

mutual respect and solidarity among the workers, and contributing to the building up of work ethics and workers' morality. According to the fourteenth article, the society also committed itself to increasing the national production through propaganda among the workers.<sup>188</sup> To these ends, the Society declared that it would collaborate with the related state departments. Interestingly, the wording of the regulation preferred to refer to a general body of workers when mentioning augmenting the national production or developing the workers' "morality", yet it clearly indicated that it exclusively referred to its own members when mentioning financial aid or legal action in labor courts. The seventh article of this regulation is rather unusual since the Society promised also to resolve the complaints of the employers about their workers, seemingly by providing some sort of arbitration. The professional education of the workers, shielding them from anarchist movements, providing financial help to individual workers through loans from mutual trust funds, and monetary donations to disabled and sick members were also cited among the functions of this society.

The society intended to organize at the level of workshops through workshop representatives. In every province where the society had a local organization there would be a provincial executive committee, on top of these there would be the nation-wide general executive committee. The supreme decision-making body would be the general council composed of the delegates of the provincial bodies. Obviously, despite their humble beginning and lack of resources, the original founders of the society possessed the aspiration of founding a nationwide network. Their aspirations were not confined to enlarging the geographical scope of the society. The wording of the articles, and the objectives cited in those articles pointed to a wider web of

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<sup>188</sup> TİD, *Türkiye İşçiler Derneği Nizamnamesi*, Sinan Matbaası ve Neşriyat Evi, İstanbul, 1946, p.4, all of the related information is based on this same source.



interest. The Society of Turkish Workers aspired to augment the national production, wanted to cultivate “informed, qualified and able workers,”<sup>189</sup> and committed itself to care about the morality of the workers, not to mention the more traditional objectives of its kind such as founding mutual trust funds for workers, and taking legal action to protect the rights of its members.

Some of the founders of this society were involved also in the establishment of the Textile Workers and Technicians Society of İstanbul. The headquarters of these two organizations were in the same address anyway.<sup>190</sup> The fourteenth article of the regulation of the latter society reads, “Our society accepts collaboration with The Society of Turkish Workers”<sup>191</sup> anyway. The next article prescribed keeping only one fourth of the collected member dues ceding the rest to the nationwide society. The aims of the latter society were in line with its parent organization. It projected to aid the Labor Ministry to further the social and economic status of the workers; it wanted to establish mutual aid funds for workers and to provide for their social care. The society, in line with the nationwide organization had a deep interest in protecting and developing the morality of the workers. The relevant article of the regulation, namely the eleventh, cites “subversive and anarchist movements” alongside with alcoholism and gambling as the immoral dangers threatening the well-being of the workers. Article 13 prescribes the inclusion of a column on the

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<sup>189</sup> Quoted from the thirteenth article.

<sup>190</sup> According to the second articles of both regulations their headquarters was in the same address. One common name existing in both regulations is that of a weaver whose name was Nazmi Sökmen. This union vanished after the promulgation of the law on trade unions with other similar organizations. İMİTO, *İstanbul Mensucat İşçileri ve Teknisyenleri Derneği Nizamnamesi* (İstanbul: Sinan Matbaası ve Neşriyat Evi, 1946). This one was also found in Mehmet Alkan personal archives. Note that both were printed in the same place.

<sup>191</sup> TİD, (1946), p.4.

member identity cards for inscribing the description of the morality and the character of the member workers.<sup>192</sup>

Fehmi Yazıcı, who was active in the unionization movement of the era and who had socialist sympathies, claimed that the nationwide society was an unsuccessful tool of the governing party: “the RPP wanted to organize the working class through two of its reliable members, one of them was Selahattin Bükülmez, the other was the olive oil merchant Haydar Bey.”<sup>193</sup> Lütfü Erişçi was also confident that the ruling party had initiated this institution: “The societies, staffed only by their founders’ committee, started to be established with RPP money and in line with its orders.”<sup>194</sup> Sülker provides a more detailed but somewhat different account of this story.<sup>195</sup> According to him, the original founders sincerely wanted to constitute an organization independent of every existing political party, yet they did not possess the necessary financial means to do so. Hence, Haydar Berkman approached the society, and proposed financial aid in return for political support in his bid for parliamentary membership on the RPP ticket. The society invented the office of honorary presidency and elected him to this post in August 1946. However, it seemed that, unable to compromise with the existing executive board and especially with Selahattin Yorulmazoğlu, Haydar Berkman sought alternative paths to get

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<sup>192</sup> This article existed also in the regulation of the Society of Turkish Workers. In the latter regulation this is the thirty fifth article on page eight. The only difference in wording between them is in their subject. In the regulation of the parent society the article begins with the expression “every worker”; the other begins with “the workers of our society.”

<sup>193</sup> Although in an article published in *Beşer*, Yazıcı gave the last name of this Selahattin as Bükülmez; it must be Yorulmazoğlu since both the regulation of the society and Sülker who possibly quoting from this regulation and a personal witness to the events gave the latter name. The last name of the merchant was Berkman and he later joined the ranks of the Democratic Party.

<sup>194</sup> Lütfü Erişçi, (1997), pp.29-30. This book was first published in 1951, hence like Yazıcı he was a first hand witness to these events, yet they were divided in one important respect, although Yazıcı collaborated with Esat Adil, Erişçi described the latter’s party as a mere tool of manipulation. Obviously, Erişçi was more sympathetic to Şefik Hüsnü and his perspective.

<sup>195</sup> Kemal Sülker, (1955).

elected to the parliament and ceased his support of the Society. The financial difficulties arising from the Haydar Berkman incident coupled with the apparent narrow basis of appeal of this society brought an abrupt end to its experience.

Whether this was an initiative of an aspiring parliamentarian or a part of a central plan devised at the RPP headquarters, in the fall of 1946 the rapid and unexpected success of the 46 unionism proved the desire to unionize among some sectors of the working class and inadequacy of organizational forms short of trade unions. The government could not ignore this actuality and continue with its original plan of limited organizational rights. Those members of the governing party acquainted with the misery of the labor force now witnessed its organizational potential. Obviously, there is a need to control this potential both for national security reasons and for manipulating it in the newly started era of electioneering. A segment of the RPP was ready to be involved in the trade unions despite the objections of some others.

While the labor ministry under Sadi Irmak discussed possible alternatives to sanction the establishment of worker societies, the party charged Rebi Barkın, the former deputy for Zonguldak, to organize the workers into trade unions that would be resilient to communist influence and intrusion. To achieve this objective the party established a worker's bureau in İstanbul as a part of its ninth executive department in charge of labor, laborers, craftsmen and professionals. Indeed the executive departments that were operating under the general secretary of the party were reallocated to social domains in 1948 and the cited department was renamed as the department of economy and social affairs.<sup>196</sup> It seems that Barkın who was a representative of this department has a special mission concerning the trade unions.

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<sup>196</sup> Ahmet Makal, *Ameleden İşçiye Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi Çalışmaları*, İletişim Yayınları İstanbul, 2007, pp.239-241.

Both Barkın and Irmak were medical doctors studied in the Nazi Germany and seemed to be amazed by the achievements of this country. Apparently, they shared a conservative and paternalistic world view on the social question.

Thus the governing party undertook both legal and organizational efforts to organize workers. However, these efforts disturbed some within the party. In one instance the İzmir branch of the party wrote a letter<sup>197</sup> criticizing the endeavors of Barkın in İstanbul, and suggested that every attempt to organize workers should be stopped. Indeed there were two currents within the Republican People's Party on the question of worker organizations. One current does not believe in the compatibility of allowing working class organizations with the nationalist and solidarist political position that the party cherished throughout its existence up until that day. Indeed the Labor Code of 1936 also became possible when this line of thought was defeated with the tight leash that the then general secretary of the party Recep Peker had over the party organization. The establishment of trade unions was simply too much for them. The other current, on the other hand, was composed of old guard corporatists with conservative paternalist world views and young cadres coupled with some worker members that were influenced and inspired by British type social liberalism symbolized by the Beveridge plan on nation wide social insurance system.<sup>198</sup> The political weights of the former current caused the labor ministry to restrict the organizational freedoms for the trade unions in their drafts, but the impact of the 46 unionism led to the easing off of these restrictions to their chagrin. At the end of 1946 both the organizational and legal institutional preparations of the ruling party were ripe enough to initiate a non political unionism.

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<sup>197</sup> The documents of this correspondence are cited in the appendix of Mustafa Gökem Doğan, (2003) and, Ahmet Makal, (2007), pp.237, 238.

<sup>198</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, "Çalışma Bakanlığı'nın Kuruluşu Çalışma Hayatında İngiliz Etkisi" *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 50, February 1988, pp. 52-56.

In December 1946, the martial law that was still in force is employed to crash both the two leftist parties and the 46 unionism in general, in order to clear the way for the government, which wanted to mould the emerging worker organizations in accordance with its own ideological premises. The harsh measures backed by penal actions brought a swift and abrupt end to the agitation among the urban workers, however the government did not only rely on policing to check the workers, the main element of the strategy was a law that regulates the worker organizations. This is the very reason why before introducing the new legal institutional framework, the government wanted to level down its target area. They needed to eliminate the existing labor organizations that were under the influence of the socialist ideals in order to remold the organized labor movement.

### The Law on Trade Unions

Changing the course of the unionization movement and shaping it through legalizing the unions became a practical necessity for the ruling party. The course that the 46 Unionism took was internationalist in the sense that it drew its ideological inspiration from the international working class movement.<sup>199</sup> The government, on the other hand, vehemently opposed the establishment of any link, ideological, organizational or whatsoever, to the foreign sources of the organized labor movement. What they want was to confine the Turkish labor movement to a national main frame both organizationally and ideologically. Indeed, after the Second World War solidarism ceased to be the primary mean to articulate the Turkish working class into the political system. There is more than one reason for this change. First of all, due to its

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<sup>199</sup> Yüksel Akkaya, Fatih Güngör, “Düzen ve Kalkınma Arayışları İçinde Türkiye’de Sendikacılık ve Milliyetçilik,” *Mülkiye Dergisi*, vol. 24, no.220, (2000), pp.237-268, pp.251-252.

association with Nazi regimes solidarist ideologies were getting discredited.

Secondly, as a victor of the War, Soviet Union turned to be a geopolitical menace. In these circumstances nationalism completed its substitution of solidarism as the primary ideological cover to unite all the segments of the laboring people into a shapeless mass devoid of any economic, political or social interest that would conflict with any other segment of the Turkish nation.

The disdain for internationalist claims of the labor movement was apparent in the address by Vedat Dicleli to the parliament during the session in which the law on trade unions was debated in the floor.<sup>200</sup> To illustrate the harmful consequences of leaving the trade unions on their own, he referred to a letter sent by a representative of a trade union to a government office concerning the employment problems of some of their members. The manner in addressing the state authorities and the wording of the quoted letter reflected self-certainty when the author of the letter opposed the view that their organization was young since it was connected with the history of the international workers' movement. This idea was foreign and repugnant to the Turkish ruling class. The reference by Dicleli showed beyond any doubt his disgust for this internationalist discourse that displayed irreverence for the state authorities. That is why the ruling party erased the existing trade unions and created a new organizational pattern which did not allow the establishment of foreign connections that could provide either ideological or material independence for those unions from the state authority. One must remember that the governments were reluctant to even allow the establishment of official links between the trade unions and the international workers' organizations of the Western Camp such as ICFTU up until 1960 when the military junta was desperate to prove that it is on the Western

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<sup>200</sup> T.C., *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Vol. 4 (1947), pp. 296-297.

Camp. The new nationally confined unions were naturally weaker; indeed Dicleli repeatedly underlined the need to protect the young trade unions.

Despite the seemingly revolutionary aspect of granting organizational rights to workers whose organizational rights were legally denied until that day, the spirit of the law, like all of the attempts to regulate the use of rights and liberties, was restrictive in nature. The real change was in 1946 when the government lifted the ban on class-based organizations. This law essentially aimed to limit this liberty within narrow borders. Indeed, the actual perceptions of the already organized part of the workers and the general public opinion supported that assertion. That is why it is not surprising to see that the social philosophy and the principles of the ruling party permeate the entire text of the Law. According to the official statement for the Law, these principles were libertarianism, nationalism and étatism.<sup>201</sup>

Libertarianism referred to the freedom of membership. The government was clear in its purpose to discard the corporatist principle of compulsory membership. Nationalism, as already cited was the substitute of solidarism and repeated by all the official parties of the debate whether in the public speeches or in the parliament as the creed of the trade unions. It seems that the membership of the Turkish trade unions in the international bodies was a hotly debated topic in this respect. It was impossible to ban the association of the Turkish organized labor into such bodies when Turkey pressed hard to incorporate itself into the Western Camp. The resolution was to grant the right to allow for such membership to the government, thus practically banning it. Lastly, étatism also signified the social responsibilities of

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<sup>201</sup> Irmak also pointed to the same principles in his parliamentary speech in defense of the Law. See T.C. *T.B.M.M. Zabut Ceridesi*. Vol. 4, 1947, (no. 88), pp.1-2 for the full text of the official reason of the law, and for Irmak's speech see pp. 300-304. Note that the non-partisanship was also an emphasized quality of the trade unions designed in this law.

the state and freedom of association was considered as a part of the effort for the amelioration of the living standard of the urban workers.

Labor Minister Sadi Irmak during the debates on the floor of the parliament classified the trade unions into three categories based on their relationship with the state: those that are against the state, those that are subjugated to the state, and finally those that collaborate with the state.<sup>202</sup> Irmak eliminated the possibility of establishing the first type in Turkey beforehand without even commenting on it and asserted that the worthy one for a free country like Turkey was the last one. The text of this speech did not provide any clue what he exactly meant when he used the word “collaboration,” yet the actual practice of the ruling party and the later statements of Irmak proved that he had in mind a scheme which excludes any possibility for the measures of class struggle in the resolution of contentious issues between workers and employers. In his memoirs, he stated that even before his days in office he had thought that clashing interests between different social sectors might exist, yet the best way to resolve them was state arbitration rather than class struggle. Furthermore, he argued that the former way rendered the latter unnecessary and even erased it.<sup>203</sup>

Indeed most of the members of the parliamentary majority did not perceive any contradiction between the emergence of trade unions and a Durkhemian solidarist worldview. For instance, Hulusi Oral, who was the speaker of the Labor Commission, put forth explicitly the congruence between granting organizational rights while preventing the emergence of class conflict: “Today within the Turkish social composition crafts, professions, classes do fully exist. This is not a political situation, but a social necessity, and this social reality needs to be organized. Recent

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<sup>202</sup> T.C., *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. vol. 4, 1947, p.301.

<sup>203</sup> This statement is quoted in M Şehmus Güzel, “İsmet İnönü, Sosyal Politika ve Grev,” *Yapıt*, no. 10, (April 1985), p.72.



events have depicted this immediate need and we must resolve this as quickly as possible.”<sup>204</sup> Oral continued his speech by illustrating the hard social conditions within which the workers lived and blamed their unorganized situation vis-à-vis the employers for these very conditions. Therefore, he claimed, they must be organized to realize collectively what they could perform individually. The reinvented principle of étatism necessitates this reform. He also added that the trade unions must not be manipulated for subversive ends. The parliament had to constitute the necessary precautions in this respect.

This was the general mood on the Law that pervaded both the government and the opposition. As a matter of fact, Fuad Köprülü and Suphi Batur, who were the speakers for the Democratic Party in this session, cited nationalism as the first item about the Law that they found appropriate.<sup>205</sup> Their opposition was centered on the denial of the right to strike to the workers’ associations, and this was the only substantial criticism that the Democratic Party directed to this bill. The speakers for the Democratic Party seemed to support the introduction of a very cautiously designed legal strike procedure into the law as a traditional necessity of a liberal democratic regime into which Turkey was being transformed. Some members of the parliamentary majority attacked swiftly on that point of view, denigrating the right to strike. They considered striking as proof of non-national behavior, and claimed that Turkey must not imitate the mistakes of classical liberalism. The members who were involved in the drafting of this bill, on the other hand, Emin Erişirgil, Zonguldak deputy who chaired the Labor Commission in the Parliament and Sadi Irmak, cautiously refrained from this discussion, and claimed that the strikes were forbidden

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<sup>204</sup> T.C., *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. vol. 4, 1947, p.315. By the expression of recent event Oral most probably meant the activities by the suppressed trade unions of 1946.

<sup>205</sup> T.C. *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Vol. 4, 1947, (no. 88), pp.299-300; 305-307.

according to Labor Law No. 3008. That is why they argued that strikes must not be on the agenda of this Law, but must be discussed as an amendment to the Labor Law. However, they did not make it clear whether they would support such an amendment to the Labor Code.

All in all, the stipulations in the Law on Trade Unions granted a restricted domain of activity to the trade unions so as to banish them to oblivion. Furthermore, due to their weak monetary resources they had very little material benefits to offer to their prospective members. This created insurmountable hardships for the young trade unions seeking to attract new members to their ranks.<sup>206</sup> It must be noted that the Labor Code that was still in force was not keen on recognizing the collective rights of the workers, besides this law on trade unions added new punishments related to issues such as strikes to those already existing in other official regulations, including the Labor Code. Indeed, according to Ahmet Makal, trade unions turned out to be effective in claiming the social and economic rights of their members only after the amendment to the Labor Law ratified on 25 January 1950. This amendment entered the parliamentary agenda thanks to the approaching elections. It enabled the trade unions to declare collective disagreement with the employer.<sup>207</sup> All of these restrictions weakened the position of the trade unions vis-à-vis the government from the start, in a sense they were subjugated to the political power for their survival.

Within this new legal context, only the governing party remained as a capable force to influence the nascent trade unions. The channels of this influence ranges

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<sup>206</sup> A year after the law the membership numbers of the trade unions did not reach satisfactory levels so that in *Hürbilek*, the journal published by the Workers' Bureau of the Republican People's Party this problem was often underlined. Among others for instance see the head article. Rebi Barkın, "İşçinin Geçim Davasında İşçilere ve Sendikalara Düşen Vazifeler," *Hürbilek*, 29 May 1947. Barkın suggests them to focus more to provide material benefits for their members rather than tackling with workplace problems.

<sup>207</sup> Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye'de Çok Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1946-1963*, Ankara, İmge Yayınevi, 2002, p. 506. Until this date only shop stewards devoid of any legal protection had this right. The amendment also brought privileged legal protection also for the shop stewards.

from teaching the basic procedural skills to run a society such as book keeping, to outright financing from the coffers of the Republican People's Party.<sup>208</sup> The party established a worker newspaper, namely *Hürbilek*<sup>209</sup> and then granted it to the Alliance of İstanbul Trade Unions, a body also established with the support of the Republican People's Party officers following the example of the banned Turkish Socialist Laborers and Peasants Party. A more important source of their authority over the workers emanated from their position as the government; this means that they had leverage over in the executive body and they represented a major industrial employer. The officers of the ruling party who were responsible of the trade unions, did not only lobby in Ankara to promote the worker demands among the governmental and parliamentary circles, they also used their pull on the managers of state enterprises sometimes to level down the barriers in front of organizational efforts and sometimes to provide privileged treatment for some workers. Indeed, they set the basics of government trade union relationships for the next fifteen years. However, the real impact of their involvement in the constituent phase of the trade unions went beyond that and molded the organizational and political strategies of the mainstream trade unionism in Turkey.

### The Republican People's Party and Trade Unions

The Republican People's Party restricted its organizational efforts during this critical constituent period of Turkish trade unionism to the workers employed in state

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<sup>208</sup> See for instance the list provided in Kemal Sülker, (1955), p.90.

<sup>209</sup> The collections of this newspaper is very beneficial for those who want to study the relationship between the governing party and the nascent trade unions for an evaluation of this newspaper see M. Şehmus Güzel, "Sendikal Basında Hürbilek Gazetesi Örneği", *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, no. 78, May 1985, pp.47-49.

economic enterprises. The party officers rarely intervened in cases concerning the private businesses and never encouraged the employee of the private sector to unionize. However, it is well known that some party cadres pressed the managers of state economic enterprises to acquiesce to the demands of the workers. The bulk of union membership came from the public sector because of this leniency on the part of the public employer, yet one must not draw a rosy picture in regard of unionism in the public sector. In line with the discrepancy existing in the governing party, some managers in the public sector did not compromise with the idea of organizing the workers and behaved intransigently vis-à-vis their demands. Thus, those officers of the ruling party that were involved in trade unions had to struggle against the bureaucrats from their own party rather than private business employers.

The intermediaries of the party within the trade unions held a tight grip over these organizations to prevent any uncontrolled development. A much-publicized event related to the political interference in the trade unions occurred during the general congress of the *Bakırköy Mensucat İşçileri Sendikası*. It seemed that a senior member of the trade union, one Enver Usta, was interviewed by a newspaper and claimed that some workers registered to the ruling party received easy and rapid promotions and manipulated the trade union. The statements of this worker reflected the problems ravaging the trade union, which also surfaced during its general congress.<sup>210</sup> Some members of the control board of the trade union refrained from approving the financial accounts. İzzet Kortun, the president of the union, accepted that the administrative committee had committed some errors during the past era, although he blamed Enver Usta for all of this mishandling of union affairs. He accused Enver of troubling the union and demanded his expulsion. The convention

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<sup>210</sup> The details from this general congress were quoted in “Bakırköy Mensucat İşçileri Sendikası Çok Heyecanlı Bir Toplantı Yaptı,” *Hürbilet*, 25 September 1948.

turned into a virtual trial against Enver. He was expelled first from the congress hall and then from the trade union. Enver's claims demonstrate the involvement of the ruling party in a trade union organized in the Bakırköy Sümerbank factory. The harsh reaction against him proved the strength of the silent agreement between the party and the union. The workers in the private sector, on the other hand, did not enjoy the same privileges. Yusuf Sidal, one of the leaders of the İstanbul Iron and Metalware Workers Trade Union, an ancestor to Maden-İş, that was mostly organized in middle sized private businesses, and a constituent member of the Alliance of İstanbul Trade Unions, which was under the tutelage of the ruling party, lost its job due to his union activities, and nobody interfered for his sake.

Neither the new institutional framework that regulated the industrial relationships nor the semi open support of the ruling party to the trade unions that accepted its tutelage dissuaded private employers from refraining from the malpractices that they widely resorted during the war years. In one well publicized instance Buçel T.A.Ş. a food processing firm located in Ayvansaray, İstanbul, made the staff work three hours more without payment. This practice is a legacy of the war years and its continuation was a major grievance by the trade unions at the time. The trade union informed the local branch of the Labor ministry, though the ministerial inspectors did not report any unlawful practice from the part of the employer. Usually the meager local inspection staves were disinclined to side against the employers. That is why the trade union applied directly to Ankara. This strategy turned to be fruitful and the employer had to pay to his employees the unpaid extra three hours in total, and the eight hours work was reinstituted. This success cost to the trade union dearly due to the firing of their members from Buçel. The employer fired off the unionized workers in compliance with the law, not exceeding three

workers at each time. The union argued that this was an implicit lockout by the employer, yet everything was perfectly legal due to the loopholes in the law.<sup>211</sup> These developments caused the shrinking of the membership of the *İstanbul Gıda Sanayi İşçileri Sendikası* since workers, afraid of losing their jobs, began to quit this trade union.<sup>212</sup> Actually, food processing business was in the hands of private entrepreneurs hence the governing party had both little leverage there and almost none intention to interfere in it.

The reluctance of the Republican People's Party to support the trade unions in private businesses, did not prevent these organizations from seeking the help of the governing party because this was the very political organization that can alter the institutional context within which the trade unions operate. The party could also be lobbied to obtain legislation that aims to ameliorate the living conditions of the industrial workers. However, some trade unions tried to keep their independence or the Republican People's Party considered them outcasts. The examples of the latter case are some unions that are organized in tobacco processing businesses which are traditionally employing migrant women from the Balkans who were conventionally open to communist agitation.<sup>213</sup> The single most important example of the former

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<sup>211</sup> This was a very wide spread worker grievance of the time. The employers performed covered lockouts due to loopholes in the Labor Law banning strikes and lockouts. This was one of the major complaints by the workers directed to Tahsin Bekir Balta, the second Turkish Labor Minister replacing İrmak in 1948, during his visit to the headquarters of the İstanbul Alliance. "Çalışma Bakanı Sendikalar Birliği Yönetim Kurulu ile Görüştü," *Hürbilet* 14 August 1948. See also Ahmet Makal, (2002) and Kemal Sülker, (1955), for an evaluation of these implicit lockouts.

<sup>212</sup> For details of this episode see "İstanbul Gıda Sanayi İşçileri Sendikası Genel Kurulu Yarın Sendika Merkezinde Toplanıyor," *Hürbilet* 21 August 1948 pp.3-4. Sabahattin Selek, the second in command of the Republican People's Party operation among the trade unions in İstanbul, mentioned in his column as early as May 1948 the continuing grievance of Buçel T.A.Ş. workers. Sabahattin Selek, "İki Müşahade" *Hürbilet* 15 May 1948. Among the documents in Barkın's personal file found in Mehmet Alkan's archive, there existed a typed copy of a letter from this trade union to the Labor Minister pleading for help under which the Bureau remarked its approval and justification of its content and demanded the resolution of this specific grievance.

<sup>213</sup> See for instance the memoirs of a communist tobacco worker on this subject; Zehra Kosova, *Ben İşçiyim*, İletişim Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1996.

case is the Press Technicians Union headed by Şeref Hivel. This trade union refrained from joining the Alliance of İstanbul Trade Unions at the last moment.<sup>214</sup> The tradition of organizing among the press technicians, a highly skilled and literate worker group, dates back to 1909 with an almost unbroken continuity.<sup>215</sup> Naturally their organization, a perfect example of a craft union, is more self reliant than the other trade unions in İstanbul. These trade unions were devoid of any political backing. Yet there was another political actor who will find courage in time to be involved in the labor organizations.

### Democratic Party and Trade Unions

The parliamentary opposition refrained from involving in the organized labor movement at first. However, just like the other social segments estranged from the one party rule, the workers poured in the local branches of the party. Moreover, the Democratic Party voiced timidly the demand for the legalization of strikes earlier in the parliament. In a very short time span some local branches of the party became real worker centers such as the one in Eyüp. The textile workers from the districts surrounding the Haliç region encouraged by the existence of the opposition party began to challenge the authority of the ruling party over their organizations. Meanwhile, the parliamentary opposition began to voice its criticisms bolder both in the parliament and in the press. It seems that as the general elections approached, the Democratic Party felt itself confident enough to challenge the incumbent.

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<sup>214</sup> See *Hürbilet* the fifteenth issue published in 14 August 1948 and the eighteenth issue published in 1 September 1948, where the letters by the Alliance and the Press Technicians Union appeared respectively.

<sup>215</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, *İşçi Tarihine Bakmak*, TÜSTAV, İstanbul, 2007, p.111. The amended sixth article of the regulation of this trade union clearly cited its direct connection to the Ottoman Typesetters Society. For the amended articles see the first issue of the weekly journal *İşçi Hakkı* published in 5.7.1951.

Trade unions were an ominous subject and the Democratic Party refrained to enlist itself to the workers' cause, apart from a reserved mention about the legalization of the right to strike by some of its spokespersons. A similar approach existed among the cadres of the ruling party that are directly involved in organizing the trade unions, anyway. However, when the year 1949 came, the political atmosphere shifted rapidly. This was the year when the second congress of the Democratic Party would be held. Moreover, the new labor minister, Reşat Şemsettin Sirer, was a staunch opponent of the right to strike and openly hostile to the independent stances of the trade unions. Two decisions reached at the congress triggered an open confrontation of the two parties over the labor issue. The first one is a general combative motion openly threatening the ruling party in order to provide the safety of the polls;<sup>216</sup> the other was adding the demand for the legalization of the right to strike into the political manifesto of the party. Therefore, the Democratic Party openly challenged the government in the social question by bringing the debate over legalizing strikes to the fore.

The trade unions blaming the government for their despondent social and economic circumstances were encouraged by this policy change. The textile workers were the first to respond to the initiative by the opposition. Their long time grievances due to three hours unpaid extra shift, a legacy of the war time measures still applied ferociously in the private textile businesses and unemployment that most observers related to the unrestricted imports of textile products distanced some textile workers from the ruling party and made them susceptible to the propaganda of the Democratic Party. Amongst these developments the *İstanbul Mensucat Sanayii İşçileri Sendikası* wanted to organize a mass meeting in Eyüp, its stronghold. The

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<sup>216</sup> For the National Hostility Pact and its consequences see Metin Toker, *Tek Partiden Çok Partiye*, Milliyet yayınları, İstanbul, 1970; and Kemal H. Karpat, (1959).



other textile trade union, *İstanbul Tekstil Sanayii İşçileri Sendikası* that was under the control of the ruling party strongly rejected this proposal. Seyfi Demirsoy, who was the speaker of the İstanbul Alliance, stated that since the worker lay-offs were perfectly legal, the problem of the unemployed textile workers could only be resolved through initiatives at the governmental level, and the employers who did not make any profit could not keep their employees. The alliance supported this line of thought when it officially declared that meetings, protests and the other mass gatherings did only harm to the workers' problems, and that silent activities were always better.<sup>217</sup>

This argument alienated some workers from the ruling party and the trade unions under its sway. The reaction was so great that the *İstanbul Tekstil Sanayii İşçileri Sendikası* could not even hold its own branch in Ayvansaray, which quitted this government supported trade union to constitute a new one.<sup>218</sup> The schism triggered in the textile sector resulted in the formation of an alternative regional alliance of trade unions in İstanbul. The mere existence of a new trade union alliance can be considered as an implicit support for the Democratic Party. Indeed some union leaders of this new alliance actively worked for this party. The new body was called the *Hür İşçi Sendikaları Birliği* (the Alliance of Free Trade Unions). Şeref Hivel from the Press Technicians Union was selected as the president. Hivel's involvement signifies the appeal and the hopes that the 1950 general elections created in the trade union circles even among the seasoned militants of the labor movement since Şeref Hivel and his comrades tried to distance themselves from the government even in the early 1947 when the survival of the trade unions depend on governmental leniency.

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<sup>217</sup> For both statements see Kemal Sülker, (1955) p.122.

<sup>218</sup> Kemal Sülker, (1955), pp.97-104 sums up these developments.

## Democratic Party in Government

The May 1950 elections that brought the Democratic Party to power witnessed a political strike by the miners of the Ereğli coal basin. The widespread belief about the unlawful interventions by the ruling party during the 1946 elections provoked the workers of the region to protect the ballot boxes. That is why the workers of the shift that had to work in the mines during the election week end left the workplace to return to their homes in order to vote and did not resume mining until the vote count ends. This event took place in a region where just a few months ago as a part of the old Labor Minister's political strategy, the trade union declared that the miners are against the right to strike and fully support the government's labor policy.<sup>219</sup> The miners proved that the old government lost all of its appeal, if it had any, among the workers.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, this event also depicted that the trade union leaderships had very little control over their member's political affiliations.

The change in government did not trigger a transformation in the nature of the relationship between the ruling party and the nascent trade unions. Just like the ousted government, the Democratic Party had its own worker deputies who once in parliament acted in complete obedience to the party whip even when this approach conflicted with the worker demands. Some of the trade union leaders, who openly opposed the Republican People's Party during their reign, continued their uncritical support of the Democratic Party while others maintained their distance from the government and struggled to protect whatever independence labor organization had

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<sup>219</sup> The declaration is dated to 26 January 1950; it appeared in the newspaper five days later along with other statements that are in favor of strikes. M. Şehmus Güzel, *Türkiye'de İşçi Örgütlenmesi 1940-1950*, (unpublished dissertation), AÜSBF, Ankara, 1982.

<sup>220</sup> For a detailed analysis of the condition of the miners employed in Zonguldak around the forties see Ahmet Ali Özek, *Türkiye Kömür Ekonomisi Tarihi (Birinci Kısım)*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 1955, pp. 179-208.

from the government in league with diehard supporters of the RPP which proved to be very few in reality. Nevertheless, the partisan differences between those who supported the Republican People's Party and the Democratic Party did not lead to an organizational schism. The implausibility of survival of a trade union openly opposing the government led the RPP supporters, who did not constitute a significant majority anyway, to compromise. In the absence of a marked difference between these two parties over their approach to labor issues, apart the right to strike also convinced the workers to the organizational unity.

The government realized some of their promises secondary to the overall demand of the labor such as paid weekend holidays or completed long delayed projects of the labor ministry such as the setting of regional minimum wages, refrained from delivering their most significant commitment, namely the legalization of the right to strike. Indeed the governmental circles were inclined to think that if they went forward with for such reforms the need for strikes would fade. In an article written to evaluate the shift in Labor Ministry Mümtaz Faik Fenik, a pro-Democratic Party journalist, cited these two as the most pressing issues that the new minister had to resolve and both of them would potentially revolutionize the income arrangement of workers.<sup>221</sup> Nonetheless, the government drafted a bill and sent to trade unions for their evaluation. This draft got largely negative reviews from the trade union circles<sup>222</sup> and this issue was dropped out of the governments' legislative agenda.

The Democratic Party did not conceive a distinct social philosophy to inspire its approach in the domain of industrial relations. This continuity became concrete as soon as the new government started to expose its policies, and its dislike of workers'

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<sup>221</sup> Hulusi Köymen replaced Hasan Polatkan as the Labor Minister and a few weeks after this substitution the minimum wage regulation was promulgated in January 8, 1951. Mümtaz Faik Fenik, "İşçileri Süratle Tatmin Etmeliyiz," *Zafer*, 24 December 1950.

<sup>222</sup> "Grev Tasarısı İşçileri Memnun Etmemiştir" *İşçi Hakkı*, 26 July 1951.

collective action.<sup>223</sup> In one instance illustrating the continuation between the two governments in their handling of the labor issues, Muhlis Ete, the minister of public enterprises, during his visit to Kırklareli accompanied by the Labor Minister Hasan Polatkan, stated that in the public enterprises there are no managers and workers but fathers and sons.<sup>224</sup> A similar message of tutelage of the workers by the managers was also delivered in Adana in the course of another visit by these ministers.<sup>225</sup> It seems that solidarism and the stress on the nationalism of workers survived the ballot boxes while the debate around the right to strike turned to be a mere an election phony made to lure the workers into voting for the Democratic Party.

Strikingly, enough at its 1953 general congress the Republican People's Party adopted the legalization of the right to strike into its program. It seems that being at the opposition made the political parties more prone to champion the demands of the trade unions. Naturally, the speaker of the party had their own legitimizing arguments according to which under the DP government the country opted for liberalism, thus abandoned the principle of étatism; hence the workers must be armed to protect themselves against the political demands of the employers. This line of argumentation suits well into the ideas of the labor friendly faction of the party who had links to the trade unions from their inception onwards.

Although both parties in the parliament adopted the principle of legalization of strikes into their political platforms, the ban and the penal articles proved to be resilient enough. Apart from the timid draft that made public during the summer of 1951, which was never entered into the agenda of the Parliament, the new

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<sup>223</sup> The mass gatherings of workers were often banned by abusing the existing legal context and their indoor congregations were always subject to police presence. See for instance "Geri Bırakılan İşçi Mitinginin Akisleri" *İşçi Hakkı*, 30.8.1951 or "Toplanma Hürriyeti Üzerine" *İşçi Hakkı*, 9.8.1951.

<sup>224</sup> "Çalışma Ve İşletmeler Bakanları Dün Kırıkkale İşçileri ile Görüştü" *Zafer*, 10 July 1950.

<sup>225</sup> "İşletmeler ve Çalışma Bakanlarının Tahkikleri," *Zafer*, 29 August 1950.

government never initiated a genuine process to legalize the strikes. This resilience is a proof that both parties were committed to a similar understanding concerning the regime of industrial relations. While the new government put the issue of strikes into back burner, the new opposition did not defend it vigorously. For instance, Rebi Barkın the veteran responsible for social issues of the Republican People's Party, did not criticize the government for not keeping his promises to workers but claimed that the Democratic Party made untenable promises in opposition such as the one in the strike issue.<sup>226</sup> In another case, the İzmir branch of the RPP drafted a report<sup>227</sup> on social problems where the legalization of strikes was proposed, indeed it was a stipulation of the party platform at the time, but the related paragraph mostly concerned itself on the legal restrictions that must be imposed over the right to strike.

The fifties are significant since this decade witnessed the institutionalization of the trade unions and their umbrella organizations. Local trade unions for instance joined their forces to establish sector wide national trade union federations. The first example of such mergers is the creation of hotel, restaurant and the casino workers trade union federation (TOLEYİS) which is the result of the amalgamation of different waiters' craft unions from different cities in the March of 1951. The December of the same year witnessed the formation of textile workers trade union federation (TEKSİF). Many present day national trade unions dates back almost directly to the federations of the early fifties, TEKSİF and TOLEYİS being cases in point. Moreover, the industrial units built mostly to process the local agricultural products widened the scope of the organized labor geographically as a result trade unions infiltrated to the remote Anatolian towns where they became hub of local

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<sup>226</sup> Rebi Barkın, "İşçi Ücretleri Davası," *Ulus* 24 November 1953; 1 December 1953.

<sup>227</sup> Sait Odyak, Haydar Aryal, "Sosyal Meseleler Hakkında Rapor" (İzmir: 1956). This report is made up of twenty five typed pages found among Rebi Barkın personal documents. The original copy is in Mehmet Alkan's personal archive.

politics revolving around patronage networks in which trade union locals provided links to Ankara in every possible meaning of the term.

Another important step in institutionalization is the establishment of Türk İş. United States government, which wanted to guard the labor movements in the countries allied to the Western Camp from the communist influence tried to take part in their developments. Hence their initiatives played a major part in concretizing the idea of establishing a trade union confederation in Turkey. It is a well documented fact that Irwing Brown, the American trade union expert who had connections to State Department, involved in the negotiations between the government officials and the trade union leaders and among the trade union leaders resulting in the establishment of Türk İş in 1952.<sup>228</sup> However, for much of the fifties Türk İş remained as a secondary center of the organized labor movement, with regional alliances, especially the İstanbul Alliance occupying a much more noteworthy place.

As the economic destitution of the workers grew harder and the trade unions began to perceive the slow pace in the realization of the promised reforms, they became more vocal in their criticisms. In return the government augmented the financial pressure on trade unions, which mostly depended for their economic survival on the funds allocated by the labor ministry,<sup>229</sup> and turned to be less tolerant against trade union leaders who are known for their leanings to the opposition party. One of the primary victims of this strategy was the general secretary of Türk-İş, İsmail İnan. In the December 1955, amidst of this political climate Mümtaz Tarhan replaced Hayrettin Erkmen in the Labor Ministry. In October 1956, *Zafer*, the

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<sup>228</sup> Kenan Öztürk, *Amerikan Sendikacılığı ve Türkiye: İlk İlişkiler*, İstanbul: TÜSTAV Yayınları, 2004.

<sup>229</sup> The Labor ministry fined the firms when they do not comply with the requirements of the Labor Law and collected this sum into a fund to be distributed among the trade unions. This was a major financial resource for the unions and the fund was under complete government discretion.

newspaper supporting the government published a serial of articles claiming that trade unions are involved in politics which means that they breached the law. The basis of this accusation is that the trade unions delivered public statements complaining from unemployment, which the government denied its widespread existence. The existence of the unemployment problem is the opposition's argument. To repress such nuisances the government attacked local and national trade union alliances, in October 11, 1956 *Zafer* mentioned Türk-İş as an "unlawfully emerged organization".<sup>230</sup> The regional alliances were easier targets. Three of them, two around the Çukurova region<sup>231</sup> and one around Eskişehir-Sakarya region were closed down; the court repelled the decision on the last one, yet this did not prevent the ministry to further its attempts. The Labor Ministry argued that regional alliances do not have any legal status according to the law in force.

From the beginning of 1957 onwards, the trade unions were also suffered from the increasing government authoritarianism. These pressures on trade unions turned to be consequential and after the 1957 elections worker leaders with known ties to the Republican People's Party were banished from the trade union administrations especially at the level of Türk İş. For instance İsmail İnönü was replaced by Nuri Beşer a well known supporter of the ruling party. However, these incidences estranged some segments of the urban labor force from the government resulting in their participation at the general atmosphere against the Democratic Party in the big cities. The ruling party had leverage and an important impact over Türk İş but very little resonance in industrial centers around İstanbul and the İstanbul

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<sup>230</sup> Quoted in Rebi Barkın "İşçi Sendikaları Birliklerinin Kapatılması," *Ulus*, 15 January 1957.

<sup>231</sup> One of these two Çukurova region alliances tended to be militant in its struggle for workers' demands. In 1951 it wanted to organize a mass meeting to protest the minimum wage level determined by the relevant government agency for the Çukurova region. The governor banned this attempt, indeed this was a time when only the meetings to protest communism were allowed, and every other mass gatherings by workers were considered political hence illegal according to the Trade Union's Law in force. See "Adana Sendikaları İşçiler Tarafından Kapatılacak" *İşçi Hakkı*, 2.8.1951.

Alliance of Trade Unions. Nevertheless it must be noted that the legislative activity directed by the labor ministry of the Democratic Party governments on social policy issues was not different in essence from its predecessor.<sup>232</sup> That means, the Democratic Party was reluctant on recognizing the collective rights of the workers, suspicious thus always controlling their organizations, and ready to grant social benefits but only to be applied in state enterprises.

The second part of the forties is the constitutive period for the Turkish organized labor movement; the cores of the important trade unions of the future era were established during that epoch, the worker leaders' of the coming decades get their basic training in mobilizing and organizing the labor force also during these years. The involvement of the ruling party was essential in molding the basic union strategy but also the spontaneous movement of the workers to initiate mobilization especially in public owned industrial complexes where brutal working conditions existed despite the legal arrangements to the contrary. Thus, the lobbies in Ankara established through the political connections of the trade unions to the establishment parties became the main vehicle through which the organized labor tried to resolve both their general problems and workplace disputes. The close link between the trade union leadership and some party cadres both attached the organized labor to the establishment and created a small ring of trade union sympathizers in various corners in Ankara. This pattern remained mostly unchanged during the reign of the Democratic Party. Thus in their entirety the latter part of the forties along with the fifties formed a distinct era in the development of the industrial relations regime and the organized labor movement.

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<sup>232</sup> For instance a rapid inspection of a propaganda pamphlet published just before the 1957 elections by the Democratic Party in order to praise the activity of the Labor Ministry, results in the detection of great similarities to the similar publications by the Republican People's Party; see Çalışma Vekaleti, *İşçiye Sağlanan Faydalar*, Ankara, 1957.



The continuities between these two eras are essential. The strikes were forbidden, thus it was impossible to force the employers into the collective bargains. The trade unions were financially meager and dependent upon the government, their main employer, for their survival. The clauses of the law on trade union were gravely insufficient to protect their organizational independence anyway. The Democratic Party, like its predecessor, pursued its own agenda of social legislation which excludes the collective rights of labor. Furthermore, the party interfered heavily into the internal affairs of trade unions in order to make their members to be elected to the administrative post, and employing trade unions as their own front organizations whereas the parliamentary opposition began to support more and more the workers' demands.

The chief novelty introduced during the fifties was the geographical proliferation of industrial relations into the Anatolia, carrying over with them the populist inclusion of the labor force into the political system through the trade unions. As a part of the policy of mechanization of agriculture the government established plants either to process agricultural produce or manufacture agricultural inputs or even some consumer non-durables. This state owned enterprises extended the clientalist arrangements further into the countryside through the employment strategies, strengthening the grip of the party over these voters. Typically, the trade unions were immediately established in these plants and further distorted the strategy of trade unions which more and more began to rely on their connections in Ankara to resolve local problems. Consequently, the movement turned to be more and more rely on its political connections in Ankara rather than its local organization and opted to use its resources in the public enterprises where it is safer to unionize. The governments, on the other hand, uses the trade unions as a medium to reach out to

the populace, dealing with the state economic enterprises made sense in this respect since the party can deliver the workers' demands without alienating any social segment.

This institutional arrangements and shared understanding about the functions of the trade unions and government duties vis-à-vis this social group contributing to the goals of national development started to cement social norms and obligations upon which the regime of industrial relations operates. But the organized labor was not still a potent social force at the time due to the low level of industrialization hence it can not make any political claims effectively on the basis of this incipient moral economy. The social and economic transformation and the political events of the next decade would recuperate this weakness.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE INTRODUCTION OF IMPORT SUBSTITUTION

The end of the one party rule did not bring about a major shift in the organized labor movement or the relationships between the ruling parties and the trade unions, however the ousting of the Democratic Party in 1960 by a military intervention did. The arising political opportunity structure was favorable for the development of a lively organized labor movement in many ways. Not only the ruling coalition of class fractions reshuffled by leaving out commercial agriculture interests, which are usually related to more conservative political currents,<sup>233</sup> but also the methods of brutally repressing social protests were discredited to some extent. The new ruling coalition favored industrialization inside a protected national economy as the new regime of capital accumulation. This new mode of articulation to the global economy involves the import of capital goods along with high custom tariffs for the consumer durables.

The coup d'état of the May 27, 1960 marked a shift to a new era of developmental strategy based on a different mode of accumulation. In line with the global trends, some sectors within the Turkish bourgeoisie pressed for a shift in policies of government subsidies. These industrial interests pressed for planning, aid to the industrial ventures by the private capital and market advantages to their production. These industrial ventures though would aim to substitute first the imports

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<sup>233</sup> Çağlar Keyder, (1990), pp, 117-123.

of non durable consumer goods and their inputs and then the replacement of the intermediate goods and the consumer durables by the domestic production.<sup>234</sup>

Globally this developmental strategy is known as Import Substituting Industrialization (ISI), and it was implemented in many developing countries at the time parallel to the requirements of the global capitalism that focused on the production of capital goods in the core and widening the reach of the markets in the periphery. It seems that a sector of the Turkish bourgeoisie pressed for such a change of course.

### The Import Substitution and the Workers

Albert Hirschman argues that the initial reasoning behind the adoption of the ISI strategy largely shape its subsequent track of development and cites four possible reason for its initial implementation: Wars creating export or impost shortages, growth of domestic market due to export earnings, balance of payment crisis and deliberate government choice.<sup>235</sup> The foreign exchange difficulties was the main factor in prompting the needs for ISI policies within some circles of the urban bourgeoisie, although the ruling Democratic Party whose power base is located within the commercialized agricultural interests vehemently opposed any attempt at that direction. The government did not prefer to redirect the state economic resources away from its traditional clientele. The introduction of planning was the issue

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<sup>234</sup> Bela Balassa, "Outward Orientation and Exchange Rate Policy in Developing Countries: The Turkish Experience", *The Middle East Journal*, 37:3, (Summer, 1983), pp. 429-447.

<sup>235</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, "The Political Economy of Import-Substituting Industrialization in Latin America", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 82. no.1, (February, 1968), pp.1-32, p.5.

through which this debate was concretized.<sup>236</sup> The urban bourgeoisie that already began to invest in factories producing consumer durables and intermediary capital goods needed mid term industrial development plans to calculate their investment strategies, and lobbied to that end. Moreover, the idea of development planning was supported by a broad coalition: the Republican People's Party with its étatist heritage, the higher echelons of the bureaucracy, big industrialists and even the international agencies, most notably the OECD.<sup>237</sup> Obviously, industrialization would also strengthen the working class and their organizations.

The shift in developmental strategy is accompanied by major policy shifts symbolized by the adoption of First Five Year Development Plan in 1963. However, right after the military intervention every significant institutional regulation was prepared with similar concerns. The measures associated with this strategy include “high levels of protection, overvalued exchange rates, a carefully monitored import regime, negative real interest rates, and use of state owned manufacturing enterprises to compensate for private sector deficiencies.”<sup>238</sup> Şevket Pamuk argues that these measures are typical for a peripheral accumulation process.<sup>239</sup> Moreover, the government subsidized the private sector through cheap credits and tax exemptions, and state economic enterprises were also instrumental in this process through providing cheap industrial inputs to the private businesses. Therefore, as Haldun Gülalp argues “industrial bourgeoisie became an increasingly dominant element in

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<sup>236</sup> For an account of arguments preceded the establishment State Planning Organization see Vedat Milor, “The Genesis of Planning in Turkey”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 4, (Fall 1990), pp.1-30.

<sup>237</sup> Şevket Pamuk, “Economic Change in Twentieth Century Turkey: Is the Glass More Than Half Full”, in Reşat Kasaba (ed.) *Cambridge History of Modern Turkey*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp.266-300.

<sup>238</sup> Henry Barkey, “State Autonomy and Crisis of Import Substitution,” *Comparative Political Studies*, vol.22, no.3, (October 1989), pp.291-314, p.298.

<sup>239</sup> Şevket Pamuk, “Political Economy of Industrialization in Turkey,” *MERIP REPORTS*, no. 93, (January 1981), p.28.

the class configuration of the society and capital labor conflict began assuming priority.”<sup>240</sup>

The organized labor rose to prominence as the industrial bourgeoisie took the helm of the ruling coalition and their conflict remained in manageable levels to some extent within the context of the early ISI period. Indeed, the new accumulation regime did not only bring about a rise in the purchasing power of the working class thanks to the necessities related of building a national market strong and large enough to create demand for domestically produced consumer goods, it also ease up to some extent the conflict between the requirements of profit maximization and demands by the organized labor to augment their share in the gross national product. Obviously, this context was favorable to a more militant trade unionism, and contributed to material gains for the workers as a result of labor militancy.<sup>241</sup> In the long run, this new context will transform the established norms of trade unionism in Turkey and hence would create new dynamics in the organized labor movement.

The new era made possible, less costly and even beneficial in some cases militancy in the workplace thus the emphasis of the movement shifted from influence in Ankara to strength in locales, mainly in the industrial centers of the country. This resulted in trade unions organizing in private businesses becoming more visible, chiefly around the Marmara region since they undertook strikes, a novelty for the legal unionism of the postwar era, and achieved their aims occasionally. Meanwhile thanks to the new legal institutional context Türk İş, a shadow umbrella organization with no real power due to financial distress, amassed unmatched financial powers in this new era and pushed for centralization to the disadvantage of the regional trade

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<sup>240</sup> Haldun Gülalp, “Patterns of Capital Accumulation and State Society Relations in Turkey,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol.15, no.3, (1985), pp.329-348, p.340.

<sup>241</sup> İlhan Akalın, *Güdümlü İşçi Hareketi: Sendikaların Mahzun Öyküsü*, Gelenek Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2000, pp.43-47.

union alliances. This move was in compliance to the tendency of Turkish trade unionism that vied for centralized national trade unions powerful enough to further the cause of labor in Ankara. This paradox, rising militancy on the one hand and the ascendancy of Türk İş over regional trade union bases on the other, put a heavy strain on the Turkish organized labor movement during the next two decade. The Ankara based Türk İş would complain from the private sector unionism in the Marmara region that would establish a new confederation in the second half of the sixties. Their claims would be heard among the government circles as the accumulation regime enters into crisis, and working class politics radicalized in the end of the sixties.

The military junta wanted to incorporate every social sector, representing mostly the urban populace, to augment the legitimacy of the new regime. That is why delegates representing the trade unions were also selected to the Constituent Assembly convened in order to draft a new constitution. There were six trade union delegates in this Constituent Assembly, of which three were from Türk İş headquarters. These deputies along with the Labor Minister, the labor friendly professor of social policy Cahit Talas, contributed to the building of the new institutional context that would frame the ISI strategy with an emphasis on the social aspect of the new constitution. The military junta itself was also lenient to trade union demands. Indeed, in the July of 1960 right after the coup, it allowed Türk İş to register to the International Congress of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), namely the pro-western international trade union alliance of the Cold War era. This membership was always denied by the Democratic Party government despite of the pressure by their western allies.<sup>242</sup> Consequently, Türk İş affiliated to the Asian Regional

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<sup>242</sup> For an account of the American point of view on this subject see Irwing Brown, "Türkiye'de Sendikal Hareket", (Kenan Öztürk translated) *Tarih ve Toplum* (July 1989), pp.46-49.

Organization of the ICFTU. This choice contradicted the Turkish tendency to align itself with Europe however it proves the large influence that the American labor organizations enjoyed over their Turkish counterparts since the American affiliate of the ICTFU, operates also in the Asian region.

### Political Connections of the Organized Labor in the New Context

The main vehicle of the organized labor in promoting their interests was their connections to the political parties of the establishment during the first fifteen years of the legal existence of the trade unions. The deepening industrialization and the urbanization accompanying the former process increased the weight of the organized labor in electoral politics. The self confidence of the movement also augmented due to the both increasing financial resources and the opportune political situation. The increasing membership figures and the direct American monetary aid that became possible with the lenience of the junta administration contribute to the financial independence. The new economic model also paved the way for a militant workplace struggle bore its fruits. Nevertheless, the influence in Ankara was still important since the institutional arrangement that was necessitated by the new regime of accumulation was devised there. The political opportunity structure that contributes to the unionization efforts was mediated by the political negotiations taking place in the capital.

From 1947 onwards Republican People's Party have been always involved in trade unions, mold to some extent their working style and political understanding. Furthermore, the party itself adopted more enthusiastically the cause of workers in opposition. Historically, one faction within the RPP opposed any involvement with



the workers. This tendency almost disappeared during the late fifties. Among those who were involved with the organized labor the first generation was educated in the Nazi Germany and maybe inspired by the residues of the Bismarckian authoritarian social conservatism. The second generation, on the other hand, was inspired by the British social liberalism. This latter line came to Turkey with the English experts who contributed to the initial efforts to establish a labor ministry, and participated to the drafting the first bills on social policy. There is a generational distinction between these two strands rather than an ideological split as illustrated by their teamwork during the late forties when their party attempted to control the trade unions.

During the sixties this faction will try to represent the party as the natural representative of the organized labor in Turkey. Their discourse also showed a level of inspiration from the Scandinavian social democratic parties. Indeed, they played a part in the building of the new institutional context regulating the industrial relations regime. The RPP activists working with trade unions during the early sixties, unlike their counterparts from the late forties, were not trying to dictate their terms on these organizations, but rather they tried to demonstrate the plight of the workers in the hands of employer friendly governments that implemented economic policies disregarding national developmentalist goals both to larger audiences of voters and specifically to the trade union circles.<sup>243</sup>

When the trade unions became major scenes of political struggles for influence between various groups just after the normalization of the parliamentary politics, RPP possessed a significant support amongst trade union leaders. However, their position between the small left winger unionist fraction that were mainly strong around the Marmara region and active in private businesses and conservative

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<sup>243</sup> For a description of trade union activist from the perspective of such an RPP activist during the early sixties see Engin Ünsal, *İşçiler Uyanıyor*, Tan Matbaası, İstanbul, 1963.

unionists controlling larger public enterprise trade unions who were under the heavy influence of American unionism was untenable. The party always attempted to create a partner trade union movement after it fixed its political orientation under the leadership of the faction led by Bülent Ecevit as left of center in mid sixties and then as democratic left in the seventies.<sup>244</sup>

The Justice Party, which was the heir of the Democratic Party, on the other hand, was somewhat pleased with the status quo of the relationship existing between the political parties and the organized labor movement. The new institutional context reduced the leverage the governments had enjoyed over the trade unions, especially since the financial strength of Türk İş augmented considerably. However, the habits of the past were intact to a great extent. The trade unions were still bastions of anti communist agitation, there existed a significant group of Justice Party supporter unionists, and more important the principle of non-partisanship, a principle propagated by the American unionists and took root because of its compatibility to the Turkish tradition, allowed all political parties to build a reliable clientele from among the trade union leaders.

This era witnessed the introduction a new approach concerning the relationship among political parties and the organized labor. The Turkish Workers Party (TİP) is itself established by the trade union leaders. TİP is not the first attempt to establish a labor party by left winger trade unionists. The first such attempt dated back to the early fifties, though neither the trade unions had any autonomous power base to back such a party nor the law on political parties was favorable for such

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<sup>244</sup> For an evaluation of the political developments within RPP during its lurch towards the left see Suna Kili, *1960-1975 Döneminde Cumhuriyet Halk Partisinde Gelişmeler: Siyaset Bilimi Açısından Bir İnceleme*, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 1976.

attempts at the time.<sup>245</sup> The sixties on the other hand reversed these two conditions totally. The first chairman of the party was Avni Erakalın who was also the chair of the İstanbul Trade Union Alliance elected right after the 27 May coup d'état. After the first year of this new experience that was wasted in oblivion, those unionist who were still interested in the prospect of a workers party invited socialist intellectuals into the party to revitalize it. Indeed only a few of the founding unionists identified themselves as socialist, and most of the trade union activists did not trust intellectuals because of widespread anticommunist propaganda.<sup>246</sup> Nevertheless, the party entered the 1965 general elections as the first leftist alternative that the Turkish voters were offered during the republican era, and gained an impressive result that enabled to party to be represented in the Assembly.

The trade union leaders affiliated to TİP were stigmatized among the worker circles. Only those who were involved in trade unions organizing private businesses continued actively to support this small party since they did not depend on the government to operate. However, they were estranged from Türk İş, and other common bodies of the organized labor. A similar fate hit the unionists supporting the Ecevit faction in the largest textile trade union TEKSİF, including the former chair of the trade union Bahir Ersoy. They were purged from this union while the TİP members were purged from Türk İş. It seems that a leftward move in an influential trade union could not be tolerated by the old guard. The introduction of TİP altered the pattern of the relationship between trade unions and political parties in Turkey, which eventually lead to a schism in the movement.

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<sup>245</sup> For an account of this experience see Kemal Sülker, *Türkiye Sendikacılık Tarihi*, TÜSTAV Yayınları, İstanbul, 2004, pp.159-162.

<sup>246</sup> Rasih Nuri İleri, *Türkiye İşçi Partisinde Oportünist Merkezîyetçilik*, Yalçın Yayınları, İstanbul, 1987. p.10.

## The Legal Context of Industrial Relations Regime after the Coup

The constitutional document drafted by the Constituent Assembly took into consideration the long-standing demands and grievances of the trade unions on issues such as legalization of strikes and lessening of government control over trade unions. The 1961 Constitution placed the collective bargaining and strikes firmly within the Turkish legal system. The strikes were considered crucial because of their functions in the collective bargaining regime both by the official circles and the labor leaders.<sup>247</sup> Although there was no legal barrier prior to the 1961 constitution, collective bargaining was almost absent in the Turkish industrial relations system due to the ban on striking. The 1936 Labor Code cites collective bargaining in the context of seasonal farm workers employed in large agricultural establishments, who traditionally do not rely on individual agreements.<sup>248</sup> Both the governments and industrial employers were resolved to limit the scope of collective bargaining to this conventional domain before 1960, and in the absence of appropriate institutional mechanisms to put it into practice, most important among them being strikes, the trade unions were powerless to demand resolutely for its implementation.

During the debates in the Constituent Assembly the worker delegate were cautious in exposing their point of view about the constitutional articles regulating collective bargaining and strikes and refrained from being steadfast and demanding.<sup>249</sup> Despite this meager support, those who pushed to insert constitutional limits to the right to strike, or adding the right to lock-out in the constitutional text

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<sup>247</sup> For an evaluation of the right to strike from a then contemporary point of view see Orhan Tuna, Metin Kutsal, *Grev hakkı: Başlıca Meseleleri ve Memleketimiz Bakımından Tanzimi*, Sermet Matbaası, İstanbul, 1962.

<sup>248</sup> Cahit Talas, *Türkiye'nin Açıklamalı Sosyal Politika Tarihi*, Bilgi Yayınları, Ankara, 1992, pp.120-122.

<sup>249</sup> TC, *Temsilciler Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi* vol. 2, 17.4.1961, pp.294-299.

failed in their efforts thanks to the unwavering attitude of the government backing the text drafted by the legal scholars. Obviously, the minister of labor himself was among the supporters of the 47<sup>th</sup> article granting the right to strike and asserting that this right would be regulated by the relevant law that must be promulgated within a two years term. It seems that the worker delegates did not intend to form a political bloc in the Constituent Assembly instead they relied to the friendly politicians and bureaucrats.

When the parliamentary politics resumed and elections were held, the government did not rush into drafting the social legislation necessitated by the constitution. Although a two years term was inserted for their promulgation, the efforts by the Labor Ministry were thwarted by the powerful employer's interests located in the various places of the political system. Meanwhile two important trade union centers pressed the government in their peculiar ways to influence the cited legislation. These centers were Türk İş headquarters in Ankara and the İstanbul Trade Union Alliance,<sup>250</sup> the conventional mouthpiece of the organized labor movement in İstanbul, the main industrial center of the country. These two centers preferred somehow opposing ways to reach the same end, by profiting the new political opportunity structure emerged after the coup.

The text of the new Constitution was inadequate to cease the debates around the cornerstones of the new industrial relations regime. The issues such as trade union liberties were resolved, yet the right to strike continued to be a contentious matter. Amongst the labor friendly circles the right to strike was demanded as an

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<sup>250</sup> For a brief description of the first such attempts by İstanbul Alliance see İstanbul Tekstil ve Örne Sanayi İşçileri Sendikası, *1959-1961 Devresi Faaliyet Raporu*, Alpaslan Matbaası, İstanbul, 1961, pp.97-98.

auxiliary tool to enforce the effectiveness of the collective bargaining regime,<sup>251</sup> rather than a medium of class struggle, indeed this was the main argument in favor of the right to strike. This issue emerged right after the first law on trade unions, fiercely debated on the eve of the 1950 general elections and remained always in the agenda of the trade unions, yet both employers and governments are still afraid of the possible outcomes of striking. That is the reason why all of the articles of the laws on trade unions and on collective bargaining and strikes were debated meticulously.

The trade unions put their weight onto these debates through mass movements. Indeed, the political conditions were ripe in order to mobilize the workers for radical acts of claim making. As a result, the years 1961 and 1962 witnessed protest actions by the trade unions. Especially 1962 was a year when trade unions pressed hard to obtain their demands from the new democratically elected government; it is interesting to note the high level of protest movements that took place right after a coup d'état. Indeed, the first legal strike that relied on the constitution, in the absence of the relevant legislation, began in the last day of the year 1961.<sup>252</sup> As a matter of fact December of 1961 was also the date of an important mass meeting organized by the Alliance of İstanbul Trade Unions, the experienced flag ship of Turkish trade unionism. The aim of the meeting was to warn the government that does not seem to hurry for drafting the bills of the Law on strikes and collective bargaining. The governor of İstanbul General Refik Tulga, appointed by the military junta, tried to intimidate the trade unions but can not prevent the gathering of a huge crowd in one of the largest labor demonstrations of the

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<sup>251</sup> For an evaluation of the striking law from mainstream social policy experts see Orhan Tuna, Metin Kutal, *Grev hakkı: Başlıca Meseleleri ve Memleketimiz Bakımından Tanzimi*, Sermet Matbaası, İstanbul, 1962.

<sup>252</sup> Yüksel Akkaya, "1960 Sonrasında İşçi Hareketleri" in *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 2, Tarih Vakfı İstanbul, 1998, pp. 105-112, p.106.

Republican history in Sarayhan Square, right beside the city hall where Tulga resided. Therefore trade unions did not wait for the government to enact the necessary legislation, but went forward with their demands through various means.

The protest cycle of that began in the aftermath of the ratification of the new constitution aimed on the one hand to pressure the government in order to influence the specifics of the new industrial relationships regime, and on the other to ameliorate the social and economic lot of the workers that was at the mercy of the employers, public or private until that era. The movement had two major centers, one is in Ankara where the headquarters of Türk İş and some public sector trade unions were located, and the other is İstanbul where the new assembly production, the hallmark of import substitution began blossoming. İstanbul was also the traditional center of the Turkish organized labor and its regional alliance of trade unions was the principal institution in this domain for the last fifteen years. After the December of 1961 strikes, meetings and marches were used by the organized labor to express their grievances and demands. Indeed, the leaders of the İstanbul Alliance established TİP in the February of 1962<sup>253</sup> to constitute an organization to represent this movement.

The most well known worker resistance action that predated the promulgation of the relevant laws is the Kavel strike<sup>254</sup> that began in the January of 1963 in the Kavel cable factory owned by Vehbi Koç. Maden İş, which was organized mainly in private businesses, headed by Kemal Türkler is the majority trade union in this work place. Maden İş is one of the trade unions that were established right after the new law on trade unions in 1947. This trade union never opposed directly the heavy hand of RPP over the trade unions but always tried to distance itself from its influence. It

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<sup>253</sup> For an account of the impact of this party on the Turkish political scene see Mehmet Ali Aybar, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi Tarihi*, BDS Yayınları, İstanbul, 1988.

<sup>254</sup> For a monograph of this strike see Zafer Aydın, *Kanunsuz Bir Grevin Öyküsü Kavel 1963*, TÜSTAV, İstanbul, 2010.

is also interesting to note that three out of four chairmen of this trade union were members of TİP during the sixties. The staunch resistance by Kavel workers coupled with the sympathy of the residents of the surrounding area and the other trade unions augmented the notoriety of this case in the national press. Moreover the two years term set in the constitution for the promulgation of the relevant laws is nearly run out with no serious efforts to draft a bill from the government. In the absence of any regulation to arrange the method of settling workplace disputes, the workers resorted to their constitutional right to strike though the authorities were harsh on them. Ultimately, the government headed by RPP mediated an accord and accelerated its efforts to draft the concerning laws.

In the summer of 1963 the young and promising labor minister, Bülent Ecevit achieved to bring the drafts of the twin laws on Trade Unions and collective bargaining to the floor of the Parliament. It is possible to follow the shifts made to the first draft after 1961 since it was published at the time.<sup>255</sup> The two years term that it was debated did produce some important changes but the underlying mentality of the text remained same. The possibility of “abusing” the right to strike, meaning its use as a tool of class war, worried the ruling class. That is why the conditions of striking were minutely regulated and this right was granted to trade unions and not to the workers, actually, the nearly two decades of trade unions’ legal existence proved their value as reliable partners to the state officials and politicians except the most conservative wing of the private employers. The law itself was advantageous to the employers because of its lengthy arbitration procedure required before the beginning of a strike, permit them to make their preparations and forecast even precisely manipulate its timing. An interesting aspect of the law was the inclusion of the so

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<sup>255</sup> T.C. Çalışma Bakanlığı, *Toplu Sözleşme, Grev ve Lokavt Kanun Tasarısı Hakkında Beyaz Kitap*, Ankara, 1961.



called Kavel article pardoning all workers involved in strikes before the promulgation of the law. This was a clear gain for those workers who added immediately the strikes to their toolkit of social protest from 1961 onwards. The labor minister Bülent Ecevit who sincerely monitored the parliamentary procedure, asserted that with the ratification of this law the last issue that the communist infiltrators can manipulate to agitate the workers is mended and Turkey attended the level of their western allies regarding the industrial relationships regime without experiencing the troubles that they survived due to labor militancy.<sup>256</sup>

The early sixties can be considered as another constitutive period in the history of the Turkish trade unions. Just like 1908 or 1946, once again the organized labor responded to the promising political developments to press for enlarging their rights and liberties. This protest cycle aimed to obtain a tolerant regime of industrial relations helpful to the unionized workers was far from being spontaneous. The sectors of the organized labor movement that spent last fifteen years fighting in their workplaces, especially those who operates in private chemical or metal industries some of them owned by the foreign capital partly or wholly and in municipal services in which the conditions and pay were terrible, felt themselves ready to pursue a more persistent type of unionism relying more on the power in the workplace and less to the lobby in Ankara. Their strategy was more offensive than a usual Turkish trade union, indeed in the gainful context of import substitution the trade unions organized in protected consumer industries pressed hard to acquire new benefits for their members. In the near future this will create strain between two approaches to trade unionism and feed the schism emerged mainly due to the political reasons.

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<sup>256</sup> Kemal Sülker, *Türkiye’de Grev Hakkı ve Grevler*, TÜSTAV Yayınları, İstanbul, 2004, pp.236-237.

The center of the trade unions embodied in Türk İş headquarters though aimed at to benefit from their newly acquired social impact and beneficial political circumstances to improve their influence in Ankara, a suitable goal for the public enterprise trade unions whose employer is the government anyway. Considering the proportion of those employed by the state among the unionized workers, it can be asserted that their tendency cannot be overlooked. It seems that the early sixties was a critical juncture in the trajectory along which the movement develops.

Consequently, instead of choosing a pathway in unison it broke into two hence neither of the two objectives can be achieved thoroughly. While the minority tendency represented by the trade unions operating mainly in private businesses and conglomerated around Marmara region lost the support of the mainstream political forces, the central tendency afraid of competition became more docile thus unable to capitalize on the newly acquired force of the organized labor.

### The Rise of Türk İş

Türk İş remained as an empty shell for much of the fifties and struggled with severe financial difficulties since its affiliates that were indeed financially weak themselves were reluctant to pay their dues to the confederation. Nevertheless when the confederation registered to the ICFTU its fate shifted. The newly acquired financial means altered the stand of the confederation vis-à-vis the regional alliances, especially the one in İstanbul, the natural representative of the organized labor for the past fifteen years. One of the main arguments by Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly in their study of labor militancy in France is that the French organized labor movement has been aimed at political influence in the capital rather than at work place bread

and butter issues unlike their North American counterparts.<sup>257</sup> It seems that the unyielding attitude of the French employers added to the historical tendency of the French workers to use strikes for political ends dating back to the days of July Monarchy created a trade union tradition based on mobilizing the national force of the organized labor centrally in order to pressure the political decision making process to reach their aims. In a similar vein, Turkish trade unionism traditionally did not rely on work place militancy, but rather to its leverage among the political class. Türk İş was the perfect tool in this respect and once it achieved to survive on its own began to operate in that capacity.

In fact, the bulk of the unionized workers are employed by the public sector and the success at public enterprises required the backing from Ankara rather than strength in the shop floor, Türk İş was advantageous in that respect too. Therefore, in the Turkish case the uncompromising approach of private employers, the sizeable proportion of the public sector workers in trade unions and the principle of nonpartisanship imposed by the Kemalist one party rule and then encouraged by the American influence created an organized labor movement tradition relying on lobbying in the capital to further the social and economic position of the workers. During the sixties, this tradition is further developed firmly by Türk İş which was then financially strong and hence more self reliant vis-à-vis the political parties.

Once Türk İş established itself as the representative of the Turkish organized labor in the province where it matters, it began to dismantle the provincial trade union alliances and replaced them with its proper regional branches from 1963 onwards. This substitution was compatible with the prevailing line of thought in Turkish unionism that strived to build centralized, strong and national bodies that are

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<sup>257</sup> Edward Shorter, Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France 1830-1968*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1974.

able to make its voice heard in Ankara. Indeed the individual trade unions also had the same tendency to centralize during this era. All in all, the American financial aid and political education<sup>258</sup> did have a constitutive influence over the Turkish trade unionism. Türk İş was the main medium through which this influence disseminated among the ranks of organized labor, and the elimination of provincial trade union alliances facilitated this dissemination.

Just prior to its fourth congress convened in the November of 1960 Türk İş represented less than three hundred thousand workers<sup>259</sup> mostly in the public sector. The fourth congress elected the leading cadre that will determine the policies of the confederation for the following two decades. Ömer Ergün a railroad worker from Eskişehir who controlled the finance of the confederation from 1953 onwards retained its position. Seyfi Demirsoy, a public enterprise worker who was one of the young union activists educated by the worker's bureau of RPP during the late forties, was elected as chair. Finally, Halil Tunç a younger trade union activist from Ankara, who was first affiliated to the Democratic Party, but left the party when the government did not keep its promises to the workers, was chosen as the general secretary. This triumvirate kept their titles until their death or resignation.

The new leadership's political allegiance lied with the establishment rather than any specific political party. Unlike the previous era when the trade unions were more directly infiltrated by the political affiliations, the new strength and independence obtained in the new era seemed to grant a more nonpartisan approach to the union officials, at least at the level of Türk İş administration. Some of those who are educated by the RPP in the past were not convinced by the left of centre

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<sup>258</sup> Alpaslan Işıklı, *Sendikacılık ve Siyaset*, Odak Yayınevi, Ankara, 1974, pp.367-368.

<sup>259</sup> Orhan Tuna, "Türk İşçi Sendikalarının Gelişme Seyri ve Fonksiyonları," İktisadi Kalkınmanın Sosyal Meseleleri, Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etüdler Konferans Heyeti, 4-24 August 1963, İstanbul, 1964, p. 252.

policies put forth by the faction led by Bülent Ecevit anyway. They were unenthusiastic about Scandinavian model where a party would be their sole political delegate, in its stead they remained loyal to the essence of their training that they received during the late forties, and preferred to establish a patronage relationship with the government, their employer. Since the Justice Party achieved two successive electoral sweeps in 1965 and 1969 that meant they would be in good terms with this party. Therefore the principle of nonpartisanship that stems from the mentality of the old RPP which forbade trade union involvement into the politics and that was strengthened by the American influence kept the bulk of trade union leaders, especially Seyfi Demirsoy and like minded others, far from RPP which tried to distance itself from its elitist tradition and hence to establish a popular support base among the wage earners and small peasantry.

The principle of nonpartisanship entered into the statute of Türk İş in its fifth congress convened in 1963. It was compatible to its established practice; it fits the teaching of its mentor, namely AFL-CIO the American confederation, but more importantly it guaranteed the unity of the confederation in which the political loyalties are not in any way related to class politics. One must note that the confederation brought together a large number of workers mostly employed in the public sector. These are mostly first or at best second generation workers, class politics are heavily repressed by state security apparatus, and the national politics did not precisely align along class lines. If the confederation adopted a clear cut political stand, it would certainly have to face a severe retribution from the government, but it might also possibly dissolve.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Yıldırım Koç, *Türk-İş Neden Böyle? Nasıl Değişecek?*, Alan Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1986, pp.169-187.

The sixth congress of the congress held in 1966 witnessed a purge in its administrative council. Until 1966 the administrative council always represented the political tendencies existing within the Turkish organized labor movement, hence the supporters of the Justice Party sat in this body along with the TİP members. However, the 1966 congress was a genuine witch hunt against the TİP members during which most of the speakers including Seyfi Demirsoy himself told the stories of their previous struggles against the communist infiltration in trade unions. As a result none of the trade union leaders who were active in TİP were elected to any post, this meant some important trade unions of the Marmara region such as Maden İş and Lastik İş were left out. This purge was conducted with the passive support of all other existing tendencies thus the loose collaboration existing between those who support labor politics whether with TİP or RPP terminated. The principle of non partisanship was abused so that those who behaved against it were removed in a bipartisan move. This congress paved the way for the institutional schism in the Turkish organized labor movement.

### The Schism in the Organized Labor Movement

In the 1965 general elections the heir of the Democratic Party, the Justice Party won a clear victory and formed the government on its own, yet the main novelty in the Parliament was the formation of the first socialist parliamentary constituted by fifteen TİP deputies, including two trade union leaders, namely Rıza Kuas of Lastik İş and Kemal Nebioğlu of Gıda İş. The laws in force allowed the trade union administrators to retain their positions while serving in the parliament and the other parties had trade unionist deputies as well. However, the political meaning of worker

deputies in a socialist party was different; it is alarming for some in the ruling class. This may be a factor in the purge of 1966.

The social situation is also alarming for the very same social group. Attempts at unionization were widespread especially in the industrial region around İstanbul; with differing success these initiatives changed the outlook of the industrial relations. Many independent unions unaffiliated to Türk-İş, such as Kimya İş, were developed in private businesses in the cited area, where the bulk of the industrial production is realized. The public enterprises and the other regions were not completely immune from this climate. For instance, in the Zonguldak mining basin the old grievances of miners who were underpaid compared to the staff working in the surface were expressed unusually vocal.<sup>261</sup> In Kozlu the disturbance over the distribution of bonus pays led to a militant resistance in which the army intervened, killing two miners, namely Satılmış Tepe and Mehmet Çavdar, in 1965.<sup>262</sup> This was the first incident where the workers killed by the state security forces during a protest; unfortunately, it will not be the last. The preceding chair of the miners union, Mehmet Alpdündar, was blamed for this grave incident along with the inexperienced officials in Zonguldak; Seyfi Demirsoy also mentioned the possibility of communist infiltration among the miners.<sup>263</sup> Mehmet Alpdündar soon established an independent miners' trade union.

The event with more lasting effects over the organized labor movement though was the strike in the Paşabahçe Glass Company that began in January 1966,

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<sup>261</sup> For a description of social unrest in the mining basin of Zonguldak prior to the multi party era see Turgut Etingü, *Kömür Havzasında İlk Grev*, Koza Yayınları, İstanbul, 1976.

<sup>262</sup> For a detailed account of this strike from the perspective of the company management and political authorities see Delwin A. Roy, "The Zonguldak Strike: A Case Study of Industrial Conflict in a Developing Society," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1974), pp.142-185.

<sup>263</sup> Kemal Sülker, *Sendikacılar ve Politika*, May Yayınları, İstanbul, 1975. p. 143.

just months earlier than the tumultuous sixth congress of Türk İş.<sup>264</sup> Kristal İş, at the time a small trade union only existing in Paşabahçe factory rejected the sectoral collective agreement concluded by Cam İş with its employer and declared a strike to achieve a new contract with better terms than the sectoral agreement. The employer, İş Bankası pressured the government to discipline this break away trade union and Türk İş intervened to end the strike in terms unacceptable to Kristal İş. As a reaction to the confederation's reluctance to back the Paşabahçe strike, the İstanbul based trade unions formed a coalition to support the strikers. This coalition was headed by Petrol İş, which represented officially Türk İş in the İstanbul area and which was a bastion of the democratic left faction within the confederation. The other members of the coalition was the stigmatized TİP supporters, Maden İş, Basın İş and Lastik İş, they were at odds with the Türk İş headquarters anyway, this was an instance to make clear their criticisms of the mentality ruling the confederation in Ankara.

The strike was consequential in itself. Kristal İş thanks to its reliable stand quickly developed among the glass workers and becomes the biggest trade union in its domain. However, the events leading to a schism in the Turkish organized labor movement mostly played during the spring of 1966 parallel to the drama of Paşabahçe workers. The confederation suspended temporarily the memberships of all the trade unions involved in the Paşabahçe strike. The TİP member trade union leaders were already purged from the administrative posts in the headquarters anyway. When all of their ties to Türk İş were severed, the trade unions led by TİP members began to look for alternatives and in the July 15, 1966, four trade unions, Basın İş, Maden İş, Lastik İş and Gıda İş signed the pact of trade union solidarity. The first three unions were Türk İş members, the last was an independent trade

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<sup>264</sup> For a detailed analysis of this strike see Aziz Çelik, Zafer Aydın, *Paşabahçe 1966 Gelenek Yaratan Grev*, TÜSTAV, İstanbul: 2006.



union, yet all four were led by TİP members. The contract<sup>265</sup> stipulated collaboration in all fields of union activities and pledged for further partnership. Indeed, these four trade unions joined with the miner's trade union, Türk Maden İş, constituted by Mehmet Alpdündar just after the Kozlu incident and established the Revolutionary Trade Unions Confederation (DİSK) in February 13<sup>th</sup> 1967, in İstanbul.

The new confederation located in İstanbul and headed by the chair of Maden İş, Kemal Türkler, achieved in a short time to be a centre of attraction for many independent trade unions operating especially in the private businesses of the greater İstanbul area, thus its membership figures rose constantly. From its inception onwards DİSK argued for a political struggle to achieve gains in workplaces, actually the e article of the “objectives” section of its statute states so. Indeed, it openly supported TİP during the 1969 elections in which Rıza Kuas, the chair of Lastik İş was reelected to the parliament as one of the two TİP deputies. The establishment of DİSK divides the Turkish organized labor movement permanently along sectoral and political lines. DİSK operated in private businesses and stood for a unionism engaged in class politics, however, it stemmed from the same historical tradition that created Türk İş. However, DİSK somehow represented more the legacy of the İstanbul Alliance which united in itself workers employed both in the public enterprises and the private businesses, except the adverse attitude of the government kept the workers of the public enterprises away from this new confederation.

The private businesses that were in question were investments lured into Turkey due to the necessities of import substitution. These were mostly joint enterprises between local capital and foreign multinational conglomerates. These establishments enjoyed the privileges of a protected domestic market through high

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<sup>265</sup> The articles of the pact were quoted in “SADA: Sendikalar Arası Dayanışma Anlaşması,” *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 2, Tarih Vakfı İstanbul, 1998, pp. 352-353.

tariffs and also benefited from the government incentives thus can afford to pay higher wages if challenged by the labor militancy so as to make them choose between higher costs of production and disruption of the production altogether. These companies were mostly situated around the greater İstanbul area hence close to their markets and operated in metal and chemical sectors. Originally, DİSK does not cover them many independent trade unions existed especially in the chemical sectors yet until the mid seventies almost all of them joined DİSK.

The sixties witnessed major transformations in the Turkish organized labor movement. Although this period was not the scene of a principal revolt or social protest by the workers, every strike or protest action was in itself a novelty and enjoyed higher public visibility compared to similar events of previous periods. The advantageous political opportunity structure made the organized labor, especially the trade unions, a significant actor of Turkish political landscape to be reckoned with. The government though was still reluctant to enforce the labor code in private businesses, yet militancy in large industrial enterprises by some trade unions brought success due to protected internal market conditions. The employers can easily reflect the rising labor cost in the prices. Moreover the demonstration effect of this militancy provided an ideological superiority to the labor politics. If the statistics on strikes were analyzed, on the other hand, it can easily be seen that apart from the municipality workers and bakers the period between 1963 and 1971 did not marked by an above standard striking activity.<sup>266</sup> The characteristics of the mentioned sectors, rather than a general unrest among unionized workers, were main factors in their strikes, anyway.

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<sup>266</sup> For an evaluation of strikes by municipality workers during this era see Yüksel Akkaya "Belediyelerde İşçi Hareketleri," *Praksis*, no.2, 2001, pp.270-287.

The split in the movement is the main legacy of the sixties. Under the favorable circumstances of import substitution, a more or less libertarian regime of rights and liberties and the introduction of socialism into the political system the growing unionization rates was undermined by the rival political strategies that broke the movement into two also organizationally. The controversy arose around the theoretical debate around the involvement of the organized labor movement into the politics though the parties to the argument also had concrete differences among them. Those who argue for the complete nonpartisanship enjoyed the advantage of governmental support in a regime of industrial relations where the state was the biggest employer. Those who favored a more direct relationship to the political parties on the other hand did not offer a unified bloc. Those who supported RPP, the Ecevit faction to be precise, had nothing in common with TİP members; they participated into their purge anyway. Thus the culprit of the schism was not TİP but rather the intention to eliminate class based unionism from Turkey. The seventies would witness a rise in tension between different centers of the organized labor movement.

### The Attempts to Eliminate DİSK

The import substitution strategy that eased the unionization efforts of the trade unions is prone to economic crisis that is why the libertarian atmosphere in the industrial relations is bound to disappear. The “easy phase”<sup>267</sup> of the import substitution strategy ended and the economy slowly entered in a crisis environment due to foreign exchange scarcity. The severity of the crisis was eased up until the

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<sup>267</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, (1968), pp.6-8.

mid seventies thanks to worker remittances primarily from the Turkish guest laborers in Germany. Nevertheless, when the profit margins tend to fall the ruling class felt the need to curb down the social dynamism of the working class through a restrictive reorganization of the legal institutional context designed after the 1960 coup, as the first precaution against the possible crisis. As a result the twin laws of 274 and 275 concerning the collective bargaining regime and the constitution of trade unions was set to be amended in an effort by all the parties represented in the parliament excluding TİP as early as 1970. The schism in the organized labor movement also facilitated this assault that mainly aims the radical wing of the movement embodied in DİSK.

The law no 274, the second law on trade unions that the Turkish Republic ever had, conceived a fairly liberal approach to trade union plurality. It is allowed to establish work place trade unions or national type sectoral trade unions or else to unite work place trade unions in a sectoral federation. Accordingly, it was fairly easy to establish new trade unions to challenge the established ones; moreover the membership figures were also hard to check since the workers were allowed to be members of more than one trade union. Indeed, in 1967 when DİSK was established the total unionized workers almost immediately rose. This was not caused by a real increase in unionization efforts, but rather it was the result of double memberships or even forged memberships.<sup>268</sup> As a result of their cumulated experience with the employer attitudes either public or private, the need for strong centralized unions is always expressed among the union circles. The abolition of regional alliances for the sake of strengthening of Türk İş in Ankara was the consequence of this motive. However, the real purpose of the amendment was disabling DİSK that shook the

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<sup>268</sup> Yıldırım Koç, (1986), pp.82-83.

established norms of trade union activity. The Justice Party does not want a union centre propagating politics based on class cleavages, the employers were troubled by the newly acquired inclination of defiance of their employees, Türk İş, on the other hand, was discomforted by the loss of membership and prestige. Indeed, according to Rıza Kuas, who despite his poor health came to the floor of the parliament to speak out against the draft, the Labor Minister Seyfi Öztürk expressed the desire of the government to shut down DİSK during the recently convened eighth congress of Türk İş. Seyfi Öztürk responded by reiterating the fact that only the courts possessed such an authority and not the government, but he did not deny the claim of Kuas.<sup>269</sup>

The new draft stipulated some legal obstacles limiting trade union plurality hence it gave an organizational advantage to the already established trade union centers meaning Türk İş, over the possible challengers, meaning DİSK. The main mechanism introduced by the draft to restrict trade union plurality is thresholds according to which in order to constitute a sectoral trade union an organization must enroll one third of the entire workforce employed in this sector, and in order to establish a confederation it is obligatory to organize at least one third of the entire Turkish labor. Furthermore, resigning from trade unions is attached to a lengthy legal procedure and establishing international connections turned to be a privilege recognized solely for the biggest confederation. All of these stipulations effectively meant, granting legal protection to Türk İş against the possible challengers, in this case DİSK. First of all, complicating and lengthening the resignation procedure would stop its loss of membership, since not only the trade union but also the employer could notice the resignations before they would actually took place hence they could maneuver against it. The one third thresholds favor Türk İş since it

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<sup>269</sup> The law no. 1317 that amends some articles of law no. 274 was discussed in the floor of the parliament in its 101<sup>st</sup> session. For the minutes of this session see T.C. *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*, vol. 6, 1970, pp.260-309.

already unionized the public sector that constituted the bulk of legal workforce. These stipulations would restrict militant unionism in private businesses to their workplaces hence reduce its power since it would be hard for this independent trade unions of the greater İstanbul area that began to unite under the banner of DİSK to constitute sectoral unions. Indeed, the survival of DİSK itself would be in peril.

The ratification of this law in the lower house of the parliament created uproar among the workers of greater İstanbul area whether they were DİSK members or not. DİSK was already ordered the setting up of factory committees to bring the debate over this draft to workplaces. In the 15 June workers quitted their factories in Kocaeli and İstanbul and began demonstrating in streets to protest the parliament. The next day marching columns from industrial centers tried to reach the Taksim square but since the shipping was stopped and the bridges were lifted they could not reach their target, the army was called to protect the factories and to establish order. Clashes between the army forces and the workers occurred in Kadıköy, three workers, one bystander and one policeman were killed. Martial law declared in İstanbul and Kocaeli, DİSK leaders were taken into custody. When the events calmed down about four thousand labor activists were sacked and rumored to have been blacklisted.<sup>270</sup>

The June 15-16, 1970, was unprecedented in the Turkish labor history and it seems as a spontaneous act of the masses, yet despite its unorganized nature it was alarming enough for the ruling class. The amendments of the law no. 1317 were annulled two years later by judicial review. The impact of the social resistance it created is more resilient. Within a year another military intervention through a memorandum curbed down the regime of liberties while the hold of the security

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<sup>270</sup> For an account of this episode see Yurdal Milcan, *Türkiye’de İşçi Hareketleri ve Sendikal Haklar*, Pano-Bas Matbaası, İstanbul, 1983, pp.19-21; or Doğan Özgüden, “İşçi Sınıfını Yenemeyeceklerdir,” *Ant*, July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1970, pp.2-12.

apparatus over the political system tightened through legal and extra legal means. The politics was also reshaped through the closure of TİP by the constitutional court and the conclusive victory of the democratic left faction in RPP. This change was confirmed in the results of the 1973 general elections.<sup>271</sup> Parallel to these developments Turkish organized labor movement entered into a new phase.

This attempt to eradicate the institutional basis of militant unionism was responded by the spontaneous reaction of the working class in the industrial heartland of the country. The two days of rioting demonstrated the capability of the working class and influenced both the future developments and the balance of political forces. First of all the RPP supporters within Türk İş began to voice their criticisms against the principle of nonpartisanship more loudly, shortly some of them will began to collaborate more closely with DİSK. The Disk officials in their turn would try to profit from this collaboration along with their rising membership figures for establishing their confederation as a mainstream trade union center. This means a shift of focus from shop floor militancy to interference into the national politics yet not by playing to both establishment parties as tradition dictates but by trying to influence RPP. Indeed the polarized political climate of the seventies complicated the efforts of Türk İş to remain bipartisan. Their rivalry with DİSK pushed their headquarters to closely collaborate with the security apparatus worried about the possibilities of rising labor militancy. In fact, the failed amendments to the institutional context created by the 1961 constitution and to the relevant laws will be realized after the military intervention in 1980 when the crisis of import substitution became acute.

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<sup>271</sup> For an analysis of the 1973 general elections see Ergun Özbudun, Frank Tachau, "Social Change and Electoral Behaviour in Turkey: Toward a 'Critical Realignment'?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 6 (October, 1975), pp.460-480.

## Shift in DİSK's Political Tendency

As the democratic left movement gathered strength inside the RPP, they began more vocal in their criticism of non-partisan unionism. Türk İş was pressurized both from outside by the declarations of RPP leaders, most importantly Bülent Ecevit, and from inside on similar grounds. These criticisms triggered concrete moves challenging the status quo in the Türk İş headquarters from 1971 onwards. In the January of 1971, four influential trade union leaders offered a report to the Türk İş administrative council, demanding to construct a clear political strategy for the confederation. They argued that non partisanship meant supporting the government so as to make Turkish labor force peons of liberal capitalist parties. Their solution was simple Türk İş must take side with a democratic left social bloc in order to establish social democracy in Turkey. The full text of this report was made public by DİSK. Its authors were Abdullah Baştürk from Genel İş, Halit Mısırlıoğlu from Yol İş, İsmail Topkar from Petrol İş and Feridun Şakir Öğünç from Deniz Ulaş İş, all known RPP members, some were members of parliament.

The administrative council preferred to ignore the report since it can neither reject nor approve it for the sake of maintaining unity within the confederation. Türk İş has accepted twenty four principles;<sup>272</sup> all of them related to social justice and development goals, in order to dodge the claims of neglect of politics. They always reaffirm their attachment to these principles against the arguments of supporting democratic left. However, as the 1973 general elections approached the RPP members, especially trade union activists, were not satisfied with such responses, as a result in July of the same year they published a manifesto making their political

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<sup>272</sup> For a complete list of these principles and their explanations see Türkiye Şeker Sanayi İşçileri Sendikası, *Türk İş İlkeleri Açıklamalar ve Uygulamalar*, Şeker İş Yayınları, no.33, Ankara, 1974.



ideas public.<sup>273</sup> This voluminous pamphlet, signed by the leaders of twelve trade unions<sup>274</sup>, explained why they are against firstly, liberal capitalism and then Marxism, next they set to describe their understanding of social democracy as a third way distinct from the other two alternatives. Their version of social democracy though, similar to twenty four principles of Türk İş, are a compilation of developmental goals and social justice measures.<sup>275</sup> The affinity of these ideas to the arguments of democratic left faction now ruling the RPP is apparent when it is compared to an article published in the first issue of the journal *Özgür İnsan*, the official mouth piece of this group.<sup>276</sup> As the elections approached the pressure for an open declaration by the trade unions supporting RPP grew stronger, but did not produce any result. Clearly, without a change in leadership Türk İş would hardly begin backing RPP.

The pamphlet of social democratic unionism was prepared to be a political platform for the social democratic unionists in the approaching Türk İş general congress. Apparently, the new RPP was not satisfied anymore with the status quo in Türk İş and wanted to redesign it in line with its new political strategy. However, the ninth general congress turned to be a major defeat for the social democratic unionists. Their report was rejected on the grounds that the working class had to deal with more pressing issues, and none of their candidates were chosen to the administrative posts in the confederation. The results amounted to be another purge, made after seven years of the first one. Not all of the trade union militants who were

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<sup>273</sup> *Türk İşçi Hareketi İçin Sosyal Demokrat Düzen: İlkeler Amaçlar Yöntem*, Oleyis Yayınları, Ankara, 1971.

<sup>274</sup> The newly added eight trade unions were Besin İş, OLEYİS, Ges İş, Kristal İş, Sağlık İş, Tez Büro İş, Harb İş and DYF İş.

<sup>275</sup> For an evaluation of the strategy put forth by social democratic unionists see Yıldırım Koç, "Türkiye'de Sosyal Demokrasi ve Sendikacılık," *11. Tez*, vol. 4, 1986, pp.107-139.

<sup>276</sup> Şükrü Koç, "Türk İşçi Hareketinde Sosyal Demokrat Düzen," *Özgür İnsan*, no.1, (June 1972).

RPP members felt offended though, but those who were closely connected to the democratic left faction understood that it is in vain to struggle in Türk İş in order to create a Scandinavian type trade union center. Some of them would commence to prepare for the constitution of a social democratic federation with little success. Such a federation was established in the fall of 1978 with Feridun Sakir Ögünç as its chair, yet it died down without any real impact on the organized labor movement. However, the propaganda activity to enlist workers to the ranks of RPP did not lose its vitality because of these defeats.<sup>277</sup>

DİSK, on the other hand, tried to accommodate itself to the necessities of the new era. TİP was closed down after the military memorandum of 1971 and the ensuing developments. The unity of the socialist political forces seemed to be an impossible objective henceforth, yet DİSK and affiliated unions was still a center of attraction for small, radical, independent trade unions, moreover their geographical reach began to extend beyond the borders of the industrialized Marmara region. The DİSK affiliated trade unions which were organized in the heavily protected industrial sectors, such as Maden İş, Lastik İş and Kimya İş, enjoyed a lofty reputation for signing advantageous collective bargaining agreements.<sup>278</sup> Before the 1973 general elections DİSK declared its open support for RPP, now under the firm control of Bülent Ecevit, for the first time. Declaring open support for a political party prior to the general elections was the DİSK's answer to the nonpartisanship of Türk İş. In 1969 DİSK supported TİP in the same way, but during the two general elections held in the seventies DİSK would stood by the RPP.

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<sup>277</sup> For an illustration of the propaganda efforts by the social democratic unionists see Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, *İşçiler CHP'de Birleşelim*, Akış Basımevi, Ankara, 1973.

<sup>278</sup> For a detailed description of a collective bargaining process conducted by Maden İş see Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, *Erdemir Grevinin İç Yüzü*, DİSK Yayınları no.11, İstanbul, 1974.

The 21<sup>st</sup> general congress of Maden İş held in September 1974, witnessed an important development for Turkish organized labor movement. The faction that would be known as Unity and Solidarity, in alliance with the old leadership of the trade union, was elected to the central administration. The newly elected included Mehmet Ertürk the general secretary, and Mehmet Karaca as one of the vice presidents. This faction, and their motto of social progress itself, belonged to the illegal Turkish Communist Party (TKP) which was reinvigorated after the military intervention when some young cadres from the abolished TİP adhered to the party.<sup>279</sup> These young cadres with the help of seasoned trade union leaders who already had relationships with the illegal party that operated from Leipzig in Eastern Germany, such as İbrahim Güzelce from Basın İş, left their mark on the fifth general congress of DİSK convened in the may of 1975, in which İbrahim Güzelce was elected as the general secretary of the confederation. This congress was symbolic not only in its overly political message, but also in its guest list full of Eastern European trade union leaders. After 1975 many young members of the party were employed in DİSK headed by Aydın Meriç, a former member of TİP Şişli county council, the top aide to the general secretary who was also a member of the political bureau of TKP. Thanks to their hold in DİSK and Maden İş, the influence of the party also spread to other trade unions especially to Bank Sen, and Baysen.

The only symbol of the politicization of the organized labor though apparently was not the reemergence of TKP at the heart of an important trade union. Besides the gigantic spontaneous uprising of the 15 and 16 June, the unionized workers were also confident in their power and ready for social mobilization in order to reach their objectives, especially in protected sectors of the industry, the most

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<sup>279</sup> Yusuf Doğan Çetinkaya, Mustafa Gökem Doğan, “TKP’nin Sosyalizmi (1920-1990)” in Murat Gültekinil (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce: Sol*. İstanbul: 2007, İletişim Yayınları, pp. 330-334.

important being the metal sector. In these circumstances, for very different reasons some groups, from employers to security officials of the state, were extremely unhappy with the hegemony of Maden İş in the metal sector. Türk İş obviously was no exception that is why they try to forge a national central trade union out of the Metal federation affiliated to their confederation. Right after the formation of the new trade union Türk Metal in 1973, the social democratic unionists in the metal sector broke up from Türk İş and established Çağdaş Metal İş, in the December of the same year, under the leadership of Fehmi Işıklar who was an active member of RPP. It is rumored that this division was related to the attempts to establish a social democratic confederation. When this attempt failed Çağdaş Metal İş merged with Maden İş in 1976 when a significant portion of those social democratic trade unions that left Türk İş decided to infiltrate into DİSK. Türk Metal, on the other hand, under the direction of Mustafa Özbek, entered into a bloody struggle against Maden İş that caused the death of some workers from either side in order to contain Maden İş to the greater İstanbul area where it was already powerful. The most sinister instances of this struggle took place in Seydişehir in 1975, and Bursa in 1976.

The shift in DİSK's attitude towards the political parties of the establishment, its approach to RPP must be evaluated within the polarized political atmosphere of the seventies and the fact that DİSK represented a minority tendency within the Turkish organized labor movement. A possible bond to RPP might mend the initial weakness of DİSK, enlarge its reach in the organized labor and reinforce its attempts to ameliorate the gains of its members in the bargaining table. This signifies a reorientation of the focus from workplaces to Ankara politics by the part of the movement which was mainly operational in private businesses around the industrial

heartland of the country. One must note that this shift was in line with its earlier tradition inherited from the İstanbul Alliance.

Between 1975 and 1977 the political tendency of DİSK was based on a call for the building of a national democratic front against imperialism and its social and political representation inside the country. This policy, in conjunction with the political platform of the Turkish Communist Party, was based on the possibility of a potential alliance with RPP and the legalization of TKP. That is why DİSK tried to remain close to RPP without losing a critical distance. However, the same critical sympathy was not extended to the other leftist political currents that were active in some trade unions affiliated to DİSK. In some instances the confederation headquarters intervened into the mergers of trade unions affiliated to DİSK to ensure the purge of socialist activists from different political tendencies, such as in the unison between Kimya İş and Petkim İş or else relied to disciplinary mechanisms to penalize their leftist opponents.<sup>280</sup> Yet, around this period DİSK conducted also purely political campaigns with great success. For instance, the protest against the reinstitution of the State Security Courts was one of few instances in which a labor organization acted on purely political grounds.<sup>281</sup> Prior to this trade unions organized demonstrations to damn communism, or anti imperialist campaigns stressing economic and political independence of the country, all of these were somehow legitimate demands for the Turkish society general. In this campaign DİSK first created a public awareness through various means and declared a day of mourning in the September 16, 1976, amounting to a political general strike, first of its kind in

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<sup>280</sup> İlhan Akalın, *Kısa DİSK Tarihi (1960-1980)*, Öteki Yayınevi, İstanbul, 1995, pp.119-127.

<sup>281</sup> Üzeyir Ataman, “DGM Direnişi,” in *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 1, Tarih Vakfı İstanbul, 1996, pp. 304-305.

Turkey, generating a widespread support also from other progressive mass organizations.

The strategy of DİSK in such campaigns was to politicize the working class struggle in an unprecedented manner. The most symbolic attempt in this respect was the May Day procession. The May Day was celebrated as a labor festival until the mid twenties mostly in İstanbul. However during the thirties it was only referred as the spring festival, its international connotations was overly disturbing for the regime. In 1976, DİSK organized a fascinating worker march to celebrate the May Day with great success. The next year DİSK organized a bigger celebration, with approximately three hundred thousand people coming all over the country. Unfortunately, this time the parade turned to be a bloody carnage due to the unidentified gunmen shooting onto the crowd, killing thirty four people. Despite the grim memory of 1977, in 1978 a still larger crowd gathered in a show of defiance, yet this time the marchers were leftist activists rather than workers, the next year the authorities banned the rally. The May Day celebration signified the resurgence of Turkish left following the decades of repression.<sup>282</sup> That is the very reason why the ban continued until the mid nineties.

All the same, from a purely union experience perspective, outside of a few examples, the trade unions affiliated to DİSK did not provide many episodes surpassing the established pattern of collective bargaining regime. Their overall political strategy summarized in the motto of national democratic front did not relate to an alternative industrial relations regime, hence remained in the limits of any somehow democratic capitalist country that protect its infant industries by subsidizing its domestic market through funding the purchasing power of the

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<sup>282</sup> Seyla Benhabib, "The Next Iran or the Next Brazil: Right Wing Groups Behind Political Violence in Turkey," *MERIP Reports*, no.77, May 1979, pp.16-17.

workers. The exceptions were a few relatively smaller trade unions, such as ASİS in wood working or Yeraltı Maden İş in mining. These trade unions in the later part of the seventies created unique experiences of worker democracy while conducting their struggles. Especially Yeraltı Maden İş achieved a major success by continuing the production after its employer left the mines to curb down the power of the trade union.<sup>283</sup> The soviet type workplace organization based on grass root democracy in Amasya Yeniçelttek administered the mine from the May of 1980, until the coup d'état of the same year.

### Political Machinations within the Organized Labor Movement

The year 1976 witnessed a major transformation in the internal constitution of DİSK. The demise of the chance of social democratic unionism to gain control of Türk İş, and their plain inability to act as a unified bloc eliminating the possibility to found a new confederation, resulted in the merger between DİSK and some of the social democratic trade union centers beginning with Ges İş in 1975. Later that year Tekstil, the trade union established a decade earlier by those purged from TEKSİF also joined the ranks of DİSK. The real wave of social democratic infiltration came in 1976, when Çağdaş Metal İş joined Maden İş, and Genel İş adhered to DİSK. The membership of Genel İş that operated in municipal services was not less than Maden İş thus effectively ending its hegemony over DİSK. Moreover, the municipality workers were known for their militancy in expressing their social and economic demands. Abdullah Baştürk, the seasoned chair of Genel İş was an early devotee of democratic left faction, yet in the mid sixties his relationship to Ecevit, thus to RPP

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<sup>283</sup> Ömer Laçiner, "Yeraltı Maden İş Olayı Üzerine," Birikim, no.32, October, 1977, pp.66-70.

was deteriorated. The sixth general congress of DİSK convened in the December of 1977 witnessed the replacement of Unity and Solidarity faction by the social democratic unionists. Abdullah Baştürk was elected as president, and Fehmi Işıklar as the general secretary. The new administration purged almost all of the staff in DİSK headquarters since they were members of TKP. In the following months OLEYİS, the İstanbul branch of TOLEYİS federation participated DİSK now dominated by social democrats. Turizm İş the trade union already affiliated to DİSK was forced to merge with older and richer OLEYİS, though Turizm İş was established as a reaction to the passivity of OLEYİS, in the first place.

The dilemma that the TKP member unionist faced was ironic, they achieved to meet with the social democrats in a national democratic organization, namely DİSK, yet the cost for them was to be eliminated from the administration and the worse has yet to come. The new headquarters had to recourse to disciplinary measures as the social unrest rose and the social struggles got to be more violent in the country. The worker and leftist activists were under constant threat of bodily harm, and the DİSK headquarters was under the close scrutiny of the government, as a result Abdullah Baştürk and his colleagues felt the need to control tightly the leash of its organization. Ironically, the disciplinary measures that Kemal Türkler had to rely in dealing with socialist affiliates other than TKP, was now used against himself and his Maden İş, its general secretary Mehmet Ertürk was ousted from the trade union.

Türk İş, on the other hand, entered the seventies as an enfeebled trade union center due to the loss of membership moreover important affiliates such as Genel İş left the confederation during the decade. However, its grasp over public enterprises remained unchallenged, a status that was secured also by the ominous organizational



tactics by Türk Metal. The oldest confederation in the country was encircled by expressly political alternative trade union centers. The ultra nationalists close to National Action Party (MHP) established MİSK in the June of 1970 right after the events of 15 and 16 June and the religious conservatives close to National Salvation Party (MSP) founded Hak İş in the October of 1976;<sup>284</sup> at its left DİSK was already a major force. The right winger confederations did not constitute a genuine alternative up until the eighties when MİSK died down anyway, whereas Hak İş turned to be a credible force within the Turkish organized labor movement.

Türk İş, though, achieved to remain faithful to its pledge of non partisanship amidst these developments. Indeed, the departure of social democratic trade unionists did not harm its look of neutrality, since a significant group of social democrats remained within Türk İş, Abdullah Baştürk, the main name among the departed was not in good terms with Ecevit, and the Justice Party was no more the sole party of power during the seventies. Loyal to its traditional strategy of lobbying in Ankara, Türk İş did not look like the appendage of the governing party unlike the sixties since when the cabinet formed through fragile coalitions hence changed frequently, the bargaining power, therefore independence of a lobbyist trade union such as Türk İş rose. Türk İş though did not lack a conviction about how the government should be formed. They staunchly supported a great coalition between the Justice Party and RPP.<sup>285</sup> Obviously, they were worried from the destabilizing effect that the minor right winger parties can create along with their subordinate union centers.

The congress held in 1976 after the death of Seyfi Demirsoy witnessed the rehabilitation of the social democratic unionists that did not quit the confederation.

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<sup>284</sup> For an account of Hak İş and its relation to MSP during this period see Yıldırım Koç, "Hak İş Konfederasyonu (1976-1980)" *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, vol.18, no. 171, 1994, pp. 40-46.

<sup>285</sup> Yıldırım Koç, (1986), pp.76-77.

However, it was clear that their influence was profoundly weakened. Halil Tunç, the new chairman, had friendlier relations with Ecevit compared to Demirsoy, who was unreceptive to the democratic left tendency. Moreover, it seems that the new Türk İş headquarters was slightly more inclined to interfere into the politics through mass actions. When the mid seventies arrived though, mass actions ceased to be a novelty for the organized labor movement anyway.

The most tumultuous exploit that the confederation undertook was a general warning act against the increased anti union pressures by the employers. Halil Tunç after a press conference made in İzmir in which he notified the mass media on the illegal attempts to weaken the trade unions, declared a day of action. The next day, in the June 16, 1975, he personally switched of the electricity in Alsancak power plant. This highly symbolic act, condemned in a penal court, conveyed a message about a possible shift in the strategy of the confederation, yet the political and economic development in the country were not favorable for this confederation to adopt a new mentality of struggle stretching its traditional limits. In the aftermath of 1978, with the deepening of the social, political and economic crisis that the country went through, Türk İş became more inert.

Türk İş also gave up its insistence on non-partisanship at least in discourse after the tenth congress in which the relevant clause of the statute was amended, yet this was a change with little practical consequence. The principle of non-partisanship was not a mere stipulation of the statute, it is rather the symbol of the cumulated wisdom required to keep trade union business in Ankara operates smoothly without endangering the established position of the organized labor vis-à-vis the government and also it is an idiom of unity for the public sector workers that depended on local political networks for employment. Nevertheless, the prestige and the trustworthiness

of the confederation were somehow shaken because of the practical developments that it caused and the new headquarters wanted to mend these damages. That is why Türk İş approached the issue as an academic debate, rather than a political choice of strategy. Accordingly, Türk İş headquarters sent a letter to the two major parties asking them specific question on their policy positions on issues relevant to labor.<sup>286</sup> The Justice Part sent a short reply gently warning Türk İş to stay clear of political issues whereas RPP stated clearly its position and asserted that Türk İş as a rule must support its policy stand.<sup>287</sup>

This transformation though reflected itself in a unique incident when Türk İş and the governing party, namely RPP, signed a social contract in July 20<sup>th</sup> 1978. This contract was based on a compromise according to which the government promised to reform the labor regime and to provide for the worker participation in the administration of public enterprises in return for a wage policy on the basis of the figures from 1976. The main aim of the contract was to control labor costs especially in capital goods produced exclusively by state economic enterprises where Türk İş is active, in order to subsidize the private businesses that relied on this input to continue its assembly based industrial production. The private employers and DİSK, which was active in private businesses, were not parties to this contract, thus from its very conception the idea was flawed and it can only be beneficial to the few monopsonists that bought the output of state economic enterprises. This attempt to sign a European type social contract failed utterly and clearly.<sup>288</sup> However, what mattered was the

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<sup>286</sup> For a brief description of this issue see Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, *Batı Ülkelerinde Uygulama Örnekleriyle İşçi Politika Sendika Parti İlişkileri*, Türk İş Yayınları, no. 92, Ankara, 1976.

<sup>287</sup> For the full texts of these replies see Türkiye Tekstil Örne ve Giyim Sanayii İşçileri Sendikası, *Türkiye’de İşçi Sendikaları ve Siyasi Partilerle İlişkileri*, TEKSİF yayınları, no.208, Ankara, 1979, pp.89-133.

fact that Türk İş and the Ecevit government made a move to cooperate in the style of Scandinavian policy making. This symbolizes a distinct instance for both RPP and the organized labor in which they attempted to make a step forward towards politicizing their relations, and they failed.<sup>289</sup>

### The Crisis of Import Substitution

The parameters of the industrial relations severely transformed from the mid seventies onwards when the foreign exchange shortage hampered the pursuit of import substitution policies. Unable to find the necessary foreign currencies to import the capital goods, the main input of its assembly industry, Turkey fell into the grip of a profound economic and political crisis. The labor organizations unionized in the protected sectors of the industry were no longer in a position to achieve their objectives through collective bargaining backed by workplace militancy. Indeed, such militancy became widespread after 1978 because of the deteriorating income and working conditions, yet its success were infrequent, furthermore the attacks against protesting workers by the right winger rogues augmented. As the security situation worsened and purchasing power of the wage earners evaporated due to inflation, the days lost in strikes skyrocketed in this period. The Ecevit government powerless to cope with the crisis signed a stand-by agreement with IMF in July 20<sup>th</sup> 1979, and the following Demirel government in line with the stand-by agreement

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<sup>288</sup> For a review of the theoretization of such agreements see Leo Panitch, "Recent Theorizations of Corporatism: Reflections on a Growth Industry," *British Journal of Sociology*, no. 31-2, (June 1980), pp.159-187.

<sup>289</sup> For an evaluation of the social contract signed between RPP government and Türk İş see Ufuk Tufanoğlu, *Labor union-political party relations in Turkey: the failure of the people's party's experience*, (unpublished M.A. thesis) BÜ Pils, İstanbul, 1988.

effectively ended the strategy of import substitution by the economic precautions package declared in the January 24, 1980.

According to Şevket Pamuk, at the end of the seventies the most important link that Turkey had with the capitalist world economy is the large international debt resulting from import substitution industrialization.<sup>290</sup> Indeed, the foreign exchange crisis was a widespread result that the countries opted for import substitution went through, unless they achieve to create internationally competitive sectors by the end of the first phase of the substitution strategy, also known as the easy phase. Second stage import substitution, on the other hand, if not properly managed, involves overvalued exchange rates and anti export bias due to prolonged protection of certain industrial sectors and the need to import capital goods widely. Moreover, the countries involved in a long-drawn-out policy of import substitution tended to lose their market share in their traditional exports, mostly agricultural products.<sup>291</sup> The natural result of these side effects is a severe foreign exchange crisis, which occurred in Turkey after 1974. Prior to this date the remittances from Turkish guest workers contributed to cover for the deficit, hence delayed the crisis and contributed to its severity.

As said by Haldun Gülalp, the economic policy orientation of the late seventies aimed to overcome the imminent crisis of the strategy of import substitution, by promoting all types of foreign exchange earning activities, yet he also argues that these policies also target to curb down labor militancy and achieve monopolization of capital.<sup>292</sup> The emphasis on producing for exports rather than domestic markets is in itself detrimental to the established bargaining strategy of the

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<sup>290</sup> Şevket Pamuk, (1981), p.30.

<sup>291</sup> Bela Balassa, (1983), p.432.

<sup>292</sup> Haldun Gülalp, (1985), p. 340.

trade unions organized in the protected sectors such as metal and chemistry. Indeed, the strained relationships between MESS headed by Turgut Özal, the employers union of the metal sector, and Maden İş the hegemonic trade union of the metal sector, the backbone of DİSK, was emblematic of these years. MESS even published two volumes containing the names of striking workers in 1980.<sup>293</sup>

The data on strikes demonstrate a rise in the strikes occurring in the sector of manufactured goods toward 1980, whereas during the earlier period only municipality workers and bakers had such a propensity to strike.<sup>294</sup> Indeed, the working class was among the beneficiaries of the import substitution strategy, up until 1979 their wages increase in comparison to the added value that they created. Especially the public sector workers enjoyed an increase in their income between 1973 and 1979. The data demonstrates that up until 1979, the workers, with a slight disadvantage for those employed in private businesses shared in the spoils of the economic policies related to import substitution, whereas the producers of wage goods and the sellers of agricultural products, meaning farmers and state economic enterprises were among the primary losers of these policies.<sup>295</sup> It seems that when the anticipated crisis of the import substitution hit the country the workers were the first to be left out from the coalition of beneficiaries even before the dismissal of import substitution. This is illustrated by the sheer number and intensity of the social struggles that rose steeply from 1978 onwards.

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<sup>293</sup> Yüksel Akkaya, “Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık-2,” *Praksis*, no.6, 2002, pp.63-101, p.84.

<sup>294</sup> Yüksel Akkaya, “Türkiye İmalat Sanayiinde Emek ile Sermaye Arasındaki Bölüşüm Sorunu”, ODTÜ Congress of International Economics V, 11-14 September 2002.

<sup>295</sup> Korkut Boratav, “Import Substitution and Income Distribution under a Populist Regime: The Case of Turkey” *Development Policy Review*, vol.4, no.2, (1986), pp.117-139.

The strikes, especially in the metal sector, proliferates in the last two years preceding the coup d'état,<sup>296</sup> however not all of the strikes were against the desires of the employers. The legal procedure of striking is lengthy and its timing is predictable very accurately due to the elaborate stipulations of the relevant law and regulations. As a result the trade unions were unable to strike at periods when they can squeeze the employers; to the contrary it is known that employers sometimes trigger strikes in order to empty their stocks. The days lost in strikes are particularly long in Turkey, private sector strikes being lengthier and show some seasonal patterns validating the argument that the employers also have recourse to manipulate striking procedure in times of need. Clearly, the end of the seventies, a period when the foreign exchange shortage made impossible to import capital goods handicapped industrial production, was an ideal time to stop the production and resorting to unpaid holidays in the guise of strikes. Therefore, the multiplying social struggles and resistance of those years was neither the result of a planned strategy by the organized labor movement nor a sign of strength of the labor, to the contrary this burgeoning was the result of a reaction to protect the already acquired rights and in a sense this was a sign of weakness. The fact that the rights and relative economic gains were threatened can be illustrated by the reversal of statistical figures that recorded good numbers for labor from the sixties onwards. For instance the purchasing power of workers dropped in 1979 despite the increasing militancy.<sup>297</sup> The year 1980 witnessed many wildcat strikes and rank and file militancy of DİSK members outside the control of the headquarters. This year was also the biennial collective bargaining year of the

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<sup>296</sup> For an enumeration of the legal strikes that were organized after 1963, until 1980 see Türkiye Denizciler Sendikası, *Türkiye'de Yapılan Grevlerin Nitel ve Nicel Değerlendirilmesi (1963-1980)*, Sema Matbaacılık, İstanbul, 1987.

<sup>297</sup> Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, *1979 Ekonomik Rapor*, DİSK yayınları, no.35, İstanbul, 1980, p.22.

public sector workers; hence many more incidents of labor resistance were expected. That is the very reason why IMF suggested the freezing of the collective bargaining regime for a five years term in the spring of 1980.

As the combativity of the workers increase rapidly, the ability of DİSK headquarters to lead these struggles lessen. The two incidents illustrating this were the Tariş resistance in İzmir and the strike at Yeniçelttek mine led by Yeraltı Maden İş. In both instances dated to 1980, “the DİSK bureaucrats were determined to preserve their position as respectable, law abiding negotiators and not antagonize the state beyond a certain point”<sup>298</sup> whereas the rank and file stepped forward to move beyond the limits of political and economic order. The history of DİSK as an alternative center of labor movement that stemmed from the critique of Türk İş, created very few episodes that broke with the routine of industrial relations regime first constituted in 1947. DİSK in itself did not represent a rupture from that pattern; rather it was a critique of nonpartisanship principle as applied then by the Türk İş headquarters that purged the bearers of this critique anyway. Indeed, later the social democratic unionists, the staunch supporters of democratic left faction in RPP, expressed the same criticism proving that this was a legitimate concern among some unionists, and not a radical rift in the organized labor movement. The only moments that provide the hints of such a rupture came in the context of the political opportunity structure conditioned by the crisis of import substitution and on the basis of grassroots democracy that the ideological atmosphere of radical populism of the seventies nurtured.<sup>299</sup> Those two incidents of resistance from 1980 also proved the

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<sup>298</sup> Ronnie Marguiles, Ergin Yıldızoğlu, “Trade Unions and Turkey’s Working Class,” *MERIP Reports*, no. 121, (February 1984), p.19.

<sup>299</sup> For an evaluation of the radical populism among the leftist political groups during the seventies see Necmi Erdoğan, “Demokratik Soldan Devrimci Yol’a: 1970’lerde Sol Popülizm Üzerine Notlar,” *Toplum ve Bilim*, no.78, (Fall 1998), pp.22-37.



increasing influence of leftist activist recently introduced to the socialist ideas. They were not a trifling force in the rank and file of the organized labor movement, anymore. The military intervention would attempt to annihilate their impact yet their imprint however tiny would be there to stay.

### The Legacy of the Decades of Import Substitution

What was the legacy of the cumulated wisdom of the Turkish organized labor movement inherited by the next generation of union militants that had to struggle in a political environment completely transformed due to the 1980 coup d'état, and elaborated by the following civilian government. The historical trajectory of the Turkish organized labor movement that it followed through, subsequent to its inception in the second part of the forties constructed a tradition that conditions its future strategic choices and political reactions. This tradition, the sedated sum of its past choices and defining experiences even constricted the options present to the movement in critical junctures that would define its future. Naturally what was meant is not a deterministic relationship devoid of human agency. The meanings of historical events are construed or even invented *ex post* by the human actors and these interpretations of past events became the building blocs of present, in an ever contested way since these events are always open to reinterpretations.<sup>300</sup> Therefore, not only the past itself but also its current interpretation matters in framing the likely choices made by the movement.

The emergence of the attempts at unionization was often spontaneous reactions to the major changes in the legal institutional context that mold the

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<sup>300</sup> William H. Sewell, jr. "Historical Events as Transformation of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille," *Theory and Society* vol.25 no.6, (December 1996), pp.841-881

industrial relations regime. This is one of the defining traits of the Turkish organized labor movement; workplace activists always tried to benefit from opportune situations and established local hubs of activity at the grassroots level. The first wave of strikes for instance took place immediately after the reinstitution of the constitutional rights of the Ottoman citizens or else immediately after the removal of the ban on class based societies in 1946, the first trade unions were established. Indeed these developments confirm the claims of the political process approach of the social movements' literature, which basically argues that the favorable political opportunity structures, for instance a political cleavage among the traditional elites that weakens the political pressure over the subordinated sectors of the society, contributed to the initiation of the social movements and protests.<sup>301</sup> If proper conditions were met, people tend to act collectively to ameliorate their social economic and political position using routines known earlier or through manners imported from different domains of social experience.<sup>302</sup> All in all, the laborers both in the Ottoman era and then the republican era resisted against the transformation that the capitalist relations of production brought to their life by relying on their already existing tool kit of protest or by adapting some content of this tool kit to the new era. The government authorities, on the other hand, made rules both to further the articulation of the country to the capitalist world system and to protect the labor force in order to augment the national productivity from the mid nineteenth century onwards.

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<sup>301</sup> Y. Doğan Çetinkaya, "Tarih ve Kuram Arasında Toplumsal Hareketler," in Y. Doğan Çetinkaya (ed.), *Toplumsal Hareketler Tarih, Teori ve Deneyim*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2008, pp. 24-25.

<sup>302</sup> For an example of social learning through importing old patterns and routines to new contexts see John F. Padgett, Paul McLean, "Organizational Invention and Elite Transformation: The Birth of Partnership Systems in Renaissance Florence," *American Journal of Sociology*, no.111, (March 2006), pp.1463-1568.

Turkish governments try to balance their developmental needs with attempts to control the industrialization process and delimit its consequences. They seemed to be particularly worried of internationalist influences over the labor force and often cited nationalism as a required quality for workers. As illustrated by the Labor Code of 1936, Ankara was always reluctant to recognize the collective rights of the workers; instead it tries to bestow individual protection to the workers through legal institutional means and tried to safeguard its workers through legislation. One must note that the existence of these legal measures does not guarantee their application and most of the times the workers had to struggle against their managers or local government officials to make these regulations work. They can also act to demand further mechanisms to guarantee their implementation to the benefit of workers. This struggle constitutes the backbone of unionization activity in the Turkish case. Apparently, this confrontation did not create a rift among the workers and the state officials since the trade unions can always find supporters in Ankara past their immediate superintendents making lobbying in Ankara or having a connection to the establishment parties a valuable tool in solving labor struggles. However, this was not relevant for private businesses. Ankara and its established political class were always disinclined to enforce the stipulations of the Labor Code in private businesses. It does not possess the necessary means and resources, especially considering the small businesses, anyway. Therefore, the republican governments were always complicit in the transgressions of the Labor Code by the private businesses, yet since the bulk of the large industrial establishments were owned by state, the public enterprises nevertheless set a minimum standard of conduct for private businesses, too. This means that the public sector was the primary mean through which the state implemented its social policy.

It is clear that the lopsided weight of the public sector does not mean that the employer of the public sector workers, the state in other words, is primarily responsible for the establishment of the trade unions. Unlike the corporatist Spain or Portugal, Ankara never tried to constitute official trade unions. Many of the influential trade unions began as factory initiatives of a handful of worker activists, in several instances encouraged by the local party bosses of the major parties. Whatever their origins were, they developed at later stages in close cooperation with the state authorities. TEKSİF for instance can be traced back to the Defterdar and Bakırköy Sümerbank factories or Kristal İş to the Paşabahçe glass factory. The bodies like İstanbul Trade Union Alliance, which had a more official outlook and established by the direct intervention of the government, were first and foremost aimed at to channel the already existing and weak local hubs of worker organizations into economic and political objectives parallel to the constituent ideology of the republic, its social philosophy and even its foreign policy priorities. While the governments search to control trade unions by collaborating closely with them, this cooperation also strengthen and develop trade unions financially and organizationally.

The last three chapters tried to make a balance of accounts of the Turkish organized labor movement at the threshold of the cataclysmic transformation of the 1980. Definitely, its involvement first with RPP than the Democratic Party made an innate impact into the genetic imprint of Turkish trade unionism. A movement constructed from bottom up conceived to form a top down organizational framework as its main objective through its emphasis on being strong in Ankara. This path of development and history of collaboration with the establishment in Ankara creates a consistent view about the social norms and obligations, the proper economic

functions of parties to the regime of industrial relations. The era of import substitution institutionalized some of these features, reinforced some others while transforming the size and significance of the movement. This total transformation and the strategic choices made during the process created a historically developed set of institutional arrangements, norms and practices between the Turkish governments and the trade unions concerning the conduct of the regime of industrial relations and the relevant decision making process.

The bureaucratic nature, the reliance on state and perceiving the grassroots level as a primitive stage that must be surpassed, rather than the constitutive unit of any organizational policy were all consequences that empowered the organized labor movement behind the protective walls erected by import substitution strategy. Moreover, the unionized workers continued to form a relatively privileged sector of the working class and their ties to the establishment discourage them to incorporate the demands of the other segments of the class apart from the few instances from the late seventies. The import substitution strengthened the trade unions yet it did not push them to speak for the class in general but mostly for their members alone. The features of the labor movement nurtured during the import substitution era implanted a debilitating frailty, which may undermine the organizational structure of the trade unions in a hostile social and political environment, since after all the real strength must stem from the workplaces, not the lobby in Ankara and the legitimacy of the lobby in Ankara can not generate solely by the union members but the workers in general.

The deep crisis of the late seventies demolished every established pattern of industrial relationships regime. The most important aspect of the new situation arisen from the crisis is the reluctance of Ankara in maintaining its collaboration with trade

unions that it developed through the years so resolutely in order to block any possible infusion of non national ideals into the labor force. The ideal of social solidarity, a family heirloom of solidarist social philosophy of important ideologues of Young Turks, was eradicated because the new era had to be marked by the hegemony of the rational market idea. The coming era is even hostile to the populist arrangements that were thought to be the underlying motive of the previous history of the Turkish Republic and blamed for its underdevelopment effectively discrediting at the level of discourse, solidarism and the populist politics built upon it. The blame though was not put on the ruling elite directly, but the workers and trade unions were implied to be among the responsible explicitly. Despite the fact that the workers are receptive of the legal institutional context constructed to bring about development without the danger of communism, that the ruling class is so afraid of, the trade unions were blamed and never enjoyed the legitimacy of the sixties and the seventies. The turbulent three years beginning from 1978 stretching to the years under the military regime efficiently criminalized the memoirs of the workplace militancy by the junta and the following civilian government.

Indeed, it will be misleading to assume that the experience of the unionized sectors infused into the larger masses of urban poor. The working class itself is divided with a strongly organized high wage group of workers whose position contrasts with that of those employed in the marginal sector without social security and sporadic income opportunities, prone to be exploited by right winger populism.<sup>303</sup> The incident that united these two groups such as Tarih resistance of 1980 was exceptional. In a sense, the aftermath of 1978 was the litmus test for the Turkish trade union centers, and they failed. Their deficiencies became explicit after

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<sup>303</sup> Çağlar Keyder, (1979), p.44.

the massacre of the Mayday hence the defeat of the Turkish organized labor movement in the coup was not surprising. Türk İş and DİSK did not achieve to compose a united front and a unified political strategy of labor to cope with the impending crisis of import substitution, although they were two branches of the same tradition. This shared ancestry, although insufficient to provide for their cooperation, handicapped their ability to surpass established unionization strategies and to riposte the crisis with a radical alternative that can articulate with the existing social struggles and to lead them. They rather focus to maintain their own existence, an objective that would be hard to attain in the coming neoliberal age. Yet in the short run spanning from the mid eighties to the early nineties the organized labor seemed to be successful in reaching its aims, in the long run though it turns out to be a pyrrhic victory exactly because of the features analyzed here. The next part deals with this episode.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE ASSAULT AGAINST THE MORAL ECONOMY

Until present in this study it is argued that the evolving institutional arrangements concerning the industrial relations and the development of the organized labor, especially its connection to the political establishment in Ankara which can be followed by the distinct episodes of the path through which the labor movement thrived, built through time a set of accepted norms and expected practices and functions concerning the working of the economy, especially relevant in the public sector. This constitutes a moral economy whose reciprocal obligations, routines and its shared understanding concerning the industrial relations is largely based on a discourse of nationalism, and anchored in developmentalist and solidarist ideals. This, in turn also conditions the profile of trade unionism to some extent. From now on this study will deal with the transformation that the country went through during the eighties that finally culminated in the labor protest that contributed to the retreat of the Motherland Party.

In the wake of the eighties the labor movement enjoyed a presence in Ankara that it relied on to further its cause with differing success. This presence though never comparable to the impact of the employees nevertheless made the organized labor a privileged group among the workers in general. Seldom the representatives of the organized labor resorted to other means of struggle such as workplace militancy or used their impact for reasons other than their immediate interests. Only those trade



unions that tried to organize in privately owned assembly industries during the sixties and the DİSK in seventies breached this routine to some extent. In the sixties the strategy of import substitution allowed militancy in those industries anyway and in the seventies DİSK pursued political objectives for opening up of the regime to the left of the political spectrum, in a social and political context where the legitimacy of the left is a fact around the poor neighborhoods of the industrial centers anyway. In total, these efforts to reach out to the disadvantaged sectors that constitute the bulk of the working class were slim and trivial and did not intend to refocus the movement. Despite that, the social and political context of the import substitution paved the way for a social mobilization achieving to enlarge the rights of the laboring classes in all respects. Indeed, DİSK was first the result and then the carrier of this mobilization.

At the end of the seventies the Turkish organized labor movement was a visible social force, even though it had to struggle to keep the social rights and the income levels of the privileged few who constituted the employees of the public enterprises and the private enterprises operating in the import substituting chemical, metal and textile industries. The crisis of import substitution necessitated the direct action of the workers more and more to maintain their economic and political lot. However, such militant acts did not trespass on the limits of the established patterns of the institutional context of the industrial relations. Neither of the trade union centers had an experience in that respect. They can lobby in Ankara, they can even pressure Ankara through mass actions or they can do both at the same time. Furthermore this strategy worked well especially in the context of the import substitution yet when the crisis strokes the rules of the game of industrial relations overburdened. The organized labor could have come off from this historical episode of IS crisis differently regarding the rising militancy of the period right before the

military intervention. However, the labor movement was on the retreat and its fate looked grim in the face of the crisis.

From 1978 onwards the labor struggles were both weakened by the apathy of the workers and tended to end in failure. The mass demonstrations attracted workers less and left winger militants more, the days lost in strikes grew whereas the number of successful strikes declined. It seemed that the employers preferred the strikes because of the devastating circumstances of the economic crisis. The end of import substitution made the organized labor vulnerable, only through reinventing their mode of operation the trade unions could cope with the harsh conditions of class confrontation that the crisis of IS triggered. The signs of such struggles emerged in 1980 in few places where more militant direct actions involving the nonorganized sectors of especially urban and rural poor with the unionized workers were organized. However the military intervened at the end of 1980 and crushed the possibility of proliferation of such episodes along with the spirit of the trade unions. The repression brought by the coup d'état and the new regime of industrial relations that it introduced, added on top of the general decline started in the last years of the seventies, made unlikely the emergence of a lively period of labor actions for the near future, yet the historical development moved in a different trajectory.

The coup d'état occurred in an international context favoring liberalization of financial transactions and international trade, and propagating the defamation of mass movements making material claims from the governments. Turkey was typical in that latter respect. The military authorities blamed the trade unions for their excessive demands and militancy while they banned lay offs and set fixed wage raises. They also kept Türk İş operational as the speaker of the interests of the organized labor. From a superficial point of view it can be asserted that apart from

the suspension of the collective bargaining regime the daily life of the unionized workers, especially those employed in the public sector and disinterested in politics, remained unchanged, moreover their safety was guaranteed considering the fact that the rampant political violence began to claim the lives of the workers especially because of the union rivalry and wildcat strikes. Presumably, once the collective bargaining regime and hence the right to strike was restored the routine of trade unionism would be reestablished. The moral economy of the unionized workers would be maintained. The civilian rule did not follow that pattern because of the necessities of the new regime of capital accumulation that was built during the eighties in line with the international trend.

The Özal administration began in earnest in 1983 yet Özal was in charge of the national economy from the beginning of the 1980 onwards except for a small interval during which he constructed his new political party. This party embodied in itself the new turn that the country would take. The strategic adjustment program that his administration implemented did not only end the import substitution and fostered export orientation in the national economy; it also changed the balance of forces both within the bourgeoisie and within the overall polity. The substitution of the state paternalism in public enterprises with the market rationality, privatizations, the emphasis on profitability rather than development and the denigration of the unionized workers, all of these amounted to a total offensive against the moral economy of the unionized workers and created a backlash in the form of a cycle of labor protest against a government, first of its kind in the Turkish labor history.

What was motivating the public enterprise workers to participate in the acts of civil disobedience that marked the latter part of the eighties was not “spasmodic”, to borrow the term from E. P. Thompson. They are not taking the risk to be fired off,

to be jailed, these are very concrete possibilities after all considering the era, because they are undernourished or deprived of the means of a decent livelihood. The transgression was not simply against their stomachs, but their way of making a living. That is why, the most crowded demonstrations took place when the trade union involved supported such actions and the main motto of the protest was against the prime minister himself. The prime minister who denounces their trade unions at every opportunity, who wanted to sell off or worse close their work places, who openly declare himself on the side of the employers, was their main target.

In this vein, this chapter first tries to contextualize the coup d'état of 1980 within the wider trends of international political economy. Similar developments occurred elsewhere in the world once the regime of import substitution overburdened politics with the demands of the working class that is why it is necessary to perceive the coup in the wider context. Then the specific stipulations promulgated during this era are going to be analyzed in order to demonstrate the new orientation of the Turkish economy along with the historical episodes in which these stipulations were drafted. The political perception of the trade union centers after the return of the civilian rule and their attempts to influence and impress the government by relying on their established methods of lobbying is also evaluated. The chapter is concluded by drafting a balance sheet of the Özal administration considering the international trend that it pursued locally.

### The Global Economic and Political Context of the Coup

The year 1980 witnessed an unprecedented rise and radicalization in labor militancy. What was occurring can not be described merely in terms of quantity but also

quality. The traditionally non political mass of workers was more assertive in their demands; they did not only confront their employers but also the security apparatus of the state and even the regime of ownership in few instances when they began to take control of the administration of their workplaces during lockouts. The government, on the other hand, desperate to resolve the crisis of the import substitution strategy declared a new program sponsored by the international financial institutions in the January 24, 1980, whose basic premise is the elimination of the essential tenets of the import substitution that defined the last two decades of the economic and social policies in Turkey. Naturally, a political and economic transformation of this scale creates a major social dislocation for the populace in large, and requires a ruthless and merciless policy of policing of the masses in order to ensure the sound implementation of the newly adopted social and economic policy measures. Within this context, the military take over that was awaited for some months took place in the 12 September 1980.

Turkey was not the only country challenged by a deep political and economic crisis caused by the over stretching of the import substitution strategy without creating export opportunities for the domestic industries. Almost all developing countries, which relied solely on domestic markets for their industrial produce, experienced severe economic crisis, and ended up in rearranging their national politics and economics so as to fit to the necessities of a new accumulation regime based on export oriented economic policies through bloody coup d'états. The examples include the Southern Cone countries of Latin America and Indonesia, though the developed nations also felt the pressure to convert their social and political structures in order to enable their industrial establishment to compete in these changing international circumstances. Indeed the crisis of the seventies

transformed the western polities more or less and eradicated the last remnants of the post war settlement, meaning the international political economic system built right after the end of the Second World War. As a result some features of the welfare state were trimmed and the political representation of the organized labor was undermined.

The term Post War Settlement denotes a political economic scheme constructed to meet the challenge of the demise of the self regulating market ideal after the Great Depression, which caused the rise of totalitarian regimes in European countries, a process which culminated in the Second World War. After the victory of the Allied Powers led by USA, Great Britain and Soviet Russia, the sphere of influence of the communist ideology extended geographically, moreover its prestige rose among the working class of the established western democracies. Consequentially, these countries opted for an institutional framework that is based on a social compromise between social classes underpinned by a social benefits system for laborers that was guaranteed by state intervention. Indeed, a systemic revision of neoclassic economics was first suggested by Lord Keynes during the thirties.<sup>304</sup> The labor parties that achieved parliamentary representation pressed for social reforms and government arbitration in the regime of industrial relations and succeeded to construct a tri-partite agreement among the employers, trade unions and the state first in Sweden in 1934 under the social democratic government led by Per Albin Hansson. While the war still ravaged the continental Europe the British cabinet drafted a plan, inspired by the famous Beveridge Report,<sup>305</sup> for a universal social

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<sup>304</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment Interest and Money*, London, Macmillan, 1936.

<sup>305</sup> For a profound evaluation of the report and its consequences see Brian Abel-Smith, "The Beveridge Report: Its Origins and Outcomes," *International Social Security Review*, vol.45, no.1-2, (January 1992), pp.5-16.

insurance scheme that will form the basis of the welfare state in Great Britain. Lord Keynes was also the chair of British delegation in the Bretton Woods conference held to define the cornerstones of the global financial system after the conclusion of the Second World War. All of these developments set the scene for a distinctive form of capitalism in Western Europe that more or less influenced the other parts of the world and shaped the respective national polities accordingly.

According to Claus Offe the model of the Western European welfare state resembles a three storied building with a roof on top.<sup>306</sup> The first floor consisted of norms and regulations that existed since the nineteenth century such as the equality in labor market, workplace safety measures and right to employment. The second floor is made up of the social safety net aside from the domain of employment, such as health, retirement and unemployment insurances. These measures date back to the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The third floor composed of political liberties and collective rights of workers including the right to strike and organizational freedoms. The roof that covers the whole building is the principles of Keynesian economics, especially the full employment standard.

The economic crisis of the seventies started the downfall of this building. The rise of commodity prices because of the oil shock, the decline of American hegemony in the aftermath of the Vietnam War undermining the supremacy of the dollar as the reserve currency, the end of the economic boom that paralleled the reconstruction of European infrastructure devastated during the Second World War, all contributed to this process.<sup>307</sup> The widespread stagflation of the seventies led to

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<sup>306</sup> Claus Offe, "The European Model of 'Social' Capitalism: Can It Survive European Integration" *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 11, no.4, 2003, pp. 437-469.

<sup>307</sup> For an analysis of the collapse of American Hegemony at the end of the sixties and the stagflationary crisis of the seventies from a Regulation School perspective see Michel Aglietta, "World Capitalism in the Eighties," *New Left Review*, no. 136, (November-December 1982), pp.5-41.

the questioning of the merits of Keynesian economics, which was contradictory to the tenets of orthodox liberalism anyway; in fact the economic and political direction of the Post War settlement was harshly criticized from its onset onwards by important liberal scholars. The seventies made these critiques mainstream once again. As a result the social and economic formation of the Western countries was reconstructed accordingly, along with their political system.

The crowding of the political system created by the accumulated social demands was singled out as the main culprit of the social crisis that had political and economic ramifications. Indeed, a complete distinction between economic and political decision making processes was the main goal of the agenda put forth by the orthodox liberal critiques of the welfare state and the ideological edifice that formed its background. A political system in which the recipient of the political demands concerning the distribution of the national wealth was not the government can only be constructed through eliminating the social component of the citizenship rights that emerged parallel to the struggles of the European working class parties. This objective can be achieved only through the discouragement of the active political participation by the masses, in some cases especially in the third world this can require “coordinated destruction”<sup>308</sup> of these classes borrowing the term from Charles Tilly. A political system populated by parties with clear cut social constituencies divided according to their material interests in the economic reproduction of this polity can not eradicate this participation. Therefore, in the long run the politics have to turn to be public relation campaigns realized at the level of

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<sup>308</sup> Charles Tilly used this term to denote the programmed annihilation of a political category's members; see Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.14.



political leaderships.<sup>309</sup> All in all, in order to cope with the systemic crisis of the global economy the state apparatus of the Western countries was reformed to spend less on social objectives through institutional mechanisms and deregulate the international regime of financial transactions. The client states in the Third World followed the lead. Evidently, the changed global capital accumulation patterns entailed new politics. These new politics emerged almost simultaneously both in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Thatcherism or Reagonomics, the political approaches that combined conservative values with market liberalism were the dominant policy preferences during the eighties. They were basically criticizing the over stretching of the power of government which eliminates the entrepreneurial initiative of the individuals. The discourse of decreasing the government power, however, is misleading, what occurred was rather a drop in the welfare expenses, while the government money began to be spent in greater amounts for enhancing domestic and foreign security measures. Social state was retreating, not the repressive state which continued to expand to deal with social dissolution through disciplining measures.<sup>310</sup> Indeed, Thatcherism is defined as a strong state protecting a free economy.<sup>311</sup> Their violent counterparts existed in some Third World countries and the underpinning mentality of such politics reigned in academic circles and international financial institutions. These institutions proposed to the developing nations that were ravaged by the ISI crisis during the seventies a ten point reform package labeled as the Washington

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<sup>309</sup> For a review of the transformation that the western democracies went through in the aftermath of the decline of the welfare state see Colin Crouch, *Post-democracy*, London, Polity Press, 2004.

<sup>310</sup> For the clash between harsher policing and economic security of citizens in the neoliberal era see Ayşen Candaş, "Hobbesian Security Paradigm and the Politics of Fear," paper presented at the annual meeting at the International Studies Association Chicago, February 28-March 3, 2007.

<sup>311</sup> Andrew Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988.

Consensus. The proposed measures included fiscal discipline, decreasing public spending on welfare benefits, financial deregulation to foster international monetary flows, further guarantees for private ownership and privatization of public enterprises. This term then widened its symbolic scope and covered a political and economic system preferred by the United States and international financial institutions, based on free market fundamentalism and imposed first on the crisis ridden states of the Third World and then to the new democracies of the Eastern Europe.<sup>312</sup> This policy approach and the wider political philosophy backing it, becomes internationally the definitive political and economic leitmotiv of the three decades following the late seventies. Especially the British case is telling since it involves the transformation of a typical western European welfare state.

The era of Margaret Thatcher began in 1979 right after the “winter of discontent”, namely the winter of 1979 during which massive strikes profoundly disturbed the daily routine of British citizens. The whole of seventies were marked with such episodes of rigorous class struggle anyway. Thus a significant segment of the British electorate was already supporting the restoration of class order. The political analysts of the time argued that an important part of the political agenda of the conservative government led by Thatcher was to curb down the power of trade unions, and to this end they wanted to defeat the miners, the symbol of union militancy during the seventies, in one swift victory.<sup>313</sup>

The conservative government refrained from alienating the trade unions up until the mid eighties over the welfare and wage issues apart from minor instances,

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<sup>312</sup> For an analysis of this reform package see John Williamson, “What Washington Means by Policy Reform,” in John Williamson (ed.), *Latin American Readjustment: How Much has Happened*, Washington DC, Institute For International Economics, 1989.

<sup>313</sup> For a more journalistic account of Thatcher era by a senior political correspondent of *Financial Times* see Peter Riddell, *The Thatcher Era and its Legacy*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1991.

but augmented the legal authority of the police over civil disturbances. Then after a careful planning the government forced the National Union of Miners to a strike that lasted approximately a year, in the February of 1984. The once mighty trade union of the miners utterly faltered at the end of this lengthy and exasperating struggle that finished in a dismal failure.<sup>314</sup> On the other hand though, during the strike as the states' hegemony broke down in Britain's coalfields, the state's reliance on violence increased.<sup>315</sup> After this date even the Labor Party adopted itself to the new trend in terms of both the economic policy approaches and the dismal prestige of the trade unions, indeed, the coming of the neoliberal era hurt the vested interest of the organized labor almost everywhere.

Miles Kahler<sup>316</sup> argues that the rise of the new orthodoxy in the international financial institutions, which virtually eliminated the academic discipline of the development economics, which assumed the implementation of a different economic policy set in the late developing countries, was based on the success of the South East Asian economies and the traditional hostility of the classical theory to protectionism. According to this point of view the cases such as South Korea, Singapore and especially Japan demonstrated the wisdom of classical economics over the interventionist policies. However, this was not a simple return to basics since the proponents of the new approach had learnt something from the development economics school and linked middle term adjustment policies to the long term developmental strategies so as to make export orientation the unique way

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<sup>314</sup> For the story of this strike whose impact still continues among the British trade unionism today see Tayfun Ertan, "İngiltere'de Kömür İşçileri Grevi -1984\1985" *11. Tez*, vol. 5, February 1987, pp.110-149.

<sup>315</sup> Tony Ward, Penny Green, "Legitimacy, Civil Society and State Crime," *Social Justice*, vol. 27, no.4 (Winter 2000), pp.76-93, p.81.

<sup>316</sup> Miles Kahler, "Orthodoxy and its Alternatives: Explaining Approaches to Stabilization and Adjustment," in Joan M. Nelson (ed.), *Economic Crisis and Policy Choice*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1990, pp. 33-61.

to achieve the necessary statistical targets in the Third World countries. Normally, the structural adjustment programs proposed to these countries from the mid seventies on, included flexible exchange rates, fiscal austerity and export drive, public enterprise reform and privatization, financial and foreign trade liberalization, and promotion of foreign direct investments.

### The Content of the 24 January 1980 Economic Measures

Although it seems to create a national industrial structure, the import substitution regime relies heavily on the import of high value added intermediary goods in order to produce a low value added final product. This process requires a constant foreign currency flow to survive, when the foreign currency reserves of import substituting countries dry up, they must be replenished through export gains which can be supposedly earned through the industrial structure that was erected thanks to the import substitution and protection of infant industries. However, except for a few cases from southeastern Asia most of the import substituting Third World countries failed to orient their economies to exporting, thus they were unable to generate the necessary foreign currency earnings and found themselves in the grips of severe balance of payment deficits which also threatened the maintenance of their social and political order. This is the basic anatomy of import substitution crisis.

The balance of payment deficits resulting in grave social disturbances were not a novelty of the late seventies. Indeed, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was established to deal with such problems by the system created according to the Bretton Woods Agreement. The IMF supplies, or encourages the other financial institutions to lend to the crisis ridden countries, the necessary credits in return for

the adoption of specific austerity measures that are aimed to economize the foreign currency earnings of these nations. What is different in the late seventies was the altered content of these austerity programs imposed by the IMF to the borrowing nations. The new package, labeled now as the structural adjustment programs, inspired by the new dogma of the monetarist economics and their followers in the political class undertook to shift the economic, and hence indirectly the political orientation of the borrower countries.

The mentality of the old package was clear and simple. The balance of payment deficit and inflation was caused by the excess demand in the market which in turn was triggered by wide government spending. Therefore, what has to be done is decreasing the public spending and devaluating the national currency in order to narrow down the aggregate demand in the market. According to Şevket Pamuk, in line with the emerging neoliberal beliefs the economists of this institution and the other international financial institutions began to blame the leniency of the Third World governments vis-à-vis the political demands of their popular classes and then suggested policy alternatives that would undermine the fiscal, economic and political bases of such leniency; hence they revised the policy packages imposed to borrower nations.<sup>317</sup> The result of the resentment led to an implicit support for the violent military regimes that curbed down the political participation of the popular classes, and the result of the revision triggered a transformation in those national economies that created a new accumulation regime more fully integrated to the global capitalism through the abolition of the barriers protecting the domestic markets and the national industries.

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<sup>317</sup> Şevket Pamuk, “24 Ocak Sonrasında Sınıflar ve Gelir Dağılımı” *11. Tez*, vol. 2, March 1986, pp.87-101.

The political scenery was made compatible to the new accumulation regime mostly after the military intervention. However in Turkey the economic policies pursued by the government started to favor the new mode of accumulation with the proclamation of the January 24, 1980, economic policy package adopted by the government prior to the military intervention. The government that was formed by Bülent Ecevit after the 1977 elections in which his party remained thirteen seats short of parliamentary majority collapsed after the October 1979 by-elections. The Justice Party headed by Süleyman Demirel formed a minority government. The political turmoil did not recede under these weak governments. Both of them needed the financial support of international financial institutions but only Demirel has an entourage of experts that embraced the revival of market fundamentalism. Turgut Özal, an old director of State Planning Organization during a former Demirel government, who was at the time chairing the dreaded metal sector employers' union (MESS), was one of them. Özal was appointed as the permanent undersecretary of the prime minister in the new government; Demirel gave him a free rein over the conduct of the economic reforms.

The government wanted to foster the exports in order to appease its foreign currency needs and aimed to restructure the legal institutional mechanism of the state accordingly. It also desired to squeeze the budget deficit by augmenting the prices of the goods produced in public enterprises and decreasing the cost of labor in these institutions. Turgut Özal complained about the leniency of the public enterprises toward their employees in regard of wages and benefits and cited as problems to be fixed in one of his briefings to the general staff right before the promulgation of the 24 January reform package.<sup>318</sup> Indeed, the government also decreed some new

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<sup>318</sup> Emin Çölaşan, *24 Ocak Bir Dönemin Perde Arkası*, Milliyet Yayınları, İstanbul, 1984, p.144.

measures such as changing the rules of strike voting making this process vulnerable to manipulation by the employers. Haldun Gülalp argues that every distinct mode of accumulation corresponds to a distinct bloc of class alliances, therefore a distinct political regime.<sup>319</sup> The new political regime, unlike the one established after the coup of the May 27, 1960, required a constitutional system squeezing the social rights and empowering the executive branch of the government in order to make it possible for the government to establish a radical break with the preceding Turkish political tradition of populism. By announcing a comprehensive economic stabilization program drafted under the surveillance of IMF the minority government formed by Süleyman Demirel, replacing the Ecevit government that was reluctant in accepting the remedy proposed by the international financial institutions in full scale, was signaling for this break away but more importantly, it laid the economic foundation of the new political regime. This means that the new era of Turkish politics began in January 24, 1980.

The 24 January destined the breakdown of the developmentalist alliance forged right after the 27 May coup d'état. This signifies a more strained relationship between the bourgeoisie and the popular masses, especially the working class. Obviously, the already faded submissiveness of the organized labor would not tend to accept to be excluded. Since the gains of the working class during the sixties and the seventies were attained in the context of an expanding organizational structure, most importantly the unionization and the radicalization of the trade unions, the transformation designed in the early eighties envisages the dismantling or the weakening of these organizations. This is not because a simple class hatred or bias against the political demands of the lower classes, but rather “this transformation is

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<sup>319</sup> Haldun Gülalp, *Gelişme Stratejileri ve Gelişme İdeolojileri*, Yurt Yayınları, Ankara, 1987, p.58.

not only impossible in the context of the populist democracy, but the heritage of the latter, which allows for the rising demands of various sections of the society, becomes a special burden.”<sup>320</sup>

All in all, what did this reform package include? The program included a thirty three percents devaluation, devotion to restrained money growth, abolition of price controls, interest rate ceilings and subsidies to state economic enterprises, and termination of deficit spending in return for funds from IMF equivalent of 625 percent of Turkey’s quota.<sup>321</sup> These measures aimed to create a realistic price for the commodities, especially the capital goods produced by the public sector hence eliminating the subsidized prices for the national industries, facilitating foreign trade thus abolishing the black market and shortages and paving the way for the constitution of a market based, competitive business environment. The implementation of realistic interest and exchange rates meant practically the elimination of domestic market oriented industries since they were designed to be operated behind protective walls in the first place. In the long run, the government hoped that these measures would redirect the Turkish economy towards an export oriented structure.

The adoption of these measures was not surprising. As the balance of payment deficits worsened Turkish governments approached to the international financial institutions, which in return demanded the same reforms to ease the foreign currency requirements of the country. The inflation that approached the hundred percent ceiling can not be controlled without a total commitment to monetary austerity. Thus, from 1978 onwards it was obvious that Turkey would be obliged to

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<sup>320</sup> Haldun Gülalp, “Patterns of Capital Accumulation and State Society Relations in Turkey,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol.15, no.3, (1985), pp.329-348, p.342.

<sup>321</sup> Altan Yalpat, “Turkey’s Economy under the Generals,” *MERIP Reports*, no. 122, (March-April 1984), pp.16-24, p.19.



transform its economic and social outlook. The full implementation of such a wide reaching program that also challenged some of the established interests of some factions of the bourgeoisie in the context of a popular political mobilization was untenable.<sup>322</sup> Therefore, the political structure of the country must also be transformed accordingly. This transformation was only made possible with the military intervention of September 12<sup>th</sup> 1980.

### The Coup d'état

The military ousted the minority government of Demirel in September 12, 1980. The commanders of army, navy, air forces and the gendarmerie constituted a junta, the National Security Council (NSC), and nominated a former navy general Bülend Ulusu as the prime minister. All the existing parties were banned and their leaders were arrested, the parliament was disbanded. The radical trade unions were also closed down and the martial law declared all over the country. The military establishment acted in unity and respected the chain of command during the intervention. Indeed, a popular and common resistance against the coup never occurred. That is why the military rule followed the civilian government quite smoothly. The cabinet of Ulusu was made up of bureaucrats and technical experts, the general secretary of Türk İş, Sadık Şide was nominated as the minister of social security. The minister of labor, on the other hand, was a professor of labor law, Turhan Esener. Interestingly enough both men served under the technocratic cabinet formed by Sadi İrmak right after the 1973 elections that failed to obtain the vote of confidence in the parliament. Sadık Şide, who was employed in the state railways

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<sup>322</sup> For an analysis of the options available to the state and bourgeoisie just prior to the coup and their choices see Mustafa Sönmez, *Türkiye Ekonomisinde Bunalım*, Belge Yayınları, İstanbul, 1982.

company and who had only experienced union struggles in the somehow lenient atmosphere of these public companies, always stood for trade union monopoly during his tenure.

A coalition of technocrats of economy preaching neoclassical dogma and military hardliners was also formed in the Turkish case just like Chile or Uruguay when the economic team that devised the 24 January, economic package was recruited by the military junta. The head of the military rule, General Kenan Evren, and the National Security Council declared that they would continue to pursue the economic policies of the toppled Demirel government, something that the government itself was unable to do.<sup>323</sup> Indeed, the architect of the economic policy package, Turgut Özal was given a cabinet post in the military government along with Kaya Erdem who was a close associate of Özal during his tenure as the permanent undersecretary of the Prime Minister in the short lived Demirel minority government. These two names would be the sole responsible for the direction of the economic policies, Özal as the deputy prime minister and Erdem as the minister of finance. This means that alongside the objective to pacify the masses in order to restore the law and order, the military rule also aimed to complete the social and economic transformation that the predecessor civilian government began with the consent and encouragement of the international financial institutions. Or else, the former objective is merely a derivative of the latter. To these ends they recruited both Özal in order to carry out the structural adjustment required by the new necessities of the changing capital accumulation regime and Şide with the purpose of maintaining the impression of labor support in the military regime.

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<sup>323</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "Military Intervention and the Crisis in Turkey," *MERIP Reports*, no.93, (January 1981), pp.5-24, p.7.

The first regulation by the military junta concerning the regime of industrial relations was promulgated in 16 September, when all the legal stipulations concerning the right to strike and lock-out were suspended with a statement by the NSC. This meant the deferral of all the existing strikes and lock-outs forcing the workers back to their jobs. The next day, a decree concerning the payment of a seventy percent increase to all wages as an advance, until the newly introduced obligatory arbitration mechanism became operational, was pronounced. Since all the collective bargaining regime was suspended indefinitely, the military regime wanted to establish a uniform wage increase which was inadequate to compensate the drop in the purchasing power of the wage earners due to the rampant inflation. Another statement promulgated in the 6 October made clear the intention of the military government to postpone the need to deal with the issue of collective bargaining process that began just before the coup d'état by implementing centrally adopted uniform pay raises that were set according to the inflation expectation of the government, indeed, this was Özal's proposal both during his tenure in the Demirel government, and before that as the president of an employers' union.

The planners of the coup were aware of the possibility of resistance by the organized labor movement. The seventh edict of the junta promulgated in the first day of the coup suspended the activities of DİSK and MİSK the small confederation led by the members of the Nationalist Action Party. Hak İş, the confederation founded by religious conservatives met the same fate a few days later; however its suspension lasted only for five months. The trade union leaders turned themselves in to the military authorities in large numbers. Some others were captured by the security forces or killed like Kenan Budak the leader of İlerici Deri İş and the brother of the then leader of TEKSTİL Rıdvan Budak, the would be president of DİSK. The

administration of the suspended confederations and their affiliates went to the trustee council determined by the Labor courts according to a law promulgated in the October 11<sup>th</sup>. The control of their financial assets and the immovable properties hence were given to persons who were alien to the organized labor movement. DİSK was the main victim of this practice, for instance the trustee council authorized the hand over of the new headquarters building of Genel İş, the biggest DİSK affiliate, in Ankara. This building hosted the Constitutional Court until recently, in a sense symbolizing the usurpation that the 1982 constitution and the accompanying legal institutional framework committed against the Turkish working class. Türk İş, on the other hand, was the sole trade union center that remained operational during the entire course of the military rule, though under strict surveillance. The rulings of the martial law authorities permitted the security officers to enter and follow every union meeting at all levels.

The new regime of industrial relations imposed on the trade unions matched largely with the previously expressed demands of the employer organizations. Prior to the coup the employer confederation (TİSK) demanded greater scrutiny over the trade unions so as to diminish their involvement into the politics. Their demands also included lowering wage increases, extending working hours, eliminating trade union plurality and restricting severance benefits. They also complained from the widespread use of strikes as an ideological tool, to borrow their term and demanded legal means to prevent such strikes.<sup>324</sup> Indeed while the national growth stopped, as it happened in the late seventies, it is not beneficial for the employers to sustain real wage increases for their workers, yet in order to contain the wages they had to restrain the freedom of activity of their organizations. One must note that the demand

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<sup>324</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, “1946 ve Sonrasında Türkiye’de Grev Tartışması.” *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 40 (Winter 1988), pp.46-50.

to eliminate the trade union plurality or to use the expression of the employers “the trade union inflation” is interesting since during the constitutive phase of the organized labor movement, meaning the late forties, the legal inhibition of the second trade unions was an essential workers’ demand in order to prevent the employer from establishing yellow unions, however, the emergence of DİSK changed the parameters on that matter. Eliminating union rivalry became a major concern for governments and employers, indeed the legal amendments that triggered the 15 and 16 June protests were aiming exactly these goals. Obviously, the ruling class and their political representatives preferred Türk İş whose powerbase is primarily in the public sector and which is receptive to the leverage by established Turkish political parties. Moreover due to the impact of American unionism of the Cold War era it is restrained in its political strategy. That is why eliminating alternative union centers became a goal of the employers and the security apparatus of the state. The elimination of DİSK failed in 1970 because of both the popular uproar it created in the industrial centers of the country and the decision of the constitutional court nullifying the law. This time those measures were introduced with the iron fist of the military junta.

Reorganizing the collective bargaining regime was one of the primary targets of the military government. Turgut Özal tried to construct with great success a uniform front of employers in the private sector for the collective bargaining negotiations when he was presiding over MESS. The state the main industrial employer of the country was incorporated into this structure by the establishment of collective agreements coordination council in the March 1980, through a prime ministerial order signed by Demirel. The coup d’état abolished the collective bargaining regime altogether and established the obligatory arbitration regime. The

new regime of arbitration developed very slowly so as to leave many collective agreement negotiations pending. In some cases the labor courts were given the authority to reintroduce the terminated collective contracts. The make up of the arbitration council was tripartite representing the state, the workers and the employers. The new body baptized as the Supreme Arbitration Council includes nine people, five from the state bureaucracy, two from Türk İş, one from TİSK and one other civil servant representing the government as an employer. The council lacks the necessary budget, personnel and other physical means to achieve the daunting task of concluding all the collective agreements for each industrial sector.<sup>325</sup> As a result, it tended to rely on the government prescriptions that put the emphasis on fiscal austerity, rather than the sustenance of the wage earners in concluding the contracts.

The inclination to regulate the industrial relations by fiat was aimed to pacify a possibly contentious area of social interaction. Naturally the military authorities who closed down the radical trade unions, who suspend the regime of collective bargaining and introduced the obligatory arbitration, had as priority the smooth continuation of the industrial production. That is why they also banned dismissals except for security, safety and general health reasons. This practice was criticized even by the members of the government such as Turgut Özal yet widespread lay-offs could trigger stir among the workers, indeed many workers were fired due to their involvement in political activities, anyway. Moreover, the arbitrary nature of this ban was obvious in instances where some employers were permitted to lay off their employees while similar demands by some others were discarded with no apparent reason. Indeed, the military rule did not mend the traditional deficiency and unwillingness of the Turkish state apparatus in imposing its rulings over the private

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<sup>325</sup> For an account of the Supreme Arbitration Council's activities see Mustafa Sönmez, *Özal Ekonomisi ve İşçi Hakları*, Belge Yayınları, İstanbul, 1984, pp.64-102.

sector when it comes to issues concerning collective and individual worker's rights. This reluctance is further solidified in a political climate in which unlike the previous era labor militancy was deemed illegitimate and labor organizations were regarded at best as lobby organizations and at worst as hubs of criminal activity.

The real wages began to regress as of 1979 due to the deteriorating overall economic conditions of Turkey. This is one of the reasons of the toughness of the social struggles occurred in 1980. The economic package and the ensuing coup did not alleviate the purchasing power of the wage earners; to the contrary it marked the beginning of a period of permanent drop. The seventy percent uniform raises ordered by the junta edicts were inadequate in a time of rampant inflation. Moreover, the Supreme Arbitration Council that turned to be the sole authority on collective agreements due to the suspension of collective bargaining process between the employers and the workers tend to rely on government statistics in determining the raises and refrained from surpassing the official inflation figures. Besides, in line with the perspective of the junta administration they clean out all stipulations of worker control over the production process and factory administration. Furthermore, the acquisitions of the earlier collective bargains were eliminated through legal means, for instance the bonus pays for the workers of public enterprises were limited to four times a year, except for the miners who were given a fifth extra, through an amended article of the relevant law in the April of 1981.<sup>326</sup> Interestingly enough, the court of cassation ruled against the collective agreements permitting more than two yearly bonuses in the December of 1980. It seems that the coup d'état was quick in adjusting the mind frames of the lawyers according to the political philosophy propagated by the international financial centers and voiced by local employers. It

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<sup>326</sup> Yıldırım Koç, *24 Ocak Kararları ve Çalışma Yaşamındaki Gelişmeler (1980-1982)*, Yol İş Yayınları, Ankara, 1982, pp.105-106.

can easily be assumed that in the private businesses where the working standards are traditionally below the limits set by the public enterprises, the bonuses must be further cut down.

The public enterprises were always the norm setter of industrial relations and from its inception their existence was an anchor for the trade unions trying to solidify the social rights and benefits of the workers, these developments signified a change of attitude by the government. Previously unheard negative changes began to be experienced in public enterprises such as belated payments or the reimbursement of the severance pays in kind. All of these developments were the harbinger of a massive transformation in the Turkish industrial relations regime since the difference between the public and private began to blur. While during the preceding decade the biggest private enterprises especially those involved in import substituting industries in the metal and chemical sectors acted somewhat like the state economic enterprises in issues related to working conditions, during the eighties the private establishments became gradually the norm setters for the public sector.

### Economic and Political Developments of the Interregnum Era

The Uluşu government appointed by the junta runs the country from the last months of 1980 until the first elections held in November 6, 1983, in which only three parties were allowed to compete. Indeed during these three years, the real power lied with the National Security Committee composed of the commanders of army, navy, air force and gendarmerie, headed by the chief of general staff, namely the uppermost echelon of the Turkish military that staged the coup d'état. This body also commissioned the convention of a non partisan Consultative Assembly to draft a new



constitution in the October of 1981, though the Committee had the final say in the draft that would be put on a referendum. This Assembly was presided by Sadi Irmak the first Labor Minister of Turkey and had 160 members, a fourth of them hand picked by the Committee. The new constitution was promulgated in October 18, 1982, while the martial law was intact all over the country. It was ratified by the people in a referendum in which the head of the junta was also elected as the seventh president of the republic. The military junta aimed to recreate the Turkish political scenery by banning all the political parties dating to the earlier era, including the Republican People's Party. That is to say the new constitution and the accompanying legal institutional context that shaped the next decades of the country was composed in an atmosphere devoid of formal political debates. The new Turkish political system symbolized by the ratification of the new constitution is built on a blank slate through the ban on the old political parties and political leaders.

The military government went through a major crisis only once due to the bankers' scandal in 1982 when a financial crisis hit the country and several brokerage houses went bankrupt evaporating the assets of a significant segment of middle income urban dwellers. The banking system was liberalized in the July of 1980 as the second step of the 24 January economic package. However, for Özal and his team financial competition means solely the elimination of direct government controls of the financial markets rather than guaranteeing non collusive behavior of the private financial institutions. The result of the government ineptitude when especially the brokerage houses opted more and more for riskier financial strategies to continue their operations created an insolvency problem in the financial markets and a run on banks occurred.<sup>327</sup> The major victim of this crisis was Özal and his

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<sup>327</sup> For a detailed description of the development of this crisis see Izak Atiyas, "The Private Sector's Response to Financial Liberalization in Turkey," 1989, World Bank, Working Paper no.167.

team, he along with his close associate Kaya Erdem had to resign from the cabinet in the July of 1982. This resignation though allows Özal to focus on his own political ambitions.

The political developments of the interregnum period directly effected the organized labor movement. Suddenly, Türk İş became the only operational labor confederation of the country when the military junta closed down every other labor organization in the country. As a result, it reassumed its traditional role of non partisan representative of the organized labor movement that pressurize Ankara for obtaining labor friendly rulings at all levels of the government and judiciary. Nevertheless, being affiliated to Türk İş did not mean protection from persecution for worker organizers. Yol İş and Petrol İş were especially hit hard because of the coup d'état, some of their branches were closed down and local directors were tried in martial law courts.

The new era catches Türk İş amidst of a leadership transformation. Halil Tunç left the presidency in the eleventh congress held in 1979, the new chairman, İbrahim Denizcier was a figure of compromise, and though he was part of the social democratic movement from its inception onwards, unlike some others he never questioned the legitimacy of the dominant political line of his confederation. Moreover, the other leadership positions remained intact, especially Sadık Şide, the representative of the right wing, kept his office as the general secretary. This means the compromise solution consisted of electing a moderate left winger to the presidency but avoiding a direct confrontation between different currents within the confederation by not challenging the posts already secured by the right wingers. Some students of the labor history argue that this policy and compromising personality of İbrahim Denizcier maintained the unity in the confederation though

the opposition against Sadık Şide grew stronger. Denzicier's deteriorating health kept him to be nominated again for the presidency in the next congress held in 1982, and he was replaced by Şevket Yılmaz, a moderate centrist.

The military interregnum achieved to lead Turkish economy out of the deep economic crisis that engulfed her from the late seventies onwards. Apart from the austerity measures enforced forcefully upon the wage earners, the much needed foreign earnings came from the export boom of the early eighties. The government intentionally steered the emphasis of domestic production towards the goal of increasing exports, yet rather than their intent, the generosity of the international lenders helped the Turkish economy. The international situation of the period helped the military government. According to the figures the financial resources entering Turkey was in positive terms until 1983, unlike the other countries that were under the strain of foreign debt, and the net positive resource transfer turned to be generously negative after this year.<sup>328</sup> It seems that, the Iranian revolution made the western lenders more generous towards Turkey, the war between Iran and Iraq created exporting outlets for Turkish manufactures in the Middle East, and its early insolvency compared to the other countries that would went down in the chain of events beginning with the Mexican debt crisis coupled with its stronger commitment to structural adjustment programs promoted by international financial institutions eased its efforts to find foreign financial resources.

These foreign resources were not the result of new foreign direct investments that were lured into Turkey thanks to the financial liberalization crafted under the 24 January economic package. Indeed, financial liberalization had an effect of taking resources away from the real economy. The main responsible of the foreign currency

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<sup>328</sup> Tosun Arıcanlı, Dani Rodrik, "An Overview of Turkey's Experience with Economic Liberalization and Structural Adjustment," *World Development*, vol.18, no.10, 1990, pp.1343-1350.

earnings of the early eighties were the manufactures of the labor intensive import substitution industries created during the sixties and the seventies. According to figures provided by Fikret Şenses the share of manufactures more than doubled its percentage within the gross export earnings in seven years from 1980 to 1987.<sup>329</sup> Depreciating wages did not only make old Turkish industries competitive but also forced them to exports by decreasing the purchasing power of the workers composing the domestic market. The workers that became poorer but continued to manufacture enabled the government to take advantage from the regional war to dump out the domestic products into those countries. The domestic market can not afford to consume these items anyway. According to the econometric calculations provided by Erinç Yeldan<sup>330</sup> the link between productivity and real wages severed after the period of 1979-1980, in the following periods the increases in the productivity was not matched by the corresponding augmentations in the real wages.

### The Offensive against the Organized Labor Movement

What were the main symbols of the hostility of the coup period against the organized labor? The brief period of the interim government was marked by legal actions against trade unions and shop floor activists, changes in the legal institutional mechanisms regulating the industrial relations regime, a general decline in the economic status of the wage earners and a vague hostility towards the political demands of the working class in the perception of the common people cultivated deliberately by the military government. Obviously a vicious witch hunt was also

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<sup>329</sup> Fikret Şenses, "An Assessment of the Pattern of Turkish Manufactured Export Growth in the 1980's and its Prospects," in Arıcanlı, Rodrik (eds.), 1990, pp.60-77.

<sup>330</sup> Erinç Yeldan, *Küreselleşme Sürecinde Türkiye Ekonomisi: Bölüşüm, Birikim ve Büyüme*, İstanbul, 2006, İletişim Yayınları, p.74.

conducted against the left winger political groupings and pro labor press during the same period. However, the trial that was most significant in determining the sociopolitical characteristic of this coup d'état was the DİSK trial. This trial not only constitutes a major front in the attempts to curb down the political impact of labor, it also set the standard of permissible union activity for the future trade union activists. In a sense the coup makers wanted to guarantee to eradicate any possibility of revival of the type of mobilization that enlarge the scope of labor rights occurred during the era of import substitution by sanctioning DİSK, indeed the organized labor would try to preserve what it already has rather than acquiring new rights in the following decades.

### The DİSK Trial

The DİSK trial indictment was made up of 817 pages, this lengthy piece of legal document was submitted to a martial law court at İstanbul in October 26, 1981.<sup>331</sup> The trial lasted for ten years, during which the confederation was effectively abolished. All the affiliate unions remained inactive; as a result their members adhered to either Türk İş trade unions or joined to independent trade unions that were handicapped by the industrial relations regime created after the coup. The ending of martial law did not alter the terms of trial in any sense, the martial law court that tried DİSK remained intact and the gradual liberalization of the regime throughout the eighties, although ameliorated the carceral conditions of the detainees, the extra legal circumstances that defined this case persisted.

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<sup>331</sup> Faruk Pekin, "DİSK'in Yirmi Yılı" *11. Tez*, vol. 5, February 1987, pp.203-208.

The indictment comprised the whole time span over which DİSK was active. In a sense the mere existence of this radical trade union confederation was a crime in itself. The main accusation was to coordinate and direct the attempts to establish the dictatorship of a social class over others and annihilating the established social and economic order of the country. In simple terms DİSK was accused of attempting at a proletarian revolution. Heavy imprisonment was demanded for 1477 trade union activists including shop floor representatives and simple workers, fifty two trade union leaders were facing capital punishment charges. The indictment cites all of the formative documents of the confederation, the final resolutions of its general congresses, the meetings such as May Day demonstrations or anti fascist rallies as criminal evidences. Moreover, the resistance of 15 and 16 June 1970 is labeled as a coup rehearsal that the confederation orchestrated in order to educate the working class in the ways of proletarian revolution. In its defense<sup>332</sup> the president of DİSK Abdullah Baştürk underlined the fact that this was a political prosecution aiming at eliminating a specific tendency of unionism, and in this sense it is a prosecution not about the alleged past crimes but about the future of the Turkish organized labor movement.

DİSK was acquitted in the July of 1991 at the end of a lengthy and exasperating legal process. The trial created an international interest and turned into a global cause for labor, making Abdullah Baştürk, the leader of DİSK and the chief defendant, an international figure, earning him a seat in the direction of European Trade Union Council (ETUC) in 1985 when his confederation became an affiliate of this body. This interest was mostly related to the democratic norms of the rule of law that were frequently breached in the course of the trial, rather than deteriorating

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<sup>332</sup> For the full text of the defense by Abdullah Baştürk see Abdullah Baştürk, *Yargı Önünde Savunma*, Çağdaş Yayınları, İstanbul, 1986.

conditions of the Turkish laborers symbolized in this case, indeed a drop in the living standards of the blue collar workers was more or less an international phenomenon. Baştürk died right after the final verdict on the case was reached. Only after the not guilty verdict the assets of DİSK were returned. This means the junta administration and the martial law conditions remained intact for DİSK during the whole decade. According to one DİSK expert in exile, the military used the DİSK trial as a tool of political propaganda to justify its intervention to the middle classes. In truth DİSK was exhausted due to the lengthy struggles of the late seventies and it was unable to challenge the coup d'état anyway.<sup>333</sup>

The peculiarities of the DİSK trial when considered along with the statements made by some representatives of the big bourgeoisie after the late seventies and during the military rule, demonstrate the inevitability of a symbolic victory over the working class, similar to the crash of miners strike in the United Kingdom during the Thatcher administration, in order to fully clear out the scene for a new accumulation regime to take hold. The new social and political configuration required a political conquest to become hegemonic; in this case the radical wing of the Turkish organized labor movement nurtured throughout the two decades of the import substitution era is the victim. The institutional transformation that was devised by the military rule became meaningful and efficient along with this symbolic victimization.

### The New Legal Bases of Industrial Relations Regime

The period that began with the 27 May coup d'état was marked by an important shift in the handling of labor organizations. The laws on trade unions and the collective

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<sup>333</sup> Metin Kara, Sami Kum, "The Workers as a Class were Defeated," *MERIP Reports*, no.121, (February 1984), pp.21-25.

bargaining regime of this previous era, namely the law no 274-275, were organic laws giving the spirit of its time which is characterized by an accumulation regime based on import substitution and an accompanying strategy of articulation to global capitalism through the import of capital goods and export of raw materials. That is to say the traditional exports of the country were used to subsidize infant industries and a nascent domestic market enlarged by the incorporation of wage earner urban blue collar workers. These laws were unexpectedly lenient towards the labor organizations thanks to the stubborn worker struggles of the early sixties and the relative political weakness of the Republican People's Party against the political vestiges of the then defunct Democratic Party. RPP wanted to solidify its popularity among the urban strata of the Turkish society that more or less supported the ousting of the old government unlike the large but somehow insignificant rural sectors. Once the normal state of affairs was restored in politics after the elections held in 1965, these two organic laws were blamed as the reason of the militancy of the working class especially by the right winger Justice Party government. Following the establishment of a rival labor confederation even Türk İş complained of their exceptionally indulgent stipulations.<sup>334</sup> As a result these two laws was attempted to be amended with little success.

The military intervention of the September 12<sup>th</sup> paved the way for these amendments. The constitution drafted by the junta authorities itself reflected the mentality of the coming era. According to Bülent Tanör the new constitution included stipulations that echoed the creed of the new international trend called neoliberalism.<sup>335</sup> The new constitution deliberately seeks to handicap the activities of

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<sup>334</sup> Yıldırım Koç, *Türkiye'de İşçiler ve Sendikalar (tarihten sayfalar)*, Türkiye Yol-İş Sendikası Yayınları, Ankara, 2000, pp.56-57.



the organized labor, especially through impeding its involvement in pursuits even remotely related to politics, the restriction to the trade union activities, the confines of the right to unionize and the right to strike turned to be internal rules of the constitution. The ban over the political activities of the trade unions is also a detailed ruling of the new constitution.<sup>336</sup> Taha Parla, comparing the constitution of the 1961 to the 1982 argues that the restrictions that were stipulated in the 51<sup>st</sup> article of the new constitution were unparalleled in isolating the trade unions from the greater polity and condemning them to a narrow economism.<sup>337</sup> Moreover, the constitutional text was drafted also with the intent to mend a long time employers' complaint about the legal equality among the social parts. The 1961 constitution, in line with the contemporary prevalent legal approach assuming the workers to be at an inherently disadvantageous position in their contractual relations with their employers, was written with a discourse of positive discrimination for the workers. The new constitutional text quits this understanding and returns to the style of the late forties preaching the formal equality of the social parts of the industrial relations. In this respect, a symbolically important addition to the constitutional document is the inclusion the right to lock out, just after the right to strike. In the Consultative Assembly that prepared the text of the constitutional document three worker deputies voted against the final version.

The general approach of the constitutional text involves meticulous details in determining the confines of the union activity, a strict attitude in restricting any political involvement by the labor organizations and a broad support for the

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<sup>335</sup> Bülent Tanör, Necmi Yüzbaşıoğlu, *1982 Anayasasına Göre Türk Anayasa Hukuku*, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2001, p.65.

<sup>336</sup> Taha Parla, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Rejimi: 1980-1989*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1995, p. 62.

<sup>337</sup> Taha Parla, *Türkiye'de Anayasalar*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002. pp.55-62.

monopolization of the organized labor movement under the already existing confederation, Türk İş to be exact. A similar tone also reflected itself in the texts of the laws regulating trade unions and the regime of industrial relations. The drafting of these laws was one of the most important priorities of the interim regime after the promulgation of the constitution. The twin laws no. 2821 and 2822 were the result of a process that began back in 1970 when the amendments to the laws no. 274 and 275 was cited favorably in the report drafted for the eighth general congress of Türk İş. The texts of these new laws included some measures demanded by the labor organizations such as the redefinition of industrial sectors, yet the major complaints of the industrial employers such as the policy of check-off in the collection of union fees were also considered in the bills. More importantly, some of the major rights of the old era like the solidarity strikes or strikes to enforce the employers to comply with the rulings of the collective contract were completely prohibited. An open letter by Vehbi Koç, the veteran industrialist of the Turkish bourgeoisie was published in the newspapers while the junta authorities were busy with drafting the law no. 2821 and 2822; in this letter Koç warned these authorities on including some sanctions against trade unions that would attempt to dismantle Turkish state and economy since according to him this was the case prior to the military intervention.<sup>338</sup> Indeed the contemporary newspapers were full of thankful statements by the businessmen towards the military. Certainly, the transformation that was implemented by the military government in the regime of industrial relations at that period complied to some extent with the demands voiced by the industrial employers throughout the seventies, and represented an unbroken continuity with the program of the last Demirel cabinet.

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<sup>338</sup> Mustafa Sönmez, *Türkiye’de Holdingler; Kırk Haramiler*, Arkadaş Yayınları, Ankara, 1992, p.349.

The twin laws<sup>339</sup> aimed to pacify the organized labor movement according to the needs of the new strategy of capital accumulation based on export orientation. To this end the law on trade unions aims to establish union monopoly to the benefit of Türk İş. The main target of the law no. 2822, on the other hand, is the right to strike since this law that regulates the collective bargaining regime both made difficult even exhausting the legal procedure of striking and prohibited some types of strikes that was legal previously. Therefore this law confines striking to enforce the employer in the collective bargaining process to yield to the workers' demands, yet since the legal procedure is perfectly predictable and lengthy the regulation gave the employer the opportunity to prepare for the occasion perfectly so as to render striking meaningless.<sup>340</sup> Moreover, striking bans were enlarged to include many types of jobs and professions. More importantly, the legal sanctions against illegal strikes and other types of laborer protests were reinforced purposefully. Interestingly enough regulating the industrial relations by referring to the criminal code was also a feature of the British legal amendments realized during the early eighties. As already cited above, these measures were later used efficiently in the suppression of the great miners' strike.

The restrictions were detailed and wide reaching.<sup>341</sup> Many domains that were left unregulated during the previous era, when the legal approach to the regime of industrial relations contained also traits of pluralism, was included into new legal texture mainly due to the experience of the sixties and seventies. For instance, the

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<sup>339</sup> For the full text of these two laws ratified in May 5<sup>th</sup> 1983 and promulgated in May 7<sup>th</sup> 1983 see T.C. *Resmî Gazete* no. 18040, 07.05.1983.

<sup>340</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, "Grev Hakkı, Anayasa ve Lokavt" *AYKO Eğitim ve Bilim Dergisi*, no. 1, (June 1982), pp.112-122.

<sup>341</sup> For an evaluation of legal drawbacks of the working class under the junta administration see, M. Şehmus Güzel, "1980 Sonrasında İşçi Haklarında Gerilemeler" *II. Tez* vol. 5, (February 1987), pp.76-91.

right to choose trade union was restricted through the ban on organizing referendum in the shop floor, in its stead a legal process was introduced to judge which trade union has the most members. The right to strike was curtailed in a similar fashion so as to prevent strikes to enforce the employer to comply with the terms of collective agreement. The labor courts made the sole responsible also in this case. Thus, the regulations intended to replace organized acts by the workers with lengthy judicial processes that would be conducted far from the immediate reach of the laborers. Indeed, this was compatible to the established model of Turkish trade unionism which relies on its impact in Ankara in order to reach its objectives, and which considers its shop floor organizations, apart from its obvious uses, as leverage for its influence among the politicians.

Another set of restrictions was introduced in the domain of organizational liberties. The establishment of company trade unions, regional alliances among the trade unions, national federations among local trade unions of the same industrial sector was banned. Indeed the formation of federations, that is to say organizations to which other organizations were adhered was prohibited completely. The exception was trade union confederations for obvious reasons, but slight hindrances to establish confederations were also devised. All in all, another organizational objective of the Turkish organized labor movement was achieved through junta laws. From its inception onwards at every possible platform the representatives of the Turkish organized labor movement praised the benefits of the unified sectoral unions organized nationwide. At last, national industrial sector unions became the norm of Turkish trade unionism, though legally, rather than a conscious choice of the unionists.

One of the principles related to the restrictions stipulated about the law on trade unions was the existence of their parallels in the laws on political parties, another basic law defining the character of the time.<sup>342</sup> Indeed, this principle was clearly stated during the discussions about the law in the National Security Council. The other significant principle that was considered during the drafting of the law was stated by the chair of Social Security, Labor and Worker Relations commission, Colonel Erberk İnam. He asserts the mission of the law as giving a peculiar spirit to Turkish trade unionism so as to create a union model in line with our tradition, culture and social requirements in order to repair the old model that was weak, dispersed and featureless.<sup>343</sup> Very similar ideas was expressed thirty six years ago when the first law on trade unions was in the floor of the parliament<sup>344</sup> when the government insisted that the Turkish trade unions did not have a previous history whatsoever, and discarded any allusion that the Turkish labor movement enjoyed a connection with neither the international workers' organizations nor its political aspirations. These ideas could have some sort of logic back in the late forties, yet during the following decades the trade unions that were portrayed as weak proved themselves in every respect of their social struggles and left their marks in domestic politics, but the military intervention itself aimed to erase these very decades and its gains for the Turkish working class from the social memory. That is why the backward leap in history expressed by the colonel was right on target.

The most important constraints over the trade union activities, however, concerned the right to be trade union administrator or founder. Those who are not

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<sup>342</sup> For an evaluation of the restrictions applied to the political parties according to the new constitution see Taha Parla, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Rejimi 1980-1989*, İstanbul, İletişim, 1995, pp.111-119.

<sup>343</sup> T.C. Milli Güvenlik Konseyi Tutanak Dergisi vol. 9, B.144, O.1, 2.5.1983, p.79.

<sup>344</sup> T.C. T.B.M.M. Zabut Ceridesi. Vol. 4 (1947), pp. 294-324.

employed as a worker for ten years were not qualified either to establish or administrate trade unions; moreover some limits were also introduced for non adult workers who wanted to register to trade unions. These measures were clear obstructions making harder the efforts at unionization. Apart from these the scrutiny over trade unions were also augmented by including worker organizations under the authority of State Inspection Institution that is responsible solely to the President of the Republic. Furthermore, the old hostility towards labor internationalism was reintroduced. The government restricted the opportunities of international contacts for the trade unions; indeed, the global labor community was among the staunchest opponents of the Turkish military regime.

The real novelty though, that would change the nature of collective bargaining process hence the main pillar of industrial relations regime is the introduction of a system of thresholds according to which a trade union has to surpass a ten percent threshold nationally in order to be able to negotiate a collective contract. In addition, it must also register half plus one of the total workers employed by an establishment to obtain the license to operate. Obviously, this regulation practically banishes new trade unions to oblivion. Without the right of conducting the collective bargaining process trade unions are mere mutual help societies, workers would shy away from leaving the existing trade unions even they were not satisfied with their achievements since they will lose the right to enjoy collective agreements. Indeed, the resignation process was also hardened in the new law. Moreover, the labor ministry has the authority over determining which trade union surpassed the ten percent threshold in the relevant industrial sector, this turned to be a considerable leverage for the governments over the trade unions, presently, the statistics held by the labor ministry were unreliable and was not referred as an indicator of union

membership in Turkey. The introduction of a threshold system was the main objective of the amendments to the trade unions' law of the old constitution. This change proved to be the most significant innovation of the new regime in determining the fate of the organized labor movement.

This regime of thresholds reduces the trade union pluralism. It aimed to create a monopolistic structure remaining just short of banning other trade union confederations altogether. The existence of such high thresholds both for industrial sectors and individual companies, and the legal privileges that were recognized only for those trade unions that surpassed these thresholds effectively prevents pluralism. This is a subject constantly criticized by the International Labor Organization,<sup>345</sup> since it harms the vitality of the shop floor level struggles. This vitality, a constitutive feature of Turkish trade unionism from its inception onwards that was illustrated in the establishment of trade unions such as Türkiye Maden İş or Kristal İş, was compromised by this unifying tendency. Although this promotes strong and centralized trade unions, a visionary dream of the founders of Turkish trade unionism, the eradication of the shop floor vitality made central trade union strength meaningless.

The new regime of industrial relations did not only restrain collective rights of workers, some of the established gains of the working class were also threatened. The major victim was the seniority payments as already cited. Indeed, the new constitutional text, in an apparent contradiction to its general outlook, lacks detail in its stipulation about social security. The sanctions related the social security is left out of the constitutional text, an understandable negligence for a legal document that substituted the term of “economic development” of its predecessor with the term

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<sup>345</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, *Türkiye’de İşçi Hareketi (1908-1984)* Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul, 1996, pp.268-278.

“economic stability”. The effects of these changes depicted themselves in the drop of the increase in the total quantity of workers covered by the social insurance system during the first part of the eighties. The real purchasing power of the minimum wage also decreased drastically.<sup>346</sup> In a sense, the new legal framework also hit the social rights of the workers.

The representative of the labor unions objected to these changes not in essence but in some trivial details that would influence them directly. Indeed, Türk İş wanted to profit from this opportunity to reestablish its shaken monopoly over the organized labor movement, and their main concern was to guarantee their autonomous control over their financial resources, an aim that they secured readily. The leadership of Türk İş was not worried about the restrictions over the right to strike or the extension of the governmental tutorship over the trade unions because their affiliates were mostly organized in the public sector hence tended to rely on their connections into the government to further their members’ interest. Therefore, their immediate concern was not linked to measures of striking.

The minutes of the meetings of the National Security Council where the laws on trade unions and collective bargaining regime were discussed illustrate this point.<sup>347</sup> During these meetings Sadık Şide objected vehemently the 25<sup>th</sup> article of the draft law on trade unions, which prohibited the membership of the retired workers into the trade unions. This measure was needed due to the militancy of the experienced workers who tend to remain as directors of local union branches after their retirement, at the trade unions where professional managers can not be afforded. Those trade unions that can not pay salaries to its branch managers were obviously

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<sup>346</sup> These figures and analysis were provided in Alpaslan Işıklı, “1960-1986 Döneminde Türkiye’de İşçi Hakları” in *Türkiye’de İşçi Hakları, Osmanlı Döneminden 1986’ya*, Türkiye Yol İş Sendikası, Ankara, 1986, pp.169-214.

<sup>347</sup> T.C. Milli Güvenlik Konseyi Tutanak Dergisi, vol.9, 144<sup>th</sup>-146<sup>th</sup> sessions.



financially meager trade unions organized in the private sector. The continuation of membership of their retired members at posts of responsibility provided an invaluable experience transfer to younger generation of industrial workers and the lawgivers of the junta wanted to cut that link. However, the Türk İş headquarters was also full of retired workers and if this article remained in the actual law, they would lose their seats. Şide after a lengthy debate achieved to obtain a two terms exception for those retired workers who held administrative posts in the trade unions at the time of the promulgation of the law. When added to the already existing exception of one term this success gave enough time to the Türk İş directors, the real target of the stipulation were purged from the union ranks by the heavy hand of the junta administration anyway.

### The Return of the Civilian Rule

The restoration of the civilian rule began in 1983 when the general elections were held in which only three parties were allowed to compete. These were the Populist Party representing the legacy of the banned Republican People's Party; the Motherland Party established by Turgut Özal<sup>348</sup> and his entourage who was at the helm of the Turkish economy from his tenure as the permanent undersecretary in the Demirel minority government until his resignation from the cabinet of the junta due to the financial scandal of 1982; the Nationalist Democracy party, a favorite of the junta headed by the prime minister of the military interregnum. Other parties had to wait the next elections where the approval of the junta authorities would not be necessary in order to compete. Two of them proved to be important factors in the

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<sup>348</sup> For an analysis of Turgut Özal's political leadership and his impact over Turkish economy in general see Ziya Öniş, "Turgut Özal and his Economic Legacy: Turkish Neo-Liberalism in Critical Perspective," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 40, no.4, (2004), pp.113-134.

politics of the eighties: these were True Path Party, the legitimate heir of the Justice Party and the Social Democratic Party headed by Erdal İnönü, the son of the late İsmet İnönü. The latter party through a merger with the Populist Party turned to be the main parliamentary opposition to the governing party in the aftermath of 1986.

The economic transformation that Turkey went through under the Özal administration is revolutionary from a certain point of view. The share of agriculture in both the GDP and labor force shrank steadily throughout the eighties making that sector a secondary factor for Turkey. Furthermore, the urbanization of the country gained momentum during the same era. The first years of this administration witnessed an export boom due to the war between two neighboring countries Iran and Iraq. The opening to the Middle Eastern markets contributed to the success of the export drive promoted by the Özal Administration. However, not all of the private businesses support the liberalization of the foreign trade that was the hallmark of the Özal era, those who relied on protectionist measures would either adapt themselves or go bankrupt. The organized labor, on the other hand, still under the oppression of the military interregnum hoped that the strengthening of the civilian rule would ameliorate their political and economic status.

The outcome of the economic policies pursued without interruption from the beginning of the 1980 onwards was mixed.<sup>349</sup> Turkish export figures increase dramatically, besides the share of manufacture in the exports also rose to unprecedented levels. However, this export boom did not occur as a result of new investments private or public, foreign or domestic, rather the existing ISI industries provided the thrust. Therefore the boom did not generate a long term growth of the Turkish economy. Moreover, the agricultural sector was hit hard by the

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<sup>349</sup> Şevket Pamuk, "Economic Change in Twentieth Century Turkey: Is the Glass more than Half Full," in Reşat Kasaba (ed.) *Cambridge History of Turkey: Turkey in Modern World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, pp. 266-300, pp.287-289.

transformation coupled with the governmental negligence. Another related area of negative scores is the deteriorating income distribution in the country not only affecting the rural areas but also the urban wage earners.

The structural adjustment of the Turkish economy to the international markets, a policy suggested by the international financial institutions after the global crisis of the seventies, prescribed the liberalization of the financial arrangements, the eradication of the public regulations over trade and credit mechanisms. The result was a radical change in the mode of capital accumulation.<sup>350</sup> A related domain of transformation concerns the ownership in the strategic sectors and industries. The privatization of public enterprises which began to dominate the political agenda after 1986 further jeopardized the fortune of the workers, especially those employed in the large public sector, which constituted the main bastion of power of the Turkish organized labor movement and the real stage of implementation of the social norms and policies enacted by the governments.

### The Trade Union Reaction to Civilian Rule

Türk İş, then the sole powerful representative of the Turkish organized labor, was confident about the benefits of the restoration of election politics. They do not have to face union competition from their left. There existed some independent trade unions yet no other confederation existed, apart from the then marginal Islamist Hak-İş. Although they can not compete for the national representation of the Turkish labor with Türk İş, the independent sectoral unions were important loci of labor militancy both because of their organizing activities and their more radical strategies

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<sup>350</sup> Sinan Sönmez, "Türkiye Ekonomisinde Neoliberal Dönüşüm Politikaları ve Etkileri," in Nergis Mütevellioğlu, Sinan Sönmez (eds.), *Küreselleşme, Kriz ve Türkiye'de Neoliberal Dönüşüm*, Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2009, pp. 25-75.

of shop floor struggle. Indeed, first minor strikes that took place during 1985 were organized by these unions, for instance, Laspetkim-İş organized a short lasting strike in Nur Suni Lastik Company, in the December of 1985,<sup>351</sup> and this was one of the first strikes under the new legal mechanisms. The independent trade unions were mostly existed prior to the coup and adapted themselves to the new regime. They enlarged their membership base by registering workers from the banned trade unions.

Very few are newcomers such as Laspetkim-İş cited above. It was one of the few trade unions organized according to the new laws in 1983; the founders were mostly ex-members of Lastik-İş, an important DİSK affiliate. This trade union joined Hak İş in 1984, considered as surpassed the sectoral ten per cent threshold by the Labor Ministry in that same year with approximately twelve thousand members, hence allowed to conduct collective bargains, and then in 1986 quits this confederation. In an interview<sup>352</sup>, the chairman of this trade union, Vahdettin Karabay, cites the incompatibility of their beliefs and opinions about trade unionism as ex-DİSK members with the prevailing mentality in Türk İş as the reason why they preferred to stay outside of it. According to him, the apparatus of that confederation is unsuitable for their insistence on the grassroots initiative and internal democracy. However, unlike these limited instances, many members of DİSK affiliated trade unions choose to join Türk İş after the restoration of the civilian rule.

Türk İş began to voice its concerns over the new regime of industrial relations only after its thirteenth congress held right after the return to the civilian politics, in the December of 1983, in front of the newly elected prime minister, Turgut Özal. The year before this congress every affiliate trade union of the confederation and Türk İş

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<sup>351</sup> Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, "Lastik Kimya ve Petrol İşçileri Sendikası," *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 2, İstanbul, 1998, pp.311-313.

<sup>352</sup> Tolga Güner, "Bağımsız Sendikacılık ve Laspetkim-İş" *Yeni Çözüm*, no.3, (March-April 1987), pp. 10-13.

itself was busy with amending their statutes to the new legal institutional framework created by the coup administration. In his inaugural speech, the new chairman of the confederation elected only eighteen months ago, Şevket Yılmaz, expressed its regret over his inability to foresee the damages caused by the legislation of the military rule.<sup>353</sup> In this congress every post in the central administration except the presidency were challenged yet only one was successful, Orhan Balaban from the traditionally social democrat Yol-İş achieved to be elected as the general secretary for organization.

The leadership of the Türk İş was absolutely certain that the return to the civilian rule would alter the adverse circumstances handicapping the effort of the confederation to ameliorate the economic and social situation of the wage earners, especially the employees of the public enterprises. They even considered themselves advantageous since the three years of the military interregnum suppressed the union rivalry. However, Türk İş headquarters made a crucial mistake and supported the Nationalist Democracy Party headed by the retired admiral and prime minister of the military junta Turgut Sunalp. The opinion leaders in general thought that this party would win the elections back in those days. Consequently, the ANAP leadership, the victors of the 1983 general elections, mistrusted the Türk İş administrators.

More importantly the new ANAP government did not tend to continue the traditional populist politics of the former centre right cabinets towards the public enterprise trade unions, the military rule might be ended, yet the politics of the 24 January still persisted. The populist practices can be seen in many areas benefiting the urban poor or the other needy sectors of the society, yet class based demands of the organized labor were not tolerated.<sup>354</sup> The structural adjustment that the Turkish

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<sup>353</sup> Türk-İş, *Genel Kurul Tutanağı: On Üçüncü Genel Kurul*, Ankara, 1983, p. 7.

system went through did not allow for the political and social considerations to set in when the economic policies were designed, and the new government did not refrain to teach the basics of this new era by the hard way. For instance, a public employer body<sup>355</sup> was set up to deal with the collective bargaining processes in the public sector, thus cutting off the patronage link between the trade union officials and politicians, which constitutes the main routine of trade union activity, especially for Türk İş whose power base lays in the state economic enterprises. Moreover, the ministers gave hostile press releases about the trade union demands and did not show up when invited by Türk İş to conferences or public events. First the veteran trade union leader Halil Tunç, who was at the time retired and joined the party led by the wife of Bülent Ecevit, expressed that “*this is a new kind of government*” in its relations to the organized labor. Obviously, the veteran labor leader who was a first hand witness to the three decades of legal unionism in Turkey was in the best position to attest the governments’ attitude against the moral economy of the unionized workers. In two different occasions he made his criticisms public: first at his speech in the Türk İş congress held in 1983, where he was a guest of honor as a long serving general secretary and an ex-chairman of the confederation; and then in a press interview<sup>356</sup> in the February of 1985.

1985 is important because of the collective bargaining process involving the public enterprises. Türk İş wanted an increase in wages in real terms since the purchasing power of the workers deteriorated steadily in the aftermath of 1980. Moreover, they also pushed for some legal improvements of the laws concerning the

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<sup>354</sup> Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908-2002*, İmge Yayınevi, Ankara, 2003, p. 153.

<sup>355</sup> For an evaluation of this body see, Türkiye Yol-İş Sendikası, *Ekonomik Toplumsal Gelişmeler ve Yol-İş’in Görüşleri*, Ankara, 1986, pp. 85-89.

<sup>356</sup> Milliyet, 15.02.1985.

industrial relations regime. However, the government did not perceive yielding to these demands as an option, indeed they are prepared for a show of force. In the mid June the parliament amended some stipulations of the law on police responsibilities with the law no. 3233, augmenting the police jurisdiction over public gatherings organized by the trade unions. This move was parallel to increase of police powers in dealing with labor militancy that the Thatcher government drafted during its early years. The government continued to rely on the method of bargaining that Turgut Özal himself designed during his tenure as the undersecretary of the last Demirel government just prior to the coup d'état. This means a central committee for all state economic enterprises was formed and this body conducts the collective bargaining process without considering the distinctive requisites of the individual companies. Trade unions organized in public enterprises hated this method since it does not allow for special treatment anywhere; its centralized logic respects only the macroeconomic policy goals of the government. According to Yol İş this body made the anti-trade union opinion of the governing party institutional.<sup>357</sup> Furthermore, this time the legal context also favors the government, they had the right to inspect the accounts and the registries of the trade unions that the government resorted throughout 1985 freely. Apart from possible financial mischief, the law also restricts the right to be an administrator in the trade unions; it seems that some existing union officers did not qualify for their post under the current law. The government leaked the results of these inspections to the press without any confirmations in order to harm the public image of the trade unions.

Türk İş relied on their traditional strategy of hard bargain. For instance they arrange a meeting with a leader of the opposition, for which the public prosecutor

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<sup>357</sup> Yol-İş Sendikası, *24 Ocak ve İşçiler*, Ankara, 1986, p.21.

began immediately an investigation for involvement into the politics.<sup>358</sup> Throughout 1985 Türk İş headquarters realized that they had to operate in a different world even if the civilian rule is restored. However, they were both unprepared and ignorant in this respect. They began to talk about the possibility of organizing large rallies and boycotting the collective bargaining meetings with the representatives of the public employer. The headquarters also forbade the organizing of signing ceremonies in those sectors where agreements were reached, though the affiliate unions that compromised with the government did not obey. A significant number of trade unions in certain sectors did not surpass the ten per cent sectoral threshold in reality, thus they desperately needed the leniency of the labor ministry in order to be able to register members and sign collective agreements in their names. In the absence of union competition from the already suppressed DİSK trade union and a tradition of militancy, these unions had very little inclination to follow the headquarters in showing teeth to the government.

All in all, Türk İş itself did not want to quit the way of the dialogue and lobbying in Ankara over which they founded their movement. Therefore, they opted for saloon meetings organized in theater halls, especially in industrial towns. These were occasions for the leaders of Türk İş to denounce the government publicly, yet the first meetings were complete failures since the workers did not participate either because of the fresh memories of the junta administration, or as a sign of protest against the Türk İş leadership. However, one must note that the reactions by the confederation headquarters did not lag behind the mood of its membership in general. These reactions more or less reflect especially the grassroots of its greater affiliates composed of the employees of the public enterprises. The smaller trade

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<sup>358</sup> Cumhuriyet, 05.06.1985.



unions though are another story and those would be the breeding ground for more radical segments of the organized labor movement throughout the eighties.

The civilian rule under the Özal administration breached the established norms of the working of the industrial relations' regime and refrained from performing their accustomed duties vis-à-vis the organized labor, chiefly concerning the welfare of the workers employed in the public enterprises and their handling of the trade union. The organized labor denigrated publicly while the living condition of the workers deteriorated and it seems that the Ankara connection worked no more. Apart from the hostile attitude and press releases of the ministers and the harsh implementation of the restrictions inherited from the military junta, the growth of free zones in industrial regions where the right to strike is legally nonexistent<sup>359</sup> and the increase of the transitory contracts for the employment in the public sector<sup>360</sup> was a subject of protest from the part of the trade unions. Especially, the latter point is one of the signs that the Özal administration departed from the established norms of safe employment in the public enterprises. The government wanted to replace the rationality of social obligations with the rationality of profit maximizing. With the decrease of opportunities to find stable employment in the public sector, the moral economy of the public sector workers began to shatter.

The shying away of the crowds from the saloon meetings was not permanent. As 1985 came to an end the confederation was able to gather the laborers in these events. In the last days of that year, in December 21, a meeting convened in Ankara Arı Theater with the participation of ICFTU chairman John Vanderveken. This last one was a real success in terms of participation and public interest, and marked the

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<sup>359</sup> For a picture of free zones from the perspective of trade unionism see İlknur Güler, "Serbest Bölgeler İhracata Yönelik Birikim ve Sermayenin Kurtarılmış Bölgeleri," *Yeni Çözüm*, no. 3, (March-April 1987), pp.16-17.

<sup>360</sup> Türkiye Yol İş Sendikası, *24 Ocak ve İşçiler*, Ankara, 1986, p.22.

first attempt where Türk İş tried to enlist international help to its cause. This was another significant change of attitude by the part of Türk İş, since its interest in international relations was mostly limited to the participation to the educational visits held in USA. The confederation deliberately distanced itself from the European trade unions in the past. It seems that while the government broke its link to the organized labor, the movement loosened its conservative attitude in its style of claim making.

In the April of 1985 during a meeting in Türk İş headquarters, Şevket Yılmaz already openly voiced its concerns over the policies of the Özal government and the need to revise the strategy of the confederation from attempts at dialogue to the demonstration of power through street action.<sup>361</sup> This was a confession by the top responsible of the movement, the failure of its traditional strategies by underlining the need of militancy in the streets and workplaces, a feature always defamed by the officials of Türk İş. More importantly Yılmaz asserts that the Özal government for the first time in the republican history openly quits the social attributes of the state. This government refused to listen to trade unions by qualifying their demands as indefensible from the start since they were incompatible to the rationality of the profit maximizing. The Özal administration was one of the pioneers of the neoliberal mentality, and the leadership of Türk İş spoke the language of a passed era which was familiar to the six hundred thousand strong labor force mostly employed in the public sector. What they were not familiar were the policies of the new government such as lockout in public enterprises, threats about easing of imports of the goods produced in public enterprises when the option of strikes voiced, constant blaming of trade unions by the prime minister, privatization of some minor state economic enterprises by governmental decrees after 1986, the negligence of all of the aspects

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<sup>361</sup> Yıldırım Koç, *Teslimiyetten Mücadeleye Doğru Türk-İş 1980-1989*, Amaç, İstanbul, 1989, pp.107-109.

of the state economic enterprises from the 24 January economic package onwards<sup>362</sup>, and the threats of privatization or closure about those establishments. The reaction against this political attitude is the hardening of the rhetoric in the declarations of both Türk İş headquarters and some of its affiliates organized in those establishments under the threat of privatization such as Yol-İş. Yet this rhetoric was not backed by concrete action.

Nevertheless, the saloon meetings and public complaints were substituted by more substantial indicators of labor unrest such as strikes towards the end of 1986. The year 1986 was a turning point, because it was the year of congress in both Türk İş and some of its largest affiliates and the rising grass roots militancy in the factories and streets. The frustration due to the decreasing real wages and the disillusionment with the Özal cabinet found itself an outlet in the congress procedures that also gave a fresh boost to the organized labor movement at the level of union locals. While the public sector workers rely on congress procedures to recalibrate their relationship with the government, the private sector workers relied on desperate attempts at organizing legal strikes since no other option seemed to be available to alleviate their perpetual material losses. These twin developments were the harbinger of gathering storm in the labor movement and it is the subject of the next chapter, yet before that the legacy of the Özal administration creating this reaction must be recapitulated.

### The Balance Sheet of the Offensive against the Organized Labor

Turkey witnessed a major social, political and economic transformation after the coup. The military rule and the institutional framework that it imposed on the trade

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<sup>362</sup> Türkiye Yol İş Sendikası, (1986), p.7.

unions brought about a change in the relative political positions of the relevant social actors. It seems that the employers were satisfied with the result even if they did not achieve all of their expressed objectives. The report submitted to general congress of TİSK held in 1982 asserts that the happy minority of the seventies, the industrial workers was no more, and the notion that the workers were oppressed must be quitted altogether with the legal understanding that preached the protection of the wage earner first.<sup>363</sup> This transformation also ameliorated the social perception of being rich and demonstrating this affluence. At the end of the interregnum, the Turkish bourgeoisie appeared “to be politically and economically more secure and at ease than they have been for decades.”<sup>364</sup> Indeed, the eighties were marked by the hegemony of the bourgeoisie over every aspect of the social, economic and political life of the Turkish polity.<sup>365</sup> Türk İş, the sole remaining center of the organized labor movement though was incapable of making sense of the general transformation that Turkey went through parallel to the global trends and tend to cooperate with the authorities at first.

Nevertheless, apart from citing the amendments realized, the overall meaning of the transformation must also be evaluated. In this vein two aspects of this transformation came to the fore because of their relevance to the subject. One is the change in the government handling of the public sector, especially its attempts to public sector reform and privatizations. The other is the political exclusion of the organized labor and its institutional representatives, namely trade union centers. This

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<sup>363</sup> Türkiye İşveren Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, *14. Olağan Genel Kurula Sunulan Çalışma Raporu*, Ankara, 1982.

<sup>364</sup> Ömer Karasapan, “Turkey’s Super Rich,” *MERIP Middle East Report*, no.142, (September-October 1986), pp.30-34.

<sup>365</sup> For an evaluation of the cultural reflections of this hegemonic position see Rıfat N. Bali, *Tarz-ı Hayat’tan Life Style’a: Yeni Seçkinler, Yeni Mekanlar, Yeni Yaşamlar*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2007, or Hayri Kozanoğlu, *Yuppieler, Prensler ve Bizim Kuşak*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1993.

latter aspect also includes the public denigration of the organized labor as the main culprit of the woes that the country went through at the end of the previous decade including economic crisis and political violence. This discourse is one of the definitive traits of the Özal administration and deserves to be dealt with first.

### Depoliticizing the Masses

From the perspective of the conservative political movements preaching liberal economics, the most ravaging legacy of the development strategy based on import substitution was the politicization of the laboring masses, especially in the developing countries. The poorer social sectors relied on their political participation at all levels to obtain a larger share from the national wealth that they contributed to create. Therefore, the political reform in these countries began first and foremost by measures to subdue laboring masses and banish them from the domain of politics. This is both an ideological necessity considering the insistence of liberal philosophy to distinguish categorically economics and politics but also a practical requirement since it is impossible to decrease the institutional government spending beneficial to the laboring masses with their consent while they were used to the established norms of authoritarian populism<sup>366</sup> that aimed to realize the national developmental goals with the cooperation of bought off popular mass movement supporting these aims. Indeed, this was the very political structure and the associated moral economy that was meant to be dismantled in the new era.

Popular mobilization was seen as destructive, overwhelming and threatening to the survival and the development of the capitalist model. The main influence

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<sup>366</sup> For a description of inclusionary and exclusionary state practices see Guillermo A. O'Donnell, "Corporatism and the Question of the State" in James M. Malloy (ed.) *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977, pp.47-87.

behind this approach came from the monetarist orthodoxy of the economic technocrats inspired by the Chicago School of Economics established by scholars such as Friedrich von Hayek, Milton Friedman and Ronald Coase, especially influential in Latin America during the seventies. This point of view singled out the excess demand from the subordinate classes as the main reason of the economic crisis.<sup>367</sup> Their approach coincided with the perception of the Cold War military apparatus that democracy, by opening the state to social complaints, became a threat to the national security. This coincidence forged an implicit collaboration between the supporters of the economic reform for the liberalization of the market structures and the abolition of state interventionism, and the conservative military apparatus in the Third World.

In fact, those who want to limit the scope of the governmental regulation about private enterprise and markets needed the heavy hand of the government for clearing their way not only in the Third World but everywhere. Indeed, Thatcherism itself was based on such a political marriage between conservative politics and liberal economics. Stuart Hall relates the rise of conservative politics in this new disguise to an ideological transformation triggered by the crisis of the seventies and suggested the term “authoritarian populism” to denote the ideological background of this ascent.<sup>368</sup> Thatcherism rests on authoritarian populism “which successfully condenses a wide range of popular discontents with the post war economic and political order and mobilizes them around an authoritarian, right-wing solution to the

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<sup>367</sup> Patrice McSherry, “Military Power, Impunity and State Society Change in Latin America,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol.25, no.3, (September 1992), pp.463-488, p.468.

<sup>368</sup> This term is different from the term authoritarian populism used in the context of Latin America for political approaches such as Peronism. For a broad overview of the aspects of Thatcherist politics see Stuart Hall, Martin Jacques (eds.), *The Politics of Thatcherism*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1983.

current economic and political crisis.”<sup>369</sup> However, in countries with strong popular movements and weak commitments to the democratic politics, in order to conserve the state authority in the midst of a structural reform program that undermine the institutional bases of populist political alliances, direct state violence rather than heavier policing and a political discourse praising conservative values was required to subdue the lower classes.

This deep transformation in the social perception had also effects over the social standing of the working class. Korkut Boratav argues that “changing and redefining the policy parameters regulating and shaping income distribution against labor in general was a major goal of the structural adjustment programs of the eighties.”<sup>370</sup> Indeed, Boratav also asserts that wage labor as such lost its importance for poorer social strata during the eighties due to the extending informal sector, furthermore, the myth of peoples’ capitalism concretized in the urban rent created in the shanty towns. Popularizing capitalism through the extension of ownership was also a policy promoted in the United Kingdom by the Thatcher government, which sold the communal houses to their proprietors and little shares of the privatized public enterprises to the public. The last method was also practiced in Turkey by the later civilian Özal governments. According to Boratav, the sum of the results of these policies killed the emerging urban working class culture in Turkey, in its infancy.

The reforms suggested to the developing nations were the natural extensions of the policies adopted in the core capitalist countries, thus it is erroneous to categorically separate the political transformation that took place in the core and the

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<sup>369</sup> Bob Jessop et al. “Authoritarian Populism, Two Nations and Thatcherism,” *New Left Review*, no. 147, (September-October 1984), pp. 32-60, p.33.

<sup>370</sup> Korkut Boratav, “Inter Class and intra Class Relations of Distribution under Structural Adjustment,” in Tosun Arıcanlı, Dani Rodrik (eds.), *The Political Economy of Turkey: Debt, Adjustment and Sustainability*, London, MacMillan, 1990, pp.199-229, p.199.

periphery of the global capitalism. A comparison of Chile with United States will illustrate this point. The sixties in the United States witnessed the Great Society scheme of Lyndon Johnson, an attempt to build a welfare state in the face of rising militancy by the disenfranchised sectors of the American society. These attempts coincided with the stagflation of the seventies that burdened the political system so as to paralyze it.<sup>371</sup> From its very inception there existed a staunch group of opponents to these attempts. The Monetarist school of economics represented the scholarly opposition, whereas the neo-conservative intellectuals such as Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Bell who rose to prominence in Washington during the seventies were the political mouthpiece of this faction.<sup>372</sup> There was also a social group of high level tax payers who preferred another distributional option that was represented by this conservative faction. They achieved to win over other social groups to their cause as the crisis began to hurt middle class households. Therefore the political coalition that brought about the rise of what was labeled as Reagonomics at the time was the response to the economic and social crisis of the seventies.

In Chile, on the other hand, a similar social coalition<sup>373</sup> supported by the Chicago trained technocrats was established in opposition to the presidency of Salvador Allende. Chile became the foremost experimentation of structural adjustment under its military government. Both United States and Chile were significant cases of similar political transformation experiences that the world witnessed after the seventies, however the latter case was also marked by widespread

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<sup>371</sup> For an evaluation of this crisis with a focus on United States, see James O'Connor, *Birikim Bunalımı*, Belge Yayınları, İstanbul, 1995.

<sup>372</sup> Pierre Dommergues, "Dès 1978, l'Outillage Intellectuel Est en Place," *Manière de Voir*, no.72, (January 2004), pp.15-17.

<sup>373</sup> For an analysis of the social impact of monetarist economic policies in Chile see Hector E. Schamis, "Distributional Coalitions and the Politics of Economic Reform in Latin America," *World Politics*, vol. 51, no.2, (1999), pp.236-268.



state violence. The reason of this difference can not be easily explained, for instance, by the lack of democratic culture in a developing country, but rather by the severity of the change in political and economic standing of the affected social sectors in a developing country so as to ignite a popular uprising to overthrow the ideologically and structurally weak governments. One must note that such governments are quite widespread among the Third World nations due to various systemic deficiencies that these countries had to cope. Obviously, this line of argument is indebted to the theoretical toolkit provided by Antonio Gramsci,<sup>374</sup> in two respects. First of all, the social coalition that supports the structural transformation is a historical bloc in the Gramscian sense, where a faction of the ruling class achieves to construct majority consent for its political preferences through a discursive ideology. Secondly, the developing states with their typically weak hegemonic ruling coalitions are not integral states, unlike the established western liberal democracies, thus they are more prone to succumb to the popular demands hence the political confrontation in these polities tend to degenerate into violence.

This last point requires further elaboration. The military interventions did take place especially in Latin America, but also in the Middle East and Africa prior to the crisis of the seventies and the ensuing decline of Keynesian economics and welfare state ideals in the core capitalist countries. When the politicization of the masses under the populist governments made it impossible for the ruling elite to maintain their hegemony over the populace, the participatory channels of the regime were closed down mostly through military interventions, and the populist politics were terminated along with the institutional role that the organized labor played in

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<sup>374</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992.

policy formulation and decision making.<sup>375</sup> However, these authoritarian governments continued to rely on corporatist mechanisms and solidarist discourse for the sake of disciplining the work force and tightening the bureaucratic control of the state over the process of industrial production in order to attain the national developmental goals. As a result, the social and economic status of the labor remains as an indicator of the legitimacy of these authoritarian regimes.

This was no more the case as the crisis of the seventies began to engulf the global economies and whilst the international financial centers started to preach another creed. According to Hector E. Schamis<sup>376</sup> the intimate link existing between the developmental strategies and the situation of the labor force was severed by the regimes established in the southern cone of the Latin America by the military coups of the seventies. Uruguay and Chile witnessed the military intervention in 1973 and Argentina in 1976. These coup d'états differed from their forerunners both regarding the violence involved and the attempted shift in developmentalist perspective. Unlike the earlier military interventions that satisfied with containing the popular demands which can jeopardize the austere economic policies designed to restore the balance of payment problems, these coups transformed radically the political, social and economic configurations of the cited countries according to the prevailing neoliberal dogmas. This remark made by Schamis was based on the assumption that these regimes were forerunners of the neo-conservative upsurge culminated in the Washington Consensus of the eighties. The new governments in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile quitted developmental economics, and renewed their faith in the wisdom of the self regulating market. A grudging conversion to neoliberal economic

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<sup>375</sup> For a now classic analysis of this process see Guillermo O'Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973.

<sup>376</sup> See Hector E. Schamis, (1991).

strategies disarmed and dismantled the Latin American political left and its social base according to Brian Loveman.<sup>377</sup>

Alfred Stepan argues that in these countries the bourgeoisie provided the social base for the new authoritarian regimes, whose first political act was the use of the coercive apparatus of the state located institutionally in the military to dismantle and disarticulate working class organizations.<sup>378</sup> This process marginalized the existing corporatist structures and buried the ideas in favor of the governmental regulation of the industrial production and finance. These military regimes aimed to eliminate the popular constituencies that voiced social demands, which was perceived as perfectly legitimate in a populist rule, yet which overburden the political system according the then recently fashionable ideas of the new right, by erroneously pressing the government to interfere with the working of the market. The economic decision making must supposedly be purely economic and thus entirely non-political. Those who disagree with these premises since they had a lot to lose in a seemingly non political economic decision making process were severely repressed.

The established Western democracies, on the other hand, relied on other methods of disenfranchising the social power of the organized labor. Indeed, during the thirties when the classical liberals defined the sphere of economics as strictly distinct from the domain of politics, the theorists that are preaching a more disciplinary version of the capitalist market system such as Carl Schmitt, favored the exclusion of the masses from the political decision making processes.<sup>379</sup> All in all,

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<sup>377</sup> Brian Loveman, "Protected Democracies and Military Guardianship: Political Transitions in Latin America, 1978-1993," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol.36, no.2, (Summer 1994), pp.105-189, p. 114.

<sup>378</sup> Alfred Stepan, "State Power and the Strength of Civil Society in the Southern Cone of Latin America" in Peter Evans, Dieter Rueschemeyer, Theda Skocpol (eds.), *Bringing the State Back in*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1985, pp. 317-345, p. 318

every method of disenfranchising the popular masses from politics were more or less enjoying an audience since ultimately they were built upon the popular reaction against the deepening political and economic crisis of the seventies that made the post war settlement desolate especially for the impoverished middle classes. The definitive example of this kind of politics is Thatcherism, and one another example in the same vein was set in Turkey by the Özal administration.

### Privatizations and Public Sector Reform

The established working of the public sector was one of the principal mechanisms through which the political and social impact of the organized labor was created. That is the very reason why without its transformation no assault against the trade unions will be consequential. Reification of the “market”, widespread efforts to reduce the extent of government regulation and privatization of the public enterprises meant the curbing of the political impact of the organized labor in order to avert the governments from redistributive policies. Especially the shift in the policy objectives in the administration of the state economic enterprises, the negligence of these establishments and the corresponding discourse preaching values such as efficiency and profitability, the traits that are erroneously attributed to the private sector, over the old priorities such as creating employment and regional development were instrumental in undermining the weight of the trade unions.

The public sector was the bastion of the Turkish trade unions, thus their demise obviously hurt the organized labor and their dismal economic performance was deliberately used to blame the workers in general along with the old habits of

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<sup>379</sup> For an evaluation of this debate see Werner Bonefeld, “European Integration: The Market, the Political and Class” *Capital & Class*, Summer 2002, 77, pp. 117-142.

populism. In fact, their declining profits was in parts the result of the lack of new investments, moreover from their inception onwards they provided subsidized goods and services both to the public at large and to the private sector establishments. Therefore, the discourse about their inefficiency reflects the political choice of the government to discredit these establishments in order to pave the way for their privatization. Their privatization would also alter the pillars of the industrial relations and the link between the state and the unionized workers in Turkey.

In 1998 the first important divestiture occurred when Çitosan and Usaş were sold to foreign companies, and Teletaş shares were put up for sale in the İstanbul Stock Exchange.<sup>380</sup> Although privatizations constitute a major component of the structural transformation that the Özal administration stood for, and the governing party always includes this objective in their political platforms, the cabinet never considered seriously during its first term such an attempt. The state economic enterprises did not serve only to build patronage networks in the Anatolian factory towns; they also provided subsidized capital goods and qualified personnel to private business. This means their significance is not restricted to the organized labor, an important segment of industrial bourgeoisie also profited from their existence. Although our subject is restricted to their implication for the political choices of the organized labor, one must note that their fate matters for the employers, too.

The legal foundations for the privatization program were established in 1984, though without any institutional mechanism to enforce market competition after privatizations. But until after the general elections of 1987 the governing party did not push for its privatization agenda. Once its economic policies gained approval as illustrated by its victory at the polls, the state economic enterprises short listed for

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<sup>380</sup> Ziya Öniş, "The Evolution of Privatization in Turkey: The Institutional Context of Public-Enterprise Reform," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol.23, no.2, (May 1991), pp. 163-176, p. 163.

privatization began to be marketed. Among the privatized firms the most noteworthy for the trade unions is Çitosan, which included in its portfolio many cement factories in different Anatolian provinces, all of them unionized. In fact the backbone of Türkiye Çimse-İş, a traditionally docile Türk İş affiliate, is located in these factories. Türkiye Çimse-İş operates in the private businesses thanks to the financial means and membership base provided by its organization in Çitosan. In the absence of this source the survival of the trade union would be in jeopardy since as already cited the stipulations of the Labor Code and the terms of organizational liberties for the trade unions are mainly implemented in the public sector. In this sense, the state economic enterprises set benchmarks for their respective industries. Çitosan is no exception to this rule, without it, protecting the unionization levels in the sector would be difficult unless an accompanying and highly improbable shift in the basic tenets of Turkish trade unionism occurs.

Turgut Özal was never silent on his intentions concerning the state economic enterprises. The change of ownership resulting in a shift of operational principles in the public sector that leads the Turkish industry would have repercussions for the whole of the economy. He was a firm believer in the efficiency of the market mechanism and never refrains from liberalizing imports to discipline the public enterprise workers, for instance when they stroke in Seydişehir the tariffs concerning the aluminum trade were lowered. During his tenure the public enterprises started to loose their roles as industrial leaders due to the lack of new financial resources. The levels of employment in these establishments are also either frozen or dropped in total, though their shares in sales and profitability did not decline because of the

frequent price adjustments, and the public enterprise reform that began with the 24 January economic package.<sup>381</sup> His legacy was unprecedented in this respect.

The opposition, especially SHP, defied vocally the privatization policy of the government. They sent every executive act concerning privatization for constitutional review. Apart from the obvious ideological reasons other motives also play their parts in this staunch criticism of the government over its attitude towards the public sector. In the Turkish context “even strongly pro-private enterprise parties did not push for privatization in practice because it would take significant patronage opportunities from them,”<sup>382</sup> True Path Party of Demirel is a case in point. That is to say opposing privatization is not simply a matter of political preference at the time. However, the Motherland Party of 1988 and 1989 was an exception; the ideological tendency of its leader is clearly lays with privatization.

Another nuisance for trade unions concerning the public enterprise reform apart from privatizations is the spread of employment through periodic personal contracts. The reformers suggested that uniform wages and job security cause inefficiency in the public sector, thus to raise competitiveness among the employees the contracts offering better wages for lesser job security<sup>383</sup> were designed. The personnel employed in this way had no right to organize, yet better wages were offered to the qualified employees who normally can form the spine of the trade union organization in the workplace. For instance, Hava-İş the trade union organized in Turkish airlines lost a quarter of its members since the qualified personnel opted

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<sup>381</sup> For an evaluation of the performance of the public sector under the Özal administration see John Waterbury, “Export-Led Growth and the Center Right Coalition in Turkey,” *Comparative Politics*, vol.24, no.2 (January 1992), pp. 136-139.

<sup>382</sup> Metin Ercan, Ziya Öniş, “Turkish Privatization: Institution and Dilemmas” *Turkish Studies*, vol.2, no.1, (Spring 2001) pp.109-134, p. 120.

<sup>383</sup> John Waterbury, 1992, p. 138.

for individual contracts and abandoned their right to unionize.<sup>384</sup> Moreover, the removal of uniformity in pay and employment conditions divides the workforce. All of these are a clear threat to the organized labor. The trade unions protested vehemently this practice, and SHP also sent the relevant legal amendments to the judicial review.

In all of these so called reforms, the Özal administration aimed to substitute the established practice based on a rationality that prioritized the developmental goals and full employment objectives with a market oriented behavior in these enterprises, in this vein the government also ceased to rely on the networks of patronage created through the public sector trade unions. Similar to the Thatcherist practices, as described under the previous heading the government addressing to an imaginary self sufficient hard working middle class to the detriment of the real people who had material claims from their government that has the authority over the redistribution of the national wealth. The government though considered the allocation through the market mechanisms the only possible legitimate distributional set and blamed all of the demands to the contrary by demonizing popular interest groups such as the unionized workers. The unionized workers once a privileged social sector, praised in the nationalist discourse, enjoying the relative benefits of stable wage, hefty pension and sound insurance schemes and well connected to Ankara through their trade unions lost ground steadily while their moral economy constituted on that basis eradicated increasingly by a government publicly denigrating the workers in the public sector, undermining their social and organizational rights and curtailing their political representation. All in all, the Özal administration as an emblematic case of conservative government trying to impose

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<sup>384</sup> “Sözleşmeli Personel ile Örgütsüzler Cumhuriyetine Doğru Marş Marş,” *İşçilerin Sesi*, 11.07.1989, p.6.



the norms of neoliberal economics assaulted on the moral economy of the unionized workers in order to both undermine their social and political position and more importantly to place firmly the rationales of the new political economy in the bastions of the Turkish industry.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE REVOLT OF THE TRADE UNIONS

What was that angered the unionized workers in all of the developments which constituted the hallmarks of the Özal administration? Most of the studies cite the permanent drop in real wages as the main factor in triggering the resistance spanning from the late 1986 to 1991. This era, as already cited was marked by a cycle of protest directed against the policies of the Özal administration which aimed to transform completely the regime of industrial relations. Was that really their deteriorating working conditions and the lowering of their purchasing power was their main motivation to undertake previously unheard methods of protests in previously docile workplaces, the giant monopolist state economic enterprises such as SEKA or İskenderun Steel Plant. This study argues that it is unfounded to expect a process of popular mobilization to gain ground when a certain point of destitution was reached. There are many other intervening factors, which the political process approach points to, mediating the various aspects of the social mobilization already described in the first chapter. Yet more importantly linking all labor mobilizations and protest movements to a similar reaction against simple deprivation, would erase the distinctive features of different cycles of protest and corresponding processes of labor mobilization. This in turn would not enrich but narrow down our understanding of social movements.

The essential reason underlying the mobilization process did not determine the course of the development of the protest movement. The general direction of the agitation, in the sense that whether its objectives aimed to defend the acquired rights or intended to get new ones, also affects the set of possible outcomes of any cycle of labor protest. Other intervening factors include the existing tool kit of protest which largely set the tone of the movement and the general political developments that can shape the context of the mobilization process. The tool kit of protest, though, can be renovated during a lively cycle of protest through innovation or transfer from another social context. Turkish organized labor movement, despite its weakened political status and organizational resources, possessed a lively tool kit of protest and a strong inclination of claiming their acquired rights even after the coup d'état.

The unionized workers employed in the public sector realized the most illustrious episodes of mass actions during the late eighties as a reaction to the offensive by the Özal administration. Two occasions came to mind and widely cited recently because of the struggle by the TEKEL workers, these are the 1989 spring actions and great miners march of the January of 1990. Students of the field tend to emphasize the decreasing real wages and the collective bargaining process involved in both cases and hence to overlook the historical events, political developments, the specific discourse used by the government and trade unions and smaller labor resistances leading to widespread protests. All of these compose the background and origin of these two colossal episodes, and if they were studied historically, as would be done below, a recurrent theme can be revealed. The Özal administration systematically and deliberately assaulted the moral economy of the unionized workers. Sometimes this assault was *institutional* such as declaring lockouts in the public sector, liberalizing the imports of some products to break the intransigency of

the workers employed in state monopolies, undermining the channels of communication between the governing party and trade unions both at the local and national levels and even forcing the trade unions in the public sector to strike to the benefit of the private entrepreneurs in the very same industry. However, mostly it was carried at the *level of discourse* such as public denigration of the union power and organized labor, blaming the trade unions for the inefficiency and the technological backwardness of the Turkish industry in general, stigmatizing the workers for their wages and social rights and permanent complaints by the government about the state economic enterprises.

The unionized workers reacted to this assault yet their mobilization was neither inevitable nor instant. In line with the predictions of the political process model<sup>385</sup> their anger and frustration is mediated by the political opportunity structure and framed by their past habits and available tool kit of protest. The mobilization process began at first in the fringe of the organized labor movement when the independent trade union organized in private sector resorted to strikes in order to maintain their organizational structure in the companies where unions existed as a legacy of the struggle of the seventies. Then the smaller affiliates of Türk İş alongside Petrol İş entered the scene and disseminated the mobilization process to less traditional spots of industrial clash. The political atmosphere of the time, the constitutional referendum and the elections, also opened a window that made the labor question public. After this stage the normally obedient public sector workers pressed their trade unions to act in order both to counter the aforementioned offensive of the government and to stop the drop in their incomes. The destitution caused by falling incomes only became mass mobilizations through these

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<sup>385</sup> See the first chapter in this dissertation pp. 25-26

intermediating factors. That is why the era spanning from 1986 to 1991 constitutes a typical cycle of protest largely depending on the existing political opportunity structure and the available organizational resources of the labor movement. Indeed, one of the main turning points in this mobilization process was the organizational renovation of the movement or rather the pressures for such a renovation to be exact. In this vein, the 1986 congresses of the Türk İş affiliated trade unions and the main congress of Türk İş was instrumental in concretizing the gathering storm in the labor movement.

### The 1986 Congresses

When 1986 arrived saloon meetings were replaced by the first attempts at open air manifestations. The public authorities were reluctant to allow the workers to take streets even if the martial law is lifted in most of the country during the past years. As a result not all of the planned demonstrations took place, indeed neither the headquarters nor the local branches, except for a very few of them, were eager to push the governors for permissions. Therefore, although Şevket Yılmaz talked a lot about demonstrations a handful actually took place. The İzmir meeting in February was a concrete success. The secretary for education of Türk İş who openly supported the coup, cites the miserable condition of the wage earners that deteriorated steadily during the last five years and the stubborn refusal of the government to acknowledge the workers' grievances as the reason why Türk İş, a labor organization normally preferring dialogue, had to take to streets large crowds of workers in a "magnificent demonstration".<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> Kaya Özdemir, "Tarihi Miting ve Öğrettikleri," *Türk İş Dergisi*, no. 197, (February 1986), pp.18-20.

The success of the İzmir meeting emboldened the confederation headquarters, consequently they toughened their rhetoric. Türk İş began to mention the possibility of general strike in the spring of 1986 after a meeting of the chairmen of its affiliate unions. After this date the call for a general strike would be the staple of empty threats up until 1990, when a general day of action was declared. Always the aim of all of this discourse is to bring about a change in the general outlook of the restrictive nature of the legal context that the trade unions had to operate within, including the articles of the constitution that violates the ILO norms, by every mean available at their arsenal. However, their tool kit of action, which means the strategies of collective action that they learnt and experienced in the past, did not match the present. The government, on the other hand, did not intend to reverse the course pursued by the junta in this respect; to the contrary it wanted to further it as demonstrated by a new bylaw concerning strikes, promulgated in the summer of 1986,<sup>387</sup> right after Türk İş leadership began to voice the possibility of a general strike. This was another proof of the uselessness to attempt to build dialogue with the Özal administration aiming to eradicate every vestige of the populist ways of the old governments in their relations with the unions.

The 1986 by elections witnessed an implementation of an old tool of protest, with a small adjustment to the contemporary needs. Similar to the campaign of punishing deputies who supported legislation against interest of workers at the 1965 general elections, this time Türk İş leadership campaigned against the Motherland Party, which they defined as the main political force which is responsible for the continuation of the restrictions over the civil rights of the workers, the rising cost of living and declining real wages. The confederation planned to organize protests

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<sup>387</sup> Servet Kurtoglu, "İşçi Sınıfı Türk İş Gerçekler," *Yeni Çözüm*, no.2, (February 1987), pp. 6-7, p.7.

against the governing party in the provinces that the elections would take place, yet the provincial governors prohibited most of them. Their campaign proved to be ineffective. Actually, the prime minister said explicitly to a protesting worker that he does not need the votes of the ungrateful workers who do not value the developments that the country went through during his tenure.<sup>388</sup> If the votes of workers become irrelevant what else remain for a Türk İş official as leverage to rely in his lobbying activities around the governmental circles. The traditional way of unionism was in complete shambles.

As the congress drew closer the trade unions published harsher critiques of the government. For instance, in his inaugural speech of Yol-İş congress<sup>389</sup>, the chairman Bayram Meral, blamed the government for trying to use force against the striking workers, due to the new bylaw recently promulgated, criticized its preoccupation with the possible irregularities in trade unions while the news about the fictitious exports and tax evasions of the private businesses were rampant in the mass media. The government according to Bayram Meral prefers to further the interest of the bosses over the wage earners. This means, a chairman of one of the largest affiliates of Türk İş defines the government as a class government of the capitalists. This was a novelty. Indeed, the sixth resolution accepted unanimously in the congress appealed for a total reversal of the 24 January economic policy package<sup>390</sup> that shaped the last six years of the country.

The fourteenth congress of the confederation was held in December and drew much public attention. Unlike the previous congresses, this time three lists competed

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<sup>388</sup> Quoted in Yıldırım Koç, (1989), p.131.

<sup>389</sup> Türkiye Yol-İş Sendikası, *Genel Başkan Bayram Meral'in Türkiye Yol-İş Sendikası 2. Olağan Genel Kurulunu Açış Konuşması*, Ankara, 1986.

<sup>390</sup> Türkiye Yol-İş Sendikası, *İkinci Olağan Genel Kurul Kararları: Program ve Taleplerimiz*, Ankara, 1986, pp. 17-20.

in the congress for every post at the central administration. One of this is led by Şevket Yılmaz the incumbent chairman, from his right he had to compete with Mustafa Özbek the leader of Türk Metal, who interestingly enough hardened his rhetoric and started to talking about “sacrificing everything for militant struggle” and general strike, this was not his typical views and it is argued that his candidacy was supported by the Motherland Party,<sup>391</sup> annoyed by the growing opposition of Şevket Yılmaz. The chief competitor though was the social democratic trade unionist movement, the tendency dating back to the seventies and symbolized in names such as Abdullah Baştürk and Halit Mısırlıoğlu. This tendency was reinvigorated as the nature of the structural transformation that Turkey went through in the aftermath of the military intervention became completely apparent. According to their point of view Şevket Yılmaz and his list represented the traditional deficiencies of the confederation that resulted in the suicidal complicity to the coup that undermined the established rights of the organized labor.

The main issue that the opposition styled itself as a democratic grassroots movement raised is the traditional principle of Türk İş: nonpartisanship. Indeed, this was the main criticism of the trade unions that seceded from the confederation back in the mid sixties in order to form a left winger labor stronghold in close cooperation with the Turkish Workers Party. This time also the opposition had a political partner in the newly founded Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP). This party was the result of the merger between the extra parliamentary Social Democratic Party led by Erdal İnönü and the main parliamentary opposition, the Populist Party. Both political bodies claimed a stake in the Republican People’s Party’s political heritage, and it seemed that the leadership of İnönü was more popular among the followers of this

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<sup>391</sup> Gencay Ozanoğlu, “Türk İş Kurultayı ve Devrimci Sendikal Mücadelenin Geleceği,” *Yeni Çözüm*, no.2, (February 1987), pp. 12-13, p.12.



political tradition. The merger occurred in the early November of 1985 without any major problem.

Unlike its predecessor that ruled the country single handedly after its constitution for almost three decades, the cadres of the new party were those who were politicized under the democratic left politics of Ecevit. They witnessed and took political responsibilities during the seventies in which the party enjoyed a mass appeal among the urban lower middle classes.<sup>392</sup> May be due to this experience SHP positioned itself more like a European socialist party rather than a traditional elitist Kemalist political faction. Furthermore, its political leadership included some trade union chiefs, mostly the younger generation of social democratic unionism movement, which was active in some important affiliates of Türk İş, such as the young chairman of Petrol İş, Cevdet Selvi, who was also their candidate to the presidency of Türk İş, although the new legal context does not allow the trade union officials to be involved into politics which was a major departure from the previous practice in which many important trade union leaders were also parliamentarians.

The loss of their right to be elected to the parliament did not reduce the social democratic trade unionist's involvement into the party businesses; the eighties resolved some of the problems that hampered their efficiency back in the seventies. First of all, they reestablished their unity. When some joined DİSK, those who remained in Türk İş had to cease their close cooperation with their comrades now registered to a different confederation. Besides, the relationship between Bülent Ecevit and Abdullah Baştürk one of the pioneers and symbols of the social democratic unionism movement deteriorated steadily over the course of the late seventies, further handicapping the political weight of this movement within the

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<sup>392</sup> For the analysis of the realignment of the Turkish electorate in the seventies see Ergun Özbudun, Frank Tachau, (1975).

RPP. The military administration by suppressing DİSK eliminated this schism, besides neither Ecevit nor Baştürk were able to be involved in every day politics. Secondly, SHP had to deal with the Motherland Party government whose policy line is particularly suitable for the opposition to resort to a political rhetoric stressing the issues related to labor and social problems. Obviously, the trade union activists are specifically adept at such situations.

Yet, while Türk İş leadership stayed at the hands of conservative unionists, their audacious political agenda of establishing a European type socialist party with a strong support base from amongst the ranks of organized labor was bound to remain hollow. The 1986 congresses seemed like the opportune moment to oust the compromise that gave the post of chairman to a mild moderate, while distributing the other posts on the basis of the strengths of the affiliate unions in Türk İş headquarters, which began after the election of İbrahim Denizcier and which always produced a single seat for the social democratic tendency. This time, social democrats, or to be exact the politically active wing of this tendency that has very close relationships with SHP, wanted to form a central administration consisting of their loyalists, and they refer to themselves as the list of Democratic Rising.

As already cited their main criticism was directed to the nonpartisanship principle. According to them this principle made Türk İş complicit in the junta administration that stole the hard won rights of the Turkish workers, moreover the junta and the new institutional context that they imposed over the organized labor left out the workers outside of the domain of politics, this is worse. The attitude of the confederation during the military interregnum was under severe criticism.<sup>393</sup> It seems that the social democratic tendency wanted to profit from the notoriety of the Sadık

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<sup>393</sup> Their ideas were exposed in their pamphlet. See Çağdaş Araştırma Merkezi, *Demokratik Yükselişe Doğru*, Gümüş Matbaası, İstanbul, 1986.

Side's involvement into a government that practically destroyed every vestige of worker's rights. In general they attached all the hardships that the wage earners had to suffer, such as decreasing purchasing powers, unemployment, sagging in the minimum wage, and the difficulties that the trade unions had to confront in registering new members, to the institutional context constructed during the military interregnum, and blamed the complicity of the Türk İş headquarters in it, along with their choice of pushing incessantly for dialogue even if the government discarded their moves in that respect.

Moreover, the apparent change of rhetoric in the higher echelons of the leadership of the traditional Türk İş direction about the legal measures throughout 1985 and 1986 possessed enormous propaganda value for the social democratic unionists who criticized and warned, although faintly, the leadership of the confederation at the time of their promulgation. All in all, the social democratic opposition movement cites the conservative political tendency of the existing leadership and their insistence on dialogue with the government in order to resolve the problems along with the principle of nonpartisanship that distanced the confederation from the labor politics as the main culprit of the woeful condition of the workers.

The social democratic opposition movement prefers struggle rather than dialogue, and suggested a more radical political stand against the government that want to further transform the balance of power of the industrial relations regime, using the opportune institutional context created by the junta administration. The agenda of the Özal administration, in this respect, includes the renovation of the regulations about severance benefits and seniority bonuses of workers in order to lessen their costs over the employers, privatization of public enterprises and

discrediting the trade unions. They militated in the congresses to launch a politically supported campaign against the institutional context of the regime of industrial relations in order to destroy the system of thresholds, the abolition of the requirement of approval by public notaries of trade union memberships and the elimination of the Supreme Arbitration Council, and the suppression of every legal ban forbidding trade unions' involvement into politics.

The opposition failed to gain a seat in the central administration of Türk İş; indeed they could not achieve to unite all of the left winger militants on their platform. For instance, Orhan Balaban the incumbent secretary for organization did not distance himself from Şevket Yılmaz, although he is a known social democrat and achieved to get reelected by securing the largest support among the delegates since he is supported by both the social democrats and those who vote for Şevket Yılmaz. Şevket Yılmaz defeated Cevdet Selvi with a very thin margin just like Emin Kul who was elected to the post of general secretary by beating his social democrat rival Kenan Durukan from Harb-İş. Two names most attached to the junta administration, Sadık Şide and Kaya Özdemir from Türk Metal, were purged. Another veteran Türk İş official Ömer Ergun, the long serving bookkeeper of the confederation also had to quit his post. This move reflected the growing unease with the collaboration of Türk İş during the military interregnum. While Şevket Yılmaz denied every allegation concerning their support of the constitutional text, the names that praised vocally the coup at the time were eliminated from the administrative ranks. The new names elected in their stead, Mustafa Başoğlu and Çetin Göçer were mainly associated with the heir to the Justice Party, the True Path Party (DYP), led by Süleyman Demirel from behind the scenes. As a result, the new central administration reflected a compromise between the moderates anew. Those who

support SHP failed to reach to their objectives, though the new leadership is apparently unsympathetic to the aspirations of the governing party.

### The Situation in Private Businesses

The private employers who achieved to adapt themselves to the necessities of the new era enjoyed hefty benefits both due to the governmental favor and decreasing labor militancy. However, as already mentioned the source of the export boom was the existing import substituting industries, private or public, and these establishments were used to trade unions as a legacy of the sixties and the seventies. Türk Metal in the absence of rivalry from Maden-İş achieved to establish its dominance by extending its reach to the private sector where the businesses were familiar to be unionized. However, especially the ex-members of Maden İş were reluctant to join this trade union and opted for independent trade unions. The above cited Otomobil-İş is one of the most important independent trade unions of the eighties and organized the first well publicized and large strike of the post coup period. The development of this strike also illustrates the institutional implementation of the right to strike. This trade union organized in the metal sector and mostly active in private businesses had a decent history of labor struggle dating back to the sixties, closed for two months after the coup d'état and obliged to assemble the meetings of its headquarters under the police surveillance like the other trade unions except for Türk İş head office. When it became apparent that Maden-İş would be kept closed even under the civilian rule its membership overwhelmingly opted for Otomobil-İş making this old but small trade union a serious competitor for Türk Metal which conducted a ferocious and sometimes violent campaign against Maden-İş prior to 1980.

The rapid extension of its membership base, which comprised ninety seven factories at the end of 1983, alarmed the directors of Türk Metal. Türk Metal applied to labor courts arguing that its main competitor was under the ten per cent sectoral threshold hence legally unable to sign collective agreements on behalf of its members. Moreover, the authorities in some provinces did not allow Otomobil-İş to open branches in their cities. The labor ministry announced the membership percentage of the trade union as two per cent below the necessary mark in the January of 1984. Some members resign since it was completely senseless to be registered to a trade union that can not legally bargain with the employer. Türk İş was the most vocal supporter of these high thresholds asserting that these would prevent the constitution of company based yellow trade unions with the initiative of employers.<sup>394</sup> In fact, the thresholds did not only prevent yellow trade unions but also any potential competitor to the long established Türk İş affiliates. This measure was proposed in the infamous attempt to amend the law on trade unions in 1970 resulting in the 15 and 16 June riots. After all, it is unlikely for workers to enlist themselves into a newly established trade union and show patience while waiting for it to surpass such a high national threshold since this means for them to abandon their right to strike and collective bargaining.<sup>395</sup> Obviously, the new law ratified by the junta administration is aiming to create a union monopoly under Türk İş.

The courts ruled in favor of Otomobil-İş in the July of 1984 declaring this trade union qualified to operate in full authority. This was the consequence of the loyalty of the majority of its members often led by the veteran labor militants from

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<sup>394</sup> Yıldırım Koç, “İşçi Hakları ve Sendikacılık” *11. Tez*, vol. 5, February 1987, pp. 32-75.

<sup>395</sup> One must remember that the Turkish industrial relations regime does not allow the workers to declare strikes but the trade unions; any strike which was not started according to the legal procedure by the qualified trade union is illegal and punishable under the penal code. The new law added the necessity to surpass the ten per cent threshold nationally in order to be considered qualified to declare legal strikes or conduct collective bargains.

the old Maden İş. However, these rulings only intensified the legal dispute between Türk Metal and Otomobil-İş in their rivalry to construct their hold over individual companies. For instance, Erdemir the most modern steel plant of the country, once a bastion of Maden-İş, was a cause of an incessant and lengthy legal struggle between them. Because of the trials the workers of Erdemir were unable to sign collective contracts for years. In this case Türk Metal ultimately achieved to win at the courts.

Otomobil-İş organized arguably the first significant strike of the eighties in Netaş; there existed prior strikes though these occurred either in very small establishments or the subject of the disagreement between the parties was petty hence strikes lasted short, like in the Birleşik Alman medicine factory where Petrol-İş strike for a few days. Netaş, a İstanbul based establishment with foreign partnership producing equipments for telecommunication, was in the process of collective bargain when the negotiations collapsed during the late October of 1986. Otomobil-İş decided to conduct a strike and finalized the legal procedure a month later. The government forced the employees of the state telecommunication services, both civil servants and interns to replace the striking workers which amount to around two thousand and six hundred person, in order to break the strike.<sup>396</sup> This was a violation of the labor code; however the government wanted to demonstrate its hardliner attitude towards striking and prove its inefficiency. The social democratic parliamentary opposition took a great interest in the strike and showed solidarity, triggering a judicial investigation of their leader, Erdal İnönü. The new strike code prohibited all forms of picketing, indeed it does not allow more than two strikers at once in front of the work place and no shelters can be built for them. That practically means, during winters no striker representative would be present to control the

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<sup>396</sup> For an interview with the local representative of Otomobil-İş, Şahin Önayak, in the 35<sup>th</sup> day of the strike see Tolga Güner, "Netaş İşçileri Tek Yumruk," *Yeni Çözüm*, no.2, (February 1987), pp.8-9.

implementation of the strike. There existed harsh penal clauses in the Law on Strikes and Collective Bargaining. All of these prevented the effective implementation of the strike. However, the strategic value of this establishment and the solidarity of its workers made the strike successful at the end of three months. In the February of 1987 the collective contract was signed and immediately the leaders of the strike were fired. Consequently the membership of Otomobil-İş dropped below the half of total employees pushing the trade union under the establishment threshold, losing its competence of organizing legal strikes. To protest that, the workers resort to actions as stopping production or slowing down the work, yet all of these more passive forms of resistance are illegal according to law. The employer invited police force within the factory to break down this kind of resistance and it succeeded.

The Netaş strike, which was significant because of the sheer number of the workers involved and their resoluteness, demonstrates the consequences of the new institutional mechanisms in quelling the labor militancy. The cost of a successful strike was high; most of the leaders were often purged from the payroll in private businesses.<sup>397</sup> Striking itself is linked to a lengthy legal procedure, just like the old system of the import substitution era, yet this time the implementation of this right is also stripped from most of its effective practices, such as picketing or organizing solidarity strikes. In these circumstances, the workers have to resort to other means which were not clearly prohibited in the text of the law; even these were banned in its spirit. Indeed, the impossibility of striking because of the existing restrictions is a shared opinion among the officials of Türk İş trade unions. For instance, Tamer

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<sup>397</sup> Firing off workers because of union membership is unconstitutional. However, in case of dismissals due to union membership, the burden of proof lied with the employee until the necessary legal changes were made in compliance to the ILO standards after 2000. The employers sought compensation to allow these amendments to be ratified, and pushed for some limitations on the severance pay rights of the workers with success.



Eralan, the chairman of Türkiye Çimse-İş defines strikes as a “right on the paper”, “impossible to put into practice” that none believes to be used efficiently.<sup>398</sup>

Nevertheless, the impact of the Netaş strike was an experience of empowerment for Turkish workers as illustrated by the immediate launch of other strikes by the other important independent trade union Laspetkim-İş. The argument of the impossibility of organizing a strike was invalidated in practice yet with a grave cost. It seems that labor militants in private businesses, who remembered the seventies, resorted to their old tool kit of action by organizing a sizeable and staunch strike in the dire economic circumstances coupled with a mildly favorable political environment in which the primary left winger opposition was pushing to represent itself as the champion of the cause of labor and the mainstream trade union centre became more vocal in expressing their complaints. The use of innovative and less confrontational protest methods, on the other hand, would be the strategy of the public enterprise workers generally member of Türk İş.

The Netaş strike was immediately followed by two strikes organized by Laspetkim-İş in Dora and Derby factories in the first months of 1987.<sup>399</sup> The former lasted for a little long than a month and resulted in a settlement along the demands of the trade union. The latter strike was more serious. Derby factory was home to some of the most important events of labor militancy during the seventies, thus the Derby employees are not foreign to militant struggle. These developments are reminiscent of the previous era during which the industrial center of the country, İstanbul and its immediate surroundings, became familiar to industrial struggles, in fact the two independent unions which were active in metal processing and chemical industries

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<sup>398</sup> Quoted in Çağdaş Araştırma Merkezi, *Demokratik Yükselişe Doğru*, p.144.

<sup>399</sup> For an analysis of the strikes organized in the first months of 1987 see Sinan Doğanay, “Grev Dalgası Yayılıyor,” *Yeni Çözüm*, no.2, (February 1987) pp.10-11.

followed the legacy inherited from the earlier decade in harsher circumstances. From a certain point of view it can be claimed that, if the coup d'état aimed to neutralize the labor militancy, it did not seem like a story of total success in the early 1987, the following three or four years would validate this argument.

On the other hand, the new institutional context of the industrial relations can not be assumed as inconsequential. Obviously, resorting to legal means such as strikes is costly and brings dubious results to those who wanted to further the cause of labor. In these conditions new forms of resistance enter into the agenda of the trade unions. For instance, while Laspetkim-İş continued its strikes, the İzmir municipality workers, once a stronghold of the then closed Genel-İş, the trade union chaired by Abdullah Baştürk, the local chief of the Genel Hizmet-İş trade union, the heir to Genel-İş, which failed to surpass the threshold, started a hunger strike to protest the performance of the qualified trade union, namely Belediye-İş. Another hunger strike around the same time took place in the Philips factory by the local representative of Otomobil-İş. It seems that when they failed to meet the legal mandates, especially the independent trade unions were ready to improvise, a feature that would disseminate to other parts of the organized labor movement very soon. For instance during the 1987 summer the dissident local officials of Demiryol-İş also resorted to hunger strikes to protest the central administration of the trade union that signed a collective contract well below the expectations of the workers. However, one must also note that the hunger strikes were a strategy of struggle used by the leftist political prisoners at the time, so possibly they were borrowing the strategy invented in another type of struggle. All in all, the end of 1986 demonstrated that the organized labor movement still possessed the potential of claim making through unconventional means.

## The 1987 Strike Wave

Şevket Yılmaz declared 1987 as a year of action when he is reelected to the Türk İş presidency. The significance of that year rose when the government decided to hold a referendum over whether to restore the political rights of the banned politicians. The military administration striped all of the parliamentarians and the party officials off their political rights with a provisional clause of the constitution, the vote will decide whether to remove this clause. The confederation, which already declared its support for the amendment of the constitutional stipulations restricting rights and liberties, especially those clauses breaching the ILO norms, which hamper the unionization efforts, offered its unconditional support to the old politicians. In fact, Şevket Yılmaz and his colleagues had a known political preference for Süleyman Demirel, the ex-prime minister, who would benefit most from the lift of the ban. Accordingly, Türk İş campaigned vigorously for the yes vote during the 1987 referendum. It seems that the principle of nonpartisanship fell to disrepute when one of the main political parties, the governing party to make matters worse, wants deliberately to confront the trade unions. Desperate to find political partners from among the establishment, the confederation sided with the old names. Therefore, politicizing the organized labor movement was not the choice of the confederation but the consequence of the choice of the Motherland Party. After the campaign some trade union leaders were even tried for taking part into the politics.

The referendum was a minor defeat for the Özal administration, the margin of the victory was slim. However, the opponents of the government rejoiced their triumph. In a defiant move Turgut Özal decided to hold the general elections in that same year. Obviously, the referendum campaign offered an opportunity to criticize

the constitution and hence the mentality backing it. The political opportunity structure emerged in this process favored the workers and the other victims of the social, political and economic transformation triggered by the coup d'état to some extent. However, the amendment in the constitution does not signify an opening of the political regime or reversal of the restrictive nature of the industrial relations system. As already cited, especially in the domain of rights and liberties of the working class the government opted for the increase of the limitations concerning the right to strike. The opportunity lays rather with the opening of the constitutional debate to the public through the referendum process. The organized labor benefited from this occasion for articulating their grievances to the victimization of the old political class in a political discourse questioning the legitimacy of the coup d'état, hence the present government that capitalized on the political, social and economic results of the military intervention. The debate that the referendum created mattered because it legitimized the labor militancy in the eyes of the public; else its concrete consequences had little to do for the trade unions.

Indeed, the governing party won the general elections to the dismay of the confederation headquarters that campaigned against the government openly, facing the risk of judicial sanctions again because of the encouraging result of the referendum. The victory of the Motherland Party broke the motivation of the headquarters. They hold to the meager hope of better treatment from the government because the new appointee to the Labor Ministry, İmren Aykut, who worked previously as an economic consultant in Türk İş trade unions. She entered into politics after the coup as a member of Nationalist Democracy Party, favored by the military and supported by the confederation during the 1983 general elections. Although the results of the general elections can be disheartening for the higher

echelons of the organized labor movement, the impact over the grassroots was less, since they did not rely over the possible consequences of the referendum as argued above.

While the top brass of the movement took part in the Ankara politics during 1987, the economic conditions continued to deteriorate for the workers. The slight political opening was not translated into the economic gains, thus the grassroots vivacity continued. Türk İş trade unions are not cast aside in this nascent process of mobilization. Some of the minor affiliates of the confederation are active in private businesses and have to endure similar problems with the likes of Otomobil-İş and Laspetkim-İş. However Petrol İş, one of the largest trade unions of the country, also followed the examples of the independent trade unions. Petrol-İş is organized in the chemical industry and its portfolio includes both private businesses and sizeable state economic enterprises such as TÜPRAŞ, the largest refinery complex in Turkey. 1987 was the year of the renewal of the collective agreements in this sector. The government wanted to continue its policy of low wages in this crucial industrial sector, moreover the policy of centrally conducting the whole bargains concerning the public sector and coordinating the offers of the public employer with the private employers' trade unions, KİPLAS in this case, was vigorously observed. This policy, which Özal himself invented right after the 24 January economic package, infuriates the trade unions as already cited, and considered one of the chief deviations of the Özal administration from the established norms and practices of the management of the public enterprises since the public employer is registered to TİSK, the umbrella organization of the private employers. Petrol-İş labels the collaboration between the public employer and KİPLAS a class front of the “monopolist capital” “constituted by the government and TİSK”, the employers' confederation, against the Turkish

working class.<sup>400</sup> While the government deviates from the established norms and practices the rhetoric of the trade unions radicalized.

The encouragement from the government that KİPLAS enjoyed made the building of a compromise between the parties impossible. From the late February 1987 onwards the bargain process collapsed and the strikes were declared. The trade union organized strikes in sixty three establishments, both public and private, for three months. Approximately 9500 workers participated in these strikes, in thirteen different provinces. The support of the government to KİPLAS was not confined to the few public enterprises in the process of collective bargaining, which left their decision making power in the hands of the private employer's association. Furthermore, the bargaining process in TPAO and TÜPRAŞ, two giant public enterprises where the bulk of Petrol-İş members are employed and striking is legally forbidden since the military intervention due to the strategic nature of these two companies was suspended. The government wants to force its terms, the terms of KİPLAS to be exact, onto Petrol-İş by leaving ten thousand public enterprise workers who do not have the right to strike without a new work contract in a period of rampant inflation.

Suspending the right to strike in a public enterprise is understandable from the perspective that the Turkish government fostered in trade unions from the late forties onwards. The public enterprises are power bases of trade unions; they are the places where Türk İş was constituted. Dialogue and lobbying in Ankara ought to be the primary means through which the collective bargains are settled there and with legitimate causes such as the national development, strikes might be forbidden through legal means. However, taking hostage the public enterprise workers who

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<sup>400</sup> Petrol-İş, *63 Grev 63 Mücadele*, Petrol-İş, İstanbul, 1987, pp. 7-9.

were denied any right to struggle for the sake of national development in order to support the demands of the private employers is inconceivable for the Turkish trade unionists. This is one of the issues where the moral economy of the Turkish public enterprise workers is breached, and that is why the central committee of Petrol-İş points to the existence of a class front of capitalists formed by the government and TİSK, a discourse foreign to Türk İş circles but started to proliferate among the ranks of the organized labor movement. The government is no more the “father of workers,”<sup>401</sup> it opted deliberately to ignore the demands of its citizens under its payroll to the benefit of the employers.

The workers of TPAO and TÜPRAŞ did not acquiesce to their fates; in solidarity with their striking comrades they invent new methods of protest short of striking. These innovations to surpass striking bans include refusing to eat lunches in the mess halls or taking company busses, and calling in sick collectively. The latter method will be a widely used addition to the tool kit of labor protest during the nineties by the public servants. The employers, on the other hand, tried to benefit from the restrictive nature of the legal mechanisms to nullify the impact of strikes. They sought to continue the production by forcing the personnel, who did not have the right to unionize since they were considered as employer’ representatives, or the unionized personnel who do not have the right to strike according to law, to work instead of the striking workers. These practices illustrate splendidly how the institutional context was composed to make striking obsolete and show us the insurmountable difficulties that the trade unions have to surpass in order to organize a successful strike. There are important establishments in some industries where striking is illegal, there are large segments of workers who were denied the right to

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<sup>401</sup> Celal Güner, the bookkeeper of Genel Hizmet-İş made this remark in an interview see *Yeni Çözüm*, no. 7, (September 1987), p. 53.

strike or even to unionize by law, picketing is forbidden so that even in the midst of winter the police did not allow the strikers built primitive shacks<sup>402</sup> for the two union representative that the law allows to watch the implementation of the strike.

After three months an agreement was reached among the parties and the strike is terminated with an average success in terms of demands accepted by the employers. However, the impact of this strike over the organized labor in general was far greater. First of all, the number of workers involved is almost ten thousand, excluding a similar number who do not have the right to strike employed in strategic public enterprises; moreover they are spread to the different regions of the country. Petrol-İş organized large saloon meetings in every province that strikes were held, attracting the public attention to these issues especially in the provinces, where, unlike the metropolitan centers, a medium for the public debate around such issues are absent.<sup>403</sup> In a sense, Petrol-İş carried to every corner of the country the wave that Otomobil-İş and Laspetkim-İş started. Obviously, the radical rhetoric of Petrol-İş, its success during the strike process and afterwards further encouraged especially the smaller affiliates of Türk İş in their attempts to resolve their issues through direct action.

Among these smaller trade unions three of them also spent the summer of 1987 in the streets rather than bargaining tables. Kristal-İş organized a rather small and short lasting strike in Kılıçoğlu roof tiles factory in Eskişehir. However, their main preoccupation was in Toprak Seramik where the employer began to fire unionized workers in the January of 1987. The trade union spent the preceding year in organizational efforts in the establishment, yet relying on the existing laws and the

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<sup>402</sup> Cevdet Selvi asserts that many strikers experienced lung problems due to the harsh winter cold during Petrol-İş strikes see *Migros Grevi ve Grevlerin Genel Bir Değerlendirmesi*, Yeni Çözüm Yayınları, İstanbul, 1987, p. 32.

<sup>403</sup> Petrol-İş, 1987, pp. 80-87.



connivance of the Labor Ministry, the employer, one of the favorites of the government, purged all of the pioneers with different pretexts and threatened the others with the same fate. Kristal-İş unable to resist these developments in legal grounds, made a boycott appeal against the products of Toprak holding, and pushed hard during the labor friendly climate of the summer of 1987 to succeed in this venture with little success.

A more rewarding experience happened in Kazlıçeşme. Kazlıçeşme district was home to the leather processing businesses for centuries, as the industry develops the area turned to be the hub of small capitalist establishments. The first documented labor action in the area dates back to 1920, and it is related to the then active Turkish socialist party led by Hüseyin Hilmi.<sup>404</sup> The qualified leather processing workers and their employers had a constant tension over the issues related wages and social benefits. Lockouts and strikes were widespread in the area before the coup d'état. Zeytinburnu neighborhood adjacent to Kazlıçeşme has been a shanty town resided by the workers employed in the surrounding area from the early forties onwards<sup>405</sup>, and it was a center of political activity of the radical left winger groups in the late seventies. In the summer of 1985 Deri-İş, a Türk İş affiliate, attempted to organize a strike during the negotiations with the local employers, and a short lasting strike and lockout occurred. In 23 March 1987, Kazlıçeşme workers left their lunches in order to protest a work place accident and made a public press declaration in front of the factory where the accident took place with the slogan “not accident but murder”<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> See M. Şehmus Güzel, *Türkiye’de İşçi Hareketi: 1908-1984*, Kaynak Yayınları, İstanbul, 1996, pp. 110-115.

<sup>405</sup> For a description of the area by an ex-member of parliament who was responsible for social issues in the Republican People’s Party see Rebi Barkın, “Mesken Buhranı Karşısında Gecekonduların Durumu,” *Hürbilet*, 17.04.1948, pp.1, 3.

<sup>406</sup> Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, “Kazlıçeşme Deri İşçileri Protesto Eylemi,” 1998, p.247.

under heavy police surveillance. Four months earlier Otomobil-İş made use of the same method during the process of collective bargaining when the representative of the employer acted negligently. Thereupon two local officials of the trade union were taken into custody for inciting the workers, not to eat lunch in this case. At the time, many workers would generally refrain from attending such protests. However, neither 1987 was a usual year nor the Zeytinburnu workers were an ordinary bunch.

In the summer of 1987, when the time for a new contract arrives, the negotiating parties were more determined to impose their terms. As a result, the negotiations came to an impasse rapidly, in the late June lockouts and strikes were declared mutually which halted the production in approximately 120 small and middle sized leather factories. The lockouts were used as leverage against the trade union since it effectively shut down the production in the whole of Kazlıçeşme whereas Deri-İş stroke only in 33 factories where it can support its members. The strikes involved almost two thousand workers, who, in accordance with their militant tradition, did not tend to remain in the confines of the legal striking procedure, and Deri-İş did very little to discourage them. Therefore the police intervened in many instances, yet the authorities refrain from intruding when the employers breached the law and tried to move their merchandise elsewhere. When the laws lack equity among the employees and employers, the government officials tend to further distort the balance. The main opposition party, SHP, camped in Zeytinburnu district to demonstrate its solidarity with workers.

Zeytinburnu became the focal point of the labor resistance in the summer of 1987 when another, Türk İş affiliate, TÜMTİS, stroke in Topkapı warehouses. The warehouses are operated by small businesses though in a unified manner. Like the leather workers, the porters and drivers had a past of militancy and mostly resided in

the surrounding Zeytinburnu district. In order to expose the solidarity that the workers enjoyed Deri-İş decided to organize an open air meeting to protest the lockouts in September 20<sup>th</sup>. The meeting took place in Bayrampaşa, it was the first action of its kind organized in İstanbul after the coup d'état. Türk İş headquarters was reluctant to offer its support and the authorities intimidated the workers, which is why only a six thousand strong crowd, made up of mostly Migros workers, TÜMTİS and Deri-İş members, all in strike, were present.<sup>407</sup> The reports show that leftist militants are also among the crowd.<sup>408</sup> The use of left winger symbols during the meeting irritated the police force and some participants were taken into custody, yet the meeting came to pass without any major trouble.

The most interesting development though was the strike that took place in Migros. This strike has many peculiarities that attracted the public attention. First of all, Migros stores are not blue collar work places; they are not situated in the industrial fringes of the urban areas but in the middle of middle class residential areas. In this sense the strike brought the labor militancy to a new setting in every possible meaning of the term. It not only carried the conflict to a new type of occupational group of the service sector, but also to a new type of neighborhood. The press also showed interest in this strike since Migros stores are owned by arguably the most prestigious business empire in the country, Koç Holding, furthermore it was led by a woman, namely Aynur Karaaslan<sup>409</sup> the chief of the İstanbul branch of Türk İş affiliate, Tez Koop-İş. She was the only chairwoman at the time in Türk İş either in local or national level.

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<sup>407</sup> “Grevlere Destek Mitingi: İşçi Toplantısı İçin Polis Sıkı Önlem Aldı,” *Güneş*, 21.09.1987.

<sup>408</sup> “Lokavtlara Karşı Deri-İş Mitingi,” *Yeni Çözüm*, no. 10, (June 1987), p. 68.

<sup>409</sup> For an interview with Karaaslan while the bargaining process continued see *Yeni Çözüm*, no. 5, (June 1987), pp. 50-52.

The strike concerning 1100 workers lasted for four months and occupied the press during most of the fall. Because of the public interest Şevket Yılmaz himself tried to mediate an agreement between the parties. This strike also demonstrated some aspects of the existing laws that seriously handicap the possibility of conducting a successful struggle through striking. Three issues in this respect came to the public attention, first of all the courts backed the decision by the employer to withhold the benefit payments to striking workers although these are due prior to the strike. Secondly, picketing was again turned to be a problem when the two strikers allowed according to law used nylon calash to be protected from the hard rain. The police drafted an indictment for pitching tent around the work place.<sup>410</sup> Lastly, the employer attempted to bypass the terms of strike by transporting its merchandise to elsewhere with the connivance of the authorities, yet the courts adjudicate in favor of the trade union in this case. The Migros strike enjoyed a wide reaching solidarity from international trade unions to local left winger groups thanks to its large publicity in the press. Tez Koop-İş also organized a special night to boost the morale of the striking workers.

### The Evaluation of the 1987 Strike Wave

It seems that from the early 1987 onwards, the strikes normalized gradually, especially in the greater İstanbul area, the industrial center of the country and took the shape of a minor and localized strike wave. “Strikes differ emphatically from cumulative social phenomena such as births, school attendance and traffic attendance since they veer rapidly in location and number from one period to the next. Indeed

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<sup>410</sup> *Migros Grevi ve Grevlerin Genel Bir Değerlendirmesi*, 1987, p. 92.

strikes arrive in great waves that wash over an entire region or country.”<sup>411</sup> The developments of 1987 comply with such a pattern. A year earlier the seventies was a distant past even in the memories of the most militant trade union officials. In the first nine months of 1987, though, the situation altered dramatically and the rhetoric of the preceding decade was heard again in workplaces and the mobilization albeit lost impetus in some instances, never died down until the demise of the government in 1991.

The strikes that took place and the trade unions that organized them had some distinguishable common features, collecting them under the common umbrella of a strike wave. The majority of these strikes mobilizing more than twenty five thousand workers are organized in private businesses by the more radical trade unions affiliated to Türk İş. However, except for Petrol İş, none of them were influential in the decision making mechanisms of the confederation, and unlike the majority of the Türk İş affiliates they are active in private businesses. Obviously, the case of Petrol İş stood alone, since it is one of the biggest trade unions in Turkey, the titular locomotive of the social democratic opposition in the confederation, and though organized itself also in private businesses, its power base rested in the public sector.

Why does the striking behavior proliferate in 1987 throughout the small trade unions of Türk İş, mostly situated in the greater İstanbul area and organized in private businesses? Obviously the transformation of the attitude in the confederation headquarters matter. The hardening of the rhetoric by the central leadership and the gradual rise in militancy of the protest methods adopted by the headquarters, such as the replacement of saloon meetings with open air demonstrations, the constant reciprocal lambasting between the government and Türk İş, all seem to signify to

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<sup>411</sup> Charles Tilly, “Introduction” in Leopold Haimson, Charles Tilly (eds.), *Strikes, Wars, and Revolutions in an International Perspective: Strikes Waves in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2002, pp. 433-448. p.433.

those who wanted, needed or pushed to strike the opportune moment is 1987, indeed, Şevket Yılmaz, the chairman of Türk İş declared 1987 as a year of action at the end of the confederation's congress as already cited.

The demonstration effect also seems to play a part in the slow but steady proliferation of the strikes. The relative success of Netaş continued by Derby and Dora strikes surpassed a threshold when Petrol İş achieved to sign a more or less favorable collective agreement as a result of its harsh and resolute struggle against the unified front of public and private chemical industry employers. During and after the chemical industry strikes during the summer of 1987, the other trade unions encouraged by the latest developments, began their action. The demonstration effect was not restricted to the recent past evidently. The strikes mostly took place, with the exception of Migros, in industries and even companies that became familiar with such acts during the seventies. However, due to the restrictive nature of the institutional context surrounding the regime of industrial relations, the trade unions have to innovate. In the absence of picketing not only the symbolism of strikes vanishes, but also their efficiency. That is why new forms of protest such as boycotts<sup>412</sup> were also used. The one declared against the products of Toprak Seramik by Kristal İş came to mind in this respect.

The obvious reason for striking, the deteriorating economic conditions, did not constitute a novelty for 1987. Real wages declined constantly after 1979, and 1987 was neither exception nor a dramatic worsening of the conditions occurred. However, the political agenda of this year was loaded and that may play a part in the strike wave. The constitutional referendum provided a focus of public debate around

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<sup>412</sup> Boycotts are not completely foreign to the tool kit of the Turkish workers though; it is widely applied against the products of the foreign owned firms or stores during the first years following the 1908 revolution especially by the port workers. See for instance Yusuf Doğan Çetinkaya, *1908 Osmanlı Boykotu Bir Toplumsal Hareketin Analizi*, İstanbul, İletişim, 2004.

the rights and liberties regime of the country. The organized labor is among the main victims of the limitations imposed over the basic political rights and this was vocally criticized by the leadership of the trade unions from the early 1986 onwards.

Consequently, trade unions turned to be natural speakers for any political coalition fighting to enlarge the constricted margins of the Turkish democracy. The victory of the yes vote might further embolden the trade unions. On the other hand, the Motherland Party's victory at the general elections might contribute the relative retreat of the movement in 1988, yet 1989 the year for municipal elections and the collective bargaining process for the public sector is another story.

It must be noted that the 1987 strike wave, however local and minor, destroyed the feeling of hopelessness in the trade union circles and proved the possibility of striking even under the existing legal procedures.<sup>413</sup> Indeed as the strikes proliferate in the summer of 1987, the Council of State annulled the bylaw that the government recently promulgated, further convincing the trade union militants in their power. As a result some other strikes also took place, for instance in the State Ware's Office or in the giant public enterprise Seydişehir aluminum factory where Türk Metal stroke for three months due to the ridiculously low wage offers of the public employer. Indeed, general complaints about the conditions of the laborers aggravated by the unresponsiveness of the government were the main themes in these labor actions. When the news of the strike in Seydişehir reached him, Özal threatened them with shutting down the factory, the only producer of aluminum, and liberalize the import of this metal. The leader of Türk Metal, Mustafa Özbek, a trade union boss known for his docility vis-à-vis the employers and the state reacted ferociously to the remark made by Özal and called him a "strike breaker" and

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<sup>413</sup> *Migros Grevi ve Grevlerin Genel Bir Değerlendirmesi*, 1987, pp. 14-23.

“workers’ enemy”<sup>414</sup>, the latter epithet will stick. The Seydişehir case demonstrates clearly the nonchalance of the government amounting to an implicit public insult against the organized labor.

All in all, only a multi factor analysis can account for deciphering the reasons underlying a strike wave, since an industrial conflict is a volatile phenomenon resembling open political struggle in which the factors influencing its outcome can not be reduced to the behavior and qualities of its direct contestants. The government policies and preferences, business cycles and political opportunity structures also contribute to the development and outcome of the industrial conflicts. The form of the ties between organized labor and government affects strike activity quite strongly.<sup>415</sup> The past tradition of struggle of the organized labor, in this case this tradition was formed as a result of both the latest relatively successful strikes and the recent past of Turkish trade unionism must also be added to the formula. However, in this case the relation of the government to the organized labor movement played a crucial part. The deliberate and public denunciations of the trade unions and the workers in general by the Özal administration abolished the possibility of dialogue. The government did not intend to negotiate anything with the trade unions. This is not a simple distancing from the old populist ways of Turkish politicians, the Özal administration assaults against the established norms and practices of Turkish trade unionism, which are applied mainly in public enterprises anyway, with the purpose of an annihilating victory over the workers to pave the way for further reforms. In the politically loaded atmosphere of referendum and general elections this strategy backfires in the industrial workplaces.

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<sup>414</sup> Refik Sönmezsoy, Erdoğan Aslıyüce, *Metal İşçilerinin Mücadele Tarihi*, Bekaş Yayınları, İstanbul, 1989, pp. 279-284.

<sup>415</sup> Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1978, p.166.



## The Aftermath of the Strike Wave

The early general elections were held in the last days of November. Although the labor unrest made headlines throughout the year, the results showed that it impressed the electorate very little. It seems that the Turkish voters did not reject the rhetoric of prime minister blaming the organized labor for the many past and present hardships that the country suffered. The Motherland Party got 36 percent of the votes while SHP had to settle for a mere 25. An anti trade union discourse is not an exclusive feature of the Özal administration, in other cases where conservative political movements that pushed for a thorough agenda of neoliberal transformation adopted similar strategies. Most famous among them would be the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who, according to Stuart Hall, deployed the discourse of nation and people against the working class and trade unions with a great vigor and popular appeal compared to other politicians. Hall argues that this discourse is a purposeful and intentional assault “on the very foundation and *raison d’être* of organized labor.”<sup>416</sup> He labels this policy package as authoritarian populism as mentioned elsewhere.

Some other students of British politics, including Bob Jessop, point to the divisive nature of the Thatcherist politics. They consider the authoritarian populism argument as deficient since it fails to catch the divisive nature of new conservatism, which is a clear two nation politics dividing the country between welfare scavengers and members of middle class with legitimate aspirations for embourgeoisment.<sup>417</sup> Notwithstanding the practical connotations of this debate for Great Britain during the

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<sup>416</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Great Moving Right Show,” *Marxism Today*, vol. 23, no.1, (January 1979), pp. 14-20, p. 17.

<sup>417</sup> See for instance Bob Jessop et al., (1984).

eighties, it must be noted that the two nation politics that means the exclusion of a sector of the Turkish polity, the organized labor in this case, is a radical break from the populist rhetoric of the Turkish political class. In a country like England where class based political affiliations has an established presence such political strategies may signify a new phase of class struggle, yet in Turkey where sacrifice for national development goals was constantly asked from the working class and where the national character of this class is underlined in almost every related legal document, adopting the Thatcherist rhetoric constitutes an attack on the moral economy of the unionized workers.

Nevertheless, the electoral results reduced the belligerency of Türk İş headquarters and the voters' preference might also affect the drop in labor militancy in 1988, yet the end of the strike wave does not entail the disappearance of the actual problems of the workers. Türk İş headquarters continued its line of action consisting of organizing demonstrations and other forms of protest, which spread among the organized labor movement due to the strike restrictions of the existing law. The law only allows striking in case of disagreement at the end of the collective bargaining process, if the terms of the agreement were breached by the employer the trade union has to apply to the labor courts, which are neither efficient nor fast in resolving such issues. The alternative forms of protest are mainly entered the agenda of the organized labor under these circumstances. The authorities tend to hold judicial inquiries for these protest methods on the basis of the penal stipulations of the law on strikes. Nevertheless, surrounded by legal impossibilities trade unions cornered by the employers' pressures opted more and more for these alternative methods of protest that is not banned in the law explicitly, and established their legitimacy in the

eyes of the public opinion hence influencing the courts too. The judiciary became lenient towards these acts as the end of the eighties drew closer.

Boycotting lunches is one of these protest methods, as already cited some local trade union branches first used this method and reprimanded by judicial investigations. It was widely used during the 1987 strike wave as a complementary pressure method during bargaining processes or the main course of action if the strike is prohibited legally. Türk İş declared a day of action, a national lunch boycott, for March 11<sup>th</sup> 1988. This was a success for the confederation since their decision was observed everywhere. The importance of this act resides not only in its national scale but also in the fact that the confederation decided to test the limits of the existing laws. Türk İş headquarters did test these confines earlier in its relationship with the political parties, yet the leadership of the confederation traditionally involved in the political maneuvering in Ankara, indeed it is their primary mean of promoting their members' interest. That is why courting the parliamentary opposition, while the governing party did not show any interest in pursuing a clientalist relationship with the confederation, is not interesting. On the other hand, organizing nationally a form of direct action at the edge of legally possible is another sign of radicalization, may be not for the Turkish organized labor in general, but definitely for the Türk İş headquarters. Furthermore, building on this success another day of action, this time a one hour warning strike, was announced by the headquarters, which continue to push the legal limits.

The confederation also continued its policy to arrange open air demonstrations in factory towns. The most important that took place was in Adana. The police force and the local authorities were never lenient before, during and after these meetings and created many troubles for the local militants of Türk İş. The

confederation continues to refrain from starting the preparations for a meeting in İstanbul, the center of the main industrial region of the country, despite many rumors about a possible gigantic demonstration. It seems that the headquarters is anxious about the participation of the left winger groups, and postponed the meeting indefinitely. The government, on the other hand, maintained its policy to harass the organized labor, not only the fringe of the movement where the independent trade unions or the small affiliates of Türk İş were active in private businesses but also the establishment of the movement. Indeed, this is the hallmark of the Özal administration. Nevertheless, the developments of 1987 had indeed an impact on the government so that the legal restriction that limits the election of the retired workers to the trade union administration to a six year term was lifted. This amendment almost exclusively benefited those in the confederation headquarters, and it seems that the government wanted to ease off its hand in the approaching collective bargains concerning the public enterprises, and eliminate the possibility of a national day of action, an objective which they succeeded.<sup>418</sup> A decade earlier, this could be considered as usual business, yet the governing party, especially its leader, is not known for giving accustomed concessions to the trade union bosses. The amendment was a deviation from the pattern arisen in the aftermath of the 1983 general elections.

Meanwhile the assault of the Özal administration against the moral economy of the unionized workers became more and more visible as the collective bargaining process in the state economic enterprises collapsed due to the stubborn attitude of the public employer. The strike in SEKA in 1988 illustrates this point. Selüloz-İş, a Türk İş affiliate whose powerbase located in the Kocaeli factory of SEKA never resorted to strike in SEKA in its history and since its main organization is in that

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<sup>418</sup> "Sendika Ağalarının Koltuklarını Sarsalım, 1989'da kongreler," *Yeni Çözüm*, no. 19 (December 1988), p. 26.

establishment it never organized a major strike. The governments preferred more or less to protect the qualified workers in this monopolistic strategic firm. The Özal administration on the other hand is resolved to maintain the fiscal austerity measures that it implemented from 1983 onwards. That is why the negotiations became sour to the surprise of the union officials who are expecting amelioration in the wages and other social benefits, an expectation shared by the workers at the shop floor. The public employer, though, mindful of the nearing larger collective bargaining stage that would take place in the spring of 1989 concerning to the bulk of public enterprises did not want the SEKA agreement to exceed certain limits.

The workers concerned with lengthening bargaining procedure started, under the leadership of the Kocaeli local of Selüloz-İş, passive forms of protest similar to those realized during the Petrol-İş strikes of the earlier year. These included lunch boycotts, letting their beards grow and calling off sick collectively which amounts to daily work stoppages. The government, on the other hand, unimpressed with these protests, continued to prevent the signing of the contract with terms closer to trade union's demands, furthermore, some ministers began to point to the low profitability of the establishment, according to their view if only the profit of SEKA rose then the workers could have better wages. The mentality that put the profitability over the considerations of strategic importance, self sufficiency in some important products, and sacrificing the lot of the public enterprise workers for this sake is the hallmark of the Özal administration yet foreign to the understanding of public enterprise trade unionists like those in Selüloz-İş, raised in the context of national developmentalism and accompanying state corporatism. That is why, the general secretary of Selüloz-İş Nevzat Sözer, an ex-SEKA worker himself, in his speech delivered in the first day of strike declared after the collapse of negotiations blamed the government. "Those who

are responsible for the first strike in 54 years history of SEKA should be ashamed” he said.<sup>419</sup> Sözer, in line with the prevalent mentality among the typical Turkish public enterprise trade unionists, thought the strike in a state owned establishment as an act to be ashamed of, though the real culprit is the government who blatantly broke off the traditional code of industrial relations in the state economic enterprises.

The strike did little to convince the public employer to make any concessions to the trade union demands; to the contrary the government liberalizes paper imports immediately, a standard practice of this government by then and declared lockout. The lockout was shocking for Selüloz-İş who had to face the pressure by the non-unionized staff of SEKA other than the twelve thousand strikers. In order to further discipline the workers the rumors concerning the relocation of the Kocaeli factory was confirmed by the cabinet. The SEKA strike attracts the attention of other trade unions locals in the Kocaeli province and many solidarity visits and aids were organized by the workers living in the surrounding industrial districts. The agreement was reached after four months of bargain in the January of 1989 right before the negotiations in the other sectors became awry. Selüloz İş headquarters unable to further resist yield to a renewed offer, the local branch in Kocaeli protested the agreement to no avail.

### The Spring Demonstrations

It is not prophetic to anticipate that 1989 would be a turbulent year; another 1987 in a larger scale, since it is the contract renewal year for many public enterprises, the municipal elections would take place and also the congress of Türk İş would be held.

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<sup>419</sup> “SEKA Grev ve Eylemleri, 1988” *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 3, İstanbul, 1998, pp.5-7, p.6.

For the file and rank, although living conditions remained stagnant, the memory of the past few years harbored higher hopes for 1989. Therefore the first half of the year would witness the coinciding of the election politics and the collective bargaining process, and the latter half the barter for the trade union congresses. The trade unions encouraged by the relatively successful experiences of the preceding years pushed for a deal that will stop or even reverse the decline of their members' wages and other social benefits. Furthermore, this time Türk İş headquarters achieved to secure the unity of its affiliates in the bargaining table. It established a central coordination responsible for the negotiations with the public employer, thus against the unified front of the employers dating back to 1980, Türk İş, the sole remaining national powerhouse of the organized labor movement after the military intervention, achieve to establish its internal harmony.

The bargaining process concerning the wages and other benefits of six hundred thousand public workers was blocked by essential disagreements. The government did not tend to yield to the demands of the trade unions. Fiscal austerity was the hallmark of the Özal administration and unless an electoral defeat became imminent, his government had very little incentive to leave this principle aside. Unless the workers proved their resilience by relying on to the means other than bargaining table, the public employer would not tend to compromise. The unity of action, maintained among the affiliate trade unions vigorously, benefited from the already existing militancy in the shop floor level. The experience of the preceding years created tangible consequences in the workplaces such as the committees of solidarity with strikes or committees to monitor the collective bargaining process.<sup>420</sup> These informal organizations emerged as a result of the legal ban on solidarity strikes

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<sup>420</sup> For the possible use of these committees see Ragıp Güntepe, "Yükselen İşçi Hareketleri Devrimci İşçiler İçin Bir Uyarıdır," *Yeni Çözüm*, no. 24, (May 1989), pp.5-7.

or striking to ensure the employer's compliance with the terms of an existing collective contract, furthermore some trade union leaderships preferred the existence of representative bodies at the grassroots level in the face of the difficulties of conducting a collective bargaining process in harsh economic conditions without any practicable leverage over the employers. The existence of such organizations means a more or less vibrant organizational structure in the shop floor level.

These grassroots organizations intervened in the bargaining process that was in a deadlock by putting pressure on the government through newly popularized forms of protest such as lunch boycotts, calling off sick collectively, slowing down production, refusing to shave, shaving off hairs, delaying starts of work shifts or organizing small gatherings before or after the work shifts etc. These entire passive forms of resistance, widely used in the recent years to surpass the legal prohibitions by testing the edge of legality, took over the bargaining process during March and April of 1989, yet these were not entirely absent from the tool kit of labor protest in the past. They were not widely used then simply because of the existence of more efficient and active legal ways of protesting. These acts were spontaneous, widespread and developed with the initiative of the local trade union activists.<sup>421</sup> For instance in a widely publicized episode from Diyarbakır more than thousand members of Yol-İş petitioned for divorce due to their inability to support their families. This one was really first of its kind.

Türk İş headquarters did neither ask for nor sanction them, yet they formed a formidable moment of the cycle of protest started at the end of 1986. Similar to the TÜPRAŞ workers who do not have the right to strike yet supported their comrades from Petrol İş by organizing frequent actions of passive disobedience during the

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<sup>421</sup> For a first hand account by the trade union activists involved in these protest movements see <http://www.emekdunyasi.net/tr/article.asp?ID=34> retrieved in 05.05.2009.



collective bargaining process of 1987, or the workers at Kocaeli SEKA factory right before the strike, thousands of public enterprises workers organized spontaneous acts of protest in almost every province of the country. Impossible to gauge their exact impact over the negotiations, it must be noted that mingled with the election atmosphere they politicized the country in a specific way thus may play a part in the result of elections and the eventual agreement between Türk İş and the government in May. Such forms of passive resistance became firmly established in the tool kit of the organized labor so that even workers employed in private enterprises like the Migros workers who strike shortly again in 1990 resorted to similar protests during the bargaining process. Despite their passive nature these protests also voiced extensively established political demands of the organized labor such as amendments to the existing laws concerning the unionization rights and the collective bargaining regime.<sup>422</sup> Moreover, encouraged by the rising labor militancy in the public sector, many strikes occur in the leather processing, metal and chemical industries, most of which continued into 1990.

It must be noted that not every Türk İş affiliate showed sympathy to the grassroots militancy. Especially, Dok Gemi-İş became the subject of protests by the Haliç and Camialtı shipyard workers who organized a spontaneous meeting in Kasımpaşa in order to denounce the attempts by this trade union's headquarters to quell the initiative of the locals in the bargaining process.<sup>423</sup> A similar incident occurred against Tek Gıda İş, when the members of this trade union stormed the headquarters for its negative attitude towards the illegal marches organized by

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<sup>422</sup> Aziz Çelik, "Bahar Eylemleri 1989," *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 1, İstanbul, 1996, pp.103-104.

<sup>423</sup> "Dok Gemi İşçilerinin İşverene ve Sendika Ağalarına Karşı Mücadelesi Yükseliyor," *Yeni Çözüm*, no. 23, (April 1989), p.43.

TEKEL workers after the work shifts.<sup>424</sup> Some other trade unions conceded to the initiative of the locals like Tes-İş or Demiryol-İş the latter trade union was heavily criticized by its members in 1987 when it desisted from striking at the last minute. Yol-İş and Petrol-İş, trade unions that have connections to the social democratic opposition, on the other hand, organized centrally such protests. The local movement resulted in the establishment of an institutional unity among local branches of the different trade unions in every industrial city.<sup>425</sup> Reminiscent of the local trade union alliances that constituted the main form of coalition among the trade unions up until the end of the fifties, these bodies bring together locals of trade unions from separate confederations and even independent trade unions, hence transcending the discord within the organized labor locally. From the spring of 1987 until the decline of the cycle of protest their initiative would be crucial, especially in Kocaeli, Gebze and İstanbul, these bodies organized meetings against privatizations or work accidents bonding together workers from different trade unions, political views and backgrounds.

Türk-İş headquarters rapidly moved in and supported these local initiatives in order to use them to its advantage in the stalling negotiations. Unlike some of its right winger affiliates the confederation never hesitated to show its solidarity with its members, especially after the municipal elections. These protests shook the daily routine of the cities everyday up until the government gave in. The April issue of the official gazette of Türk İş is full of articles openly embracing the movements in the street. By a declaration of its presidential council Türk İş addressed the government,

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<sup>424</sup> “Bu Daha Başlangıç,” *İşçilerin Sesi*, 01.05.1989, p.10.

<sup>425</sup> For an evaluation of these bodies see Hasan Oğuz, *1980 Sonrasında İşçi Hareketinde Durum*, Scala Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1995, pp.136-163.

confident in its power, and demanded immediate resolution of the negotiations. They sound like they are among the victors of the municipal elections.

The municipal elections were an utter defeat for the Motherland Party and a promising victory for its social democratic opponent, SHP. The urban wage earners seem to have voted for SHP since this party did especially well, in cities such as İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Adana, Gaziantep and Kocaeli. These provinces are the foremost industrial centers of the country and contained a large worker electorate. The month of March during which the electoral campaign and widespread labor unrest and protests coincided produced a political climate largely in favor of labor politics in the industrialized cities, yet Türk İş did not campaign openly against the governing party this time, maybe as a result of the previous years' amendment to the law on trade unions or because of the bad memories of the 1987 general elections. On the other hand, the dismal result of ANAP encouraged the workers and facilitated their efforts to get an advantageous offer from the public employer. Consequently, the agreement was reached in mid May between a triumphant Şevket Yılmaz and a governing party losing ground to its opponents. The raise, which Türk İş gets, brought an increase in real wages, first time after a decade of sustained drops. The Motherland Party after the defeat in the spring elections sustained another blow when its historical leader Turgut Özal chose to be nominated to presidency in the fall of 1989.

The radicalization of the labor movement also showed itself in the decision to hold a May Day parade by the İstanbul platform of trade union locals. An organizing committee was formed by Petrol-İş, TÜMTİS, Deri-İş, Otomobil-İş, Laspetkim-İş, Kristal-İş and Hava-İş. They decided to celebrate May Day in Abidei Hürriyet square in Mecidiyeköy while some other leftist groups decided to march to Taksim Square

where the May Day massacre occurred in 1977. After 1978, first the martial law authorities then the civilian administration did not allow May Day parades, especially in İstanbul, since they consider these demonstrations as subversive acts. Therefore the trade unions involved in this decision undertook a bold move, yet it seems that the climate of the 1989 spring convinced these trade union activists about the possibility of celebrating the May Day. The security forces intervened into the Mecidiyeköy gathering. Moreover, the authorities prohibited every gathering around the Taksim square and one demonstrator, a young worker from Zeytinburnu, trying to reach the square was killed by the police. According to the governor of İstanbul, Cahit Bayar, 533 people were taken into custody including 208 workers and 4 trade union officials.<sup>426</sup> The rise in militancy necessitated new legal measures to quell these protests, thus the bylaw on strikes and lockouts, annulled by the courts was reenacted in the September of 1989. The stipulations of this new regulation includes the permission to use the gendarmerie and even commandos during strikes and lockouts if needs arise.<sup>427</sup>

The Spring Actions mark one of the two peak moment in the cycle of protest that began at the end of 1986 and continued until the last months of 1991. The sheer number of the workers involved in the spontaneous movement can only be compared to such historical incidents in the Turkish labor history such as the strike wave of 1908 and the 15-16 June uprising. Besides, thanks to the spread of the state economic enterprises throughout Anatolia almost every important city witnessed some form of action. The 1987 strike wave is important because of its pioneer nature. Despite the authoritarian measures still in force, and the general mood of submissiveness inherited from the three years of military rule, especially among the rank and file of

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<sup>426</sup> “1 Mayıs Kutlandı!” *Yeni Çözüm*, no. 24, (May 1989), p.4.

<sup>427</sup> “Grev Alanlarında İşçiye Savaş İlanı” *Yeni Çözüm*, no. 30, (December 1990), pp.64-65.

the organized labor movement, the bold attempts of independent trade unions followed by the Türk İş affiliates broke the silence of the trade unions. The 1989 spring, on the other hand, revealed the anger of the public enterprise workers against being cast off from the political sphere. The cumulated experience of the last two years showed the possibility to enter the domain of politics with more direct means. Because the traditional links of dialogue was severed by the Özal administration these direct means seemed to be more feasible. One must admit the passivity of the protest methods used by the demonstrators, yet these methods was invented by the more radical segments of the Turkish organized labor movement in order to bypass the crippling stipulations of the industrial relations regime during the previous years. When they are used by thousands of workers on a daily basis they become radical. Under a political regime where every gathering, even scientific conferences, must obtain an authorization from the provincial authorities,<sup>428</sup> radical may be considered as an insufficient adjective to describe these seemingly passive acts, such as marching to workplaces instead of taking service busses or calling sick collectively, an obvious act of illegal work stoppage.

The consequence of the 1989 spring was manifold. First of all, the deal reached between the government and Türk İş ended a decade of permanent decreases in real wages. This surely on the one hand emboldened the workers in their struggle, on the other hand eased off the tension among especially the public enterprise workers. Secondly, it somehow contributed to the only electoral victory that the left witnessed in the aftermath of 1977; it eased the restrictions over the public gatherings, from the summer of 1989 onwards the trade unions organized open air demonstrations frequently compared to the rest of the eighties. The workers in the

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<sup>428</sup> Some old trade union activists claimed that the government showed leniency toward this movement see for instance Faruk Pekin, "89 Baharı ve İşçi Eylemleri Üzerine," *Birikim*, no.2, (June 1989), pp.19-24.

private sector also participated in these demonstrations by organizing solidarity visits or even marches. The strike activity also rose among the private businesses. However, after the signing of the lucrative agreement between Türk İş and the government many workers who led these protests were sanctioned by the discipline investigations, some of them lost their jobs, in most such cases because of the considerations related to the approaching congresses the trade union officials refrained from protecting those workers due to the fear of electoral competition with these younger grassroots leaders. The lay offs were more frequent in the private businesses as expected. Approximately six thousand workers were fired during May and June of 1989, only in the chemical industry. The reports showed that most of them were related to the protest movement. In any case, especially at the local level trade union leadership was renovated as a result of the 1989 spring, though the higher echelons held off this onslaught, particularly in greater trade unions. Those who came to prominence in these actions were eliminated in a few years, yet in the smaller affiliates of Türk İş, mostly in close collaboration with left winger groups, a new leadership takes hold.

### The Impact of the Spring Actions and Türk İş Congresses

The spring of protest were continued into the summer when the collective bargaining negotiations collapsed in two steel important mills namely Kardemir and İsdemir. These establishments had mixed ownership with state possessing the majority shares; hence they are not considered as state economic enterprises. However, since the state is the bigger partner, the industrial relations in these establishments are reminiscent of the public enterprises. In spite of this established understanding since this

government made the public employer a member of TİSK, the private employers' organization, during the negotiations of 1989 the counterpart of the qualified trade union, namely Çelik-İş, was the dreaded MESS, the metal sector employers' organization once headed by Özal himself, and not a public body. This situation made difficult the conduct of negotiations in itself because the private sector possessed stocks of steel and ready to cope with a strike, indeed they needed a strike in these two giant factories in order to sell of their stocks. The attitude of the government is a purposeful act of hostility against the workers of these two steel mills profiting the private traders of iron and steel.

In May 1989 Çelik-İş, the independent trade union which mainly exists in these two establishments was in the middle of a debate about uniting with either Öz Demir-İş an affiliate of Hak İş confederation or Otomobil-İş. It is also known that Türk Metal attempted to take over the İsdemir factory. Among the employees of these establishments there existed supporters of the banned National Salvation Party. The troubled situation of the trade union was further complicated since a strike would be the first in the history of Kardemir which is the first steel mill constructed in Turkey.<sup>429</sup> The unintelligible uncompromising attitude of the government, which recently signed a deal with Türk İş, forced an unlikely candidate to strike. There exist widespread rumors claiming that the government deliberately prolonging the strike in order to benefit some steel importing companies close to the Motherland Party, which hoarded substantial amounts of steel prior to the strike.<sup>430</sup>

These rumors further intensified the negative attitude of recently victorious Türk İş against the government. The connection between the praise for market mechanisms and profiteering through handicapping the state economic enterprises

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<sup>429</sup> "Yüksek Fırınlara Sıcaklığı Demir Çelik İşçisinin Eyleminde," *İşçilerin Sesi*, 19.05.1989, p.3.

<sup>430</sup> "Demir Çelik İşçileri Direniyor," *İşçilerin Sesi*, 05.08.1989, p.3.

was obvious for the organized labor movement in large. In order to underline this point, the normally reclusive Türk İş organized an open air demonstration of solidarity with the independent Çelik-İş trade union in Karabük. A similar rally planned for İskenderun, yet the local authorities did not permit, nevertheless Şevket Yılmaz visited Ereğli and large crowds were gathered to greet him. This episode marks one of the definitive violations of the established norms and practices of the industrial relations. The government victimized the workers explicitly to the benefit of the private sector. The strike ended by a court ruling yet augmented the popularity of Çelik-İş among the conservative metal workers; indeed the union united with Öz Demir-İş and joined the Islamist Hak İş confederation. Otomobil-İş also conducted simultaneous strikes in the middle sized steel plants around Gebze in 1989.<sup>431</sup> Another important event of 1989 was the short lasting strike in Migros which occurred in the midst of congress turmoil of Tez Kop-İş resulting in the elimination of the union local organized in Migros.<sup>432</sup>

The route to the fifteenth congress of Türk İş was exceptionally vivacious. The congresses of the trade union locals were extremely competitive especially in the bigger cities where the members of these locals were just recently organizing colorful acts of disobedience. The workers are used to organize meetings to discuss their course of action during the spring of 1989. After the signing of the agreement the main agenda of these gatherings turned to be the congresses. The lively atmosphere of the locals does not bode well with the central administrations that aimed to maintain more or less stable both the organizational and the political configuration of their trade unions. In order to achieve their aims they intervened into

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<sup>431</sup> For a short evaluation of these Otomobil-İş strikes see Engin Yıldırım, “The Metal Workers of Gebze” in Erol Kahveci, Nadir Sugur, Theo Nichols (eds.), *Work and Occupation in Modern Turkey*, Mansell, London, 1996, pp. 164-166.

<sup>432</sup> “Migros İşçileri Yeni Bir Örnek Sundu.” *Yeni Çözüm*, no. 28, (October 1989), pp.11-12.



the local congresses with every available mean at their disposal, including legal impeachment against their own members. Tes-İş and Tez Kop-İş are the two trade unions where the battle of the control over the locals was the fiercest. In the former case a retired worker, Faruk Büyükkucak who is still the representative of Türk İş in the Marmara region was restored to its post through some manipulations. Tez Kop-İş, on the other hand, did not achieve to convene its congress before the congress of the confederation in compliance to the Türk İş statute. The legal problems did not arise only because of factional strife. For instance, a court ruling denied Hasan Basri Babalı, the chairman of Kristal-İş a second term on the basis of a restrictive stipulation in the existing law on trade unions. It seems that the authorities are more meticulous in their investigations when the radical trade unions are concerned and their interference benefited the conservatives in the confederation.

While the old guard fought hard to retain its dominance over the trade unions, the customary rhetoric of Türk İş underlining the developmental goals, national unity and industrial harmony is nowhere to be seen. The official reports of trade unions, even those with clear sympathies to the right winger parties, include expressions related to class and class struggle for the first time. The speeches delivered during the congresses of the locals are also loaded with a seemingly socialist discourse. The electoral base of Türk İş trade unions remained pretty much the same. It can be safely assumed that the experience of the Spring Actions may have a result over the consciousness of the workers, yet it is baseless to take for granted such a huge of shift in mentality spontaneously. This transformation at the level of discourse can rather be understood as an answer to the rhetoric fostered by the Özal administration that is based on the ideas related to market efficiency, which threatens the moral economy of the public enterprise workers. Those who pointed to an alternative and

more familiar conceptualization of the industrial relations resonate among the union delegates, otherwise there is no a sudden inclination for socialism, especially in the last months of 1989 when the regimes in the Eastern Europe crumbles one after another.

Nevertheless, some swings occur as a result of which certain trade unions within Türk İş joined the ranks of the left wing, not only as the supporters of the social democratic tendency grouped under the leadership of Petrol-İş, but also as a locus of radical unionism inside Türk-İş. Belediye-İş is the most important acquisition for the left wingers, this traditionally conservative trade union changed its positioning in the power struggle in the confederation. Two smaller trade unions Likat-İş and Hava-İş also elected pro-socialist trade union activists to the headquarters whereas TÜMTİS is thoroughly taken over by a radical tendency. As already cited, at the local level similar changes also occurred in greater trade unions yet these developments were reversed in those cases within a few years. The social democratic tendency is an obvious winner of these swings, the democratic opposition constituted by Petrol-İş and Harb-İş is the sole option for the more radical delegates in the level of confederation.<sup>433</sup> However, this tendency mainly sought an alliance with the supporters of the True Path Party during the congresses. It seems that a duplicate of the coalition that will overthrow the Motherland Party rule was first tried to be formed inside Türk İş. The democratic opposition tried to secure both the support of the radical elements, and the followers of Demirel, an impossible task to succeed.

The congress of the confederation held in December 1989 was as spirited as the local congresses. The main message of the congress is claiming the credit for the

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<sup>433</sup> “Şimdi Bütün Sendikacılar Demokrat,” *İşçilerin Sesi*, 05.11.1989, p.4.

Spring of 1989. One of the decisions reached at the congress unanimously condemned the privatizations of the public enterprises and commissioned the new headquarters with organizing campaigns against it. The ministers were unable to address the delegation because of the constant booing.<sup>434</sup> This is not the normal state of affairs in a Türk İş congress which are generally solemn happenings where the government exposes its social and developmental policies. This time the delegation disillusioned with the government and foreseeing its approaching demise, did not allow for the staging of the usual spectacles. The leftist discourse also pervaded the congress of the confederation without producing a corresponding outcome. The social democratic opposition supported by the tiny radical fringe did not acquire the anticipated backing of the centrists like the previous time. The new headquarters is a replica of the preceding central administration, Şevket Yılmaz formed a coalition mostly sympathetic to the True Path Party, and added a social democratic trade unionist from Yol-İş this time Mehmet Nurettin Bamyacı. Thus the great rising of the public workers in the months of March and April, and all of the rhetoric about class struggle did not correspond to a transformation at the headquarters.

The confederation tends to blame the Motherland Party for all of the woes of the eighties. This government is responsible for the privatizations, spread of non-unionized employment in the public sector, the close collaboration between the public and private employers, and the liberalization of foreign trade harming the state economic enterprises. Moreover they are the real architect of the discourse blaming the organized labor, mainly the public enterprise employees, as the source of the technological backwardness and fiscal bottlenecks that the country witnessed both in the past and present. Predicting its demise, the confederation already adapted itself

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<sup>434</sup> “15. Türk İş Kurultayından İzlenimler,” *Yeni Çözüm*, no. 31, (January 1990), pp.48-49.

under the leadership of Şevket Yılmaz to the next government even before its actual formation in 1991.

The presidency of Turgut Özal meant for the higher echelons of the Turkish organized labor easier access to the cabinet. Although the ideology of the party is still dominated by the views of the newly elected president of the republic himself, those who are responsible for the daily management of the party wanted to reverse its fortune, thus, some of the old habits concerning the relationships with trade unions were restored. Nevertheless, 1990 witnessed some contentious developments concerning the organized labor, mainly because of the collective bargains in the metal industry which is the best precursor of the state of the industrial relations. The metal employers want to restrict the increase of the labor cost that shows the signs of climbing after 1989; the trade unions on the other hand were in the midst of a bitter struggle for survival. The Labor Ministry declared Çelik-İş disqualified from conducting collective bargains for its members due to the threshold. Türk Metal pressed for taking over its membership especially in İsdemir. Under the same threat the independent Otomobil-İş and Hak İş affiliate Özdemir-İş joined their forces with Çelik-İş in the bargaining process against both the employers represented by MESS and Türk Metal. The relatively successful contract secured by Çelik-İş raised the standards. In these circumstances the competition among the trade unions made compromises with the employers unlikely. The crisis in the Gulf changed the scenery since the government showed its intent to postpone the strikes due to the national security concerns. Türk Metal signed the collective contract in the early 1991, and the others followed. Notwithstanding the internal strife among the trade unions, these incidents maintained the fervor of the labor movement taken over from 1989.

The workers employed in the metal sector were not the sole perpetrators of the movement. Laspetkim-İş resorted to strikes in tire producing factories such as Good Year and Pirelli. Many smaller private businesses saw the attempts at unionization inspired by the recent labor militancy. These mostly failed efforts diffused the movement towards the fringes of the organized labor movement. Nevertheless, the bulk of the movement still resides in the public sector. The municipalities run by the social democratic mayors, witnesses a wave of labor unrest in 1990 due to the rising expectations of the workers especially in İzmir and to a lesser extent in İstanbul. Yet the most important incident of labor related resistance was in cement factories, a sector in which privatizations occurred recently.

The privatization of Çitosan was not completed as of 1990, thus Türkiye Çimse-İş had to negotiate both with the French employer who bought a few cement factories and the public employer representing the remaining majority. Because of the imminent sales especially the public employer wanted to keep the labor cost low in the factories yet to be privatized and the French employer refrained from making an offer surpassing the public employer. It seems that the possibility of an agreement was hollow and the trade union declared a strike.<sup>435</sup> The authorities banned the strikes in the factories located in south western Turkey and then postponed the remaining ones due to the crisis in the Persian Gulf. The law allows the government to postpone strikes due to the national security or healthcare concerns, the cabinet relied to this stipulation quite freely in 1990 using the developments in the Persian Gulf, the invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi army and the subsequent events, as a pretext.<sup>436</sup> The cabinet postponed strikes both in the private and the public sectors

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<sup>435</sup> “Çamura Can Veren Eller Grevde,” *İşçilerin Sesi*, 30.03.1990.

<sup>436</sup> “Irak Kuveyt’i İşgal Etti, Türkiye’de Grevler Ertelendi: İlk Kurşun İşçilere,” *İşçilerin Sesi*, 20.08.1990.

without considering the attributes of the relevant industry. Although most of these decisions were annulled in the courts, the trade unions gave in and sign contracts immediately after the suspension of the strikes.

The July of 1990 witnessed also the birth of another social movement indirectly related to the struggle initiated by the trade unions. The public servants whose right to unionize is not cited explicitly in the constitution took to the streets to protest their humble wage increases compared to the recent gains by the public sector workers. Their main demand was the right to unionize. The public servants just like the other wage earners were hit hard by the economic policies of the eighties, but their lot remained intact unlike the unionized workers who achieved to get a more or less satisfactory deal in 1989. In the public sector workplaces where the civil servants were employed side by side with workers the wage differentials are more visible. The unionization movement of the Turkish civil servants that manifested itself first in the July of 1990 is a distinct social phenomenon from our subject yet its incubation period is the cycle of protest that is analyzed here.<sup>437</sup> Although its mechanics of progress, which continued into the nineties, is quite distinct from the moral economy argument elaborated in this dissertation, the demand centered on the right to unionize is the result of the struggle of the trade unions during this period and a consequence of its demonstration effect. This is a further proof of the efficiency and the social resonance of the protest movement under study.

1990 was a decisive year in more than one respect for Türk İş headquarters. It must capitalize on the gains of 1989 and adapt itself to the receding Cold War, after all at least two of its affiliates were headed by socialists, yet maintain the essence of its status quo. At least in 1990 what was threatening this delicate balance was not the

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<sup>437</sup> For a brief evaluation of the early years of this movement see M. Görkem Doğan, “Türkiye’de Örgütlü Emek Hareketinin Tarihi Üzerine,” in Yusuf Doğan Çetinkaya (ed.), *Toplumsal Hareketler Tarih Teori ve Deneyim*, İletişim, İstanbul, 2008, pp.333-334.

movement from below, but rather the deep and thorough transformation that the country went through, along the lines of the global trend of the rise of neoliberalism, under the Özal administration. This transformation transgressed the moral economy of the public enterprise workers making up the basis of power of the Turkish organized labor. Yet, the decline of the Motherland Party reduced the scale of the threat and its most visible aspects that motivates the grassroots to act in protest. The restoration of the dialogue channels with the cabinet, the calming down of the employees of the public enterprises because of the recent lucrative deal enable Türk İş headquarters to operate as usual to a certain extent.

There were nevertheless changes in the confederation. In 1990 Mayday was celebrated for the first time in the confederation history though in an indoor event attended by the leader of the parliamentary opposition Erdal İnönü, while the more radical İstanbul trade union locals' platform declared a two hours work stoppage. It seems that as the end of 1990 came closer the main threat to the status quo of established Turkish trade unionism turned to be the new forces that the cycle of protest unleashed. These forces, claiming the inheritance of the militancy of the seventies yet experienced with shop floor militancy during the second part of the eighties opted for more direct and participatory means of unionism and had a certain power in the local branches. From the 1989 congresses onwards these union militants were purged constantly especially from the greater affiliates of Türk İş through deliberate intervention of the headquarters and with the support of the employers including the state. However, a gigantic labor struggle from the first days of 1991 turned to be the main proof of its prevalence among the unionized workers of the public sector.

## The Great March of Miners

One of the most illustrative episodes, and the other peak moment, in the whole cycle of protest stemming from the late 1986 onwards and died down in the middle of 1991 is the great march of Zonguldak miners to the capital. This experience not only constitutes a model case of the grievances and frustration of the public enterprise workers but also involves a movement of historical significance. Zonguldak basin is the foremost coal mining center of the country, yet never witnessed large scale labor unrest or even long lasting strikes. Apart from the some rare and spontaneous resistance movements the history of Zonguldak miners is devoid of major strikes or demonstrations, unlike their counterparts in other countries. The coal fields in this area were operated from the mid nineteenth century onwards first by the foreign capital and then by a state monopoly after the Republican era. The first examples of social policy legislation concerns the Zonguldak coal fields and dates back to the late Ottoman era. Nonetheless, maybe purposefully the province which is built upon coal mines is always isolated from the rest of the country. Despite the traditional tendency of Turkish trade unions to unite in nationally integrated organizations, Zonguldak miners retained their own trade unions even after the Trade Unions Law of the junta that promote national unification, they only changed its name from Zonguldak Mine Workers' Union to General Mine Worker's Union. All in all, the Turkish Blackcoal Institution (TTK) is a quintessential state economic enterprise and its employees are typical public enterprise workers.

From the mid eighties onwards the Zonguldak mines became the focal point in the debate concerning the privatizations. The prime minister, his brother who was the undersecretary of the State Planning Organization and famous industrialists like



İshak Alaton all cites the Zonguldak mines as the primary example of the inefficiency of the public enterprises. These people claimed that importing coal would be cheaper hence more cost efficient. During the final days in the Office of Prime Minister Turgut Özal qualified the Zonguldak mines as a hindrance for the state. These institutions, according their point of view, operate with higher costs compared to the international standards so that it is better to shut them down rather than to try to renovate them. These people claimed that the coal basin does not operate according the market rationality, indeed it was established on the basis of a different rationale, one based on strategic concerns and national development aims. The miners and the populace of Zonguldak are not used to these criterions; they have no reason to accept their relevancy for the mines.

Furthermore, the demands for higher wages by the trade unions representing these inefficient institutions were described by Özal as illegitimate. He made it plain his stand over these issues when he declared the state will be no more the father figure. Indeed, Özal in its person represents a new rationality based on the infallible self regulating market mechanism. If the rules of this mechanism were observed, it would generate prosperity that would eventually trickle down to the workers.<sup>438</sup> The miners and the populace of Zonguldak, on the other hand, are greatly worried generally and disturbed by such remarks. Moreover the selling off the mining rights in some fringe coal veins to private entrepreneurs further disturbed them.<sup>439</sup> It seems that these worries reflected themselves in the change of the Zonguldak Miners' trade union (GMİS) leadership after 1986.

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<sup>438</sup> Ömer Laçiner, "Zonguldak Olayı ve İşçi Hareketinde Siyaset," *Birikim*, no. 21, (January 1991), pp.5-11. Laçiner though, in this article written in the midst of rapid developing events, considers this new rationality as a new progress in the search for efficiency, hence domination over the labor force, of the capitalist mode of production rather than an another incidence of praise for self regulating market mechanism.

<sup>439</sup> For a first hand account of the general mood in Zonguldak just prior the strike see "Zonguldak Direnecek," *İşçilerin Sesi*, 22.09.1990, p.7.

GMİS was a typical Türk İş affiliate prior to 1986 with union bosses who occupied the same posts for years, involved heavily in local politics through establishment parties and used to lobby in Ankara to obtain pay raises and other benefits. According to Delwin A. Roy, who conducted a research on coalminers during the late sixties in the Ereğli coal basin it was a device for restraining organized labor movements rather than for promoting them.<sup>440</sup> Most of its active members were the surface workers from the Eastern Black Sea region and the local people, mostly underground workers, kept their distance from the daily working of the union. At the end of 1986 a new generation of miners were elected to the headquarters of GMİS, which unlike many other Türk İş trade unions is not located in Ankara but in Zonguldak, including locals and underground workers. The last remnants of the old cadre were swept away in the 1989 congress.<sup>441</sup> A further drive behind this rejuvenation was the unexpectedly negative contract that the old leadership signed during the previous collective bargaining phase. The old leadership reliance to their connections in Ankara bore fruitless, the miners' income deteriorated and their establishment lagged behind in technology and decays due to the governmental negligence. On top of all this came the bombardment of hostile press releases from the government authorities. TTK was in loss and technologically backward so their demands for pay raises were illegitimate. The miners though are well aware that it is this government that refrains from investing in the coal basin, and wanted to divest the mines to private businesses. This government is also

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<sup>440</sup> Delwin A. Roy, "Labour and Trade Unionism in Turkey: The Ereğli Coalminers," *Middle Eastern Studies*, no. 12, (1976), pp. 125-172.

<sup>441</sup> "Genel Maden İş Yönetimi Gençleşti" *Yeni Çözüm*, no.30, (December 1989), p. 69.

responsible for the decrease of their purchasing power while blaming them for the woes hitting their province.<sup>442</sup> Anger and frustration is brewing in Zonguldak.

A large demonstration organized in February 24, 1990, in Zonguldak to protest the accident that kills recently sixty nine miners in Yeniçelttek lignite mines.<sup>443</sup> Meanwhile, Türk İş declared a day of mourning at the same day yet refrained from organizing an open air demonstration in an industrial center to damn the work accidents claiming the life of hundreds of workers every year. GMİS for the first time is ahead of the confederation. This unusual meeting accompanied by a two hours work stoppage is a sign of change in the mood of Zonguldak miners who were known for their submissiveness. The Zonguldak miners isolated from the remaining labor force of the country seldom resorts to claim making through direct action. Moreover, the newly elected union administration went into the mines and discussed the terms of the contract with the miners thus adding them to the negotiation process, another novelty for the coal basin.

The public employer seems to force the trade union to strike since it refrained from making monetary offers during much of the negotiations concerning the coal exploration part of the establishment. This attitude was also perceived as a proof off the intention to close down the mines. The province of Zonguldak whose economy is related to mines some way or other closely watching the bargaining process.<sup>444</sup> The miners themselves were involved in the process through the committees established thanks to the supportive approach of the new GMİS headquarters. These committees played an important part in the following events. The workers who demanded wages

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<sup>442</sup> For a brief description of the underlying causes of the organizational radicalization of the Zonguldak miners see Erol Kahveci, "The Miners of Zonguldak," in Erol Kahveci, et al (eds.), 1996, pp.194-200.

<sup>443</sup> "İşçiler Türk İş'i Beklemedi," *İşçilerin Sesi*, 14.03.1990.

<sup>444</sup> "Zonguldak Halkı Tek Yürek Tek Yumruk," *İşçilerin Sesi*, 22.10.1990, p.4.

and benefits normally, after the spread of the rumors about the closing down of the mines began to demand democracy, in the sense of having a say over the political decisions related to their own futures.<sup>445</sup> The protest was not restricted to the miners; the entire populace of Zonguldak depended on the mines and wants their voice heard on such a crucial matter for their livelihood.

As expected the negotiations collapsed and 42 thousands miners went on strike at the last day of November. The uncompromising attitude of the employer strengthens the fears concerning the closure of the coal mines. The December of 1990 passed while the rhetoric about the inefficiency and losses of the coal mining intensified and the grip of the trade union over Zonguldak tightens. Through strike committees the climate of resistance spread everywhere in the province. Türk İş headquarters intervened in the dealings because of the symbolic character of the crisis. While the discourse of shutting down the coal mines is still on table, the labor unrest would never calm down, yet the government under the pressure of the president does not yield. The confederation thus decided to show its muscles and declared a day of action. This would be a general strike without mentioning the name, Şevket Yılmaz declared that he would not go to work in the January 3, 1991, and expected the membership of Türk İş did the same. The participation was beyond expectations especially in some regions,<sup>446</sup> yet the significance of this action lies in the fact that Türk İş resorted to such a radical measure. One must note that the threat to close down the mines is also radical.

The government was not impressed by the confederation decision to call for a day of general action, so the negotiations continued to stall the following day. The

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<sup>445</sup> This remark is made by Çetin Uygur, the ex-chairman of Yeraltı Maden-İş and then Dev Maden-Sen, during a personal interview in İstanbul, in 17.05.2009.

<sup>446</sup> “Sessiz Bir Haykırış 3 Ocak Eylemi,” *İşçilerin Sesi*, 21.01.1991, p.3.

miners' expectations though were otherwise so they gathered in Zonguldak city center and waited for the decision of GMİS headquarters. From the beginning of the strike the miners always mentioned to march to Ankara, a great march to finalize the contract for good. Indeed, GMİS planned to carry a number of miners to Ankara with busses to further pressure the government to reach a deal. The tool kit of protest and the experience of trade unions always stress the impact in Ankara whether through lobbies in the parliamentary parties and the ministries or if this soft power does not work through the presence of the masses in the streets. Yet the busses were not allowed into the city so the chairman of GMİS, a relatively young union official, Şemsi Denizer invited his comrades to march to Ankara on foot.<sup>447</sup> When he and the other officers of GMİS began marching, thousands including women followed them without the necessary logistics of a winter march. Nobody expected such a huge crowd to take the road to Ankara. It seems that most of the miners thought that they could reach the main highway connecting Ankara to İstanbul and block the road to coerce the government.

The simple scenery of marching ordinary people during winter, in the midst of nowhere, chanting slogans against the government is impressive and inspiring to say the least. The government, amazed, reacted very clumsily. Indeed, even most of those who were involved in the labor struggle of the recent years were astonished since this march is the first of its kind. The procession reached Devrek in the night and the populace received the marchers extremely well, the next day they reached Mengen and the lack of logistics began to be felt gravely.<sup>448</sup> However, the marchers were stubborn and continued for the third day while the government accepted to

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<sup>447</sup> For an account of the strike and the march by a journalist see Sevkuthan N. Karakaş, *Eylem Günlüğü: Zonguldak Maden Grevi ve Yürüyüşü*, Metis, İstanbul, 1992.

<sup>448</sup> Murat Dönmez, "Karanlık Dehlizlerden Aydınlık Geleceğe," *Birikim*, no. 21, (January 1991), pp.64-66.

renegotiate the terms of the contract on the condition of the ending of the march. The march arrived at a few kilometers away of the main highway and halted by a military barricade. The miners camped in front of the fortification for the night. The stalemate was resolved the next day when the Prime Minister, Yıldırım Akbulut, a mild and traditional politician, disobeying Turgut Özal, gave his word concerning the renegotiation of the terms of the agreement to the leader of GMİS, Şemsi Denizler.

After the miners returned back to Zonguldak, the GMİS leadership was humiliated in Ankara and had to sign a contract that did not match the historical importance of their movement. The government also delayed the miners' strike before the agreement because of the first Gulf War. Türk İş headquarters, which refrained from organizing active protests in other cities while the miners marched, did not stand by GMİS during this process. This is understandable since the Prime Minister's attitude showed that the imminent threat against the way of living of the miners and hence of the public enterprise workers in general began to be dissolved. However, the militancy of the miners exposed another threat against the status quo of the trade unions. Indeed, the bigger affiliates of Türk İş mostly active in public enterprises refrained from organizing widespread solidarity campaigns for the Zonguldak miners since they achieved to finalize more or less beneficial contracts and the government's crusade against public enterprises lost its zeal.

The vociferous protest movement that Türk İş had to participate -even sometimes to lead- did not intent to revolutionize the regime of industrial relations but rather to restore its very basis. That is why, it is meaningless for the bulk of the public enterprise workers to endorse or promote the march of the miners which greatly disturbed the political status quo of the country. In 1991 the violator of the moral economy was visibly on the decline, it would loose the general elections a few

months later and business as usual seems to take root in the dealings with some greater affiliates of Türk İş such as Teksif, Tes-İş or Tek Gıda-İş, and these trade unions focused on purges in their ranks. Large scale privatizations were either postponed or extended over a time period. The establishments of the organized labor movement did not feel the grassroots pressure to intervene directly hence the activity of the unions receded. This means in a sense the beginning of the retreat of the cycle of protest stemming from the late 1986. Especially during the negotiations of 1991 this retreat turned to be visible just before the defeat of the Motherland Party in the October of 1991.

### The Retreat of the Movement

The march of the miners did not trigger a widespread reaction among the public enterprise workers; to the contrary in the spring of 1991 it seemed that the movement died down. There was unrest only in SEKA another establishment threatened by permanent closure where the new rounds of bargains after three years of the first strike met the same fate and stalled. Selüloz-İş declared a strike in January but soon the government postponed it due to the first Gulf War, thus the trade union had to sign an agreement. Another important collective bargaining process was taking place in the air transportation sector. Hava-İş recently swung to the left, thus its new administration also had to prove its competence. The union tried to establish a participatory process yet the employer did not ameliorate its offer, the strike was inevitable. Surprisingly, the strike that attracted the attention of the mass media did not attract the solidarity of the fellow Türk İş affiliates. This could be considered as a

proof of the retreat of the labor movement, and hence the cycle of protest.<sup>449</sup> Indeed, the ultimate contract signed by Hava-İş remained short of the expectations.

An episode reminiscent of the Zonguldak resistance took place during the summer in Beykoz district of İstanbul. Beykoz was a working class neighborhood at the time since three important factories existing in the district, two of them were state economic enterprises one TEKEL and other Sümerbank. The district was also a historical center of glass production. Şişe Cam Company wanted to remove its oldest glass factory from Paşabahçe. As already cited Beykoz built around three factories, the glass factory being the biggest. Kristal-İş signed a contract accepting lower wages in the hope of stopping this closure. However, the employer continued its plan by firing off a third of the employees, despite his vague promises during the negotiations. The workers resisted and stopped the production. This is a clear violation of the law on strikes yet the whole neighborhood supported the workers. For a month the stalemate persist and only ended when the employer accepted retiring the older personnel instead of firing the younger employees. In any case the fate of this factory is sealed, yet this resistance showed the impact of the protest movement of the last five years in enlarging the scope of legitimate beyond the borders of the legal. An illegal strike occurred in a country where five years ago the trade unions complained about the impossibility of striking under existing laws.

Another important development of 1991 was the ultimate acquittal of DİSK. As a result in the summer of 1991 the focus of the organized labor movement was turned to this confederation. The reopened DİSK lost most of its appeal and fervor from the seventies. The leadership of the social democratic unionism clearly rests with Petrol-İş, the demise of Soviet Union destroyed the convictions of the official

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<sup>449</sup> “Hava-İş Grevinin Öğrettikleri” *İşçilerin Sesi*, 17.06.1991, p.4.



Turkish communists entrenched in the DİSK bureaucracy. Nevertheless Otomobil-İş and Laspetkim-İş the two important independent trade unions of the eighties joined with the DİSK affiliates so as to constitute new trade unions Birleşik Metal and Lastik-İş, respectively. These two are still operational.

1991 marks the ending of the cycle of protest instigated by the organized labor especially as a reaction of those aspects of the neoliberal transformation that threatens the moral economy of the unionized Turkish workers. The employees of the state economic enterprises who constitute the backbone of the national trade unions were the primary targets of this transformation. The demise of the movement made itself clear in the collective bargaining process of 1991 where a repetition of the protests of 1989 was staged, yet this time in an institutional manner. The spontaneity, the creativity and the testing the limits of the legal by relying on the legitimacy of the demands were absent. The principal characteristic of the 1989 spring was the breaking of the routine, yet now these passive forms of action were normalized as auxiliary rituals of the collective bargaining process. Furthermore, the passivity of these protests coupled with their spontaneity and unusual popularity made them ground-breaking in 1989, but in 1991 repeating them is dull. Although the public servants engineered more creative forms of protest at the same time, the workers and their trade unions kept their distance from the protests staged by the public servants. The most important centrally planned act of the whole period was a national day of action in the 22 July when the workers collectively went the factory infirmaries which means a couple hours work stoppage.<sup>450</sup>

Throughout the negotiations Türk İş headquarters always kept the initiative and control over the movement. The content of the slogans were more political in

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<sup>450</sup> For a first hand account of these protests see “İşçiler Türk İş Engelini Aşamadı,” *İşçilerin Sesi*, 27.07.1991.

1991 compared to 1989. However, this is understandable since everyone expecting early general elections and the catchphrases making ridicule of Özal were common and pervasive. For the bulk and the mainstream of the organized labor movement that instigated the popular labor protests after 1986 until 1991, the target was the transgression of the moral economy clearly and beyond any doubt, symbolized by Özal whose demise was imminent, rather than the existing relations of production. In 1991 while the radical phase and upbeat pace of the neoliberal transformation process receded so did its opponent, in the guise of the traditional trade union centers and their membership.

The reaction against the political and economic transformation, which aimed to install the market rationality based on profit maximizing behavior as the essential principle in the management of the public economy, is mainly defensive in its objectives. Indeed, as already cited the disposition of the labor unrest when triggered because of a perceived violation of the moral economy of the industrial relations is almost always “restorative” in nature. Its restorative nature does not mean promoting an alternative political agenda for the country to compete with the government’s targets. It rather aims to shield the obvious victims of this transformation, the employees of the public enterprises specifically and the organized labor in general. The trajectory of development that the Turkish organized labor movement went through, conditions their official segment, represented more or less legitimately by the higher echelons of Türk İş, in a certain way so that the confederation intervenes to quell down the protests when it breached the limits of acceptable political criticism. A lively protest movement based on the working class, on the other hand, tends to force these limits, at least by the more politically motivated sectors of this opposition. If the authorities augment the political pressures over the opposition, the

movement will either gave in or radicalize under the rising influence of the politically motivated fringe. However, if the demands were somehow accommodated the consequence would be the decline of the movement, may be coupled with the emergence of a new balance of forces in the movement itself. The nature of demands of the movement is also an intervening factor, if these were restorative rather than change oriented the constitution of a compromise might be reached easier by temporary concessions that did not hurt the basic rationale of the transformation which was under way. This model may summarize the fate of the protest movement instigated by the workers when the Özal administration violated the moral economy of the Turkish organized labor.

The general elections held in fall 1991 brought to power a coalition government composed of SHP and DYP as expected. The hardboiled politician Süleyman Demirel became the prime minister. His cabinet including the social democrats did not reverse the general policy orientation of its predecessor yet neither its discourse nor its priorities reflected the zeal of the Özal administration for the structural transformation of the country.<sup>451</sup> Indeed, this change of attitude was already under way when ANAP lost the municipal elections and Özal opted for presidency rather than remaining directly at the helm of his party. The repercussions of this softening discourse against the trade unions and the more pragmatist approach to the issues related to public sector trade unions coupled with the frequent postponements of strikes on the pretext of the Gulf War contributed to the retreat of the protest movement of the unionized workers. Demirel's cabinet inherited this trend and furthered it.

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<sup>451</sup> For an overall evaluation of the first three years of the coalition government see Kemali Saybaşı, *DYP-SHP Koalisyonunun Üç Yılı*, Bağlam, İstanbul, 1995.

All in all, the pace of the structural transformation slowed down considerably during the nineties. Turkey was no longer a model country for the implementation of the neoliberal model in the developing world. The governments preferred gradual methods in adjustments concerning the organized labor, protecting the existing workers while the rights of the future employees were ruined. Therefore, the Turkish organized labor that tends to care the interests of its members rather than the working class in general was coopted to these policies. The loss of prestige of the socialist ideals also eased the hands of the trade unions in this respect. The protest movement of the late eighties has a share in bringing these results; above all it played a part in the downfall of the Motherland Party. The main political foe of Turgut Özal was the organized labor rather than Erdal İnönü or Süleyman Demirel. The confederation headquarters though preferred to struggle against the radical fringe of the movement rather than the government, especially after the election of Özal as the president of the republic.

### The Aftermath of the General Elections

The coalition government which reflects the alliance in the Türk İş headquarters restored the prestige of the confederation, and the higher echelons of the organized labor in their turn returned to the traditional attitude of outward nonpartisanship, the hallmark of Türk İş. The structural transformation triggered by the previous government though changed the outlook of the country drastically. The economy was no longer inward oriented the finances were attached to the global markets; the Turkish citizens get used to utilize foreign currencies in their daily lives. The popularization of capitalism, the spread of the praise of the entrepreneurial ethos

must also be cited among the significant consequences of the eighties. There are other factors affecting the political developments of the nineties. The demise of the Soviet Union ruined the credibility of the socialist ideals and the self confidence of the militants at the shop floor. Moreover, it facilitated the establishment of Türk İş in its purges of the left wingers in its big affiliates and silenced the left opposition carried by those who achieved to be elected to the management in the smaller trade unions.

Nevertheless, the collapse of the socialist block also boosts the supporters of the neoliberal transformation pursued by the earlier Özal administration. Their ideological supremacy further corroborated, although the coalition government did not have an interest in ideological purism. Yet during the early nineties when the liberal capitalist economic and political system seems to be unchallenged, the confrontational union practices were also discredited. As the domain of economy was separated absolutely from the bickering of politics the mediation of class interests either in some forms of corporatist arrangements or in an open political confrontation became baseless. In the absence of an alternative the only possible role for the trade unions is providing a medium of social dialogue for better governance not of the economy but the social problems of the wage earners. Indeed, the leadership of the confederation quickly internalized this type of trade unionism,<sup>452</sup> which, as long as the employment opportunities of its actual members were not threatened, did not contradict its basic understanding of their duties as a labor confederation and their traditional manner of operating.

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<sup>452</sup> The change of trade union practices is a widely debated subject during the early part of the nineties. For a study compiling the views by some important officials of Türk İş and its affiliate unions see Erdinç Yazıcı (ed.), *Yeni Bir Dünyanın Eşiğinde Türk İş ve Değişim*, Sistem Yayınları, Ankara, 1993.

Another important development dating back to the early nineties is the ultimate acquittal of DİSK and its reopening. However, the lost decade of DİSK cost dearly to the confederation some of the independent trade unions joined the confederation but this did not change the fact that its organization is only the shell of its former self. Most of its affiliates remained open thanks to their immovable properties rather than members' fees. The loss of faith in the aftermath of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc is clearly visible among the ranks of DİSK. Lastik-İş became the pioneer of Japanese trade unionism based on secure employment in return for the labor contribution to the management of the enterprises, in Turkey. Participation in the management which actually means as a contribution to the reaching of company objectives was represented as a kind of a democratic process. Under the strain of the requirements of international competitiveness, neither metal nor chemical industries can afford rising costs of labor, and the DİSK affiliates accommodated their strategies accordingly. This is understandable since the state economic enterprises mostly ceased recruiting new employees due to the public sector reform, thus the membership in the trade union power bases getting older, as a result union activities in private businesses lost an important ally and financial resources.

There occurred other important developments affecting the fate of the organized labor movement. Most important among them is the mass migration from the south eastern provinces to the industrial cities due to the low intensity warfare in the region. The rapid urbanization suddenly changed the makeup of the labor force available in the fringe of these cities. The culture of the working class is deeply influenced by these changes. Moreover the Kurdish rebellion caused rising ethnic tensions among the laborers and legitimized the use of harsher policing methods

against social disturbances especially in the eyes of the middle classes. Therefore, the normalization of the political regime pursued by the coalition government advanced parallel to a rising state sponsored violence against chosen social or ethnic groups.

The Turkish industry also went through important changes especially because of the opening up of the export opportunities in the old soviet republics. This development gave a boost to the textiles and many small manufactures began to exploit the available pool of urban poor to recruit as textile workers. Many small companies emerged and contracting out of the job to these small firms became the norm of first the textile production then in the other industries. The big corporations of the seventies did no more constitute the bulk of Turkish manufactures; this development also had adverse effects on the union membership.

Turkey was an exemplary country for its strict adherence to the structural adjustment programs proposed by the international financial institutions during the early part of the eighties. It embraced these policy suggestions such as the privatizations earlier than many indebted Third World countries. Yet, at the end of the eighties it lagged behind in applying these reforms compared to many late comers such as the eastern European countries.<sup>453</sup> Obviously, the role the organized labor in bringing down the Motherland Party government had its consequences. However, this can be considered as a pyrrhic victory at best. The rationale of the global economy was never challenged by the movement with an alternative political project. The protest developed on the basis of a breach of the moral economy, prioritized the interests of the actual unionized workers and not the working class. As the cases such as Çitosan illustrate the existing unionism can not survive in the new milieu.

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<sup>453</sup> Metin Ercan, Ziya Öniş, (2001), p.109.

Powerful trade unions such as Türkiye Çimse-İş, Yol-İş and Selüloz-İş safeguarded the well being of their members thanks to both their connections to the partners of the coalition government and the legacy of their resistance against the former government, yet the change of ownership or outright closures of the state economic enterprises destroyed any chance of prosperity for these trade unions unless they achieve a major shift in their approach to industrial relations. Then again, the circumstances for such a shift were not favorable regarding the cumulated experience of unionism from 1947 onwards. The existing trajectory prepared a potent reaction against the imposition of the structural transformation yet it handicaps the chances to devise an alternative project for the working class. Consequently, the nineties turned out to be period in which the trade unions constantly lost ground, their members did not lost jobs or impoverish dramatically. Compared to the new urban poor migrated to the cities they were better off in many respects yet the organized labor in general declines steadily and silently so as to make them powerless in the face of the transformation that was pursued after the economic crisis in 2001 though this is another story that still unfolds presently.

The particular trajectory of the development of the Turkish organized labor movement, its relationship with the state authorities and the political parties of the establishment, and the resulting institutional dynamics of the regime of industrial relations condition the set of legitimate norms and practices that must be observed, and proper economic functions that must be fulfilled by the parties to the industrial relations. This reciprocal and institutionalized understanding about the roles, obligations and routines of the working of the industrial relations constitutes a moral economy in the eyes of the organized labor represented more or less by the trade unions. The development of the Turkish organized labor movement and the political



preferences of the government made the trade unions a force mostly existing in state economic enterprises and in the biggest industrial establishments owned by the private sector. That is why this moral economy echoes by and large in the channels of the formal employment, and especially the public sector.

The enlarging public sector was a legacy of the post war settlement everywhere. In the Turkish case, just like some other developing countries, the étatist experiences of the thirties, a policy choice adopted generally due to the consequences of the Great Depression, also added on top of the political preferences emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. Among other ends, the governing parties also used these establishments to carve out a popular power base inside the working class. Consequently, the trade unions established in these factories turned out to be important channels between the parliament and the organized labor. In many cases the trade unions resolved the problems of their members in Ankara by bypassing their immediate superintendents. This link was so effective that most of the leaders of the bigger trade unions served as parliamentarians as well.

Apart from the impact of the governments, the political parties of the establishment and the resources provided by them, another important development that affected the organized labor movement was the experience of the two decades preceding the eighties. The change in the regime of capital accumulation and the mode of articulation into the global capitalism transformed the political economy of the country. The introduction of the import substitution strategy as the main economic policy choice of the governments during these two decades offered an advantageous political atmosphere and institutional arrangement to the organized labor movement. The enlarging domestic market necessitated the rise in the purchasing power of the industrial workers at least; as a result the labor militancy

was tolerated by the regime. Accordingly the trade unions became important social actors and made their impact visible through significant episodes of social mobilization.

These episodes of labor militancy politicized the organized labor movement. The involvement of the organized labor into politics became a public issue widely debated both among the intellectuals and the trade union circles. These developments took place in a specific international conjuncture of decolonization creating a rampant sympathy to leftwing ideologies among the youth. However, the Turkish left is in a peculiar position among its European counterparts since it did not have the chance to be introduced into the political arena in the late forties unlike them and lost the opportunity to build its institutional channels during the post war boom environment, rather it appeared as a political force in the late sixties during a period of international economic crisis and a widespread counter culture movement that shook the foundations of every institutional structures of leftwing politics.

The cumulative experience of this era composed of boycotts, strikes and other forms of social resistance did not trigger a radical break from traditional approaches to the relationship between politics and trade unions. Besides, one must not exaggerate the involvement of trade union militants with radical left wing politics,<sup>454</sup> the majority have been and are still active members of the center parties and some are even registered to the Islamic or fascist right wing organizations. Moreover, Türk İş under the impact of American labor circles opted for a nonpartisanship approach that resulted in the schism of the movement. The establishment of socialist parties and their interest in the labor movement created the tension leading to the division. All in all, the pattern concerning the relation between trade unions and political

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<sup>454</sup> For an account of the impact of socialist organizations among the Turkish working class see Yüksel Akkaya, "Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Türkiye Solu ve İşçi Sınıfı" in Murat Gültekingil (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: Sol*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2007, pp. 790-810.

parties that were established in the late forties remained intact with only the expansion of the spectrum of political organizations that sought influence over trade unions.

The seventies witnessed the deepening of the rift between the alternative trade union centers on the one hand, and the normalization of the existence of the alternative trade union center, on the other. The principle of nonpartisanship lost its meaning amidst of the radicalization of the labor struggles and the rampant political violence that often victimized the workers. The end of the seventies also witnessed the crisis of the import substitution strategy darkening the atmosphere of political violence. The shortage of foreign currency made impossible the survival of the assembly production that the private industries relied and earned hefty profits until then. Widespread shortages of basic necessities and black marketing ravaged the daily lives of the urban wage earners. No government seemed to be resilient enough to cope with the insurmountable difficulties of the crisis of the import substitution. Just like elsewhere in the developing countries the military intervened to maintain the power of the ruling class by transforming the regime of capital accumulation and the mode of articulation of the local economy to global capitalism, while keeping the organized labor at bay. Consequently, the regime of industrial relations was amended so as to handicap the organized labor. Indeed the seventies witnessed similar bloody coup d'états with similar results elsewhere in the Third World.

The transformation that Turkey went through from the 1980 onwards was in line with the global trends of the time. The collapse of the Bretton Woods system symbolized by the devaluation of the dollar discredited the tenets of Keynesian economics. In its stead the old dogma reemerged and the rise of neoclassical economics engulfed first the academic circles and international financial institutions

then the governments in general. These ideas were imposed to the national economies through various means, including methods of repression. Yet more subtle means also existed, the countries that resorted to these institutions for financial help were demanded to adjust their economic policies in line with the new approach, thus to adopt a structural adjustment program under the auspices of the IMF.

The structural adjustment program pursued by the Özal administration aimed at destroying the governmental paternalism in public enterprises, among its other policy objectives. The trade unions reacted to these policies since the bulk of the organized labor had its organizational backbones in these establishments. The result of the structural adjustment amounted to the reduction of workers' income level and the loss of prestige by the trade unions. Furthermore, the class nature of the governments became more visible since the state closely collaborated with the private employers. These reactions took the form of a trade union led social opposition to the Özal administration from the late eighties onwards until the general elections that was held in 1991.

This cycle of protest included some of the most monumental labor protests of the Turkish history. The great miners' march of the January 1991 and the pervasive spontaneous mass protest actions of the spring of 1989 were unprecedented episodes of social mobilization for Turkey. However, the political objectives of these protest movements are constrained and conditioned by the past of the organized labor movement. This means that the political content of the labor struggles of the late eighties were molded by the cumulated routine of the public enterprise unionism, at least for the leadership of the then existing largest trade union confederation. That is why the officialdom of the organized labor contented itself with the protection of the interests of their members as best as they can, and this best was far from sufficient

anyway, whereas they did very little to protect the interest of the workers as a class. As a result the privatization program of the governments functioned smoothly and the ideological offensive against the organized labor was supplied by many examples of public inefficiency in the overstaffed factories waiting for closure. Throughout the nineties, the trade unions achieved to protect the employment of their members, their retirement schemes while the public sector evaporates along with the social, economic and political status of the labor.

Today the turbulent five years spanning from 1986 to 1991 is largely forgotten. The main reason in this is the restorative nature of the protests and the lack of an alternative political agenda pursued by the organized labor movement. The spring of 1989 and the Great Miners' March are historical moments of a social movement, which protested the neoliberal assault on the way of living of the unionized workers, broke their daily routines, yet the cited deficiencies made them out of touch with the direction of the global social transformation. Furthermore, the Pyrrhic victory obtained in the bargaining table between Türk İş and the government protected the workers individually yet allowed the suppression of their style of livelihood and nascent working class culture. As the nineties progressed many of the reforms projected by the Özal administration were implemented albeit by caring for those employed at the time of the reforms. These reforms weakened the power of the organized labor's social and political power in total and eroded their membership base so as to make the trade unions unarmed against the newest onslaughts of the neoliberal agenda consisting of mainly precarization of the labor, which entered the agenda of the governments in the aftermath of the 2001 economic crisis. The memory of the late eighties only resonates in the enlarging tool kit of protest that the Turkish organized labor movement relied on when opposing to the government

policies hurting their interests, yet at the time the choice of these strategies was a result of the restrictive legal context devised by the coup. Now it is a reflection of their powerlessness. Presently, the once powerful trade unions organized formerly in the public sector possess immovable properties in Ankara but no real members, and try to figure out a new rationale to sustain their existence.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION: SHOULD THE DISAPPEARED MORAL ECONOMY STILL INSPIRE WORKERS?

This study is prompted by the ostensible dilemma of the emergence of a widespread labor mobilization during a relatively repressive era while this mobilization vanishes into thin air during the nineties when the regime became more and more democratic in some of its aspects. What triggered the reaction of the unionized workers and their organizations at the time and why it did not last into the following decade? The disappearance of the movement was so complete that even its memory faded away. The answer to this question lies in the trajectory of the institutional development of the organized labor movement, the impact of its relationship with the state and the specific composition of its moral economy.

The moral economy argument does not only signify that the Turkish trade unions struggle against the imperatives of the market economy that alter the usual working of the public enterprises, it also means that the workers' action is not a direct result of the drop in incomes or deterioration of their living conditions, rather it is a result of trespassing the established norms of the national industrial relations regime by the employers, whether public or private, that in the end both push back their material interests and violate their everyday life. These established norms are constituted by the historical development of the institutional aspects of the industrial relations hence they are not essential features of an unchanging culture or worldview.

The resistance against the imposed norms, on the other hand, emerges when the market imperatives both lower wages and transforms the conditions of trade unionism in a reciprocal manner. However, once the market imperatives permeate the logic of union militants in public enterprises, that is to say when the novel norms of industrial relations based on the neoliberal world view become established, these militants too began to conceive their workplace in terms of effectiveness and cost-benefit ratio. Unlike their predecessors they will not insist on the non-economic function of these institutions. Therefore, they will be acquiescent while they lost ground through privatization or contracting out of jobs.

The reaction against the political and economic transformation, which aimed to install the market rationality based on profit maximizing behavior as the essential principle in the management of the public economy, is mainly defensive in its objectives. Indeed, as already cited the disposition of the labor unrest when triggered because of a perceived violation of the moral economy of the industrial relations is almost always “restorative” in nature. This means the labor actions motivated in this vein, almost always aim to prevent the market mechanisms from further commodifying the social relations of production. Its restorative nature does not entail promoting an alternative political agenda for the country to compete with the government’s targets. It rather aims to shield the obvious victims of this transformation, the employees of the public enterprises specifically and the organized labor in general. This did not mean that the dynamics of this defensive struggle can never breach the established norms of socially acceptable types of protest or revolutionize the mind set of its bearers. Nevertheless in the Turkish case the factors surrounding the mobilization process did not facilitate such a transformation.



In these circumstances the deliberate and stubborn attempts of the Özal administration, which aimed to transform radically the institutional context of the industrial relations, alienated the workers so as to provoke them to resort direct actions to manifest their reaction and anger. The mobilization, encouraged by the relative successes of the independent trade unions organized in private businesses of the metal and chemical sectors, created a cycle of protest spanning from the late 1986 until the end of 1991. The Özal administration trespassing of the moral economy triggered the mobilization process yet in its turn the protest itself and the converting nature of class struggle carried the potential to radicalize the movement itself. However, the political developments undermined the Özal administration and lessened the zeal of the adherence of the ruling party to the neoliberal creed that it preached as the hallmark of a new era in this country.

The trajectory of development that the Turkish organized labor movement went through, conditions the establishment of this movement, represented more or less legitimately by the higher echelons of Türk İş, in a certain way so that the confederation intervenes to quell down the protests when it breached the limits of acceptable political criticism. A lively protest movement based on the working class, on the other hand, tends to force these limits, at least by the more politically motivated sectors of this opposition. If the authorities augment the political pressures over the opposition, the movement will either gave in or radicalize under the rising influence of the politically motivated fringe. However, if the demands were somehow accommodated the consequence would be the decline of the movement may be coupled with the emergence of a new balance of forces. The nature of demands of the movement is also an intervening factor, if these were restorative rather than change oriented the constitution of a compromise might be reached easier

by temporary concessions that did not hurt the basic rationale of the transformation which was under way. This model may summarize the fate of the protest movement instigated by the workers when the Özal administration violated the moral economy of the Turkish organized labor.

However, this model functions in a historically structured context. The moral economy of the unionized workers is not an essential part of their culture or whatsoever but a historically constructed mainframe of action, an institutional arrangement and understanding between the Turkish governments and the trade unions concerning the conduct of the regime of industrial relations and the relevant decision making process and procedures. It is built through historical episodes in which the state and the organized labor interacted to set the terms of the regime of industrial relations on a rationale other than the imperatives of self regulating market. Besides, the general ideological choices of the state elite and the political competition among the parties also had an impact on this construct. In this vein, three significant episodes conditioned the moral economy of the unionized workers in a specific way so as to create both a normally subservient trade union leadership and a solid connection between the parties of the establishment and the organized labor movement through this leadership structure.

The first episode in this respect was the thirties during which the first attempts at state led industrialization were realized and the first legal texts regulating the industrial relations were legislated. The political climate of that era was marked by the rising authoritarian regimes throughout most of the Europe, on the domain of economics the consequences of the Great Depression was felt still severely and the international trade virtually collapsed. In these circumstances the Turkish state opted for establishing local industries meanwhile it also tried to prevent the formation of a

proletarianized work force. This means the state would be the biggest industrial employer and its preferences in this respect would shape the organized labor to some extent.

In order to reach these objectives the state adopted ideological, legal and physical precautions. It reproduced a solidarist discourse and devised the nationalism as an essential trait of the Turkish workers; it recognized the individual rights of its employees and gave them legal protection but refrained from acknowledging its collective rights, indeed it criminalized labor mobilization and any organizational attempts in this respect, lastly it disseminates the industrial units throughout Anatolia and never showed enthusiasm for implementing social norms existing in the laws in private businesses mostly located dense urban industrial centers. As a result, the basis for the developmentalist discourse and the praiseful role of the nationalist Turkish workers and the state economic enterprises was built, on top of which a silent mutual understanding of reciprocity, where the state promised for the well being of its employees-citizens and in return expected strict adherence to the relevant restrictive laws from the workers, was founded.

The second episode instrumental in the formation of the moral economy was clearly the constitutive era of the Turkish trade unions spanning from the mid forties to the mid fifties. During this era the disillusionment created by the hardships of the war unleashed an ardor for mobilization when the regime opted for liberalization. The government though trying to mold this mobilization according to its own terms intervened through subtle and not so subtle means in order to influence the nascent trade unions. The result of this struggle is a change in the form of link existing between organized labor and political parties. Instead of state as a united entity, in line with the election politics, the parties of the establishment became partakers of

the reciprocal understanding through which the trade unions attached firmly their membership base to the parliamentary politics. Therefore, extra parliamentary means of political participation relegated to a lesser status and the lobbies in Ankara turned to be the primary mean through which politics and organized labor became linked. Likewise, although the developmentalist ideological discourse of the earlier era remained intact the public sector also started to serve as a hub of clientalist relations and state economic enterprises were established in many places spreading union organizations along the way.

The third episode began with the introduction of import substitution as the primary policy choice for industrialization of the country. This era witnessed both the strengthening of the organized labor movement thanks to the favorable economic policies of this particular kind of policy package. The more mature trade unions embarked on an organizational campaign in the newly emerging industrial centers around the Marmara region hence they established a foothold in the private industries located there. Their ingenuity, sacrifice and the favorable climate permit the trade unions organized in private sector to obtain relatively lucrative deals in these establishments. Even more radical methods of claim making may pay off and when they did these struggles made headlines nationally and their demonstration effect created consequences influencing the movement as a whole.

This organizational line strong in the greater İstanbul area and its surroundings was expelled by the Ankara based traditional leadership of the organized labor. Their challenge and new strategy may be also because of the international political climate of the Cold War tried to be confined both by the establishment parties and their partners in the top brass of the trade union hierarchy. This new strategy aims to obtain new rights and privileges for the labor on the basis

of its power emanating from its place in the production process. However, when the import substitution strategy entered into a structural crisis the basis of such a line of action vanishes into thin air. The remaining difference between the two trade union centers was mostly about dissimilar political affiliations. Nevertheless, the cumulated experience from this era enriched the tool kit of protest of labor.

The moral economy of the unionized workers came out of the sixties and the seventies as a powerful legitimating source for the trade unions; the movement on the other hand enriched its tool kit of protest and augmented its impact within the political system. The reciprocity between the establishment parties and the trade unions functioned without much trouble especially after DİSK approached with the democratic left faction of the RPP. The industrialization efforts of the era contributed to the relevant discourse and étatism reentered the scene also as an ideological device connecting the workers to the state. The nationalist sermon receded yet the left wing of the movement always stressed its patriotic stand while condemning the American infiltration in Türk İş. The extra parliamentary means of claim making establish their presence in the arsenal of the organized labor evidently yet the reliance to official channels and informal networks of patronage kept their primacy.

Even the coup itself strengthened some of the components of the moral economy of the unionized workers such as praise of the nationalist Turkish workers' contribution to the goals of national development and the need to remain within the borders of the establishment if the cause of the workers would be served.

Nevertheless it must be noted that its material basis began to be eroded from the late seventies onwards rapidly. The declining income levels of the workers and the governmental inability to protect them, the decline of the public sector and the rising spontaneous acts of civil disobedience even armed clashes involving workers, all

pointed in the same direction. The economic model was unable to sustain the moral economy. The choice of the ruling class at this point, in line with the preferences of the global capitalism, was to substitute it with a political economy based on almost pure market rationality. This will require a radical transformation of the institutional working of the politics, the regime of industrial relations and the ideological discourse wrapping these formal realms of economic, political and social relations.

The Özal administration was in charge of this substitution and achieved a great deal especially in the domain of ideology, though some real change also occurred at the institutional level. The governments led by Özal quit the traditional methods of appeasing the trade union leadership and did not prefer to rely on their support to reach to their constituencies in the small Anatolian towns built around state economic enterprises, explicitly blamed these establishments and their employees for the backwardness of the country hence left aside the discourse of development and the role of workers in this respect. Hostile speeches against the trade unions because of their remarks concerning wage levels, privatizations or public sector reform became normal in this era. Moreover, first divestitures occurred and the legal context for further privatizations was laid down. Some arrangements indirectly hurt the interest of the organized labor such as easing of tariffs for goods produced by state monopolies, some other exposed plainly the class nature of the government such as the merging of public employer trade union with its counterpart for the private entrepreneurs or forcing strikes in state monopolies to the benefit of private sector, whether industrialists or traders. All of these amounted to a full scale assault against the moral economy of the unionized workers.

The resistance against this assault that aims to further the commodification of the labor processes slowed down this process thanks to the above described cycle of

protest, yet their slim victory became meaningless in the long run as already cited. Presently, the Turkish organized labor lost ground both in numerical terms and at the level of ideology. It did neither possess the required strength nor enjoy the necessary social and political support to resist effectively against the deliberate governmental policies hurting its material interests. It seems that even the recent global developments discrediting the neoliberal onslaught and reinvigorating the mobilizations based on social questions did not echo with the Turkish organized labor movement. The memory of the past struggles, which can give the much needed confidence to the organized labor in its efforts to further its cause, is long perished. That is why as Edward Thompson once said it is up to the student of labor politics to rescue the meaning of their struggle “from the enormous condescension of posterity,” and this is one of the aims here.

This study argues that the demise of the oppositional social movements rooted in the class based popular resistance from the mid nineties onwards is not related solely to the institutional transformation initiated by the 24 January economic program and the ensuing period of structural adjustment that lasted until the late eighties, although the long term effects of the institutional transformation realized after the coup are responsible for the weakening of the trade unions ultimately, hence their capacity to resist to the governmental policies undermining their interests. Rather the already existing deficiencies of the struggle of the late eighties emerged as a reaction against the onslaught of the neo-liberal economics coupled with neo-conservative politics is responsible for the subsequent absence of any working class opposition to the transformation of the nineties. The labor mobilization on the basis to defend their moral economy was inherently incapable to meet the challenge of the neoliberal transformation, because the foundation of this notion not only aimed to

rebuild a past whose material basis no longer exists but also it consist of a self perception as a lobby group rather than a class organization with political motivations. The reciprocity that their moral economy was built upon did not entail a political vision, rather it preoccupied with the protection of the interests of the actual members.

The subsequent period did nevertheless witness some separate incidents of labor protests. It must be noted that the period following the retreat of the lively mobilization period of the latter part of the eighties and also the demise of the Özal administration was marked by a different rationale. The trade unions accepted the necessity of reforming the function and the working of the public sector yet they had reservations over its conduct. The pension schemes and the employment opportunities of the workers must not be harmed. That is why the same moral economy construct can not be applies to the meager protests occurred during the nineties and afterwards. Three cases came to mind in this respect. In historical order these are the resistance of Yol-İş members employed in the defunct government agency of village services, the protests by the closed down Kocaeli SEKA factory workers, and the present struggle of the TEKEKEL workers.

The first incident was in fact a reminder by Yol-İş to the government about the demands of its members employed in village services because of the looming closure of this gigantic government agency that employed ten hundreds in the rural areas and hence created one of the powerful trade unions of the country. The Yol İş wanted the employment guarantees for its members in line with the silent understanding that was devised after the demise of the Özal administration partly due to labor protests. The trade union somewhat secured this objective. The second incident also had a similar nature and at the end SEKA workers were transferred to



the Kocaeli municipality. The TEKEL resistance, on the other hand, emanated from a similar dynamic yet the shift in government response and the growing weakness of the organized labor movement altered its outcome, it seems that the reciprocal understanding about the manners of conduct in the public sector reform established after the retreat of the Özal administration exist no more, and the organized labor movement as it exist is powerless to challenge this.

Today the organized labor movement must reinvent itself relying on its past achievements and considering its present objectives. The old reciprocity upon which their moral economy was built no longer exists; furthermore the tacit understanding about the public sector reform and the regime of industrial relations that marked its last two decades under which trade unions eroded was not observed by the governments lately. In fact, these circumstances seem to be highly disadvantageous yet despair and lethargy is pointless, to the contrary the erosion of the already existing norms and practices of traditional trade unionism can create unprecedented opportunities for a renovation of the organized labor movement. Turkish organized labor movement achieved to left its mark on the political developments of its time under the highly disadvantageous conditions of the eighties by relying on its own experience and tool kit of protest. This was not an anomaly or exception; it is unreasonable and unfounded to believe otherwise.

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