

THE STATIST INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE FORMATION OF  
INDUSTRIAL WORKING CLASS IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

by

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Title: “The Statist Industrialization and the Formation of Industrial Working Class in the Early Republic”

The basic concern of this master’s thesis is to develop a historical approach towards the statist industrialization initiated in early 1930s and the formation of Turkish industrial working class with its economic, social, ideological and political aspects. It tries to ascertain how the state-owned enterprises Sümerbank and Etibank shaped the profile of the industrial working class and what sort of an influence they had on the intra-class composition and inter-class relations.

Those state-owned factories went beyond being merely a production plant and provided other facilities such as housing, training activities, and so on. In this way, the industry complexes contributed to the provisioning and the reproduction of the labour force required by the statist industrialization. The policies pursued by those enterprises had an impact also on the formation and representation of the class identity of industrial workers. Depicting how those impacts were experienced by workers, this thesis examines the labor movement, including both the period before and after the ban on unionization.

## Özet

### Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Devletçi Sanayileşme ve Sanayi İşçi Sınıfının

### Oluşumu

Selin Dingiloğlu

Bu tezin amacı, 1930'ların ilk yarısında başlayan devletçi sanayileşme politikalarına ve bu bağlamda ekonomik, sosyal, ideolojik ve siyasi boyutlarıyla Türkiye sanayi işçi sınıfının oluşumuna tarihsel bir yaklaşım geliştirmektir. Tezde, Sümerbank ve Etibank devlet işletmelerinin sanayi işçisi profilini nasıl şekillendirdikleri ve sınıf içi kompozisyon ve sınıflararası ilişkiler üzerinde nasıl bir etkide bulundukları incelenmektedir. Bu devlet işletmeleri sadece bir üretim mekanı olmanın ötesine geçerek konut, eğitim ve benzeri faaliyetler içinde bulunurlar. Bu yönüyle bu sanayi kompleksleri, devletçi sanayileşmenin ihtiyaç duyduğu emek gücünün sağlanması ve yeniden üretiminde rol üstlenirler. Bu işletmeler tarafından izlenen politikalar, sanayi işçi sınıfının oluşumu ve sınıf kimliğinin sunumu üzerinde de etkili oldu. Tez, bu etkinin işçiler tarafından nasıl deneyimlendiğini aktararak, sendikalaşma yasağı öncesi ve sonrası emek hareketini ele almaktadır.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, the state-run industrialization process during the early Republican period in terms of formation of the working class is examined. On the experiences in the factory, the production process, and the reflection of such experiences in the daily lives of the working class and their economic and social existence and the ideological formation and the political activities during this process are discussed. In this regard, this study provides an overview of labor history during the 1930s and 1940s.

It is obvious that Turkey does not have a rich literature especially in terms of labor history studies conducted during the early years of the Republic. However, recently there has been an increasing interest in labor history. This interest has been inspired by the historiographical debate opened by the outstanding British marxist historian E.P. Thompson on re-defining the agency and attributing the central role to the workers' experience in historical process.

What makes E.P. Thompson's contribution so crucial is that he offers a new concept of class as the agency of history, in considering class as a historical phenomenon and relationship, rather than a once-appeared structure that is merely a function of the capitalist relations of production. In other words, workers become a class as they experience their pre-determined positions, which they enter involuntarily, through the mediation of the social totality, that is the capitalist formation. Accordingly, Thompson offers the replacement of class analysis with class struggle analysis, and thanks to that notion of class struggles, class turns into an agency instead of merely a bearer of the structure.

Yet surprisingly, referring to Thompson's emphasis on the "evidence of experience," it is observed that class ideas and activity tend to be inferred from class structure in various debates concerning Turkish labor history. Actually, "the essentialist assumption that classes 'in themselves' will, indeed must, act 'for themselves,' is rarely stated in such a direct, old-fashioned way, but it continues more implicitly to underpin much of the theoretical debate about class formation. In the most extreme formulation of such theoretical work, class formation is given a definition condensed by a notion of class consciousness which is seen as an all-or-nothing matter."<sup>1</sup>

This study asserts that the reason for this "implicit essentialism" lays in the fact that the focus on the daily experiences alone in order to avoid the hegemonic discourse of "high politics" causes the formation of class to be isolated from the capitalist formation, which is not a direct function of the dominance of a class, but rather a *mediated* whole containing the historical and actual composition of inter- and intra-class relations. While the daily life that proves the physical difference between the lower and upper classes is emphasized, the political realm may become a series of activities conducted only by the upper classes and their political representatives. Each contact point between the working class and this realm can be construed as a break from and, by extension, even condemning the specific experiences of the class and an increasing discursive domination.

Whereas in Thompson's conception, each class experiences the particular moment of the class struggles through the capitalist formation as the actual prism of the historical inheritance of class relations, as is referred by his emphasis on the "free-born Englishman," among many others. Bearing a historical accumulation, this

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<sup>1</sup> Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, *Working Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns of in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey: 1986), pp. 6-7.

capitalist formation presents a specific composition of inter- and intra-class relations in each particular moment. Henceforth, the historical inheritance of the capitalist formation and how the different classes experience such inheritance in a definite moment in regard of class relations count. In this context, the daily experiences of the different classes, their discrete positions and struggles are reflected through the prism of this holistic formation. Otherwise, the experiences of workers that cannot be located in this holistic formation have significant practical and theoretical restrictions, even they are valuable as a descriptive quotation.

“Importing” Thompson’s contribution of attributing the role of agency to the working class, this thesis endeavours to depict how the Turkish working classes’ experienced the specific dynamics of Turkish capitalism of that particular period.

Henceforth, the reason why this thesis focuses on the ideological and political repertoire of the Turkish capitalist establishment does not lay in the attempt at an eclectic integration of “high politics” and working class experiences, but in the very assumption that the histories of national working classes are composed not only of workplace relationships, trade unions, and so on. In this regard, inherited, preindustrial, precapitalist traditions count. Furthermore, the formation of the bourgeoisie and the specific composition of class relations also affect the formation of the working class. Class, society, and politics cannot be conflated; their relationships are contingent.<sup>2</sup>

This conflation is binding not only for the working classes, but also for the upper classes and political elites. In other words, the fact that social movements are the product of political struggles involving all of society also means that the upper classes do not create their class disposition on their own. Indeed, this very integrity

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 11.



of the classes in the capitalist formation paves the way for the working class to become involved in the formation of other classes, and hence, the agency of history.

Departing from such theoretical premises, the features of the inter-class relations in Turkey should be noted. For this purpose, the components of the formation of the upper classes and political elites, and of the working classes need to be examined.

The effect of the inter-class relations on the formation of the ideological repertoire of the dominant classes are valid in every single capitalist entity. Gerald Friedman depicts how labor movements shaped the state-making process in France and the United States as follows:

... fearful of the emerging coalition of Republican state officials and union activists, French employers formed associations to defend their interests and began to search for a new, modified republicanism that would exclude the demands of organized labor. The magnitude and effects of French employers' mobilization are discussed along with the limits that French republican ideology put on assertions of employer authority.

Compared with their French counterparts, American employers were particularly effective at organizing to counter strikes, and they were creative in their search for strategies to shore up their authority. The development of American welfare capitalism as a program and ideology is discussed, along with reasons why this approach to containing labor militancy was more effective than paternalism or employer associations.<sup>3</sup>

As far as the Turkish experience is concerned, one of the most significant characteristics is the noteworthy influence of early industrialization experiences in Europe on the ideological and political considerations of Turkish elites. As is known, dominant ideologies employ the historical experiences, knowledge and fears -beyond the solutions of practical problems such as capital accumulation, profit maximization, the creation of conditions for exploiting a cheap labor force, and so on. In this respect, the positions of the political-ideological elites was determined by

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<sup>3</sup> Gerald Friedman, *State-Making and Labor Movements* (Cornell University Press, New York: 1998), pp. 152-3.

the tangible information about the class struggles in Europe and the Bolshevik revolution, beyond their own experiences and the interest of a particular segment of the social classes.

Political elites employed this historical inheritance in challenging any possible social and political consequence of the Turkish industrialization. The fact that Turkish capitalism, which had witnessed the harsh class struggles in Europe, and a socialist revolution in its neighboring country, advanced a deliberate political consciousness which postulated that a well-developed identity among the factory workers would threaten the very conception of “classless society.” This brought about a series of “pre-emptive” measures against any possible resurgence of a labor movement. The labor movement, which had been liquidated during the consolidation process of the new Republic in second half of the 1920s, was criminalized at the very beginning of the industrialization attempts. Any class-based economic and political organization was banned. Although some of the bans were lifted during the liberalization of the post-war years, those “pre-emptive” measures were not relinquished, but instead the labor movement in especially state-run factories were kept under strict control.

The handicaps which the labor movement faced were not only those suppressive measures, but also the political elites’ avoidance of any radical structural change in society, which could result in appearance of a class identity among the workers. One can come across complaints about both the lack of permanent factory labor and absenteeism, and the socio-political advantages of the bonds of factory workers to their villages. “Keeping the villagers in their villages,” the consequence

of political drawbacks against a possible emergence of working class identity, as well as of some economic considerations.<sup>4</sup>

Under those circumstances, the workers applied different ways of self-expression, the majority of which were deprived of organizations. This constituted a specific repertoire of expression of their dissent, ranging from absenteeism and petitions to illegal attempts by militant workers.

At this point, the question of to what extent this dissent served the making of the working class in terms of the development of a class identity appears. This question brings about the discussions regarding the difference of acting as class conscious proletarians or as peasants-in-the-factories resisting the impositions of the industrial relations and unnatural restraints of the hostile industrial society.

It seemed that the dissent of the peasant-workers against the living and working conditions imposed on them by the industrial employment did not refer to the working class identity, but rather, applying their sense of justice they inherited from village life and agricultural economy to urban and industrial employment. For a long time and for the bulk of the peasant-workers, the object was not to gain economic, social and political rights as workers, but to return home to their villages.

This study claims that that difference is crucial, as far as the formation of the working class is concerned. For, in the absence of the worker identity, self-expression was dominated by the ideological discourses and patterns of the Turkish ruling classes, as is seen in the paternalist image of the state in the petitions addressed by the workers to the then-governing party, the RPP.

This was, to a large extent, due to the lack of an organizational instruments for self-expression. Since the class identity cannot be inferred from the class structure

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<sup>4</sup> As an invaluable resource about “villagism” in the dominant discourse, see Asım Karaömerlioğlu, *Orada Bir Köy Var Uzakta: Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Köycü Söylem* (İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları 2006).

itself, and classes are not the direct functions of the process of production, collective identity prerequisites collective action. Hence, the lift on the ban on unionization released several dynamics within the labor force, and the labor movement witnessed a wave of massive unionization and the re-emergence of class-based organizations.

Within this framework, the following chapter examines the production, employment and the reproduction processes of the labor force. It is discussed whether the housing, health, nutrition, education and other facilities provided in the public enterprises were based on a systematic social policy. It is sustained that those facilities actually aimed at the elimination of problems in the labor supply, which many enterprises met, and ensured social discipline in the production process, rather than the implementation of a social policy. In this regard, especially the discussions about villagers-workers and the mechanisms provided for attracting the required labor force in industry from agricultural production are emphasized.

In Chapter Three, workers' dissent in the state-run factories and mines before the 1946 unionization are examined. Several instruments of self-expression including absenteeism or petitions are discussed. In this chapter, also how the Turkish elites introduced their knowledge on the earlier industrialization experiences in Europe into the Turkish context against any possible rise of a labor movement also is discussed.

Then, the Chapter Four depicts the labor movement after the lift on ban on unionization, and the so-called 1946 unionization wave, with particular focus on the public enterprises. Finally, the governing party's intervention to that radical unionism wave through a new law imposing strict limits on the labor movement and its affects on the class organizations/movements are discussed.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE (RE)PRODUCTION OF LABOR FORCE**

#### Introduction

This chapter examines the formation of the industrial working class within the context of problems regarding employment and the reproduction of the labor force in the state-run enterprises of Sümerbank and Etibank, which were established within the framework of statism of the 1930s in Turkey. Focus will be given to the place of the state enterprises in the employment policies and labor force recruitment practices and how this process was experienced by the working class of Turkey through salaries, and facilities such as housing, nutrition, education, and so on. The political aspects of this formation on side of bourgeoisie and industrial proletariat of Turkey will be taken into consideration in the following chapter.

It would be useful to analyze the quantitative structure of the Turkish working class before discussing the place of Sümerbank and Etibank in the formation of the industrial proletariat of Turkey. Although the available statistics about this topic are not sufficient,<sup>5</sup> they manage to provide a general idea. As a result of the 1930 Labor Code, “the number of workers in facilities employing at least 10 workers” were calculated and determined as 427,364. Rozaliyev adds to this the 116,000 workers employed in small enterprises and 100,000 workers employed in transportation. Thus, the number workers in Turkey was calculated as 1,400,000, which corresponds

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<sup>5</sup> The work statics gathered in 1937, 1938 and 1948 for determining the number of workers exclude an important proportion of the wage earners –including those working at the factories employing less than 10 workers or the agricultural workers. Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye’de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1946* (Ankara: İmge, 1999), p. 303.

to seven percent of the population.<sup>6</sup> This number seems exaggerated when compared to other sources on the issue and is estimated to be a minimum of 798,000 and maximum of 960,000 in the work of Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, dated 1935.<sup>7</sup>

An analysis of the position of Sümerbank, founded in 1933, and Etibank, founded in 1935, within statist industrialization policies in general, lies outside the scope of this study. However, it is known that these two enterprises assumed critical functions in terms of the problems of the industrial proletariat, which constituted one of the central components of industrialization. This study focuses on these functions.

Turkish capitalism entered the statist period with a working class quantitatively limited and largely divided into small enterprises, and applied a statist industrialization that did not bring about a radical change in the total number of workers until the end of the war period, however one that generated important results in terms of the concentration of workers. A considerable change in the number of workers in the scope of the Labor Code was not observed between 1937 and 1943; the number of workplaces, however, was halved. The number of workers per workplace, which was 37 in 1937, reached 86 in 1943.<sup>8</sup> State enterprises established on a larger scale had an important place in this concentration. The total number of workers in the Sümerbank factories was specified as 23,023 in the inspection committee's report on Sümerbank of 1943.<sup>9</sup> This number reached 33,610 in 1950.<sup>10</sup> With the fusion that gathered the mine enterprises in the basin under Etibank, the bank employed approximately 23.000 workers. "Managing the issues of workers

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<sup>6</sup> Y. N. Rozaliyev, *Türkiye Sanayi Proletaryası*, (İstanbul: Yar Yayınları, 1974), pp. 53-60.

<sup>7</sup> Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1946*, p. 304.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>9</sup> Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Sümerbank 1943 Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu*, (Ankara: 1944), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Zafer Toprak, *Sümerbank* (Sümerbank Holding A.Ş. Yayını, 1990), p. 168.

under a single administration” was specified among the expectations from gathering all these enterprises under a single administration.<sup>11</sup>

The effects of the state enterprises on the working class of Turkey did not consist only of quantitative concentration. Rather, this quantitative concentration constituted one of the components of the larger scope of the structural transformation. As is known, planned industrialization moves brought about collectivization and socialization in the production process, not only in Turkey but also in other countries, and this had important inputs in terms of the formation of the industrial working class. How the process was experienced in different countries was dependent on the social-economic fabric in each one and thus on the intra- and inter-class composition inherited from the past. As in many other countries marked with late capitalism, the deficiency in the breakup from agriculture and the lack of formation of a permanent industrial proletariat stood out in the debates on the labor force problem in large enterprises and the formation of an industrial proletariat. Likewise, it is known that Soviet Russia, which provided an eight million dollar credit for the construction of large industrial complexes and sent teams of specialists to Turkey to train personnel, had similar experiences. It is possible to observe the experience from these labor force problems in a report prepared by one of the delegations, which will be discussed in detail later. It is possible to see traces of this debate both in the intervention of the state in the industrialization process through the labor force problem, and in examining the class representation and inter-class struggle, from the perspective of any of the parties.

For these reasons, before taking into consideration the more experimental and descriptive dimensions of the formation of the industrial proletariat, it is necessary to

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<sup>11</sup> Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Etibank Ereğli Kömür İşletmeleri Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu*, p. 1.

analyze to some extent this structural situation and take up the peasant-workers debate.

### “Cultivating” Workers from Peasants

Two basic sources are mentioned in the literature on the formation of an industrial proletariat, proletarianization of peasants and artisans. The restructuring of the social classes under capitalist configuration and the emergence of factory workers from this new configuration were determined by different capitalist dynamics in different places.

In this context, the differences between industrialization in Turkey and the industrialization of Western Europe, defined with early capitalization, and its similarities to that of Russia, have been much discussed. Although Turkey and Russia experienced certain overlapping dynamics of uneven development, due to the differences between their agricultural structures (that is, the serfdom in Russia) they also had important differences.

Research on the laying of the foundation of future industrialization by the process of proto-industrialization and cottage industry in Russia refers to the role of serfdom in the generation of the peasant-worker.<sup>12</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, serf owners tended to unite their agricultural estates with manufacturing enterprise on their own land, whereby the remained time after the short growing season was exploited and used to monetary advantage. Furthermore, when the peasants failed to pay their rents, they were sent to the factories in the town by the landlords, thus

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<sup>12</sup> As two important articles regarding that issue see Richard L. Rudolph, “Agricultural Structure and Proto-Industrialization in Russia: Economic Development with Unfree Labor,” *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 45, no. 1 (Mar. 1985), pp. 47-69; Franklin Mendels, “Proto-Industrialization: The First Phase of the Industrial Process,” *The Journal of Economic History* 32 (Mar. 1972), pp. 241-315.



diminishing the significance of the agricultural labor in such villages. To this end, passports were granted to serfs who became factory workers bringing high returns to their masters. Then, just before the emancipation, the factories on the estates were closed down as a result of the growth of nearby markets, which escalated the movement toward quit rents. This was a strong push for promoting the extra-agricultural activities and employment of the peasants. Further inducements for the peasants to tend to by-employment activities was the lost of their land to the demense, as well as the heavy taxes imposed on Russian peasantry.<sup>13</sup>

When Turkey and the 1930s are in question, regarding the above, it can be said that small scale land property was prevalent. Although partial developments can be observed during these years towards dispossession in agriculture, they were not the extent that they changed the general situation.<sup>14</sup> The prevalence of small enterprises in agriculture impeded the emergence of paid labor in the sector, as well as making it more difficult for the emergence of a massive array of workers who would join the industrial proletariat.

Considering the artisan segment of society, Turkey had a relatively enhanced tradition, inherited from the Ottoman era. There are many examples in the evaluations conducted during the foundation of the textile and weaving factories showing that this artisan tradition was taken into consideration. For example, in the Soviet reports, a weaver labor force was mentioned among the advantages of Denizli, which was among the proposed places for a textile factory. Unemployed weavers were mentioned as possible source of labor in Soviet reports about Kayseri.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Rudolp, pp. 58-64.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from Gülten Kazgan. See Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye'nin Sanayileşme Sürecinde İşgücü Sorunu ve Sosyal Politika*, p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> Türkiye Pamuk, Keten, Kendir, Kimya, Demir Sanayii Hakkında Sovyet Mühassısları Tarafından Verilen Raporlar, Başvekalet Müdevvenat Matbaası, 1933, aktaran: İlhan Tekeli, Selim İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye'de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu*, p. 153, 189.

However, research on this topic indicates that there was no considerable transfer of labor force from artisans to the newly established industry.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, from where and how did the newly established factories recruit the needed labor force? Although it did not result in a massive dispossession, the damage of the traditional rural economy and the concern for complementing the reduced agricultural incomes with a salary resulted in the seasonal migration of peasants and farmers. However, on the other hand, the model based on a labor force recruited from peasants who worked in factories for a certain period in order to pay high taxes and then returned to their villages during the harvest, impeded the formation of a permanent factory work force.

The most important indication of this was the high rotation rates and absenteeism, which were the subjects of many complaints by the authorities in those years. According to the records of the High Arbitrage Board that resolved collective labor disputes, quoted by Rozaliyef, most of the 11,500 workers in the Ereğli coal enterprises worked six months in the mines and six months in the villages.<sup>17</sup> A report of ILO indicated that even in 1960, 43 percent of the workers in the largest 1648 industrial enterprises in the country worked for one year, whereas 24 percent worked for at most six months per year.<sup>18</sup>

Available data regarding worker rotation rates are spectacular. According to the data given by Nusret Ekin, the absenteeism rate from Sümerbank reached 93.58 percent in 1944. This figure was 165 percent for Etibank in 1941. The worker rotation rate was approximately 300 percent in the state-owned sugar factories in 1940. In many cases, these high rotation rates resulted in working with imperfect

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<sup>16</sup> As an example, see Ahmet Makal, “Türkiye’nin Sanayileşme Sürecinde İşgücü Sorunu ve Sosyal Politika ve İktisadi Devlet Teşekkülleri: 1930’lu ve 1940’lı Yıllar,” *Toplum ve Bilim*, 92, (Spring 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Y.N. Rozaliyev, *Türkiye Sanayi Proletaryası*, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> ILO, *Labor Problems in Turkey* (Geneve: 1950), p. 63.

capacity. According to Ekin, the East Chromium Enterprise could only recruit 300 workers, despite its requirement for 520 workers in 1941.<sup>19</sup>

Similar complaints are encountered frequently in the inspection reports. The most important difficulties caused by the high worker rotation rates were the low efficiency and profitability rates resulting from the inability to train qualified workers. For example, in a report from Etibank dated 1940, there was a complaint about the lack of professional workers in the Zonguldak basin and it mentioned that approximately 80 percent of the workers were farmers from nearby villages. Another complaint concerned the negative effect on efficiency of workers working for nearly one month and then leaving.<sup>20</sup>

One of the reasons frequently referred to by the intellectuals, bureaucrats and politicians of that time for explaining the difficulties in the transfer of the labor force to industry was the “idiocy of the peasantry.” According to Sarc, who gave one of the typical examples of this reasoning:

... the opinions of the peasantry was far from materialized. It can be said that, as a rule, our farmers preferred staying on their land rather than improving their level of welfare. It can be concluded from various analysis that ... farmers do not wish to leave their land even if living conditions become difficult in the villages, for example, when land scarcity arises, and high wages do not always attract them to the factories.<sup>21</sup>

It is unquestionable that peasants showed resistance to leaving their land. At some point, however, accusing peasants of “thinking like peasants” does not answer

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<sup>19</sup> Nusret Ekin, “Memleketimizde İşçi Devri Mevzuunda Yapılan Araştırmalar ve Ortaya Koydukları Neticeler,” *Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları*, Dokuzuncu-Onuncu-Onbirinci Kitap, (İstanbul: 1960), pp. 135-136.

<sup>20</sup> Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1940, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Ömer Celal Sarc, *Türkiye Ekonomisinin Genel Esasları*, İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Yayını, İstanbul, 1962: “köylünün görüşleri maddileşmiş olmaktan uzaktır. Çiftçimizin kaide olarak toprağı başında kalmağı, refah seviyesini yükseltmeye tercih ettiğı söylenebilir. Türli incelemelerden, köyde hayat şartları güçleştiğı, mesela toprak sıkıntısı başgösterdiğı takdirde dahi, çiftçinin arazisinden ayrılmak istemediğı, yüksek ücretlerin devamlı surette fabrikaya celbedemediğı . . . neticesi çıkmakta(dır).”

the question. The lack of attractive conditions for the masses to give up their existing economic activities and lives should not be disregarded. Although it would be speculative to discuss to what extent separation from land would accelerate if being a factory worker offered more convenient conditions, it is not possible to discuss a peasantry that resisted despite the promise of high wages and high levels of welfare and living standards. In this context, Yerasimos' emphasis on the discouraging conditions of working in industry are meaningful:

With the relatively effective form of exploitation in general and the despotic image of industrialization in the beginning in particular, working conditions in factories, lack of work security and difficulties of adapting to big cities, force the proletariat not to give up fully their occupations in agriculture for as long as possible. This continues as long as they do not entirely loose the means of production and are not able to keep these activities.<sup>22</sup>

It is important to analyze how this process was experienced by the peasant-workers who were separated from their villages and came to the factories. One aspect of this is the topic of social facilities, which include the aim to overcome the constraints on wages and labor force, as well as more indirect discipline processes aimed at providing certain qualifications required by factory labor. Especially housing, health, nutrition and the similar facilities come under this scope. Nevertheless, insofar as those were inadequate, recruitment methods based on legal or physical force to transfer the labor force from the villages to the factories, that is, a kind of “worker-hunt,” was applied.

The problem faced by the factories in securing workers had been a question before nationalization, as well. For example, private companies in the mining sector

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<sup>22</sup> Stefanos Yerasimos, *Az gelişmişlik Sürecinde Türkiye, I. Dünya Savaşından 1971'e*, (İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1976), pp. 1614-5: “Genellikle daha gelişmiş bir sömürü biçimi olması, özel olarak da sanayileşmenin ilk başlarında büründüğü zorbaca görünümle fabrikada çalışma şartları; iş güvenliğinden yoksun oluş ve büyük şehirlere alışmanın güçlüğüyle oluşma halindeki bu proletaryayı mümkün olduğu kadar uzun zaman tarım alanındaki işgüçlerinden hepten kopmamaya zorlar. Üretim araçlarını tamamen kaybedip de bu faaliyetlerini hiçbir şekilde sürdüremez hale gelecekleri güne kadar bu böylece devam eder.”

had been engaged in a kind of competition for workers in the basin. Attempts by employers to make agreements to share workers had also occurred and the partitioning of villages among enterprises had been agreed upon. However, the limited supply of labor force often prevented the operation of such “gentlemen’s agreements.” Factories attempted to transport workers from villages with trucks in order to gain advantages against other private enterprises and increase their numbers of workers.<sup>23</sup>

This irregular worker market brought with it a system of intermediation that continued into the statist period. Worker groups led by an intermediary marketed workers to enterprises. These intermediaries could be village headmen, landowners or the rural apparatus of the single party regime of the Republican People’s Party (RPP), especially along with the statist experience:

The workers contractors that developed inside these apparatus [local branches of the RPP] secured strong positions for themselves. The worker requirements of the enterprises were met by auctions among these workers contractors, who leaded a crowd of unemployed men and who received commissions when they found them jobs.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, as is known, these mechanisms of intermediation were not adequate to bind the workers to the factories. In fact, the peasants kept their inclination to return to their villages after working in the enterprises for a period of time, and did not regard themselves as “factory workers.” At this point, police measures were introduced. Factories established their own “police forces” and pursued workers who returned to their villages. Muammer Tuksavul, a European educated engineer, who worked as director in many private companies and the Turhal Sugar Factory established by the state explains that approximately 500

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<sup>23</sup> Kadri Yersel, *Madencilikte Bir Ömür*, (İstanbul: Yurt Madenciligini Geliştirme Vakfı Maden Mühendisleri Odası Ortak Yayını, 1989), p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> Stefanos Yerasimos, *Az gelişmişlik Sürecinde Türkiye*, p. 1314. TÜRKCESİNİ AKTAR! &&&

workers quit their jobs every week and that they had to find that many new workers to replace them. They hired sergeants who traveled to all of the villages from Sivas to Samsun to find workers and prevent their escape.<sup>25</sup>

Keeping workers in factories was a task assigned not only to sergeants, but also to other workers. A worker in the Bakırköy Sümerbank factory complained in a petition presented to the factory administration that the expenditures of other workers who had come with him from İzmir had been deduced from his wage after they had escaped.<sup>26</sup>

Policies based on systematic pressure were intensified, making use of the atmosphere of the martial law declared during the war period, through the National Protection Law and compulsory work regulations. Furthermore, a decision taken on 3 April 1944, provided the right to exert force in order to keep workers in their workplaces and to deduce from their wages the costs of bringing back workers who had left their workplaces without permission. Throughout the compulsory work regime, from within the 25-30.000 miners only 5000 ones were free laborers.<sup>27</sup> For,

Turkish capitalism was in no position to wait for the dismantling of the social structure in the rural areas by capitalist development dynamics and for the peasants of the past to form a queue to apply for employment in the mines as free laborers. The peasants again were put under compulsory work and the male population in the villages determined by the village headmen were taken to the mines through force exerted by the gendarmerie.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Muammer Tuksavul, *Doğudan Batıya ve Sonrası*, (İstanbul, 1981), p. 358.

<sup>26</sup> Nacar, p. 99.

<sup>27</sup> Ahmet Ali Özeken, "Türkiye'de Sanayii İşçileri", *İçtimai Siyaset Konferansları*, Birinci Kitap, (İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat ve İçtimaiyat Enstitüsü: 1948), p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> Kadir Tuncer, *Tarihten Günümüze Zonguldak'ta İşçi Sınıfının Durumu* (İstanbul: Göçebe Yayınları, 1998), pp. 59-60: "Türkiye kapitalizminin kırdaki toplumsal yapının kapitalist gelişme dinamikleri tarafından çözülmesini ve dünün köylülerinin özgür emekçiler olarak madenlerde iş bulmak için sıraya girmesini bekleyecek hali yoktur. Köylüler gene mükellefiyete tabi tutulur, köylerde muhtar kütüklerinden tesbit edilen erkek nüfus jandarma zoruyla ocaklara indirilir."

However, the law had no other legal sanction but military service. Pursuing deserters and bringing them back to their workplaces was not effective enough, because the workers escaped again and again, and the gendarmerie forces proved to be inadequate. As another solution, escaping workers were taken into the military and worker battalions were established. Another deterrent “measure” was harassment in villages by the gendarmerie in various ways of the relatives of deserters.<sup>29</sup>

Another deterrent measure adopted during the compulsory work regime was the construction of open prisons and police stations within the territory of the complexes. Those were installed not only to secure attendance, but for some political considerations, as well.

Incentive measures were also applied along with punishments. For example, grains were distributed to those who worked regularly and efficiently.

Although the compulsory work, called mine-suffering (*madenkeşlik*) by the miners, was justified on the grounds of meeting the requirements of the war years, this practice lasted until 1 September 1947. At the time when the special applications of the war period were repealed, there were people who claimed that forced labor should be continued at least for a while and repealed gradually. For instance İhsan Soyak argued that the only way to ensure attendance was the compulsory work regime. Likewise, an inspection report regarding Etibank dated 1940, it was stated that increases in wages, housing opportunities, and other social facilities had not proven effective in improving workers attendance, while forced labor provided good results and increases were achieved in daily work shifts.<sup>30</sup> As for the measures to be taken when the compulsory regime would be repealed, allocating “crack workers” consisting of *permanent* forced labor was proposed, as well as a properly functioning

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<sup>29</sup> For this worker-hunt between peasants and gendarme in the mine basin, see İrfan Yalçın, *Ölümün Ağzı* (İstanbul: Adam Yayınları, 1979).

<sup>30</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1940*, p. 21.

incentive system. Those measures included moreover the construction of new open prisons close to the mines, which, they stated, would discourage miners from exploiting the abrogation of strict discipline brought about by the compulsory regime.<sup>31</sup>

### Wage Policies

Wages assume a crucial role both in the incentive to separate the peasant from the land and in the formation of factory workers, and in evaluations regarding the living and working conditions of the working class. Regarding these two dimensions, it necessary to discuss not only wage levels, but also the payment systems. This is because wage systems played central roles in the increase of profit, especially in countries and sectors that underwent late capitalism and produced at relatively low technological levels, as it did in establishing discipline in the production process. Thus, this topic will be considered before wage levels.

Wage systems can be categorized in general into two, as time- and output-based payment systems. The most important difference between these two systems from the perspective of the working class, and in terms of our topic, is that profits and losses resulting from the change in workers' productivity theoretically belongs to the capitalist in the first case and to the working class in the second, and the profit or loss remains for the capitalist only from general costs per output unit. Hence, the output-based payment (or the accord system, as used in Turkey in those days) forces the worker to increase production.

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<sup>31</sup> Yersel, p. 29.



Taking into account the labor-intensive production in the textile industry, the general inclination was to increase efficiency and profitability by pressure through wages, among other things. It was possible to observe the same pressure in the textile industry in Turkey, along with many other late capitalist countries that integrated into world capitalism through the same industry. Accordingly, the ratio of workers paid via accord wages was approximately 50 percent in the Defterdar and Bakırköy factories throughout the 1940s.<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, what theoretically straight was (that is, the accord system would reflect the increase in efficiency to worker wages) was not so in practice. A comparison between workers efficiency and wages in the Defterdar factory between the years 1930 and 1940 indicates this fact. Although workers' efficiency increased throughout these ten years and the factory was profitable, the wages were reduced from eight piasters to five piasters per 1,000 scarves. The reason for this was that accord rates were revised continuously by the factory administration and the wage scales were changed to the disadvantage of the workers.<sup>33</sup>

Another important point to be mentioned regarding the wage system is the premium system. Premiums were applied partly as a solution to the problem of attendance in employment and as an indirect incentive for attendance. For example, foremen and workers were paid their production, quality and raw material saving premiums at the Bakırköy and Defterdar factories subject to attendance conditions. Premiums also were used for eliminating the lack of qualified workers, as an extension of the rotation problem. Premiums worth a few months of salary were paid in the same Sümerbank enterprises, following 15 years of employment, called "long

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<sup>32</sup> Sabahaddin Zaim, *İstanbul Mensucat Sanayinin Bünyesi ve Ücretler*, (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1956), p. 176.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

service incentive premium,” in order to encourage workers to qualification and in this way bind them to the enterprise.<sup>34</sup>

Along with an indirect function of incentive, the premium system was adopted as a means for ensuring political and social control and discipline over workers as well. This was because the payment of premiums was “discretionary” according to the premium regulations. In other words, even in cases when conditions such as production and quality were satisfied, the payment of premium to the worker was subject to the discretion of the administration. “Complying with the regulations and orders of the factory and obeying supervisors” was listed among the prerequisites that determined the decision of the enterprise.<sup>35</sup>

Considering in terms of wage levels, the general inclination to compensate for the high costs resulting from technological backwardness by increasing the pressure on wages can be also observed in the case of Turkey. Candidate provinces entered competitions to provide “cheap labor forces” during the investigation of suitable places to establish factories following the preparation of the first industrialization plan. For example, in a report submitted to the National Assembly by the Kütahya Chamber of Industry and Commerce, along with other institutions such as the municipality of Kütahya, headmen offices, RPP organization, commercial and agricultural chambers and People’s House, it was stated that this province provided the most suitable place for a printing factory due to “cheap labor:”

... Life is cheap, workers are generous, labor is very cheap. Thousands of women and men workers, suitable and ready for all kinds of labor, are available for 40-70 percent less wages with respect to cities such as Eskişehir and Kayseri... Daily wages for women are 10-30 and for men are 40-60 piasters and demand for jobs is still very high.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>36</sup> İlhan Tekeli, Selim İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu* (Ankara: ODTÜ İdari İlimler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1982), pp. E79-E80.

It was observed that the intervention of the state in production did not include intervention to the labor market through the wages. For example, statism did not bring about principles such as “equal wages for equal work” to the labor market and especially due to the “special needs” of the war period, flexibility on the minimum wage deepened those negative conditions. The lack of systematic and legal arrangements by the state to the advantage of the working class resulted in enormous differences in wages between and within the enterprises, while most private factories did not even have a wage scale.

Another source of inequality was the exploitation of female and child labor. The extensive use of female labor in the textile industry went back further to the industrialization experience during the Ottoman period.

According to the data from the Employment Agency, the ratio of female workers increased to a total of 60 percent in both the private- and state-run sector in 1950.<sup>37</sup> Wage differences in the textile industry also pointed to a similar fact. Female labor was used intensively in the silk factories where the wages were lowest. The ratio of women and children younger than 14 years was 48 percent in 1949 in Bursa, where an artificial silk factory was located.<sup>38</sup> The skill level was another factor that determined wage differences, along with woman and child labor. As a result, differences in wage levels in state enterprises were as follows: The average wage in the cotton weaving factories in Bakırköy, Kayseri, Ereğli and Nazilli was 23,50 liras a month, according to the inspection report of 1939.<sup>39</sup> Daily wages were 12,70 piasters in Bünyan, 17 piasters in Deftardar, 14,80 piasters in Hereke and 9,70 piasters in Merinos, according to the data provided by the inspection report on the

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<sup>37</sup> Ekmek Zadil, “İş ve İşçi Bulma Hizmeti”, *İçtimai Siyaset Konferansları* (Ankara: 1951), p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> Rozaliyev, pp. 64-65.

<sup>39</sup> Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Sümerbank Birleşik Pamuk İpliği ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1941 Yılı Raporu* (Ankara: 1942).

wool weaving factories. As can be seen, average wages were higher in cotton weaving, which required higher qualification, while the lowest wage levels were observed in the Merinos artificial silk factory, where qualification was low and female labor was intensively employed.

Purchasing capacity should also be considered beyond the nominal value of wages. We encounter a serious decrease in real wages when observing the yearly change in the wages in state enterprises. Yerasimos presents the daily wages in the Sümerbank and Etibank factories in the period 1939-1951 and draws attention to the point that the decrease in real wages was higher than the decrease in the national income.<sup>40</sup> This decrease gained pace during the war years, along with the increase in the cost of living, and the real wages in the public textile industry decreased by 68.8 percent in 1943 with respect to 1938 (the increase in wages was 60 percent whereas increase in prices was 300 percent during 1938-43). Yet the decrease was not only in real wages, for wages which had already decreased in real value in the period 1930-40 due to increase in the cost of living, were also decreased nominally.<sup>41</sup>

Considering the wage levels in the mining sector separately, the decrease in real wages greater than national income that was valid for Turkey in general, was also valid in mining. When considering the real wage index, there was a decrease of approximately 40 percent from 1938 to 1944 and wages were approximately at 25 percent with respect to their level in 1938 even after the end of the forced labor regime. In fact, it was envisaged that it would not be possible to keep the workers in the mines, who were forced to work there, following the end of forced labor.<sup>42</sup>

When the wage level of the mine workers is compared with that of the working class and other public workers, the following results can be observed: The wages of

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<sup>40</sup> Yerasimos, pp. 1324-1325.

<sup>41</sup> Zaim, *İstanbul Mensucat Sanayinin Bünyesi ve Ücretler*, p. 158.

<sup>42</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1944*, p. 54.

the mine workers were below the national average (20 percent lower in 1946). When a comparison is made only among public workers, this difference increases due to the fact that wages were higher in the public with respect to the private sector.<sup>43</sup>

Wages differences within the sector such as those observed in textiles can also be observed in mining. The wage scale defined in terms of the level of qualification resulted in large wage differences among forced workers without experience in mining and free workers. In 1938, in other words before compulsory work, *lağımçıs* received 100, *kazmacıs* 85, skilled workers 65 and unskilled workers received 60 piasters a day. In 1945, *lağımçıs*, consisting of experienced and qualified free workers, received 200-300 piasters a day, while unqualified workers, consisting mostly of forced workers, received between 80-120 piasters. Thus, the daily wages of forced workers were only 35-40 percent that of free workers. Makal states that this huge gap in wages exceeded the difference in efficiency.<sup>44</sup>

Along with these figures, it must be kept in mind that, as stated before, wages in the state-run factories were higher than those in private factories. In the table referred to by Zaim, where general wages in the textile factories in Bakırköy and Defterdar are compared, those in the latter were always higher. This was true both for nominal and real wages. Thus it can be claimed that public workers were in a better situation in terms of purchasing capacity.<sup>45</sup>

Wage differences between private and public enterprises increased even further when the social assistance programs offered in the state-owned factories was added to the nominal income. The ratio of in-kind wage, that had increased further during the war years, reached 25 percent of the total cash wage in Sümerbank factories in

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<sup>43</sup> Ahmet Makal, “65. Yılında Milli Korunma Kanunu, Çalışma İlişkileri ve İş Mükellefiyeti Üzerine Bir İnceleme”, *Toplum ve Bilim* 102, (2005) p. 74.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>45</sup> Zaim, pp. 236, 279-280.

1950. The same ratio was approximately 15 percent of the cash wage in the private factories in that sector.<sup>46</sup> According to the report of 1949, increases in social wages were much higher than those of cash wages.<sup>47</sup>

An attempt was made in general to compensate for the decrease in real cash wages in the state-run factories with increases in social shares. The state aimed to strengthen the social facilities in order to increase workers attendance, and production continuity and efficiency, taking into consideration the relationship between low wages and rotation. Indeed, low wage levels were an important factor in the inability to attract workers to the factories and mines. In 1943, when real wages declined the most, worker rotations increased to their highest level. For example, in Bakırköy in Istanbul, where this ratio had been low compared to other enterprises, it increased to 96 percent and in Defterdar, to 101 percent.<sup>48</sup> As a reaction to this, a sharp increase in social assistance was observed following 1943. For example, in the same factories, the ratio of social relieves to the total wage was 1.9 and 1.1, respectively in 1940, whereas the moderate increase until 1943 suddenly gained momentum following this year, and increasing to 18 and 15 percent, respectively.<sup>49</sup>

The success of this compensation method, however, was controversial. Etibank claimed that the increase in the number of workers coming to the fusion, despite a lack of increase in wages, was due to the covering of social services by the institution. Nevertheless, in the same report, there was complaint about high worker rotation rates. The most striking point was that along with rotational workers, for whom this might be considered as conceivable, the same was true for free workers, as well. The increased easiness in the recruitment of the required labor force despite

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>47</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1949*, p. 42.

<sup>48</sup> Zaim, pp. 159, 313.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

this high rotation rate was related to the economic stagnation during 1948-1949, making it easier for the workers to leave their villages.<sup>50</sup> As is known, contrary to the trends throughout the world, following the war, agriculture/industry domestic trade rates –except for cotton- turned against the agricultural sector in Turkey, following the war.<sup>51</sup> Especially, the approximately 30 percent decrease in the relative price of tobacco had a negative effect on the economic conditions of farmers in the Black Sea region. Thus, it is possible to explain the flow to the mining sector with the decline in agricultural incomes, rather than the attractive conditions in this sector.

It is necessary to take a closer look at those social services to discuss to what extent they had an effect on attracting workers.

### The Reproduction of the Labor Force

The formation of the industrial proletariat exceeds production and also includes the reproduction process of the labor force. Industrialization brings about a transformation in the social formation in which individuals in new capitalist relations move. When the experience of the industrial working class is in question, factories are also one of the important components of this transformation. And as far as factories are concerned, a comprehensive production system should be considered, exceeding the boundaries of the production building of the factory. The factory becomes the container of a new network of social relations, within the framework of the needs of the recruitment and reproduction of the labor force, to be employed there.

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<sup>50</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1949*, p. 40.

<sup>51</sup> Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908-2002*, (Ankara: 2004) pp. 104-105.

Different axes stand out in different cases of industrialization. In countries which experienced early industrialization, such as Britain, the process of the flow of the labor force to the industry and factories caused specific problems. Especially, problems such as the rapid flow of population from rural to urban areas, and the formation of massive worker settlements deprived of all kinds of infrastructure can be shown as examples.

The basic axis of this process in Turkey seems to have been problems regarding the supply and stability of the labor force during the 1930s-1940s. Factors such as the slow process of industrialization that was not suitable for the generation of mass employment on the one hand, the continuing prevalence of small property in land ownership, on the other hand, as mentioned before, made the problem of the labor force supply critical. The housing policy of the state enterprises were envisaged as a solution to this problem.

The reproduction of the recruited labor force was another aspect of the process. The facilities offered by the state enterprises, such as health, nutrition, and education services gain meaning when considered to a large extent as components of this process of reproduction.<sup>52</sup>

When I mention analyzing certain social facilities of Sümerbank and Etibank within the framework of the concept of the reproduction of the labor force, I mean a double process of which components are in close proximity to each other: expenditures that can be regarded as a part of the cost of the labor force bringing

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<sup>52</sup> At this point, we can discuss the assertion that the political elites tried to “liberate” the Turkish working class from its “Asian” and peasant roots. If those assertions imply securing the attendance of the factory workers, it is obviously true. Yet if those considerations are perceived as an extension of the well-known formula “reaching the contemporary civilization,” in other words, resemblance to the Western working class, it is highly questionable. Although resemblance to Western capitalism is a central motive in the ideological repertoire of Turkish capitalism and its political cadres, that very motive echoes as sharp class struggles, as far as the working classes are concerned. A more detailed discussion will be held in the following chapters.



increases in efficiency and profitability and acting as instruments for providing discipline and control over the labor force.

A good example that shows how this issue was taken into consideration in the state enterprises is a public inspection report prepared for Sümerbank, dated 1943. The report evaluates in detail the activities of the enterprise in social affair and states that the main motivation behind all these activities was to eliminate worker instability. It is claimed that unless this stability was achieved, the offered social facilities would only serve to “improve the conditions of workers” and that this would only make an indirect contribution to the main objective:

The main issue of the social affairs of Sümerbank is to eliminate worker instability. Without achieving this, methods for improving the conditions of workers, no matter how useful they prove to be materially or morally, can only have a partial indirect contribution to the main issue of social affairs... Unless Sümerbank finds and applies other measures to directly ensure stability, it will not be able to gain its worth for the labor and costs it has spent and the indirect labor and costs of the workers naturally will increase year by year as new factories, plants and workshops are opened.<sup>53</sup>

Following this evaluation, the report continues by discussing the measures that will enable stability and complains about the lack of a clear opinion in the concerned institutions regarding the issue.

Among the reasons given for leaving the factory mentioned in the report were complaints about the bad working conditions, and the continuing relations with the village (in other words, seasonal labor). Also noted were common beliefs that “anyone who enters the factory gets ill,” and the distance of housing to the factory and low wages.<sup>54</sup>

Solutions regarding the restriction brought about by the relations with the village on working at the factory stand out among suggestions for solution, rather

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<sup>53</sup> *Sümerbank 1943 Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu*, p. 48.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 49-50.

than opinions on the improvement of working conditions. These include solutions such as giving a piece of land to each peasant that he could sow, and even providing an annual leave during harvest, in order to ensure the carrying out of subsistence agricultural activities along with factory labor. Giving double wages during harvest was criticized with the concern that “it could have a negative effect when the wage reduces in winter.” Similarly, suggestions such as the establishment of workers insurance and providing attractive, safe and healthy work environment were objected on grounds that “workers only think of today, insurance belongs to the future”. Again, measures for bringing stability to wages through “transition from the accord system to regular wages”, were opposed in arguing that it could damage the system of accord that enforce more work.<sup>55</sup>

Next, the social applications that were stated to be insufficient for ensuring workers stability, but which improved the conditions of workers will be examined one by one.

### Housing

Since the state-run companies perceived the lack of labor force as their primary problem, they focused mainly on housing as the central facility in respect with the reproduction of the labor force.

The low-cost housing policies which remained limited in the country throughout the early Republican period due to the scarcity of construction materials and real estate speculation schemes brought about the problem of housing the workers who came to work at the factories. Therefore, for securing the workers to the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

factories, this need had to be met by the state-owned companies themselves through constructing activities on the properties of the complexes.

The adequacy and conditions of those housing facilities are, however, open to discussion. For in the journal published by the Ministry of Labor, it was stated that while only 20 percent of the worker domiciles were convenient for housing, the rest was fully deprived of any basic amenities and hygienic conditions.<sup>56</sup> But before that, the housing conditions of the workers employed by the private sector will be reviewed in brief so as to offer a comprehensive look at the general situation of the working classes in those days and to make a comparison between different segments of that group, that is between those in the private and public sectors. In his work on the conditions of working class during the war years, Nacar provides valuable information regarding the housing opportunities among private sector laborers. For instance, migrant tannery workers in İstanbul had to rent rundown rooms at inns along the Kazlıçeşme or Zeytinburnu coasts, where four or five workers had to sleep in the same room. Nevertheless, despite the miserable conditions, rents were very high. In addition, some homeless factory workers spent their nights in “available” places within the factory. Sleeping in public baths, ruined buildings and public spaces such as mosques and cinemas were “alternatives” for workers. Even some people chose to spend the cold winter nights in prison. Although sometimes the municipalities took the initiative to settle those poor people in appropriate places, those measures mostly proved to be insufficient.<sup>57</sup> As a consequence, although the the Health Law of 1930 and the regarding directory of 1941 specified some statutory obligations about providing housing facilities for the workers, private companies did not make any noteworthy step towards offering that opportunity to their workers.

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<sup>56</sup> Anon., *Prodüktivite ve Memleketimizde Prodüktiviteyi Artırmağa Matuf Tedbirler*, *Çalışma Vekaleti Dergisi*, September-October-November-December 1953, Vol. 1, no. 3, p. 47.

<sup>57</sup> Nacar, pp. 66-69.

As for the state run companies, the housing question was on the agenda from the very beginning of the construction of the large complexes. In determining the location of the factories, one of the factors taken into consideration by the Soviet advisory committee was the question of housing of the prospective workers. For instance, in pointing to Denizli as a proper location for a textile industry, the report referred to the fact that the city was quiet large, which would facilitated the settlement of the workers. Similar assessments were made for Kayseri. Nevertheless, the group visiting Nazilli reported that the best location for housing was being investigated. Because of the lack of free labor, workers would have to be brought in from outside.<sup>58</sup>

The motive lying beneath the construction of housing for workers was, obviously, the need for the recruitment of the labor force from outside due to the paucity of free workers.<sup>59</sup> The fact which demonstrates that the concern was this paucity rather than the well-being of the workers was that the Sümerbank factories in Istanbul did not provide such a facility. Having a more or less rooted textile tradition from the Ottoman period on, İstanbul locally hosted a large number of factory workers –including the artisans who, due to the deterioration of artisanship in the villages surrounding Istanbul, had joined the array of wage earners, Balkan migrants, and so on. Consequently, worker settlements had already appeared throughout those years. For instance, because of the location of the Bakırköy factory, one of the oldest factories in Turkey, there was a large worker settlement between Zeytinburnu and Bakırköy, where also private capital tended to construct factories in order to facilitate the recruitment of its labor force. Henceforth, differently from the public enterprises

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<sup>58</sup> Selim İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu*, p. 153.

<sup>59</sup> Sümerbank, X. Yıl, p. 239.

in Anatolia, those in İstanbul did not provide free transportation for their workers and made the workers themselves to meet that need.<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, since the factories in Anatolia mostly were located in underdeveloped and under-urbanized areas, the question of housing appeared on the agenda. Accordingly, we can consider the population movement from the country side to the towns. As it is known, one of the most important components of the housing issue is the urbanization process, in other words the permanent migration from the villages to the cities, along with the industrialization. When we glance at the Turkish experience, we see that the migration from villages to cities of those years was hardly permanent. In this respect, the urbanization rates were not comparable with those of Western Europe or Russia in-between wars. The rate of urban population which was 16 percent in 1927 increased merely to 17,7 percent in 1945, and that movement was not towards the big cities, but to the newly established industrial centers. For instance, the population increase circulating around 40 percent in Bursa reached at 100 percent in Nazilli and Malatya, the majority of which was composed of villagers-come-to-the-factory.<sup>61</sup> But the then existing residential areas and the factories in those cities were so distant that it could affect production levels negatively. Therefore, the construction of the complexes brought about the construction of new cities. Karabük and Hereke were two examples of that fact. In Üstündağ-Selamoğlu's oral history on Hereke, the interviewees stated that before the 1950s, the social life in Hereke was colored by the Sümerbank factory and its employees.<sup>62</sup> Karabük, which, according to Mübeccel Kıray's definition, previously

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<sup>60</sup> Zaim, pp. 261-262.

<sup>61</sup> Ahmet Ali Özeken, Türkiye Sanayiinde İşçiyi Barındırma Problemi, İçtimai Siyaset Konferansları, Üçüncü Kitap (İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat ve İçtimaiyat Enstitüsü: 1949), p. 111.

<sup>62</sup> Esra Üstündağ-Selamoğlu, Bir Sözlü Tarih Çalışması: Hereke'de Değişim, p. 30.

had been a coastal town, underwent considerable urbanization process along with the industrialization.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to the location of the city, another factor determining the housing need was the considerations about the number of the workers to be employed in the factories. For Sümerbank Kayseri, Nazilli and Etibank Ereğli factories, which realized the largest housing projects, were also the factories which employed the most worker.

Nonetheless, the fact that the Bursa Merinos factory, which employed more than 2,000 workers and the Defterdar and Bakırköy factories, which employed almost 2,000 workers, did not provide housing facilities demonstrated that the number of workers was partially explanatory.<sup>64</sup> The common point of these three factories was that they were located in cities which had relatively large and permanent arrays of factory workers. Especially in a city like Istanbul, where subsistence farming had been eliminated and the cost of living was high, one could anticipate that the workers could hardly sustain their lives. Hence, the “social assistance” mentality of the housing policies lay in the need for securing workers and increasing production through ceasing the rotation.

Following those general assessments, we shall focus on the living conditions in the housing facilities provided by the companies. Foremost, the housing reflected the inter-class segmentation and hierarchy in the production process. In his work on housing policies in Kayseri and Nazilli complexes, Peri describes different housing types, including those for administrative officers (*şef evleri*), employees and single workers (*bekar evleri*). Among those, the first ones having five rooms offered a much higher living standard if compared with the barracks for single workers, which

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<sup>63</sup> Mübeccel B. Kıray, *Ereğli Ağır Sanayiden Önce Bir Sahil Kasabası* (İstanbul: 2000), pp. 87-93.

<sup>64</sup> For the employment rates of Sümerbank ve Etibank between 1936 and 1951, see Kemalettin Apak, *Türkiye’de Sanayi ve Maden İşletmeleri* (İzmit: Selüloz Basımevi, 1952), p. 88.

provided only sleeping and cleaning facilities. Furthermore, it was noteworthy that only houses for administrative officers were constructed within the boundaries of the complexes.<sup>65</sup>

The same hierarchical attitude in housing was also reflected in the intra-class status differences. The most comfortable places were provided for the foremen, and then the rest were arranged in line with the inner hierarchy between the specialists (*mühassıs işçiler*), first class, second class and third class workers. Last, the workers outside the factory and the non-specialist workers were accommodated in pavilions located in isolated and remote places.<sup>66</sup>

This hierarchical approach was not limited to the stylistic design and standard of the houses, but also included an uneven access to the housing facilities. In the oral history on Hereke mentioned above, it is noted that the public housing provided by the factories were appropriated mostly by the employees, technicians and administrative cadres. As for the workers, they had to walk five kilometers on foot.<sup>67</sup>

Especially as a consequence of the adoption of compulsory wage work and the increase in the number of workers employed, the housing facilities felt short of covering the need. The inspection report on Etibank, which after the fusion began to employ 23,000 workers and became the largest industrial enterprise, mentioned the company's inadequacy in providing housing for its workers. According to the report of 1940, the total number of dormitories was 106 and merely 62 percent of the workers were housed in them.<sup>68</sup> As for the Zonguldak coal basin which employed

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<sup>65</sup> Burak Peri, "Building the 'Modern' Environment in Early Republican Turkey: Sümerbank Kayseri and Nazilli Factory Settlements." Master Thesis, Middle East Technical University (2002) pp. 75-76.

<sup>66</sup> N. Baydar, *Kombina ve şehir*, *Ulus*, 19 September 1935, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> Esra Üstündağ-Selamoğlu,

<sup>68</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1940*, p. 32.

58,000 forced workers, dormitories there offered only 20,000 beds. Workers slept on a wooden floor, using pieces of wood as pillows.<sup>69</sup>

In 1949, the number of the workers sleeping in the dormitories did not exceed 18,000. Considering the increase in employment, that figure still proved to be inadequate. Furthermore, those figures also included the workers in the port construction which was performed by a private company. Etibank constructed a new pavilion for those port workers and did not receive the money from the privately run company, covering the expenditures on its own.<sup>70</sup>

While the state-run enterprises were opening their pavilions to private companies, the additional housing was made available through secluded barracks constructed by the private companies. These privately-run barracks offered much worse and miserable conditions than those run by the state.<sup>71</sup>

The housing problem was not limited to the Etibank enterprises. Nazilli, one of the most active factories in offering housing facilities, witnessed similar problems. In 1494, while the factory was employing nearly 3,000 workers, its dormitories were capable of housing only 300-350 workers.<sup>72</sup>

Another complaint of the workers about the housing conditions was that the only option available to particularly the unskilled workers was the housing for single workers. According to the figures given by Özen, the proportion of the Sümerbank workers having the opportunity to be housed with their families was only 7 percent.<sup>73</sup> Taking into account that one of the primary rationales of the housing facilities was allegedly binding the workers to the factory and enabling the permanent break-away

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<sup>69</sup> Erol Kahveci, "The Miners of Zonguldak," *Work and Occupation in Modern Turkey*, ed. Nadir Sugur, Theo Nichols and Erol Kahveci (London: Mansell, 1996), pp. 184-186.

<sup>70</sup> 1949 *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu*, p. 76.

<sup>71</sup> *Tan*, 2 September 1945.

<sup>72</sup> Mustafa Gökem Doğan, "Governmental Involvement in the establishment and performance of the trade unions during the transition to multi party politics: the case of the Worker's Bureau of the Republican People's Party," Master Thesis, Bogazici University (2003), Appendix 2.

<sup>73</sup> Ahmet Ali Özen, *Türkiye Sanayiinde İşçiyi Barındırma Problemi*, p. 117.



from the villages, this policy forced the workers to leave their families at home and, hence reinforced the seasonal employment. The fact that one of the most frequently used justifications for leaving the factory was, in addition to the harvest, family affairs, such as health problems, indicates the central importance of the housing factor in the formation of permanent factory workers.

This uneven access reflected also an discrimination between the minority chosen as “permanent workers” of the factory and the peasant-workers, as the Karabük experience demonstrated. While establishing the Karabük factory, the administration chose 400 workers who usually had worked before in chrome and cupper factories, and hence were proper candidates to become permanent workers. Those workers were closely watched through personal files on their moral and, in its broadest sense, political attitudes, as well as their attendance and qualifications. Then, they were sent to England to be trained as skilled workers. At the end, when they returned to the factory, they became the only fortunate workers who were placed with their families to the houses constructed by the factory.<sup>74</sup>

## Health

Another social facility provided by the state-run companies was health services. According to the 1947 figures, Sümerbank owned 13 hospitals and employed 188 health personnel. These health institutions offered their services not only to the workers, but also to people residing in the neighborhood.<sup>75</sup>

But the experiences, especially in a sector like mining where the working conditions were extremely hard and the price of negligence in health affairs was

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>75</sup> Ahmet Makal, “65. Yılında Milli Korunma Kanunu, Çalışma İlişkileri ve İş Mükellefiyeti Üzerine Bir İnceleme,” p. 271.

high, demonstrated that the companies were insufficient and even careless. Makal's assertion that the health services were regular and the level was much higher than the minimum responsibilities envisaged in the Law of Public Health seems to be open to discussion.<sup>76</sup> For instance, while according to the law, which regulated that the companies should maintain one bed for every 100 workers, the Etibank Central Hospital was to have 500 beds, yet did 250 ones.

The testimony of Sabire and Hulusi Dosdoğru who, worked as doctors in the Zonguldak coal basin during the compulsory wage work period, presents spectacular data on the negative health conditions in the Etibank companies.<sup>77</sup> One of the primary causes of these negative situation was the unhealthy housing conditions. Because of the 24-hours working day composed of three shifts, the majority of the workers shared the same beds according to their shifts. Workers who could not find a free place in the pavilions slept outside or took shelter in the privately-run secluded barracks. The fact that those workers worked in the same mines as well as the ones who bathed and were sterilized caused epidemic diseases to spread. Furthermore, the fact that the workers who spent the night in the neighborhood under extremely unhealthy conditions started work without any sanitary control was another cause of the epidemics.<sup>78</sup>

The compulsory work fueled the epidemic diseases caused by the negative housing conditions:

Under the circumstances of compulsory work, the workers rotating every 45 days have miserable 45 days in their villages, deprived of any sanitary facility, after the allegedly clean 45 days, and then start to work without any

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>77</sup> The two doctors, who succeeded in publishing a series of articles in *Tan* newspaper, attracted a reaction from the administration of the company and the People's House and were accused of "betrayal of the country." The doctors warned the administration about the unhealthy conditions and were not let enter the mines. Sabire Dosdoğru, Hulusi Dosdoğru, *Sağlık Açısından Maden İşçilerimizin Dünyü Bugünü*, (Istanbul: BDS Yayınları, 1990), p. 40.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

isolation and collective sanitary inspection . . . Therefore, using rotational forced workers is an uncompensable mistake in respect with social hygiene.<sup>79</sup>

The negligence in hygienic conditions created further health problems. Since there was no reserve for bed and pillow slips, and pavilion clothing, the workers use the same stuff throughout the 45 compulsory working days. The request made by the workers for additional clothes during a typhus epidemic received no response.<sup>80</sup>

Because of these sanitary problems, almost every miner became infested with fleas. This epidemic spread not only from the villages to the basin, but also vice versa.<sup>81</sup> While Dosdoğru stressed that fighting fleas could not be reduced to sterilization, but should include healthy housing and sanitary facilities and the upgrading of social standards. He recollected that as a measure, a mining engineer gathered the workers together and made them promise that they would not become infested with fleas again.<sup>82</sup>

A further reason for the spread of epidemic diseases was the fact that those who were being treated were sent to their villages before they recovered, due to the lack of beds. For instance, it was reported that the workers suffering from tuberculosis were exempted from compulsory work and sent home. Similarly, one time eight workers infected with leprosy were expelled from the basin and returned to their villages. On the other hand, many compulsory workers dragged from their homes and brought to the mines were afraid of being detained there and kept their diseases secret in order to return home as soon as possible.<sup>83</sup> Hence, the fact that Etibank offered health services in the neighborhood was partly due to the close ties between the mines and villages, which ease the outbreak of any epidemic.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 14. türkçesi

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>81</sup> Yalçın, p. 18.

<sup>82</sup> Dosdoğru, p. 15.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 19, 36.

The inspection report provided figures on epidemic diseases and tuberculosis, which obviously also affected the workers' families. Of thirty-eight people who died of tuberculosis, thirty were workers and the rest family members. The committee criticized the company for declining to install a tuberculosis clinic despite the seriousness of the sanitary situation.<sup>84</sup>

Diseases caused by malnutrition were another health problem. It was reported several times that the low quality foods distributed to the workers disturbed their digestive systems, and that some workers suffered from malaria due to the malnutrition.<sup>85</sup>

One of the most negative affects of the compulsory work on the workers' health was the increasing number of work accidents. According to the data Makal deduced from the inspection reports, more than 700 workers died and almost 30,000 workers were injured as a result of the work accidents throughout the compulsory work period.<sup>86</sup>

The rise in the number of accidents was due partly to the lack of safety measures. In the inspection reports commenting on the work accidents, it was argued that the safety measures were adequate, the dust risk in the mines was minimum and the number of conflagrations not terrifying; hence, the accidents were caused by the inexperienced workers.<sup>87</sup> Yet there are several reports and evaluations demonstrating that the safety in the mines was not as adequate as was claimed by the inspection committee. On the issue, Dosdogru mentioned bad vantilation. He further argued that

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<sup>84</sup> Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1949, p. 92.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>86</sup> Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1940, p. 30.

<sup>87</sup> Dosdogru, p. 50-51. As another important resource on that issue, see Nichols, Theo, Kahveci Erol, "The condition of mine labor in Turkey: Injuries to miners in Zonguldak, 1942-90," *Middle Eastern Studies* (April 1995) Vol. 31, Issue 2.

the salvage station was nothing but a “museum visited by touring groups,” and some closed galleries and granaries were described on paper as first aid stations.<sup>88</sup>

During the war years, the companies tended to compensate for the technical incapacities by forcing the present labor force so as to increase production rates. In recollecting the pressures exerted by the government for output to increase, the then director of compulsory work said that the disreputable colliery explosion in Çamlık mine in 1943 where 63 workers died mainly was caused by that pressure. If the fact that as a consequence of the compulsory work regulations, a great number of peasants, soldiers and convicts, who had no professional experience or training in mining were forced to work underground is added to this picture, the cause of accidents became more conceivable.

The debates on the need for the investigation of workers’ blood groups due to the injuries in those frequent work accidents shows the negligence even among some doctors working for the Etibank companies. Few doctors held that the investigation of workers’ blood groups was superfluous, and instead, their parents’ or family members’ blood could be transplanted without any previous blood test. Dosdogru’s insistent attempts for those tests were impeded indirectly through not allocating the cars owned by the company for this purpose. In line with this mentality, Dosdogru was criticized for “allowing medicine worth 10 liras for the workers worth 10 piasters.”<sup>89</sup>

In addition to the hospitals and clinics, a health insurance mechanism was also available in the state-run companies. This mechanism paid the ill and injured workers a part of or all of expenses of the treatment. Referring to documents he came across during his study on workers’ files in Sümerbank, Nacar touches on this issue. For

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<sup>88</sup> Yersel, pp. 25-26.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, pp. 24-25.

instance, Osman Koral, a worker in the Bakırköy Sümerbank Factory, injured his right hand in a work accident and was given nine days leave. The factory paid him 30.15 TL as his average daily wage for nine days. Another worker, Ali Göral, having had a work accident, was paid for the days he did not work, but this time the payment was lower than his average daily wage. As another form of assistance for the workers suffering from particularly serious health problems, the factory administration could send them to well-found hospitals and pay their expenses.<sup>90</sup>

On the other hand, however, Dosdogru complained about the insufficient amount of assistance determined in proportion to the daily average wages:

Assisting the workers in proportion to their daily wages is beyond comprehension. If his wage were adequate for his subsistence, he would not suffer from diseases such as tuberculosis, anemia or malaria. Everyone knows that the treatment of an ill person is much more expensive than the nutrition in ordinary days.<sup>91</sup>

In some cases, ill workers were provided food for their recovery, as well. For example, a foreman working at the İpekiş Factory was given a thirty gram cutlet, one egg, 500 grams of milk, 300 grams of rice, and 250 grams of butter every day, because he suffered from tuberculosis. In addition, his wife and daughter were employed in the factory.<sup>92</sup>

Nonetheless, there were several cases demonstrating that the factories abstained from covering the medical needs of the injured workers. The most common example of that was the attempts to minimize the loss of working days through limiting the recovery period in the hospital, ignoring the medical requirements. For instance, the Sümerbank Bakırköy Factory administration, which sent a worker to the

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<sup>90</sup> Nacar, p. 115.

<sup>91</sup> Dosdogru, türkçesi

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. 116.

Cerrahpaşa Hospital for an operation, wrote a petition to the hospital, warning that the worker could not stay at the hospital more than two months.<sup>93</sup>

The same tight policy towards minimizing the recovery period was observed also in Etibank. According to the inspection reports of 1949, 3,431 from among 4,891 injured workers left the hospital within the first 15 days.<sup>94</sup>

Another component of the health insurance system was the Zonguldak Workers Union Relief Fund, which was funded by one percent deductions from the workers' wages. Dosdogru asserted that those funds functioned just like the Dilaver Pasha Code applied during the Ottoman period. The mentioned code had stipulated that ill workers "be mounted on a horse and sent to their homes."<sup>95</sup> Dosdogru further reported that a worker suffering from cancer or anemia rested for a definite period in his village and was able to obtain monetary assistance from the Workers Union only if he recovered and returned to the clinic to acquire a certificate of disability from the hospital.<sup>96</sup>

Another matter of complaint about the Union was that workers' families had to reside within the boundaries of the basin in order to benefit from the funds in case of sickness or birth.<sup>97</sup> Considering the fact that for unskilled workers, only pavilions for unmarried men were provided, this prerequisite prevented a huge number of workers from benefitting from those opportunities. Moreover, the ambiguity of the boundaries of the basin mostly caused the decisions to be made adversely to the workers' interests.

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 116

<sup>94</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1949*

<sup>95</sup> For the regulations adopted by the Dilaver Pasha Code see Ahmet Naim, *Zonguldak Havzası: Uzun Mehmet'ten Bugüne Kadar*, (İstanbul: 1934).

<sup>96</sup> Dosdogru, pp. 57-58.

<sup>97</sup> *Ereğli Kömür Havzası Maden Ocaklarında Çalışan İşçilerin Sıhhi İhtiyaçlarının Teminine Dair Nizamname*, No. 2/3811, Düstur 3, Cilt 17.

Another debate on that issue was how to determine the sickness premium on a cost-lowering basis. The inspection committee reported that there were heated conflicts on determining the disability pension scale among the insurance administration and the workers claiming that their disabilities were not covered adequately because of the particularly risky conditions in their sector.<sup>98</sup>

### Nutrition

The workers employed by the state-run companies were provided with nutritional assistance, including free meals and shopping at lower prices at cooperatives. The motive behind this provisioning was the fact that, especially during the war period, the worker wages were insufficient to cover the basic nutrition needs and that malnutrition decreased productivity. As the inspection committee's report on Etibank underlined,<sup>99</sup> this was the case particularly in the mining sector, where the heavy work increased the daily food requirements.<sup>100</sup> Also Tuksavul, witnessing the situation in the sugar factories, recollected that they "had to provide a generous portion of warm and meaty food in every shift for all workers since they were unable to work because of malnutrition."<sup>101</sup>

In the beginning, this provisioning was bound to wage levels and the administration of the companies determined the minimum wage levels for free meals. As for workers who were paid higher wages, the companies distributed meals for them at lower prices. At Sümerbank, the minimum wage level was 160 piasters in 1941, which mounted to 200 piasters in 1942 and 300 piasters in 1943. At Etibank,

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<sup>98</sup> As examples of those complaints see *Tan*, 6 November 1945, *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1949*, p. 87.

<sup>99</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1949*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>100</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1940*, p. 31.

<sup>101</sup> Muammer Tuksavul, *Doğudan Batıya ve Sonrası*, (Istanbul, 1981), p. 360.



while the workers residing in the factory and earning daily less than 400 piasters were provided two meals a day and 600 grams of bread, those residing in their homes were given one meal a day in addition to the 600 grams of bread.<sup>102</sup>

As mentioned above, those earning wages higher than the minimum level obtained cheaper meals. The inspection committee report on Etibank proposed the regulation of monthly personal ration cards for the workers in order to compensate and cover the costs of the meals directly from their wages.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, however, the majority of the workers were unable to benefit from that opportunity at all. For instance, in the Defterdar factory, the percentage of workers who were able to benefit from cheap meals, the cost of which half was covered by the factory, did not exceed thirty percent. Even though this was attributed by the bureaucrats and Kemalist intelligentsia of that time to the fact that the workers were “accustomed to the low-quality foods of their villages,” and their concern was to save as much money as possible and to return to the village as soon as possible.

Furthermore, though the nutrition assistance was being calculated as an expenditure made by the company, it was also an effective instrument for reducing the cost of labor force. The most illuminative case showing the affect of the provisioning on that curbing was the fact that while the foods were bought by the company at wholesale price, the costs were calculated according to the market prices in subtracting them from the workers’ wages. As a response to that, the workers demanded a role in supervising the food buying.<sup>104</sup>

On the other hand, there were many complaints about the nutritional and hygienic quality of the foods. Dosdogru recollected that the nutritional quality of a food called “malay,” which is frequently mentioned in every memoir or novel

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<sup>102</sup> Makal, p. 269.

<sup>103</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1940*, p. 269.

<sup>104</sup> Rozaliyev, pp. 143-144.

depicting those years, was very low. Besides, considering the heavy working conditions in mining, the foods distributed by the administration could hardly cover half of the daily calorie needs, which in turn, caused many diseases resulting from malnutrition.<sup>105</sup>

The repercussion of the cost-lowering measures on food buying worsened that situation. For instance, the inspection committee report of 1949 noted that the replacement of pure oil with refined oil because the former was expensive and compensation of the paucity of meat with additional oil in the meals provoked reaction among the workers.<sup>106</sup>

Again in Etibank, Dosdoğru took a sample of the meal that had received complaints by the workers, who poured it into the toilets, and noted that the few beans in the oiled water were bitter like poison and harsh. The doctor brought the sample to the administration and received the following answer:

Yes, you are right... They bought animal feed instead of beans by mistake... What can we do but eat these until they are exhausted... I have told the people concerned to be careful from now on.<sup>107</sup>

The workers complained about dirty dishes, too. This complaint was especially noteworthy, because both the company administration and the intelligentsia accused the workers of not familiarizing themselves with the hygienic conditions of modern factories and keeping their rural habits.

In addition to the free or low-priced meals, other facilities provided for the workers were the cooperatives. The reason for their foundation was to provide consumer goods for the workers and employees of the companies at lower prices.

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<sup>105</sup> Dosdoğru, p. 27.

<sup>106</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1949*, p. 83.

<sup>107</sup> Dosdoğru, p. 28.

Prices were calculated through adding the expenses to the costs. The ratio of the expenses was a mere 5.6 percent in 1943.<sup>108</sup>

The cooperatives enabled the workers to pay for what they bought after they received their paychecks, as well. The workers could shop in the cooperatives functioning as a formal way of charge-account, and the price was cut directly from their wages.<sup>109</sup> An employee at the Hereke factory, Mjgan Pekgirek, recollected that while shopping in the cooperatives, “it did not matter whether you had cash at the moment.”<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the profits made by the cooperatives were distributed at the end of the year.<sup>111</sup>

Nonetheless, there were rumours that the loose auditing in the cooperatives, where huge amounts of goods flowed in and out opened the way to abuses and the directors of the cooperatives sometimes accumulated illicit money. The inspection committee proposed tightening the control over the bookkeeping.<sup>112</sup> Depicting his experiences in the Turhal factories, Tuksavul narrated the story of a clerk called Raif who worked in the cooperative. Appointed as the director of the cooperative, Raif was responsible for purchasing and transporting tons of oil and food. After a while, Raif became first the director of the casino in the factory, and then the mayor of Turhal.<sup>113</sup>

## Education

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<sup>108</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1949*, p. 84.

<sup>109</sup> Makal, p. 272.

<sup>110</sup> Galib Fuad, “1200 Metre Yerin Altında Yrdkten Sonra Kmr Amelesi Taramacı Devrekli Mehmet Kkkaya ile Konutum”, *Kara İnci*, No. 3 (June 1941), pp. 10-11.

<sup>111</sup> Esra stndaĒ-SelamoĒlu, p.

<sup>112</sup> *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1940*, p. 32.

<sup>113</sup> Muammer Tuksavul, *DoĒudan Batıya ve Sonrası*, (Istanbul, 1981), p. 365-367.

Article 2 of Sümerbank Law No 2262 included the provision “opening schools to train workers in accordance with the needs of the country and factories, and sending students to academies abroad to train industrial engineers and specialists or to assist the schools that will be established by the Ministry of Economy for this purpose, and sending students and trainees abroad.”<sup>114</sup>

To this end, the first Five-Year Industrial Plan mentioned the organization of the appropriate professional teaching so as to secure the functioning of the industry. Accordingly, it was proposed that while the engineers and technicians be trained in foreign countries, and the foremen in the technical schools of the Ministry of Economy in Istanbul and Izmir, the workers would attend courses in the state-run factories and the like.<sup>115</sup>

Seventy foremen and technicians were sent to the Soviet Union before the factories were installed. It was envisaged that some of those technicians would be employed as managers in the state-owned companies. Similarly, fourteen students who had passed an exam convened by Sümerbank in 1933 were sent to Germany and Belgium to study textiles, chemistry, electromechanics and industrial management there.<sup>116</sup> When those who had studied the textile industry in Germany came back to the country, they were charged with managerial duties in the companies. The managers of the Bakırköy, Kayseri, Hereke, Defterdar, Nazilli, Eregli, Malatya and Gemlik factories had been trained in Europe.<sup>117</sup>

As for the worker training, it was being evaluated in respect with “the fall in productivity, and increase in casualties and hence costs as a result of the lack of

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<sup>114</sup> Apak, p. 65: “Memlekete ve kendi fabrikalarına lüzumlu olan usta ve işçileri yetiştirmek üzere mektepler açmak ve sanayi mühendisi ve mütehassıslarını yetiştirmek için dahildeki yüksek mekteplerde talebe okutmak veya bu maksatla İktisat Vekaletince açılacak mekteplere yardım etmek ve ecnebi memleketlere talebe ve stajyer göndermek.”

<sup>115</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyetinin Birinci Sanayi Planı, 1933, Mesleki Tedrisat Raporu, pp. 134-137.

<sup>116</sup> Peri, pp.

<sup>117</sup> *Turkey On The Way of Industrialization*, 1937. Press Department of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, pp. 42-44.

professional education.”<sup>118</sup> The fact that the labor force employed by the newly-established industries was primarily of rural origin and its limited industrial experience aggravated the need for professional training for skilled workers.

For instance, the inspection committee’s reports noted that the Sümerbank spinning and weaving factories had observed an increase in the working hour per output, and hence a drop in labor performance due to the lack of training.<sup>119</sup> To handle the drop in productivity in spite of the partial improvement in technical efficiency, the report highlighted the importance of workers’ training, as well as the working discipline-oriented measures such as minimizing the stoppages of machines.

To this end, Sümerbank ran several courses in the factories, as well as apprentice schools for primary school graduates in Karabük and Kayseri. Taking into consideration that Sümerbank employed 20,000 workers in total, the number of workers attending those courses were limited. For example, the number of workers and foreman assistants who graduated from the courses at Sümerbank was 1,600 in 1940-41 and 2,400 in 1941-42.<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, it seemed that those who attended the courses tended to stay in the factory as a permanent worker, since the rate of qualification among Sümerbank workers showed an advance year by year and reached two-thirds of the total number in 1948.<sup>121</sup>

As far as the training of the workers was concerned, the problem in Etibank’s companies was much more crucial because the importance of the safety in the mining required greater professional qualification. In addition to the technological backwardness applied in the mining sector in Turkey then, the recruitment of

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<sup>118</sup> Hamit Nuri Irmak, Dokuma Sanayi, Sümer Bank ve yetiştirilecek işçi, *Ticari Birlik Mecmuası*, 15 September 1942, No. 14, p. 5.

<sup>119</sup> *Sümerbank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu 1941*, p. 26.

<sup>120</sup> *Türkiye Cumhuriyetinin Birinci Sanayi Planı*, 1933, Mesleki Tedrisat Raporu, pp. 133-137.

<sup>121</sup> Makal, p. 275.

peasants who did have any professional experience and training at all during the compulsory work period exacerbated the issue.<sup>122</sup>

The Schooling Book for Mine Workers prepared by the Ereğli Coal Company explained the rules for safety, including how to use a safety lamp, notice the risk of firedamp explosion, and how to use the coal barrow. In addition, the illustrated and simple instructions were expressed in a scolding fashion, which implied that the administration was of the opinion that the workers could not be persuaded with a complicated and technical language. To give few examples of that scolding tone:

Wait your turn in the cage. Remain docile. Do not make noise. Pay attention to the illustration. Understand what will happen to you if you don't [work properly]. You will become incapacitated and will not be able to work throughout your life. . . . The one who watches out for danger lives and works. The one who does not take care, dies. Look at what happens to the thoughtless worker in the illustration. See that the back of the barrow is not secure . . . What happens to the one who enters the guess-rope boat without permission? You get when you look at. It becomes too late. Your friends die. You are penalized.<sup>123</sup>

The view that the miners ignored the safety rules because of their illiteracy was shared by Dosdoğru.<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, it seems more relevant to attribute workers' ignorance about safety to the "underdevelopment" of the working class identity rather than to illiteracy. In particular, the forced labor environment developed this ignorance as a reaction against being forced to work in the mines. A similar reaction could be observed among the peasants-come-to-the-factory, who although were not legally forced to work there, perceived mining as a provisional work and themselves as peasants.

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<sup>122</sup> For an evaluation on that issue see Gerhard Kessler, "Zonguldak ve Karabük'teki Çalışma Şartları," *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi Mecmuası*, Vol. 9, No. 3, April 1948, pp. 173-196.

<sup>123</sup> Ereğli Kömür İşletmesi Kültür Servisi, *Maden İşçisi Okuma Kitabı*, Osmanbey Matbaası, 1947, pp. 40-51.

<sup>124</sup> See Dosdoğru, p. 50: "Ancak, bizde olduğu gibi, ocak içlerinde bilinçsiz, yarı ırgat yarı zorunlu madenişçisi çalıştıran yerlerde, cahil işçi elindeki Davvy lambasının uyarısına da aldırılmaz. Ocak içinde kibrit çakmaya, sigara yakmaya, yada kazmasını sert taşa çarpıp kıvılcım çıkmasına neden olur."

Therefore, it can be claimed that the sensitivity about the safety rules was not to be reduced to merely an issue of training, but developed in line with the formation of the worker identity, or considering “being of a worker” important. Interviews made by Kahveci with miners in Zonguldak in 1993 give interesting examples for comparison. What attracts attention in those interviews is the attitude of all the miners who stressed the importance and gravity of their job. The workers, who were asked about their working conditions gave a series of technical explanations concerning their jobs. One of them, a permanent hewer, recollected:

In every coal seam, the coal has its *avanak* [weak] point. You must start digging the coal there. You have to know how to dig the coal. If coal discharges itself that means there is an old working behind it or you are approaching a fault. If dust comes from the hanging wall that means it will cave in. Any vigilant guy could do this work but you need experience as well.<sup>125</sup>

In Etibank’s schooling book, professional knowledge regarding technical and safety issues was presented along with lessons on obedience to the state and superiors, and avoiding any rebellion. At this point, it is worth noting that the administration used a language referring to the traditional subordination patterns, remote of the repertoire of modern politics: “A good worker obeys orders, respects his senior. He follows the order. He works much, he earns much . . . I [the worker] respect my company, engineer, chief in every aspect. I will pay my debt with working honestly and efficiently. I promise solemnly.”<sup>126</sup>

The teaching also included civics. The formula that the workers of the Turkish republic should learn first was that they were Turks: “I am a Turk: My mother is a Turk, my father is a Turk, my grandfather is a Turk.”<sup>127</sup> By extension, we come upon the well-known formulations of Turkish nationalism, such as the assertions that in

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<sup>125</sup> Kahveci, “The Miners of Zonguldak,” p. 191.

<sup>126</sup> Ereğli Kömür İşletmesi Kültür Servisi, *Maden İşçisi Okuma Kitabı*, p. 49.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

Anatolia only the Turks lived, all the citizens spoke Turkish, or the Turks were the most long-established nation and so on, and political knowledge regarding the unique geostrategical location of Turkey or the central role of the Turkish army.

The schooling book was prepared with particular attention to the fact that the miners were recruited from the villages, i.e. they were peasants. From civics to mathematics, all of the lessons appealed to the peasant identity of the miners. For instance, in praising İsmet İnönü, while there was any reference to the workers, the book mentioned that he saved the peasants from heavy taxes. Similarly, the “poet for miners” narrated the voyage between the village and the mine. As for the mathematic exercises, they reflected the absenteeism, the continuing bonds with the village, the transition from subsistence farming into wage work, and so on. For instance, the book made the definition of the money and taught the values of different Turkish currencies such as the lira and the piaster. In the summation exercises, the miners who were forced to leave their village were taught how to sum their debts including land taxes and release payments. In another exercise, the miners should calculate the numbers of the absentee peasants who did not come to the mine to work. Or the miners were taught how to calculate the earnings of a peasant who merchandised the eggs that he produced in his village before coming to the mine.<sup>128</sup>

Nonetheless, asserting that Turkish working class was massively imputed by a systematic and well-developed ideological formation by the Turkish capitalism and state would be an exaggeration on the part of capacities and visions of the latters. For the proportion of the workers who attended those courses could hardly exceed 2 percent.<sup>129</sup> Instead, the more direct and coercion-oriented discipline methods should be stressed. This is consistent with the considerations of the “political reason” of the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-52.

<sup>129</sup> Ahmet Ali Özeken, *Türkiye’de Sanayii İşçileri*, p. 80.



Turkish capitalism, which will be discussed in the following parts of the thesis to the scope that the formation of the working class is concerned.

## Conclusion

In concluding the chapter regarding the socio-economic formation of the industrial working class in the state-run companies, it will be worthwhile to discuss two subjects: The first one is the comparison between the village and factory, along with different attitudes toward the movement from the countryside to the industry. Second, and accordingly, it is useful to question whether the attempts for securing factory workers was founded on a systematic policy aiming at a clean break from peasantry or pragmatic and ad hoc measures.

There are two mainstream approaches dominant in the literature concerning the consequences of the movement from the village to the factory on the working and living conditions. On the one hand, it is claimed that the industrialization and urbanization pave the way for detaching from the backward environment in the countryside, and thanks to the social facilities provided particularly by the public enterprises, improve the living and working conditions. Hence, granted that the strict and impersonal regimen of the factory was a hardship, it was also an social gain, since the factory offered medical care and certain other social opportunities, stimulated literacy, and so on. While the village was poor and hungry; the factory paid at least wage. In addition, the peasants were weaned away from the “idiocy of the countryside.” On the other hand, the other approach focuses on the drastic conditions in the urban industrial life, and emphasizes that leaving the village deprives the worker-come-to-the-factory of the social security provided by the

subsistence farming and social solidarity in the countryside.<sup>130</sup> From the point of departure that the peasant who are unfamiliar with the factory work are subjected to a strict discipline in the productional and recreational process, a negative attitude toward the industrialization in general is elaborated.

True, the opportunities of factory work assumed by the former approach proved to be unrealistic and inadequate to a large extent. But on the other hand, looking at the conditions both in the village and at the factory, it would be hard to prove that the peasants were degraded at the factory, neither. It was so not because the conditions provided by the factory were convenient, but because the life in the village had not provided the peasants with the “amenities” as supposed to.

Actually, such simple comparison of village and factory is rather beside the point. Assuming that there was a radical break from the agricultural employment in the countryside toward an urban and industrial employment would not be realistic. The point is that for the bulk of industrial labor, the factory was an extension and continuation of the village with respect to the maintenance of the social relations in the village. For instance, the go-betweens functioning in the recruitment process included mostly the dominant figures from within the network in the rural area. The peasant-workers paid their debts in the villages with whatever they had earned in the factories. Furthermore, on the part of the state and the administration of the enterprises, the continuation of the economic and social life in the countryside was not perceived only as a source of problem resulting in absenteeism, but also as a “relief valve” securing the social coherence. In the discussions concerning the need for regular factory workers, the risks of social disturbances which would be brought

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<sup>130</sup> About the theses on the factory experience of the Russian peasants developed by the Narodnics who were the ones elaborated a comprehensive theory of this approach, see Theodore H. Von Laue, “Russian Peasants in the Factory”, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March 1961), pp. 61-80.

about by a possible destruction of the subsistence farming especially in case of an economic crisis and increase in unemployment were pointed to. As a measure against this, the significance of the maintenance of relations with the village was underlined.<sup>131</sup>

At this point, the debate on whether a systematic policy toward creating a permanent industrial labor force, beyond resolving immediate labor shortage through ad hoc practices, was conducted appears on the scene. At first glance, the continuous complaints made by the political figures and modernist intellectuals of those days about the “paucity of factory workforce” implies such a vision. Yet the policies practiced were hardly engaged in securing such permanence of the labor force. As mentioned before, the facilities which the public enterprises were to provide felt short of encouraging the factory work. True it was a common feature of the capitalist development in different countries that the need for workforce was not met by offering high standards of living (for, the model of welfare state which systematized the social regulations was not formulated in reference to the recruitment of labor force, but as a part of a specific mode of capitalist accumulation and as a response to ascending class struggles). In this respect, the Turkish experience was not discrete. At most did the Turkish late-capitalist development tend to compensate the backwardness through intensifying the direct exploitation, which also explains why the more coercive methods such as the compulsory work or the construction of prisons close to the factories were appealed more frequently than the “soft power” of recreational activities such as education.

Nonetheless, what made Turkish case discrete was that some practices which could encourage a permanent tie to the factory were avoided on the ground of purely

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<sup>131</sup> Ahmet Ali Özeken, *Türkiye Sanayiinde İşçiyi Barındırma Problemi*, p. 130.

–and sometimes excessively- political considerations. Thinking in economic terms of the capitalism, the argument that the social facilities served nothing but “fertilizing the slippery soil”<sup>132</sup> because the absenteeism impeded any progress in productivity makes sense, yet the following debate on housing policies in Karabük is remarkable:

After a technical assessment on the Zonguldak mine basin in the mid-1940s, it was concluded that 55 percent of the 26,000 workers had to be settled close to the mines in order that avoid any paucity of labor force when the production level would increase. But this suggestion was objected on the ground that settling such a great amount of workers collectively in Zonguldak would possibly result in “social disturbances and instabilities in the remote future.” Instead, a small group of workers, who were selected with reference to their obedience to social order, as well as their skill levels, were settled in the permanent houses. As for the rest of the workers, a road combining their villages to the mines was constructed.

The similar mentality was apparent when the housing question of the workers in Istanbul was discussed. This time, the suggestion was providing the workers with arable land, along with houses. In rationalizing this suggestion, the importance of guarding the workers against subversive currents and stimulating the nationalist sentiments among the workers via enhancing the sense of being the part of the “public.”<sup>133</sup> Considering the significance of the dispossession and being totally dependent on wages in the development of the identity of a separate and collective social class, the special meaning of this very small land ownership becomes apprehensible.

Henceforth, it can be claimed that Turkish capitalism, which had pored over the harsh class struggles in Europe, elaborated an excessively deliberate political

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<sup>132</sup> Ahmet Ali Özekten, *Türkiye’de Sanayii İşçileri*, p. 67.

<sup>133</sup> Zaim, p. 149.

consciousness which postulated that a well-developed identity of factory worker would threaten the very conception of “classless society.”<sup>134</sup>

The question asked by Lilo Linke pointing to the tension between this historical memory which was highly imputed by the political drawbacks and the efforts to develop the factory workers from the peasants who could not engage in industrial employment is worth quoting:

Peasant and casual workers, hitherto living without any regular order, sleeping in hovels or, during the summer months, out in the open with nothing but their soiled quilts to cover them, half animals in their dumbness and ignorance –such were the men who were slowly to be turned into a self-conscious working class, forbidden at the same time to become class-conscious. Would the experiment succeed?

To conclude, an industrialization experience which was stigmatized by an excessive deliberateness against the formation of a class consciousness... This was another significant aspect of how the Turkish industrial working class experienced the process.

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<sup>134</sup> The roots of this political tradition go back further even to the Ottoman industrialization. For instance in mentioning the establishment of the *Islah-ı Sanayi Komisyonu* (1860), Ortaylı attributes the effort for maintaining of the guilds to Ottoman state’s fear of the repetition of the traumatic social disturbances in the mid-Victorian period in Europe. See İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı*. (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), p. 207.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **THE BAN ON UNIONIZATION AND LABOR MOVEMENT**

This chapter focuses on the workers' dissent and mobilization against the industrial society in the public enterprises, preceding the lift of the ban on unionization. This dissent was expressed through different means, such as unorganized and individual instruments including petitions or fleeing the working places, or illegal unionization attempts by usually the radical leftist parties and militant workers in those factories.

Which repertoire of self-expression the workers applied depended upon several factors, including the political inheritance and structural peculiarities in different geographical locations, sectors or segments of the working class, as well as the general balances of class struggles in that particular period. Henceforth, it is useful to ascertain the overall course of inter-class relations and the legacy of working class movement, with particular focus on the sectors and regions where the Sümerbank and Etibank companies are active.

In examining the general course of the class relations, an approach composing the political and ideological inheritance of the Turkish capitalist establishment, and that of working class will be developed. Accordingly, before depicting the class movement in the public enterprises, the concept of "classless society" will be evaluated in brief, with reference to the Turkish capitalism's handling the possible social "threats" of industrialization, and as a measure to that, its attempt to criminalize the organized class movement. Then the particular experience of the workers employed in the Sümerbank and Etibank factories and their dissent against

the “hostile industrial society,” including both the individual and unorganized resistance, and illegal leftist activism will be depicted.

### On the Legacy of Class Relations

The discourse developed by several agencies of the Turkish capitalist establishment on the peculiarities of Turkish capitalism was reflected most precisely in the concept of “being a classless and integrated nation.” In line with that, the Turkish establishment, which looked into the Western experiences, advanced a specific corporatist model. Henceforth, the historical memory of Turkish capitalism with respect to the class struggles exceeded the actual experience of the relatively young Turkish capitalist state. Witnessing the legacy of the working class movement in the Western industrial metropolises, the Turkish state gravitated to exploit the benefits of “coming from behind,” that is, uneven development.

For instance, in explaining the importance of the state’s intervention in the trade unions and the ban on going on strike, Sadi Irmak, the then Minister of Labor, argued that,

If there is one, the only consolation of late industrialization is to have the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of those who started out the industrial life before we did. One can meet the traces of those experiences in our laws, as well as our social regulations. It is not necessary to undergo anew every single phrase of the century-old industrial life of the West.<sup>135</sup>

Considering the practices applied, it seems that benefitting from the century-old experiences of the West meant advancing very deliberately, and taking “preemptive” measures. Those preemptive instruments were applied frequently in the wake of the prospective social and political disturbances of industrialization.

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<sup>135</sup> Sadi Irmak, “Türk Sendikaları,” *Çalışma Dergisi*, no. 16 (May 1947), p. 69.

Impeding the development of the collective identity and action of the working class was one of the dimensions of this preperation against the “side effects” of industrialization.

In 1932, Istanbul alone witnessed 18 strikes, along with the miners’ struggles in the Zonguldak mine basin which had not been nationalized yet; and workers initiated some attempts to organize independently from the Republican People’s Party (RPP). As a response to these events, the RPP put a draft of the Labor Code on the agenda, yet the draft was withdrawn on the grounds that it would be a haste initiative. On the other hand, however, the RPP collected fingerprints of the workers in Istanbul as a “preperation” for the industrialization.<sup>136</sup>

As far as the legacy of the Turkish working class before the statist industrialization is concerned, the 1908 and 1923 strike waves appear on the forefront. The 1908 events, which resulted in the promulgation of the Law on Strike (*Tatil-i Eşgal Kanunu*), had considerable repercussions in the Zonguldak mine basin, which would be run by Etibank from the 1930s onwards. Thousands of miners invaded the French company and demanded the cuts from the salaries due to treatment expenses were abolished.<sup>137</sup> In 1923, those militant actions raised once more. This time, miners, who were paid only if they finished the work charged to them by the company, claimed for their participation in the determination of the work they finished and for the deletion of the financial penalties imposed on them unfairly.<sup>138</sup> Sina Çıladır recollected that the mobilization among the miners was annihilated by provoking by the foreign capital the ethnic (Kurd vs. Laz) or

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<sup>136</sup> İlhan Tekeli, Selim İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu*, Ankara: ODTÜ İdari İlimler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1982, p. 289.

<sup>137</sup> Sina Çıladır, *Zonguldak Havzasında İşçi Hareketlerinin Tarihi*, Ankara: Yeraltı Maden/İş Yayınları, 1977, pp. 92-95.

<sup>138</sup> Ahmet Naim, *Zonguldak Havzası Uzun Mehmetten Bugüne Kadar*, İstanbul: Hüsniyatı Matbaası, 1934, p. 126.



geographic (inhabitants of Zonguldak vs. Eastern Black Sea) differences among the miners. Çıladıır further argued that these provocations caused the early intellectual generations of the region to be influenced by the racist thoughts, and deprived the class movement from meeting with a progressive intellectual vein.<sup>139</sup>

At the same time, however, the communist circles gathered around the journal called *Aydınlık* tried to mobilize the miners. There were the rumours that they had infiltrated the All Workers Union of Turkey, led by the RPP, and contributed to the organization of the 1923 strikes.<sup>140</sup> In addition, the leader of this group, Şefik Hüsnü, made some deliberate references to the organizational attempts in the basin.<sup>141</sup>

As for the textiles sector, particularly the factories in Istanbul inherited a long legacy of class movement. The fact that textiles had assumed an important role in the integration to the world capitalism and pioneered the capitalist development, as has been seen in many other late-capitalist countries, paved the way for the emergence of textile workers in a relatively early period. For instance, the Ottoman Worker's Party (*Osmanlı Amele Fırkası*), which was established by a group of workers after the World War I, included the textile workers of Istanbul as well.<sup>142</sup>

Before mentioning the specific experiences during the statist industrialization process, the following evaluation has to be done in order to ascertain the general characteristics of the legacies of class movement in Turkey: If the ascending moments of the working class movement are outlined, it appears that those moments directly corresponded with the general political atmosphere of the country. It may sound ordinary, yet what stigmatized this close interrelationship between the workers' activism and the general political mood was as follows: After every re-

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<sup>139</sup> Sina Çıladıır, pp. 147, 166.

<sup>140</sup> Sina Çıladıır, p. 137.

<sup>141</sup> See "Türkiye'de Dernek Birliklerinin Teşekkülü," *Aydınlık*, 15 May 1923; quoted by Çıladıır, *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Kemal Sülker, p. 41.

consolidation process of the Turkish establishment, this activism was attacked so fundamentally that the history of the class movement suffered from many interruptions, which handicapped the emergence of an accumulative legacy.

The preparations toward industrialization witnessed a similar attack on the class organizations, which tried to impede any possible labor mobilization as a response against the social impacts of industrialization. Those attacks can be summarized under the title of “criminalization of labor organizations and activism,” for it both banned any unionization attempt and brought about a strict political control mechanisms against any initiative to overcome the restraints of repressive legal regulations.

#### Criminalization of the Labor Movement

The industrialization process was accompanied by the “preemptive” measures against any possible working class militancy, and de jure and de facto criminalization of the labor activism. Henceforth, the Turkish working class entered the statist industrialization period with a series of restrictive laws and bans on the right to organize on the one hand, and strict control and policing mechanisms on the other.

When the statist industrialization gained momentum in 1936, the RPP initiated the preparation of a new labor code and had the US experts review the 1932 draft mentioned above. The Hines reports, which contained that review, strongly recommended that the workers not be given the right to unionize and strike at this stage.<sup>143</sup> In addition to the report, the RPP initiated a worker’s organization in İzmir, which was to serve as a laboratory to test the ground. As a measure against the

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<sup>143</sup> Yüksel Işık, *Osmanlı’dan Günümüze İşçi Hareketi*, Ankara: Öteki Yayınevi, 1995, p. 95.

workers' discontent revealed by this attempt, some articles of the penal code were harshened before the new labor code was promulgated. Furthermore, the newly-established labor office was charged with observing the workers' activities and attitudes.<sup>144</sup>

The Labor Code, dated 1936, included several control mechanisms over the workers against the possibly negative implications of the political and social transformation caused by industrialization. Rozaliyev argued that the Employment Agency, which was defined as an instrument of social policy, was one of the tools of that control, as well. The agency, which organized the employment processes in the workplaces subject to the Labor Code, including the public enterprises, kept reports on the reliability of the workers and prepared black lists based upon those reports. The Ministry of Labor transmitted the information, which it received from the agency, to its departments dealing with the "psychology of the workers."<sup>145</sup> Those who audited the application of the labor code were the employees of the Ministry of Labor, and one of their main duties was "securing the routine working at the workshops." If this routine was interrupted for any reason, they had to convey this information to the police.<sup>146</sup> As a similar measure, the state had insider workers, who informed the state about the political and general situation in the factory and in its workshops. For example, the Communist Party of Turkey revealed the names of those insiders in its periodical called Hammer and Sickle (*Orak-Çekiç*). Mesih, a worker from the Beykoz factory of the Sümerbank was one of those insiders who was made public and targeted by the journal.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Kemal Sülker, *ibid.*, pp.49-50.

<sup>145</sup> Y.N. Rozaliyev, *ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>146</sup> Rozaliyev, *ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>147</sup> Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar-II (1925-1936)*, İstanbul: BDS Yayınları, 1992, p. 376.

Dispelling the ambiguities in the regulations envisaged by the Law on Strike, dated 1909, the new Labor Code clearly banned going on strike. The Article 127 of the eighth chapter of the Code determined the penalties in case of going on strike. What attracts attention is that while in the private enterprises the strikers were punished with a fine, those in the public enterprises were to serve a jail sentence.<sup>148</sup>

The ban on strikes required the formulation of alternative mechanisms for settling industrial disputes. Instead of the trade unions and strikes, the Code anticipated a conciliation mechanism. According to this mechanism, the parties were to attempt to solve the dispute between themselves, basing on the mediation of workers' representative. If this process failed, the conflict was to be taken into consideration by a government official. If the parties still could not reach an agreement, then the Provincial Conciliation Committee (*İl Hakem Kurulu*), overwhelmingly consisting of government officials, was to be established. If one of the party was dissatisfied with the decision made by this committee, it had to apply to the High Conciliation Committee, that was composed of high-rank officials from the concerning ministries and the decision of which was absolute.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, the Law on Societies, dated 1938, banned the establishment of the class-based organizations. Due to this regulation, unionization was not possible in either public or private enterprises.

Under these circumstances, the workers applied different ways of expression of their dissent, which, in the majority of cases, were deprived of organizational instruments. Those mostly individual ways of self-expression established a specific repertoire, which brought about crucial debates on the emergence of class consciousness, collective class identity, and by extension, class movement.

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<sup>148</sup> Yüksel Işık, *ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>149</sup> *İş Kanunu*, Republic of Turkey, Düstur 3. Tertip Vol. 17, pp. 1146-1205.

## Waging Resistance Deprived of Organizations

Under the legal restraints, the working class expressed its unrest usually in unorganized and individual ways. Different types came to the front.

For instance, high turnover rates and absenteeism, which were explained in the second chapter of this thesis in details, were one of them. It was motivated, to some extent, by negative working conditions, such as low wages and insufficient housing. Spectacular data on the high rates of absenteeism in the public enterprises contained in several resources (such as inspection reports or memoirs of those days) which are already referred in this thesis will not be repeated here. What is necessary to notice here is the reasons for the unwillingness to regular employment in the factories.

Although the industrialization process was not accompanied by a massive dispossession in the rural area, the worsening damage of the rural economy forced the peasants and farmers to seek for additional salaries to compensate the reduced agricultural income as a result of the damage of the traditional economy, and pay high taxes. Yet those economic needs did not keep the workers from leaving the factories.

On the one hand, it is questionable whether more attractive conditions in industry would overcome the peasants' resistance against leaving their land and giving up their existing economic activities. For, leaving the working places cannot be discussed separately from the pattern of seasonal employment and continuing economic and social bounds with the rural life. Nonetheless, putting this topic aside to be discussed later, it was obvious that the workers reacted against the working conditions, and absenteeism was partly one of the expressions of this reaction.

Leaving the working place as a resistance against the negative and discouraging working conditions was frequent especially in the mines, and especially during the compulsory work regime. In the case of compulsory work regime in Zonguldak basin, the general means for workers' self-expression was fleeing the mines.

Men who were included in the deferment lists prepared for those would be exempted from military service due to compulsory working exploited that opportunity to flee the mines. According to the tecil regulations, the peasant who were obliged to compulsory work were muaf from military service. Exploiting that regulation, peasants who did not work in the mines both escaped working and military service through writing their names in the lists.<sup>150</sup>

Miners' reaction against the harsh working conditions went so far that they did not refrain from cutting arms and feet to get a disability certificate, or, if that did not work, bribing the public hospitals to arrange such a certificate were another means to leave the mines and go back to home in the village.<sup>151</sup>

Another means which was employed by the working class to express its unrest was the petitions sent to the factory administration, the RPP, and National Assembly.

An example of the petitions to the Assembly was applied by peasants from Vakfıkebir during the compulsory work regime. In the petition, the peasants demanded to be exempted from compulsory work, arguing that they were gaunt and most of the people suffering from tuberculosis were among them.<sup>152</sup>

The RPP, which worked then as a component of the state apparatus rather than a political party, was also addressed by the workers complaining about their wages,

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<sup>150</sup> Kadri Yersel, *Madencilikte Bir Ömür*, İstanbul: Yurt Madenciligini Geliştirme Vakfı Maden Mühendisleri Odası Ortak Yayını, 1989, p. 20.

<sup>151</sup> Sina Çıladı, *ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>152</sup> Sabire Dosdoğru, Hulusi Dosdoğru, *Sağlık Açısından Maden İşçilerimizin Dünü Bugünü*, İstanbul: BDS Yayınları, 1990, p. 18.

working conditions or being unemployed. For instance, depicting his participation to the World War I and national struggle in the petition, Selanikli Hasanoğlu Mehmet Bey informed the RPP that the husband of his sister had died and she stayed with her children on the streets, lonely and desperately. Mehmet Bey had appealed the governor of Ankara, the General Directorate of the İs Bankası and Sümerbank and requested to be employed, yet not been replied, although there were free offices.<sup>153</sup>

Not only the unemployed people, but also the workers employed expressed their unrest about working conditions in the petitions written to the directorate of the factory. The most common subject of complaints was low level of wages. Especially during the war years, workers were complaining about the insufficiency of their wages, which did not cover even their basic needs. In those petitions, increase in wages or alternative ways to compensate the insufficient wages were demanded. One of these petitions was addressed in March 1944 by Resmiye Şen, who was working in the Bakırköy Sümerbank Factory for an hourly wage of fifteen piasters. Şen complained that, bearing the responsibility of her five children, whose ages ranged between five and thirteen, as a widow, she could do nothing for them but providing only a piece of bread. She was complaining about being unable to send them to school. To handle the situation, she proposed several solutions to the factory administration. Those included increasing her wage or sending her children to school. And if none of these could be accomplished, she demanded her exemption from tax cuts.<sup>154</sup>

Also the methods used by the factory administration to encourage permanent employment could provoke reactions among the workers. As mentioned above, the responsibility of providing the discipline in production process was attributed to the

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<sup>153</sup> Yiğit Akın, *Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Sosyal Tarihinde Dilekçeler*, *Toplum ve Bilim*, p. 124.

<sup>154</sup> Can Nacar, *Working Class in Turkey During the World War II Period: Between Social Policies and Everyday Experiences*, Master Thesis, Bogazici University, 2004, p. 98.

workers, as well as the administration. In addition to the conspirative and policing measures, the wages were also utilized to make the a worker to control the other. As an example, Fatma Erginer, another worker in the Bakırköy Sümerbank Factory, wrote a petition to the administration in September 1943, and complained that “since the workers who came from İzmir with her escaped from the factory, the expenditures made for them had been cut from her wages.”<sup>155</sup>

As for the conciliation mechanism mentioned above, Sabahaddin Zaim argues that it was not a properly-functioning mechanism and the lengthiness of the process deterred the workers from applying this instrument.<sup>156</sup> Hence, although the majority of the cases were solved in favor of the workers’ demands, this mechanism, with its long and bureaucratic stages, felt too short of compensating the lack of the right to unionize and strike. Nonetheless, there were also those cases which were solved in favor of the workers in the first step, without carrying the case to the higher committees. As an example from the state-run enterprises, when the workers from the Defterdar factory applied to the factory administration for wage increase, the administration accepted their demand and increased their wages between ten and sixty percent.<sup>157</sup>

It was noteworthy that the application to the conciliation mechanism occurred mostly in the private companies.<sup>158</sup> Although there is not a systematic record of the applications, and hence, the exact percentage of the cases carried to those committees by the workers employed in the public enterprises cannot be determined, the fact that

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<sup>155</sup> Can Nacar, *ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>156</sup> Zaim, *ibid.*, p. 332.

<sup>157</sup> Z. Fahri Fındıkoğlu, *Defterdar Fabrikası Hakkında Bir Tatbiki Sınai Sosyoloji Denemesi*, İstanbul: Türkiye Harsi ve İktimai Araştırmalar Derneği, 1955, p. 26.

<sup>158</sup> For an account of the applications to the conciliation mechanism in the private enterprises, see. Sedat Toydemir, “Türkiye’de iş ihtilaflarının tarihçesi”, *İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisadiyat ve İktimaiyat Enstitüsü*, Dördüncü Kitap, pp. 45-66.



examples given in the articles and newspapers often included those in private companies possibly reflected a tendency.

Those mentioned above represented the general repertoire of the dissent of the workers in the absence of legal opportunities to get organized in the form of political parties, trade unions, or any class-based economic, social or political organization. At this point, it may be questioned whether the workers protesting the conditions perceived themselves and acted as class conscious proletarians or as peasants-in-the-factories rebelling against the unnatural restraints imposed upon them by a hostile industrial society –and applying their sense of justice to factory or city.

Although it is obvious that the peasant-workers reacted against the working and living conditions and challenged the factory administration, it was hardly based on a worker identity. For those reactions aimed at avoiding from being a worker, rather than protecting the workers' rights. To refer the examples given above, the resistance in the mines did not aim at improvement the working conditions, but leaving the mines and going back to the village to continue the agricultural activities as a peasant. In other words, it was an attempt to protect themselves from the hostile industrial society.

Undoubtedly, it was not peculiar to the Turkish case. The tension observed especially in the early stages of the labor mobility from villages to the cities had always been between the moral “virtues” of the traditional economy and industrial antagonisms. In this respect, the consciousness derived from those tensions was the expression of a search for the mentality of the traditional economy, rather than that of industrial antagonisms and their political repertoire.

As a comparative example, the Russian experience worths mentioning. Russian peasants who came to the city to work at factories were legally classified as peasants and under the law treated as such. More importantly, it is claimed that

the majority of workers themselves demanded to be called peasants, whether they worked permanently at the factory or not. In their imagination their permanent side earnings were still no more than just that. . . . There is no evidence that the peasants made any efforts to be reclassified as members of the meshchanstvo [that is, urban poor], the only other official category open to them. If a transition from peasant to meshchanin status had occurred in connection with industrial employment, it had taken decades.<sup>159</sup>

As far as the Turkey in those years was concerned, it appeared that the discourse through which the reactions were expressed was the paternalist image of the state. It can be argued that the Turkish bourgeois revolution, which lacked the capacity or intent for mobilizing large masses, preferred to contain the rural regions through applying the image of a paternalist state.

For Yiğit Akın, who examined the discourse in the petitions written during the early Republican period, highlights that image and workers' application to the paternal roles of the state. He further claims that this discourse served to the making of legitimacy of the state and regime:

The function of this procedure for the institution or person appealed by the petition is to create the image that any person who has been aggrieved due to several reasons by the regime, then made several attempts to mağduriyetini gidermek within the framework of the bureaucratic mechanisms, but been not replied positively could mağduriyetini gidermek through appealing to the senior officials, and moreover, that this mechanism is open to anyone.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Theodore H. Von Laue, Russian Peasants in the Factory 1892-1904, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (March 1961), p. 63.

<sup>160</sup> "Dilekçenin hitap ettiği kurum ya da şahıs açısından bu işlemin anlamı, mevcut rejim yüzünden çeşitli sebeplerle mağdur olmuş, belki bu mağduriyetini gidermek için mevcut bürokratik yapı dahilinde birtakım girişimlerde bulunmuş ama sonuç alamamış birine bu yapı içinde mağduriyetinin en üst makama yazarak giderilmesinin ve hem de bu yolun herkes tarafından kullanılmasının mümkün olduğu görüntüsünü sağlamaktır."Yiğit Akın, ibid., p. 103.

Another point to be stressed about the petitions is the absence of the collective application to that mechanism. As Akin underlines, the collective petitions which were frequently used in Russia and Japan in those days were hardly applied in the early Republican period in Turkey. This fact can be taken as the weakness of the development of a collective identity.

### Leftist activism

The working class struggle was not limited to a repertoire of individual dissent even in that period when the legal opportunities were very limited and class-based organization were absent. There appeared various attempts toward establishing professional organizations, albeit being illegal and closed after a while. In the bulk of those attempts which pushed the limits of legal framework and reached at a certain level of prevalence, the intervention of the leftist movements and organizations were observed.

The most significant dimension of the leftist activism, which made it different from the individual and unorganized unrest mentioned above, was its emphasis on the class identity. In the pamphlets and similar propaganda materials prepared for the factory workers and miners by the CPT, the discourse underlying the collective class identity appeared in the foreground. For instance, the motto of the *Orak Çekiç*, which was published by the CPT during the 1930s, was “all the workers in the world, unite!” This journal published several materials concerning the collective interests and struggle of working class.

For instance, the discussions on the Labor Code, dated 1936, were evaluated in this journal, and the communists, who rejected “the Labor Code prepared by

Kemalist bourgeoisie,” appealed to the workers for the struggle for a real and fair code:

Workers! Fight for a labor code which is on your favor! The right to free unionization, publish newspaper, and meetings are gained through fighting. The right to strike is gained through going on strike! If you want a real labor code to be legislated: Organize meetings and demonstrations in the workshops and factories for the labor code put forward by the Communist Party of Turkey!<sup>161</sup>

The workers performed some illegal activities and demonstrations in the factories where the leftist parties were active and organized. Although the Communist Party of Turkey (CPT) had had never the opportunity for legal activity until the short legal experience in 1946, it had some affiliations among the workers, especially in Istanbul.

The factories where, despite of the restrictive laws, some initiatives toward class-based organizations were taken were those which were familiar with the leftist party’s activities before. Leftist parties could lead some illegal activities through mobilizing its cadres or sympathizers in the factories. The most famous and effective case was experienced in the tobacco sector which had been and still was the main resource of the worker cadres of the Communist Party. Behind the political activities of the tobacco workers, who constituted the most militant segment of the labor movement, were usually the members or sympathizers of the CPT.

Similar observations can be made in Sümerbank and Etibank cases. In the Sümerbank factories –and especially those which were formed in the Ottoman period, so long before the 1930s’ statist industrialization- the socialist parties could activate their old relations and members working there. In addition to the tobacco

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<sup>161</sup> “Amele arkadaş! İstedğin iş kanununun çıkarılması için savaşa geç! Serbest birlik kurmak, gazete çıkararak gösteri yapmak hakkı savaşıyla alınır. Grev hakkı grevle tanıtılır! Gerçek iş kanunun çıkarılmasını istiyorsan: Türkiye Komünist Partisinin ileri sürdüğü iş kanunu için atelyelerde, fabrikalarda toplantılar, gösteriler yap!” Mete Tunçay, ibid., p. 370.

workers, who were the main worker cadre of the party, it had connections to the rooted factories such as the Defterdar.

For instance, one day in 1936, Defterdar workers who were led by Tatar Ali, a member of the CPT, stopped working and marched on the streets. Again in the Defterdar factory, a communist worker narrated a story on dogfish which implied the significance of class consciousness. In this story, the “antagonistic relationship” between camgöz representing boss and small fishes representing workers was told, in telkin the antagonisms between capitalists and workers. Moreover, the story explained how the small fishes acting collectively overcame the camgöz, implying the importance of collective struggle instead of individual and unorganized resistance.<sup>162</sup>

Also the proceedings of the trials against members of the CPT give some clues about the leftist activism in the factories, notwithstanding exaggerated by the state in order to exacerbate the sentences. For instance, Salih Ecer, who was judged due to his communist activities in Ankara, explained in his lawsuit that he had met the communists through the mediation of a worker in the Feshane factory. In the case against the Progressive Youth Organization (*İlerici Gençlik Derneği*), affiliated to the CPT, Bilal Şen was judged due to his May Day propaganda in the Feshane factory in 1945. The communist tried to deliver pamphlets, titled “Workers, Unite!” They explained the importance of the Mayday and anti-fascist struggle, and suggested the workers to read the leftist daily newspaper Tan. Bilal Şen, who was charged with delivering the pamphlets, was both an economics student and a worker in Feshane. Şen went to the factory early in the morning, when nobody was at the

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<sup>162</sup> Interview with Suat Şükrü Kundakçı, 14.05.2006.

factory, to hide the pamphlets. When the administration of the factory noticed them, they immediately called police.<sup>163</sup>

Also Zonguldak witnessed similar activities organized by leftists. The workers established an aid fund in Kilimli in 1942, but it was banned on the grounds that it was a class-based organization, and hence, illegal.<sup>164</sup>

The records of the case against the CPT, dated 1944, indicate that few party members organized at the Karabük Iron and Steel Factory to constitute a communist cell in Karabük in 1944. Among those who tried to organize the communist cell, there were several employees including the workers and administrative personnel of the factory. For instance, Zihni Anadol was employed by the mediation of his brother who was the governor of Karabük. It was claimed that along with him, 15 workers and foremen gathered together every night to discuss what to do at the factory.<sup>165</sup> Nihat Çavuşoğlu, who had communist friends in Istanbul and was appointed as administrative employee in the Karabük factory, made contact with them and joined that group. The cell defined organizational activities at the factory as its main priority. In their gatherings, they decided to slow down the production, to increase the number of the restless workers through propaganda, to deliver the Communist Manifesto, to hang up the Manifesto on the doors of the manager assistants Fatin and Tayyip Beys. Nonetheless those duties were charged to those who were not working at the factory, since any worker involved in those sort of activities would be fired immediately by the factory.<sup>166</sup> Their propaganda materials were concerned overwhelmingly with anti-fascism and criticism of the economic policies in Turkey, and so on.

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<sup>163</sup> Rasih Nuri İleri (ed.), *Kırklı Yıllar-3 1945 İGB Davası*, İstanbul: TÜSTAV, 2003, pp. 117-118.

<sup>164</sup> Kadir Tuncer, *ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>165</sup> Rasih Nuri İleri (ed.), *Kırklı Yıllar-2 1944 TKP Davası*, İstanbul: TÜSTAV, 2003, pp. 15-16.

<sup>166</sup> Rasih Nuri İleri, *ibid.*, pp. 71-74.

Those who were judged in 1944 due to their militant activities in Karabük included factory employees, such as Zihni Turgay Anadol (control officer), Mustafa Osmanoglu (repairman) and Sami Memiş (electrician). In addition, the court records demonstrated that Sevket Ertekin (mechanic), Ertugrul Istanbulu and Ahmet Ozkok (rollers), who did military service in the factory, involved into those political activities.

Obviously, those political activities of the CPT were strictly controlled and investigated by police, which collected information about the militants thanks to the “insider” workers. For the Orak Çekiç was publishing blacklists announcing the names of those insiders and where they worked. The factories where the insiders were announced included some Sümerbank companies, as well as the state-run tobacco factories and private enterprises. For instance Mesih from the Beykoz, Fahri from the Alpulu, Erzurumlu Mesrur Naci from the Defterdar factories were among them.<sup>167</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter, the labor dissent and movement preceding the lift on the ban on unionization, including both the unorganized and individual reactions against the industrial transformation, and organized leftist activism is examined. In conclusion, two main arguments need to be underlined:

Examining the legacy of inter-class relations, it is observed that the ascending moments of the working class movement corresponded with the periods when the political mobilization and turmoil ascended in general. In other words, the

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<sup>167</sup> Mete Tunçay, *ibid.*, pp. 375-376.

revolutionary mood of the early 1900s or the national struggle of the 1920s count, as far as the working class activism was concerned. More importantly, not only the ascendance political struggles, but also the re-consolidation processes strongly influenced the labor movement. For every consolidation of the Turkish establishment targeted the labor activism, in the sense that it was attacked and annihilated at both the organizational and political levels. Those consolidation processes detained the labor organizations and movement from securing organizational inheritance. Suffering many interruption throughout its history, the emergence of an accumulative legacy and experience in the labor movement was handicapped.

The late 1920s and 1930s witnessed a similar consolidation process of the Turkish capitalism, with the ruling classes trying to leave the revolutionary and shaken period behind. One of the targets of that recomposition of the political sphere was working class movement, along with the Kurdish movement and other dynamics challenging the new-born and fragile Turkish bourgeois republic. Consequently, the Turkish working classes entered those years the ban on their rights to organize and other restrictive laws and policies imposed upon them. Under those circumstances, the workers applied different ways of expression of their dissent, which, in the majority of cases, were deprived of organizational instruments, which constituted a specific repertoire of self-expression, ranging from absenteeism and petitions to illegal attempts by militant workers, the majority of whom were affiliated with radical leftist parties such as the Communist Party of Turkey.

At this point, the second important debate to be made in this chapter appears: that is, to what extent the workers protesting the conditions perceived themselves and acted as class conscious proletarians or as peasants-in-the-factories rejecting the impositions of the industrial relations and rebelling against the unnatural restraints of



the hostile industrial society –and applying their sense of justice characterized by village life and agricultural economy to city and industrial employment.

This study concludes that the fair reaction and dissent of the peasant-workers against the living and working conditions imposed on them by the industrial employment did not refer to the “identity of being worker;” in contrast, represented a resistance against becoming a worker. The paternalist image of the state in the petitions written by the workers are the example of the fact that, in the absence of a worker identity, the content of the self-expression was dominated by the ideological discourses and patterns of the Turkish ruling classes, which, in turn, handicapped the development of ideological, political and organizational independence of the workers from the governing parties or state apparatus.

It was partly due to the lack of an organizational base for the self-expression. Since the class identity cannot be inferred from the class structure itself, and classes are not the direct functions of the process of production, collective identity prerequisites collective action. Accordingly, the following chapter will focus on the period after the lift on the ban on unionization, which witnessed a wave of massive unionization and the re-emergence of class-based organizations, including both the trade unions and leftist parties.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **TRADE UNIONISM IN THE PUBLIC ENTERPRISES**

Once the ban on the establishment of class-based organizations stipulated by the Law on Societies was lifted in 1946, a wave of unionization, the majority of which were in the public enterprises, started. The period following 1946 can be divided into two phrases.

The first one contained the experience called 1946 unionism, which was highly predominated by the general ideological confrontation of the post-war period. This experience paved the way for radical movements that could not be dominated by the governing party and the state. The leftist parties that were established in the same period, namely the Socialist Party of Turkey (SPT) and the Socialist Laborers and Peasants Party of Turkey (SLPPT), achieved an organization expansion and strenght through those unions, which alarmed the RPP.

This period lasted only six months and was eliminated through the liquidation of the leftist parties and the trade unions affiliated with those. The restrictive Law on Trade Unions was promulgated in 1947 and especially the trade unions which were thought to be linked to the leftist parties were liquidated. That law ushered a new phrase of a new unionism that was strictly controlled by the governing party and parliamentary opposition, competing to each other.

In this respect, the 1946 and 1947 unionisms are taken as two contrasting experiences in Turkish labor history. While the former represented a class-based unionism accompanied by the establishment of legal socialist parties, the latter was identified as a controlled unionism under the shadow of the restrictive Law on Unions.

In this chapter, both the 1946 and 1947 unionism will be examined, with particular reference to their repercussions on the public enterprises, focusing on both how the workers experienced the unionization, and the radical leftist parties involved into the process, and the Republican People's Party and Democrat Party perceived massive unionization and ascending labor activism.

### The Short But Radical Experience of 1946 Unionization

To focus on the experience of 1946 unionization in the public enterprises, it was characterized by the ideological confrontation between the socialist and capitalist blocs, as has been already mentioned, and was strongly influenced by the radical leftist tendencies as a result of the leading role of newly-established socialist parties. The 1946 unionization followed a long-lasting ban on any class-based organization, including both trade unions and radical leftist parties referring to class-based politics. The lift of that ban paved the way for a class-based and militant working class activism, and that short period lasting until the enforcement of the restrictive Law on Trade Unions (1947) served as a laboratory demonstrating the radical dynamics within the Turkish working class.

Accordingly, the main characteristic of the 1946 unions was their reference to being class-based organization, aiming at the formation of class identity among Turkish workers through fortifying the class unity and collectivity. For instance, the Istanbul Workers' Club declared its aim as follows:

Annihilating the disunity of the localized labor movements, sharing the lessons derived from individual experiences, laying the foundation for several movements and activities to complete and support each other, fortifying the

sense of unity among the workers employed different factories and workplaces.<sup>168</sup>

Although the figures about the number of the trade unions and their members were conflicting, the Cumhuriyet asserted that it reached 700 in short time.<sup>169</sup> It was claimed that the number of the workers organized by the trade unions affiliated to the socialist parties reached 10,000 in Istanbul. Among them, the Textile Workers Trade Union of Turkey unionized 4,500 workers in month.<sup>170</sup> One of the reasons why the unionism set off such immediate and massive repercussions lay in the continuing burden of the National Protection Law on the textile workers. The law, which envisaged three-hour extra-work, created tremendous reactions among the workers.

Furthermore, if the cities where the 1946 unions were established were taken into consideration, the legacy of class movement and the leftist activism should be added to the former fact. It can be argued that the socialist parties mobilized the legacy of working class activism in those cities and sectors, along with its own cadres. For instance, the textile factories in Istanbul and Izmir or the Zonguldak mine basin had already witnessed an influential and widespread activism long before the trade unions were proclaimed legal. As for Adana, it had always been an important center of the class movement, with its worker population in agriculture, as well as industry. The worker movements in Zonguldak basin, which was active from the mid-1800s onwards, had had a rooted heritage, including the 1908 strikes.

To begin with the repercussions of the 1946 experience particularly on the Sümerbank and Etibank companies, the trade unions established in those factories

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<sup>168</sup> “Mahalli işçi hareketlerini dağınıklıktan kurtarmak, her birinin tecrübelerinden dierleri için dersler çıkarmak, muhtelif hareket ve faaliyetlerin birbirlerini tamamlamaları ve desteklemeleri imkanını hazırlamak, muhtelif istihsal şubelerinde çalışan işçi tabakaları arasında tesanüt duygularını kuvvetlendirmek” Zafer Toprak, 1946 Sendikacılığı: Sendika Gazetesi, İşçi Sendikaları Birlikleri ve İşçi Kulüpleri, *Toplumsal Tarih*, No. 31 (July 1996), p. 24.

<sup>169</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, 19 December 1946.

<sup>170</sup> Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul: 1996, p. 174.

included the Textile Workers Trade Union of Turkey (*Türkiye Mensucat İşçileri Sendikası*), Adana Textile Workers Trade Union (*Adana Mensucat Sanayii İşçileri Sendikası*), İzmir Textile Workers Trade Union (*İzmir Mensucat Sanayii İşçileri*), Bakırköy Cloth Factory Workers Trade Union (*Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası İşçileri Sendikası*), and Zonguldak Coal Basin Workers Trade Union (*Zonguldak Kömür Havzası İşçileri Sendikası*).

As for the socialist parties' involvement, both SPT and SLPPT formed their own trade unions, according to their own programmatic tenets and organizational strength or background in different sectors.

SPT organized the Textile Workers Trade Union of Turkey, and Iron and Steel Workers of Turkey. While the former was established overwhelmingly by weavers, the president of the latter was an engineer.

On the other hand, the SLPPT seemed to unionize faster and became more influential in the labor movement. It was partly due to the fact that the cadres who were active in organizing factories were member of the latter party. It can be assumed that the trade unions of which regulations were published in the party's journal *Sendika* (The Union) were penetrated and influenced, if not established and led, by the party. Basing upon this assumption, the Bakırköy Cloth Factory Workers Trade Union and İzmir Textile Workers Trade Union were the unions which were organized in the Sümerbank and Etibank factories in affiliation with the SLPPT.<sup>171</sup>

The party's journal *Sendika* put a special emphasis on the debate on organizational structure of unionism. According to the journal, that the workers themselves organize their unions and the class-conscious workers head the unionization were of central importance. Besides, the unions should be formed at the

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<sup>171</sup> For also the other unions organized in other public enterprises or private factories in affiliation with the SLPPT see Zafer Toprak, *ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

factory or workshop level, and by the workers working there. Every factory could, and indeed should, have its own union, even if they were active in the same sector. This was so especially if the number of workers was at a certain level, as was in the public enterprises.

Accordingly, this party rejected to start the unionization with a nation-wide confederation. This was due to their assumption that with the from-up-to-bottom initiatives, the predomination of the labor organization was intended. Instead of starting with nation-wide confederations, the workshop unions could form a federation in a certain sector later on. That is, the trade unions organized in the same sector but in different regions could unite and form union federations. And by extention, federations in the similar sectors could gather together and establish a nation-wide confederation.<sup>172</sup>

For the Workers' Unions Association (*İşçi Sendikaları Birlikleri*) which was envisaged to be formed in accordance with the framework mentioned above, sixteen regions or cities and sixteen sectors were chosen. Those cities included İstanbul, Trakya, Kocaeli, Bursa, İzmir (Aegean region), Zonguldak (and its neighborhood), Eskişehir, Ankara, Kayseri, Sivas, Malatya, Diyarbakır, Samsun, Trabzon, Çukurova (Adana and its neighborhood), and Aydın (and its neighborhood). As for the sectors, they were mining, mining industry, coal and woods industry, transportation, energy, warfare, construction, agricultural industry, textiles, tobacco, shoe, publishing, ports, and navigation. The sectors and cities the party aimed at organizing included those where Sümerbank and Etibank companies were active, too.<sup>173</sup>

These preferences pointed, on the one hand, to the cities (such as İstanbul, İzmir and Adana) where the class movement was already rooted and the left already

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<sup>172</sup> Zafer Toprak, *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>173</sup> Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, *ibid.*, p. 171-172.

active, and where working class was formed by the industrialization move led by Sümerbank, on the other (such as Malatya and Kayseri). The party was succesful in organizing the Bakırköy Cloth Factory Workers Trade Union (*Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası İşçileri Sendikası*), İzmir Textile Industry Workers Trade Union (*İzmir Tekstil Sanayii İşçileri Sendikası*), and Adana Yarn and Weaving Workers Trade Union (*Adana İplik ve Dokuma İşçileri Sendikası*).

As if the newly-industrializing cities of Anatolia, the unionization experience started after 1947, and was led and manipulated by the RPP. This fact demonstrates the important role of the inheritance in the establishment of unions which are independent from the governing party and state.

Yet the RPP did not wait for the law on unions, and attempted to take the initiative in order not to leave the unions to the hands of socialist parties, especially in the public enterprises. As a way of that, in the state-run enterprises, the RPP employed workers to be raised “worker leaders” who were to manipulate the workers in the industrialized regions with a dense worker population in accordance with the ideological-political stance of the governing party. Those “leaders” acted as an extension of the governing party at factory. They even had a say in firing or employing of the workers, with respect to, among other things, political concerns.<sup>174</sup>

The experience of the Society of Turkish Workers is an example of organizations infiltrated by the governing party to counterweight the uncontrolled unionization attempt. The Society gave the priority to unionizing in the textile sector, which assumed a critical place with its huge number of workers employed. Yet after this attempt proved unsuccessful, compared to the activism achieved by the 1946 unionism, the RPP developed a new strategy which contained the liquidation of the

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<sup>174</sup> M. Şehmus Güzel, “1940’larda İşgücünün (İşçilerin) Özellikleri,” *Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi*, no. 119 (May 1990), p. 20.

existing unions and initiating a controlled unionization through strict control from the very beginning. The Law on Trade Unions assumed that role of maintaining discipline in the unionization movement, rather than the liberalization and democratization necessitated by the incorporation to the “free world.”

As for the Society of Turkish Workers, after the trade unions and Workers’ Club affiliated with the socialist parties were liquidated, it sent off a telgraph to the Martial Command, giving expression to its gratitude for “securing the right to unrestricted and democratic organization” and demanded an “absolute guidance” for trade unionism.<sup>175</sup>

#### Law on Unions: “Preemptive” Unionization

Before evaluating how “state-run” unionism got organized and what sort of a class movement it envisaged in Sümerbank and Etibank, some points are to be discussed. The positions taken and the arguments advanced by the bureaucrats and parties are related closely to the missions assumed to the trade unions and the actual union activities of that time.

Any discussion related to making of the union code put forth the tension between the “classless mass” and the class consciousness imputed by the picture reflected by the Western industrial centers, as quoted above from Sadi Irmak, and the deliberate approach of the capitalism in Turkey. In the discussions about the union code in the Assembly,<sup>176</sup> a group of deputies legitimately defended the argument that “there was no need for a union code in Turkey, since classes had not been determined in Turkey.” The deputies defending the code respond this argument,

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<sup>175</sup> Kemal Sülker, *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>176</sup> TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, vol. 4, no. 88 (1947), p. 87.



asking that if they would have to wait for the class struggles in the Western countries to come to their country. Vedat Dicleli uttered a similar approach in Ulus newspaper and he, as Sami Irmak, mentioned that the sole alleviation of the late industrialization was the advantage of taking early measures.<sup>177</sup> That was to say, the arrangement was some sort of "preemptive unionization" based on the 1947 Law on Trade Unions.

The most important title of this preemptive unionization was non-partisanship and that the unions should keep away from politics. However, non-partisanship was binding for the relations between parties outside the RPP (that is, the leftist parties and DP) and the unions. Especially the leftist parties' attempt for organizing the workers which triggered the unionization tendencies had alarmed the governing party. As mentioned in the examples of the unions organized in Sumerbank and Etibank, there had been a series of interferences by the RPP, especially through the workers office of the party.

The politics prohibition of the unions went beyond the party affiliation and in general forbade the unions from getting involved in political issues. However, in general, the prohibition included the lines outside the political program of the RPP and the political preferences of Turkish capitalism, not all the political positions. Otherwise, the Law on Unions declared that all unions were to be nationalist. Here, nationalism was defined as the opposite of internationalism. It was possible to define such a sense of the state, considering the international conditions of the term. The increasing prestige of the Soviet Unions after the war and reflection of such prestige in the European worker activism through internationalist solidarity impelled the RPP to take measures in this regard. While the review called *Türk İşçisi*, published by the RPP for the workers, indicated that the Turkish unions should not be involved in

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<sup>177</sup> Vedat Dicleli, "İşçi ve İşveren Sendikaları," *Çalışma Dergisi*, May 1947, no. 16.

politics, it also included editorial articles related to world politics under the title of "what is happening in the world" on every issue. The common theme of those articles was anti-Sovietism and anti-communism in parallel with the ideological mood in the capitalist block of the term.

In one such article, for example, the country, which delayed the peace in the world was the Soviet Russia, which wished to spread communism throughout the world. Anglo-Saxons were the power that would introduce peace in the world in spite of the aggressive policy the Soviets imposed.<sup>178</sup> In an article appraising the Marshall Aid, the well-known "iron curtain" literature was referred to and it was asserted that Soviet Russia maintained a spreading tradition inherited by the tsardom, wanted land in the Straits and eastern Anatolia, and the USA helped Turkey and Greece withstand such pressures coming from Russia.<sup>179</sup>

The Soviet Union was criticized on workers' rights, too. It was argued that in the Soviet Union, which was a reference for the working class and the leftist movement of that period not only in Turkey but also in the whole world, people suffered extreme poverty and the country gave the least amount of freedom to organize to its workers. The critics concerning the pressures on the right to organization of workers, taking the Soviet Unions as example, were opposed. The reason for Turkey's inability to allocate a source for the workers and the villagers was that the budget had to allocate money for the army because of the Soviet threat.<sup>180</sup>

*Türk İşçisi* suggested that the Turkish workers should take Western Europe as example, departing from such anti-communist propaganda. According to the journal,

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<sup>178</sup> *Türk İşçisi*, 21 December 1946, no. 5.

<sup>179</sup> *Türk İşçisi*, 21 December 1946, no. 5.

<sup>180</sup> As few examples; see "İşçi derneklerinin kuruluş maksadı ve mahiyeti," *Türk İşçisi*, 28 December 1946, no. 6; *Türk İşçisi*, 5 April 1947, no. 20.

there were different types of unions; for example, the unions in France were anarchist and the unions in England were reformist. Each country established unions in line with its structure. As for the structure in Turkey, the English model was more convenient. In this context, several examples from the English trade unions were given.

The journal, which argued that reformist unionism was appropriate for the Turkish workers, invited the workers not to nurse a grudge against the boss and not to come to the communist incitement, considering the experience of 1946 unionism. Anyway, there had been no worker activism left in the country after commencing of the operations of the Ministry of Labor.<sup>181</sup> The review also responded to the critics arguing that the Law on Unions was promulgated too early. According to this, unless the unions were not be taken under control with a rapid action, the communist propaganda would be given rise, as in 1946, and the worker activism organized by the communists in France would be experienced in Turkey.<sup>182</sup>

The journal attributed to the unions established by the law not only a preventive mission, but also a duty of policing against the leftist activities. Against the Law on Unions including a restrictive motivation for 1946 move, "a counter-propaganda has been commenced among the worker circles. To determine such agitators and deliver them to the laws are the citizenship duty of the workers' unions."<sup>183</sup>

The strike prohibition also was considered by associating it with the prohibition of political activism, besides the economic requirements of the late industrialization. It was claimed that the political movements could not be prevented

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<sup>181</sup> "Bizdeki Solcular," *Türk İşçisi*, 8 February 1947, no. 12.

<sup>182</sup> Abidin Daver, "İşçi Sendikaları ve Grev Hakkı," *Türk İşçisi*, 1 March 1947, no. 15.

<sup>183</sup> "Türk işçisi sendikaları! Vazife başına," *Türk İşçisi*, 10 May 1947, no. 25: "İşçi muhitlerinde karşı propaganda başlamıştır. İşçi sendikalarının bu ajitatörleri tespit edip kanuna teslim etmesi vatan borcudur."

easily, once a tool such as strike had commenced to be used. It was further claimed that the strike was incited by the Soviet Union for intervening into the domestic affairs of other countries. Examples from Europe and the USA were frequently referred to and it was told how the communists increased their political affects through strikes:

Do you think we should give the right to strike to the Turkish workers and let our country become a ruin? Today, to grant the right to strike to the Turkish workers ... means to give communism a chance. The communists will go into operation from this strike issue and will spend their best efforts for collapsing us internally. We cannot give the degenerated people of this ignominious regime, who do not recognize God and kick the honor concept, a chance.<sup>184</sup>

#### “State-owned” Unions in State-owned Enterprises

The government attempted to establish trade unions in order to control the worker organizations through a law it initiated. However, the workers were reluctant to organize unions and to subscribe the organized unions due to the fear of being accused of being communists. For, while the unions of 1946 were being closed, almost every activists, who were executing unionists activities, were accused for being communists and some of them were tried for being members of a communist party.<sup>185</sup>

On the other hand, the RPP insisted that some unions under its own control rapidly be established. To quote Sadi Irmak, the Minister of Labor of those days, who invited the workers to become members of the unions organized by the government in a speech he gave to the workers of Ereğli coal basin in 1947,

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<sup>184</sup> Grev Olayları ve Türkiyemiz, Ankara: Çalışma Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1950, p. 75: “*Grev hakkını Türk işçisine verelim de memleketimizi viranelere mi döndürelim? Bugün Türk işçisine grev hakkını vermek demek ... komünizme meydan vermek demektir. Bu grev meselesinden kızılar hemen faaliyete geçecek ve bizi içten yıkmak için elden gelen gayreti sarfedeceklerdi. Allah tanımayan ve namus mefhumunu tekmeliyen bu alçak rejimin soysuzlarına meydan veremeyiz.*”

<sup>185</sup> See “Kızılar Adalet Karşısında,” *Türk İşçisi*, 2 August 1947, no. 37.

we think that, as a developed country cannot leave its citizens, social groups and classes to their own destiny, we do not want them to award their rights by themselves. In accordance with the mentality of a developed country, we think that it is reasonable and necessary that the Turkish government should arrange the social life.<sup>186</sup>

Sadi Irmak, who joined the establishment ceremony of Zonguldak Mine Workers Union with the governor of Zonguldak, made similar statements.<sup>187</sup> However, the intervention to the unions were not limited only to such statements. It was also current that the unions were intervened organizationally in such meetings. For example, RPP deputies Ismail Ergene and Sabri Koçer, RPP chairman and the governor participated the annual general assembly of the union besides 300 delegates elected by the member of the union. Worker deputy Sabri Koçer was elected as the chairman of the congress.<sup>188</sup> According to the law, the congress could only consist of members of the union. But among the participants of that congress, there were deputies, and moreover one of them was elected as the congress chairman. At the union meetings held in this way, no complaint was expressed in the speeches given by the worker delegates, whose election was probably supervised by the party, based on the newspapers.

A workers office was established in this regard, which was especially intended for the state-run factories, and Rebi Barkın was elected as the chairman of this office. Rebi Barkın organized visits to the state-run factories and held some meetings with the workers employed in such factories and checked them. It was seen that the activities of the office were focused on the textile sector and especially on the public works. There were many reasons for such focusing. First of all, some dynamics that

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<sup>186</sup> Kemal Sülker, p. 88: “Biz o kanaatteyiz ki, ileri bir devlet vatandaşları zümre ve sınıfları kendi kaderlerine terk edemediği gibi kendi vasıtaları ile haklarını ihkak etmelerini de istemeyiz. İleri bir devlet anlayışına uygun olarak türk devletinin sosyal hayatı nizamlamasını tabii ve zaruri görüyoruz.”

<sup>187</sup> “Yurdun En Büyük İşçi Sendikası Kömür Havzasında Kuruldu,” *Türk İşçisi*, 12 April 1947, no. 21.

<sup>188</sup> Cumhuriyet, 10 April 1948.

might occur in the unions beyond its control, and especially the leftists' ability to direct the unions, as well as the vote struggle that was introduced by the transition into the multiparty regime had important roles. In addition, it can be argued that the RPP needed to get free from the image of being the party of the state and to consolidate its social connections. Textiles had some important characteristics in this regard. First, it employed a large number of workers. Moreover, this sector was spread throughout Anatolia, unlike the mining sector. Therefore, the "representative affect" of a connection that could be achieved over this sector could be used for traversing the other connections one by one.

The specific focus on the public sector in the textile industry might be caused by a possible irritation of the private capital from the unionization activities, which would undermine the relationship between the party and that social class. Likewise, there were some examples illustrating that even the managements of the state-run factories suffered from such activities, although they were under the control of RPP, and sometimes they could find some channels to express their discomfort within the party. As for the private sector, the employers were immediately firing anyone who was engaged in such activities. An example of such events will be given below.

The report issued by Barkın after his visit to the Nazilli factory was a product of his studies carried out in the state-owned textile factories. He evaluated the working conditions at the factory and warned that men working under such difficult conditions would inevitably sympathize with the opposition. He quoted that 100 to 150 people, who had attended the meeting he convened, had criticized the power scathingly. After such evaluations, Barkın answered the question of how the administration and the party in power could please the workers and suggested that the administration not behave crudely to the workers, rather than improving the

working conditions, on the grounds that otherwise they would sympathize with the communists. He claimed that the actual agents of the communists were not the ones who manifest their thoughts at those meetings with the administration or party leaders, but those who worked slyly and camouflaged. He suggested that the police should secretly carry out some investigations about such people.<sup>189</sup>

Further visits by the RPP leaders and ministers were organized in the state-run factories in Adana, Malatya, Kayseri, İstanbul, İzmir and Zonguldak.<sup>190</sup> In all of them, some messages in line with the governmental approach were given to the workers, such as the unionist act should not be involved in politics, they should ignore the provocations originated from the foreign countries, implying the Soviet Union, or the state and the government granted all the rights to the workers without any strike.

Sometimes, during such visits, party leaders participated directly in union meetings. Sadi Irmak, for example, held a meeting at the Adana İplik ve Dokuma İşçileri Sendikası and addressed the unionist workers. In his speech, referring to how the Turkish unions should work and what should they intend, Irmak said,

Turkish unions will be kept out of the political movements ... one of the main characteristics of the Turkish unions is that they are nationalist ... some interests of the workers and employers, other than the common national issues, can be contradictory to each other. We believe in a juridical system that prefers arranging the intervention of the State rather than the domination of one of such group against the other.<sup>191</sup>

Those interventions in the congresses sometimes caused sensational events that became widely known by the public, and led to hot discussions on the sincerity of the

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<sup>189</sup> Rebi Barkın, Nazillide işçilerin geçim ve barınma şartları (unpublished report), 13 July 1949.

<sup>190</sup> See “Muhalefet Grevi Sihirli Kutu Mu Zannediyor,” *Ulus*, 7 November 1949; “İş Kanununun tadili münasebetiyle grev konusuna ilişkin bir konuşma,” *Grev Olayları ve Türkiyemiz*, pp. 91-94.

<sup>191</sup> “Türk Sendikalarının Amacı ve Karakteri,” *Türk İşçisi*, 17 May 1947, no. 26: “Türk sendikaları siyasi cereyanların dışında kalacaklardır ... Türk sendikalarının bir ana vasfı milli teşekküller olmalarıdır ... İşçi ve işverenin müşterek vatan meseleleri dışında bazı menfaatleri birbirine zıt olabilir. Bu zıddiyetler karşısında bu zümrelerin birbirine tahakküm etmeleri yerine Devletin basireti vadil nizamlayıcı müdahalesini tercih eden bir hukuk sistemine inanıyoruz.”

principle of non-partisanship. For instance, at the congress of the Bakırköy Textile Workers Union, which was unionized at the Bakırköy Sümerbank factory, a foreman called Enver Usta claimed that the workers affiliated with the ruling party received easy promotions and manipulated the union. This tension was reflected in the control board of the trade union, and hence, some members of the board abstained from approving the financial accounts. Upon this, Enver was expelled first from the congress hall and then from the union.<sup>192</sup>

It was also common that the workers, who met with the party leaders during their factory visits, kept their contact with the party and led the unionization attempts. For instance, after Barkın's visit to the Isparta yarn and textile factory, Hilmi Uz, a foreman in that factory, sent a personal letter to Barkın, expressing his gratitude because Barkın had dealt with his "cumbersome problem." Then Uz informed Barkın that they would soon establish their trade union and subscribe the workers to *Hürbilek*, a journal published by the RPP. As Dogan stresses, organizing such visits to industrial centers and meetings with the workers employed in the public sector was "the conventional strategy to gain useful adherents from among the workers, and turn them into party agents to organize the workers."<sup>193</sup>

Hence, the Bureau pursued its unionization activities in public enterprises through mobilizing selected workers who were members of or close to the RPP. Those attempts sometimes resulted in tension with the administration of the factory. For example, the administration of the Kayseri Cloth Factory which resisted these attempts was targeted by *Hürbilek*. The journal published news accusing the administration of the mismanagement of the factory and worsening situation of the workers. The president of the Kayseri trade union convened a visit to the Labor

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<sup>192</sup> "Bakırköy Mensucat İşçileri Çok Heyecanlı Bir Toplantı Yaptı," *Hürbilek*, 25 September 1948, quoted by Mustafa Görkem Dogan, *ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>193</sup> Mustafa Görkem Dogan, *ibid.*, p. 149.



Ministry and the Ministry of Economy in Ankara, which implied that the government was interested deeply in the problems of the workers.<sup>194</sup>

Monetary relations were one of the instruments appropriated for controlling the unions. The legal channel of such monetary relations was the aids provided for the unions from the workers penalty payments deducted in accordance with the Article 30 of the Labor Code by the Minister of Labor. The organizations that received money included some unions organized in the public textile industry, especially the Defterdar Factory Youth Club, Eyüp Textile Workers Union (organized in the Defterdar factory), and Bakırköy Cloth Factory Workers Union. However, some rumors were circulating such that the Party had donated about 7,000-8,000 Turkish liras per year both to the workers who worked for the Party and the unions through informal channels.<sup>195</sup>

While the office focused on the textile industry on a sectoral basis, Istanbul was the capital of the economic activities, working class movements and especially the radical politics. The textile sector in Istanbul was dense in Eyüp and its vicinity. The largest one among such factories was the Defterdar textile factory. It was clear that the Party considered controlling the workers employed in this factory very important; so much that the penalty payments were first provided to this factory.

However, there were some specific difficulties of pursuing such activities in Istanbul. The RPP was obliged to follow the strategy of liquidating the competing unions and dominating the realm rather than leading to unionization and ensuring control in Istanbul, which had a rooted legacy of class movement and radical politics, compared to the textile factories in many other Anatolian cities. The efforts were

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<sup>194</sup> “Bir Devlet Fabrikasının Feci Durumu Kayseri Bez Fabrikasının Halini Açıklıyoruz,” *Hürbilek*, 21 August 1948, quoted by Dogan, *ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>195</sup> Kemal Sülker, *ibid.*, p. 90.

made to unite many unions that were organized outside the party initiative and dominate them under the strict control of the RPP.

The first experiment of such efforts was the attempt to introduce a common association for the workers' unions in Istanbul. The Golden Horn Region Textile Workers Union, organized at the Defterdar factory and controlled by RPP, was the initiator of that attempt. The objective was to prevent the other two unions that were not dominated by the party from initiating first, and not to leave Istanbul to other political groups. These two unions were the Istanbul Tobacco Workers' and Istanbul Textile Workers' unions. The affiliation of those unions with the leftist parties was well-known. Those unions were not invited to the founding meetings of the association. Five of the 16 unions gathering under the Istanbul Workers' Unions Association were the unions organized in the textile sector: the Golden Horn Region Textile Industry Workers' Union, Bakırköy Textile Workers' Union, Fatih Eminönü Textile Workers' Union, Beyoğlu Textile Workers' Union and Eyüp Golden Horn Textile Workers' Union.<sup>196</sup>

After organizing a location-based association in Istanbul, the RPP attempted to organize a sector-wide unification in textile, as well. Yet since the election term was drawing near, that attempt was impeded by the rising competition between the RPP and the DP, and failed until 1951, as the resentment of the workers towards the governing party increased especially before the elections. Consequently, the Eyüp-Haliç Textile Workers Union, which was controlled by the DP, strongly opposed the RPP's intervention in the unionization affairs, and hence, the merger of the trade unions organized in that sector. At first, the other four trade unions decided to merger, and then in 1951, the other one participated in the merger.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Kemal Sülker, *ibid.*, 91-92.

<sup>197</sup> Kemal Sülker, *ibid.*, 96-98.

The intervention of the RPP and state to the trade unions through the Law on Unions, dated 1947, closed the short period of independent and radical unionism experience of the Turkish working class, which lasted until the rise of socialist politics and militant working class movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The labor movement would accompany with the radicalization of politics in general again, which turned the Turkish capitalist establishment's "classless society" into the fertile soil of class struggles. When the working class movement, which also established strong organic ties to the organized socialist politics, gained a massive social basis and support from both the class itself and different segments of the society, the strict measures against any possible labor movement in those days proved ineffective to a large extent. Those measures which led a marxist intellectual in those days to write the following irony in a journal: "Poor Marx, you have so many enemies even in a 'classless society!'"<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Interview with Suat Şükrü Kundakçı, 14.05.2006.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

In this study, the formation of the Turkish industrial working class in the public enterprises Sümerbank and Etibank with reference to its economic, social and political dimensions is examined. In this part, some concluding remarks are to be made.

Two questions inspired this study: Firstly, to what extent the material and social facilities provided by those enterprises can be evaluated with reference to a systematic social policy, whether favoring it as an improvement in the welfare of the workers or condemning it as an attempt for formation a new subject. Secondly, how different ways of self-expression of the peasants-working-in-the-factory should be analyzed, as far as the ideological and political dimensions of the formation process and the dynamics of the class consciousness are concerned.

To start with the first question, there is a general tendency of considering those facilities as instruments of social policy and then discuss the sufficiency in respect to their effects on the welfare of working class. It is argued that, although the opportunities provided by the public factories felt short of covering and satisfying the needs of the workers, they were sufficient enough to enhance the working and living conditions of the workers compared those employed by the private sector, and aimed at the formation of permanent working class through applying a systematic employment policy towards providing stability. Ahmet Makal, to whom this study refers several times, represents this approach, with his emphasis on the positive impacts of statist industrialization on the formation of the Turkish working class, albeit considering its shortages.

On the other hand, still taking the social policies as a point of departure, another argument emphasizes that “although there were insufficiencies and unevenness in the application stage, the goal of these facilities was to form a new subject who came to the factory regularly, worked in a disciplined manner, and had a high productivity level. However, fulfillment of this goal depended not only to the facilities aiming to improve the welfare of individuals, but also to the control and discipline processes, both in and outside the workplace.”<sup>199</sup> Following this argumentation, Can Nacar properly depicts how the performance of workers in the workplace was scrutinized carefully. In this way, Nacar recollects that those facilities were a component of the control and domination over the labor force, which was as an inherent part of the formation of working class.

Although the attempt to re-read the history, looking through the experiences of workers and highlighting the discipline processes, in various studies on labor history in recent years are valuable, both argumentations miss the point, which this study tries to stress: abstaining from an exaggerated attribution of “systematic attempts” towards either creating the Republic’s “prosperous and civilized” workers, or in contrast, a new subject, which is strongly subordinated by a well-established discipline and indoctrination process inside and outside the workplace. Rather than that, this study tends to stress the *ad hoc* character of those policies, including those aiming at strict control and discipline over the workers. In this respect, whether the facilities provided by the enterprises improved the welfare of the peasant-workers, compared to their life in the village, or to what extent did the discipline processes serve to the indoctrination and subordination of the workers by the Republic is rather beside the point.

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<sup>199</sup> Can Nacar, *ibid.*, p. 152.

The basic agenda of the slow process of industrialization in Turkey were the problems regarding the supply and stability of the labor force throughout the 1930s-1940s. The fact that the slow process of industrialization did not pave the way for generation of mass employment on the one hand, and by extension, the continuing prevalence of small property in land ownership, on the other hand, made the public enterprises to find solutions to the problem of the labor force supply. For instance, the housing policy of the state enterprises were envisaged as a solution to this problem, rather than providing strict control over the free time of workers.

Furthermore, that solution was not figured out from the perspective of breaking the peasants from their lives in the village and pulling them to the city and factory so as to create a new subject which, in the long run, was supposed to turn into a disciplined, urbanized and permanent industrial labor force.

It was so not only because the facilities provided felt short of encouraging permanent employment in factories. For, as in several other late-capitalist experiences, Turkish capitalist development tend to counterbalance the problems caused by the paucity or disqualification of the labor force through intensifying the direct exploitation, which also explains why more coercive methods in disciplinizing the workforce massively, such as constructing prisons within the area of factory complex, rather than more indirect manipulation of recreational activities.

First of all, assuming that there was a radical break from the agricultural employment toward an urban and industrial employment would not be realistic. It would be more realistic to argue that for the majority of the industrial labor, the factory and city life was an extension and continuation of the village with its prevailing social relations in the village. By extension, assuming that the state and the administration of the enterprises perceived the continuation of the economic and

social bonds to the countryside as a problem to be solved through incentive or repressive instruments resulting in permanent employment is, at least, open to discussion. For the same bonds and mechanisms were taken as a “relief valve” securing the social coherence, too.

Discussions concerning the possible social disintegration and disturbances as a consequence of industrialization and destruction of the traditional economic structure in the village, especiall in case of an economic crises, were the most illuminative example of that. Those discussion are crucial in understanding whether a systematic policy toward creating a permanent industrial labor force, beyond resolving immediate labor shortage through *ad hoc* practices, was conducted. They demonstrate that the policies practiced were hardly engaged in securing such a permanence of the labor force.

As is mentioned several times in this study, what made Turkish case discrete was that, for instance, the housing facilities were planned in a way which discourages a permanent tie to the factory, on the grounds of political drawbacks. The housing case in Karabük, which is referred above, and is the most illuminative example of those political considerations, worths remembering:

The technical assesments on the Zonguldak mine basin concluded that 55 percent of the miners had to be settled close to the mine so as to impede the absenteeism and paucity of labor force on the eve of need for a prospective increase in production due to the war. Yet that project was avoided on the grounds that settling such an amount of miners in the same place, which is also close the city, would cause to social instabilities in the future. Instead, a small group of workers were selected with reference to their social and political obedience to be settled in the permanent houses.

In this thesis, it is claimed that Turkish capitalism, of which basic postulate was the conception of “classless society” in the sense that, thanks to its pre-emptive political measures, it would never be shaken by harsh class struggles, was stigmatized by a deliberate political consciousness, which pored over the legacy of class struggles in Europe. In this connection, the main political actors of the Turkish capitalist establishment always considered themselves as winner of the uneven development, and made use of these advantages of “coming from behind” their mainstay in handling the inter-class confrontations.

Then, what about the adverse party? Actually, various theses on Turkish labor history, which try to make room for the lower classes, attempt for attributing a central role to the workers in the policies practiced by the public enterprises. To quote Arif Dirlik, what labor history intends is to “decenter the history.”<sup>200</sup> From that point of departure, how the Turkish industrial working class experienced the process and various ways of self-expression of that experience become crucial questions which inspires those studies. As examples of the reaction or self-expression of the workers against their experience with industry, absenteeism, fleeing the mines, writing petitions to several administrative bodies or even cutting arms and feet to get a disability certificate are referred.

This focus on the experience and self-expression of the workers is inspired by the proper rejection of the common treatment toward the concept of class which assumes that classes are functions of the process of production, in the sense that they are not its subjects, but determined by its form. Challenging this treatment, E.P. Thompson’s intervention for re-writing the history underlines that,

class formations . . . arise at the intersection of determination and self-activity; the working class “made itself as much as it was made.” We cannot

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<sup>200</sup> Arif Dirlik, *Modernity as history: post-revolutionary China, globalization and the question of modernity*, *Social History* Vol. 27, No. 1, January 2002, pp. 16-38.



put “class” here and “class consciousness” there, as two separate entities, the one sequential upon the other, since both must be taken together –the experience of determination, and the “handling” of this in conscious ways. Nor can we deduce class from a static “section” (since it is a becoming over time), nor as a function of a mode of production, since class formations and class consciousness (while subject to determinate pressures) eventuate in an open-ended process of relationship –of struggle with other classes- over time.<sup>201</sup>

Departing from that point, the labor historians referring this important challenge by Thompson tend to focus on daily experiences of working class. But this very focus can be misleading if the point which is as central as the former is missed. That is, in place of a static, instrumentalist economic determinism, Thompson treated class as a dynamic social relation, a form of social domination, which requires to take the historical and actual class dispositions which are shaped by relationships into consideration. And this, by extension, requires that a more “holistic” and integral model of inter-class relations is developed. In evaluating the formation of working class movement with its particular repertoire and peculiarities, those of the bourgeoisie count. Just like the workers had an impact on policies figured out by the “governing elites.”

This thesis disagrees with the assertion that a model which based on the “mediation” of the whole capitalist formation, instead of focusing the “independent” (that is, “own”) experiences, handicaps workers’ appearance as a subject. Consequently, labor history requires a re-composition of the fragmented model of class relations with reference to a holistic concept in order that working class is not isolated in “their own” daily experiences and has an access to the capitalist formation, which it experiences on its part but in the course of inter-class relations, and daily but in the course of the history.

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<sup>201</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London: Merlin Press, 1978, p. 299.

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#### Interview

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