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Many Voices of a Turkish State Factory

Working at Bakırköy Cloth Factory, 1932-50

Görkem Akgöz
Many Voices of a Turkish State Factory
Working at Bakirköy Cloth Factory, 1932-50

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Faculteit der Maatschappij- en Gedragswetenschappen
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Introduction

This dissertation investigates the Bakırköy Cloth Factory, a state-owned textile factory, in Istanbul between 1932 and 1950. It is a micro-historical actor-centred study of the working and living conditions, and the development of the political consciousness and language of Bakırköy Factory workers. This first systematic archive-driven study of a factory in early Republican Turkey, i.e. the period between 1923 and 1950, introduces a whole new perspective on the study of working-class formation in Turkey in two ways. First, it analyses the relations between the politics of production and the larger framework of state politics in the contexts of a national factory, a factory that was run by the state as part of its efforts to complement its recently acquired political independence with economic sovereignty. Second, through a close reading of workers’ experience of shop floor activity and politics, it examines the discursive structuring of class consciousness as the infusion of two different discourses: the discourse of nation-building and citizenship, and the discourse of labour politics. Thus, it tries to establish the interactions between the process of nation-building and the process of industrial proletarianisation by means of examining the fluid boundaries between class and citizenship.\(^1\) Through documenting these interactions, I aim to open up class formation to a wider process of cultural and political definition and conceptualise it as much a discursive as a material process.

On another level, it introduces biographical instances of the process of working-class formation in order to evaluate the overly-generalised conclusions on state workers. Put differently, it brings the particular aspects to the foreground against the theoretical inclination of specialists in this field to go for the more general. As a state factory that was transferred from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, Bakırköy Factory provides the micro universe for studying that formation in a context where the state and the citizen faced each other as the employer and the employee. Precisely because of these characteristics, the interactions of the two processes are easily detectable in this originally Ottoman factory that

\(^1\) Though the literature on Turkish nationalism is expanding, its development has not been studied in a systematic manner in relation to the emergence of an industrial proletariat. Analyses of Turkish nationalism and the formation of the nation-state are characterised by paradigms of modernisation and Westernisation, whereby the development of Turkish nationalism is treated as an aspect of political modernisation. See, for example: Bernard Lewis, The Emergence of Modern Turkey, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); Feroz Ahmad, The Making of Modern Turkey, (London: Routledge, 1993); Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, 1808-1975, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Niyazi Berkes, Development of Secularism in Turkey, (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1963); David Kushner, The Rise of Turkish Nationalism, 1876-1908, (London: Frank Cass, 1977).
was reclaimed materially and symbolically by the Republic. In other words, Bakırköy Factory will be treated as a lens that will enable the reader to zoom into the daily lives of state workers during this period, with an emphasis on the language they used to represent themselves as *Turkish workers* against their employer, the *Turkish state*.

Thus, the analysis fills a gap in Turkish labour history by means of introducing the human dimension to the mainly sociological conclusions of labour history studies during this period. The dominant narrative form of these studies has been characterised by the suppression and manipulation of a working-class collectivity by the state through means of domination, subjugation and force, and its ensuing failure to carry out its historical mission. In other words, a narrative of failure and an epistemology of absence underline these studies. Moreover, most of the time, working-class history is reduced to a chronology of state actions mainly in the form of labour legislation; workers are thus reduced to passive recipients of these regulations and legislations. The state is as such recognised as the only social actor and it is reified; it is given an independent existence, even when the authors are criticising the dominant “strong state tradition” approach within Turkish historiography. Though conclusions may vary, the uniformity of the narrative presupposes similar questions that would foreclose the analysis to the alternative socio-political visions within the labour movement that were suppressed.

In this study, I use a historical materialist methodology that pays special attention to the discursive aspects of this very dynamic and contradictory period of working-class history in Turkey. This methodology, first and foremost, entails starting from the conditions of the material existence of real men and women under conditions of exploitation and domination and their experience of that existence. Thus, instead of inferring working-class formation from class structure, I begin with the concrete activities of real people and document these activities in an anthropologically influenced narrative mode characterised by an interpretative approach to written and spoken word.

It is these methodological concerns that lie beneath the choice of a factory as the unit of analysis of this study. In order to bring an alternative narrative structure to the study of working-class formation, I chose to minimise the scope as much as possible and thus examine the details of that process. The factory site in this study is conceptualised as the cross point where space, mentality and ideology are materialised; as such, it is the space of manifold experiences related to work but that goes beyond work in its political and ideological effects. Being the site where the expropriation of surplus begins, the factory site is also the context
where workers display their first reaction to that appropriation. Through a study of the representations involved in that reaction and the later dealings of the factory management with that reaction, we could trace the changes in the mentality and language of workers’ self-perception. It is also at this level that we see the shaping and reshaping of the form and content of the managerial practices, which involve both means of discipline and incorporation. This allows us to make a fluid analysis: fluid in the sense that we can map out the changes in both workers’ and management’s languages and strategies. In such an analysis, discipline and control are not merely imposed on the workers; they are also constituted by their actions. Following a worker’s experience on the shop floor also allows us to see how that experience shapes their self-perception and the language she uses outside the factory. Thus, instead of seeing the larger framework of state politics as the determining factor of workers’ experience at the site of production, such an analysis enables us to conceptualise this relation as a contingent interaction. As such, it becomes possible to see the effects of the political developments on self-perceptions and representations.

This is not to imply a one-way simple causality; of course, the same developments would not yield similar results in different workers’ political language and activity. The relational question here has more of a contingent character. For example, we see a rather dramatic change in the language of the petitions after World War II. It would be easy to attribute these changes to the increasing politicisation of the everyday life with the end of the single party regime, but such an explanation could not establish the connections with workers’ past experiences. Or when we analyse the changes in the political affiliations of individual workers’ during the same period, it opens up a whole new dimension to analyse these in connection with their shop floor activity on the one hand and their immediate experience of labour politics at the factory trade union level on the other. The factory site is the spatial context in which the experience of labour is mediated by these developments at the same time when it mediates the political language of the workers as well. Thus, the political and economic developments of the early Republican period are given a human face through a study of micro-stories that took place in the factory.

Individual workers’ experiences on the shop floor are analysed in detail in order to explain the dynamics of the self-perception of state workers. Petitions they wrote, speeches they gave, and personal accounts they left are regarded as documentation of that self-perception. Through a close-reading of this documentation, I trace the inscriptions of nation-formation onto the process of working-class formation under state-led industrialisation. While
these micro studies give a human face to the sociological conclusions of a general order, the conclusions themselves are treated as the conditioning factors of workers’ self-perception, the constitution of a working-class political language.

A cautionary remark must be made here. When criticising the historians for siding with the victors of history, Alf Lüdtke reminds us of the importance of attending to the rich intensity of actual lives. One option to transcend the narrowly one-dimensional nature of the big questions in historical analysis “is to focus our attention on the historical subjects themselves, exploring them in the context of their immediate modes of action and expression”. But this should not be understood as a mere redressing of past historiographic neglect. The recognition of the multiplicity of synchrony also offers a new insight into the past by means of focusing “attention on the spectrum and range of what is historically possible in any given conjuncture”. The boundaries of that terrain of possibility, however, are not determined by constraints on action and temptations to act that are fixed givens. They should be viewed “as fluent moments in a spiral which moves from perceiving and interpreting reality to acting upon it and – in turn – to perceiving the changed state of things”.

This is exactly what this study does by means of listening to the voices of the workers of a national factory where the discourse of the national community – often evoking the metaphor of family – displaced the labour-capital conflict. Workers’ perception and reaction to that displacement and their strategies for dealing with it are treated as open-ended processes characterised by contingency.

In a way, then, this study starts from where labour historians stopped; it deconstructs their conclusions in order to view the suppressed experiences, alternative voices and political visions of the state workers of the early Republican period. As such, it follows Ira Katznelson’s suggestion to move away from the question of whether class formation occurred to an inquiry into “the terms and content of class formation with respect to a quite specific, but deliberately open, object of analysis: the ways the newly emerging working classes expressed their claims to their employers and to the state.”

To recapitulate, there are two analytical axes to this dissertation: the intertwining of nationalisation and proletarianisation, and the relationship between the process of production

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3 Ibid., p. 83.
4 Ibid., p. 60.
broadly defined and the emergence of a worker as a form of subjectivity and of a language of
class in the context of a national factory. In these introductory pages, I will first explain the
historiographical and methodological choices I have made in this study. I will follow with a
brief theoretical discussion on the possible interrelations between these two processes. In the
following sections, I will provide an outline of the chapters and a brief note on the method
and sources.

Methodological Considerations on Labour Historiography

At the meeting of the Labour Network of the European Social Science History Conference in
2008, the high number of young labour historians surprised the more experienced
practitioners of the field. “And they say labour history is dead!” shouted one of them with a
happy undertone of surprise; others approved enthusiastically. Indeed, it was surprising to see
that many academics at the beginning of their careers are interested in a field that has
allegedly been in a ‘disorienting epistemological crisis.’ Having lived out its glory days in
the 1960s and 1970s with the emergence of the ‘new social history,’ the explanatory
categories of the field have come under increasing scrutiny in the last two decades. The
‘history from below’ approach, which was once celebrated as a fresh insight brought to
studies of working-class history, has been widely criticised because of its dependence on
grand narratives. There are different aspects of this critique, ranging from the improper
treatment of language and discourse to the neglect of imperial and racial dynamics of the
study of working-class formation. The common denominator of these critiques has been their
questioning of the fundamental concepts of social history such as experience, agency, and
identity. In fact, the notion of ‘class’, which has been the building block of labour history, has
been scrutinised by a growing number of social scientists since the late 1970s with the rise of

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7 The emblematic study of working-class formation from below is *The Making of the English Working-Class* by E.P. Thompson (New York: Vintage Books, 1966). Thompson’s conceptualisation of class has been shaped in opposition to the sociological understanding of it in stratification studies in which it was treated as a ‘thing’, a ‘category’. To Thompson, class is an historical relationship and class formation is an historical process shaped by the logic of material determinations.
post-structuralism and its questioning of the possibility of the unitary subject, and, by implication, the notion of agency.  

Though the critiques vary, I will discuss two of them that have influenced me in designing the methodology of this research. Arguably, these have also been the most effective in challenging the ‘history from below’ approach. The current study is also located in the historiographical tradition of this approach. As such it uses the Thompsonian conceptualisations of class, class struggle and experience in a critical manner. Yet, it has also been influenced by these two sets of critiques and adopted some of their methodological insights. On the one hand, there is the turn to culture, language and gender; what came to be defined in general terms as the linguistic turn introduced the historical analysis of representations to the field. Beginning in the 1980s, labour historians have become increasingly critical of the use of concepts such as experience and consciousness without a thorough understanding of the constructivist role of language. An equally powerful critique of these explanatory categories came from scholars of race and empire who have exposed the Eurocentric nature of labour history. For a long time, histories of labour in the non-Western world could not go beyond mere applications of theories and historiographies of the Western world. In other words, the field did not learn from those settings in which labour-capital relations and state formation did not show similar characteristics with the Western world. The situation changed dramatically, however, from the 1980s onward, and today a number of studies exist that challenge the theoretical and methodological assumptions of social history. Most important among them has been the universalistic claims on culturalist assumptions and the effects of differences in state formation on working-class subjectivity and collectivity.

In the next two sections, I will analyse these two sets of critiques in terms of their relevance to the current study. These two sections could be read as an attempt to move beyond

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8 William Reddy gives an extreme example: “It is quite possible to account for the whole of English history down through 1850 without evoking class interest to explain events” (qtd. in Theodore Koditschek, “Marxism and the Historiography of Modern Britain: from Engels to Thompson to Deconstruction and Beyond”, in Terry Brotherstone and Geoff Pilling [eds.] History, Economic History and the Future of Marxism, [London: Porcupine Press, 1996], p. 120).

the epistemological crisis of labour history and to have a productive dialogue between a progressive materialist history and post-structuralism critiques of the new social history paradigm.

The Linguistic Turn

The post-1980 debates within labour history have differed from previous ones in two ways. First, they reflected the need to reconsider the faith in the revolutionary agency of the working-class in the context of the emergence of neo-liberal capitalism. At the centre of the polemical debates was the questioning of the new social history’s efforts to integrate social and political narratives, which, the critics claimed, produced a tendency to reduce political behaviour to a function of the changes in social structure. The call to give politics and its expressions their autonomy characterised these revisionist attempts. Secondly, critiques on labour historiography have borrowed extensively from other disciplines. Social historians have transferred theoretical insights from a spectrum of social sciences and called for social history to adopt these to the study of subordinate classes. This was a time when post-structuralism became increasingly popular in the social sciences and humanities; the questioning of the universal explanations and the unitary subject has undermined the possibility of accurate historical analysis. The most significant effect of this questioning concerns the treatment of language and discourse within labour history.

It has been increasingly argued that, within labour history, the “problematic character of language” had been concealed thus far because the founding concepts of the field have assumed a too-easy relation between social being and the ways it found its expression in social consciousness. At stake here are concepts such as ‘experience’ and ‘consciousness’, the definitions and implications of which had been elaborately given by E.P. Thompson, the prominent name of the ‘new social history’ tradition within labour history. The problem with these concepts, critics argued, has been their treatment of language as nothing but a simple medium through which consciousness is achieved. The authority of the concept of

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13 Jones, *Languages of Class*, p. 20.
experience, that is, “the appeal to experience as incontestable evidence and as an ordinary point of explanation” has been questioned and experience is defined as “a linguistic event that does not happen outside established meanings.”\textsuperscript{14} Thus, scholars operating from a poststructuralist perspective have criticised labour historians’ tendency to interpret workers’ language too literally.\textsuperscript{15} In other words, it is argued that language should be treated as one of the constituents of social being, and not just as an expression of it. Thus, its mere decoding could not lead to an understanding of material conditions. Likewise, a notion of experience as being distinct from language could not be thought of as bridging the gap between social being and social consciousness. What leads to an understanding of common miseries among the masses is a linguistic ordering of experience. In between consciousness and experience, then, lies “a particular language which organises the understanding of experience” and this language is by no means a single one. The solution to the problem lies in the substitution of the prefigurative conception of language with a non-referential one.\textsuperscript{16}

It has been more than twenty years since these debates and the historical analysis of the construction of social meaning and representation has become completely endemic. The debate continues, however, with regard to the methodological ways in which that study is conducted and the ways in which it arrives at certain conclusions. To begin with, labour historians’ confinement of language to spoken word resulted in the reproduction of the methodology of intellectual history.\textsuperscript{17} The second problem concerns the application of theoretical and methodological insights borrowed from other disciplines to the study of labour. The feminist poststructuralist inquiry has uncritically imported methods to the field. While borrowing theoretical and methodological insights from other disciplines, however, the borrowing discipline should be aware of the methodological differences between the disciplines. In other words, the borrowing discipline needs to filter them through its own epistemological and ontological existence. Within labour history, the most problematic issue in this regard has been the importing of the method of deconstruction from literary studies where it has been identified with post-structuralist philosophy.

William Sewell defines two differences between literary and historical scholarship in terms of their object of analysis and their interpretive tasks. Different from literary

\textsuperscript{15} Laura L. Frader, “Dissent over Discourse”, p. 215.
\textsuperscript{16} Jones, \textit{Languages of Class}, p. 24.
scholarship, historical scholarship does not take language and meaning construction as its object of study. The concern of historical scholarship lies in the quest to “understand a world that is manifested, reflected, refracted or referred to in the texts but that is different from” them in its broader reach. The structure of human social worlds is not confined to linguistic conventions; thus, deconstruction would not suffice as the only tool for the reconstruction of the past. Moreover, considering that the discipline of history is mainly about the study of time and context, deconstruction’s scant regard for these two categories makes its use in historical studies problematic. Hence, it has to be modified as an analytical strategy in order to answer historical questions. It is for all these reasons that if historians are to borrow deconstruction from literary scholarship they need to modify its “vocabulary, practice, and epistemology” to suit their purposes. Only then could deconstruction shed light on hitherto shadowed aspects of history.

It has been argued that a historical materialist methodology would be incompatible with the constructivist conceptualisation of discourse. I would like to argue with Theodore Koditschek that there is not much difference between how “the rise of Marxist class theory in the mid-nineteenth century made it possible to see that universal liberalism was, in actuality, an unconscious bourgeois self-projection, from which workers were excluded” and how “the rise of the feminist theory in the mid-twentieth century now enables us to see that Marx’s universal proletariat was, in actuality, an unconscious masculine self-projection, from which women were excluded”. Both expose the hidden mechanisms of suppression, exclusion and domination that were constructed materially as well as discursively. When its identification with the “arbitrary, nihilistic philosophy of poststructuralism” ceases, deconstruction is a useful ground-clearing activity. Yet, to be sure, a historical materialist labour historiography would also demand a critical distinction between deconstruction as a method and

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20 Sewell, “Gender and the Politics of History”, p. 82.
21 Koditschek, “Marxism and the Historiography of Modern Britain”, p. 124. Koditschek goes on to argue that “a good case can be made that it was Marx and Engels themselves who were the first deconstructionist” (p. 123). That is to say that one could read Capital as the deconstruction of the bourgeois political economy by means of showing its subtle ideological and tyrannical character. Consider, for example, Scott’s definition of the history of the present as the task of the historians: “What are the reigning truths that need to be historicised in order to challenge their aura of naturalness or inevitability?” (Joan W. Scott, “The ‘Class’ We Have Lost”, International Labour and Working-Class History, Vol. 57, 2000, p. 73). I think especially the sections on money and fetishism in Capital VI are outstanding examples of such an undertaking.
22 Koditschek, “Marxism and the Historiography of Modern Britain”, p. 130. Linda Gordon has a similar point of view: “[D]econstructionist lines of inquiry can lead to rewarding any subversive challenges to lazy and status quo readings of experience” (“Gender and the Politics of History”, Signs, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1990, p. 858.)
poststructuralism as a philosophy, for the latter rejects materialist explanations of the past completely. Unless we deprive our analysis from the actual activities of real women and men, ignore their connections with the changes in the material conditions of life, this self-sufficient philosophy could not be the basis for our understanding of the subaltern classes’ past experiences. Even when we exclusively focus on the discursive aspects of that history, deconstruction on its own cannot be our sole method since it is a method of exposing hidden meanings, and not constructing new ones.23

History, however, never stops at that point; it also has a constructive power of its own. In other words, a historian’s task could not be confined to the act of clearing the ground. It also entails the construction of new grounds to make sense of the past. That is why we as social historians have no choice but to engage with a grabby social analysis in the end;24 because this is the only method to learn about “how subjects mediate, challenge, resist, or transform discourses in the process of defining their identities.”25 It is this two-fold nature of the historian’s task that negates the oppositions that had arisen during the course of the linguistic turn between material and discursive transformations. Linguistic turn’s call for the historical analysis of representation does not need to be defined in opposition to the analysis of discernible, retrievable historical reality.26 We do not have to give up the task of documenting the experience when we examine how difference was constituted in the first place within an either/or paradigm.27 Tilly’s distinction between two different but complementary histories, the analytical, problem-oriented social history on the one hand, and the descriptive/interpretive studies on the other, speaks exactly to this two-fold nature.28

In this study, I try to bring these two different kinds of historical analysis together by means of attending the experiences of Bakirköy workers both in terms of the objective conditions that shaped them and their subjective interpretations of these conditions. For the methodology of the current study, I have been inspired by a feminist historian who managed

23 Tilly, “Comment and Debate”, p. 452.
26 Ibid., p. 369.
27 To give an example, Scott’s call for writing the history of homosexuality instead of homosexuals, or writing the history of blackness instead of blacks implies that there is a clear distinction between the discursive construction of difference and the ways in which people experienced it. Not only there is the distinction but also there is the implication that the analysis of the latter precludes the analysis of the former (Ibid., pp. 375-6).
to bring these two different perspectives on labour history together. In her analysis of the complex relationships between gender and class in German labour history, Kathleen Canning researches the emergence and rapid expansion of women’s work in textile factories in Germany in the nineteenth century. The expansion of female factory workforce occurred in the midst of a series of changes in the discourses surrounding sexuality, family and marriage. The focal points of Canning’s analysis is the dialectical relation between the constitutive and subjugate powers of discourses, on the one hand, and the force of the material reality, which pressures and destabilises the discursive domain requiring “representations to be reworked, shored up, reconstructed on the other”. I take this conceptualisation as my starting point in order to study the social structure and worker subjectivity as interconnected, or even mutually determining, categories.

There is another aspect of Canning’s work that I follow. She is interested in the question of agency regarding the discursive domain that was formed by the convergence of different but overlapping and often competing discourses. Within this dominant discursive domain, there existed multiple subject positions characterised by their discrepancies in access to social space and power. It is at this point that the problem-oriented social history starts and the grabby social analysis enters the picture. To make sense of these differences in power, we need to invoke the experiences of the agents of these different discourses. The significant aspect of Canning’s analysis rises at the point when the two methods – discursive and social analyses – are used in a complementary way. The dialectical relation between the discursive and the material domains requires a dynamic analysis that allows fluidity between the two methods. Such an approach could answer the questions of how and why discourses emerged, how the historical world was internalised or inscribed in texts and when the moments of

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29 Geoff Eley and Keith Nield praised Canning’s work using the following words: “Kathleen Canning’s work has disengaged class from the sovereignty of “objective” economic and social interests. Grounded in imaginative and meticulous studies of labour markets, workplace organisation, job cultures, family and household dynamics, industrial relations, and so on, she nonetheless opens class formation to a wider process of cultural and political definition. Here at least, social history of the classical kind and readings of language and political history are the opposite of incompatible.” (“Farewell to the Working Class?”, International Labour and Working Class History, Vol. 57, 2000, p. 8.)

30 Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn, p. 380. Canning borrows the formulation from Judith Walkowitz who analysed the production and circulation of cultural meanings and their material contexts in the pretext of a melodrama from late Victorian period on the sexual danger faced by the young working-class women. She explains the dialectical relation between material reality and discursive construction as follows: “Material reality always exists as a certain pressure, a destabilising force on cultural production, forcing representations to be reworked, shored up, reconstructed. And the power of representations derives in good part from the material context in which they appear, from the social spaces where they are enunciated, and from the social and political networks that are organised around them” (Judith Walkowitz, Myra Jehlen and Bell Chevigny, “Patrolling the Borders: Feminist Historiography and the New Historicism”, Radical History Review, No. 43, 1989, pp. 23-43.)
inscription of these discursive shifts happened through such an analysis. Hence, Canning’s analysis of the discourses on female labour in Germany challenges the alleged opposition between a discourse “being caused by industrial conditions” and its “helping to shape them.”

The inclusion of social space and power in the analysis of the discursive domain is another methodological point that connects discourse analysis to social history. The recognition of the discursive aspects of class formation and its ideological and material effects on later struggles has been the contribution of the linguistic turn in social sciences to labour history. The discursive domain itself also includes different power positions. The relative power of multiple discourses emanating from the level of their publicity or their hegemonic capacity changes the power dynamics between the carriers of various discourses in the material terrain. Moreover, this conceptualisation also allows us to analyse the ‘defeated’ discourses, the alternatives that once existed, and which were suppressed by others and thus were lost in the archives.

It is this dialectic understanding of the relations between the discursive and material domains that underlines the methodology of the current study. I have briefly mentioned the visual metaphor of a camera zooming in-and-out above the factory to explain the narrative structure of the analysis at hand. The narrative moves continuously between the miniscule details of a worker’s experience on the shop floor and the macro level socio-economic developments. These moves are extensions from the micro context to the totality that shapes it. In other words, the narrative is underlined by a process of induction from the particular situation. The analyses of workers’ language answers the two-fold question of the material context of discursive struggles around subjectivity and representations, on the one hand, and the constitutive power of these representations, on the other. The inscriptions of the material context in the discourses are revealed through a thorough examination of the written texts by workers themselves. The method of close reading allows us to reconstruct the inner worlds of workers through a study of their choice of words, their mode of thinking and presentation of their ideas, and the ways they make sense of their environment. When the written texts left by the management are added to the study, a more dynamic relation between these modes is revealed. The travel from the close reading of written texts abruptly carries us to a much larger scale of development in material reality. I move continuously between the task of documenting a worker’s language and the possible factors that made that language possible.

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31 Canning, “Feminist History after the Linguistic Turn”, p. 382.
Obviously, these both change. When we consider the question of when a certain representation needs to be reworked and restructured arises, or whether a peculiar restructuring works or not, the analysis necessarily returns to the materialist approach.

In this study, I particularly focus on two discourses and their interactions: nationalism and working-class politics. The emergence of a language of class, I will argue, was shaped through discursive contestations between these two. Both their individual constructions and their interactions are shaped and reshaped according to the time, context and the agendas of their agents. Individuals shift between different discourses depending on these three conditions; and this constitutes one of the kernels of this study. When studying workers’ self-perceptions and representations, I focus on these changes and shifts in the context of the interactions between the processes of nationalism and proletarianisation and their corresponding discourses.

**The Problem of Eurocentricism**

The second significant debate on labour historiography concerns an issue that has originated in other disciplines. Different from the linguistic turn where labour historians borrowed mainly from other disciplines, in this case, labour and social historians have made considerable contributions to the debate that went beyond their fields in effect. The issue at stake is a complex one that can possibly be best summarised as the Eurocentric character of the theory and historiography of working-class formation. As the empirical studies coming from Asia, Africa and Latin America increased in number, it became clear that the basic concepts of the field were not working for a vast majority of the world population and thus it was necessary to de-Occidentalise the field and develop a truly comparative approach.  

It is in such a context that suggestions for broadening the definition and conceptualisation of what constitutes labour, and considering the contours of the working class as fluid, gain utmost importance.  

Within labour history, the predominant debates concerning the Eurocentric critic have mostly concerned the narrative of transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist social relations and the cultural assumptions that accompany that transition. The narrative of transition from

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pre-capitalist to capitalist social relations is based on the acceptance on the universality of the Western trajectory. It presupposes that capitalism would cause the complete dissolution of pre-capitalist forms of labour control by inscribing the entire field of social relations. According to this logic, categories such as unfree labour or partial proletarianisation belong to the pre-history of capitalism. The problem with this narrative is that, when the analysis is ensconced in the terminology of free and unfree, the gray zones of the matter, the partially-proletarianised labourers are left aside.34

An important aspect of the problem concerns the origins of the industrial proletariat. The European literature on industrial working-class formation indicates two types of origins of the industrial proletariat: agricultural workers who were tied off from land and artisans who gradually lost access to the means of production and thus had to become proletarians. This narrative, however, does not always explain the situation in non-Western parts of the world where pre-capitalist and capitalist social relations have co-existed in a context of different modes of labour control. In Chapter 1, I will revisit this issue in the section on the origins of the industrial proletariat. Suffice to note here is the multiplicity of the process of transitions that implies a multiplicity of working-class formations and politics. The second debate on cultural assumptions speaks also to this aspect of historical studies of labour. It has revealed that certain cultural aspects of working-class formation and labour movements had been based on the experiences of European labourers and yet they had been presented as universal.35

What arose was an epistemology of absence which points to the lack of these specific cultural traits as the reason for the historical divergence of the non-West from the history of labour in

35 Though it is a fact that the key works of the field had been about Western Europe and thus the key concepts were defined using historical examples from that part of the world, it would be wrong to think of histories of labour in Western and non-Western parts of the world as separate and completely incompatible examples. Historical inquiry is a type of quest that does not lend itself easily to ready-made theoretical generalisations. Such generalisations would make us blind to differences between working-class formations in nineteenth-century England and Germany when we talk of Western European histories of labour on one side and Indian labour history on the other. Concepts such as core and periphery do not have much explanatory value in a historical analysis because historicising makes both comparison and grouping quite different. However, it is also true that within the development of world-historical capitalism, there are certain general characteristics that are visible in some parts of the world but not in others. In the case of labour history, the most important characteristics of this kind would be the incompleteness of the process of proletarianisation due to capital’s different strategies of labour control, the differences in state formation under colonialism, and delays and contradictions in the process of internalising the logic of capitalist mode of production such as the perception of time and the work discipline. The important point, however, is to understand these not as opposing tendencies within capitalism but as different strategies of labour control deployed by capital. Histories of labour in different parts of the world cannot be treated as isolated, unrelated stories with their own logic of development.
the Western world, and regardless of the fact that the latter is far from being a singular history.

In this study, I follow one of the strongest aspects of the Eurocentric critique of the new social history paradigm. This has been the call for attention to the effects of differences in state formation on the development of working-class collectivity. Initiated by Subaltern Studies’ efforts to develop an alternative to both colonialist and nationalist historiography of India, the analysis of the colonial state and its shaping of the social relations has become a centrepiece in Indian historiography. Arguably, the labour historian whose work has been most widely discussed in this regard is Dipesh Chakrabarty. In his study on Bengalese labour history, *Rethinking Working-Class History*, Chakrabarty deals with the tension underlying the historical narratives of the periphery: the pendulum between universalism and exceptionalism. The source of this ‘soul torturing antitheses,’ he argues, lies in the fact that the categories and concepts of Marxian analysis, which are based on culture-specific assumptions, have been treated as being universal and applied to the Indian – or any other non-Western – setting without any critical engagement by the labour historians.36 Thus, the question that concerns us most would be how to use the conceptual tools of labour history in histories of peripheral working classes.

Naturally, the question comes down to the evaluation of the political role assigned to the working classes, which has not been realised in the case of India as well as others. Rather than coming up with explanations of why it did not happen, Chakrabarty directs our attention to a totally different level and questions why we expect it to happen in the first place. His reasoning is that this expectation is based on some culturally specific assumptions such as the liberal state tradition and the notion of citizenship. In other words, where these preconditions did not exist, it is meaningless to use the terminology of the historical mission of the working classes to begin with:

> If the particular notions of “free-born Englishman,” “equality before the law,” and so on were the most crucial heritages of the English working class in respect of its capacity for developing class consciousness, what about the working classes – for instance, the Indian one – whose heritages do not include such a liberal baggage? Are the latter

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condemned then forever to a state of “low classness” unless they develop some kind of cultural resemblance to the English?³⁷

Rethinking Working-Class History is an attempt to answer this question in the context of colonial India where the ‘working class’ was “born into a culture characterised by the persistence of precapitalist relationships” and tries to answer the question of how this condition affects its capacity for class and revolutionary action.³⁸ To do so, Chakrabarty goes beyond the writings on labour history by locating the source of the problem in the culturally specific assumptions of hegemonic bourgeois culture in Marx’s writings. Once the problem is carried to this level, the incorporation of the ‘cultural’ to the writings of labour history becomes inevitable. Thus, Chakrabarty argues that “a theoretical understanding of the working class needs to go beyond the ‘political-economic’”.³⁹ Besides the cultural aspects, labour history should also be thought of as a part of “the relevant history of citizenship and hence as a part of the biography of the state”.⁴⁰ Underlying this argument is Chakrabarty’s claim that the assumption of hegemonic bourgeois culture is intertwined with state formation and the relations between state and capital, on the one hand, and between state and labour, on the other. Thus, Rethinking Working Class should be read as a dialogue with Marxism on consciousness, the nature of working-class politics, and the dialectic between citizenship and the process of proletarianisation.

In fact, the call to attend state as an independent variable and state action as a potentially important influence on socio-political outcomes was made within labour history in the 1980s. This call was part of the movement of bringing the state back into social analysis based on the argument that the social sciences have ignored the state’s centrality to the explanation of social change. Ira Katznelson’s article in Bringing the State Back In, argued that teleological assumptions were partly the result of the economy- and state-centred explanations. This is yet another critique of the assumption that organised class-conscious working classes naturally emerge from the process of capitalist industrialisation. To Katznelson, issues such as the timing of democratisation in relation to capitalist industrialisation, the growth of the national state, and the legal conditions under which working-class organisations had to operate were important factors that affected working-class

³⁷ Ibid., p. 222.
³⁸ Ibid., p. xiii.
³⁹ Ibid., p. 65.
action. Important here are the connections Katznelson makes between state actions and the creation of meaning pertaining to the language of class. These are conceptualised as factors that “shape and inform the creation of meaning about class expressed in language, dispositions, and organisations” and “established the vocabularies and institutional forms that workers would develop to shape and represent their demands directed both to employers and to the state”.  

This conceptualisation would allow us to include the state as an independent variable in our studies of working-class formation not only as the regulator of material conditions, but also of the discursive constructions.

The contribution of non-Western labour history to this idea of incorporating state actions is its interrogation of the universalistic claims on state formation. Once that formation is studied in terms of its peculiarities, it is seen that different mechanisms of displacement of labour-capital conflict has been at work in different contexts. For example, under colonialism, it becomes more difficult to distinguish the acts of workers against the state from the acts of workers against the bourgeoisie since the two are often close allies. In the absence of bourgeois revolutions in which the state at least appears to be the common aspiration of both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the state is likely to be an instrument of capital, both of a native and colonial kind. This close relationship could even give way to arguments such as the claim that the principal contradiction of the working poor was with the colonial state, not with the employers. Consequently, labour history should be concerned with the general position of the state towards the working classes.  

It is this general position that I conceptualise as one of the axes of the present study. The period of the study covers the etatist period of Turkish economy, that is, the years between 1932 and 1950. The detailed analysis of etatism as a moment of state-formation is provided in Chapter 1. Here, I will give a short historical background to the period studied, and then outline the theoretical considerations and the methodological disquisitions that determine the choice of period as a particular moment of working-class formation in Turkey.


Differential Temporalities

The Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, the last year of the Anatolian War with the victory of the Turkish nationalist forces under the command of Mustafa Kemal and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Though the Republic signified a clear political break from the Empire, the structure and the organisation of the economy remained intact. The economic heritage of the Empire was characterised by a vulnerable economic structure dependent mainly on exporting agricultural products. Industrial activity was very low. The dominance of foreign capital and merchants had already been problematised since the beginning of the century, and creating a national economy was commonly cited as the only way to economic sovereignty. But the Empire’s way of integration into the world capitalist system did not leave much space to this first peripheral area to become an independent nation-state to manoeuvre. Thus, the Turkish economy in the 1920s was characterised by an exceptional openness. The new government was bound by pre-republican agreements until 1929, and no restrictions were legislated on the movement of foreign capital. The state budget constituted 8-9 per cent of the gross national income. The Republic had neither a central economic institution nor a sound economic policy, and the institutions involved in the economy were a part of the Ottoman heritage. The new state, thus, was an ideal example of the laissez-faire ideology. Consequently, economic structure stayed intact until the effects of the Great Depression and the dynamics of changing class alliances made it impossible to sustain. But the following decade witnessed increasing state intervention in the economy, an intervention that bestowed the state with the role of the employer as well as regulator of the economy. Numerous state factories emerged during this period; some were newly constructed, others were taken over from administrative bodies by Sümerbank, the holding that was established to run state factories. The number of employees in state industrial enterprises reached 70,455 in 1938 and increased to 146,902 in 1948. Sümerbank employed 20,000 workers in 1940, 22,000 in 1945 and 30,050 in 1950.

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46 “Sümerbank İctimai Teşkilat Raporu”, in *Sümerbank 1940 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait İdare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabi*, (Ankara: TBMM Matbaası, 1941), p.1; *Sümerbank 1946 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait İdare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabi*, (İstanbul: n.p., 1947), p.1; Başbakanlık
Besides the change in the economic policy, the 1930s were also characterised by the emergence of a new state form characterised by the identification of the Republican People’s Party, the party that Mustafa Kemal himself founded and that remained in power until 1950, with the state apparatus. After this full congruency between state administration and party organisation was declared, increasing suppression of civil rights and societal autonomy followed, which also included the heavy oppression of the working class and the denial of the existence of the social classes in the populist Kemalist regime. All these political and economic changes were achieved with the aid of an ideology of nationalism. The process of proletarianisation happened in the context of the emergence of a new politics of nation and citizenship.

The socio-historical problem that the simultaneity of these two processes poses could best be understood through a relational analysis of state politics and production politics. I chose to deploy a rather eclectic theoretical framework for the analysis presented here. This is mainly because the scope of the monographic study at hand could serve only as a starting point for a thorough understanding of the dynamics of a working-class formation process in Turkey. Thus, it would raise more questions than answers on that process. To begin with, it is necessary to conceptualise the relationship between the temporalities of economics and politics. These are the two differential temporalities of nation-building and proletarianisation; interdependent in a contingent way. In an article on the constituents and conditions of working-class collectivity, Göran Therborn defines the relationship of political and economic time, specifically the time of industrial take-off and the time of political development, as one of the key determinants of national working-class collectivity:

> Historiographic evidence would appear to support the idea that a *coincidence of economic and political time* – of industrial take-off and of popular struggles for political rights of participation – is the most propitious for the creation of a national working-class collectivity. Prior industrialisation means a politically inexperienced proletariat, very vulnerable, in its loose organisational forms, to ruling-class repression.47

I argue that working-class formation in Turkey exemplifies this specific relationship of political and economic time. The period of industrial take-off in Turkey starts from the
beginning of the 1930s when the state took industrialisation upon itself.\footnote{Aided by the recovery in the world economy after 1933, Turkish industry expanded. It is from this period that the take-off can be dated, based on import substitution in light industries and the less sophisticated heavy industries...[P]rogress was thwarted by conditions during the Second World War, but the first phase of Turkish industrialisation was completed in the 1950s.” (W.W. Rostow, \textit{The World Economy: History and Prospect}, [Texas: University of Austin Press, 1978], p. 76).} Popular struggles for political rights of participation, on the other hand, came only after WWII. The end of the single-party regime and the increasing popularity of the main opposition party, the Democrat Party, which resulted in its electoral victory in 1950 general election, indicated an increasing politicisation of everyday life. As I will show in Chapter 4, the DP had considerable electoral base among the workers; after 1947, the labour movement was increasingly fragmented around political party affiliations. The DP government was celebrated as the people’s government, which came after twenty-seven years of authoritarian rule.

Though mind-opening as a venture point, the study of the effects of the relationship of economic and political time keeps the focus mainly on the level of societal developments, and thus does not allow us to amend the historiographic oversights in the study of the process of class formation.\footnote{Lüdtke evaluates the effort to amend those oversights as follows: “[O]ur historical interest in the realities of everyday life, the hopes and anxieties of people at gross roots level, appears to be a kind of ‘compensatory modernisation’” (“Polymorphous Synchrony”, p. 44). This formulation indeed captures one of the underlying motivations of this study. As I have noted above, the literature on Turkish nationalism mostly reproduces a narrative of the Western-style modernisation process. To look for the everyday, subaltern manifestations of that process would produce an alternative set of questions, if not answers on that process.} Since the unit of analysis here is the factory site, we need to take a step further in the direction of theorising the shop floor activity in relation to the general level of politics and analyse the shop floor determinants of working-class collectivity. One attempt to such theorisation is Michael Burawoy’s \textit{The Politics of Production}, which connects the working-class interventions in history to the effects of the process of production by way of expanding the study of that process beyond its purely economic moment. Burawoy’s methodological rationale to carry out this analysis corresponds to the historiographic motivations I outlined above: the examination of real workers in their productive circumstances even when passivity predominates. In Burawoy’s own words, the notion of politics of production “aims to undo the compartmentalisation of production and politics by linking the organisation of work to the state.”\footnote{Michael Burawoy, “Between the Labour Process and the State: The Changing Face of Factory Regimes under Advanced Capitalism”, \textit{American Sociological Review}, Vol. 48, No. 5, 1983, p. 587.} The process of production, in this framework, is conceptualised beyond its objective shaping of the industrial working-class; it also entails the subjective dimensions by way of shaping the struggles engendered by a specific experience or interpretation of the type of labour it carries out. What emerges is a dynamic interrelationality between the shop floor and the societal level of politics. The methodological
basis of this analysis is a relational notion of the labour process defined in terms of its effects on the reproduction of social relations, both inside and outside the workplace. Burawoy argues for a conceptualisation of the labour process that goes beyond the apparent reproduction of the relations in production by state apparatuses and attracts our attention to its reproductive effects on relations of domination that originate outside production.

In Burawoy’s analysis, the political and ideological effects of the organisation of work, i.e. the labour process, and the distinctive political and ideological apparatuses of production constitute the two political moments of the process of production. The analytical category he arrives at by way of this conceptualisation is the concept of factory regimes. A factory regime is determined by a constellation of the following factors: labour process, enterprise relations to state and market, and the mode of reproduction of labour power. Based on the configuration of these four, Burawoy defines four types of factory regimes each of which has different effects on working-class collectivity. I will refrain from explaining these different types since my current purposes do not entail the determination of the particular factory regime Bakırköy Factory had during the period under study. Indeed, such an endeavour would necessitate a thorough and systematic analysis of the four factors mentioned. Neither the scope nor the main analytical axes of this study allows such an analysis. Rather, I selectively use one of the independent variables of Burawoy’s factory regimes model: the institutional relationship between apparatuses of factory and of state. Burawoy explains the significance of that relationship through the comparison of the South Chicago division of a multinational corporation, Allied, where he worked as a machine operator in 1974 and the Red Star Tractor Factory in Budapest where Miklós Haraszti worked as a mill operator in 1971:

At Allied, the factory apparatuses and state apparatuses were institutionally separated; at Red Star they were fused. To be sure, the state intervened to shape the form of factory apparatuses at Allied, but it was not physically present at the point of production. At Red Star, management, party and trade union were arms of the state at the point of production.\(^{51}\)

I argue that it was this fusing of the management, party and trade union that characterised the context of work at Bakırköy Factory. Furthermore, this fusion was circumscribed by the specific simultaneity of the two aforementioned processes. What emerged was a national

factory in the sense that its function was defined as serving the creation of the national economy. That was why it did not operate under stringent profit constraints; and its workers were expected to patriotically relate to their labour. Discourses around its existence manifested various expressions of nationalism ranging from the comparison of factory work with military service to describing a work stoppage attempt as an act of betrayal to the homeland. The emergence of the language of class at that national factory was shaped by these references that were partially internalised by Bakırköy workers as well.

The theoretical considerations outlined so far make the research question here more specific: how did the category of worker as a form of subjectivity emerge at a state-owned textile producing enterprise where factory apparatuses and state apparatuses were fused in early Republican Turkey? I analyse the effects of the labour process at Bakırköy on that process in detail in the following chapters. But, to study the self-perceptions, representations and the development of the political languages of the Bakırköy workers, we need to understand how workers related to this image of Bakırköy Factory as a national site of production. This is the point where Burawoy’s conceptualisation of production politics and state politics as interrelated realms is significant for the current study. However, to attend to the levels of subjectivity constructed under such conditions of industrial work, we need other concepts that would carry us to the realm of perceptions, representations and subjectivity. In his historical analysis of the image and concept of “German quality workmanship” as a symbolic representation of German workers, Alf Lüdtke invokes the concept of “national labour” that could bridge the two levels of politics in terms of their interconnected effects on workers’ subjectivity. Encompassing a variety of work-related virtues that cut across different labour processes ranging from craft trades to heavy industry, this symbolic representation gained a new meaning with the war mobilisation in 1914:

Quality workmanship was pointedly transformed into patriotic effort: “national labour.” After 1918, “national labour” and “quality workmanship” were fused in the modifier-plus-noun formula of deutsche Qualitätsarbeit…The images and formulae deutsche Qualitätsarbeit carried a double load of semantic freight: on the one hand, an appeal to work experiences and attitudes; on the other, a patriotic reference to their significance for the “whole nation.”

This class-transcended image of labour was seen in other national contexts such as the Stakhanov campaigns in the Soviet Union and the New Deal USA with specific aspects of

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52 Lüdtke, “Polymorphous Synchrony”, pp. 80-1.
national-state ideology. I argue that the category of state work in the early Republican Turkish context was also characterised by this image. The patriotic references to labour at state factories in particular and to labour in general in early Republican Turkey shaped the political language of the labour movement to a great extent. The language on labour, its collective organisation, strikes, and social benefits are full of these references. The common designation of workers as *Turkish workers* during this period, I argue, constrained labour politics to a great extent. But, at the same time, it politically enabled workers by means of allowing them to participate in politics through their inclusion in the national community.

**On the Mode of Presentation**

While it has been true that patterns of working-class formation, organisation and action have been seen mainly as a function of the characteristics of the process of capitalist industrialization, attention has been directed to differences and variations in working-class formation within new social history.\(^5^3\) One such attempt was the edited volume by Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zoldberg, which sought to explain the divergent patterns of class formation from a comparative and theoretical perspective. In the introductory article of this volume, Katznelson provides a model to study the variations and differences in working-class formation in four layers: the structure of capitalist economic development, the social organization of society lived by actual people in real social formations including workplace social relations and labour markets, the range of shared dispositions and common experience among groups of working people, and the modalities of collective action.\(^5^4\)

Katznelson’s approach to working-class formation has many interesting novelties, three of which bear the highest importance for my current purposes. I think of these three related points as openings to a more nuanced and accurate writing of working-class formation. First, the model of levels of working-class formation does not present these four levels in a teleological manner. In other words, there is not a causal relationship between the different levels that gives way to a pre-determined outcome. Among, other things, this allows the student of working-class formation the much-needed space to account for the “failures” as well as the “successes” of that class in attaining revolutionary consciousness.

\(^{53}\) Thompson made this explicit in terms of the study of the working-class consciousness: “Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in *just* the same way” (*The Making of the English Working-Class*, p. 10).

Also related to the first point, Katznelson’s model, as Silver rightly points out, is an attempt to unpack the class-in-itself/class-for-itself master narrative.\textsuperscript{55} Although, at one point, it sounds as if the model is a prerequisite of the further improved usage of that dichotomous division, the strength of the model is clearly specified immediately after: “With the specification of different levels it becomes possible to construct the various cases of class formation in their own terms.”\textsuperscript{56} Thus, the student of labour history could leave the narratives of failure behind and focus on the particularities of specific historical processes in their own right.

Third, the model, mainly by endowing the term “class” with an analytical content, enables the historian of class formation to carry out a multidimensional analysis. Covering both the structural and cultural processes of working-class formation, the model, just as Katznelson suggests, allows the researcher to bring a wide variety of economic, social and political phenomena together in a holistic manner. The inclusion of the state-centred questions alongside the economy and society-centred ones in the set of determinants of working-class formation deserves further attention for the purposes of the current study.\textsuperscript{57} Some questions Katznelson lists in this regard concern the formation of the nation-state, the extent and character of state bureaucratization, the state capacity to tax, conscript, repress, and make public policy authoritatively, and the content of various public policies such as labour law. Both as an actor and “a shaper of the motives, interests, strategies, and activities of other actors”\textsuperscript{58}, the state acquires a central role in the shaping of the working-class formation.

It is due to these three openings that the organization of chapters follows the four layers of working-class formation. I start from the experience-distant level of macro-scale socio-economic developments, go through the workplace social relations and arrive at the experiences of workers recounted in their petitions, newspaper articles and interviews. The application of the levels approach to class formation, it should be noted, does not imply a linear progression but establishes the connections between different layers of working-class formation by way of studying the interrelations between material conditions and discursive constructions.

\textsuperscript{55} Beverly Silver, \textit{Forces of Labour}, p.31.
\textsuperscript{56} “Without clear analytical distinctions between levels or layers of class, it is hard to improve on the “class in itself-for itself” model” (Katznelson, \textit{Working-Class Formation}, p. 14).
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., pp. 30-31.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p. 31.
Outline of Chapters

The first chapter is on the structure of capitalist economic development of early Republican Turkey. By means of connecting the Republican regime to its Ottoman heritage in political and economic terms, it shows the historical roots of state-led industrialisation of the 1930s and 40s. The chapter also portrays the general characteristics of state structure during this period and argues that the implementation of etatism was a constituent of a new state form. By means of providing a bird’s-eye view of the constellation of nationalism and state-led industrialisation, this chapter illustrates how the former shaped the latter. The practical applications of etatism, such as the first five-year plan, the establishment of Sümerbank, its taking over of old factories and establishing new factories in Anatolia are also analysed in Chapter 1, within the framework of the reproductive effects of state power. The analysis here explains the process of the young Turkish state’s assuming the role of the employer in the field of industrial production. A section on the historical background of Bakırköy Factory describes the story of this original Ottoman enterprise that came to be an economic space defined through the Republican ideology. In a nutshell, the chapter argues that Bakırköy Factory was designed as a national factory; i.e. a factory that would be in the service of the nation, and thus its workers were expected to be conscious on their duty towards the homeland.

The second chapter is our entrance point to Bakırköy Factory. Here, I move away from the experience-distant level of class I analysed in the previous chapter to an analysis of the main features of the process of production and the relations in production, i.e. work-place social relations. These social relations are shaped simultaneously by the greater social and political environment that surrounds them. To a greater extent, this chapter deals with the former direction. I mainly use the concept of politics of production to understand the political and ideological, as well as the economic, moments of the labour process at Bakırköy Factory. Starting from the moment they apply for work, I portray the workers’ multi-faceted experiences on the shop floor. The chapter provides detailed information on the factory’s policy of recruitment, systems of remuneration, the managerial control of the labour process, the reproduction of labour power, the provision of social welfare and the strategies of the workers to cope with problems. Workers’ lives outside the factory are also partially analysed here, especially pertaining to their housing conditions and their rural ties.

This chapter brings together a variety of archival material in order to reconstruct the working and living conditions of Bakırköy workers. Thus, a dialogue with studies on Turkish
labour history underlies the chapter. Most important among these are the factory files, which include written material documenting the correspondence between workers and the management. As such, I insert the voice of the workers into the analysis and revisit some of the assumptions of Turkish labour historiography that attained the status of historiographic common sense with new archival material. One of the most significant among these assumptions concerns the very high turn-over rates at state factories. This is often attributed to the partial character of proletarianisation meaning the state workers were not completely cut off from means of subsistence thanks to their ensuing rural ties. I show in this chapter that this explanation does not hold for Bakırköy workers. A close reading of the excuses they gave for leaving the factory, the pattern of exiting and re-entering the factory and the management’s attitude towards these prove that Bakırköy workers did not continue to have strong rural ties. In some cases, it is even possible to establish that they chose to work for private factories in between their entries to Bakırköy Factory.

This takes us to another discussion: the allegedly higher wage levels of state workers compared to private sector workers in this period. The concept of labour aristocracy is invoked to state the differences in working and living conditions of state and private sector workers. Here also, evidence from workers’ files challenges the calculations on state workers’ remuneration levels. Obviously, the data does not have much representational value due to the limited size of the sample. However, there is another significant issue at stake here, namely, the dependence of labour historians on material produced by the state. Besides the biased character of these figures, the exclusive use of this type of material results in labour historians interpreting the data through the eyes of the state. In this regard, the presentation of new evidence on wage levels, which continues into Chapter 3, is important in the sense of changing our historiographic lens.

The issue of social provisions is another topic where this lens change is most needed. In Chapter 2, I argue that these provisions should be interpreted as part of the Turkish state’s efforts to create a new subjectivity, one that is in accordance with the political as well as the economic needs of the young Republic. Instead of interpreting state welfare policies, either as an act of benevolence or a tactical move and thus keep the focus on state’s motivations and concern, I move the focus on how these were received by the workers. Another significant point rises here concerning the treatment of state workers as a uniform group. I argue that not enough attention has been paid to the time and space differentials among state workers. In
Chapter 2, I distinguish between state factories’ working and living conditions based on the effects of spatial differences on conditions of employment.

In Chapter 3, I take an even closer step into the world of Bakırköy workers as I analyse the changes in the self-understanding and perceptions of Bakırköy workers against the labour control regime imposed upon them. This chapter deals with the key role played by petitioning in labour-management relations at Bakırköy Factory in the 1940s by means of analyzing five aspects of petitions: timing, frequency, addressee, content and vocabulary. This is, in a way, a Geertzian social analysis as described by Ira Katznelson, since the micro-historical case study of the petitions enables us to construct the world-view of the rank-and-file workers. Through a close reading of Bakırköy workers’ petitions and the commentaries of the management on these petitions, I portray the dynamics of the worker-management relations at the shop floor. By means of discerning the changes in these petitions over time, I aim to show that the workers’ self-perceptions and the representations of these self-perceptions underwent a dramatic change in the early Republican period.

As the analysis here is based on the written correspondence between labour and management, it exemplifies the relational aspect of class formation. The nature of the relationship is conceptualised as one of action and reaction; and thus it includes instances of both adaptation and resistance. The analysis is built upon the conditions of employment studied in the previous chapter, and as such, it depicts the ways in which the workers themselves interpreted these conditions. The diachronic analysis of petitions gives us clues about how workers construct meaning. That entails the formation and reformation of their understanding of the social system and their values of justice. They could be analysed as the plausible and meaningful responses to the circumstances workers found themselves in. As such, they present the possible visions of Bakırköy workers on what it is to be a worker at a time when the socio-political environment around them is fast changing. In this regard, Chapter 3 reveals a threshold point when a dramatic change in workers’ language happened. That point is the end of the war. To argue that, however, does not necessarily mean that this happened because of the changing international context. On the contrary, the confluence of a number of factors, including the official beginning of the labour movement, made it possible.

The importance of the analysis presented in Chapter 3 stems from its ability to reveal the undocumented, unregistered instances of resistance. Not collective in character, these instances cannot point to the formation of a working-class collectivity per se. But they clearly show that workers could make sense of the changing political environment around them and
formulate a language of complaint accordingly. In this regard, Chapter 3 introduces a very important archival document for the study of labour-management relations at state factories. This is presented in the form of a transcription of the interrogation of a worker by the factory management. A first example of its kind, this document is significant for it allows us to reconstruct that encounter, which presents a number of power relations and subsequent strategies of resistance. A close reading of the choice of arguments by both parties, and the words in which they were expressed, brings us closer to the dynamics of representation at a state factory.

By means of connecting these languages to the wider socio-political dynamics, I aim to explain what made certain language possible and effective in workers’ dealings with the management. Thus, to an extent, Chapter 3 also deals with the changing character of state-society relations throughout the 1940s. In a way, Bakırköy workers’ petitions could be read as written correspondence between the state and its subject. Working at a state factory meant encountering the state on a daily basis in an employee-employer relationship. To what extent the Bakırköy workers perceived these encounters in this way, we cannot know. But the factory management’s dealing with the petitions clearly reflected the workings of state bureaucracy. Moreover, the fact that some workers turned to the Sümerbank General Directorate and the Prime Ministry when their petitions to the factory management did not yield the desired result suggests that they perceived the factory as a part of the state bureaucracy. As such, my analysis of the petitions sheds light on the changes in the way an ordinary working citizen positioned himself vis-à-vis the early republican Turkish state.

Having covered the relations of and in production on the shop floor in Chapters 2 and 3, I take the reader outside the factory in the final chapter. This chapter examines the working-class collectivity at Bakırköy Factory in relation to the changing state-labour relations during the post-World War II period. This is where the first axis of the study, namely the interrelations between the processes of proletarianisation and nationalisation, is analysed most systematically. The chapter begins with a brief introduction on the background of the emergence of trade unions in 1947. In this section, I explore the connection between the understudied trade unionism of 1946 and the Turkish state’s efforts to contain the labour movement through the Trade Union Law of 1947, a law that crippled the development of the labour movement from the start. The literature on early trade unionism evaluates this phase of labour movement as an ineffective and subdued period of working-class politics. The Republican People’s Party’s (RPP) efforts to control and contain the trade union movement
are given extensive emphasis. It is true that the movement was to a large extent controlled by the state. But, by means of arriving at overgeneralised conclusions arrived through hindsight, such analyses conceal the alternative voices and visions within that movement. It is at this point that the level of analysis of the factory becomes functional in revealing these suppressed moments of alternative politics and resistance. In some ways, this means that I am further pursuing the question raised in the third chapter, namely the changes in the self-perception and presentations of workers in the post-WWII context, in the context of the labour movement. As such, I move from individual to more collective moments of resistance, but this does not mean that I lose track of the individual workers in that collectivity.

In this chapter, I mainly follow the politicisation processes of two weavers from Bakırköy. These two weavers represent two different alternatives to the RPP-steered trade unionism. The first one, Enver, was a member of a liberal party that criticised the government for its etatist policies. Throughout the period that I follow him, his political trajectory did not change dramatically. The second weaver, Ahmet, on the other hand, underwent a political transformation as he moved from the main opposition party, DP, to a more working-class based party, and finally found a communist party in 1954. In terms of reconstructing their experiences on the shop floor, trade union meetings and in the arena of formal politics to an extent, I aim to illustrate the changes in their mentality pertaining to their self-perceptions, political visions and ideas of the labour movement. I also analyse the horizontal relations among workers through their interaction on the shop floor as well as at trade union meetings. The difference in how their stories end shows us the limits of dissidence accepted by the dominant ideology.

This final chapter has much to offer in terms of our understanding of the interactions between the discursive construction of nationalism and working-class politics. Using material on the trade union movement in general, I portray a general picture of the language of trade unionism. That language is heavily affected by nationalism, references to the nation as community, Turkish people as a family and national enemies – mostly communists – trying to undermine sovereignty abound. I analyse these as the effects of the displacement of labour-capital conflict through nationalism. But the question remains of how that language was internalised and sometimes even used in a tactical manner. In this chapter, I add two new dimensions on the construction and the workings of the nationalist discourse during this period. The first concerns the uses of the nationalist discourse to control and contain the trade union movement, while the second examines the ways in which this discourse was used both
by different factions within the movement against more radical visions of state-society relations and by the movement as a tool to convince the state to recognise the legitimacy of its claims.

**Sources and Method**

In general, the section on the sources of a dissertation is often rather predictable: a list of different sources and the ways they are used is described, and the main methods deployed in the analysis are explained. My version will be slightly different. I would like to give an autobiographical account of the archival research for this project for that story itself speaks of the social history of the Turkish Republic. In other words, it is not just the content of the archival material but the very conditions of its existence, and non-existence for that matter, and of access to it that deserves the attention of a social historian studying Turkey.

The autobiographical account of this project’s trajectory is helpful in two ways. First, it helps the reader to better understand the choices of scope and the design of the study. Important in this regard is the silence of the manuscript on female labour. This has basically been the effect of the reproduction of the silence of the archival material on the issue. Second, such an account would reveal the difficulty awaiting Turkish labour historians in the archives. Many complaints have been made on the limitedness of the archival material on the early Republican period. Burke specifies three types of archival material – other than newspapers, magazines, journals, personal documents such as diaries and letters by workers – that labour historians could use: first are the documentation kept by workers’ organisations, trade unions and left-wing political parties, second are the documents private or state enterprises kept on their labour force and third are the documents kept by institutions such as the ministry of labour, employment bureaus and security forces on workers. In what follows, I will assess the availability of these three types of material in the Turkish context by narrating the story of this project’s trajectory.

In its initial formulations, this project was designed as a comparative study of two textile factories, one state-owned and the other private, during the early Republican period. The idea was to compare the production processes and politics in these two factories along the

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lines of labour process, relations in production and reproduction of labour power. This would have been a study based mainly on the factory files of the two enterprises, i.e. the second type of documents mentioned above. Soon after I began the research, I came to realise that this was not possible for it seemed that archival material for the private factory was so scarce that a systematic comparative study would not be achievable. Thus, I decided to turn it into a monograph, as I knew for a fact that Bakırköy Factory files were available to consult. Indeed, researchers had consulted these documents at the actual building site of the factory, which had ceased working in 2004.

Unfortunately, that turned out to also be a disappointment as I learnt that the documents were no longer at the factory when I commenced my archival research. It took nearly six months to locate them and another six to get permission to view them. The files of all Sümerbank factories are stored at The Turkish Republic Prime Ministry General Directorate of the State Archives, Directorate of the Republic Archives in Ankara. Partly because they have not been classified, and partly for other reasons (for example, I was once told that it is illegal for researchers to view the personnel files of people still living), they are not open to researchers. After days of negotiation, the archive officers agreed to show the files to me in the following manner: I was given the inventory of Bakırköy and Defterdar Factory – another Sümerbank textile factory in Istanbul – files and asked to prepare a list of twenty-five files. These were brought from the storage the following day. The inventory was prepared by Sümerbank clerks, I was told, during the period of the purging of the state enterprises. I learnt from a storage worker that the clerks were under the utmost pressure during the time as the process of privatisation was increasingly threatening their employment status. Some were forced to resign at an early age; many were relocated to other state institutions. In fact, that particular storage worker once worked for Sümerbank and was still very bitter about his relocation.

The design of my project was based on the study of the intersections between political and economic developments within the everyday lives of rank-and-file workers. I realised at that moment that my adventures in the state archives had become a perfect example of that intersection. There I was, after months of detective work locating the files of a state factory, in the very building of the archives of the Republic. It was a partial success in the sense that I managed to find out where the files were. But, just when I thought I was about to see the files, a story that connected these files to the neo-liberal recent history of Turkey was unfolding before my very eyes! I was planning to write about workers whom, I thought, had suffered
from the painful process of proletarianisation; yet I found myself in the midst of a history that was destroying the lives of a large number of employees in state enterprises, a process of precarisation.

The inventories were Excel tables containing the following columns: sequence number, employee number, retirement number, social insurance number, name, year of birth, number of documents in the file, sequence number (repeated) and box number. The list did not follow any criteria such as ascending birth year or employee number. In fact, it appeared to be completely unsystematic, making random sampling impossible. For example, a worker born after 1950 followed another one born in 1908. Thus, after a few days of trying to do random sampling, I realised that I had to give up and choose those workers who were born before 1920. This, however, also did not solve the problem entirely since the inventory did not specify whether the worker worked at Bakırköy or Defterdar Factory. My first attempts returned mostly files of Defterdar Factory.

Moreover, in some cases, though the worker was born before 1920, he entered Bakırköy later than 1950. After a trial and error period of several days, I managed to pinpoint a part of the inventory that predominantly listed the names of Bakırköy workers. After that point, the process became a bit faster but the problems with sampling persisted. The biggest problem was the complete overlooking of underage workers. The files I studied did not include any underage employment though I knew for a fact that many children were employed at state factories. Since the names of workers were selected according to their year of birth, however, and because the files of workers from the 1920 period were very hard to find, I could not document the experiences of the underage workers. Furthermore, female workers are underrepresented in the sample compared to their actual numbers on the shop floor due to two reasons: first was because the problems related to the inventory, while the second reason concerns a more sociological problem. In many cases, the files of women gave almost no other information other than basic demographical data.

Another significant problem with the files surfaced after I wrote Chapters 2 and 3, combining the data from the files with other sources of archival material. Chapter 4, the final chapter was intended as a study of working-class political activity at Bakırköy based on a close reading of workers’ experience of trade unionism. However, the files provided virtually no information on trade union affiliations of workers during the 1940s and 1950s. My efforts to acquire such information from the archives of the trade unions were not fruitful either since they are almost non-existent. I spent much time on the phone with professional trade unionists.
asking where I could find member names of trade unions in the late 1940s. In most cases, my question triggered sarcastic laughter. In every case, the conversation was very brief. Since the archives of security forces or Ministry of Internal Affairs, i.e. the third type of archival material available to labour historians, are not open to researchers, it was not possible to collect the names of even the ‘dissidents’. At the point when I was about to give up on the fourth chapter, I came across a publication – a weekly newspaper – which reported on trade union activity at Bakırköy Factory and mentioned some names from the administration board of the union. This meant another lengthy study within the inventory, which was well worth the effort since it provided me with the files of thirteen trade unionists. However, this was also problematic because they were all at the administrative level within the union. Thus, my sample was silent on the rank-and-file membership. Furthermore, as could be expected, there was not a single woman among these administrative board members. Women once again fell through the cracks of history; their presence was wiped out during this selective process of archiving. Yet mentioning all these difficulties does not necessarily imply a transfer of responsibility for the omissions and mistakes in the manuscript. I believe there is much work to do in terms of documenting the experiences of the unvoiced labourers of the Turkish labour history. This study has been a small step in that direction, a step that will hopefully be a part of a long and tiring, but rewarding, journey.

The files themselves are a rich source of data. Still, they record only a small part of an individual’s total activity. They do not cover, for example, the interactions among workers on the shop floor. Plus, there are considerable discrepancies between the files in terms of the completeness of the data they provide. Each file includes a job application form requiring personal information, past employment experience and the type of work requested by the worker. But mostly these forms are only partially filled in, and as we could speculate from the similarity of the handwriting, that they were filled out by a clerk. Thus, it was not possible to gather systematic information on workers’ past work experience or the type of work they preferred at the factory.

The second source of archival material used in this study comes from the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam (IISH). This institute has an invaluable collection on Republican Turkey. The collection I have predominantly used is the Kemal Sülker Collection. Sülker was a journalist and trade-union activist. This is a vast collection including a range of documents from newspaper clippings to personal letters, from Sülker’s trade union notes to meeting minutes. I have also used other material from the IISH Turkey Collection such as
newspapers (Hürbilek) and video recordings of in-depth interviews with trade union leaders conducted by Yıldırım Koç in 1988. In this manuscript, I have used two of these interviews, with Bahir Ersoy and Ahmet Cansızoğlu. Ersoy worked as a weaver at Sümerbank Defterdar Factory. He was an active trade unionist from 1947 onwards. Later, he became an MP from the RPP and then the Minister of Labour in the late 1970s. The second interviewee, Cansızoğlu, worked as a weaver at Bakırköy Factory. This interview became most useful because I managed to combine Cansızoğlu’s personal testimony with information in his personnel file and information on his trade union activity from newspapers. His story is the most complete in this study and is thus narrated in great detail in Chapter 4. I also conducted oral history interviews with five Bakırköy workers in Istanbul and Kastamonu in August 2009.

A fourth source of archival material I used is the collection of reports at the Prime Ministry Higher Board of Inspection. There are two types of reports in this archive: factory inspection reports and expert reports. The former begins in 1938 and covers all Sümerbank factories. In addition to annual reports on all Sümerbank factories, these include reports on certain factories and sometimes even thematic reports such as the ones on the labour organisation at state enterprises. These reports have been most useful in a number of ways. They include the presentation of statistical figures, working and living conditions and the decision-making mechanisms. For example, the administrative council reports present precious information on government views on state enterprises; it is also possible to delineate certain parliament members on the ways these affect private business. Though their language is usually very dry, and the information they provide tends to get repetitive at times, they are interesting as they hint at the differences in management and organisational outlooks among the bureaucrats.

The second type of reports begins in 1934. They have been written by a number of experts from various countries. Beginning in the early 1930s, these experts were consulted on policy implementations at first at a time when the Turkish state was trying to formulate its new industrial planning. Among these were Soviet experts who were consulted on the preparation of the first five-year plan, experts from American research firms, and German citizens who escaped from the Nazi regime. These reports also vary in terms of scope: some are on individual factories, some on state enterprises in general and others are on thematic

issues such as technical facilities or wage regimes. They usually contain comparisons between Turkish and foreign enterprises, containing critical remarks about the former.

This dissertation draws on the review of news and articles in the following papers: Akşam, Cumhuriyet, Haber Akşam Postası, Son Posta, Telgraf, Tan, Yeni Asır. These collections were studied at Beyazıt Kütüphanesi and the National Library of Turkey. I have also consulted the Prime Ministry’s State Archives in Ankara for state documents on labour issues and Sümer Holding papers in Ankara.
Chapter 1

Contextualizing the Bakırköy Factory:
The Political and Economic Universe of the Early Republican Period

This chapter examines the structure of capitalist economic development in early Republican Turkey with an emphasis on the implementation of etatist economic policy in the 1930s. The analysis presented here introduces the reader to the political, economic and ideological universe of the early Republican period. In a way, this chapter is a prelude to our travels within the Bakırköy Factory since it portrays the social formation in which that national factory existed. The chapter also portrays the general characteristics of state structure during this period. Any study of working-class formation should include an analysis of the state structure in which that formation occurred for there is a constitutive relation between them. This necessity is even more pressing in the current study because, in the Turkish case, the state and the workers faced each other directly as employer and employee. Thus, the character of the state apparatuses and the particular ideological superstructure of the early Republican period are analysed in this part of the study. It should be noted that, although the analysis is underlined by a theoretical framework that helps to conceptualize the relation between the Turkish state and the social classes, my aim here is not to provide a thorough analysis of the class character of the state during this period. I confine myself to explain the transformation of the Turkish state from the regulating and controlling agent of the economy to an entrepreneur within that economy. I also address the practical and ideological ways the early Republican Turkish state engaged with the labour question in general and the state workers in particular.

As it corresponds to Ira Katznelson’s first layer of analysis of class formation, this experience-distant level of class formation prepares the reader for later chapters, where the analysis becomes considerably experience-near. In a way, it portrays the general characteristics of the social context in which the state workers experienced the process of proletarianization. A cautionary remark should be made here, however. I try to be as careful as possible when choosing verbs to describe the function of the analysis here. “To introduce” and “to prepare” sound the most neutral verbs to describe the relation between the current chapter and the following ones. I explained earlier that the general structure of the study follows the four layers described by Ira Katznelson in Working Class Formation. However, as
the editors of that volume also emphasise, these layers do not suggest a chronological and/or a causal relationship between them. Rather, the analytical distinctions between them are meaningful as long as they help us to distinguish between questions on different instances and aspects of the process of class formation and to improve the model of “class in itself-for itself” by means of avoiding teleological assumptions and a priori conclusions. Thus, the following sketchy analysis of macroscopic economic development of the young Turkish Republic should not be read as the determining factor of the working-class formation.

This macroscopic development had a peculiar characteristic pertaining to the atypical conjoining of economic and political temporalities. The process of the formation of an industrial proletariat in Turkey was simultaneous with the process of nation-building. The interactions between these two processes, I argue, had a significant effect on working-class political and cultural behaviour. For this reason, the analysis here goes beyond the realm of economic development to tackle the character of state-society relations in general and the state-working-class relations in particular. My aim here is to conceptualize etatism, the main component of the macroscopic economic development in the 1930s, beyond economic policy by means of unfolding the class structure that gave way to its rise in the first place. To do so, we should first look at the economic structure into which the Republic was born and discuss the shift from the liberal economic practices of the 1920s to the practice of state-led industrialization in the 1930s.

Conventionally, the implementation of etatism has been explained as a response to the drastic effects of the Great Depression on Turkish economy. However, I argue that, if Turkish etatism is reduced to a response to world economic conjuncture, its specific character is not explained. Nor could we understand its often contradictory and changing content. Such an approach would also be irrelevant to my current purposes as it overlooks the changing class dynamics and state-society relations. For these reasons, I analyse the rise of etatism during the 1930s from the perspective of changing composition of the ruling class and the class character of the state power in Turkey. I tackle the following questions: What were the internal political and economic conditions that brought the liberal economic policies of the 1920s to an end? What was the rationale presented by the state for taking on the task of building industry? How can we interpret this motivation in relation to the efforts of nationalizing the economy that had continued from the first constitutional period under Ottoman rule? In what ways did the implementation of etatism affect the class character of the state and state-society relations? After answering these questions, I proceed to analyse the practical means through which
etatism was implemented. The development plans, the administrative structure of state economic enterprises and the state factories constitute the subject matter of this section. The chapter ends with a section on the historical background of the Bakırköy Factory.

From the Empire to the Republic: A Complex Story of Rupture and Continuity

Every social formation is a product and, to some extent, a continuation of earlier social formations. When there is a regime change, however, the emergence of a new social order is often presented as a complete break from the past. The official historiography of the Turkish Republic is a perfect example of this. The radical change of political regime, from the Empire to the Republic, has been presented as a strong case of rupture with the past, a past that had already become the symbol of tyranny. In a context where the entire state apparatus changed and political and social life underwent radical reforms, which were believed to be the requisite conditions of Western modernity, this idea of radical rupture acquires a convincing status. The problem here is to transfer this idea to the realm of economics since it takes much longer for relations of distribution and exploitation to change.62

As we shall see later, the argument that the Republican social formation signified a totally novel and peculiar social formation functioned as a discursive weapon in the hands of the state to legitimise its actions. The historiographical implication of a radical rupture is a jump-start of development and progress in which analyses centred on the changes in social structure are replaced by stories of great men’s actions.63 As a result, individual agency replaces class struggle as the motor of history. Studied in this way, etatist economic policies become Kemalist regime’s solution for the post-Great Depression world economy. The state bureaucracy, and, above all, Mustafa Kemal himself, and his infamous ability to foresee, are

62 Perry Anderson calls the systematic transformation of the young Republican Turkey a strange one: “a cultural revolution without a social revolution, something historically very rare indeed that might look a priori impossible. The structure of society, the rules of property, the pattern of class relations, remained unaltered. (‘Kemalism’, London Review of Books, 11 September 2008).

63 Recent historiography of the early Republican period is rich in remarks about the need to establish the continuity with the Ottoman past against the Kemalist claim of definitive rupture. From the profile of the ruling cadres to the administrative bodies, from cultural ideologies to social rituals, historians of this era have been busy with delineating the continuum as opposed to the idea of rupture advocated by official historiography. A short list of examples include M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu, Orada Bir Köy Var Üzakta: Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Köyçü Söylem [There is a Village Far Far Away: The Villagist Discourse in the Early Republican Period], (Istanbul: İletişim, 2006), p.17; Ayhan Akta, Varlık Vergisi ve ‘Türkeşirme’ Politikaları [Capital Levy and the Turkification Policies], (Istanbul: İletişim, 2000), p.215; Füsun Üstel, “Makbul Vatandaş’ın Peşinde: II. Meşrutiyetten Bu Günde Vatandaşlık Eğitimi [In Search of the Agreeable Citizen: Citizenship Education from the Second Constitutional Period until Today], (Istanbul: İletişim, 2004), pp.155-6; Haldun Gülalp, “Capitalism and the Modern Nation-State: Rethinking the Creation of the Turkish Republic,” Journal of Historical Sociology, Vol. 7, Iss. 2, June 1994, pp. 155-6.
the agents of this project of taking the Turkish economy out of an economic impasse. As such, etatism is reduced to a reaction to a changing world economic conjuncture. The debates around the term ‘etatism,’ the actions and reactions of the state elites to policy implementations, and the demise of etatism due to changes in the balance of power within the ruling bloc are the themes around which such analyses are centred. Limited by a legalist framework, these analyses fall short of explaining why etatism took the exact form, or forms, that it did. Most importantly, by focusing exclusively on state actions and intellectual debates, this approach neglects how the masses were affected by and reacted upon the implementation of etatist policies, i.e. how they experienced etatism.

If, however, etatism is analysed within the larger context of state-society relations, it appears as an important moment of state-formation and nation-building; processes that are characterized by both rupture and continuity. Such an analysis also reveals, especially in terms of the class composition of the ruling class and the desire to create a national economy as a means to maintain the class position of certain groups within that class, that there is more continuity in political structure between the two state forms than granted. The perspective Çağlar Keyder develops in *State and Class in Turkey* reflects this complex character of social change through a study of the dynamics of the ruling class composition. Emphasising the continuity between the Ottoman and the Turkish state structures, in terms of the role bureaucracy played, Keyder provides a historical analysis of bureaucracy’s transformation, systemic location, political capacity, and the alliance it made with the bourgeoisie. Historically, the bureaucratic class has seen itself as the agent of change through societal reforms from above. Despite very different historical contexts, its main concern has always been to secure the existence of the State against the claims of sovereignty of both the national and religious groups, since the well-being of the state also guaranteed that class’s secure existence. The etatist policies of the 1930s are but another effort to save the state in the face of the hardening of its conditions of existence, both politically and economically. As I will explain below, state intervention in the economy in the 1930s presents a contrast with the relatively liberal 1920s. Instead of explaining this dramatic policy change as a mere reaction to the changing conjuncture of the world economy, keeping the focus on the intra-ruling bloc struggles would unfold etatism as a moment in a long history of state-society relations in Turkish history.
The Ottoman Heritage: A Dependent Economy

Korkut Boratav defines the Ottoman economic heritage as a semi-colonized social structure. In the 1920s, this inherited social structure was characterized by the predominance of agricultural activity of which the share in the national income was 50 percent. Eighty per cent of the population was engaged in agricultural production carried out by simple methods. Agricultural products made the biggest share of the export trade the final stage of which was monopolized by foreign merchants. Foreign capital had also played an important role in the encouragement and organization of export-oriented agriculture through mechanisms such as trading ventures, merchant houses, banks and direct participation in the distribution of credit. Industrial production made up 10 to 11 per cent of the national income, the rest of which derived from service sector activities. A Law for the Encouragement for Industry was passed in 1909; but in 1913 there were only 269 establishments with machines in the whole of Ottoman Turkey, which employed around 17,000 workers. Even in the 1920s, the structure of the manufacturing sector was characterized by the predominance of traditional craft production, since the integration into the world economy at that stage did not require the transformation of traditional crafts into modern manufacturing. Foreign capital also dominated the industrial sector. Two thirds of the capital in manufacturing firms was of a foreign origin.

The dominance of foreign capital had its origins in the historical composition of the Ottoman bourgeoisie. This predominantly non-Muslim class had engaged mainly in commercial activity. Starting from the second Constitutional period onwards, i.e. 1908, the policies of Turkification of the population applied also to the bourgeoisie and changed its ethnic composition. Within the paradigm of ‘national economy,’ the transfer of the economic position of the Christian minority to the Turkish-Muslim minority was a systematic policy that first started under the Young Turk regime of 1908-1918 and finally ended by the end of

70 Keyder, The Definition of a Peripheral Economy, p. 57.
71 Boratav, Türkiye İktisat Tarihi, p. 23.
the Kemalist War of Liberation. Keyder explains the increasing involvement of foreign capital in the economy in the 1920s through the inherent contradiction of interests between a local merchant bourgeoisie and foreign capital as parties with opposing developmental projects. The expulsion of the Christian bourgeoisie partially solved this contradiction to the advantage of foreign capital. The liberalization of the conditions of property ownership of foreigners in January 1924 further increased foreign direct investment in manufacturing. The total investments of foreign capital in manufacturing corporations doubled the contributions of Turkish capital between 1923 and 1929, and certain foreign firms acquired monopoly rights to import and sell particular goods. To take another indicator, the state budget made only 8 to 9 per cent of the total national income, whereas the total capital of 94 foreign companies in 1924 amounted to one third of the national income.

The development of the manufacturing industry in the periphery is circumscribed by the needs of commercial activity, for the former is expected to complement the latter. In other words, native capital is reduced to an adjunct to penetrating capital, which in the Turkish case is of a merchant character. As a rule, the development of the manufacturing industry in a peripheral economy is dependent on the needs of export processing. It is only expected to produce manufactured goods that are too costly to import. In any case, it is determined by trade relations that not only dictate the terms of this production but also supply its technological needs. It is this dual structure that distinguishes the manufacturing industries in the peripheral economies from those at the centre of the world economy. Whereas in the latter “industry developed autonomously and out of a transformation of rural manufacturers, [such] a transformation was precluded in the periphery because of the competition of imports and the destruction of traditional manufacturing.” The enactment of the Law for the Encouragement of Industry in 1927, which was a modified version of the 1913 law with the same name, was an effort by the Turkish state to bypass this arrested development of the manufacturing sector. This law was planned to stay in effect until 1942, thus giving the private industries fifteen years to increase the level of capital accumulation.

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73 Keyder, State and Class in Turkey, p. 93.
74 Keyder, The Definition of a Peripheral Economy, p. 59.
75 Keyder, State and Class in Turkey, p. 94.
77 Keyder, The Definition of a Peripheral Economy, p. 130.
78 Ibid., p.57.
In a nutshell, the decade of the 1920s was an exemplary structure of a dependent economy in which the intervention of the state had been minimal. On top of this, the extremely restricting rules imposed by the Lausanne Treaty, according to which Turkey had to live under the Ottoman trade regime until 1929, practically hog-tied the Turkish state. Kazgan asserts that, throughout the 1920s, the new state tried to clear out the Ottoman heritage but could not do so because the economic institutions themselves were a part of that heritage. In addition, a state that did not have even an emission bank, and was subject to speculative exchange and interest mechanisms, was what the laissez-faire ideology of the period wished for.

**Industrial Activity in the 1920s**

Even before the Great Depression hit the already vulnerable Turkish economy, efforts to increase national industrial production were made. The internal market was protected mainly through the increased customs tariff after 1929 and the state’s control over the number of imports. For example, in 1927, the old Law for Encouragement of Industry (Teşvik-i Sanayi Kanunu) was revised and, in June 1929, with the Law of Protection for Industry (Sanayi Koruma Kanunu), protectionist policies for industrial production were enacted.

According to the first industrial census of the Republic conducted in 1927, 266,900 people worked in 65,300 industrial establishments, 79 per cent of which employed three or more workers. The average number of workers per enterprise was 3.9. In terms of sectoral concentration, enterprises in textile and food sectors made up 60 per cent of the total number. The low level of productivity in these enterprises created the necessity of imports, ranging from sugar to cotton textiles giving way to chronic trade deficit and the accompanying devaluation of the Turkish lira in the 1920s.

During this protectionist period, the positive effects of the Law for the Encouragement of Industry, which entitled qualified manufacturers to benefits such as customs exemptions, land grants and guaranteed public purchase, was felt. But, these laws affected only those firms with a certain level of mechanisation and scale, leaving a large number of small enterprises

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82 The first Law for the Encouragement of Industry was enacted by the Young Turk government in 1913. It was revised in 1915.
out.\textsuperscript{85} Thus, after 1930, the number of enterprises benefiting from this law decreased in number but grew in scale, a change which was reflected in the 2.4 increase in the gross output per firm between 1932 and 1939.\textsuperscript{86} Compared to the total number that all enterprises reported in the 1927 census, the number of qualified enterprises is indeed low.\textsuperscript{87} Keyder concludes that the effectiveness of the law was limited until 1930, the year when protectionist measures were taken. Five years after the enactment of the Law for the Encouragement of Industry, the average number of workers per enterprise was 38 for qualified firms. The striking difference between this figure and the 1927 figure for all enterprises suggests that the approved firms had come close to becoming modern factories.\textsuperscript{88}

When the trade deficit doubled in 1929, the government took measures to control imports, which resulted in a 42 per cent decrease from 1928 to 1934. Cotton textiles constituted the biggest share in the total imports throughout this period. The total share of all intermediate and end textile products decreased from 32.25 per cent in 1929 to 28.96 per cent in 1934, while the share of yarn imports in total textile imports and the share of textile machines in total imports increased.\textsuperscript{89} The enactment of two laws concerning industrial production, as Aydemir argues, hindered further development of industry. The first law was the Business Tax levied only on large industrial enterprises. According to Aydemir, this law held back a considerable amount of further investment in constant capital by protecting the primitive enterprise at the expense of the modern one. The second law, the Law of Regulation of Overproduction, enacted in 1933, granted the state the regulation and control of future investments in industrial production. Supposedly aimed at protecting the already existing investments, this law had been an impediment before the further development of private

\textsuperscript{85} Keyder, \textit{The Definition of a Peripheral Economy}, p. 58; Keyder, \textit{State and Class in Turkey}, p. 103; Aydemir, \textit{İkinci Adam}, p. 443. Kazgan specifies the criterion required to benefit from the Law as follows: those enterprises using a minimum of ten horsepower and paying 1500 daily wages a year were qualified to benefit from all provisions, while those using less than ten horsepower and paying 750 daily wages could benefit from some of them. The number of enterprises benefiting changed from 1443 to 1103 during the 1932-1939 period. Though this was only 3\% of the total number of enterprises reported in the 1927 census, Kazgan reminds us that in terms of their size of labour force and production value, these firms constituted a much higher share in the total figures (Türkiye Ekonomisinde Krizler, 1929-2001: “Ekonomi Politik Açısından bir İrdeleme [Crises in Turkish Economy, 1929-2001: An Analysis from the Perspective of “Political Economy”), [Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2005], p. 80).

\textsuperscript{86} Keyder, \textit{State and Class in Turkey}, p.103. Of the 1473 enterprises benefiting from the law in 1932, 651 were in sectors related to agriculture, animal raising and hunting activities, while 351 were in the textile sector. The percentages are respectively, 44.3 per cent and 23.8 per cent (Haldun Derin, \textit{Türkiye’de Devletçilik}, [Istanbul: Çituri Biraderler, 1940], p. 84). The figure on textile sector is important because of the later activity in this sector both by the state and private capital.

\textsuperscript{87} Derin, \textit{Türkiye’de Devletçilik}, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{88} Keyder, \textit{The Definition of a Peripheral Economy}, p. 58. It should also be noted that these firms were highly concentrated geographically, with 47 per cent of them located in Istanbul and Izmir.

industrial production. Between 1930 and 1938, the private sector did not improve, not because the state was against it, but because of investment difficulties and contradictory legal arrangements.\(^{90}\)

However, there were also frequent attempts by industrial capitalists to organize in cartels in order to prevent overproduction.\(^{91}\) As such, it might be misleading to interpret this law as a total blow on private capital as Aydemir suggests. Similarly, Ilkin and Tekeli argue that, these industrialists, who benefited from the Law for the Encouragement of the Industry, wished for internal protection as well as protection against imports. Behind the use of the term ‘overproduction’ was the desire to maintain the already high rates of industrial profit.\(^{92}\)

Keyder notes the positive response of the state to these demands by citing the permission of the “formation of sector-based associations, which openly sought to fix prices and avoid competition”\(^{93}\). The economic policy, thus, presented a significant contradiction as the state was trying to establish industry on the one hand, while enacting various laws to hold back the further capital investment in industrial production, on the other. Like many other bureaucrats of the day, Aydemir was insistent that etatism did not hinder the development of private industries, and his emphasis on investment difficulties and legal contradictions should be read against this background. Similarly, after citing the decreasing number of enterprises benefiting from the Law of Encouragement for Industry after the 1933 Law of Regulation of Overproduction, he immediately states that the decrease can be explained by private enterprises combining in order to achieve more productivity. In fact, when we look at the changes in the value of constant capital, we see that there is an increase of 12.6% in 1933, 21.2% in 1934, 25.3% in 1933, and 36.4% in 1936 compared to 1932. Similarly, there is also an increase in the horsepower of the engines. Most importantly, although the number of enterprises decreased, the value contributed by industrial production to the gross value increased by 11.8% between 1932 and 1933.\(^{94}\) Thus, there is enough reason to think that the size of the enterprises and the level of productivity increased in the 1930s.

Between 1928 and 1934, the share of industry in the gross national product increased from 11 per cent to 17.8 per cent. Between 1929 and 1934 the annual growth rate of industrial production was 15.5%. Although Ilkin and Tekeli note that this increase was mainly due to initially low figures, these figures prove the existence of an encouraging environment for

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\(^{90}\) Aydemir, İkinci Adam, pp. 421-441.
\(^{91}\) Keyder, State and Class in Turkey, p. 103.
\(^{92}\) Ilkin and Tekeli, Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu, pp. 219.
\(^{93}\) Keyder, State and Class in Turkey, p. 103.
\(^{94}\) Derin, Türkiye’de Devletçilik, pp. 86-7.
increasing industrial concentration and profitability. They also point to an extension and intensification of the already existing relations of productions in the aftermath of the Great Depression.

However, all these measures did not suffice for the establishment of a national industry. The Great Depression brought capital accumulation to a halt and left commercial capital and the credit mechanism in a mess in the 1930s. The lack of entrepreneurs, technicians and workers also added to the problem.\textsuperscript{95} Despite the various disagreements on the definition of etatism, economic planning and protectionism became increasingly popular in the context of the deepening of the economic crisis worldwide that brought about planned state intervention even in developed countries.\textsuperscript{96} Thus, in Boratav’s periodization, the period of liberal economy, which was characterized by strong encouragement for private industry, ended in 1929. During the period from 1930 to 1932, protectionism was in practice, but support for private capital continued. This brief period of import substitution was replaced by a synthesis of protectionism and etatism after 1933.\textsuperscript{97}

**Why and How to Build a National Economy**

The most dramatic effect of the Great Depression on Turkish economy had been the abrupt downfall in the price of agricultural products, the single most important item of export. This has resulted in an exchange crisis and a dramatic decrease in the value of the Turkish lira. Bankruptcies in the commercial sector highlighted the weakness of the bourgeoisie for it depended excessively on foreign markets “to an extent that the material base of its activity could disappear at a moment’s notice”.\textsuperscript{98} While the local economy was showing its vulnerability, foreign merchants continued to benefit from the trade mechanism. It was in this context that the nationalization of the economy, a project that had been voiced since the Young Turk regime of 1908-1918, gained more prominence.

The idea that political sovereignty had to be complemented with economic sovereignty was voiced repeatedly. İnsel argues that economics was regarded as a matter concerning the very existence of the state from the beginning of the Republic. Similar to Keyder’s analysis of the bureaucracy’s ceaseless efforts to save the state, İnsel argues that the most important

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\textsuperscript{95} Aydemir, *İkinci Adam*, pp. 360-2.

\textsuperscript{96} Īlkin and Tekeli, *Uygulama Gecerken Turkiye ‘de Devletciligin Oluşumu*, p.134.


\textsuperscript{98} Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, pp. 95-6.
aspects of economics were those that concerned the reproduction of the state’s existence. Economy had to have a national character for economy’s increasing autonomy would constitute a threat to that very existence. The fact that this had been the desire of the ruling classes from the Young Turk governments to the Republican state raises the question as to why the 1920s did not witness nationalization of the economy on a larger scale. The political preoccupations of the 1920s, together with the limitations on the customs sovereignty imposed by the Lausanne Treaty, did not allow the state to be more active in the economy. The state spent the 1920s trying to impose superstructural reformism, which received substantial opposition, and overcome threats to territorial integrity such as the 1925 Kurdish rebellion. However, the attempts to nationalize the economy had already started in 1926 with the Cabotage Law, which enforced the transportation of goods between Turkish ports by Turkish ships, the abolition of tax concessions, the requirement of conducting correspondence between firms in Turkish, the obligation to employ Turkish personnel and the nationalization of the foreign railway companies. On 11 June 1932, a new law which specified the crafts and services that could only be done by Turkish citizens was enacted and foreigners were given a year to leave these crafts and services. In the banking sector, the number of deposits controlled by national and foreign banks changed in favour of the former. In popular imagery, any foreign merchant who speculated against the Turkish lira and the foreign banks’ reserves in foreign currencies was seen as a culprit in Keyder’s words. This negative perception was institutionalized through government organized associations such as Association for National Economy and Parsimony (Milli İktisat ve Tasarruf Çemiyeti), which was founded in 1929, the year when the Turkish lira lost value against the British pound. The tasks of this association were “to promote frugality, to reduce the consumption of imported commodities by encouraging the production and consumption of local products, and generally to promote the idea of economic self-sufficiency”. This is an indication of the extent of the politicization of the discourse on the economy. Writing in 1940, a bureaucrat makes the following observation: there was a considerable degree of animosity towards capitalism, which shaped the policy decisions in the 1930s. This is a curious remark because, as we

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101 Derin, Türkiye’de Devletçilik, p. 25.
102 Ibid., p. 51.
103 Keyder, State and Class in Turkey, p. 98.
104 Haldun Derin started his career as a coding clerk for Mustafa Kemal in 1933. He served first as a clerk for the Presidency and then as executive assistant for President İsmet İnönü from 1945.
shall see below, the comments on etatism were very carefully worded in order to stress its originality; it was presented as a completely unprecedented policy that would resemble neither capitalism nor socialism. Indeed, as we read into the words of this bureaucrat, it becomes clear that what he means by animosity towards capitalism is indeed a specific configuration of nationalism and the experience of economic hardship. The animosity towards capitalism in Turkey is completely different from other countries, he continues, for it is actually the animosity towards foreign capital that hides its political character under a commercial form. Both society and the state respect the private entrepreneur who conducts business fairly regardless of his ethnic origin. Thus, the problem is not with capitalism or any of its components such as free competition, land rent or interest, but with the economic activities of non-Turkish people that supposedly threatened the Turkish nation’s sovereignty.\footnote{Derin, \textit{Türkiye’de Devletçilik}, p. 5.} We will see different expressions of this popular sentiment later in this study, when we discuss examples on the perception of the state and the worker in an employer-employee relationship. Suffice to say here that the negative perception of foreign capital was instrumental for the state to take economic matters into its hands.

The Formation and Dissolution of the Bourgeoisie-Bureaucracy Alliance

The founding ideology of the Turkish Republic, Kemalist nationalism, has two origins according to Gülalp: the ethnic conflict that resolved in favour of the Muslim/Turkish element, and the political process of nation-state building.\footnote{Gülalp, “Capitalism and the Modern Nation-State”, pp. 155-6.} In economic terms, the first component of this ideology was the removal of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie from the territory of the new nation-state leaving a considerable number of vacant positions and physical property to be seized by the Muslim bourgeoisie in-formation. This nascent bourgeois class had already gained some impetus owing to the Young Turk government’s favourable policies. At the sociopolitical level, these third-party resources to be expropriated ensured that “the relationship between the bureaucracy and the Muslim commercial class could continue without engendering a conflict over distribution.”\footnote{Keyder, \textit{State and Class in Turkey}, pp. 94-5 (quotation from p. 95).} Within this equation, the latter party had neither the strength nor the pressure of further asserting itself thanks to the already greater scale of opportunity they could deal with. The expansion of the world economy in the 1920s enabled the merchant capital to make use of the opportunities opened thereby in the context of minimal intervention by the political authority.
With the Great Depression, the hopes of this bourgeoisie-in-formation to participate more in political power came to a halt because of the crash in the world market, which devastated the commercial sector. According to Keyder, besides revealing the weakness of the Muslim bourgeoisie, the conditions of the aftermath of the Depression revealed the impossibility of the continuation of this precarious relationship between the two parties: “There was no possibility of utilizing the existing links towards a structural transformation; for that, the political authority needed at its disposal a different set of instruments and policies. By 1929, the bureaucratic faction in power had emerged victorious from the intra-class struggle.”

From the perspective of class composition of the ruling class, the years 1930 and 1931 witnessed political transformations through which the bureaucracy consolidated its place within the power bloc. When the Depression crashed the boom economy and gave an end to trade as a lucrative economic activity, the political authority gained more relative autonomy. In the context of the economic hardship, the bureaucracy found the opportunity to install itself into the class equation. At the same time, the economic difficulties experienced by the commercial bourgeoisie required the formulation of new economic policies. As a result, a new state form came into existence, which “together with the set of measures originally formulated to combat the crisis, resulted in a regime which represented the culmination of bureaucratic reformism”, and it remained in force until the end of World War II.

Ilkin and Tekeli make a similar analysis to Keyder in explaining how the change in economic policy became possible from the perspective of class character of the ruling class. The class composition of the ruling class at the end of the 1920s was dominated by the commercial bourgeoisie, which had recently started to include bureaucrats, and large landowners. These were the sectors of the economy most badly affected by the Great Depression. For the large landowners, the problem was the dramatic decrease in the price of agricultural products. Their expectation from the state was to create mechanisms that would

108 Ibid., pp. 95-6 (quotation from p. 96). Keyder traces the historical roots of the emergence of a civil bureaucracy to the centralization efforts of the Ottoman state in the 1830s and points to the Young Turk government as the period when bureaucratic activism evolved into its revolutionary version. Analyzing the intellectual constitution of the Young Turk movement, and delineating its primary aims as overcoming economic backwardness through the creation of national economy and re-establishing the autonomy and the geographical integrity of the Ottoman state, he shows the extent of the dependence of its class position on the condition of “saving the state.” (Ibid., pp. 49-54) This historical account enables us to understand the historical development of the still very much strong state-centered perspective of the Turkish bureaucracy.

109 Keyder, The Definition of a Peripheral Economy, p. 3.
110 Keyder, State and Class in Turkey, pp. 96-7 (quotation from p. 97).
keep the prices high, in order to secure guaranteed public purchase, and to regulate agricultural exports. But the state’s involvement in the organization of export trade was completely against the class interests of the commercial bourgeoisie. This conflict of interests between the two ruling factions caused the dissolution of this coalition and gave bureaucracy the chance to implement state-led industrialization by securing the support of the landed faction, which would eventually benefit from industrial production as providers of raw materials. For the export merchant, this was tolerable as long as the state did not intervene in organizing the export trade. Thus, neither faction of the ruling class had strong reasons to oppose state-led industrialization.  

In summary, the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s created a peculiar situation in which the global economy and the national political and ideological atmosphere pointed in the direction of a more restrictive trade policy, which had become possible with the expiration of the open trade policy imposition by the Lausanne Treaty. The crisis of the commercial bourgeoisie required new formulations for economic policies, which turned the years 1930 and 1931 into years of economic innovation and zealous debates about the role of the state in the economy among politicians and the intelligentsia. As such, etatism was “the double response of a historically specific polity: first, to the World Depression and, secondly, to developments in the Turkish political economy in the years 1923 to 30.” Three years of uncertainty about the new power dynamics of the further capitalist development came to a halt in 1932, when the state and the workers came face-to-face as employer and employee.

Definitional Problems: “Moderate Etatism”

Although the necessity of national production of consumer main goods was an agreed upon idea by the beginning of the 1930s, there was no consensus on the means to achieve this. The debate surrounding the role of the state in the economy in the early 1930s was characterized by the disagreement between those who argued that this could only be realized through industrial activity by the state and those who believed that industrial activity should be left to the entrepreneurs. The debate was not only about economics; it also reflected differences of opinion on state-society relations. On one side the bureaucracy was trying to secure its ruling

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111 İlkın and Tekeli, Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu, pp. 76-7.
112 Keyder, State and Class in Turkey, p. 96.
role within the framework of a strong state. On the other side were the more liberally minded politicians and intelligentsia who believed that the state’s role in the economic sphere should be restricted. Although on a discursive level the disagreement was seemingly confined to the degree of state intervention in the economy, it signified more important ideological differences.

The following example illustrates this multifaceted character of the debate. In August 1930, the Liberal Republican Party was founded by Ali Fethi Okyar upon Mustafa Kemal’s request. The rationale was to create an opposition to the ruling RPP and thus to establish the tradition of multi-party democracy in Turkey. In its programme, the party announced its commitment to the RPP principles but opposed its economic policy advocating for the encouragement of foreign investment and criticising state intervention in the economy, which, to Okyar, left all the burden of rebuilding the nation on the shoulders of one generation through the enormous amounts of money allocated to public works. The Prime Minister refuted these accusations by defining the peculiar economic policy of the Republic as “moderate etatism.” To him, this was necessitated by two factors. First, he cited the complete dependence of the Turkish people on the state, even for the simplest economic activity. Expecting to benefit from the economic activities of capitalists, he argued, would be a mistake because the people would not agree. In a way, then, he expressed a common belief in the inability of Turkish society to act for itself without the guidance of a strong state on which it both depends and holds accountable for every single problem. Read against the background of the increasing dissatisfaction with the RPP government, this could also be interpreted as an effort of the RPP to reconnect with the people.

The second factor concerned the issue of the national character of the economy: “For years, the propaganda for capital had been trying to undermine national politics.” Inonu does

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115 This extremely short-lived party is an important case study to understand the dynamics of the Turkish democracy in this period. Fethi Okyar’s visit to Izmir, an important city in the Aegean region, created a scandal due to the enormous number of people supporting the party, which resulted in the death of two people. Ilkin notes that among these supporters, there were also workers (Selim Ilkin, “Devletçilik Döneminin İlk Yıllarında İşçi Sorununa Yaklaşım ve 1932 İş Kanunu Tasarısı” [Approaches to the Labor Question in the Early Years of the Etatist Period and the 1932 Labor Law Draft], Gelişme Dergisi 1978 Özel Sayısı, p. 258). Following this, the party was accused of stirring up a reaction against Mustafa Kemal’s nationalist reform program. Liberal/Free Republican Party annulled itself on 17 November 1930, after only 99 days. Following this, the single party regime continued until 1945, and the Republican People’s Party ruled until 1950, when it lost to Democrat Party one of the founders of which was Adnan Menderes, an adherent of Liberal/Free Republican Party.

116 Aydemir, Ikinci Adam, p. 372.

117 The clearest example of this dissatisfaction was the incident of Free Party – by then in existence only for days – leadership’s visit to Izmir. Despite the local RPP officials’ efforts to block their coming, the support of the people was overwhelming. The leader of the party, Fethi Okyar admits that he was taken by surprise with the extent of the support, which caused panic among the ruling elite. (Ali Fethi Okyar, Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası Nasıl Doğdu Nasıl Feshedildi [How was the Free Republican Party Born and Dissolved], [Istanbul, 1987]).
not elaborate on this point but we could speculate that what he means by “propaganda for capital” here is the dominance of foreign capital in the Turkish economy. Considered together with the previously cited words of a bureaucrat who distinguished animosity towards capitalism from animosity towards foreign capital, these words reveal the strong nationalist element in Turkish etatism. On the other hand, the adjective ‘moderate’ displays the sensitive balance between the emphasis on nationalism, on the one hand, and the effort not to alienate private capital from this specifically Turkish economic policy, on the other. These arguments could also be read as an example of the state’s uses of claims of peculiarity. The Prime Minister is actually trying to convince the public that state intervention in the economy was a must because of the peculiar character of both the Turkish people and the historical conditions of economic development of the country. Once this claim acquires hegemonic status, it functions as a protective mechanism in the service of the state for its actions could not be evaluated, for example, according to the standards of Western liberal democracy. Even in this simple argument, we acquire a glimpse of the perception of the society by the state.

In 1931, etatism, and also the principle of revolutionism, entered the party programme of the Republican People’s party at the second party congress and completed the six principles of the Party. 118 It was written into the constitution on 5 February 1937. Although made official in these ways, there was still confusion around the term. Despite its common use in many contexts, the term was not given a clear definition. Many bureaucrats understood it as the prerequisite of a national economy, or sometimes its synonym and thus invoked it as the remedy to the problems of economic sovereignty. To a prominent intellectual, and, later, also a bureaucrat of the period, etatism – like liberalism or socialism – was a system within national economy, which was a totality of economic relations. 119 As seen in this example, the definitions did not have much analytical value. Moreover, the expectations of etatism went beyond economic development. Within the framework of the ideology of ‘solidarity in the service of state’, etatism was seen as a means to strengthen the state. But this was also undesirable since “too much etatism” would practically mean socialism.

However, etatism was never conceptualized as an economic policy within the general framework of capitalism either. Etatism signified an alternative both to liberal capitalism and socialism at the same time. It was a practical solution, not a regime change. The bulk of the state’s efforts during this period were directed at convincing private capital that the goal of

118 The first party congress was held in October 1927. Mustafa Kemal defined four party principles: republicanism, nationalism, secularism and populism.

119 Aydemir, İkinci Adam, pp. 403-5.
etatism was not to replace private enterprise with state investments but to create an investment atmosphere in which the two complemented one another. The RPP was often at pains to explain that the main goal was not to hinder the development of private capital but to take the tasks that cannot be carried on by private capital onto the state. For example, in Civil Knowledge for the Citizen (Vatandaş İçin Medeni Bilgiler), a book that was written under the close supervision of Mustafa Kemal, Afet İnan writes: “While recognizing private enterprise as the principle, our etatism entails state involvement in tasks, especially in the sphere of economy, that the common and higher interests of the people dictates in order to carry the people and the country to prosperity in the shortest time possible.”

Similarly, when Prime Minister İnönü published an article on etatism in Kadro (Cadre), he argued that Turkish etatism is not a doctrine but a means to achieve the goal of creating a national industry. Most significant here were the efforts to formulate etatism in such a way as to make its distance from socialism clear. For example, the following words in the preface to the second five-year industrialization plan by Mustafa Kemal emphasizes the peculiarity of Turkish etatism: “Turkish etatism is not a system translated from the socialist theories developed since the nineteenth century-instead, it is a system that emerges from the specific needs of Turkey, a system peculiar to her”.

William Hale summarizes these claims of peculiarity as follows: “[O]fficially, etatism was usually defined as a home-grown plant, specifically evolved for Turkish conditions”. I noted above that these claims were repeatedly used by the state in different contexts pertaining to various aspects of Turkish state and society structure. These claims gave the state more power to keep societal dynamics under control. In other words, they were functional in terms of increasing the hegemonic capacity of the regime.

In the following chapters, we will see other examples of the uses of this rhetoric of peculiarity. For the sake of the current argument, it suffices to say that not only did this rhetoric help the implementation of etatism in the face of liberal critics; they also contributed to the self-image of the Turkish state. During the period etatist policies stayed in practice, they also helped the state to contain and, when necessary, prosecute sporadic incidents of dissidence.

120 Quoted in ibid., p. 445. Aydemir notes that Mustafa Kemal personally worked on this formulation; he had actually seen the corrections he made on the original document. He cites this as an example of the extent of care given to definitions.


122 Ibid., p. 105.
A Classless, Fused Mass: The Discourse of Populism

In his examination of the interaction between ideological debate and economic development in Turkey after 1930, William Hale discusses populism as the ideological commitment of the regime that was most closely related to etatism. Among etatism’s supporters he cites “the radical-reform nationalist who saw etatism as a permanent alternative to capitalism and who linked its principles to the belief in social solidarism labeled as ‘populism’”. Key to these interpretations was the belief in the unity between the nation and the state. Hale quotes one of the founding fathers of Turkish nationalism, Tekin Alp (an Ottoman Jew by birth who converted to Islam and advocated for the Turkification of the minorities) as an extreme example of this identification: “[I]n the Kemalist regime Nation and State form a single, indivisible and inseparable whole. The spirit with which the whole nation, and particularly the elite which surrounds the leader is imbued...constitutes a guarantee against any possible deviation or degeneration of etatism...The Kemalist state cannot tolerate the implantation in Turkey of perpetual and fratricidal struggles between the two elements of national production, the employers and the workers.”

Populism was the embodiment of this concatenation of the economic policy with the peculiar character of the Turkish nation and state. Formulated as one of the six principles of the RPP in 1937, it was defined in the 1943 Party Program as follows:

It is one of our main principles to regard the people of the Turkish Republic not composed of different social classes but as a community organized around division of labor for individual and social life. Farmers, small industry holders and shopkeepers, workers, independent business holders, merchants and civil servants are the main laboring groups that make the Turkish community. The labouring of each of these is requisite for the living and happiness of the others and the community in general. The objective of our party aimed through this principle is to provide social order and solidarity instead of class struggle and to maintain harmony between interests that are not opposing each other.

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123 Ibid., p. 105.
124 CHP Programi (RPP Programme), (Ankara: Zerbamat Basımevi, 1943), p.4, Ankara. In her study on citizenship education in Turkey from the second constitutional period onwards, Füsun Üstel gives examples of the discourse of social division of labor and solidarity from textbooks of the 1930s, which she defines as the period when the Republican pedagogues undertook the mission of producing the citizen that is compatible with the single-party regime (“Makbul Vatandaş’ın Peşinde”, p.215). One particular example concerns the use of the category of “laboring” within that discourse: “The emphasis on ‘personal initiative’ in the textbooks of the second constitutional period is replaced by [the concept of] “laboring” through [an understanding of] ‘responsibility/work ethic’ directed at mobilizing the entire society on the basis of the project of national development from the early Republican period onwards. Without referring to economic underdevelopment, the emphasis of ‘labor’ presents ‘work’ as a value in itself, a virtue and as a mode of moral existence in the final
Written in 1943, that is, after the decade of the 1930s, which consolidated the identification of the party with the state, the definition reflects a solidarist understanding. The party-state rules independent of any interest groups in that supposedly unprivileged mass. Historically, there were two factors that enabled the state to present itself as the disinterested party vis-à-vis the society. First, the fact that the ruling cadre was mainly composed of the military elites who took part in the independence war provided the top government officers with a considerable degree of respectability and status. Those forces that saved the country from enemies in the Independence War later served in the construction of the new Republic, and their former commitment saved them from suspicion of seeking their self-interest at the expense of the people they “rescued” in the first place. That is why, for example, while addressing the RPP’s Izmir Congress months after the Free Party incident, Mustafa Kemal emphasized the specific nature of the party:

As you know political parties are formed for narrow and specific reasons. For example the merchants of Izmir may form a party to accomplish their own aims. Or there could be a party for farmers. There may be such narrow parties but our party is set up to achieve the aims of each class of the people without hurting the interests of any other.

Second, in the popular imagery of the day, far from being conceptualized as a part of the changing world in the aftermath of WWI, the Independence War was seen as a singular case of an heroic action of a people coming together under the leadership of one man: Mustafa Kemal. Together, these two factors functioned as the cement of the construction of the Turkish state as a supreme independent entity, the very existence of which laid the foundation of Turkish society.

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125 The strongest expression of this identification was the presentation of the Society for the Defence of the Rights of Thrace and Anatolia, the organization that led the Independence War, as the predecessor of the RPP and the acceptance of the Sivas Congress as the first party congress of the party. (Hakkı Uyar, “‘Devletin İşçi Sınıfı’ ve Örgütlenme Girişimi”, Vol. 27, No. 157, 1997, p. 14) It should be noted that in saying this, I do not mean to suggest this perception of the state officers as a consensual social reality. If nothing else, the story of the brief existence of the Free Republican Party in 1930 testifies to the discontent about the RPP government among the masses. Rather, what I am portraying is the popular imagery reflected in various state-issued declarations and the cultural products of the day.

126 Qtd. in Feroz Ahmad, “The Development of Class-consciousness in Republican Turkey, 1923-45,” in Donald Quataert and Erik Jan Zürcher (eds.), *Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995), p. 90. In a publication of Association of Izmir Workers and Craftsmen in 1935, the RPP addressed the Turkish workers as follows: “There is no you and me, dear Turkish worker; there is only us!” (Uyar, “‘Devletin İşçi Sınıfı’ ve Örgütlenme Girişimi”, p. 17).
Whether perceived in a unity with the Nation or as ruling over the Nation without any interest of its own, these narratives on the Turkish state suggest a certain sense of peculiarity. By rejecting the existence of social classes, the Turkish state also rejected the possibility of any class interest infiltrating the state apparatus. An extreme example of this view came from the Prime Minister, Şükrü Saraçoğlu, during his parliamentary speech on 5 August 1942:

Privileges and classes never existed in our case. Democracy is a great reality that comes from the depth of Turkish history. We have been populist, are populist and will remain populist. The fact that we have formed a single-party state is mainly based on this great reality. We want no reign of court, of capital or of classes. All we want is the sovereignty of the Turkish people.

All these arguments create the impression that in implementing etatist economic policies, the Turkish state had considerable relative autonomy. When we analyse the practical effects of these policies, however, a different picture arises. Not only did etatism emerge in a class society, but through its reproductive effects it furthered the development of that society.

**The First Five Year Plan and Sümerbank**

In their detailed study on the practical implementations of etatist economic policy in Turkey, Ilkin and Tekeli provide a thorough analysis of the actors, debates and documents on etatism in the early 1930s. Though this detailed analysis lies beyond the scope of the current study, especially the section on the preparation of the First Five Year Plan, it is relevant for it illustrates the interactions between the ideology of populism and the implementation of

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127 An exception to the argument of peculiarity could be found, mainly in relation to the second factor discussed here, is Şevket Süreyya Aydemir’s assessment of etatism: “The social classes in the countries of the ‘national liberation front’ and those in the industrialized countries do not have a similar formation. In the former, the existence of a capitalist class hinders industrialization [presumably because its interests are linked to those of capitalism in the industrialized countries]. Therefore, this function devolves on the state. The establishment of industry, transport networks and major credit institutions by the state, under the state’s control and within the framework of a planned economy will bring about not just economic welfare, but also social harmony, since the state’s directory role will prevent the emergence of opposing classes in the country, and thus of class conflict. The result will be the creation of a “united society, without privilege or classes” (Hale, “Ideology and Economic Development in Turkey”, p. 106). Although very different both in terms of analytic value and the reasoning from other assessments referred to in the same study, Aydemir’s analysis is similar to them in terms of his expectations from etatism: a classless society.

128 Qtd. in Aktar, Varlık Vergisi, p. 142-3.
To Ilkin and Tekeli, there are two predecessors to the first five year plan: reports written by the Ministry of Economy, the Department of Industry and the reports of the Soviet experts. In December 1931, the General Director of Industry, Ahmet Şerif Onay, was given the task of reporting on RPP program’s parts concerning industrial activity. The report he presented is important because it included many of the ideas that were later included in the Plan. To begin with, Onay advocated an import substitution model in which the national industries would use local raw materials and produce main goods leaving the end product manufacturing to private industry. He argued for protection of the internal market through high custom tariffs and emphasized the need for creating consumer demand for the manufactured goods. Thus, at the end of his report, he also addressed issues of distribution. This did not make Onay any more popular with the more liberal minded bureaucrats and the private capital holders. Soon after, first the Minister of Economy, who had personally appointed Onay to that position, and then Onay himself had to resign.

The significance of this report for our current purposes lies in the direct connection Onay establishes between populism and etatism. After asserting that a reasonable economic policy could avoid class divisions, he explains how the principle of populism could work in the realm of industrial activity:

Production is based on labour and capital. The fruits of production are distributed between these two differently in different countries. A big part of capital in our country is of foreign origin, whereas labour is almost completely national. Thus, an important part of capital’s share goes abroad. Labour’s share, however, is almost entirely paid to the [Turkish] people. This is why we should organize our rules and organizations in such a way that labour’s share is as big as possible compared to capital’s share. Because the main component of national income is indeed labour’s share. In fact, to secure this type of distribution is the duty of any national government.

What stands out in this explanation is the emphasis on the national character of the economy as the rationale for planning, on the one hand, and the immediate reference to the principle of populism, on the other, after the threat of class struggle is mentioned. As we shall see in the following pages, this identification was widely made, not only by the government but also by the labour movement. Populism was often invoked as the solution to the problem of class conflict.

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129 Tekeli and İlkin, Uygulama Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu, pp. 145 to 158.
130 Ibid., p. 147.
Soon after Onay submitted his report, the Prime Minister visited the Soviet Union and Italy, where he secured a considerable sum of credit for the establishment of industries. The government was already impressed by the successes of the planned economy in the Soviet Union and these visits became the starting point for cooperation between the two countries. First, Turkish experts examined seventy textile manufacturing enterprises in the Soviet Union. Later a committee of Soviet experts came to Turkey to study the locations and other practicalities of the planned state factories. By mid 1932, a three-year plan that focused primarily on cotton textiles had been prepared. But later that year, the Minister of Economy changed and alterations in the organization structure of state institutions responsible for state enterprises followed.

The institutional arrangement for the implementation of planned industrialization already became a subject of discussion in early 1932. The Bank for Industry and Mining was established in 1925 to run the state factories until they were handed over to the private sector. This institution was supposed to enter into partnership with private capital by means of providing credit and banking services to private entrepreneurs. As such, it was not considered appropriate for performing the new tasks entailed by the etatist policies. In July 1932, laws for the establishment of first the State Industrial Office and then the Industrial Credit Bank were enacted. While the Bank for Industry and Mining was supposed to run the enterprises until they were taken by private capital, the State Industrial Office, endowed with considerably large authority in regulating relations with the private sector, took upon the task of permanently managing new state enterprises. This signalled a change of attitude toward private businesses. With the forceful replacement of the Minister of Economy in September 1932, from a devoted advocator of stated-owned industrial enterprises to a name known for his close relations to business circles, this change became more institutionalized. The two institutions began to be criticised soon after they began operating. It was at this point that the name Sümerbank, which was allegedly coined by Mustafa Kemal, was first mentioned in the press. Enacted on 3 June 1933, the Sümerbank law presented its legislative intention as to replace the Industrial Office, which, the law’s preamble argued, “instead of helping the development of national industry, [had the effect of] worrying the industrialists.”

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131 It is worth mentioning a few words about the first cadre of the Ministry of Economy during the planning of etatism is order to establish their difference from the later cadres. Mustafa Şerif Özkan, the Minister of Economy between September 1930 and September 1932, was the first person to work for etatism’s inclusion in the RPP program (İlkin, “Devletçilik Döneminin İlk Yıllarında İşçi Sorununa Yaklaşım”, p. 285). Further comparisons between the approaches of these two ministers to the question of formulating a Labor Law before and in 1932 are made in İlkin’s 1978 article.

132 Tekeli and İlkin, Uygulama Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu, pp. 149-55 and 177.
The Class Character of State Power

The disagreements on the state’s role in the economy reflect multiple aspects of the class character of the new Turkish state. This brief account of the organizational and institutional arrangements and of the transfer of power – from bureaucrat with protectionist opinions to those defending the rights and interests of private business – provides significant insights into the class character of the state during this period. To understand the long-term effects of these changes, I would follow Göran Therborn’s conceptualization of the class character of state power.

Therborn begins by defining the class character of state power with a significant argument, which helps us to overcome certain conceptual and terminological confusions. According to this conceptualization, state and political power must be analysed in relation to the ongoing processes of social reproduction and transformation. In this model, the class character of a state is not defined in terms of its constituency and composition but the reproductive effects created through its interventions. Therborn defines three objects of reproduction affected by state power: the relations and forces of production, the character of the state apparatus and the particular ideological superstructure with its specialised apparatuses of qualification and subjection.¹³³

In the economic sphere, state interventions may further allow, go against or break existing relations of production. ‘To further’, in this context, means to extend given relations of production as exemplified in opening up new areas and labour resources for capitalist exploitation. In addition, ‘to further’ also means intensifying the exploitation or domination of the ruling class of a given mode of production.¹³⁴ Above, I illustrated the efforts of government officials to delicately formulate their statements on etatism in order to convince private capital that its existence is not under threat.

For Therborn, the character of the state apparatus has a key role because it is “a material crystallization of the relationships and division of labor dominant in society” and it has an indirect and delayed effect on the other two objects of reproduction, namely economy and ideology. First of all, everything that is done by the state is done through the state apparatus; thus it provides a filter determining the modality of state economic and ideological interventions. Moreover, the manner in which state economic and ideological policies of a given aim and content are actually implemented is a crucial determinant of their effects.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 160.
particularly those of an indirect and intermediate kind. Secondly, the state apparatus, as a material condensation of class relations, affords a strategic base for an overall change in state policy. Once it is entrenched in the state apparatus, the ruling class or hegemonic class of an alliance enjoys a privileged position of strength, from which it may proceed to withdraw concessions, and end or shift alliances.\textsuperscript{135}

Indeed, the effects of these institutional arrangements on these two objects of reproduction are easy to detect. In the sphere of economy, the positive reactions of the private capital to the replacement of the Industrial Office by Sümerbank, especially after it was announced that the latter would grant loans to industrialists, reveal that capital had managed to steer the development of economic policy through its representatives in the state apparatus.\textsuperscript{136} A very interesting statistic supporting this argument concerns the ownership structure of the private enterprises established in the 1930s. In Keyder’s words, it became difficult to distinguish between the top ranks of the political class and the industrial bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{137} Indeed, 74.2 per cent of those running these enterprises were state officers. Kazgan explains this high figure as an outcome of the increasing income level of bureaucrats in the face of decreasing prices and the opportunity to learn business at state enterprises. Thus, she concludes, state’s contribution to the industrialization of the economy was not limited to opening new factories. The recruitment of private entrepreneurs from within the bureaucracy was also an important input.\textsuperscript{138} This merging of interests on a personal level also indicates a newly emerging coalition between bureaucracy and the nascent industrial class.

On the ideological level, it should suffice to say that the same Minister of Labour, who initiated the attack on the Industrial Office, became one of the founders of the oppositional liberal Democrat Party in 1945, which utilized an anti-etatist stance in its campaign for the 1950 elections. The elections resulted in DP’s victory. As such, Turkish etatism exemplifies what Therborn calls the nationalization of capitalist enterprises, which “indicated a real temporary weakness of the bourgeoisie, they posed no threat to its power”.\textsuperscript{139}

Consider the following list of Sümerbank’s tasks in light of this framework: running the factories taken over from the State Industry Office, managing the state shares in private

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., pp. 150-1.
\textsuperscript{136} On a similar note, Tekeli and ıIkin illustrate how the bureaucracy maintained and reproduced its existence within the state apparatus in the context of the Great Depression through an analysis of the social expenditure in the 1930s. A striking example would be the dramatic increase in the share of social security expenditures, which covered only the civil servants in this period, in total state expenditures rose from 0.2 % in 1927 to 8.3 % in 1934 (\textit{Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye'de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu}, pp. 51-4).
\textsuperscript{137} Keyder, \textit{State and Class in Turkey}, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{138} Kazgan, \textit{Türkiye Ekonomisinde Krizler}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{139} Therborn, \textit{What does the Ruling Class do}, p. 152.
Industrial enterprises, preparing and directing the preliminary research and projects of all factories built with state investment (with the exception of factories established through special laws), participating in or helping out the establishment or expansion of enterprises that are economically productive for the country, opening up schools to train foremen and workers required by factories, financing the education of industrial engineers and experts in the higher education institutions or helping schools that are opened for this reason by the Ministry of Economy, sending students and interns to foreign countries, providing credit to industrial enterprises and carrying out general banking tasks, and carrying out research on the conditions of development of national industry and reporting back on this issue as well as other issues requested by the Ministry of Economy. As this long list illustrates, instead of being confined to tasks concerning only state enterprises, Sümerbank was given the task of encouraging the development of the national economy as a whole, mainly through the provision of credit, and investments in training and education. The emphasis on national economy characterised the practicalities of planned economy and state-led industrialization, and its effects became visible in later decades with a dramatic increase in national industrial production.

The Content and the Success of the Plan

The Plan was a collection of different reports that had been written over a long course of time. It was made public in January 1934 and its implementation officially began on 17 April 1934. The presentation text explained the need for planned economy by means of rejecting the international division of labour and Turkey’s role in it as the provider of agricultural products and raw materials. The goal is specified as the manufacturing of end products using locally produced raw materials. This would benefit the national economy as a whole, it is argued, since it would give an impulse to agricultural production and increase the price of raw materials.  

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140 Derin, Türkiye ‘de Devletçilik, pp. 92-3.
141 An interesting example of the benefits the private sector enjoyed through etatism comes from the war years when cotton yarn was very difficult to find. The Local Products Market, the buying and selling institution of Sümerbank, replied positively to the offers of private textile manufacturers who demanded yarn in return for selling their end products. Various inspection reports complain that the private manufacturers took advantage of this deal. When available, they bought cheaper and poorer quality yarn from the market and used it for products they sold to Sümerbank, while they used the better quality yarn for products they sold in the market. In the end, the deal benefited the private textile manufacturers who not only took advantage of guaranteed public purchase but also increased their profits by taking the opportunities opened in the private market. See: Sümerbank 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, (Ankara: Basvekalet Devlet Matbaası, 1943), p. 23; Sümerbank 1943 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Matbaası, 1944), p. 13; “Sümerbank Yerli Mallar Pazarları Müessesesi 1944 Yılı Murakebe Heyeti Raporu”, in Sümerbank 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Matbaası, 1945), p. 13.
materials. The industries would also open new areas of employment and increase the purchasing power of the people as a whole. In the words of the Minister of Economy, the ‘national factories’ would meet the needs of the internal market. In short, his proposed model of industrialization was import substitution and it reflected the popularity of the term “national economy”, which was first and foremost understood as the attainment of economic sovereignty. In practical terms, it meant national factories producing the basic consumer goods. Thus, the main objective of the First Five Year Plan was to establish enterprises that would produce hitherto imported commodities for which raw materials could be either imported or gathered within the country. The choices of industrial sectors for state investment were made accordingly.

Five such branches of industry were covered in the plan: textile, mining, cellulose, ceramic and chemical industries. Of these five industries, textile and mining were the top two in terms of their share in total imports. While the former constituted 24.7 per cent of total imports, the latter made up 11.1 per cent. In accordance with these figures, these two sectors were assigned 50.7 and 26.9 per cent, respectively, of the total expected investment. Within textiles, cotton received the biggest share with 42.2 per cent of the total investment. The following projects were realized in this sector: on 13 August 1934, the extension of Bakırköy Cloth Factory started. The building of Kayseri Cotton Textiles Combine and Ereğli Hosiery Combine started on 20 May 1934 and 20 September 1934, respectively. While the former factory was opened in 1936, the latter opened in 1937. The building of three factories started in 1935: a calico factory in Nazilli which started operating in 1937, an artificial silk factory in Gemlik which started operating in 1938, and a merino factory in Bursa was opened in 1938. The construction work for a hosiery factory in Malatya started in 1937 and the factory opened in 1947. With the opening of this factory, Sümerbank became the top producer of cotton textiles. The bank controlled 47 per cent of all the spindles as well as 47 per cent of the entire workforce in the textile sector and carried out 68 per cent of all the textile production.

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142 Percentages calculated using the data in Aydemir, *İkinci Adam*, pp. 414-5.
143 Percentage calculated using the date in Derin, *Türkiye’de Devletçilik*, p. 94. There is a slight difference between the percentage of total textile investment calculated through the data in Aydemir and Derin. The share of textile investment is 50.7% and 49.8% when calculated using the date given in the two accounts, respectively. The difference stems from the fact that, while Derin states the total investment to be 45 million TL, the figure he provides in the tables is 43,953,000 TL.
144 Aydemir, *İkinci Adam*, p. 436.
Aydemir notes that the plan was not carried out completely because of the additional projects, inaccurate calculations, underestimation of needed resources. Tekeli and Ilkin, however, assert that it was implemented to a large extent, although it took until 1948 for all the investments to be completed mainly because of the war conditions. A second five year plan was prepared in 1938, but, because of the difficulties in securing financial means for the first five year plan and the threat of a new world war, this plan was abandoned. In its stead, a four-year plan was made and accepted on 16 September 1938. Together with the unfinished projects from the first five-year plan, this second four-year plan constituted the main document on industries. The total amount of anticipated capital for these projects amounted to 164,240,545 TL in 1938 whereas the state revenue was 250,094,000 TL in the same year. Thus, the state had to drop many of the projects, including the establishment of 70 new factories by Sümerbank.

Labour Force Overview: Numbers, Legal Arrangements and Conditions

Numerical information on the size of the labour force during this period mainly comes from industrial censuses that have two main problems. First, the information they provide is incomplete. Second, the results are difficult to compare because of the definitional and classificational differences between them. Nevertheless, the lack of better statistics compels us to rely on them to document the general development of the industrial workforce during the period. The incongruence among the following figures should be evaluated against this background information.

The following figures illustrate the growth in the size of the proletariat from 1915 to the end of the 1940s. In 1915, fewer than 15,000 workers worked in the manufacturing industry. 15% of the investment in industries was of national origin, and Turkish workers made up 15% of the entire workforce. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce statistics, in 1922, the total number of industrial workers was 75,411 and 35,316 of them worked in the textile sector. The average number of workers per enterprise was 2.3 for all

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146 Aydemir, İkinci Adam, p. 418.
147 Tekeli and Ilkin, Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu, pp. 198-9.
148 Aydemir, İkinci Adam, p. 419.
149 The term labour force here denotes factory-or workshop-based free wage labourers.
150 50 Yılda Çalışma Hayatımız, (Ankara: T.C. Çalışma Bakanlığı, 1973), p. 46. Almost half of those worked in the textile sector. An interesting point to note here concerns the large difference between daily wages in the textile sector and the other sectors of industry. Wages in the former were approximately half of the second worst paid industry. This could be explained by the widespread employment of women in textile manufacturing and the dissolution of the small-scale production (Türkiye’de Toplumsal ve Ekonomik Gelişmenin 50 Yılı, p. 145-6).
industries and 1.76 for textile manufacturing enterprises.\textsuperscript{151} In 1927, four years after the independence, the number of industrial workers was 256,900, while workers employed in large enterprises\textsuperscript{152} totalled 52,173 in 1932 for the entire country.\textsuperscript{153} With the development of state industrialization, the size of the manufacturing workforce in such enterprises grew rapidly to reach 165,700 by the late 1940s.\textsuperscript{154}

Derin gives the number of all employees in the occupational category of industry as 299,369 in 1927 and 656,421 in 1935. This drastic increase, however, could be misleading mainly because of the changes in the classification between the two censuses. During the same period, total employment increased from 5,351,215 to 7,921,205.\textsuperscript{155} Accordingly, while in 1927 industrial employment made up 5.6\% of total employment, its share increased to 8.3\% in 1935. Makal, however, states that the share of industrial employment in total employment increased from 4.6\% in 1924 to 8.0\% in 1939 and 8.3\% in 1944.\textsuperscript{156} Thus, a nine-year gap exists between the two accounts.

The number of workers at enterprises qualified for the Law for the Encouragement for Industry increased from 27,000 in 1927 to 90,000 in 1939. In the latter year, they made up one-quarter of all industrial workers.\textsuperscript{157} In Aydemir’s account, the number of workers at qualified enterprises is slightly higher: 105,596 workers at 1394 qualified enterprises.\textsuperscript{158} Regardless of these differences in figures, we can conclude that the decrease in the number of qualified enterprises at the same time, when the size of labour force was fast increasing, proves a trend toward the concentration of capital and the increase in the size of industrial enterprises. As such, we can conclude that enterprises resembling modern factories were growing in number.

As for the textile sector before state-led industrialization began, the following figures portray the picture of an underdeveloped industry. Textile enterprises made up 14.3\% of the

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\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., p. 41.
\textsuperscript{152} This was defined as those enterprises with five or more workers where transducer is used, and ten or more workers where it is not (\textit{Kalkınan Türkiye, Rakamlarla 1923-1968} [Developing Turkey], [DPT KD-İstatistik Şubesı Yayın NO: DPT: 772-KD: 62], [Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1969], p. 55).
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Kalkınan Türkiye}, p. 56. A striking point here is the very low number of workers of foreign numbers: 347 (Türkije de Toplumsal ve Ekonomik Gelişmenin 50 Yılı, p. 51).
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Kalkınan Türkiye}, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{155} Derin, \textit{Türkije de Devletçilik}, p. 40. This drastic increase, however, could be misleading mainly because of the changes in the classification between the two censuses.
\textsuperscript{156} In real numbers, in the early 1940s, the total number of workers in all sectors, i.e. industry, agriculture and home production, is somewhere around 701,000 and the composition would be 275,000 workers subject to the labour law, 20,000 workers in small industry, 100,000 working as small artisans, 100,000 handicraft artisan working at home, 6000 sea workers, and 200,000 agricultural workers (Ahmet Makal, \textit{Ameleden İşçiye: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi Çalışmaları}, [İstanbul: İletişim, 2007], p. 72).
\textsuperscript{157} Kazgan, \textit{Türkiye Ekonomisinde Krizler}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{158} Aydemir, \textit{İkinci Adam}, p. 443.
total 65,245 formal manufacturing enterprises in 1927 and 18.7% of the industrial workforce worked in the textile sector. This number, however, excludes those engaged in home-based production. Among formal textile establishments, only 4.6% had 11 workers or more and, even fewer, 2.6%, had motorized equipment. Of the 38,000 women working at establishments employing four workers or more, which made up 16 per cent of all workers at such enterprises, 16,000 was in textiles, and they made 52 per cent of the textile workforce. Interestingly, women from a wide range of age groups were employed.

Further complication arises when we analyse the distribution of this workforce between private and state enterprises, for different authors use varying criteria to define state employment. For example, Makal gives the following figures: the total number of all employees in state industrial enterprises increased from 70,455 in 1938 to 146,902 in 1948. If we compare these figures with the total number of industrial workers we calculated above, we can argue that workers in the state enterprises made up 16.9% of the entire workforce in industry in 1938. Their number continued to increase; it was 146,902 in 1948 meaning a 109 per cent rate of increase. The share of state workers in the total number of workers employed in enterprises that are subject to the Labour Law was even higher at 62-63 per cent. This indicates that state workers constituted the majority in large-scale enterprises where labour was concentrated and production was mechanized. As for Sümerbank, data gathered from inspection reports indicate a considerable increase in the number of workers between 1940 and 1950. The total number of workers was 20,000 in 1940; 22,000 in 1945; and 30,050 in 1950.

Assessing the effects of etatism on industrial employment, Makal reminds us of the employment opportunities opened in the private sector through the effects of state industrialization and concludes that state industrial enterprises had a considerable effect on total employment figures. It was in these enterprises that a modern working-class came into being, not because of numerical increases but because of the increasing concentration of

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162 Makal, *Ameleden İşçiye*, p. 119.
163 Ibid., p. 44.
labour and the developing technical conditions of production.\textsuperscript{165} State-led industrialization also affected the employment structure in other sectors. One such effect concerned the state’s interventions in the agricultural sector during this period both directly and indirectly. Direct interventions were the agricultural experimental stations and enterprises to raise brood stock. Indirectly, the Ministry of Agriculture was in charge of improving cotton production in order to meet the needs of the textile industry. While until 1930, cotton produced in the country was an export commodity, after 1932 the local textile industry’s cotton demand increased dramatically, which, in effect, increased the need for agricultural labour.\textsuperscript{166} Thus, the establishment of state-owned cotton textile factories created a considerable amount of employment beyond the actual production site.

\textbf{Origins of the Industrial Proletariat}

The transformation of traditional Ottoman production structures occurred in the nineteenth century in the context of the peripheralisation of the Ottoman economy. Karakışla explains the emergence of the modern manufacturing establishments as a by-product of the \textit{Tanzimat} reforms and a set of economic treaties signed in 1838.\textsuperscript{167} Protectionism was abandoned with the Anglo-Ottoman Commercial Convention of August 1839. The reforms signalled a change in the government policy towards local manufacturers by means of permitting foreign merchants to engage in internal trade and thus favouring freedom in the marketplace at the expense of the long-standing monopolies. Still, there was a general revival of Ottoman manufacturing beginning in the early 1870s and continuing until World War I; a revival that was possible thanks to the willingness of the local workers to work for very low wages amongst other factors.\textsuperscript{168}

Three different forms of manufacturing characterized the nineteenth-century Ottoman formation; small handicrafts, state-owned modern manufactures and privately owned urban manufactures.\textsuperscript{169} In terms of labour forms and organization, Şevket Pamuk evaluates the last two of these together and specifies two periods during which they developed. The first period

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{165} Makal, “Türkiye’nin Sanayileşme Sürecinde İşgücü Sorunu”, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{166} Derin, \textit{Türkiye’dede Devletçilik}, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{167} Yavuz Selim Karakışla, “The Emergence of the Ottoman Industrial Working-Class, 1839-1923”, in Donald Quataert and Erik Jan Zürcher (eds.), \textit{Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic} (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995), p. 19.
\end{flushleft}
includes the 1830s and 40s when the state undertook manufacturing to meet the needs of the army. The second period starts in the 1880s when protectionism on the Ottoman economy weakened. Manufacturing increased in industries that benefited most from the availability of local raw materials and cheap labour. These included cotton, woollen and silk manufacturing enterprises, which were geographically concentrated in Istanbul and, to an extent, in the Izmir and Adana regions. In 1914, around five thousand workers were employed in such enterprises. The bulk of textile production took place in the countryside where household consumption and a putting-out system existed side by side.170

Privately owned urban manufacturing was concentrated in Istanbul, Salonica (the Empire’s most important industrial centre until 1912) and Izmir, and was mostly undertaken by Ottoman Greeks, Armenians and resident foreigners. Most of the workers were also non-Muslims. These differed from the state enterprises in terms of the scale of production; most of them employed fewer than ten workers. However, Keyder notes that they still signified a novel form of production “because of the introduction of the wage relation bringing together a proletarianized, free labour force and free capital, contracting freely in a labour market.”171

The rationale behind the establishment of state-owned manufactures was to meet the demands of the palace and the army. In fact, early Ottoman establishments built during the Tanzimat era were designed to supply the needs of the modernized Ottoman army. In the absence of the sources for factory proletariat, these enterprises depended on soldiers as workers.172

Both the financial investment and the bulk of the personnel of these enterprises were of foreign origin. As for the locally recruited unskilled workers, Keyder writes that they were “at least initially, found among convicts, army conscripts, and from populations which were considered to be outside the integral structure of the Ottoman society.”173 High turn-over rates, which constituted the most significant problem of state enterprises as late as the 1950s, characterized this labour force. These enterprises stopped production after a short while because of the difficulties with securing the raw materials and the labour force. They regained importance with the coming of the War, but the scarcity of labour was persistent. One important development in this period was the employment of female labour in Istanbul’s state

170 Şevket Pamuk, 100 Soruda Osmanlı-Türkiye Iktisadi, 1500-1914, (İstanbul: Gerçek, 1990), pp. 275-291.
171 Keyder, “Manufacturing in the Ottoman Empire”, p. 125.
173 Keyder, “Manufacturing in the Ottoman Empire”, p. 125.
enterprises.\textsuperscript{174} In fact, Quataert notes that the employment of female labour in manufacturing was commonplace in the nineteenth century, especially in the export-oriented textile industries the employment of girls and women was strikingly common.\textsuperscript{175} With the end of the war, these manufactures declined. Thus, the industrial structure of the young Turkish Republic was very weak.

**Origins of the Bakırköy Workforce**

Bakırköy workers’ files include a valuable form that asks about occupation, and the skill level of the worker. Unfortunately, these forms are almost always incomplete, and only the basic information such as name, date and place of birth are recorded. Thus, it is not possible to collect systematic data on the background of industrial workers during this period.

Sketchy information collected through interviews and presented in the following chapters is insufficient to arrive at general conclusions. We can only make inferences by looking at the changes in other sectors, especially agriculture. It was noted earlier that the Ottoman social formation was characterized by the continuation of small-scale landownership. However, this should not blind us to the reality of the landless peasants. Referring to a speech by Prime Minister İnönü in 1936, Derin states that, even at places where land fragmentation had occurred extensively, nearly half of all peasants did not own any land. Likewise, in 1934, Minister of Internal Affairs, Şükrü Kaya, reported that five million peasants worked on land that they did not own. In a country with a population of 16,200,694 in 1935, this number is striking indeed. It becomes even more curious when we note that private ownership constituted 5\% of the total land in 1933.\textsuperscript{176} As mentioned above, agricultural production, together with foreign trade, was the most badly hit sector by the Depression in 1929. Although, during the first seven years of the 1930s, 1,280,881 decare land was distributed to peasants, Tekeli and İlkin assert that the crisis in the agricultural sector pulled apart at least some part of the peasantry from the countryside and thus increased labour supply for non-agricultural sectors.\textsuperscript{177} Increasing unemployment in the agricultural sector, which led to migration to the cities, is mentioned widely in newspapers during the first half of the 1930s.\textsuperscript{178}

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., p. 133.
\textsuperscript{175} Quataert, *Ottoman Manufacturing*, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{176} Derin, *Türkiye’de Devletçilik*, pp. 57-61.
\textsuperscript{177} Tekeli and İlkin, *Uygulama Geçerken Türkiye’de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu*, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{178} A short list of examples is given in Chapter 2, footnote 246.
For the second source of industrial proletariat, the Turkish case presents a peculiarity in that there is a time lag between the disappearance of the guild system and the beginning of industrialization. As a consequence of this time lag, “instead of moving straight from handicrafts into industry, as the workers of many other countries had done, the potential industrial workers of Turkey had to pass through several miserable generations, during which they inevitably tended to lose their standards of skill and their occupational consciousness”\(^{179}\)

Indeed, as we shall see later in this study, state workers’ lack of skills and their discontinuity in industrial work constituted the two most important complaints of the factory inspectors.

When we look at the changes in the wage levels under etatism, the picture becomes increasingly clearer in terms of the main beneficiaries of the policy. The 1930s witnessed a dramatic decrease in wages, while industrial production became more and more profitable. Kazgan attributes the increase in the rate of profit to three factors: the decrease in raw material prices, the very low level of wages due to decreasing food prices, and the effect of agricultural crisis in terms of dissolution of peasantry and the decrease in labour cost.\(^{180}\) Real wages of workers at qualified firms decreased by 25 per cent between 1934 and 1938.\(^{181}\) Considering that these statistics do not include workers at smaller firms, we could assume that the decrease in real wages was even higher. Between 1938 and 1943, average wages in Istanbul declined by another 40 per cent in real terms, and the increase in real wages lagged well behind the increase in the cost of living.\(^{182}\) At the same time, industrial production became so profitable during the 1930s that the rate of surplus value increased dramatically from 172 per cent in 1932 to 318.2 per cent in 1939.\(^{183}\) This was a combined effect of the low labour costs and the length of the working day. Also important here, as Ilkin and Tekeli remark, is the absence of a labour code, which specified a minimum wage level.\(^{184}\) That had to wait until 1936. But even long after that, in 1949, an ILO report described the wage situation in Turkish industry as follows: “Turkey’s present poverty is inevitably reflected in low rates of remuneration, which for most workers represent a standard of living which at best is little is at all above a bare subsistence level and in many cases is definitely below it”.\(^{185}\)


\(^{180}\) Kazgan, *Türkiye Ekonomisinde Krizler*, p. 79.


\(^{182}\) Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, p. 105.

\(^{183}\) *Türkiye’de Toplumsal ve Ekonomik Gelişmenin 50 Yılı*, p. 155.


\(^{185}\) *Labour Problems in Turkey*, p. 16.
Bakırköy workers’ wage levels support this observation, as we shall see in detail in the following chapters.

**State Factories: Ideological and Spatial Dynamics**

Besides being economic enterprises, the state factories of the early Republican period also had ideological functions that went well beyond their physical limits. To begin with, as both Birtek and Makal argue, state industrialization was a result of not only an insufficient level of capital accumulation but also a lack of an industrial labour force. Birtek goes on to argue that one of the motivations behind the establishment of state factories was to create a modern and harmonious labour force, which would eventually benefit the private industries. Indeed, the training for personnel for private enterprises was one of the goals of the first five-year industrial plan.

On the level of material existence, state enterprises were imagined to exemplify the space of Western modernity, which, in this context, was defined through the infrastructural improvements and recreational facilities around the factory settlements. İnsel quotes a French observer who visited several of these in the 1930s: “With a strong and well cared road structure, green areas, sanitary neighbourhoods, well organized water and electricity provisions, stadiums, and market places, these centres of settlement change the face of the old cities they are located in.” They also had the function of accelerating and disseminating the Westernization process. Visiting the Merinos Factory in Bursa in 1939, a journalist described the factory complex as “an industrial abide of the Republican will, a masterpiece of Republic.” The factory, he observes, changed the cultural and social constitution of the entire city and, thus, it was much more than a mere economic enterprise. Aydemir would go so far as to claim that with their parks, social housing, and educational, social and sports facilities, state enterprises were “civilized” establishments, the likes of which were not often seen in the “democratic” countries. An inspection report from 1943 reveals the extra-economic rationale behind the establishment of state factories through a comparison between private

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188 Qtd in İnsel, “Devletçilik Anatomisi”, p. 424.
190 Aydemir, *İkinci Adam*, p.447. Looking at Kayseri and Nazilli factory settlements, Burak Peri argued that they were “the built form of the early Republican attempts to modernize society... [they were] also the active centers of social education that exemplified the new life of citizens in a modern country to the workers” (*Building the ‘Modern’ Environment in Early Republican Turkey: Sümerbank Kayseri and Nazilli Factory Settlement*, Unpublished Msc. Thesis, 2002, pp. 107-108).
and state enterprises. The private sector’s geographical choices, the report argues, are based on economic calculations such as the raw material supplies and energy needs, whereas when locations for state enterprises are chosen, long-term interests of the nation are calculated. Indeed in a geographic context where regional imbalances in industrial enterprises were prominent, the establishment of state factories in remote Anatolian towns could be interpreted as a sign of the state’s desire to penetrate the peripheral areas by means of materializing its existence in the form of factories.

A similar argument was made in a commission meeting on Sümerbank factories in 1940. A member of the parliament specifies his reason for joining the commission as the bad talk he heard about Sümerbank, but his experience in the commission convinced him that its establishment was a smart move by the rulers with foresight. They were established to avoid the repetition of the sufferings of the First World War. Note here the historical distortion of the rationale for state industrialization. These enterprises, he concluded, were products of military and political motivations rather than economic ones. Many social historians also shared this perception of state enterprises as the tools of societal transformation. One of them notes that the scattering of factories around Anatolia was done “in what any sane capitalist would have considered crazy economics”.

But state enterprises’ effects went beyond the built environment. In The Production of Space, Henri Lefebvre explains how spatial transformations relate to the reproduction of society. In his formulation, space is not only a means of production but also “a means of control, and hence of domination, of power”. It is a material force that is not only produced by social relations, but also one that produces and inscribes social relations. Consider the following goals of state industrialization in light of this idea: to carry the modern, civilized, progressive lifestyles to the far ends of the country and thus provide examples of progressivism, to set an example for the private enterprises in terms of the value given to the managers, the workers and the employee by means of providing them with an acceptable life.

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191 Sümerbank 1943 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 252.
192 Erdal Yavuz gives the following figures on these regional imbalances: “In 1938, 30 per cent of all industrial establishments were in Istanbul, followed by Izmir and Bursa with 12.9 and 7.3 per cent respectively. On a regional basis, the Marmara and Aegean areas together constituted 71.1 per cent of all industry. Particularly in the Marmara region, where industrial centers like Istanbul and Bursa are situated, the share was about 49 per cent. More precisely, 86 per cent of the textile and 76.2 per cent of the metal works were in the Marmara region” (“The State of the Industrial Workforce, 1923-40”, in Donald Quataert and Erik Jan Zürcher [eds.], Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic [London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995], pp. 97-8).
194 Ahmad, “The Development of Class-consciousness”, p. 91.
standard and to take care of their needs such as housing, healthcare, education and childcare and social life, and to provide them with the means of self-development. In İnsel’s words, state enterprises are educational institutions training the “civilized citizen”. As such, industrial investments were seen as the backbone of social development as a whole. And the blueprints of this development were determined by the peculiar character of the nation-state.

Thus, while creating spaces of Western modernity in Anatolia, these enterprises would also present an alternative to the “Western” type of industrialization characterized by a long and arduous history of class conflict, a model that was utterly detested by the ruling elites of the new Republic. This meant that state factories would set an example for private enterprises as well. Since their primary motivation was not to maximize profit, state factories would illustrate the social organization of a proper workplace. They were to show the newly emerging Turkish capitalists how to engage with their workers, and what conditions to provide at the sites of production.

As we shall see in the following chapter, the motivation behind social provisions was partly constituted by this fear of class conflict during industrialization. The claim that the planned social provisions were not distributed equally among different state factories, and that they were usually not as beneficial as some state documents – and, for that matter, labour history studies based on these documents – claim, constitute the subject matter of the next chapter. Suffice here to say that the material existence of state factories enabled the Turkish state to consolidate the image of a disinterested caretaker.

1936 Labour Law: A Law of Regime

In an article on the failed attempts of establishing a Labour Law in 1932, Ilkin documents the efforts of the Republican State to formulate a legal document on the question of labour. These efforts had started in 1921, during the war years, but each attempt was repressed through inner conflicts within the state apparatus. It was only in 1936 that a Labour Law was enacted.

In the aftermath of the Depression, unemployment increased dramatically. By the end of 1931, the figure had reached 100,000. The effect of this was immediately felt on the wages.

196 Aydemir, İkinci Adam, p. 446. Being one of the most influential intellectual figures of the period, Aydemir also worked as a bureaucrat; he became the head of the Office of Industrial Examination (Sanayi Tetkik Dairesi). As such, his views are representative to a considerable extent.
On top of this, the very hard working conditions, the complete lack of social security measures and the strict ban on the organizational action left the working masses with a sense of unease. The Kurdish rebellions of 1924 and 1925 led the government to enact a Law for the Maintenance of Order, the overarching main article of which stated that “the government can – with the confirmation of the president – forbid and abolish any institution, behaviour, and publications which disrupt the country’s social order, calm, security, and safety”. This provided an institutional framework for the already established authoritarian rule of the RPP and practically eliminated all possible channels of opposition, which remained closed until the end of the single-party rule.\footnote{199}

The decade of the 1930s is regarded as the period when the Kemalist regime was fully consolidated.\footnote{200} A nationalist consciousness was arising and the discourse of uniformity had become hegemonic. Keyder explains the rise of nationalism in the following words: “Now that a state had been established, the population living in it had to be forged into a nation. Individuals were supposed to find meaning in their belonging to the national unit, and alternative affiliations, sub or supra-national, were regarded with suspicion”.\footnote{201} The 1935 RPP program was characterized by this idea of national unity, which supposedly made social classes redundant. This text is important to analyse for it includes the blueprints of the Labour Law enacted the following year. Written three years after etatism began, the programme was formulated in the context of heavy criticism of the RPP’s economic policies. The claim of peculiarity once more became useful as the Party Secretary answered those critics by arguing that the Turkish state is neither liberal nor a class-based state, it is the national state. He recognized that rapid industrialization brought a considerable increase in the size of the working-class; but the poisoning of the Turkish worker with ideas such as class conflict should be avoided at all costs. That is why the program dictated agreement and harmony between the workers and the bosses. If they cannot secure this on their own, the state would interfere through arbitration. When he announced that the programme banned strikes and lock-outs, the audience replied with an enthusiastic “Bravo!” But, he added, it should also be guaranteed that a capitalist would not pressure a worker unfairly, because, after all, populism dictates that they are both sons of the country.\footnote{202} The next year, full congruency between state administration and party organization was declared. In fact, this was only the legal expression of what had been going on in practice.

\footnote{200} Gülalp, “Capitalism and the Modern Nation-State”, p. 171.  
\footnote{201} Keyder, \textit{State and Class in Turkey}, p. 89.  
\footnote{202} “Türkiyen’in Sınıf Mücadelesi Olmayacak”, \textit{Akşam} (14 May 1935).
It was under such political conditions that etatism was implemented. Scholars point to the connections between the economic policy and the changes in the state form and ideology in the following manner. Birtek interprets the implementation of etatism as “part of more general process whereby a particular political mode extends itself to previously uncontrolled spheres of a society”.203 Keyder also makes the same point when he invokes the regime’s realisation of its weakness after the Free Party incident in 1930 as a motivation for a new policy. The increasing suppression of civil rights and the state’s direct involvement in the economy were parts of a new policy, which consisted of heavy oppression of the working class, and an attempt centrally to coordinate investment decisions through increasing the surplus available to an industrial bourgeoisie nurtured by protectionism. All this was achieved with the aid of an ideology of nationalism and a rhetoric of mobilization, where the existence of social classes was denied in favour of a corporatist model of society, and the state was celebrated as the sole source of economic and societal development.204

It was in such a context that the Labour Law, modelled on fascist Italian legislation, was enacted on 12 June 1936 and became effective on 12 June 1937. This was a “law of regime” in the words of the Minister of Internal Affairs. The law concerned those enterprises that technically employ ten or more workers on a daily basis and, thus, covered only 180,000 workers. This became a contentious issue from the start, as an increasing number of workers demanded the protection the law provided. After the war years, the demands of textile workers working in small manufacturing enterprises were increasingly centred on the issue of the law’s scope. The law had in fact provided considerable benefits to labourers. For example, the law determined the working day as eight hours and the working week as forty-eight hours. But there were many exceptions to these rules. Subjected to detailed regulations concerning health conditions and wage compensations, the working day could be extended by three hours. That these regulations were not followed during the war years is often attributed to the National Protection Law, which was enacted in 1940. There was also the impression that at state factories workers were under the protection of the state regarding the working hours, as well as wages and social benefits.205 However, as I demonstrate in the following chapter, these rules were often not followed in state factories even before the war. Regulations concerning health and security matters were also issued in the law. Finally, a minimum wage was determined.

205 Aydemir, İkinci Adam, p. 396.
Although the law brought some protective regulations on the level of individual work relations, its determining feature was the authoritarian measures on the collective level.\footnote{Makal, \textit{Ameleden İşçiye}, p. 46.} To Birtek, the law generalized the paternalistic attitude toward workers at state industries to the entire labour force.\footnote{Birtek, “The Rise and Fall of Etatism”, p. 417.} In fact, the 1935 penal code had already imposed punitive sanctions on strikes but with the Labour Law they became illegal. In 1936, activities aimed at “establishing the hegemony or domination of a social class over the other social classes, or eliminate a social class or overthrow any of the fundamental economic or social orders established within the country” were declared illegal in the Penal Code.\footnote{Hale, “Ideology and Economic Development”, p. 105.} The final blow came in 1938 with the revised Law of Associations, which banned all forms of “organizations based on social class.”\footnote{Derin, \textit{Türkiye’de Devletçilik}, pp. 42-3.}

We will look at the different ways workers made sense of these bans and prosecutions in Chapter 4. But we have an account of a bureaucrat that gives an interesting reading of the banning of strike and lock-outs from the perspective of the ruling class.\footnote{Kazgan, \textit{Türkiye Ekonomisinde Krizler}, p. 85.} Derin begins the short section on the Labour Law in his book on etatism by quoting the definition of populism in the RPP program and then goes on directly to praise the party for renaming the May Day as the Spring Fest and thus allowing it to be enjoyed by everybody, not only workers. Following this is the reference to the banning of strikes and lock-outs in the Labour Law in the party program. Derin’s language is neutral in this part; he only reports what the law and the program states. But he was a bureaucrat, as I mentioned earlier, who had an effect on policy making. Thus, we could read this very brief account of the labour law, written only four years after its enactment, as an indication of the extent and strength of the faith in the principle of populism. It appears that the hegemonic power of the populist discourse was so strong that even the labour law was perceived as both an expression and a guarantor of that.

Kazgan brings a new perspective to the analysis of the rationale behind the Labour Law when she evokes another 1936-dated law that gave the Minister of Economy the power to control and fix the production costs and market prices of industrial products. Both this law and the Labour Law emerged as a necessity to balance the negative effects of the super-exploitation of labour and the dramatic increase in the rate of profit on consumer demand. The recognition of the need to keep a balance between labour and capital in the Labour Law should be read as an indication that the rulers moved from the corporatist social order and realized the existence of social classes.\footnote{Kazgan, \textit{Türkiye Ekonomisinde Krizler}, p. 85.} This is a far-fetching interpretation, in my opinion,
for the authoritarian measures against collective actions were justified by the claim that there was no room for class conflict in the Turkish society. Thus, the state was persistent on rejecting the existence of social classes discursively. Practically, strikes and collective bargaining remained illegal for years to come because they were declared redundant, for the state already functioned as the disinterested mediator between employers and employees. As such, the state’s recognition of the need to improve working conditions could be explained through multiple motivations. But to conclude that the Labour Law signifies an acceptance of social classes, even at the level of rhetoric, would be misleading for the law reflected and reproduced the new ideology of the solidarity in the service of the state, the anti-thesis of a class society.211

A mission report of the International Labour Office from 1949 observes the curious – and definitely transitional, according to the writers – nature of public opinion with respect to the labour question:

On the one hand, the sentiment of national unity which was generated by the independence movement and which played so large a part in assuring that movement’s success is still a very real factor in Turkish public life. Class distinctions do not appear to be at all sharply defined…On the other hand, there appears to exist in many circles a feeling of distrust toward “labour”-a feeling based rather on a knowledge (not always entirely accurate) of developments in other countries than on actual experience in Turkey.212

It was in the context of these contradictions that the new industrial proletariat constructed its politics.

The Background of the Bakırköy Cloth Factory

Bakırköy Factory was established by Barutçubaşı Ohannes as a private enterprise in 1850. Constructed by Garabet Amira Balyan, it was located in Bakirköy, one of the largest municipalities in the European side of Istanbul. In the beginning, its main activity was hand-weaving and printing; thus it took the name Basmahane (Calico/Printing House). It used calico samples imported from England and produced Turkish and Arabic print designs. Receiving no protection from the state in the midst of the decaying Ottoman economy, the

211 Keyder, State and Class in Turkey, p. 104. Keyder notes these as the words of the general secretary of the RPP.
212 Labour Problems in Turkey, p. 17.
private factory could not continue its production and it was transferred to the Ottoman Private Treasury in 1860 and to the Ministry of War in 1867. For the next 51 years, various types of clothes were manufactured at the factory for the army. In 1921, it was transferred to the General Directorate of Istanbul Factories together with Feshane (a woollen textiles factory also transferred to Sümerbank in 1933), and to the General Directorate of Military Factories in 1923. In 1925, with other military factories, it was transferred to the Bank for Industry and Mining, and underwent some renovations. During this period, efforts to rationalise production were also made. In 1932, the factory became the property of the State Industrial Office and, finally, on 11 July 1933, Sümerbank became the owner of Basmahane. The number of workers at the factory changed from 1173 in 1939 to 2148 in 1950.\textsuperscript{213}

Different sources agree that the factory’s transfer to Sümerbank ownership was a turning point. In fact, between 1922 and 1930, the annual production of cotton cloth had already increased from 41,000 to 1,639,670 metres. The share of market sales in total sales also increased during this period, from 6\% to 45\%. In 1930, the construction of a new building started.\textsuperscript{214} However, there was never any serious attempt to renovate the factory or improve the technical conditions. A newspaper reports the striking contradiction between the new machinery and the old building structure, while praising the young and active director of the factory who did his best to improve the production conditions and operated the factory day and night according to a commercial mentality.\textsuperscript{215} When he wrote a report on the factory in 1936, Von der Porten mentioned the uselessness of the old spinning machines, which had been in use for the past ten years, but had not been properly taken care of. Of the 340 looms at the factory, 60 had to be replaced immediately.\textsuperscript{216} As late as 1940, these looms were still at the factory and complaints about them were also made in state inspection reports. Comparing the four cotton textile factories in terms of their production levels in 1939 and 1940, one report indicates that Bakırköy was the only factory where the amount of woven cloth actually decreased because of the worn-out machinery.\textsuperscript{217} In fact, the other three cotton textile

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{214} “Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası”, Cumhuriyet (11 May 1936).
\textsuperscript{215} “Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası”, Cumhuriyet (13 May 1933).
\textsuperscript{216} Max Von der Porten, Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası Hakkında, (n.p., 1936).
\textsuperscript{217} “Sümerbank Birleşik Pamuk İpliği ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu”, in Sümerbank 1940 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait İdare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabi, pp. 17-27.
\end{footnotesize}
factories were established according to the First Five Year Plan, and thus enjoyed not only newer machinery but also social provisions related to the built environment.\textsuperscript{218} When Sümerbank took over the factory, there were 3,200 spins and 60 old weaving looms. Construction began soon after Sümerbank was in charge and the factory was reopened in 1934 with 8928 spins and 320 looms. Additional facilities included a nursery for female workers and showers for workers. One newspaper article reported that these additions made the factory a perfect example for all Turkish factories.\textsuperscript{219} New machinery imported from Europe was placed in the factory in early 1934, increasing the number of spins to 10,000. Production capacity quadrupled while a considerable improvement in production quality was observed. By 1935, the annual production of cloth was 4,625,275 metres. Another important development was the production of cotton yarn, which began in 1932 with 322,931 kilograms a year and increased to 978,147 kilograms in 1935.\textsuperscript{220} These improvements also brought more variety in the types of cloth produced. Besides producing for the army, thin calico printed fabric and cotton dress fabric were also produced for the market in 1934.\textsuperscript{221} An expert report from 1938 mentions muslin, bed sheet material and apparel cloth among the type of cloth produced, while a state inspection report from the following year specifies canvas, cloth for military outfits, tents and primers, and calico as the main products of the factory.\textsuperscript{222} As late as 1949, the characteristic product of the factory was still clothes produced for the army. Celebrating the centennial anniversary of Bakırköy, the report praises the factory for the service it provided to the Turkish army.\textsuperscript{223}

Changes in the administrative structure of Sümerbank in the 1930s and 1940s testify to the argument that etatism was very much shaped in practice, and decisions were made in a pragmatic manner rather than in a planned fashion. Three of the four cotton textile factories – i.e. Kayseri, Eregli and Nazilli, established by Sümerbank – had been run as enterprises since they began operating. Different from these three newly built factories, the Bakırköy factory

\textsuperscript{218} Another report attributes the decrease to the change in the type of cloth woven in this period (Sümerbank 1940 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait İdare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabi, p.13). As we shall see in Chapter 4, while analyzing a work stoppage incident at the factory, during the war years, the factory wove a coarser and heavier type of cloth. Since the wages of weavers were calculated according to the length of the woven product, this change decreased the amount of their daily earnings. This incident is analysed in detail in Chapter 4 as an example of the effects of the changes in the labour process on the relations in production.

\textsuperscript{219} “Bakırköy Bez Fabrikasının Yeni Daireleri Dün Açıldı”, Akşam (14 Aug. 1934).

\textsuperscript{220} “Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası”, Akşam (11 May 1936).

\textsuperscript{221} “Bakırköy Bez Fabrikasının Yeni Daireleri Dün Açıldı”, Akşam (14 Aug. 1934).

\textsuperscript{222} Hans Landau, Kayseri, Ereğli, Nazilli, Merinos Fabrikaları Hakkında, (n.p., 1938), p.12; Sümerbank 1939 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 5.

was handed over to Sümerbank by the Bank for Industry and Mining in 1934 and, after two years of operating as an enterprise, it became a joint stock company in 1936. This double structure prevailed until the end of 1938 when the four factories were brought together under the Institution of Combined Cotton Yarn and Textile Factories in early 1939. Functioning as a legal entity, this institution was supposed to run on its own, though the general directions were still given by the main organization, Sümerbank.224 This was heavily criticized in the inspection report of 1940, and a new administrative arrangement was made with the establishment of the Institution of Yarn and Textile Factories in October 1941. This new arrangement brought nine woollen, cotton and silk textile producing factories together and lasted until 31 May 1949.225 The inspection reports until this date had all mentioned the administrative problems stemming from an ineffective division of labour between different units and the over-centralization of the decision-making process. Instead of overseeing the management of the factories, the Enterprise intervened in every detail, which not only caused a considerable increase in operational costs but also slowed down business to such an extent that it became inevitable to turn each factory into an individual enterprise by 1949. The twelve cotton and woollen textile producing factories became autonomous enterprises.226

Problems pertaining to the productivity levels were continuously mentioned in state inspection reports. In an interview he gave in 1947, the director of the factory complained that the 400 per cent increase in the labour force after Sümerbank took over did not bring with it a corresponding increase in the production level. But, he added, the factory was working more effectively in 1947 and the situation was improving.227 In fact, in many inspection reports on different Sümerbank factories, similar complaints were often followed by such claims of recent improvement.

224 Sümerbank 1939 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 7.
226 Sümerbank Bakırköy Sanayii Müessesesinin 1949 Yılı Raporu, p. 1-2; “Sümerbank İplik ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1948 Yılı Raporu”, in Sümerbank 1948 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait Idare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabı, (İzmit: Selüloz Basmevi, 1949), p. 4. This report advises that the factories were to be given more initiative, especially with regards to purchasing decisions.
At the opening ceremony of the Bakırköy Factory in 1934, Prime Minister İnönü described what the new state factories meant to the nation with the following words:

Each worker should think of getting the most out of the machines he uses not only by means of technical knowledge; he should also desire it as a burning ambition. These factories, which the entire nation considers important in terms of giving a direction to its new economic life, are places for only those who are willing to know, work and learn and those who are capable of learning. The nation is not building and will never build factories for those who are not hardworking and diligent to take refuge in. From the first day they enter the factory on, both state officers and workers should internalize this at the bottom of their hearts. This is why the new large factories should try to train craftsmen whose hearts are beating with care they show to their labour.228

In this short quote lies the kernel of the ideological underpinnings of etatist industrialisation. Bakırköy Factory was not just an economic enterprise, but also a national space that was built on the toil of the nation and thus was expected to benefit the nation through its operation. From then on, the workers of this national factory were expected to relate to their labour in these terms. It was not enough that they worked hard; they were also supposed to enjoy working. The patriotic reference to the significance of their toil was made through this highly emotional language, which had a Janus face character. It acknowledged them as part of that nation, or better, the sons of that nation, while bestowing them with the responsibility of serving the nation. Theirs was not simply industrial work; it was their opportunity to pay their homage to the nation and its forefathers. Such was the popular imagery of the ruling class. The remainder of this study explores whether this was a shared assumption by Bakırköy workers.

228 Sümerbank (1.7.1933-11.7.1943), (Istanbul: Sümerbank Umum Müdürlüğü Yayını, 1943), p. 33.
Chapter 2

Working at Bakırköy Factory:
Subtle Responses to Difficult Conditions

The rapidly growing literature of the sociology of industrialization is like a landscape which has been blasted by ten years of moral drought: one must travel through many tens of thousands of words of parched a-historical abstraction between each oasis of human actuality.229

In Chapter 1, I analysed the restructuring of economic and political life in the 1920s and early 1930s in early Republican Turkey in terms of its effects upon the process of working-class formation. As such, the chapter tackled the first layer of class formation in Katznelson’s model: the structure of capitalist economic development. I argued that etatism, as a strategy of accelerated capitalist development, paved the way for the deepening of capitalist relations of production. I now move from this experience-distant level of class to a discussion of relations in production as defined by Michael Burawoy in his seminal work The Politics of Production. These are social relations into which men and women enter in order to produce useful things.230

The starting point of Burawoy’s analysis is his critique of the theories of production that ignore the political moments of the production process on the one hand, and the theories of state that overstressed its autonomy and thus dislocated its economic foundations on the other.231 The term politics of production is coined to stress the interlinked character of politics and production. The factory regime is the nodal concept here, for it links the state politics to the politics of production. Through a study of historical development of factory regimes, Burawoy explains the changes in management control systems in advanced capitalist and socialist states, and in developing countries. The crucial point in this analysis is the fact that labour control regimes are constructed not only through workplace policies but also through public policies enacted by the state.

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The definition of ‘production process’ in this model goes beyond the limited understanding of production as the act of turning raw materials into finished products. It also encompasses the social relations in which labour and capital come together at the site of the workplace but not detached from the greater social and political environment that surrounds it. In Burawoy’s words, the process of production:

[…] contains political and ideological elements as well as a purely economic moment. That is, the process of production is not confined to the labor process-to the social relations into which men and women enter as they transform raw materials into useful products with instruments of production. The process of production also includes political apparatuses which reproduce those relations of the labor process through the regulation of struggles. I call these apparatuses the factory regime and the associated struggles the politics of production or simply production politics.  

It is this widened and nuanced definition of the process of production that allows us to see it as a factor shaping the development of working-class struggles.

Katznelson’s model suggests a similar interlinkedness between state politics and production politics by way of analytically separating but theoretically connecting the first and the second levels of class formation. If the first level is defined as the structure of capitalist accumulation and the self-sustaining development of the economy, the second level concerns how such broad patterns of economic development exist for working people where they work and live. In other words, the second level of class formation studies the social organization of society lived by actual people in real social formations. This experience-near level of analysis, adds Katznelson, also includes work-place social relations and the study of labour markets as the level of ways of life, as it is called, “refers to how actual capitalist societies develop at work and away from it.”

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232 Ibid., p. 587. Later in The Politics of Production, he rephrases the same definition as follows: First, the organization of work has political and ideological effects – that is, as men and women transform raw materials into useful things, they also reproduce particular social relations as well as an experience of those relations. Second, alongside the organization of work – that is the labour process – there are distinctive political and ideological apparatuses of production, which regulate production relations. The notion of production regime or, more specifically, factory regime, embraces both these dimensions of production politics (pp. 7-8).


234 Ibid., p. 15.

235 Ibid., p. 16.
of process of production as something that goes beyond a pure economic moment, Katznelson also notes that neither of these two levels is purely economic.\textsuperscript{236}

Both Katznelson and Burawoy speak of the ensuing effects of the initial patterns of structuring of the social relations on the shopfloor. But neither of them suggests a teleological development that will carry these effects to a pre-determined outcome of consciousness. To Katznelson, the analysis at the level of ways of life, “may tell us how workers exist and live in certain circumstances, but not how they will think or act in those experienced circumstances.”\textsuperscript{237} To Burawoy, factory regimes effect, not determine, shop-floor struggles, and the political apparatuses reproduce the social relations of the labour process through the regulation of struggles.\textsuperscript{238}

In what follows, I analyse the factory regime of a state-owned factory in which the line between state politics and production politics is blurred, for the state itself is the employer and thus the organizer of the process of production. I tackle the question of how the experience of workers both inside and outside the factory is shaped by this factory regime. This experience is multi-faceted in that it encompasses the lives of workers both inside and outside the factory, starting from the moment they apply for work at the factory. Deriving from scattered information on the background, recruitment, working and living conditions of the workers in their personnel files on the one hand and the interviews I conducted with old Bakırköy workers on the other, the annual inspection reports that give an overview of workers’ conditions in the state factories, and newspaper articles, the chapter provides detailed information on the factory’s policy of recruitment, systems of remuneration, the managerial control of the labour process, the reproduction of labour power, the provision of social welfare and the strategies of the workers to cope with problems at the shopfloor. As well as presenting new evidence collected from workers’ files, I also visit the literature on the problem of high turnover rate, the wage level of state workers and the use of social welfare with a new perspective, which puts the workers’ experience at the centre of analysis.

\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{238} Burawoy, “Between the Labor Process and the State”, pp. 587-595.
The Composition of the Sample of Personnel Files

The information presented in this chapter is mainly based on 54 personnel files that I analysed in October 2008. The workers in the sample had all worked at the factory before 1950 for different periods of time. Of these 54 workers, 15 are women; in other words, women constitute 27.8 per cent of the sample. Twenty-one workers in the sample were born outside what constituted Turkey after 1923 and many of them acquired Turkish citizenship during their work at Bakırköy. Every worker was born before 1920, that is, before the Republic was established. The majority of the workers entered the factory in the 1930s and early 1940s, with a few exceptions who worked at Bakırköy in the 1920s.

The workers had significantly different experiences of the labour process at the point of production in terms of the planning and carrying out of their work and the extent of the managerial control. The factory was composed of three main production departments: the spinnery, the weavery and the dye-house. These departments differed in the working conditions, the disparity in working hours and the wage levels. In addition there was a repair-shop and other auxiliary departments such as the canteen. The composition of the sample according to the department of work is as follows: 23 worked at the weaving department, twenty-one at the spinnery and seven at the dyeing department. One worker was reported to be working at carder machines, while eleven worked outside the main production units, including porters, carpenters, coal, metal and construction workers. Altogether, the sum of the number of workers in different departments is greater than the size of the sample for the simple reason that many workers changed their department of work. It should also be noted that, in some cases, contradictory information on the department of a worker is provided in

239 In fact, I have looked at the files of sixty-seven workers. The additional thirteen files belonged to the trade unionists at the factory, whose names I have collected from newspaper reports on the activities of the Bakırköy Cloth Factory Workers’ Trade Union. I saw these files in August 2009, that is, after I wrote the draft for the current chapter. I chose not to change the analysis of the composition of the files here for two reasons. First, while the fifty-four files were selected randomly (I explained the selection process in detail in the Introduction), the files of the trade unionists, as I have mentioned, were not. Second, because the newspapers only mentioned the names of workers who were in managerial positions in the trade union, the sample is highly selective in terms of gender (there is no female trade unionist whose name was mentioned), period of employment at the factory, and the department the unionist were working at. These points are discussed in detail in the section on the composition of the trade unionists’ sample in Chapter 4. For these two reasons, I choose not to change the compositional analysis here in order to keep the sample as randomly constituted as possible.

240 This sampling method obviously has the problem of omitting the child workers from the sample. However, partly because of the organization of the inventories of the personnel files and partly because of the official restraints on my archival research, which are discussed in the Introduction, this did not allow for a better sampling method.

241 There is only one worker who came from Nazilli Cloth Factory where he had worked from since 1937 to Bakırköy in 1952.
different documents in a single file. These cases, however, are not numerous and thus could be ignored for our current objective.

Of those twenty-three workers who were employed at the weavery, twenty-one were men. One of the two women at the weavery worked as a loom wiper, which meant that she was not actually weaving. Thus, there is only one female weaver in the sample. Contrary to this, the spinning department was predominantly female. Of the twenty-one workers at the spinnery, only eight were male and two of these worked as yarn cleaners, while five were transferred to another department after a brief time at the spinnery. The composition of the sample fits the gender composition of the workforce in the 1940s as Asım presents:

There were a lot of women [at the factory]. A lot at the spinnery, not that many at the weavery, only a few, [but] the spinners were mostly women. In the dressing [department] there were no women, [they were] all men. In the warp [department] there were women, I mean those who bring the thread back when it is broken, and you tie it to the warp beam, and it keeps going again. Later it got automatic, it stopped when it [the thread] broke, and you find the tip and tie it.\(^{242}\)

Figure 1. Women at the spinnery. IISH, Kemal Sülker Collection.

\(^{242}\) Interview I conducted with Asım Kocabaş on 3 August 2009 in Istanbul.
In a report he wrote in 1939 on the spinnery and weavery operations of another state-owned factory, Max von der Porten, who worked for the Ministry of Economy as a head consultant at the time, compared the labour processes in these two departments in order to
explain the differences between the two in terms of productivity and meeting production targets. According to this comparison, the main difference is the simplicity of operation in the spinnery where the preparation is done automatically and thus mistakes are rare, especially if the production is mechanized. The only skill needed here is to be able to tie the broken threads as fast as possible with the minimum loss of materials. The rest is dependent on the quality of the raw materials and the machinery, and the technical capabilities of the engineer. All that the spinner needs to do is to be careful and diligent so as to minimize interruption of the production process. To von der Porten, this is the reason why women, especially young girls, are better at working as spinners. In the weavery, by contrast, the quality of the woven fabric is dependent on the skill of the weaver.\textsuperscript{243} Von der Porten also includes the dyeing department in the definition of the work of weaving and, as one might expect, workers at the dyeing department are all men. The same is also true for the auxiliary departments.

**Entering the Factory: Practices of Recruitment**

The industrial production in the early Republican period was characterized by problems of low productivity and efficiency. The production levels of the state-owned textile factories, for example, were far lower than the goals aimed at in the work programs. The problem was caused primarily by the lack of a steady workforce, according to the reports on different sectors of state industries. “Workers’ movements,” the term used in the inspection reports to denote the high turnover rate, was the biggest problem before meeting production targets. Indeed, the term ‘movement’ seems to be an appropriate one, for it was very common for a worker to leave and return to the same factory multiple times over a short span of time. This was possible because, in accordance with the hardship of maintaining a steady labour force, the policy of recruitment was very loose. It was possible, for example, to leave the factory without any prior notification and be recruited again in a couple of months’ time. Consequently, sources of and remedies for this problem constituted much of the discussion on the workforce in state documents. Basing its analysis mainly on these documents, Turkish labour historiography has placed an extraordinary emphasis on the reasons and effects of the high turnover rate in the industrial establishments during the period as well. Much of the reason lies in the use of the state archives as the only archival source and thus reproducing the questions and problems about the workforce from the perspective of the employer.

Furthermore, the explanations for the problem are also reproduced in that the reason for the extremely high turnover rates had been established as the persisting rural ties of the workers. In turn, the provision of social welfare, which was advocated by many inspection reports as the solution to the problem, has been interpreted as the state’s attempts to lower the labour turnover rate. Indeed, I agree with Akın’s critique of the existing scholarship: that it had underestimated the agency of the workers by picturing them as passive receivers of social welfare and overlooked the disciplinary functions of the social policies by reducing them to a mere set of rational calculations. Instead of asking who the workers that left the factories were and what were their motivations, the scholarship accepted the explanations by the state. The rhetoric used by the workers to legitimate a reason of leave at the time of leaving or later in the employment period when seniority claims were made, for example, had never been discussed. Similarly, how the management at the level of the factory thought about these reasons and made decisions on re-recruitment or seniority benefits is also unknown. As such, a complex matter with multiple aspects that change over time had been reduced to a two-dimensional picture in which workers left the factories while the state tried to keep them there.

The problem is also one of the most cited aspects of working-class formation in Turkish historiography in that the perception of workers’ rural ties hindered the development of a genuine class of workers. In other words, similar to working-class formation processes in other developing countries, the assumption of the pre-dominance of peasant-workers, as opposed to firmly established industrial workers, stands as an obstacle before the historical formation of a working-class consciousness. In what follows, I introduce new archival material, mainly petitions written by workers to explain their reasons of leave, that would help us to understand the high turnover rate as a workers’ response to their working and living conditions. These petitions suggest that the reasons for leaving the factory were manifold, and that sometimes the reason given to the management was not the only, if not the most accurate one. Moreover, the letters also contain small notes from the supervisors across the different levels of management, which would allow us to construct a dynamic account of the negotiation process concerning the leaving and re-recruiting practices at Bakırköy Factory.

244 Yigit Akın, “Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihçiliğine Katkı: Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Kaynaklar”, Tarih ve Toplum, No. 2, Fall 2005, pp. 73-111.
The High Labour Turnover Rate at Bakırköy: New Evidence and Analysis

The persistence of high turnover rates in an economy characterized by unemployment because of the after effects of the 1929 Depression, followed by the conditions of the war years, is a curious fact. Especially in Istanbul, to which people from the provinces migrated for economic reasons, we need more information on the motivations and strategies of workers’ leaving their factory jobs.\(^{246}\)

When I asked Asım if he knew of any workers who left their jobs at the factory to work on their land, he was so surprised that he wanted to make sure that he got the question right: “The workers? They leave the factory? Is it possible that once you make it to the factory you leave it? They managed to get in [to the factory], [why] would they leave?!” However, a report written by another foreign expert on the Bakırköy Factory presents an entirely different picture.\(^{247}\) The following table shows the number of workers at the beginning of the year, the number of entries and departures during the year, and the total number of workers at the end of the year for the years 1940-1943 at Bakırköy Factory:

\(^{246}\) A short list of newspaper articles reporting on the increasing number of unemployed migrants in Istanbul would include the following: “İşsizler: vilayete müracaat edenlerden vesika istenecek” [“Unemployed: those applying to the governor’s office will be asked for a certificate”] (Akşam, 9 March 1932) [this article gives the reason of rising unemployment as the bankruptcies in the private sector]; “İşsizliğe karşı belediye yeni teşkilat yapmak istiyor” [“The municipality wants to build a new organization for unemployment”] (Akşam, 6 Aug. 1932); “İstanbula iş bulmak için gelenler” [“Those coming to Istanbul to Find a Job”] (Akşam, 21 Nov. 1932); “İş bulmak için belediye bu sene bir iş bürosu açıyor” [“The municipality is opening an employment bureau this year”] (Akşam, 14 June 1934). Another article published on 17 June 1934 gives a detailed explanation of why migrants come to Istanbul: “The construction activities and the opening of new factories in Istanbul are causing many people from Anatolia to come here. The majority of these are agricultural workers, some of whom are small land owners and the rest is hired workman. In Anatolian villages, the hearsay is circulating that there are new factories opening in Istanbul and they desperately need workers. There are a lot of those believing this, they leave their jobs and come here” (Akşam). This was indeed the year when Sümerbank starting opening new factories as well as operating old factories such as the Bakırköy Factory. The tone of the newspaper articles on the economy significantly changes around this time. The etatist policy is praised and many positive reports are made about the state factories. But the problem with unemployment persists and the local government offices in Istanbul are still at pains to deal with the unemployed. [For example, “Finding a Job: The Municipality is Planning to Open an Employment Bureau” (Akşam, 9 Feb. 1935)]. Opening a parenthesis here, I would like to note that the discourse on the unemployed changed dramatically over the following years. In June 1943, for example, it was reported that “unemployed ramblers” in Istanbul would be collected in a madrassa and will be sent away from the city after they are washed in the public bath and forced to clean the madrassa. The governorship, it was reported, presented this as a measure against typhus (Akşam, 22 June 1943). The same year, it was reported that there were 2855 unemployed children in the city. They were called a danger because “they carry germs around and they add to the difficulty of food provision... they are good for nothing.” The Social Aid Committee of Eminönü People’s House [people’s houses were the local social and cultural organizations of the RPP] was delighted, the newspaper reported, to have learnt that the Ministry of Agriculture will move these children away from Istanbul by employing them in agricultural work. To my knowledge, there is no study on the social history of unemployment in this period. Such a study would be most useful in a number of ways starting with the structure of the local government offices. Most interestingly, it would reveal the (re)construction of discourses on poverty, migration, childhood, health issues and social aid. Such a study would also be interesting in terms of juxtaposing the perception of Istanbul as a space of privilege by the ruling class and as a space of hope by the poor.

\(^{247}\) Ing. Hosli, Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor, (n.p., 1943).
Table 1. Labour Turnover at Bakırköy Factory, 1940-1943.

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<th>1940</th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1942</th>
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<td>1121</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1082</td>
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<td>1569</td>
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<td></td>
<td>77</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>107</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>2203</td>
<td>2619</td>
<td>3018</td>
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<td></td>
<td>177</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>207</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1053</td>
<td>1170</td>
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<td>1150</td>
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<td>1619</td>
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<td>end of the year</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>126</td>
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As seen in Table 1, the number of workers between 1940 and 1943 increased dramatically. There is a remarkable increase in the number of newcomers from 1941 to 1942, although the real wages were decreasing. This was a time when the cost of living was increasing because of the war conditions. Still, the number of leavers continued to increase during this four-year period.

The report also offers invaluable information about the factors that affected one’s decision to leave. First, contrary to the argument that female workers left factories after getting married at an early age, and thus their period of employment was short, Hosli notes that the turn-over rate of the male workforce is higher compared to the female workforce at Bakırköy. Second was the fact that weavers changed more than the other workers. Since the weavers at Bakırköy were predominantly male, as we saw above, this was in tune with the first statement. Hosli reasoned that this was because of the difficulty of the job and the long working hours in the weaving department. I argue, however, that there is another very important factor contributing to this: finding a job was not as difficult for skilled workers as it was for the unskilled. If we remember von der Porten’s comparison of the spinning and weaving in terms

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248 For example, Yüksel Akkaya argues: “Women worked until they got married. Since they got married at an early age, their length of employment was relatively short and this hindered the development of class consciousness” (“Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikaçılık I (Kısa özet)”, Praksis, No. 5, Winter 2002, p. 135).

249 These data were repeated in other reports and, in 1948, increasing the number of female workers was suggested by the inspection report as a solution. The reply from Sümeyrbank hints at the working and living conditions of female workers in the 1940s. According to this, Sümeyrbank was trying to recruit more female workers, but the fact that women worked as cultivators hindered this. Also, the Ministry of Labour forbid that women work on the night shifts, and did not allow the day shifts to do overwork, which increased the difficulty of recruiting women (Sümeyrbank 1948 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait Idare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabı, [Izmit: Selüloz Basımevi, 1949]).

250 This point is further discussed in Chapter 3, where I introduce differences between weavers and the rest of the workers in terms of the bargaining power they have while dealing with managerial control. Suffice to say here that the newspapers ads were seeking for weavers during the period.
of their difficulty and skill requirements, Hösli’s observation is further substantiated. Furthermore, in another report he wrote on the Nazilli Factory in 1943, Hosli gives figures on the turnover rates at the weavery and the spinner as 176 per cent and 100%, respectively.\footnote{251} Third, workers receiving hourly wages changed more than those with accorded wages, which would support the argument that the low level of wages caused people to leave in the first place.\footnote{252} Overall, then, we can conclude that gender, labour process and the systems of remuneration are the three factors effecting workers’ decisions to leave. Below, I question these findings by means of analyzing individual stories of leaving and returning to the factory. As well as being a symptom of an instable labour market, the labour turnover rate is also affected by the different job opportunities for skilled and unskilled labourers.

When it comes to the question of qualifications, Hosli notes that the above figures do not suffice to make a definite conclusion. Thus, he also looks at the composition of the Bakırköy workforce in terms of duration of work at the factory\footnote{253}.  


252 An inspection report from 1945 gives a set of data that is invaluable to contextualize the figures given by Hosli (“Sümerbank İşletmelerinde İşletmede İnsan ve İşçi Meseleleri”, in \textit{Sümerbank 1945 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait İdare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabı}, [Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Matbaası, 1946]). Though the report covers all Sümerbank enterprises, I present here the data on factories that were run by the Yarn and Weaving Enterprise. These included four cotton and five woollen textile factories as well as an artificial silk factory, and two offices collecting cotton for these factories. A very important note about these data is its aggregation of factories in Istanbul and Anatolia. This could be problematic for reasons that I will discuss later in the chapter, but suffice here to say that the important differences existed among these factories in terms of, for example, working and living conditions such social provisions, wage levels. I also suspect, though I cannot establish at this point, that workers in these factories differed in terms of their access to land because workers in Anatolian factories are expected to have originated from the same region whereas, for example in Bakırköy, the number of those who were born outside Turkey is high.

The report gives the number of workers who left these factories in 1945 according to five criteria: sex, marital status, age, origin of birth, and seniority. Of 5274 women who made up 25.69% of the total workforce of these factories, 3321 had left employment; whereas, out of 15,296 men, 9922 did the same. The percentages of women and men leaving employment are respectively: 62.97 and 64.87. The difference between married and unmarried (including both singles and widowers) is much more dramatic with 95.34% of the latter category leaving employment in 1945 as opposed to 70.14% of married workers. There must be a typo in the table showing the number of leavers according to their age, since the percentage calculated by the inspectors is far from the percentage calculated from the figures in the table. Thus, I do not go into the details of these criteria but only mention that 50% of those between ages 12 and 18 left employment and, as expected, the percentages decrease as age increases.

The origin of birth criteria is divided into three categories: from the same region with the factory, from regions around the factory, and from far away. The percentages of those leaving employment within these categories are respectively: 78.35, 85.03, and 85.88%. As expected from the previous figures, the percentage of leaving the factory decreases sharply as seniority increases. It is not possible to give actual percentages since the seniority composition of the total workforce is not provided, but the real number of those with less than a year of seniority leaving employment is almost our times higher than those with one to two years seniority.

This general picture is the most detailed analysis of the dynamics of the labour turnover rate but still it is far from complete for many reasons. Moreover, the widespread typo and calculation mistakes I have encountered in these inspection reports weaken the credibility of the figures. However, these analysis are valuable not only for nuancing a much overgeneralized problem but also in illustrating the extent of the problem of securing a stable workforce for the state as the employer.

253 Hosli, \textit{Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor}.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of work</th>
<th>% of the total workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3 months</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 months</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9 months</td>
<td>8.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12 months</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 years</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 years</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years or more</td>
<td>13.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Workers' Length of Service at Bakırköy Factory, 1943.

Although the numbers of leavers are quite high, the statistics on the length of stay at the factory makes the picture less dramatic in terms of production efficiency. In fact, according to this survey, 65 per cent of the workforce had been working in the factory for more than a year.\(^{254}\) However, the low level of labour productivity still needs to be explained and Hosli presents two reasons for this: on the one hand, proper training for the workers is not provided. On the other hand, he argues, technical limitations coupled with the absence of proper supervision produced this result.

The remedy Hosli proposes is not different from all the others writing on state factories in this period: an appropriate wage policy and the provision of social welfare. Overall, the high labour turnover rate can be explained by the arduous working conditions and the inadequacy of material incentives offered to workers. As such, the workers’ decision to leave appears to be a response to their bad working conditions. Given the absence of an effective labour organization, the workers’ ability to take collective action is limited; leaving is one of the possible individual responses to their exploitation. I now turn to the issue of factory discipline, for it is one of the factors that played a role in workers’ employment decisions. The main question here is the following: How is factory discipline secured in the context of a fast-changing labour force? In other words, how is managerial control over the labour process secured when the workers resort to the option of ‘exit’ so often?\(^{255}\)

\(^{254}\) However, it should be noted that workers did not count the short periods of leave when they were calculating their duration of work at the factory. For example, if a worker left the factory for three years for military service and for some several more years for various reasons, he would still write in his later letters he had worked from the factory since his first recruitment.

\(^{255}\) I elaborate on this point with regard to the changing labour management relations in Chapter 3.
Managerial Control and Disciplinary Measures

While evaluating Henry Braverman’s contributions to the analysis of the capitalist labour process, Burawoy elegantly summarizes the problem of managerial control in capitalism:\(^\text{256}\):

He [i.e. Braverman] begins with the distinctive feature of the capitalist mode of production: that the direct producers sell to the capitalist neither themselves nor labour services but their labour power—their capacity to labour. The definitive problem of the capitalist labour process is therefore the translation of labour power into labour.

The problem gets more difficult to handle in the context of the extremely high labour turnover rates since the translation of labour power into labour depends on securing a stable labour force in the first place. As Aray puts it, one of the motivations for workers to leave their jobs was the fact that they could easily return. Because of the shortage of qualified continuous workers, employers could not enforce any degree of control through recruitment practices.\(^\text{257}\)

In the section on workers’ reasons for leaving the factory, we will see that workers did not have to specify their reason of leave, let alone provide a legitimate excuse. Under such conditions, one assumes that the discipline at the level of the shopfloor would not be too easy to establish and maintain.

The personnel files do not provide much information on the disciplinary measures taken at the factory, except for the detailed registration of fining practices. The only system of fining documented is deductions from wages. The sample of personnel files contains 117 receipts of fines issued between 1941 and 1952 to 27 workers. The reasons for these cases of fining can be divided into four groups. The first and the most common reason is absenteeism, which is a general category ranging from not following the time schedule while at the factory to not coming to the factory at all. In the former, reasons such as leaving before the working day ends or taking an early lunch break are cited. In the latter category, usually the receipt specifies that the worker did not show up ‘without permission and reason.’ Absenteeism constitutes 55.6 per cent of all the fines issued. The second most important reason for punishment by a wage deduction is poor performance, which is specified as “neglect” or “doing the job wrong” in the receipts. These reasons make up 36.8 per cent of all the fines. Third in the list is disobedience. Seven such incidents are reported in the receipt which makes

\(^{256}\) Burawoy, Politics of Production, p. 21.

\(^{257}\) Suat Aray, Sanayi İşletmelerinde İşçi Hareketleri ve Bunların Zirai Scheplerle İlgileri [Workers’ Movements in Industrial Enterprises and their Connections to Agricultural Reasons], 1950.
little less than 6 per cent of all the fines. Finally, two workers were fined for damaging the machinery.

In a study on cotton mill workers in Bombay, it is stated that women were not fined for going to work late and leaving early unlike men.\textsuperscript{258} The situation at Bakirköy is completely different since six out of fifteen women in the sample were fined repeatedly. In fact, forty-two receipts of fine are in their names. Congruent with the figures pertaining to the entire sample, these women were mostly fined for absenteeism. But cases of punishment for poor performance were also very common. Only one woman was fined: for leaving her work and sleeping in the toilet.

The distribution of fines over several years yields rather interesting results with only one fine in 1941 and none in 1942. There were six and ten fines in 1943 and 1944, respectively, and a few in 1945 and 1946. The number of fines increased dramatically after 1947. Whether this means a tightening of supervision and disciplinary measures or it is simply because the fines were recorded more accurately after this period is beyond our knowledge. One would expect that, as the experience levels of workers increase, the number of fines would decrease; however, the number of fines due to absenteeism was still very high at the end of the 1940s.

Since the files do not offer information on the daily practices of supervision on the shop floor, it is not easy to assess the degree and structure of managerial control. We cannot document, for example, managerial control over workers by means of detailed time tracking or increasing division of labour. We learn from a letter from the chief of personnel to the head foreman of the weaving department that workers had to punch cards when they started and stopped working. Another letter from the chief of the weaving department warns a foreman of his unit’s poor performance and gives him fifteen days to increase production.\textsuperscript{259} The files do not offer further information on the organization of the working day, the degree of mechanization or the extent of division of labour in different production departments. As such it is not possible to draw conclusions on the degree of deskillling, which is regarded as the basis of the separation of the conception and execution of work in Braverman’s analysis.\textsuperscript{260}

We could speculate, however, that this would not be of interest to management since complaints about the lack of skilled, qualified workers filled the pages of the inspection

\textsuperscript{259} Personnel file of Ahmet Çelenoğlu.
As the above-cited figures indicate, the greatest struggle of the management appears to be trying to secure the continuity of production rather than increasing productivity.

A very important actor in securing the discipline on the shopfloor is the foreman, according to factory memos. On many workers’ petitions, as I further illustrate in Chapter 3, the foreman comments on the performance of the worker and sometimes offers his opinion about the issue at hand. This same opinion is usually repeated by higher officers in the factory, which then forms the basis of the final decision. An oral history interview I conducted with Hüseyin Yılmaz reveals the extent of the authority of the head foremen in the factory. Decisions on wage increases, he reports, were made by the head foremen who were also responsible for paying the wages as we understand from a letter concerning the payment of wages in the weavery. Hüseyin’s comments on the election of head foremen as workers representatives are significant in that they clearly illustrate the workers’ perception of the head foremen as part of the management. Ismail makes a similar comment pertaining to the election of representative after the trade union emerged. The workers usually supported the candidates the trade union endorsed, he remembers. And these candidates were not foremen. This was the right thing to do, he continues, for “we could only tell our problems to those like us, not to those who are higher in status.” When I asked Hüseyin to comment on the relations between workers and head foremen, he calls the latter “the employers” who had contempt for workers. He gives the example of the head foreman of his department: “We worked together for twenty-six years, he never said “you are doing well” to me.” The relationship was also characterized by social distance. Hüseyin notes that the head foremen usually did not greet the workers and interprets it as a sign of social status difference. An incident from 1941 illustrates the tension between workers and the foreman in the weavery. When a foreman in the weavery ordered Ali to clean his loom, he was confronted by Ali’s elder brother who said Ali would not clean the loom or take the cloth batch to the control department. The foreman wanted them to be fired for they violated his authority and thus the factory discipline. After this incident, Ali left the factory.

As understood from other accounts of relations between workers and head foremen, the relationship was characterized by fear and respect. Asım, for example, remembers that when he was called to work on the first day of a religious fest, he felt obliged to go in order “for the head foreman not to get cross.” Hüseyin notes the presence of verbal contempt and remembers a head foreman who beat workers. This paternal structure also benefited workers

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261 Personel file of Ahmet Çelenoğlu.
in some cases, as Ismail notes: the management did not always know the problems among workers and between workers and the head foremen: “We tried to correct each other’s mistakes, we did not take the matter to the supervisors, we did not grass up on each other...We tried to help each other to secure our daily bread.”

The co-operation among workers sometimes took the form of what Burawoy calls ‘making out.’ This is a game in which operators set themselves certain percentage output targets by restricting the output through “a jointly regulated upper limit on the amount of work to be ‘handed in.’” Asım worked in the warp department and was paid according to a piece-rate system. When asked about the assigned production quotas, he gives an answer, which reveals a number of important aspects pertaining to relations of supervision on the shop floor:

If you do this much, you get this much. If you don’t work at all, you get nothing. But there is something else, when you do more than the rate, they do not pay you accordingly...Because it is a lot of money. Then you are not paid accordingly when you work hard...If you work hard you get fifty percent of what you normally earn. So, I slowed down the job...For example, how much did I use to earn? [his wife interrupts: one hundred and twenty liras] One hundred and eighty liras [he calculates how much he was supposed to earn, G.A], they did not give it, I mean there is the controller who follows you, he keeps an eye on you. We were all cunning. I arranged myself accordingly, the controller could not cope with it...He did not pay me [the amount I earned], why would I wear myself out for the same money? [when asked if others did the same] Of course they did.

Another example of workers’ attempts to benefit from the rules on their pay levels comes from an inspection report on cotton textile factories in 1939. According to this, workers took advantage of the sliding scales of taxation imposed on piece-rate earnings. Up to 80 piastres a day was exempt from income tax; between 80 and 120 piastres of daily pay, only 40 piastres was taxed, while earnings higher than 120 piastres a day were subject to taxation of the full amount. Workers controlled their level of production in order to make the most advantage of this wage scales system.

Burawoy’s evaluation of ‘making out’ among workers opens up an important discussion on the character of these workers’ responses in relation to their effects on the

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262 Burawoy, Politics of Production, p. 131.
reproduction of capitalist relations of production on the shopfloor. Different from prominent labour historians such as Eugene Genovese and Thompson, who emphasized elements of resistance in workers’ responses, Burawoy defines them as “ideological mechanisms through which workers are sucked into accepting what is as natural and inevitable,” and as “the arenas of subjectivity without which advanced capitalism cannot operate effectively.” Defined in this manner, games become tools of adaptation rather than of resistance, for they secure the cooperation of the workers in maintaining the capitalist relations of production. There is a problem with Burawoy’s analysis, however, that stems from his understanding of adaptation and resistance as two completely distinct and even opposite categories. Though he questions “under what conditions does adaptation turn into resistance,” in his analysis, he appears to miss the fluidity between the two.

It is in this framework of fluidity that I would like to discuss the archival evidence I present in this chapter. Obviously, we cannot establish if indeed games on the shopfloor in the sense Burawoy defined them were a common practice among workers in other departments. But the overall picture presented by this inevitably sketchy analysis of managerial control and disciplinary measures suggests that there were serious limits to capitalist control at the factory. A report from 1943 supports this suggestion by emphasizing the cultural factors effecting the implementation of control over the labour process. According to this, almost all state textile factories were characterized by the lack of proper labour control. From the foreman to the directors, the report continues, all supervisors are busy in their offices instead of supervising workers.

An important reason for the lack of effective labour control was the ease of exiting and re-entering the factory, or other factories for that matter. Also related to this was the fact that workers did not internalize the work-discipline demanded by the management, as we understand from the high number of fines given for absenteeism. The evidence indicates responses in the form of resistance, albeit in a hidden form. In the absence of organized collective action, leaving the factory becomes the only possible reaction workers could give to their bad working conditions. The fact that they made use of the ease of returning to their jobs, or that they were not fired even after they were fined for absenteeism at various times, suggests that leaving the factory was an effective mechanism.

The evidence also supports Burawoy’s idea that, through cooperation, workers are able to adapt to capitalist work. Asım’s words are a clear example of this. A rather more

264 Burawoy, Politics of Production, p. 76.
covert example comes from Ismail’s account of how workers and the foreman solved problems among themselves, without notifying the management. Although both these cases suggest non-conformity on the surface level, their effects secure the maintenance of production of surplus value through securing the order of the workplace and the cooperation of the workers. Important to note at this point is the fact that there is not a single case in which a worker objects to a fine. Refusal to pay was obviously not an option as fines were deducted from wages but, though workers wrote many petitions questioning the managerial practices at the factory, as we shall see later in this study, they did not write a single petition on the practice of fining. Only in Ali’s case do we see a direct response to fining: he left the factory upon being fined a week’s wage and did not return for seven years. Other than this instance, no contestation over fees is documented. With this I leave the discussion on managerial control and disciplinary measures at Bakırköy Factory and move on to the section on wage policy. The subject is further discussed, however, both in other sections of the current chapter and in Chapter 3, which tackles the changing dynamics of worker-management relations in detail.

**Wage Levels in Textile Sector**

Wage levels in state factories of the early Republican period are often discussed in relation to wage levels in the private sector. Though this comparative understanding has obvious advantages, it brings about two distinct problems. First, when discussing state workers as the better-paid segment of the industrial working class, it implies a certain degree of quality of life of these workers. However, since industrial wages were in general very low during this period, such a comparison could only indicate that workers with higher wage levels lived in less difficult conditions, yet still in difficult conditions. To put it in other way, a labour historian should never lose sight of what E.P. Thompson reminds us from fifty years ago: “Any evaluation of the quality of life must entail an assessment of the total life-experience, the manifold satisfactions or deprivations, cultural as well as material, of the people concerned.”

The second problem with this comparison is of a technical nature. The

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266 E.P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (Penguin Books: London, 1991), p. 486. Elsewhere in his book, Thompson elaborates on the use of statistical vs. literary evidence in reconstructing workers’ experiences: “[T]he term ‘standard’ leads us from data amenable to statistical measurement (wages or articles of consumption) to those satisfactions which are sometimes described by statisticians as ‘imponderables.’ From food we are led to homes, from homes to health, from health to family life, and thence to leisure, work-discipline, education and play, intensity of labour, and so on. From standard-of-life we pass to way-of-life. But the two are not the same. The first is a measurement of quantities: the second a description (and
discrepancies between wage levels among the state factories were noted by Hosli in 1943. He reports that wages were increased by 35.5 per cent from 1941 to 1942 at Nazilli Factory; an increase, he added, which did not meet the rise in living costs. Furthermore, the record wages of some workers, who were paid piece rates, increased the average wage level to a considerable extent.\footnote{Hosli, Nazilli Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor.}

Sebahattin Zaim made a similar remark in his study on the wage levels in the textile sector. He notes the extreme differentiation between wage levels even among workers doing the same job in the same factory. In Istanbul, female workers earned on average only 70 per cent of the male wage, and the percentage was even lower for child workers at 62. Because of these discrepancies, the average wages could be misleading, he adds, for there were many workers paid much less.\footnote{Sabahaddin Zaim, “Türkiye Mensucat Sanayiinde Ücretler”, Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları, Sekizinci Kitap, pp. 37-8.}

Warnings about the representative quality of the average wage levels are also found in the inspection reports. In addition to the dramatic wage differences among workers, changes in methods of calculation, the inspectors note, damage this quality. For example, the 15.4 per cent wage increase from 1947 to 1948 in state textile factories does not reflect the reality for the foreman salaries, which used to be evaluated in a separate category, and which was lumped with wage data of the purely productive workers.\footnote{“Sümerbank Iplik ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1948 Yılı Raporu”, in Sümerbank 1948 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait Idare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabi, (İzmit: Selüloz Basmevi, 1949), p. 33.}

Such a warning was also made in an inspection report on cotton textile factories in 1939. According to this, the distinction between productive and auxiliary workers was not made in the same way even among the four cotton textile factories. In some factories, productive workers were those who engaged in productive activity regardless of the wage system they were subjected to. In others, however, productive workers were those paid piece rates regardless of their activity in the factory. Because of these differences in classifications, analyses of and comparisons between wage levels would not be precise.\footnote{Sümerbank Birleşik Pamuk Ipliği ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1939 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 37. We also learn from this report that in 1939, the piece rates at cotton textile factories were fixed by the “Sümerbank Cotton Yarn Enterprise.” Each factory had different scales according to its “characteristic.” Unfortunately the report does not elaborate on these characteristics and the issue is not raised in later dated reports either (p. 88).}
It is on the wage data Zaim published in 1956 that Makal bases his calculations of wages in the textile sector in Istanbul between 1938 and 1954. He compares wages in state textile factories with wages across the entire textile sector in Istanbul and notes that since 80 per cent of employment was in the private sector, the latter data largely reflect wages in the private sector and thus allow a comparison between state and private textile sector wages in the city. The data cover the nominal wages, social welfare, and the cost of living index. The calculations show that, while real wages in the private sector increased between 1938 and 1940, real wages in state sector decreased. In 1941, real wages in the private sector also decreased, but the index was still higher than that of the state sector. It was in 1942 that an extreme gap between the two sectors occurred with the real wage index in the state sector at 83.2 (compared to 100 in 1938), and 51.6 in the private sector. The following year, however, the two indexes grew closer to one another, with the state sector at 61.4 and the private sector at 60.1. The gap widened the following year and the private sector lagged behind the state sector in terms of real wage indexes in during the remainder of the period. The wage index in the state sector reached its 1938 level in 1946, while the private sector had to wait two more years to do so.

The problem with Makal’s interpretation of these figures is two-fold. First, he does not pay attention to the fact that, even after the war years, the increase in the real wage index was dramatically behind the increase in the cost of living index. That is to say, workers in both sectors were impoverished during the period. Although he does cite Korkut Boratav’s assertions that the burden of industrialization was carried by wheat producers and the working class, by arguing that state workers did not really suffer from the torments of industrialization, he overlooks this very important point in my opinion. Second, a considerable part of the widening difference in total wage earnings in the two sectors was due to the increasing number of social welfare state workers enjoyed after 1941. Makal is silent on this significant point – significant because, as I show below, the provision of social welfare differed dramatically among state factories on the one hand, and among workers at the same factory on the other. Thus, the issue of social provisions requires a much more detailed analysis than provided in the aforementioned study.

According to Makal, in a context where workers did not have the right to organize, collective bargaining, and strike, the increases in wages should be interpreted in the framework of the need to secure the labour force in order to sustain state-led industrialization.

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The question is then why this was not done until 1942, which was, as I showed above, characterized by very high labour turnover rates. Likewise, in 1947, we would expect to see lower turnover rate in state factories since the wage levels were recovering faster in state factories compared to private enterprises. However, as we learnt from a report in 1950, these rates were still very high at the beginning of the 1950s, which shows that the state’s efforts to keep the labour force at state factories were in vain to a great extent.

If we compare the wage figures Makal gives with wage figures at Bakırköy Factory given in various inspection reports, the following points arise. First, a report from 1943 compares the hourly wages between two state-owned textile factories in Istanbul: Bakırköy and Defterdar between late 1940 and early 1943. The hourly wage at Bakırköy in the last month of 1940 was 16.95 piastres, while it was 16.93 piastres at Defterdar. The following year, the hourly wage at Bakırköy decreased to 16.50 piastres, while it increased to 18.24 piastres in Defterdar. During the next two years, hourly wages at both factories increased, but Bakırköy workers earned 87.3% of Defterdar workers’ pay. The wage gap among state textile factories in the whole country was much more dramatic in 1947, when the lowest wage was paid at Bünyan factory at a level of 32.02 and the highest was at Defterdar at 60.51 piastres an hour. In other words, the average wage at Bünyan was only 53% of the average wage at Defterdar.

Another report dated 1946 gives the hourly wages (including the non-monetary benefits as well) at Bakırköy between 1939 and 1946. According to this report, while in 1939 and 1940 daily wages at Bakırköy were slightly higher than what Makal gave for state-owned textile factories in Istanbul, from 1941 on, with the exception of 1943, the figures are lower than this. Especially in 1942, the difference between these two sets of data is striking: the daily average wage at Bakırköy was 194.4 piastres according to this report while Makal gives it as 235 piastres for state textile factories in Istanbul.

The most significant difference between Makal’s figures on state textile factories in Istanbul and figures from the inspection reports on Bakırköy Factory concerns the sum of

272 Makal, Ameleden İşçiye, p. 134.
273 Suat Aray, Sanayi İşletmelerinde İşçi Hareketleri.
275 “Sümerbank İplik ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1948 Yılı Raporu”, p. 34.
social welfare workers received in 1947 and 1948. Makal calculates that workers in state-owned textile factories in Istanbul received 75 piastres in 1947 and 93 piastres in 1948 as social welfare. To the inspection report, however, these figures are 23.28 piastres and 26.39 piastres, respectively. Below, I address the different practices of social provisions in state factories in detail. First, however, to return to Thompson’s reminder on the need to assess the total life-experience of workers to evaluate their quality of life, a few more case studies need to be discussed.

Bakırköy workers’ complaints on their wage levels abound in the sample of personnel files and a detailed analysis of these written complaints is made in the next chapter. Thus, I limit the discussion to four examples here. The first example is from 1943. A worker from the dyeing department, who had been working at the factory for seven years by this time, wrote a petition to the general directorate of Sümerbank. His wage at the time was 18 piastres an hour, i.e. 144 piastres a day – much less than the figure of 259 piastres a day given by Makal. Moreover, as his wage increase documents illustrate, since 1936, his hourly wage was increased by only 8 piastres an hour. Thus, his wage increase was far removed from the trend of increase in wages of state workers in the textile sector in Istanbul as suggested by Makal. According to this trend, the nominal wages almost doubled between 1938 and 1943.

Three other examples come from 1947, the second consecutive year when the wage index reached the level of 1938 according to Makal’s calculations. Cemil left the factory in 1945 because, he wrote, he had to visit his family. He then returned in March 1947 after working at a private factory in Istanbul for six months. Four months after his third recruitment at Bakırköy, Cemil wrote another letter asking for termination of his employment because he could not provide a living for his family although he did not have any children at the time. When he returned in 1948, his hourly wage was 25 piastres, almost one third of the figure Makal gives as the average nominal wage for the same year. It appears that 1947 was a year of economic hardship for many others in the factory too. Kamil, who had worked as a caretaker, wrote to the factory management that he could not live on his salary of 50 liras with his wife and child and demanded it be raised to 60 liras a month. An interesting point to note

277 A confusion regarding the choice of terminology must be noted here. While Makal divides workers’ earnings into two categories as nominal wage and social welfare, when he adds them up, he calls the sum “wages in kind and cash”. In the inspection report I cite here, however, workers’ earnings are divided into three categories: wages in cash, wages in kind and social expenses. Thus, I use the sum of the last two categories in the inspection report to compare the figures on social welfare between two sets of data.
278 “Sümerbank İplik ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1948 Yılı Raporu”, p. 35.
279 In Turkish, especially in rural parts of the country, “family” means “wife.” Thus, some workers specify the people they are providing for as “my family and kids”.

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about Kamil’s employment history arises from his file: when he was working in another state factory in 1944, he used to earn 60 liras a month doing the same job he had done at Bakırköy in 1947. According to the figures Makal gives, his wage needed to increase from 75.9 to 110.50 liras a month between 1944 and 1947. The last example is from a weaver, the more skilled and sought after labourers in the textile workforce. After ten years of work at the factory, Mehmet earned 25 piastres an hour in 1947, which, as he noted in his petition, “was not enough even for one person, let alone a family.” He also noted that, while in 1942 he was earning 140 liras a month; in 1947 he was earning only 52 liras, which compelled him to sell some of his furniture. A final note about the data provided in the files concerns the practice of indicating the wage levels before taxation. For example, when Mehmet wrote that he earned 20 piastres an hour, his file stated that his wage was 35 piastres an hour, which suggests that Mehmet was taxed 42.9 per cent of his wage in 1947.

In citing these examples, my aim is not to claim that the statistical figures on state workers’ wages are not dependable. I am well aware of the fact that statistical figures could not be falsified by citing exceptional cases. However, these cases raise three significant points concerning wages during the early Republican period. First, they reveal the dubious quality of the available data. As I explained above, not only the dramatic wage discrepancies among state workers, but also the lack of uniformity or precision of data collection procedures seriously affect the average wage levels. Second, even a small sample of workers’ files strongly challenge the argument Makal makes based on his comparison of state and private sector textile workers. According to Makal, workers in state economic enterprises did not suffer distinctly from the torments of industrialization. In arguing this, Makal was opposing the claims that state workers were a labour aristocracy. But there is not much difference between his approach and the approaches of those he argued against. In the end, they all suffer from the same methodological problem of substituting parched a-historical abstractions in place of the experiences of actual workers. Third, as evident from Makal’s generalization of wage comparisons in the textile sector to the entire body of state workers, these studies are characterized by an extreme degree of overgeneralization. That the state factories operated in very different sectors with strikingly different levels of mechanization requiring different levels of skill and experience, that they were established in places which differed in terms of social geography, cost of living and supply of labour are overlooked in these analyses to a great extent.

280 Makal, Ameleden İşçiye, p. 159.
Sümerbank’s Wage Policy

This section is composed of two parts. First, I look at the wage policy issues from the perspective of the state as employer. The discussions on wage policy from this perspective focus on the possible solutions of problems relating to turnover rate, labour productivity and efficiency. Second, by means of introducing archival material on Bakırköy workers’ wages, I challenge some of the dominant arguments in the literature pertaining to the income levels of state factories.

In many inspection reports, wages at state factories were cited as the most important reason for workers to leave. According to many of these, the wage levels were also the reason for low productivity and efficiency levels. Overall, Sümerbank could not develop a wage policy that would keep the workforce at the factories on the one hand, and provide incentives and motives for hard work on the other. Thus, in the 1930s, foreign experts inspecting the state factories were increasingly complaining of the lack of a well-defined wage policy. Writing about the Kayseri factory in 1936, a foreign engineer specified the lack of a clear and accessible system of remuneration as the main problem preventing the formation of an efficient labour force.\(^{281}\) Similarly, in a report on Nazilli Factory, the complete lack of a wage policy was cited among the factors causing workers to leave and thus hinders the emergence of a skilled workforce.\(^{282}\) The lack of a skilled workforce also indirectly affected the wage structure at the factories. For example, a report from 1942 explains why there are too many workers at textile factories as follows: normally, one worker should be able to operate two spinning machines, but because workers are not skilled and experienced enough, sometimes two workers attend one machine. Moreover, because there is a high level of absenteeism, backup workers are employed.\(^{283}\) A similar complaint was made by von der Porten regarding the unqualified weavers at Kayseri Factory. He notes that, at some factories, a weaver attends sixteen looms, whereas in Sümerbank textile factories, a weaver attending eight looms would satisfy the management because on average each worker attends six looms as of 1939.\(^{284}\) Overall, these factors produce not only low levels of labour productivity but also high levels of labour expenses for the factories as well. Another problem they caused was large wage

\(^{281}\) Bereznitsky, Kayseri Bez Fabrikasi Hakkında, (n.p., 1936).

\(^{282}\) Hosli, Nazilli Bez Fabrikasi Hakkında Rapor; Ing. Hosli, Merinos Fabrikasi Hakkında Rapor, (n.p., 1943). Similarly, an inspection report on all Sümerbank textile factories in 1942 specifies the inappropriate wage policy as the reason for skilled workers to leave the factory (“Sümerbank 1942 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait İdare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabı”, in Sümerbank 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, [Ankara: Başvekalet Devlet Matbaası, 1943], p. 23).

\(^{283}\) “Sümerbank 1942 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait İdare Meclisi raporu”, p. 160.

\(^{284}\) Von der Porten, Max. Kayseri Fabrikasi Iplik ve Dokuma Daireleri Hakkında.
discrepancies among workers. The incompetence in bookkeeping and the inability to present a clear structure of wage levels created dramatically different results, not only among state factories but within a single factory as well.\textsuperscript{285} When the state’s wage policy was discussed in the parliament in 1943, the issue of introducing appropriate wage scales for qualified workers was addressed by MPs who argued that the inappropriate wage policy caused two different problems related to wage levels: qualified workers were not paid enough, while the unqualified were sometimes paid too much.\textsuperscript{286} Besides wage scales, the implementation and then the reform of different systems of remuneration was a widely discussed issue in state documents. The information on the adaptation of systems of remuneration is usually incomplete and scattered across different inspection reports written throughout the period using different terminologies for presumably the same applications and practices. Consequently, it is not possible to sketch a holistic picture of a diversified wage system in the factory over time. The following is thus an incomplete attempt to construct the wage policy at Bakırköy Factory.

Both the data in personnel files and the inspection reports reveal that the system of remuneration was an hourly pay system in Bakırköy Factory in the early 1930s. As early as 1936, however, foreign experts started advocating for the implementation of the “accord based wage system” in all production departments. For example, Von der Porten asserts that in a mechanized factory like Bakırköy, where diligence and attention is of the utmost importance, workers should not be paid a fixed daily wage. The accord system is the best option for the factory according to him.\textsuperscript{287} This opinion was shared by other foreign experts

\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|}
\hline
        & Bakırköy & Ereğli \\
\hline
Yarn    & 15.0     & \{11.8\} \\
Spinning& 14.75    & \}  \\
Bobbin  & 12.0     & \{12.0\} \\
Warp    & \{14.3\} & \\
Weaving & 20.0     & 10.0 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

The most curious point in this comparison concerns the hourly wages of the weavers compared to others at Ereğli Factory. Hosli notes that weavers are the workers who are needed to show the greatest effort. It should be researched, he continues, if this was a result of or the reason for workers to leave their jobs. There should also be shared principles determining the wage levels at state factories.

\textsuperscript{285} Ing. Hosli, \textit{Ereğli Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor}, (n.p., 1940). The report also includes a table comparing the daily wages paid in different production units at Ereğli and Bakırköy factories in 1940:


\textsuperscript{287} Max von der Porten, Max. \textit{Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası Hakkında}, (n.p., 1936).
who were advising rational and scientific management for state factories. At the beginning of the 1940s, the inspection reports mentioned the importance of implementing a system that would reward the hardworking workers in order to increase productivity. And the replies to these reports by Sümerbank indicated the slow but successive progress made in this direction.

By 1936, this system was in effect to a large extent in the weavery. Von der Porten explains in detail how it worked as follows: the workers are not paid according to the weight of the cloth they weave because this would unfairly benefit those weaving coarser threads. The length of the woven cloth is also disregarded, as weavers producing loose cloths with a low weft density would receive a higher pay. Instead, the weavers are paid according to the number of shuttles they weave. When the yarn is broken, the machine automatically stops and the shuttling is thus interrupted. Consequently, the pay does not increase, which von der Porten finds highly effective. As for the spinnery, however, the situation was completely different for he states: “it is wrongly assumed that the accord system is applied in the spinnery.” The wages depended on the number of hanks of yarn spun. And that number was calculated by a counter attached to the spinning loom, which recorded the number of hank automatically. In other words, referring to the metaphor von der Porten used, just as a tachometer records the number of tours wheels make, and thus calculates the kilometres travelled, without actually indicating anything about the task achieved during this travel, these counters kept counting the spins, even when the yarn was broken or the loom was unattended. What should be done, according to von der Porten, was to pay the workers according to the weight of the yarn they spun. He notes that he was told that experiments with different pay systems are being done but that this was not enough. Especially during the night shifts, he continues, productivity is very low. Besides, if the worker understands that, regardless of his performance, he would be paid the same amount, this would lead him to laziness. While giving this detailed explanation, von der Porten also reveals an interesting point about how decisions on wage systems are taken at the factory. When he discussed the option of paying workers on the basis of the weight of yarn produced, the engineer at the spinnery objected on the grounds that such a system would decrease the quality of the yarn. It appears that while they discussed this, an officer from Sümerbank, namely the director of the Istanbul branch of Sümerbank, was there. He claimed that the current system was effective in exerting control

288 Among these, the following could be listed: Bereznitsky, Kayseri Bez Fabrikasi Hakkinda; A. Mundorf, Feshane Çuha Fabrikası Faaliyeti Hakkında, (n.p., 1935); Max von der Porten, Feshane ve Hereke Fabrikaları Tetkiklerine Dair, (n.p., 1936); Hosli, Ereğli Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor; Bauer, Bakırköy Fabrikası İğleri Hakkında, (n.p., 1934); E. Sachsenberg, Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası Organizasyonu Hakkında, (n.p., 1937).
over workers. Von der Porten noted that the management was convinced that the current system was a proper adaptation of the accord system.289

These problems could be generalized to an extent as the inspection reports on state-owned textile factories reveal that the accord system was implemented in the weavery, whereas in the spinnery and other departments, its adaptation was slower and problematic. In 1939, for example, of the 7789 workers at four cotton textile factories (Nazilli, Kayseri, Eregli and Bakırköy), 4303 were paid piece rates and worked mostly at spinning, weaving preparation and weaving departments.290 In 1943, there were 869 workers in the weavery department of Bakırköy Factory, of whom 206 worked as weavers. The number of workers paid a piece rate was 583, i.e. they made up 67 per cent of the workforce in the weavery.291 In 1939, for example, some spinners at Kayseri Factory were earning hourly wages, whereas all weavers were on an accord wage.292 The insistence in the reports on the need to implement the accord wage system to all the employees in the factories, which continued into the 1940s, reflected the belief in the necessity of creating incentives for higher productivity. The fact that the weavery was ahead of other departments in this regard substantiates the arguments on the structural bargaining power of the weavers in the labour market. The management had to pay the weavers handsomely to keep them at the factory.

The implementation of these incentives also had a gender dimension. In a report on premium and bonus payments to Sümerbank workers, the author suggests the implementation of a specific kind of piece-rate system. After listing the benefits this implementation would bring, he notes that this would not change the conditions of the female workers, because they are obliged to leave their earnings to their families.293 Unfortunately, the reports do not provide data on diverse systems of wages pertaining to female labour. But we could make some deductions, for example, using the information that the accord wage was not as common in the spinnery as it was in the weavery. Since women were predominantly employed in the spinnery, it would be logical to assume that an hourly wage was more common than an accord wage among female workers. This would be a rather curious point since, as I have noted above, Sümerbank claimed to have tried to increase female labour participation. Although it

289 Max von der Porten, Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası hakkında, (n.p., 1936); Sachsenberg, Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası Organizasyonu hakkında.
292 Von der Porten, Kayseri Fabrikası İplik ve Dokuma Daireleri hakkında.
293 Klopfer, Sümerbank Memur ve Amelelerine Prim ve Ikramiye esasları hak, (n.p., 1941).
was established that an accord wage was more likely to keep workers at the factory compared to an hourly wage, female workers continued to work without having much influence on their wage levels. Whether this was again an organizational and technical problem or it reflected the perception of male workers as individuals who would respond to such incentives due to their social status as breadwinners is hard to say. However, the above statement about the female workers indicates, at least to an extent, that female labour was regarded in different terms in discussions on wage policy.

Although there seems to be a crude pattern of annual increases in the wages, it appears as though there was no clear wage increase policy at Bakırköy. Later in the 1940s, as we shall see below, demands for increases in the wages were rejected based on the claim that the conditions were not met. These conditions, however, were never clearly explained and in many cases workers worked for the same wage for years.

**The Working Day**

The earliest information on the length and organization of the working day at Bakırköy factory dates from 1936. Von der Porten reports two work shifts of eleven hours and gives a detailed critique of this system. To him, nobody at the factory seemed to understand the fact that the work efficiency of the night shift was extremely low. Because of the difficulty measuring the amount of work done, as I explained above, von der Porten goes on to prove his argument through a study of the electricity consumption during night shifts. The figures he calculates are indeed striking: while the electricity consumption at night should have made up twenty-seven per cent of the whole monthly consumption, it made up only 11 per cent. The figure was even lower for the month of August, which, he notes, yielded the lowest level of efficiency because of high temperatures. The problem, however, was that the workload of the factory was very heavy at the time; so heavy that it was unthinkable to sacrifice even 10 per cent of the whole production. In other words, the management felt the need to keep the organization of the working day as it was. But to von der Porten, the replacement of two work shifts of eleven hours with two work shifts of eight hours would not cause much loss in production. He was able to convince the management to try out three work shifts of eight hours with a few spinning and weaving looms and then compare the output levels of the two day shifts with the then current output levels of the entire twenty-hours. He gives assurance
that the difference would not be more than 10 per cent of the whole output.\textsuperscript{294} As is clear from these calculations, von der Porten’s main concern is to reduce the production costs by means of decreasing the level of energy consumption. It could also be argued that his suggestion implies a tightening of managerial control over labour if we evaluate this together with his complaints on the wage practices in the spinnery. Nowhere in the report does he refer to the hardships, night shifts or long hours of work enforced upon workers. There is no mention of comments or complaints from workers on the length and organization of the working day in personnel files. Furthermore, no such public commentary is documented.

In 1938, the working day was shortened to eight hours but the wage policy required that workers on an hourly page would not lose any part of their earnings with this change.\textsuperscript{295} The problem was that for workers on accord wage pay, no such measurement was taken. This, von der Porten warns, would alienate those workers who are expected to work harder for their wage levels and would stay behind that of the less qualified ones working on hourly wages.\textsuperscript{296} As for Bakırköy Factory, no such regulation or complaints over changes in the wage levels were documented in the late 1930s.

The practice of an eight-hour working day came to a halt with the outbreak of the war. Although the Charter of Working Hours of 1943 determined the working day as eight hours,\textsuperscript{297} it was allowed to extend the working day to eleven hours according to the coordination commission decision dated 2 September 1942.\textsuperscript{298} When I asked Asım if he had ever worked eleven hours a day after he returned from the army in 1943, he responded with laughter and a hand gesture meaning “always.” He also notes that, even after the introduction of the eight hour working day, although the workers were forced to work eleven hours a day, they had to punch their card at the end of the eighth hour so that they would not be entitled to overtime pay. Asım explains how this administrative infraction affected the accord workers and the hourly paid workers differently in the following words: “For the accord workers it is the same thing [i.e. they still got the pay according to how much they produced]. For those paid hourly, it was 12-13 hours of work [for 8 hours payment].”\textsuperscript{299} In an oral history interview, Ahmet notes that he used to work for twelve hours a day before he left for the army.

\textsuperscript{294} Max von der Porten, \textit{Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası Hakkında} [On Bakırköy Cloth Factory], 1936.
\textsuperscript{295} Indeed the hourly wages increased from 7.3 kuruş in 1937 to 10.6 kuruş in 1938 in the yarn department of the Kayseri Factory.
\textsuperscript{296} Max von der Porten, \textit{Kayseri Fabrikası İplik ve Dokuma Daireleri Hakkında}.
\textsuperscript{297} İş Muddetteri Nizamnamesi. TC İktisat Vekaleti İş Dairesi, 1943: 6. Kemal Sülker Collection, IISH. The working day for enterprises that operated on Saturday afternoon could extend to nine hours.
\textsuperscript{298} Makal, \textit{Ameleden İşçiye}, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{299} Interview I conducted with Asım Kocabaş on 3 Aug. 2009 in Istanbul.
in 1943. Later in the decade, when the working day was indeed shortened to eight hours a day, this did not please workers on an hourly wage. A weaver’s petition from April 1947 complains that he had been working for 8 hours a day instead of 11 hours, which was the case three months ago. He wrote:

*I am in a terrible situation for this reason. I have been put off with the promise of an increase so far which caused my damnification. Taking my current situation into consideration, I would kindly ask for an increase in my hourly wage with utmost respect.*

What this petition illustrates is the lack of precautionary measures against workers’ wage losses at Bakırköy although such a measure had been taken at Kayseri in 1939.

**The Food Provision Policy**

Until 1941, Sümerbank did not have any systematic food provision policy. A report based on inspections carried in April 1941 illustrates the existence of different food provision practices in different factories. For example, in Kayseri and Defterdar factories, there were canteens run by the cooperatives. The price was shared between workers and the factory. However, the percentage of workers who made use of these provisions was extremely small: 3.5 per cent in Kayseri, and 30 per cent in Defterdar. The report implies that this was a free choice on the part of the workers. Possible reasons why so few workers chose to make use of these provisions are given below. In other factories such as Nazilli and Adana Mensucat, food was supplied by private undertakers but the prices were controlled by the factories. The choice was free in this system also. A third system was observed in Beykoz shoe factory. Here, the factory cooperative prepared food. The factory did not contribute to the cost of the food but allocated a place for the cooperative. In some other factories, there was no food provision at all. The bottom-line was that, in 1940, there was not a single Sümerbank factory that could solve the problem of providing healthy food for the workers. On average, only 5 per cent of the workers benefited from the kinds of food provisions mentioned. Even at Defterdar factory, where food prices were subsidized by 50 per cent by the factory, only 30 per cent of the total

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300 Interview with Ahmet Cansızoğlu conducted by Yıldırım Koç (1988), IISH Collections, BGV1/40-54.
301 Personnel file of Mustafa Arap.
labour force made use of the provisions. The rest, the report continues, lacked enough nutritious food to work efficiently.³⁰²

The inspection reports supply no information on the food policy or its absence in Bakırköy before 1941. However, the remuneration tables of a few workers who were employed at the factory in the 1930s could provide us with a clue about the food provision practices at Bakırköy Factory. 1938 is the year in which the category table d’hôte first appeared in the remuneration tables.³⁰³ The word in itself does not tell us the kind of food provision practice. It could be one, or none, of the types mentioned above. It appears to be the case that Bakırköy workers paid for their own food until 1941. Though systematic calculation is not possible, scattered data could give us a rough idea on how much of a worker’s earning was spent on eating at work. In September 1938, Mehmet earned 17.39 liras a month before taxes, 1.52 liras of which he spent on the table d’hôte.³⁰⁴ In other words, 8.74 per cent per cent of his earnings before taxes were spent on the food consumed at the factory. Yakup, in January 1940, on the other hand, earned much less than Mehmet: 12.75 liras and paid 1.68 liras for the meals.³⁰⁵ Although Yakup’s monthly earnings decreased over the course of 1940, the money he spent on food increased to 1.84. An analysis of the remuneration tables of different workers show that, despite the differences in wage levels among workers, the percentage of food expenses to monthly earnings was never below 8 per cent.

Left on their own, state workers developed some peculiar eating habits, the above-mentioned report notes. For example, some workers tried to get by on one meal a day, which consisted of some olives, a little bit of cheese and some leek, and which did not allow the workers to work in a healthy manner.³⁰⁶ In the following year, another inspection report also noted a severe problem of undernourishment among workers in state enterprises. However, this report claimed that, besides low wages, cultural habits also played a role in the problem. Those paid low wages simply could not eat enough, but even those who had the financial means were not in the habit of having regular, nutritious meals. There are workers, it noted, who lived on one meal a day (or went for even longer on one meal), or who consider non-

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³⁰³ The term refers to a limited choice, fixed price menu in Turkish.
³⁰⁴ Personnel file of Mehmet Ak.
³⁰⁵ Personnel file of Yakup Davulcu.
³⁰⁶ “Sümerbank Fabrikaları İçtimai Teşkilat 1940 Yılı Raporu”, pp. 22-3.
nutritious food good. The report did not go into the details of these cultural habits which were so strong that they stopped workers from eating enough during their long working day. That task was left to the general director of Sümerbank in his address of the general committee of inspection in 1942. But before going into the details of that meeting, we should look at the year 1941.

1941: The Year of Provisions

A sequence of reports emphasizing the need for an efficient and inclusive food provision policy must have been effective by 1941. Addressing the connection the inspection reports made between health problems and the lack of a food policy, the Ministry of Economy noted in 1941 that the provision of food with enough calories was the most important sanitation measure to be taken by state enterprises. As a result, Sümerbank began to seriously tackle social welfare. In June 1941, Sümerbank managers had a meeting at Nazilli Factory where they decided to give “hot food”, the calories of which would be equal to food given to soldiers.

This practice started in September the same year with the following specifications: workers earning up to 160 piastres a day would receive free food, while those earning more would pay the production cost. At the time of writing the report (the title indicated the year 1941 but the report was printed in 1942), the upper wage limit for free food was already 200 piastres. Another report mentioned the number of workers receiving free food as 7000 in 1941. The report insistently emphasized the need for food provisions at state factories in the context of the war years, which witnessed an ever-increasing cost of living. Like many

\[\text{307 Sümerbank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İçtimai Teşkilatı Hakkında Rapor (1941), p. 38. Archival Collection of the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Supreme Audit Board. Amb./Db.No: K.A./255.07.02.01.06.3236.}\]


\[\text{309 “1941 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Sümerbank Raporu”, p.29. In general, there seems to be a considerable time lag between the time of the writing of the reports and the year they cover. It is possible to find, for instance, information referring to 1942 in a report dated 1940.}\]

\[\text{310 “Sümerbank”ın 1940 yılı muamelatile bilanço, kar ve zarar hesaplarının tettikine dair olan Umumi Murakebe Heyeti raporu hakkında İktisat Vekaleti Mütelaası”, in Sümerbank 1940 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait İdare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesah, (Ankara: TBMM Matbaası, 1941), p. 9. In the 1941 reply of Sümerbank to the General Inspection Committee report, the change in the upper limit is reported to be enacted in 1942 and the coverage of free food provision policy enlarged to include the salaried “müstahdems,” a group including the cleaners, doormen and many other lower status jobs not directly engaged in the production process. It is also reported that Sümerbank was examining the possibility of covering all the workers with no regard to their wage levels (“Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Sümerbank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İçtimai Teşkilatı 1941 Yılı Raporu Hakkında Mütalaalar”, in 1941 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Sümerbank Raporu, (Ankara: Alaaddin Kıral Basımevi, 1942), p. 26).}\]
other inspection reports and the remarks by Hosli concerning the need to increase payments in kind instead of monetary wages, this report argues that food provisions were more effective than wage increases in bettering the conditions of workers.\textsuperscript{311}

In 1942, the meeting of the general assembly on the social policies of Sümerbank witnessed a heated debate on the limits of social welfare, especially the food provision policy. The debate illustrates the diversity of approaches within the state apparatus concerning the ‘duties’ of the state as employer. The general directorate of Sümerbank had to answer two concerns expressed by the members of the parliament. While some members found the extent of social welfare too large, others argued that it was a necessity for the state to provide food for its workers. The explanation is illustrative in showing the workings of the decision-making process within Sümerbank. He starts his speech by giving the example of underage workers, who are:

‘exploited’ by their families. Their wages were sized in return for a piece of “dry bread,” he claimed. Thus, speaking in the first plural pronoun, they arrived at the belief that supplying the workers with adequate amount of calories within the working hours is a must. Knowing that cutting the wages for the provision of food would be ‘defective’\textsuperscript{312} and that it would not be possible to provide free food for all workers, they decided that those earning up to 160 piastres would benefit from the free food policy. Because, he added, those earning more could already provide for themselves, Sümerbank gave free food to the majority of its twenty thousand workers and the rest ate “warm food” on their own account.\textsuperscript{313}

Despite the positive picture portrayed by the Ministry of Economy, the report on the social organization of Sümerbank dated 1941 emphasized the problems with the differences between factories in terms of the implementation of the new food policy. Comparing four factories, the inspectors reported that one of them gave free meals to workers earning up to 160 piastres, while the other three complied with the upper limit raised to 200 piastres by Sümerbank. The practice of including bread within the free meal package also differed from factory to factory, as did the number of meals provided. The report is critical of the practice of charging for bread in the face of the already low levels of wages. If we look at the practices

\textsuperscript{311} Sümerbank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İctimai Teşkilatı Hakkında Rapor (1941), pp. 39-41.

\textsuperscript{312} He uses the Turkish term “sakat vermek” here (“Fakat bunu parasından kesersek gene sakat verecegini biliyorduk”) which is somewhat a slangy way of saying: “it would create problems”. What kind of problems these might be are not mentioned, but it is probable that the fear triggered more labour instability.

at Defterdar Factory, we see that workers earning up to 200 piastres a day were given one free meal a day. There were 1064 such workers, who made up 81 per cent of the total workforce. On average the meals amounted to 1000-1500 calories – well below the limit then believed to be apt for an industrial worker, at 4000 calories.\textsuperscript{314}

Further into the food provision, rules and regulations became more specific. Ceiling wage for free food provision was raised again on 12 January, 1943. Workers earning up to 300 piastres a day were given free food and free bread (300 grams), while those earning between 300 and 350 piastres were paying half price for both food and the bread, and those earning more than 350 paid the full production cost of both. It was also decided that total calories would be between 1500 and 1800, and that there would be two different dishes served at each meal. An interesting specification concerned the weight of the bread given. Between mid-May and the end of November – months during which workers left the factories most – workers would be given 600 grams of weight in bread.\textsuperscript{315}

The differences in food provisions according to wage levels were abolished in March 1945 with the Social Welfare Ordinance. After this, all workers were given free food, including 1500-1800 calories and 450 grams of bread. This appears to be a practical solution to the problem of organization and distribution, as the report indicates that various difficulties had arisen before. It was also noted that these differences were negatively affecting the productivity of workers paid piece rates but no further explanation as to how this happened was provided. Another practice that started in 1945 was to sell workers a second meal at the production cost. The motivation to do so was two-fold. On the one hand, workers would be stopped from cooking at their ‘places’ in an unsanitary manner. Here, the word ‘places’ would possibly mean the shelters near factories where single men lived because a ‘disorder’ was mentioned. On the other hand, to provide a second nutritious meal for workers was seen as an act of charity.\textsuperscript{316} Another report from the same year interpreted the Ordinance as a progressive move, which shows the importance the Republican government gives to workers.\textsuperscript{317}

We learn what happened at Bakırköy regarding food provisions during these years from a 1943 report by Hosli. Between 1941 and 1943, the canteen expense per worker for a

\textsuperscript{314} Sümerbank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İÇTİMAY Teşkilati Hakkında Rapor (1941), pp. 39-41.
\textsuperscript{315} Sümerbank 1942 Yılı Umumlu Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, pp. 34-5.
\textsuperscript{317} Ibid., p.6.
month increased from 0.77 to 3.16 in 1942 and to 9.90 in 1943.\footnote{Hosli, \textit{Bakirköy Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor}. Hosli does not provide information on the ‘canteen’ system; however, we could assume that he meant a place like a dining hall. The opening of a dining hall, besides other social facilities, in the factory in 1945 is analysed in the following chapter. Moreover, Hosli does not specify whether the 1941 figure reflects the average of twelve months or only the last four months when food provision policy was put into effect. Given the very low amount of the money spent (0.77 liras a month compared to, for example, 1.68 liras Yakup spent on food every month in 1940), I suspect that the calculation is made for the entire year of 1941.} Although Hosli provides no information about the practices of food provision before 1941, we can conclude from the dramatic increase in the canteen expenses from 1941 to 1942 that Bakırköy was also one of these factories that started food provision in September 1941, in accordance with the decisions made at the Nazilli meeting. As for the threefold increase from 1942 to 1943, it is possible that the reason was the increase in the food prices caused by the hardening war conditions and the inclusion of workers earning between 160 and 200 piastres a day in the free food provision system. If we compare the amount of money paid for food by the Bakırköy workers in 1940 with what the factory paid in 1942, we see a dramatic increase in the money spent on food, from 1.68 liras in 1940 to 3.16 liras in 1942. Judging from Hösli’s note that immaterial wages consisted only of one meal a day with bread and the distribution of pieces of faulty fabric to workers, we can speculate that the increase in the expenses did not stem from an increase in the amount of food. It would be more logical to attribute the increase to wartime conditions on the one hand, and to the raising of the upper wage limit for the right to free food from 160 piastres to 200 piastres in 1942 on the other, which meant a more inclusive free food provision policy.

To assess the impact of the social welfare on the lives of Bakırköy workers, we could calculate the share of the food expenses in the total amount of social expenses. Between 1941 and 1943, the amount of social expenses per worker in a year increased from 22.49 liras in 1941 to 62.80 liras in 1942 and to 153.14 liras in 1943 at Bakırköy.\footnote{Ibid. In a report on Bursa Merinos Factory dated 1943, Hosli gives the percentage of non-money wages to total expenses for a worker a month as 28.6%. Similar to Bakırköy, non-money wages amounted to one meal a day and some fabric given to the workers. Thus, the high percentage suggests that the non-money wage constituted more than 1/5 of the money wages, which implies very low purchasing power for workers (Hosli, \textit{Merinos Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor}).} Canteen expenses made 40.7 per cent, 60.2 per cent and 77.5 per cent of the total social expenses in these years, respectively. It appears that the infamous social expenses did not bring considerable improvements to the lives of the Bakırköy workers. In fact, among the state textile factories, Bakırköy spent least on social welfare programs in 1945.\footnote{“İplik ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesi 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu”, in \textit{Sümerbank 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu}.} We will now turn our attention to
the second item which made the social expenses in early 1940s as Hosli reported in his 1943 report on Bakırköy.

The Nazilli meeting in 1941 also introduced the provision of clothes including apparel, underwear and shoes to Sümerbank workers. The provisions were made in two different forms. The first one was the provision of work clothes. Between June 1941 and 1942, 14,114 such items of clothing were distributed.\(^{321}\) In this group, besides clothes, materials which were specified by the Labour Law of 1936 were also distributed. These included wooden sabots and gloves for workers using acidic and high temperature materials. The second form was selling materials produced by Sümerbank factories to workers at their production cost. These included shoes, apparels, undershirts, woollen socks, leather shirts and underwear. In June 1941, the ‘Local Products Bazaar’, the sales agent of Sümerbank, started selling these materials to the workers’ families at a low cost.\(^{322}\)

The 1941 meeting took place in the context of high labour turnover rates at Sümerbank factories. The “clothing policy,” as it was termed by the Ministry of Economy, was one of the measures taken against this problem as it is understood from the rules and regulations concerning the distribution of these materials. Workers with six months of service were given enough fabric to make one ‘apparel’; those with one year of service received forty meters of fabric, those with three years of service received enough fabric for a coat, and those with six years of service were given a blanket. These could not be thought of as bonuses, however, as the workers actually had to pay for them. Although it is not very clear from the language of the report, it was probably the case that these materials were sold to the workers at their production cost.\(^{323}\) Four years after the clothing provisions started, the workers’ clothing situation was far from improved. Workers were not given proper clothing, such as boots, working glasses and gloves, to increase job security and some workers were so poor that they came to work barefoot. It was also observed that lice were a very common problem among state workers.\(^{324}\)

No factory expenses on workers’ clothes are recorded at Bakırköy before 1942. In 1942 and 1943, the amount spent on clothing per worker in a month was between 0.52 liras and 0.96 liras, and these expenses made up 9.9 and 7.5 per cent of the total social expenditure.

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321 1941 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Sümerbank Raporu, p. 29.
322 Ibid., pp. 29-30.
323 Ibid., p. 30.
324 Sümerbank 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 40.
in 1942 and 1943, respectively. These provisions were very carefully recorded in the personnel files of Bakırköy workers with the date, the type and the amount of provision specified. However, whether the workers paid for these provisions or not was not specified. In some cases, little notes, for example “for giving birth” or “with petition,” were added to the descriptions. Interestingly, the records start in the year 1945. However, we can conclude that this was a result of not keeping records of material provisions before this year since Hosli notes that the social expenses were composed of some fabric besides the meal provisions and healthcare benefits by early 1943.

The Housing Problem

The shortage of housing appears to be one of the biggest, if not the biggest, problem of industrial workers during the early Republican period, which severely added to the problem of low wages and the rising cost of living, especially during the war years. An inspection report from 1945 makes the following comparison: while rent or monthly instalments for housing made on average 7 per cent of the monthly income in the West, it consumed almost 25 per cent of the monthly income in Turkey. Alongside the low level of wages, the housing problem was cited as the main source of workers’ grievance leading to the decision to leave the factories.

The language the inspection reports used on the housing problem and its possible solutions hints at the state’s vision of the social welfare schemas and their role in social transformation. For example, as early as 1940, an inspection report on cotton textile factories, that is Nazilli, Kayseri, Eregli and Bakırköy factories, made the following observation: “It is necessary to build sanitary houses for workers with land apt for cultivation or growing vegetables in order to place the worker in the area of the factory with his family and to cut off his ties with his village.” Two significant points arise from this example. First, the problem is not confined to providing housing for state workers. They should be given proper living

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325 Hosli, Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor. The Turkish translation of Hosli’s report uses the word “elbise” which could mean apparel or dress, depending on the context. The work clothing was also called just “elbise” in the inspection reports, which suggests that Hosli is most likely speaking of the work clothes.


328 Sümerbank Birleşik Pamuk İpliği ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1939 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 42. The report also accentuates the peculiarity of the Istanbul factories by indicating that in places where land is scarce and expensive like Istanbul, apartments could be a solution (p. 16).
spaces together with their families. Second, they should still continue cultivation. Together, these points suggest that the housing policy was not merely interested in maintaining the labour force at state factories, but to affect a social transformation of the rural society in accordance with the requirements of an industrial one. This suggestion was repeated in an expert report on housing provisions for state workers in 1945. This time, a more detailed analysis of the benefits of small land allocations to workers is given. Housing provision policy should not be considered in isolated terms, but in relation to its economic implications because this would be the only way that workers of a craftsman or with a peasant background would settle with their families nearby the factories.

Thus, the authors continue, where the land is available, it is of utmost importance to provide workers with separate houses and a plot of land. Such a practice would benefit the industries in three ways. First, it gives the workers the opportunity to make good use of their spare time. Second, it allows the family members who were not apt for working at the factories to engage in economically fruitful activities such as keeping fowl, growing cash crops and fishing. Third, these kinds of activities would not only strengthen workers’ commitment to their workplace, they would also bring order to workers’ lives and thus yield to higher productivity and safer working conditions.\textsuperscript{329}

Makal admits that social welfare policies could not be reduced to the state’s efforts to solve the problem of stable labour force. At times, he continues, these practices were underlined by paternalist populism.\textsuperscript{330} I argue with others that this does not entirely explain the motivation behind the social welfare policies. For example, I agree with Nacar when he argues that the motivation behind the implementation of social assistance programs in the public enterprises was to form a new subject: “a subject who came to the factory regularly, worked hard and in a disciplined manner, had a high productivity level.”\textsuperscript{331} In this process of self-formation, the person is expected to be active and self-constructive. The cited alleged benefits of small land allocation most clearly exemplify this vision. Establishing a connection between different realms of workers’ lives, this vision has a two-fold aim: to increase productivity at work and to transform the private life of the workers. They would be more industrious, it assumes, if they had the opportunity to make use of their spare time.

\textsuperscript{329} Aydemir et al., \textit{Devlet Endüstrisinde}.
\textsuperscript{330} Makal, \textit{Ameleden İşçiye}, p. 131. He does not elaborate on this point, however, arguing that this lies beyond the scope of his study. In my opinion, this is exactly the question labour historians should be tackling. Makal’s approach exemplifies how the use of state documents could blind the historian to what mattered for the people and focus instead on what bothered the state.
Furthermore, the aimed transformation does not only concern the individual worker, but it is planned on the level of the household. The entire household is expected to engage in a process of self-improvement through labouring both outside of and inside the factory. The economic gains of the state as employer, we might suggest, is not confined to rising productivity on the shopfloor. By means of creating the conditions under which the entire family would engage in economic activity, the suggestion also implies that workers would take care of maintaining the conditions of reproducing their labour power. A similar suggestion is also made concerning the training of the Sümerbank workforce. The inspection report on the social organization of Sümerbank in 1940 suggests that youngsters between the ages of fourteen and twenty should be chosen preferably from the families of the state workers. As well as attending school, these youngsters should also work at the factory for certain hours with a daily wage of 10-15 piastres. Most importantly, they should be taught not only occupational skills but also ‘good manners’.\(^{332}\)

This example on educational facilities at state factories suggests that social policy had two aims: to contain and control the young population living near the factories, and to secure the reproduction of labour power in the context of high labour instability. Speculatively, then, we could argue that advised social policy measures aimed at reducing the labour cost. But, there is also another dimension of these policies that concerns disciplining the workers in accordance with the needs of industrial work. To give an example, Akin argues against the positive evaluation of recreational opportunities such as sports facilities in the state enterprises. To him, the rationale behind the existence of these facilities was far from giving the workers the opportunity to have a good time. Rather, they were expected to fulfil two goals: disciplining the bodies of peasants in accordance with the needs of a Fordist-Taylorist production model and keeping the workers away from activities such as drinking, gambling and spending time at coffee-houses.\(^{333}\)

The inspection report on state cotton textile factories I cited above also indicates the differences between those four factories in terms of the already existing housing provisions and their need for further construction of workers’ houses. Nazilli and Kayseri Factories in particular needed such solutions urgently, although all four factories, with the exception of Bakırköy, had houses and apartments for the civil servants, apartments for the foremen, pavilions for the single workers, canteens, meeting and cinema halls, hospitals and

\(^{332}\) Sümerbank Fabrikaları İçtimai Teşkilat 1940 Yılı Raporu, p. 18.

\(^{333}\) Akin, “Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi”, p. 25.
infirmaries, sports facilities and fields. However, six years later, the housing problem still existed for state workers, for only 10 per cent of the entire Sümerbank labour force received a housing provision. Even the planned constructions, the report noted, would not solve the problem.

**Rethinking Social Welfare Policies**

Social welfare provided by the state during the early Republican period has received a great deal of attention from labour historians. However, as Akin also notes, the discussion on these benefits is often limited to the state’s efforts to control the labour turnover rate and thus the perspective of the labour historian is reduced to that of a social policy expert of the period. I have already cited inspection and expert reports that argued the social policy implementations were a must to solve the problem of stable labour supply. Many reports on the social organization or labour problems asserted that social policy was an important tool to increase the commitment of the workers to the factories. The discourse was not that of rights and obligations on the part of the employer and the employee, but that of sheer pragmatism in the face of the continuing problem of high labour turnover rate.

Mainly using these state documents, social historians have focused on the goals and the rationale of the social welfare programs leaving out the question of how state workers perceived and acted upon these benefits. In a way, the discourse of the historians followed the state documents on the motivations behind the social welfare policies. However, one such document mentioned in 1945 that food and housing provisions and wage increases did not solve the problem at all. Thus, even if we accept that the motivation behind the social welfare policies was limited to keeping the workers at state factories, we still have to explain why they did not work. The assumption that state workers increasingly benefited from social provisions underlines the conclusion that they made the better off segment of the working-

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334 Sümerbank Birleşik Pamuk Ipliği ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Mülzesesi 1939 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu.
335 Sümerbank 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 42.
337 See, for example: Sümerbank Fabrikaları İçtimai Teşkilat 1940 Yılı Raporu, p. 7.
338 Sümerbank 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 45.
classes in the period. The political effect of the material privileges state workers enjoyed, according to these analyses, had been the undermining of the working-class movement.\textsuperscript{339}

There is another significant problem with these analyses: they are characterized by an extreme degree of overgeneralization among state enterprises pertaining to social welfare practices. I will use the example of housing provisions to illustrate these differences since housing appears to be the kind of social welfare provision that reveals the greatest discrepancy among state enterprises. There are three levels of differentiation we should pay attention to. First, sectoral differences among the state enterprises should be taken into account. Second, the date of establishment of a state enterprise plays a role in the provision of certain benefits. As we shall see below, modern enterprises benefited more from housing policies because of both practical reasons and the expectations from them in terms of producing the Republican ideal of modern spatiality. Third, the differentiations between the civil servants and the workers on the one hand, and between the qualified and unqualified workers on the other, should not be overlooked in the analysis of housing benefits.

In the discussions on social welfare, most of the examples on public housing benefits concern the mining and heavy industry sectors. When arguing about the vast array of social benefits ranging from health and social security to housing, from paid holidays to education and cultural activities, Makal uses the spending figures of the Etibank coal mines. These figures show that the share of social facilities in the entire construction budget is higher than that of the industrial facilities, although there were no such legal obligations. As for Sümerbank workers, however, his examples are limited to either comments in the inspection reports on the need to increase the quality of life of the workers to solve the labour turnover problem or the administrative changes in the way social welfare practices were managed.\textsuperscript{340}

But, lumping these two holdings together in a discussion on social welfare would be quite misleading, for there were significantly different conditions at work at coal mines and, for example, textile factories. To begin with, the geographical remoteness of mines from residential areas makes housing provisions for miners an imperative. Indeed, an inspection report on the housing of the personnel dated 1945 makes the following comparison between Etibank and Sümerbank: the pavilions, where the workers stayed without their families, housed 70-80 per cent of all the workers of Etibank while they housed only 10 per cent of all

\textsuperscript{339}Yıldırım Koç, Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık Tarihi: Olaylar-Değerlendirmeler, (Ankara: Türkiye Yol-İş Sendikası Yayınları, 1996), p. 30. Boratav reverses the cause-effect relation suggested in the last two studies cited here and argues that state workers benefited from these opportunities because they were integrated with the state (Korkut Boratav, Gelir Dağılımı, [İstanbul: Gerçek Yayınları, 1969], p. 162).

\textsuperscript{340}Makal, Ameleden İşçiye, pp. 130-1.
the Sümerbank workers. The difference, the report explained, stemmed from the practice of compulsory work at and the remoteness of the mines, which ruled out commuting as an option. Indeed, Etibank workers were the most affected by the enactment of the National Protection Law in 1940. Both the difficult working conditions and the practice of compulsory work in mines caused the workers’ desertion of the mines. Thus, it was imperative to keep them under close control.

It is also essential to distinguish between textile factories themselves in terms of their location and date of establishment. In fact, these two factors are interrelated as it was the case that factories in Istanbul were old ones from the nineteenth century, whereas factories in Anatolia were built by the Republican government in the 1930s. Thus, the ‘new’ factories reflected the spatial dynamics of the Republican ideology and carried that ideology in the form of the built environment to the remote parts of the country. The ‘old’ factories, on the other hand, were taken over from Ottoman institutions, and although some renovations and extensions were carried out, they remained intact physically. The difference between the old and new cotton textile factories in terms of the money spent on their social organization was noted in an inspection report from 1939. “An important amount” was spent for the new factories, the report notes, whereas the old cotton factories, especially the Hereke Factory, “were left deprived from such facilities.”

For example, when constructions of houses at seven factories began in 1941, the year when Sümerbank made considerable improvements in social welfare as we shall see below, factories in Istanbul were left out. Of the fifteen factories covered by the report on the housing of the Sümerbank personnel in 1945, three factories in Istanbul including Bakırköy, provided no housing for the workers. Among the textile factories, Kayseri, Nazilli and Hereke were the top in providing housing but even the best conditions meant that only 22% of workers were given housing at Kayseri Factory. In Nazilli, for example, only 300 out of 2800

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341 At this point, it is also important to note that housing is a misnomer for the experience of taking shelter in these pavilions. Irfan Yalçın’s powerful novel, Ölümün Ağzı (“The Mouth of Death”) exemplifies the horrendous living conditions at the Zonguldak mines. The report I cited here also testifies to this by reporting that the rate of leave among the workers sheltered in these pavilions amounted to 90%.


343 Sümerbank 1941 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 4. Archival Collection of the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Supreme Audit Board. Amb./Db.No: K.A./255.07.02.01.06.3236.

344 An earlier dated inspection report, which covers seven Sümerbank factories including Bakırköy, gives more detail on the issue. One of these three factories in Istanbul, Beykoz Leather and Shoe Factory, had actually housed 5 per cent of the workforce. The fact remains, however, that of the seven factories, only 7.1 per cent of the total workforce was provided with housing benefits and these were single workers sheltered at the pavilions, with the exception of Nazilli and Kayseri factories which provided housing for married foremen (Sümerbank Fabrikaları İchtimai Teşkilat 1940 Yılı Raporu, p. 20).
workers were provided housing by the factory, while 11% of all Sümerbank workers benefited from housing provisions in total and, given the above mentioned fact that 10 per cent of these were staying in pavilions away from their families, less than 1% of all the workers stayed in actual houses or apartments. The substandard living conditions at these pavilions in 1945 were described as follows: “A lot of lice were seen, beds and bed sheets were dirty, and rooms were covered with dust and trash, and bedsteads with bedbugs.”

An expert report on the housing of state workers estimates the number of houses needed for each factory. According to this report, state officials at Bakırköy needed 153 houses, while workers needed 750. Also, a pavilion that could house fifty single workers was needed. These calculations, the report warns, were not based on the actual number of workers at Bakırköy, but on the number of workers according to the production plans. As I noted earlier, there were many more workers employed at state factories because of the labour stability. For example, Bakırköy had 1585 workers in 1945, although the number should have been 800 to carry out the same level of production. Thus, the actual number of houses needed would be much higher. An important point made here concerns the emphasis on the need to reinforce the job sanctions of skilled workers with housing privileges. Assuming that 70% of the workforce should be skilled, in order not to employ more workers than needed, the experts conclude that Bakırköy Factory needed to house 560 workers immediately. These houses were not constructed in the following years although other reports continued to advise an expansionary housing policy. Thus, Bakırköy workers, as well as many other state workers, were left alone in dealing with the problem of finding sanitary and affordable housing.

**The Housing Conditions of Bakırköy Workers: The Move to Gecekondu**

Scattered information on Bakırköy workers’ housing conditions is given in their personnel files. The job application form asks the address and the property status of workers’s houses. Almost all workers who gave information on the subject lived in close proximity to the factory, in neighbourhoods such as Yenimahalle, Kartaltepe, Osmaniye, Zeytinlik, Cevizlik, Yeniköy and Sakızağacı. Only one worker owned the house she lived in while several

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345 Hosli, Ing. Nazilli Be Fabrikasi Hakkında Rapor.
346 Sümerbank 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 40.
347 Aydemir, Ş. Süreyya, Bülent Büktas, Fazlı Turga & Turgut Akkaş, Devlet Endüstrisinde Çalışan Personelin İşletmeler Civarına Verleştirme Şekilleri Hakkında (1945).
348 The factory was in Sakızağacı, close to the neighbourhood of Zeytinburnu. Later in 1957, Zeytinburnu became a separate municipality. Some workers live in neighbourhoods which are now in the borders of Zeytinburnu but they are still very close to the factory’s location.
others mentioned that they rented their houses. In later years, the neighbourhood was specified more and more as Zeytinburnu. Behind this was the birth of a new social phenomenon.

Zeytinburnu had been the centre of the leather industry since the early nineteenth century. After the Republic, the region also became an important textile industry area. The gardens and the pastures of the region remained empty until 1946. After the war ended, although the National Protection Law, which protected the tenants against rent increases, was still in effect, property owners increasingly violated the law by introducing new expenses.349 It was in this context that workers started building their own houses in Zeytinburnu and the region came to be one of the first shanty town areas of Turkey.350 According to the religious commissary of the Sümer Mosque351 in Sümer Mahallesi, in the late 1940s, many industrial workers built their own squatter houses on what used to be fields or state-owned land in Zeytinburnu. He remembers that they brought cheap materials on horse carts. By using light planking and caulked linoleum, they built small houses in which they lived, until the gendarmeries came to demolish them. His statements are in accordance with what Akçay wrote in his study of Zeytinburnu about the men and women who connected pieces of wood and tin boxes together at night only to see them demolished next day by the security forces.352

A petition from a worker further testifies to the difficulty of living in a gecekondu.353 Hayri asked for four days off in 1948 because “the wall of the house I built myself has suddenly collapsed.”354

Eight workers in the sample reported their addresses as the Zeytinburnu shantytown area,355 and seven of them changed their addresses from the neighbourhoods listed above to Zeytinburnu. The earliest change was in 1946. In addition, two workers gave Sümer Mahallesi as their address in the late 1940s. One worker wrote his address in the following form “Zeytinburnu Gecekondu-Sümer Mahallesi”, suggesting that Sümer Mahallesi was also a part of the gecekondu area. Akçay gives two reasons why the area was called after


350 The area where the squatter houses were first built was named Yenidoğan, meaning “new-born” in Turkish.

351 In a phone interview I conducted with Mr. Ibrahim Sevme, who was the imam of the Sümer Mosque between 1958 and 2003, I learnt that the mosque was built in 1948 by the dwellers among which there was a Bakırköy worker who kept collecting money for the maintenance of the mosque in the early 1950s.


353 The term gecekondu translates into English as “shanty,” “squatter house” or “slum”. The literal translation would approximately be “put at night” or “constructed overnight,” implying the clandestine and primitive character of the actual act of building the house in a hurry.

354 Personnel file of Hayri Önen.

355 It is probable that there were more workers in the sample who moved to the gecekondu area because address changes for continuing workers were not recorded in the files.
Sümerbank. The first one is its proximity to the Bakırköy Factory. It is also said that there was a bazaar that sold products of Sümerbank factories in this area. According to Mr. Sevme, the area came to be known as Sümer Neighbourhood because of the proximity to the Bakırköy Factory and the growing number of workers living there. Although the name was in circulation in late 1940s, it was only in the 1950s that the official name of the neighbourhood became Sümer Mahallesi.

Süleyman Kızılgünüş was the first worker to report his address as Zeytinburnu Gecekondu in July 1946, but there is also a further explanation: across the cement factory. No such explanation is made in the later dated forms, which might suggest that the new residential area became known. The cement factory in Zeytinburnu was run by Sümerbank until 1946. Three of the eight gecekondu dwellers had had connections to the cement factory. For example, Cemal came to Bakırköy in 1947 after working at Zeytinburnu Cement Factory. But it was after he started at Bakırköy that he moved to the gecekondu area in 1947. Hanife was living in Yeniköy when she first entered Bakırköy in 1942, but she moved to the gecekondu area after she married her second husband who worked at the cement factory. Kamil, who had worked at the cement factory between 1944 and 1946, moved from Osmaniye to the gecekondu area in 1946 after he started at Bakırköy the same year. His case is telling in that Kamil complained twice in 1947 and 1948 about his wage. He was a doorman with a salary of fifty liras in 1947 at Bakırköy, although he had earned sixty liras a month at Zeytinburnu Cement Factory in 1944. A year after his first letter in 1947, Kamil wrote another stating that his current salary of 90 liras was also not enough to live on with his family. We have seen how Meryem had to leave the factory in 1945 because her Armenian family was transferred to Anatolia. When she first entered the factory in 1943, Meryem lived in Yenimahalle. When she returned in 1950, as we saw above, the document she brought to the factory stated that she had lived in Kartaltepe for the last two years but that she had moved to the gecekondu area recently. After two years in Istanbul, Meryem had to return to the factory upon her moving to a gecekondu.

356 Akçay, Zeytinburnu, p. 17.
357 Sümer Neighbourhood should not be taken for the Sümer Houses (Sümer Evleri) which were two-storey houses built by the workers’ cooperatives later in the 1950s in Kartaltepe. Also, the name Sümer Neighbourhood was given to neighbourhoods near Sümerbank factories in different cities. An example is the Sümer Mahallesi in Adana. This suggests that the state factories seriously changed the built environment and had an impact on the social space, as I argued in Chapter 1.
358 Personnel file of Cemal Uçkan.
359 Personnel file of Hanife Balkanli.
360 Personnel file of Kamil Uygun.
Can we conclude that Bakırköy workers had to move to the gecekondu areas because of the continuing low level of wages? Considering the unhealthy conditions of the gecekondu and the constant threat of demolition by the security forces, it seems logical to argue that moving to the gecekondu area was a necessity for the workers, rather than an opportunity to seize in order to have a house of their own.\footnote{The law on gecekondu, which forbid the building of new ones but did not order to demolish the already existing ones, was only enacted in 1966. However, the gecekondu problem only grew more serious after the law was introduced.} This argument is substantiated by Huseyin’s account of his decision to stay away from the gecekondu area. He shared accommodation with his brother in Osmaniye in 1949. His wage was thirty-eight piastres an hour, and they paid twenty liras, i.e. two thousand piastres, for rent. When I asked him if they had difficulty paying the rent, he responded:

Of course I did. The maximum I earned, including the bonuses, was forty-nine liras a month, calculate it, seven and a half hours a day, and I paid twenty liras for rent…It did not even have a toilet inside. I paid half of my earnings to rent.” When asked if there was a housing shortage, he immediately notes the gecekondu area: “There was. Everywhere was gecekondu. Zeytinburnu and so on were all built then.” There were many workers at Bakırköy living in gecekondu. Why did he not move there also? “I was going to move but my wife did not agree. I got married in 1949 and my wife wanted to stay in Osmaniye. [Because] we did not witness but they beat people up, they would cut off [women’s] arms to get the jewelery, [bad] things happened, it was not for everybody to live in gecekondu…only those brave ones at the factory, who accepted everything, went there.

An inspection report covering seven factories mentions the hardships stemming from housing problems, especially for those working the night shifts and staying at places far from the factories.\footnote{Sümerbank Fabrikaları İctimai Teşkilat 1940 Yılı Raporu, p. 20-22.} It is reported that many workers slept in unhealthy places such as boathouses, inns, coffeehouses, and huts, and thus suffered from health problems. Two Bakırköy workers were among those who suffered. Weaver Yakup applied to the factory in November 1939. By then, he had been living in a hotel, named after his hometown Rize Pazar, in Galata for the past ten months. Although no further information is provided, the fact that Yakup stayed at his fellow countrymen’s hotel after coming to Istanbul from a remote small town in Northern Anatolia suggests that a certain social network based on townsman ship was at work for the newcomers. When Yakup returned to the factory after the completion of his military service
in 1945, his addressed changed to Cevizlik. Although this might be interpreted as an improvement in his quality of life, in 1950, Yakup went back to Pazar for good, indicating that he did not have much to leave behind. Weaver Yusuf reported his address as the Samatya Coffeehouse when he first entered the factory in 1940. Unlike Yakup, we do not know how long he had stayed there. Only upon his second entry in 1945, do we learn that he lived in a house in Yeniköy but that he also left the factory in 1954.

Overall, this sketchy portrayal of housing conditions suggests that Bakırköy workers were not taken care of at all in terms of housing provisions. Only one worker in the entire sample reported to own the house he lived in. An interesting question to ask is why the housing problem was not cited in the letters complaining about the life conditions in general and the wages specifically in the late 1940s? I argue that the Bakırköy workers did not have any expectations from the factory in terms of housing provisions. Contrary to the efforts of providing social housing for the workers in the smaller towns of Anatolia, the state factories in Istanbul did not engage in any effort to provide housing for their workers during the early Republican period. The very few number of single workers sheltered in the pavilions probably did not mean much to other workers, particularly married ones. It is also possible that, until the emergence of the trade unions, the workers were not knowledgeable about conditions at other state factories. Thus, when the housing problem became more and more serious, they had no choice but to engage in self-help practices. The phenomenon of gecekondu was a product of this desperation.

Social Welfare and the Moral Education of the “Turkish Worker”

The popular perception about state factories during the early Republican period was that these factories were more than just economic enterprises. In the words of a state bureaucrat of the 1940s, Sevket Sureyya Aydemir, the state enterprises fulfilled the role of carrying the “modern, civilized, and progressive living style” to the far corners of the country.\footnote{Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, İkinci Adam Birinci Cilt [The Second Man Volume 1], (Istanbul :Remzi, 1984), p. 447.} The recreational facilities at factory sites were the tools of this “civilized” lifestyle. Four years before the 1941 Nazilli meeting, which increased the budget on social welfare policies at state enterprises, von der Porten compared the state and private textile factories in terms of the amount they spent on social welfare policies. The former, he reports, spent a considerable
amount on housing, sports facilities, baths, and recreational facilities.\(^{364}\) Despite social historians’ exclusive emphasis on the need to maintain labour stability, Aydemir cites an equally important motivation behind the implementation of these policies: state factories were to set an example to private entrepreneurs. The model employer aspirations dictated that the state provided its workers with a means to live “like a human being and to improve their conditions.”\(^{365}\) However, the vision of the state worker went beyond that. As I noted above, suggestions on the housing conditions illustrate that the social welfare policies aimed at creating a citizen who would be productive and well behaved. By linking the industrial productivity to workers’ living conditions, these policies attempted to cover the worker’s social life in its entirety.

The strong statements about what the “Turkish worker” needs in the inspection report on the social organization of Sümerbank in 1940 further illustrate the vision of the “ideal worker”:

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Today, it is a must to provide the Turkish worker not only with material but also with moral sustenance and to feed him spiritually, just as materially, with the props and the aims on which the society is based. This could only be possible with establishing institutions, parallel to the institutions we described here, of moral education (such as workers’ schools, conferences, stagings, educational and disciplinary institutions) that would turn the workers into productive and civilized forces of the society.\(^{366}\)
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One of the suggested institutions was literary courses, which would also help illiterate youngsters to go to apprentice schools. These courses would be useful in two ways: first, workers would become well-mannered, which would also positively affect the productivity; second, it would be beneficial in terms of the general social development.\(^{367}\) In response to the suggestions in this report, the Ministry of Economy reported that the morals of the workers were given utmost importance. Recreational facilities such as sports facilities, cinemas, and educational activities such as conferences, were among the planned social welfare policies that would trigger the “joy of working” among state workers.\(^{368}\)


\(^{365}\) Aydemir, İkinci Adam, p. 446.

\(^{366}\) Sümerbank Fabrikaları İçtimai Teşkilat 1940 Yılı Raporu, p. 27-8.

\(^{367}\) Ibid., pp. 18-9.

\(^{368}\) Sümerbank’ın 1940 yılı muamelat ile bilanço, kar ve zarar hesaplarının tetkikine dair olan Umumi Murakebe Heyeti raporu hakkında İktisat Vekaleti Mütaelası, p. 10.
Soon after the social welfare programs designed in the 1941 meeting began being implemented, heated debates also began among the members of the committee, evaluating Sümerbank’s financial situation. A member of the parliament argued that the state enterprises would turn into an almshouse if the social aid continued to be given in the same manner. At the opposite end of the argument was the claim that, in order to secure the commitment of workers, every state enterprise should be a “benignity house.” Underlying these two opinions were disagreements on the social character of the state, for the discussion moved from social welfare programs at state factories to social policies in general. In the end, questions such as whether it was a social necessity to provide schooling for the workers’ children gave way to discussions on the Turkish state’s having to be most careful in order to prevent the idea of socialism which “the European countries are suffering from today” entering the country.

Indeed, beneath the apparent disagreement, the two sides of the debate shared the same political conception: workers were apolitical subjects in need of protection. It was the form of this protection that distinguished the two camps. Thus, the question became if the state enterprises should function as ‘benignity houses’ that take care of workers’ basic citizenship rights such as health and education, or would this damage the Turkish state in terms of the fight it waged against the evil of socialism?

However, in the same document, we read the closing remarks of the Minister of Economy, which brings a totally new dimension to the discussion at hand: “In fact, our worker is knowledgeable and cunning about matters that interest him, he is acquiring his rights.” Which one of these contradictory conceptions of workers was closer to the reality? Interestingly, this is the central question in the recent discussions on labour historiography of the early Republican Turkish history. For example, the interpretation of the social welfare policies, to a great extent, depends on this conception for the determining factor in these analyses as the political agency attributed to the ruled classes. And it is also this conception that opens the discussion to new areas of studies in labour history and working-class formation; areas such as organized and non-organized acts of resistance, political agency, and consciousness. I will tackle these in the following two chapters in detail. It suffices to note here that, even if we see state actions exclusively as strategies to control and manipulate the

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370 Ibid., pp. 141-2.
371 Ibid., p. 143.
labour force, we still have to answer the following question: did they work and, if not, then why? The archival evidence I offered in the current chapter partly answers this question. I have mentioned that my perspective on social welfare policies is underlined by the question of how Bakırköy workers perceived and acted upon these.

I posed the following question at the beginning of the section on social welfare: How did Bakırköy workers receive and act upon the social policies? Given the strong emphasis on the intentions of the state to control labour instability through provisions of social welfare programs, it is necessary to examine whether they actually worked to keep the workers at the factory. If we return to the table two, which shows the changes in the labour turnover rate at Bakırköy between 1940 and 1943, we can see that the number of workers leaving the factory increased from 821 in 1940 to 1399 in 1943, and the percentages of those leaving to the total number of workers increased from 75 per cent to 96.5 per cent. The increase in the social welfare expenditure, which made up 17.2 per cent of the total monthly expenses made for the workers in 1943, did not keep the workers at Bakırköy.372

The State’s willingness to intervene on behalf of the working class by legislating worker-friendly labour regulations and/or providing social welfare benefits is a decisive factor both in terms of shaping the conditions of reproduction of labour power and in terms of affecting the development of the labour movement. But, as Therborn argues in his analysis of a comprehensive program of welfare policies in a different context, these policies should not be analysed as the manifestation of a clear and static political strategy: “State welfare policies,” Therborn argues, “should be regarded neither as an expression of supra-class benevolence nor a shrewd ruse of the ruling class. They are, rather, a manifestation of the inevitably contradictory and conflictual character of class rule.”373 Thus, my earlier argument that what we should focus on is the outcome from below rather than the intention from above gains a new dimension with this statement. Studying the intention should be left not only because it is not the main concern of the labour historian, but also because it is a dead end in the sense that it leads us away from the methodologically more productive questions.

373 Göran Therborn, What does the Ruling Class do When it Rules? State Apparatuses and State Power under Feudalism, Capitalism and Socialism?, (London: New Left Books, 1978), p. 240. The social welfare program mentioned here is the Beveridge Plan, which was referred to as an example by Turkish state officials as we shall see in the next chapter.

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Workers’ Reasons to Leave Bakırköy

The persistence of industrial workers’ rural links has been a widely discussed issue in labour history. Related to the argument that the transition to capitalism has been incomplete outside the developed world, and especially in colonial settings, the continuation of industrial workers’ agricultural activity is regarded as indicative of the lack of a working-class in the full meaning of the term. In the words of Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, the transitional situation becomes permanent where “the transition to capitalist/wage-labour relationship is incomplete or is not sufficiently generalized.” In South Asia, the special characteristics of the class structure are a consequence of this “almost…‘permanently transitional’ situation, which calls for concepts other than the clear-cut ones of advanced metropolitan economies.” Some of these concepts pertaining to the relationship between the incomplete transition to capitalism and the peculiarity of the resulting working-class characteristics are listed when he goes on to give examples of similar analyses from other post-colonial settings: “incomplete proletariat,” “obstructed transitional stage,” [lack of] “classical types of class divisions,” “class formation as an incomplete process,” and “underdeveloped class structure.” Shahid Amin and Marcel van der Linden, on the other hand, argue that the pure “free wage labour” is an ideal type contrary to social historians’ efforts for searching for it until labour histories in the peripheral regions of the world started to question the explanatory strength of this stereotype. Amin and van der Linden’s idea that the history of labour is not a unilinear process underlined by the transition from traditional to modern forms is widely accepted among labour historians. It is in this context that the discussion of the meaning of the continuing rural links of industrial workers should be located.

A narrative of incomplete transition to capitalism also characterizes the historical understanding of the Ottoman social formation. Since the nineteenth century, foreign capital mainly entered the Empire in the form of merchant capital, the role of which is limited to reorienting existing forms of production, thus not giving way to the rapid dissolution of the old forms. The mode of articulation between merchant capital and small producers on the one hand, and the deliberate efforts of the central authority to defend the independent peasantry through its policies on the other, hindered the formation of a disposed peasantry available as a

375 Ibid., p. 11.
376 Ibid., p. 18.
free proletariat. Makal concludes that, together with the intact structure of small land holding, in accordance with the availability of further cultivable land, this had important effects on the formation of a proletariat as late as the end of the 1930s. Köymen, for example, makes similar remarks about miners during this period. The idea that the category of peasant-worker characterized the workforce was also voiced during the early Republican period. In a report on Turkey published in 1936, it is stated that: “Most of the work is done by farmers who work a couple of months to earn enough money to pay taxes and go back to their farms afterwards.” Kazgan, on the other hand, argues that from the mid-1930s onwards, the process of impoverishment started in the countryside, giving way to loosening ties with land.

The contradiction between these arguments is further complicated by the archival material used in this study. The state documents claim that the main source of the high labour turnover rate is the persistence of rural ties. This claim is both validated and negated by the data from the personnel files. I will present these data below, but it should be noted that within Turkish labour historiography, the issue of disintegration of the land ownership and the impoverishment of peasantry is cited as an obstacle before securing a stable workforce. For example, Makal bases his analysis on a comparison between possible interpretations of high labour turnover rates in Western economies and in early Republican Turkey in the following way:

While in the West, where there is a well-established industrial labor, and a high labor turnover rate is an expression of discontent with working conditions, in early republican Turkey, the problem is the absence of a well-established labor force and the structural reasons behind it. The phenomena of an unskilled labor force that works in the industrial sector for a certain period of the year and maintains its ties with the countryside, is partly related to the inadequacy of housing, health, social security, and wage provisions. But the essential reason is related to the structural characteristics of the agriculture and artisanry which make up the main source of the labor force...If the problem was only about the working conditions, the

379 Makal, Ameleden İşçiye, p. 121.
provisions provided for the workers by the state would have cleared the discontent and decrease the labor turnover rate.\textsuperscript{383}

Above, I have quoted a worker from Bakırköy who could not believe that people would leave the factory in order to attend their land. I argue that his skepticism compels us to examine the archival material more carefully and try to reconstruct the narrative on labour turnover rates from the perspective of the workers themselves. An inspection report from 1945 partially did this by specifying workers’ reasons for leaving employment at Sümerbank enterprises:\textsuperscript{384}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason of Leave</th>
<th>Wages</th>
<th>Agricultural Work</th>
<th>Military Service</th>
<th>Lack of Housing</th>
<th>Insecurity of Future</th>
<th>Health Problems</th>
<th>Lay Offs</th>
<th>Working Conditions</th>
<th>Fired because of Discontinuity</th>
<th>Unspecified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>853</td>
<td>1792</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>6452</td>
<td>1293</td>
<td>3241</td>
<td>5048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Workers’ Reasons for Leaving Sümerbank Factories, 1945.

The report warns the reader that the reasons specified are not always accurate and thus these figures only give a rough picture. In fact, it argues that the number of those leaving for agricultural work is higher but workers hide that by giving other reasons of leave. It then goes

\textsuperscript{383} Makal, Ameleden İşçiye, p. 53.

\textsuperscript{384} Sümerbank İşletmelerinde İşletmede İnsan ve İşçi Meseleleri 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu. Archival Collection of the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Supreme Audit Board. Amb./Db.No: K.A./255.07.02.01.7462: 19. I have corrected a calculation mistake in the report: the number of workers who left because of agricultural work was calculated as 1822, whereas the correct number should be 1792.

One very important reason to leave that is not mentioned in this report is military service, which usually lasted three years. During the Second World War, men were enlisted even for a second time, depending on the needs of the army. This added to the already serious problem of securing the workforce for expanding industrial production and the inspection reports complained heavily. For example, the examination reports of the general assembly on state enterprises in 1940 touch upon the seriousness of the problem (3460 sayılı kanuna bağlı iktisadi teşekkurlerin 1940 yılı bilançoları ile kar ve zarar hesaplarını tetkik eden Umumi heyet zabıtı, Cilt 3, 27.XI.1941 ve 22,23/XII/1941 ve 13,15,20,21,22,23,24/1/1942 tarihli inikatlar, Yedinci Inikat, 21.1.1942. Archival Collection of the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Supreme Audit Board. Amb.Db.No: K.A./255.07.02.01.06.3229).

A member of the parliament requested from the Minister of Defence to defer the military service of all the workers at state enterprises. Others also supported the idea when the Minister of Economy mentioned that in the cotton textiles efficiency was decreasing because of personnel deficiency.

A note on the handling of the labour turnover rate in state factories in the inspection reports is due here. Writing on research on labour turnover rate in late 1950s (exact date is not specified), Nusret Ekin evaluates the inspection reports in terms of their analysis on the issue. First, he mentions the fact that, since the early years of publication, these reports dealt with the issue, which shows not only the extent of the problem but also the presence of a serious and rational management policy. However, he continues, these analyses have a number of problems, ranging from the use of different terminologies to changing methods of statistical calculation. Furthermore, that the analyses are not conducted regularly across different industrial sectors hinders the possibility of a diachronic evaluation of the problem. Thus, one should be careful in building an analysis on the figures given in these reports. (Nusret Ekin, “Memleketimizde İşçi Devri Mevzuunda Yapılan Araştırmalar ve Ortaya Koydukları Neticeler”, Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları Dokuzuncu, Onuncu, Onbirinci Kitap, pp. 123-192).
on to analyse the situation in two textile factories in Anatolia, namely Malatya and Adana factories. The number of leaves is so high in the first factory in 1944 that, starting from 1945, the factory had to take a measure by not admitting workers who left the factory until after a year of their leave. Though the report does not specify the rationale behind this measure, presumably it was directed at those workers who left the factories for doing the harvest season either to work on their own land or to take advantage of the rising daily wages for agricultural work. The number of leavers here, notes the report, is high because of widespread horticulture in the region. For the second factory, located in the Çukurova region of the country known for its fertile lands where mainly cotton is raised, the problem was the result of the dramatic difference between the daily wage paid for factory work and for agricultural work, to the disadvantage of the former. Among state enterprises, Nazilli had the highest labour turnover rate mainly because of the threat of malaria. Cillov, for example, reports that, in the face of severe labour shortage at Nazilli Factory, hand weavers from the Denizli region went there to work in late 1937 and early 1938. Because of the malaria epidemic, however, this labour migration stopped and the hand weavers returned to their hometowns. Then, qualified workers were transferred from another state factory in Kayseri but did not stay long in Nazilli either.\footnote{Haluk Cillov, \textit{Denizli El Dokumaçılığı Sanayi}, (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi, 1949), p. 149.} One Bakırköy worker states that he left Nazilli Factory in 1938 because he could not bear the climate.\footnote{Interview with Ahmet Cansızoğlu conducted by Yıldırım Koç (1988), IISH Collections, BGV1/40-54.} Another inspection report cites the effects of cultural factors on labour turnover such as the rumour that factory work would cause health problems.\footnote{Sümerbank 1943 Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu. Archival Collection of the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Supreme Audit Board. Amb./Db. No: K.A./255.07.02.01.06.3246.}

Obviously, these rumours are not unsubstantiated as the threat of malaria or the unhealthy working conditions at factories are also mentioned in this report. Two other rather interesting reasons for leave are also mentioned in this document. First, when workers paid piece-rate see that they cannot increase productivity and thus their earnings because of low-quality raw materials or broken machines, they leave their jobs. Second, since workers earn very little at state factories, they are unable to save and thus their expectations from factory work decrease. I regard these reasons as interesting because they recognize workers’ agency by means of treating them as rational economic actors.

It is worth noting at this point that a certain degree of tension existed between the inspection reports and the replies Sümerbank gave to these reports. While in the inspection reports labour turnover was analysed as a complex problem that could only be solved by improving the living and working conditions of state workers, the replies insistently
formulated the problem in terms of workers’ choice of agricultural activity over factory work. The incompatibility between these two kinds of documents is also reflected in their methods and perspectives. For example, the inspection report I just quoted uses ILO statistics to compare Turkish state factories with foreign ones. Overall, the report looks at the problem from workers’ perspectives and tries to understand the motives of the workers to leave; it even calls for scientific research to assess the validity of its claims. In Sümerbank’s reports, however, the high labour turnover rate is used as an excuse against the inspectors’ critique, ranging from the failure of training workers to not being able to meet the production targets. As such, it became a blanket excuse and disabled further debate on the workings of state enterprises.

I would like to introduce a new variable into the picture, namely that of the regional origin of the workers. Of the 50 workers whose place of birth is known in the sample, 21 were born in parts of the Ottoman Empire that were not a part of the Republic. Among the places that are cited as the place of birth, Bulgarian towns are the most common, followed by Greek, Macedonian, Romanian and Russian towns. There is information about six workers who became Turkish citizens after 1940, one in 1935. The fact that most of these workers’ place of birth was changed to place names in Turkey suggests that many others changed their citizenship but detailed information about the change was not reported. It is reasonable, then, to assume that their rural ties would be weaker than those who travel a relatively short distance to work at factories in the countryside. It is important here to note that significant differences existed among state factories during this period in terms of the social conditions of reproduction of labour power. A detailed discussion of these differences can be found in later sections of this chapter. However, the following section, which furthers the efforts of the abovementioned report to give a human face to statistical figures, introduces the reasons why Bakırköy workers had to leave the factory.

**How Long Does the Harvest Season Last?**

In accordance with the claims of the inspection reports, the need to attend the harvest was a commonly cited excuse to leave the Bakırköy Factory as the following petitions illustrate:

“Because I received a letter saying that my family is sick and my harvest is left unattended on the field, I request your permission for closing off of my existing account.”
This petition was written on 15 July 1944 by a worker who had entered the factory in August 1941. Though his file does not contain any document indicating his leave from the factory, we learn from a job application form he filled out in August 1943 that he did leave the factory at some point. When he was employed the first time, he was a silver worker in the spinnery. The second time, however, he was employed in the dyeing department and was given the task of bleaching the fabric. His form indicates that he actually asked for that job. On his letter there is a note from the head foreman of the chemical finishing department: “He is a very hardworking worker. But since he has to leave to go to his village, I kindly request that you give him permission to leave.” Almost a month after he wrote the petition, Murat left the factory in August 1944. He was back seven months later and worked at the factory until June 1955 when his contract was terminated because of his poor performance. In fact, he had had two work accidents in 1950 while carrying 50 to 100 kilograms of fabric on beams and he claimed that he had never fully recovered. Between 1945 and 1955, there is no indication that he asked for any more leave.

In May 1948, another worker wrote a similar petition. The earliest dated document in Süleyman’s file was another petition from February 1944 asking for leave because of his low wage level. He returned almost four years later but he was now a construction worker. After only five months of work, he wrote a short and clear petition: “I respectfully ask your permission and orders to terminate my contract since I will go to my village for the harvest.” The note under his petition was equally clear: “Since he has no family at the village, it is okay for him to leave.” Almost three years later, he was back for the third time and he continued working at the factory until his retirement in 1969.

When we read them in their own right, these petitions appear to be simple formalistic texts that inform the management about the reasons of a worker’s leave and there is no reason to be suspicious about their accuracy. Reading them together with the other documents in the file as I did above, however, reveals a different picture. To begin with, both workers left the factory two times. The first time, Murat left for an unknown period of time and then for seven months. In the second one, the periods are considerably longer: almost four years the first time and almost three years the second time. The curious point here concerns the dates of the leave. When Murat leaves the factory to attend the harvest, it was August. A year earlier, however, he had applied to the factory in August. The dates vary even more in Süleyman’s case for he left the factory in February, returned in December, left again for the harvest in

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388 Personnel file of Murat Özcân.
389 Personnel file of Süleyman Yapıcı.
May and returned in February. A second point is the length of the leave period. Obviously, seven months is a long period of time to harvest, which suggests that neither worker came back to the factory right after the harvest, even if they had left for that reason to begin with. The point is, contrary to what one would expect, the employment histories of these two workers do not follow the rhythm of the agricultural season. Thus, there is no reason to assume that these workers had strong ties with the countryside, in the sense that they regularly had to leave the factory to take care of their land.

A third petition mentioning the same excuse substantiates my above arguments. Dated June 1948, this petition did not request a termination of employment but a temporary leave of twenty days. The comment under this petition specifies, for the first time, that the worker is actually an agricultural worker: “20 days leave by this worker who is a rençper is okay.” Indeed, the worker was back the next month as we understand from a document indicating a change in his work-department. The interesting point is that there is no difference in treatment among these workers and that there is no sanction deployed by the management to those who take leave that goes far beyond the time needed for harvesting.

Judging from the comments written by the foremen of the related departments under these three petitions, we could say that “having to harvest” was a frequently cited reason for leaving the factory. Both comments have a tone that recognizes the normality of the situation and the necessity to leave. This is a curious point because, although there are four years between these two letters, high levels of labour turnover rate continued to be a serious problem for state factories. Naturally, the factory management could not force these workers to stay at the factory against their wishes. But, what is striking is that whenever these workers came back, they were recruited immediately.

Two points could be made about these cases. First, one wonders if this gave the message to the workers that leaving and coming back whenever one wished was possible at all times. Above, I mentioned a measure taken at the state textile factory in Malatya. If these two workers were working there, Murat would not be able to return to the factory in 1945, the year when this measure was put into effect. But no such measure was taken at Bakırköy. Second, the fact that being at one’s homeland for the harvest season was recognized as a necessity for the management at all levels – since no punitive measure was taken against it –

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390 Personnel file of Ismail Menenlioğlu.
391 According to the Turkish Language Association, “rençper” means both a day labourer and a farmer. As such, the term does not immediately suggest information about ownership of land and thus could be translated into English as ‘cultivator.’ However, since the worker writes “my own crops,” there is enough reason to assume that he asked for permission to harvest his family land.
suggests that having to do the harvest was a legitimate excuse for long unpaid periods of leave.

**Family Responsibilities**

The sample of personnel files includes a number of cases in which the reason to go to the homeland had nothing to do with agricultural work. For example, a weaver, Yakup, asked for permission to go to his homeland in April 1950. Although he was supposed to return to work on 28 April, he had not returned by 17 May, nor had he written a petition to explain the situation. As a result, his employment was terminated. Later on, he wrote a petition explaining what happened as follows: He went to his hometown to spend his leave but upon his arrival, he found his father terribly sick; the household was in a desperate situation and the work was left unattended. That is why he could not return. Yakup comes from a village in North Anatolia where the area of agriculture is very limited because of the lack of fertile soil and large enough land in this mountainous region of the country. At a time when people were emigrating from the Black Sea Region where Yakup’s village is located, Yakup chose to return eleven years after he entered Bakırköy because of his responsibilities towards the family he left behind. During these eleven years, he had worked at the factory without interruption, with the exception of three years of military service between 1942 and 1945.

Written in May 1950, Yakup’s petition includes a claim, which he would not have been able to make a few months before. He asks for a termination of his contract, which, as mentioned above, was already done, and to be paid an indemnity. In January of the same year, the Labour Law was amended to the effect that, on the condition that the worker had worked in the same job for more than three years, he would be paid fifteen days of daily wage as an indemnity. The law stated that the indemnity should be paid if the employer terminated the contract because of reasons that preclude the worker from working. If Yakup’s reason to leave was considered as such, we will never know as his file does not provide information on whether he was paid the indemnity or not.

Other workers cited the illness of a parent as their reason to leave. Şükriye, who is stated to be working at the weavery in her employment contracts but actually worked in the maintenance department since 1942, asked for termination of her employment in June 1944 upon receiving a letter saying that her mother was on her sick bed. One month later, she was back at work. A curious point about this second recruitment is the note that she asked to be

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employed in the spinnery but as later dated pay documents reveal, she was again employed in
the maintenance department. Bearing in mind that the paperwork of the factory was not done
properly, a speculative guess would be that Şükriye wanted to change her work department
because workers in the maintenance department was predominantly male whereas spinnery
workers were mostly women. Another reason could be her preference for the piece-rate wage
since the maintenance department workers were paid hourly. After working in the same job
for almost a year, Şükriye wanted to leave again in July 1945 to go to her hometown. This
time, however, she does not specify why she has to go. She left the factory in August 1945 to
return only seven months later. She then left a third time, the date and the reason for which we
do not know and returned in 1949. Interestingly, this time she asked to work as a controller.
The contract does not specify her workplace but indicates that she was paid a piece-rate.
When she left in 1954, she was still referred as “the weaver wiper”.

Another such example comes from the employment history of a weaver, Ali, who
worked at the factory from March 1940 onwards, with many interruptions. The reason for his
first leave is stated as discontinuity. However, a petition from his foreman adds a new
dimension to the story. Ali and his brother had a fight with the foreman. After he received a
monetary punishment in the amount of a week’s wage, Ali stopped coming to work. He
returned seven years later for four months only when he wrote the following petition in
February 1949:

I have been working at the weft unit of the weavery of your factory for the last four months
continuously. I have heard that my father has died in my hometown Çorlu. Since it is a must
that I should be with my sibling and mother, I kindly ask for permission to leave.

Four months after this petition, Ali was recruited again in June 1949 only to work for another
seven months. In January 1950, he wrote that his mother was very sick and thus he had to
leave. Almost a month later, he wrote another petition to explain the situation in more detail:

While working at the weft unit of our department, I received a letter from my hometown saying
that my mother suddenly fell sick and that I should leave my job to take care of her medical
treatment. Thus, I wrote a petition and asked for terminating my contract. I brought my
mother to my house in Osmaniye and am continuing [attending] her treatment. I would like to

393 Personnel file of Ali Akgül.
394 A detailed analysis of this incident is given in Chapter 3.
The first note under his letter asked if it was possible to employ him at his old job and advised to take him back if he did not have any fault in his leave. The next note suggests that the first one was written by the chief of the weaving department because the reply is addressed to him. It states that Ali left the factory upon his own will. During his employment, he was fined for disobedience but this was not an impediment for taking him back. There was no job available at the weft section and Ali had to wait two months before he was recruited again. As we understand from another contract dated November 1951, he had left the factory once more before that date. Finally, in October 1957, he left the factory for the last time.

In the three cases above, the responsibility of the workers to their immediate family compelled them to leave their job at the factory. When they came back, they were recruited without any problems with the exception of Ali’s waiting for an available position. The fact that in all these cases, the need to take care of a family members is cited as a necessity and that these workers were admitted to the factory when they returned suggests that workers’ decisions to leave were not always economically motivated. They were also influenced by social expectations and their sense of responsibility to their larger family. Whether these expectations were related to taking care of the household economy or to attend a sick member of the family, their presence implies that migrant workers had close ties with their homeland. The important point here is that these ties do not always imply continuing agricultural activity as is too easily assumed, but could just take the form of social relations providing health and financial security in a context where the state fails to provide them. These visits might also have had a social function similar to what has been argued in another context: “The phenomenon of absenteeism – the visit back home – was not only economically necessary for the workers’ survival, it was the only relief from the drudgery of work and unhealthy conditions of city life and an occasion for family reunion, enjoyment and participation in festivities.”

The difficulty of becoming permanent urban residents, both financially and psychologically, might have played a role in workers’ choice to keep their family ties intact.

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Discontinuity as the Reason to Leave

As I mentioned above, a considerable component of the high labour turnover rate was the discontinuous workers. 3241 such workers were fired from Sümerbank enterprises in 1945. The employment history of Aslan not only shows the limits of indiscipline at work place but hints at a possible explanation for the factory’s loose attitude towards experienced and skilled workers. When he was fired in April 1943 because of discontinuity, Aslan had been working at the factory on and off for eight years. The petition he wrote in May 1943, however, claims that he had worked for ten years at the factory as a weaver. Of course, he does not mention that he had left the factory at least four times during these years: first between 1935 and December 1936, no reason is given; the second time in October 1937, that is after ten months of work, and of his own will, the third time in December 1939, after fourteen months of work and again of his own will; and in February 1941 to do his military service. He gives a rather interesting reason for his absence:

*I could not come to work about a month ago. Suddenly, by coincidence, I ran into a relative of mine who came from my hometown. Since he was very sick, I had to go all the way to Manisa with him. I had planned to come back immediately to start working. But I had to deal with housing matters. I spent fifteen days thinking I would come back either today or tomorrow. I respectfully ask your forgiveness for my mistake and your high orders and guidance to let me return to my job.*

He signed the letter as “laborious weaver at your factory, Aslan.” Under this petition, there is a note stating that both the foreman and the chief of his department reported Aslan absent and thus it was better not to take him back. However, Aslan was back at the factory three months after that and his contract was terminated again one month later again for the same reason. Two important points arise from this employment history. First, Aslan does not even try to give a legitimate excuse such as doing the harvest as we saw in the previous petitions. Though his file clearly shows that he had left the factory of his own will before, and he did not really give a reason that satisfied his immediate supervisors, this did not constitute an obstacle before his recruitment. I would argue that this was possible most likely because he was an experienced weaver.

The second point strengthens this speculative argument. That Aslan did not come to the factory, even after he was recruited in July 1943, does not mean that he was unemployed until his next recruitment in February 1944. Most of the time, it is not possible to know what
workers did during the time in between their two instances of recruitment. However, in Aslan’s case, we know that he was employed between September 1943 and February 1944 at another factory: the woollen textile factory owned by Sümerbank in Istanbul, Defterdar Factory. Besides showing the ease of finding a job for a weaver, this story also displays the extent of lack of coordination among state factories. The troubled employment history of a worker at one state factory did not stop another state factory from recruiting the same worker. One more significant question arises from this story which concerns Aslan’s decision to come back to Bakırköy after four months of work at Defterdar. His file does not provide any information on his working conditions at that factory. But the fact that he came back obviously suggests the presence of better conditions, at least for him, at Bakırköy, even if these only concern the ease of a better known social environment.

In a similar story, a worker, Ahmet, who is stated to have worked in the leather sector before coming to Bakırköy, left the factory at least two times without giving a reason. He started working at the factory in 1935 and his first leave was due to military service. In March 1943, his contract was terminated because of discontinuity; two months after that, he was recruited again. In June 1944, again his contract was terminated for the same reason. When he came back in December 1946, different from the previous cases, he wrote a petition to explain his absence. He had an excuse, which he did not specify, two and a half years ago to go to another city but he came back and he wanted to work at the factory again. He started the next day.

For Meryem, an Armenian woman from central Anatolia, things were more complicated. She started working at Bakırköy in 1940, left the factory after fifteen months in 1941 and came back in 1943. In March 1945, Meryem wrote a petition to the factory management saying that her family had been transferred to Anatolia, not specifying where or why they went. She wrote that it was impossible for her to stay in Istanbul alone, thus she asked to terminate her employment. When she came back to the factory five years later, she brought a good conduct certificate stating that she had been living in a neighbourhood of Istanbul for two years before she moved to another one. Thus, she did not come back to the factory immediately after she came back to Istanbul, that is, if she ever had left the city in the first place. She was recruited with the condition of a three months trial period. Fifteen months later, Meryem left the factory once again saying that she would go to her homeland and did not come back ever again.

396 Personnel file of Meryem Yolsever.
The last example of this section brings a whole new dimension to the discussion of workers’ reasons for leaving employment. Cemil’s first entrance to the factory was in March 1941. He was employed as a weaver apprentice. He had barely worked for three months when his contract was terminated due to absenteeism. After three years of military service, he was back at the factory in May 1945. The same year in October, he wrote that he had to leave the factory because he had to go back home to his family. When he came back in July 1947, however, he submitted an official letter stating that he had been working at a private factory producing glassware. The economic implications of this case are analysed in detail below. Here, I am only interested in his employment history in terms of his periods of leave and recruitment at Bakırköy Factory. He was recruited again in March 1947 and resigned in July the same year because he could not make do with his wage. This was not the end, however, since he came back one final time in September 1948 and did not leave again until his retirement in 1972.

**Behavioural Responses to Low Job Satisfaction: Absenteeism and Turnover**

So far, I have presented new archival material pertaining to workers’ reasons for leaving Bakırköy Factory. These life stories not only give a human face to statistical interpretations of the labour turnover rate in the early Republican period. They also indicate that we should be doubtful of the easy attribution of high labour turnover rate to agricultural activity. Indeed, as early as 1950, a report on the issue was published, which warned the state of the danger of assuming the persistence of rural ties as the primary reason of high turnover rate. The author divides workers’ reasons to leave into two categories: materialistic and moral reasons. Within the first category, the primary reason of the changes in the workforce was the low level of wages. Until recently, he continues, workers left factories in summer time when there are plenty of available jobs and came back to factories once seasonal job opportunities vanished. The fact that the wage levels were so low in the factories made the stability that factory work offered redundant for these workers who needed to secure their daily bread in the first place. Writing in 1950, he reports, it was only recently that these workers were

397 Aray, Sanayi İşletmelerinde İşçi Hareketleri.
398 An ILO report dated 1949 also stated that the high turnover rate in the industry was not only a result of seasonal movement between industry and agriculture but also a result of a set of reasons such as the low wages, the housing problem, and the problems workers have because of a lack of skills (Labour Problems in Turkey, p. 216).
not recruited again. Thus, a growing number of such workers were suffering from unemployment.

The second reason is the heavy conditions of factory work, which caused workers to choose other kinds of employment, even when they could not earn as much as they did at the factory. In the Çukurova region, for example, workers left factories where they had to work for eight hours in summer without any ventilation and preferred working twelve to thirteen hours in the fields. As for the female workers, Aray has a rather interesting, and not substantiated for that matter, argument that the social environment was a decisive factor for women in Izmir who preferred working with fellow female workers in the presence of a gramophone. Events related to the family life such as marriage, having kids, changing place of residence were also important reasons for female workers to leave their jobs. Meryem’s story exemplifies such an event.

As for the moral reasons, Aray mentions ensuing rural ties as the most important one. This, however, should not immediately be interpreted as continuing agricultural activity. Rather, these rural ties should be understood in terms of their effects on workers’ level of commitment to factory work. In fact, in studying the enjoining and internalization of the time-discipline of industrial manufacturing, Thompson explains the problem of securing a disciplined labour force as follows:

Most commonly, in countries where the link between the new factory proletariat and their relatives (and perhaps land-holdings or rights to land) in the villages are much closer –and are maintained for much longer- than in the English experience, it appears as one of disciplining a labour force which is only partially and temporarily “committed” to the industrial way-of-life. 399

Thompson’s description of the problem completely fits Aray’s explanations of the psychological aspects of ensuing rural ties of the industrial workers. To him, even those workers who had only distant relatives in their villages maintained close ties. We have seen this in the stories of Aslan who claimed to have gone all the way to his hometown to accompany a sick relative. Also, the stories of Yakup, Şüكريye and Ali illustrate the extent of responsibility these workers felt towards their families they had left behind in the village.

Aray also makes an important point regarding the changes in the way of life factory work entails for workers with rural backgrounds. The longing for the village, he argues, is

partly caused by the desire to break free from the discipline and the supervision factory work imposes on workers. As a people accustomed to living unrestricted, the worker would like to exercise self-command even at the expense of poverty. “The worker gets bored,” Aray argues, “doing long, monotonous industrial work and prefers different, dynamic, non-monotonous work and leaves his job in search for this kind of jobs.” This is the reason why workers working at closed-off sections of the factory leave their jobs more than the others. The most important argument in Aray’s analysis of the reasons for leaving industrial employment is his critique of the assumption that workers would engage in agricultural activity. He notes that there are workers, for example, who would leave their factory job to work as street vendors during the summer months.

The employment histories of ten Bakırköy workers I presented above supports the argument that workers’ reasons for leaving employment at factories were multiple and complex. To reduce such a complicated issue to a simple understanding of incomplete proletarianization is misleading. For example, it would not help us to understand why workers who claimed to leave Bakırköy to attend to the harvest did not come back for years, why workers came back to the factory years after they left without giving a reason, why they said they would go to their hometown but continued living in Istanbul and did not come back to the factory. Perhaps the most significant of all, as we saw in Cemil’s employment history, is why they chose to work in the private sector after they left Bakırköy to, as they claimed, go to their hometown. As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, when human actuality is the centre of the story, the narrative becomes sophisticated yet confusing; sophisticated, because it nullifies overgeneralizations and introduces dimensions that have been so far neglected; confusing because conflicting evidence is presented, which makes an absolute explanation impossible to sustain.

**State Workers: A Labour Aristocracy?**

First developed by Marx and Engels, to explain English labour’s lack of revolutionary zeal in the mid-nineteenth century, the concept of labour aristocracy became highly popular in labour

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400 Cillov makes a similar argument in 1949, which substantiates Aray’s claims in relation to the transfer of hand weavers to textile factories. Weavers left Denizli region, where handweaving was a common economic activity, in search of work only during certain months when their incomes decreased. These are mostly journeymen and sometimes master weavers who could not make a living from hand weaving because, Cillov argues, masters who earn enough would not trade their freedom to factory work. In a survey conducted in Denizli in 1948, he continues, 90 per cent of masters stated that they would not work at a factory (Cillov, *Denizli El Dokumacılığı Sarayı*, p. 150).

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history in the 1960s and 1970s, when it was increasingly used in reference to the development of class relations in Victorian and Edwardian Britain and the historical discussion on the character of the working class in the later nineteenth century. Field summarizes the central propositions in the concept of labour aristocracy used in these studies on British labour history as follows: a distinctive stratum of skilled workers emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, which played a decisive role in reducing the level of class antagonism, as they came to accept the existence of capitalist relations of production and confined their struggles to improvements within the limits of existing society. Economically less militant workers’ organizations were an expression of this acceptance; while politically, the appeal to bourgeois democracy was expressed in the search for citizen-status and culturally, the adoption of bourgeois values further separated this stratum from the rest of the labourers. The overall political and ideological effects of this incorporation and adoption are an apparent social and political consensus in mid-Victorian Britain. The term, then, was used in other contexts of labour to explain the moderate and reformist politics of the working classes. The problem with the use of the concept of labour aristocracy in this manner is related to the widespread expectation of the working classes to fulfil their revolutionary role in historical change – an expectation I criticized earlier in this study. It is in this framework that we have to read the uses of the concept within Turkish labour history as well.

As I noted earlier, the early Republican period of Turkish history is characterized by the state’s assault on societal autonomy, which, similar to what Field argued on the mid-Victorian Britain, presented an apparent social and political consensus. The fact that the workers did not engage in collective action to challenge the furthering of the capitalist relations of production, necessitated an explanation of workers’ political quiescence, and this explanation is based on a simplistic equation between class position and behaviour. Very simplistically, the concept was used to differentiate state workers from the rest of the labouring classes. Without enough substantiation, the convention in Turkish labour historiography has been that workers at the state factories had comparably better conditions.


compared to private sector workers. The assumed social gap between state and private sector workers is based mainly on two arguments: state workers’ higher wage levels and their access to social provisions. Below, I first present examples of the use of the concept of labour aristocracy in Turkish labour history and then discuss the two arguments by citing new archival material on Bakırköy workers’ working and living conditions.

The approaches to the use of the concept can be analysed in three main lines of reasoning. First, there is the reference to the need of the state to maintain a skilled labour force by means of providing better working conditions. For example, Yıldırım Koç cites the incomplete process of dispossession of land as the reason why the more skilled section of the workforce was given material privileges and thus qualified as a labour aristocracy. Hence, he continues, despite the extension of capitalist exploitation, an independent and strong labour movement could not develop. The second line of reasoning emphasizes how state workers were perceived by others. Ahmet İnsel refers both to social provisions and the high wage levels in state enterprises, and argues that even the lowest status workers in these factories were seen as privileged state officers. The third line of reasoning again concerns a mode of perception but different from the second one, it emphasizes how state workers perceived themselves in relation to their employer. M. Şehmuz Güzel exemplifies this reasoning as follows: “It is seen that in this period [1930s], [state] workers thought of themselves as “state officers,” and perceived the state as “the father who gave them a job” in this model of worker-employer-State relations.” İnsel makes a similar argument: the reason behind state employment was the state’s efforts to create a working class that would accept the social order as it is and even identify itself with that order. In this argument, the labour aristocracy is the instrumental creation of the authoritarian state. This is not only problematic because of the intentionality attributed to state’s actions, but also of the assumption that the state would achieve any goal regardless of social reactions of the people.

Common to all these arguments is the claim that the emergence of a labour aristocracy hindered the development of a revolutionary class-consciousness by incorporating an important part of the working class. Weakening the labour movement, the labour aristocracy formed an obstacle to radical social change. Thus, the object of explanation, once again,

404 Koç, Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı, p. 30.
405 Ahmet İnsel, Düzen ve Kalkınma Kıskacında Türkiye, Kalkınma Sürecinde Devletin Rolü, (İstanbul: Ayrintı Yayınları, 1996), pp. 228-229.
becomes the failure of the working class to fulfill its historical mission. For example, Koç asserts that the legal improvements in work conditions between 1923 and 1946 was not an outcome of workers’ struggles but a strategy to solve the problem of labour supply, especially pertaining to skilled workers, and to avoid social conflicts. By means of creating a labour aristocracy, these improvements brought about a part of the working class that was dependent on the state, which would lead to divisions among the working classes in later years.408 Similar arguments based on the alleged privileges state workers enjoyed and on the extent of state’s control over the labour movement were repeated in numerous studies.409

Eric Hobsbawm notes that the labour aristocracy was characteristically a British phenomenon: “a stratum peculiar to that country where the class of independent small producers, shopkeepers, etc. was relatively insignificant.”410 Leaving aside the methodological problems in these studies concerning the ‘measurement’ of class-consciousness, there is a logical error in using the concept of labour aristocracy for a workforce that is mainly characterized by very high levels of labour turnover. If, as argued, the state workers, or at least a segment of them, were labour aristocrats, how could we explain, for example, the labour turnover rates at Bakırköy factory between 1940 and 1943 given in Table 1? If a big part of these workers maintained their rural ties while working at state factories, how could they be labour aristocrats whose interests lied at the reproduction of capitalist relations of production? In other words, how can we talk about a labour force that is made of pre-dominantly peasant-workers and labour aristocrats simultaneously? The examples I presented earlier in the chapter do not support the claims that state workers enjoyed many privileges. Below, I will provide detailed information on the extent of social provisions Bakırköy workers benefited from, which further challenges these arguments. Field made an important point regarding the uses of the concept in British labour historians to explain the absence of revolution:

410 Qtd. in Field, “British”, p. 79.
If this is the question that is being posed, then clearly it implies two things: that if there were an undifferentiated mass of wage slaves (an “ideal type” proletariat that has never existed), there would be an unremitting revolutionary struggle; and it implies a teleological conception of history and of the role of class struggle in particular, in which the cultural meaning attached to material rewards become unproblematic and unambiguous.411

I argue that the labour historians of Turkey not only made a simplistic equation between class position and behaviour, they also too readily assumed the class position of state workers. Furthermore, not studying the political beliefs and cultural traits of the working classes in the period, they regarded cultural and political behaviour as a more or less passive reflection of economic situation. The next sections, as well as the following chapters, address these issues.

**State Workers: A Homogeneous Conglomerate?**

Many studies on working classes in the early Republican period take the entire system of state enterprises as their object of study. Thus, analyses with sweeping generalizations, that conceal more than they reveal, dominate the field. Factors such as the location of the factories, the differences in labour recruitment and maintenance policies, different labour processes and the particularities of the industries (for example, miners and textile workers would be cited within the same paragraph when the effects of National Protection Law is discussed), and so forth, have not been given due attention in such macroscopic studies. Moreover, the use of mainly state-produced documents, which are not much concerned with particularities but the general level of all factories in a given sector, fail to grasp the fact that each state factory was a site of production with its own management team that had changing degrees of autonomy.

Especially in terms of the pay levels and the provision of social welfare, state factories display extremely different patterns.412 In 1940, for example, Hosli compared the hourly wages at Eregli and Bakırköy factories. In the spinnery, the hourly wage at Bakırköy was 26 per cent more than that at Eregli. In the weaving section, the difference was much more pronounced: Bakırköy weavers earned twice as much as Eregli weavers. In the woof and bobbin sections, however, Eregli workers earned 9.6 per cent more than the Bakırköy

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411 Ibid., p. 77.
412 I will keep the discussion limited to the differences among textile factories, for the differences beyond that level are first too much to tackle and second are of no immediate importance to the present study. I will also not enter into a discussion on the differences in capacity, productivity and performance among the textile factories.
Comparisons with the Merinos Factory in Bursa also reveal very different wage levels, to the advantage of Bakırköy workers, with the exception of the spinners. Such differences are also illustrated in the employment history of a Bakırköy worker who had worked at the dyeing department of the Nazilli Factory for fourteen years. Ahmet asked for the same wage – 80 kuruş per hour – he had been given in Nazilli before his transfer to Bakırköy in 1951. It was not possible, he was told, because there was no position available at that wage level. He had to accept 68 piastres an hour. As this case shows, the availability of an empty position at a certain wage level also determined how much a worker would earn. A practical solution to problems stemming from this bureaucratic arrangement was to change the work department of a worker in order to give him a wage raise.

If we were to compare wages at Bakırköy Factory with wages at another state textile factory in Istanbul, Defterdar, the following results would arise. First, we see that wage levels differed among different departments of the same factory. For example, in 1936, young girls who worked at roving frames earned 73 piastres a day, whereas ward workers earned 52 piastres a day. In the dyeing and washing departments, the wage was 90-100 piastres, and in the drying section it was 70-80 piastres a day. Although we do not have information about the duration of the working day at Feshane in 1936, if we assume that it was ten hours, the hourly wages of these workers would appear much less than their counterparts in Bakırköy. In 1937, a female worker in the yarn department (whose exact job we do not know) earned 17 kuruş per hour before taxes. A male worker in the dyeing department at Bakırköy in 1937 was also earning more than his counterpart at Feshane: 12 kuruş an hour. Because we do not know whether the figures Hosli gives indicate wages before or after tax, we cannot make precise comparisons, but in any case it appears that even between factories, which were in close proximity, there were rather large differences between the wage levels or workers of the same sex and more or less the same job.

As seen from these comparisons, not only between different factories but also among different departments within the same factory, or even between workers in the same

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413 Ing Hosli, Ereğli Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor [Report on Ereğli Cloth Factory], 1940.
414 Ing Hosli, Merinos Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor [Report on the Merinos Factory], 1943.
415 Personnel file of Ahmet Ergün.
416 Indeed, we need to do so for, as Hosli notes in 1943, wages in Istanbul were generally higher than wages in other parts of the country. Ing. Hosli, Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor [Report On Bakırköy Cloth Factory], 1943. Archival Collection of the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Supreme Audit Board.Amb./Db.No: K.A./255.07.02.01.06.1241.
417 Max. von der Porten, Feshane ve Hereke Fabrikaları Tetkiklerine Dair, 1936.
418 Personnel file of Zehra Dalıca.
419 Personnel file of Ahmet Ergün.
department of a factory, there were tremendous wage differences. Thus, to make easy
generalizations about state factories, even within the same sector, would be misleading.
Furthermore, the picture becomes more complicated when we compare state factories in terms
of the social welfare they offered.

Recently, younger generation social historians have criticized the conception of social
welfare as mere tools of increasing productivity and of workers as passive objects of these
policies. Following their critique, I argue that social welfare was used by the Turkish state
to tame workers who resisted its efforts to turn them into a docile industrial labour force. By
means of alleviating the living conditions of the workers, and extending the state’s control
beyond the shopfloor, these policies were aimed at creating a labour force that was disciplined
to the new productive requirements. Morris reminds us that the “‘one universal demand’ made
by an industrial system is that the labour force is structured; that it operate within a precise,
well-known and rationally-applied system of rules.” The social welfare programs, I would
argue, carry a role in that structuration in two ways: First, by establishing a relation of
gratitude towards the state through constructing a discourse on state policies around notions of
social justice and welfare for the masses. Second, by means of transforming the social lives of
the labouring classes, they attempt to habituate them to new obligations and routines of the
industrial activity. But there is a more immediate motivation of the state in transferring
resources from capital to labour for welfare purposes in a ‘backward economy’:

In considering this problem, one must realize that a backward economy undergoing rapid
industrialization faces different conditions than do advanced countries. In the United
Kingdom, for example, the emphasis on labor welfare and social security measures came more
or less at the close of the Industrial Revolution. In a country such as India, on the other hand,
unless government provides for transfers of resources from capital to labor for welfare
purposes, it is likely to lose the political support of a large section of the population.

The increasing involvement of the state in the reproduction of the labour power, then, is a
necessity to secure the political sector for those holding political power. “State enterprises in
Turkey,” argues Insel, “cannot be analysed with the criterion peculiar to capitalist

420 Akın, “Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi”; Nacar, Working Class in Turkey; Murat Metinsoy, Murat, Wars Outside
421 David Morris, “Labor Discipline, Trade-Unions, and the State in India”, The Journal of Political Economy,
422 C.N. Vakil, and P.R. Brahmananda, “Reflections on India's Five Year Plan”, Pacific Affairs, Vol. 25, No. 3,
enterprises,” because such analyses would yield either to the conclusion that these enterprises were not efficient or that efficiency should not be searched within economic criterion. In arguing so, Insel claims the primacy of the political rather than the economic character of the state enterprises. It is in this framework that we should discuss the implementation of social welfare. The argument that social welfare was merely a strategic tool of the state to control the labour supply should be abandoned in favor of a more dynamic understanding of the content and the effects of these policies. Once again, in this section, I am more interested in the outcome from below rather than the intention from above. To this end, I first present a framework to understand the motivations behind the social welfare provisions. I have already argued against the conception of state enterprises as a homogeneous conglomerate pertaining to the analyses of wage levels. A further correction in this regard seems to be most necessary for an analysis of social welfare as the gap between different factories in terms of social welfare programs were extreme. The issue of housing provisions appears to be the component of these programs that reflects these differences most clearly. These points are followed by a portrayal of the housing conditions of the Bakırköy workers, a portrayal that would give flesh and blood to statistics on social welfare.

**By Way of Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have documented the main features of the process of production at Bakırköy Factory. I have defined this process in a broader sense following Burawoy’s conception of it as the totality of social relations in which labour and capital come together at the site of the workplace. These social relations are simultaneously shaped by and shape the greater social and political environment that surrounds them. To a greater extent, the current chapter dealt with the former direction. Thus, I have mainly shown the workings of broad patterns of social and economic development in the lives of Bakırköy workers. The political and ideological elements of the process of production, and the ways a specific experience of labour affect the working class struggles constitute the subject matter of the following chapters.

I designed this chapter with the following quote from the *German Ideology* in my mind:

> The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men – the language of real life…

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Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious being, and the being of men is their actual life-process... not setting out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh; but setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. 424

Having partially documented the relations between workplace policies and the public policies that affect them, I now move on to a discussion on the changes in the self-understanding and perceptions of Bakırköy workers against the labour control regime imposed upon them. The following chapter deals with the key symbolic role played by petitioning in labour management relations at Bakırköy Factory in the 1940s. Situated between Chapters 2 and 4, Chapter 3 hints at the ways the process of production shapes the industrial working class subjectively. Finally, Chapter 4 discusses further the effects of the factory regime analysed here on the trade union movement in the later 1940s.

Chapter 3

Tracing the Subjective Levels of Transformation in the Bakırköy Labour Force: An Analysis of Workers’ Responses

On 18 November 1945, there was a crowded ceremony at the Bakırköy Factory attended by members of the cabinet and other high-rank bureaucrats.\(^{425}\) The occasion was the opening of the hospital and the dining hall built for the workers and their families. The guests first gathered at the sports club for which the workers were supposed to pay 4 per cent of their earnings. The ceremony commenced at 4pm with the singing of the national anthem by the workers’ chorus and continued with the speech of the factory manager on Sümerbank’s efforts to improve the social conditions of state workers. After a second speech by the general manager of Sümerbank, the Minister of Economy cut the ribbon and expressed his hopes for more pleasing and satisfying improvements to follow this example. The program continued with a tour of the new buildings.

With twenty beds, two departments of internal and external diseases, a maternity ward, a polyclinics of dentistry and gynaecology, several x-ray machines, a laboratory and an affluent pharmacy, the hospital was said to easily meet the needs of the 1600 workers at the factory. The dining hall, which was also to be used for other purposes, could accommodate 800 people for eating and 1200 for watching movies and shows. For the clerks, another hall that could seat 80 people was built. The dining hall had a modern kitchen, a cold storage depot and other facilities. On the second floor, other rooms for social facilities were located. Among them were a studio, a storage room for the cinema equipment, two guest rooms and a sleeping room for the service staff. The reporter was particularly amazed with the studio among all these new facilities, which he thought of as a “big novelty.” Indeed, the planned uses of the studio were impressive. Besides broadcasting the daily factory news, including the production level of the previous day, the most productive worker of the day, the amount he produced and the corresponding wage he earned, the radio would also announce the orders and instructions by the factory management.

This eventful day at the factory concluded with a tea party and a show including different performances by the workers. According to the reporter “Workers showed great success in eastern and western music styles, village songs and folkloric dances,” and they

\(^{425}\) “Bakırköy Fabrikasında”, Cumhuriyet (19 Nov. 1945).
received a great deal of applause from the audience. The ceremony must have attracted much attention since another article was published about it on the same day in the same newspaper. This time, however, the reporter contextualised the particular event in a broader historical and social setting. On the one hand, he compared the old times of the factory with the improvements after Sümerbank took over. On the other, he contextualised the novelties at Bakirköy within the wider context of the goals and functions of the state social policies. After explaining why the new buildings were needed and how they can be of benefit not only to the workers but also to their families, he concluded that their establishment “was an act of ‘charity’.” He continued,

*The state, in its own factories, thinks about the health and well-being of its workers and clerks, [it] thinks about their food, [it] thinks about their social civility, [it] thinks about their recreation. In one word, [it] provides them with the necessities of a civilised life. As such, the state also precludes the class war which turned the western world upside down because instead of the idea of exploiting the workers and the clerks, the mentality of providing a more prosperous life for them reigns. The worker finds a heaven at the factory, not hell, and commits to it.*

It is impossible to know whether Mümin was among those attending the ceremony. Perhaps attendance was compulsory just as contributing to the sports club, Sümerspor, was. But the reporter was not interested in workers’ reaction to these developments. One thing is for sure: Even if Mümin was there, he did not share the enthusiasm of the article. A careful study of his personnel file shows that what he found at the factory was far from a heaven. He described his situation in July 1946 with the following words:

*To the office of management at Bakırköy Cloth Factory,*

*The following is my wish.*

*[Your] servant Mümin Kılıç, nine years in the yarn department and nine months in the maintenance department as assistant foreman has been working at the factory for nine years and nine months. Although I have been working for such a [long] time, I have received only

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426 Ibid.
427 I choose to leave the grammatical and lexical language mistakes in the petitions since they could be regarded as indications of literacy among the workers, although I would imagine that, in many cases, someone else had written them since many workers had little or no literacy at the time of their employment. Unfortunately, I do not have more information to further speculate on this matter.
428 The exact word is “bendeleri”, which is originally a Persian word with strong religious connotations. It could mean “the subject of” or “the servant of” depending on the context.
five piastres increase. I am a member of a family of four, since the money I am receiving does not allow making do my ... [unreadable, GA] family agonise in exigency. My counterparts, as well as the apprentices that I teach, receive fifty piastres. Because of the high cost of living, I respectfully ask from your high office to be given wages like my friends, taking into consideration that I have been working for this many years without intervals to receive a raise in order not to be excessively aggrieved.

This petition is one of the eighteen written by the Bakırköy workers in my sample to plea for a wage increase between 1942 and 1951. Several petitions were also written for other sorts of economic gains such as child support and indemnities for different reasons. While the newspapers were celebrating the improvements in the conditions of the state workers, the Bakırköy workers were writing more and more petitions to explain their hardening conditions.

The current chapter analyses these petitions through studying their five aspects: timing, frequency, addressee, content and vocabulary. My objective here is two-fold. First, through a close reading of the workers’ petitions and the commentaries of the management on these petitions, I would like to portray the dynamics of the worker-management relations at the Bakırköy factory. Second, by means of discerning the changes in these petitions over time, I aim to show that the workers’ self-perceptions and the representations of that self-perception underwent a dramatic change during the early Republican period. The stories of Bakırköy workers demonstrate that, while they tried to cope with the hardening working and living conditions, they also devised strategies to resist the management’s attempts to increase control both inside and outside the factory. Contrary to the prevailing arguments in the literature on workers of the period, class consciousness was growing and resistance was building up, slowly but firmly, in the post-War years.

This chapter also deals with the question of the changing character of state-society relations throughout the 1940s. In a way, Bakırköy workers’ petitions could be read as written correspondence between the state and its subject. Working at a state factory meant encountering the state on a daily basis in an employee-employer relationship. To what extent the Bakırköy workers perceived these encounters in this way, we will never know. But the factory management’s dealing with the petitions clearly reflected the workings of state bureaucracy. Moreover, the fact that some workers turned to the Sümerbank General Directorate and the Prime Ministry when their petitions to the factory management did not succeed suggests that they saw the latter as part of the state apparatus at least to some extent.
As such, my analysis of the petitions sheds some light on the changes in the way an ordinary working citizen positioned himself vis-à-vis the early republican Turkish state.

**The Worker as the “Destitute”**

Of the eighteen petitions analysed here, the earliest dates from January 1943:

> To the Higher Office of General Directorate of Sümerbank,

> My esteemed sir,

> The destitute had been working at the Bakırköy Cloth Factory for seven years and I have dared to take refuge in your Higher Office as a worker who had always gained the countenance of his superiors all the time during this period. The situation is that many of my friends benefited from the increases in every aspect. The destitute, however, is deprived. I am in extreme poverty. Especially the latest high cost of living suffocated me. I kindly ask you with my eternal respect to give your order and permission to those concerned for an increase in my wage in the suitable amount also to the destitute in order not to cause my damnification.\(^{429}\)

Mehmet began working in the dyeing department in 1936. He was an extraordinary worker, in that he worked uninterruptedly from 1936 to February 1941, the year he was enlisted in the army. Immediately after his demobilization in January 1942, he returned to the factory. As explained in the previous chapter, if the state workers returned to their workplaces within a certain time period after their demobilization, the time of their military duty was added to their seniority. For Mehmet, however, this was not the case as we learn from his petition dated 29.01.1942:

> The following is my wish.

> [Your] servant is one of your workers who worked for five years. Eleven months ago, I went to the military to carry out my national duty and have been demobilised. I beg with respect for the sake of humanity that your servant with wife and children is re-employed so that I am not aggrieved on this winter day and saved from extreme poverty.

From a short note below Mehmet’s petition, we learn that there was no position available at the time and thus he had to wait. In Chapter 2, we saw that the high labour turnover rate

\(^{429}\) Mehmet Karagözü.
constituted a problem for state factories. That an experienced worker such as Mehmet had difficulty in returning to the factory under such conditions requires further elaboration on the structure of the labour market during the period. The next section addresses this need by contextualizing Mehmet’s and other workers’ petitions within the wider framework of political economy of the 1940s.

The Paradoxical Labour Market

The labour market of the early Republican period displays a paradoxical character in that, while workers such as Mehmet had to beg for work, factories and workshops were continuously looking for new workers. For example, in the same year as when Mehmet wrote the above petition, Bakırcıköy Factory was publishing job advertisements. In one of these advertisements, the factory claims that a hardworking weaver could earn up to 700 piastres a day with the additional benefits of one meal, and a loaf of bread free of charge, and food and other products at their production cost. Those who regularly come to work, it adds, would receive an additional 10 per cent every month. Another newspaper reports that the extensions in the Bakırcıköy factory required the recruitment of new workers, especially weavers, but despite the increase in the wages and benefits, it was still very hard to find experienced workers. It is hard to believe that a few months earlier, the same newspaper published ads by weavers, claiming to be experienced and skilled, looking for employment at factories or that the Employment and Salvation Hall of one of the Republican People’s Party People’s Houses in Istanbul was receiving applications from people with secondary and even high school diplomas seeking employment as a worker at a state factory. The explanation of this paradoxical situation is two-fold. First, the lack of co-ordination in the national labour market gave way to the contradictory co-existence of labourers moving around the country in search of employment, on the one hand, and factories in search of labour, on the other. Second, the ensuing problems of high labour turnover rates, and the lack of vocational training, created a labour market in which experienced and skilled workers were scarce while unskilled workers were in abundance.

Within this context of incongruence between supply of and demand for labour, Mehmet had to beg to return to the factory at a wage level of 15 piastres an hour in 1942. This

432 “İş ve İşçi Arayanlar”, Haber Akşam Postası (29 Mar. 1943); Haber Akşam Postası (12 Apr. 1943).
figure is considerably lower than the one Makal gives as the average daily wage of a textile worker at a state factory in Istanbul in 1942.⁴³⁴ Although he received an increase of 3 piastres in November 1942, Mehmet’s situation in January 1943 was still grave as the wording of his first petition I quoted above illustrates. In fact, the striking similarity of the descriptions in the two petitions suggests that one year of employment did not change much for Mehmet and his family.

Mehmet gives three reasons as to why he is entitled to a wage increase in 1943. First, he mentions that he had been working at the factory for seven years by then. He was aware that this was an exceptionally long time of employment. In fact, in 1945, the technician of his department stated that he was a “very old” and “hardworking” worker. Thus, it is safe to assume that Mehmet was a relatively experienced and skilled worker. Second, immediately after the implication of seniority comes a reference to the appraisal of the supervisors. Together, these two factors encouraged Mehmet “to take refuge in Your Higher Office.” A certain practice should be noted here concerning the regulation of wage levels at Bakırköy. As far as the files indicate, wage increases at Bakırköy were supposed to be given every six months, only if the appraisal of the supervisors was secured. By referring to his seniority and the approval of his superiors, Mehmet makes it clear that he knew the rules of the game. He was aware of his qualities as a worker and emphasised them in order to convince the management. Third, while many of his friends had received a wage increase, Mehmet continued, he was left behind. He does not specify whether these friends were from the same department as him, but we can use two other workers’ data to assess the validity of Mehmet’s claims. The first worker had also been working in the dyeing department since 1935 – barely a year earlier than Mehmet had started at the factory – and earned 30 piastres in August 1943 as an assistant foreman.⁴³⁵ The second worker, a weaver who had already worked at the factory since 1928, earned 25 piastres an hour in March 1943 but his wage was increased to 30 piastres after he petitioned.⁴³⁶ Mehmet’s hourly wage in January 1943, however, was only 18 piastres an hour. Thus, Mehmet’s situation supports the argument I made in the previous chapter concerning the considerable wage differences between workers in the same department on the one hand, and workers in different departments of the factory, on the other. As the experience and seniority levels of these three workers illustrate, the wage differences were determined rather randomly.

⁴³⁴ Ahmet Makal, Anleden İşçiye: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi Çalışmaları, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2007), p. 132. For a discussion of the wage figures Makal gives, see Chapter 2.
⁴³⁵ Osman Yatış.
⁴³⁶ Cemal Öndağ.
Mehmet describes his poverty using powerful terms such as “deprivation”, “damnification” and “suffocation”. He cites the latest increase in the cost of living as the final blow. Indeed, the dramatic increase, especially in the price of food in early 1942, was a common topic covered by the newspapers with references to discussions on the necessity of state distribution of food supplies. Under these conditions, as the weaver I cited in the above paragraph claimed not to be able to make a living on 25 piastres an hour, Mehmet’s financial situation must have indeed been extremely difficult.

**On the Language and the Addressee of Mehmet’s Petition**

We have seen the word “destitute” in other petitions discussed in Chapter 2. The Turkish word “acizleri” carries the meaning of an impotent and powerless person. It is also used to refer to oneself as a sign of modesty. Within the context of Mehmet’s petition, references to the first definition are obvious with direct relevance to material deprivation: “The destitute, however, is deprived. I am in extreme poverty.” In the opening sentence of the petition, we can say that there is a reference to the second meaning since he chose to refer to himself not immediately in the first person singular pronoun but as “the destitute” and thus makes his agency less pronounced. He switches to “I”, however, in the second half of the sentence where he tries to legitimise his act of petitioning, which he describes as “daring to take refuge in.”

Mehmet did not write this petition to the Bakırköy Factory management but to the General Directorate of Sümerbank. Whether he had made other attempts, written or verbal, at the level of factory management before writing to Sümerbank is unknown to us. Perhaps thinking that the management was being unfair by not giving him the same increase that others received, he decided that it would be more efficient to appeal to a higher authority. It was noted on his previous petition dated 29 January 1942 that he made an oral application and that he was told to wait until there was a position available. However, it was only after his petition that he was recruited again. Could it be the case that he thought of writing to the higher offices as a strategically better option? Why did he skip the factory management before appealing to the busy headquarters of Sümerbank in Ankara to get an increase from his factory in Istanbul?

From the official reply of Bakırköy Factory to the Directorate of Sümerbank Yarn and Weaving Factories Enterprise, we understand that there was official correspondence between the factory and the General Directorate of Sümerbank about Mehmet’s petition.
Unfortunately, Mehmet’s file does not include the petition written by Sümerbank. But we know that more than a month after Mehmet wrote the petition, the factory management wrote to the General Directorate to explain that it was not possible to increase his wage because it had not been six months since he had received the last one. This did not prevent Mehmet from writing a second petition, this time directly to the factory management, asking for a wage increase, and again referring to the argument that he could not live on the wage he earned. The petition was dated 20 March 1943, and he received an increase of 2 piastres eleven days later, exactly six months after his last increase. The whole story suggests that the factory management was very much immune to such petitions written in a pleading tone and that it followed the rules of wage increases strictly. But how did it respond to petitions asking either for an increase or the termination of employment?

The Disposable Worker

When Süleyman started in the dyeing department in December 1943, his hourly wage was 18 piastres an hour. Only three months later, he wrote a petition to the chief of the department asking for the termination of his employment due to increasing financial difficulty caused by the rising cost of living. He was a new worker and was probably not skilled, as we will see later. When he started at Bakırköy, he had a one-year old daughter, but this did not stop him risking unemployment. The note by the foreman of the dyeing department under his petition made it clear that Süleyman was one of these disposable workers: “There is no inconvenience about his immediate leave.” Thus, Süleyman left the factory. Judging from his return to Bakırköy three years later to work as a construction worker for an hourly wage which was less than what he had earned in 1943, one can only assume that it was not easy for him to find stable employment elsewhere. Lacking any institutionalised social protection or assistance from any sort of workers’ organization, Süleyman was left alone in a highly unstable labour market. Five months after his second recruitment, he left the factory again, this time claiming that he had to go to his village for the harvest.

Was it the case that his ensuing rural ties constituted a defence mechanism against the harsh conditions of factory work? If we follow him further, we see that he returned to the factory three years later again in 1949. Obviously, he must have done other jobs than only the harvest during these three years. The point is that he did not want to return to Bakırköy

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437 Süleyman Yapıcı. Note that, although he was a new worker, Süleyman earned the same wage as Mehmet in 1943, which suggests that the factory management did not follow the rules of wage increases and promotions strictly. I will return to this topic in the following pages.
Factory where, according to the reporter I referred to above, the workers had found a heaven. But in the early 1950s, Süleyman was a man in his forties and his rural ties were probably weakening and his chances of finding employment elsewhere fading. He stayed on at Bakırköy until his retirement in 1969.

Above, I have shown that the demand for weavers was high at textile factories. The question here is whether this brought a change in the management’s attitude towards weavers’ complaints. Cemil, who had worked at Bakırköy as an apprentice weaver for very short periods of time in 1941 and in 1945, was recruited in the yarn department in March 1947. In 1941, his employment was terminated because of absenteeism only three months after he was recruited. In 1945, after five months of employment, he resigned saying that he had to go to his hometown. In Chapter 2 we saw that he actually worked at a private factory in Istanbul for almost six months in 1946 and 1947. In March 1947, he returned but was not recruited as a weaver this time, which meant that his wage was lower than before. After four months, he wrote that he was “obliged to resign since I cannot make a living for my family with the wage that I am earning”. The note of the foreman was brief and concise: “Since a replacement has been found’ he may leave today.” We do not know what Cemil did between July 1947 and September 1948 when he returned once more to work as an apprentice weaver again, for 25 piastres an hour. He was thirty years old, married with no children, which probably made it easier for him to leave his job so often. He was now living in a gecekondu in Zeytinburnu, close to the factory where he remained until his retirement in 1972.

**Contextualizing the Petitions: Changes in State-Labour Relations after WWII**

Between Süleyman’s petition in 1944 and Cemil’s petition in 1947, substantial changes occurred regarding the regulative and legislative character of the state. Especially in 1946, various initiatives regarding the labour question were made. Until then, the Republican People’s Party had exemplified Therborn’s definition of repression as a form of mediation of the exploitation and domination of the ruling class over other classes.438 Prohibition of opposition was exemplified by the proscription of unions, while restriction of intra-systemic opposition came in the form of the limitations on the right to strike, harassment and terror, and surveillance. Until 10 June 1946, the establishment of organizations based on the

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principle of class was illegal.\textsuperscript{439} The 1936 Labour Law had already outlawed strikes. Leftists were subjected to increasing harassment, terror and surveillance. Fearing that the students and the cadets in the armed forces would follow left-wing ideas, the state dealt harshly with left-wing intellectuals such as Kerim Sadi, Hikmet Kırlıçmıl, and Nazım Hikmet by means of giving them long prison sentences or sending them to exile.\textsuperscript{440}

Within the international context of the post-War era, however, containing and controlling the labour force through mere repression was no longer possible. As part of its efforts to become a member of the post-war international community, the Turkish state needed to handle the labour question in more democratic terms. The increasing state intervention into labour relations during this period should be understood in this context. The establishments of the Ministry of Labour in 1945 and the “Employment and Employee Bureau” in 1946, and the enactment of social insurance laws for industrial workers increased the state’s capacity in regulating the labour market and the social conditions of work. The 1936 Labour Law was also amended in this period. On 14 January 1946, the Minister of Labour was referring to the International Labour Conference in Philadelphia in 1944 as one of the motivations for this amendment.\textsuperscript{441} Of the four main principles that made the Declaration of Philadelphia, the Minister was referring only to the first one, which states that labour cannot be regarded as a commodity. He omitted the second, as well as the third and the fourth principles, which defined freedom of expression and association as essential to sustained progress.\textsuperscript{442} On other occasions, he mentioned the similarities between the social policy measures in Turkey and the Beveridge Plan in England. All these references to the Western World signaled a shift in the way state-society relations were organised.

There were substantial changes in the arena of national politics as well. The RPP also had to deal with the increasing opposition to its authoritarian rule. The success of the recently founded Democrat Party in the 1946 general elections revealed the discontent with the single-party regime, which manifested itself in the form of an alliance between different classes voting for the opposition. As Beverly Silver argues in her analysis of the world-scale evolution of labour-capital conflict, the period between 1870, the time of the crisis of the

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\textsuperscript{439} Kurthan Fişek notes that, through the changes in the penal code eight days after this date, it was ensured that the right to organise was a stillborn. \textit{Türkiyede Kapitalizmin Gelişmesi ve İşçi Sınıfı}, (Ankara: Doğan Yayınevi, 1969), p. 82.

\textsuperscript{440} Feroz Ahmad, “The Development of Class-consciousness in Republican Turkey, 1923-45, in Donald Quataert and Erik Jan Zürcher (eds.), \textit{Workers and Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, 1839-1950}, (London: Tauris, 1995), p. 94.

\textsuperscript{441} “Çalı́şma Bakanlı́ğımın Hazırladığı Kanunlar”, \textit{Cumhuriyet} (15 Jan 1946).


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British hegemony, and 1945 was characterised by, among others, the growing politicization of that conflict. This trend was clearly visible in labour politics of the immediate post-War era in Turkey. For example, the rights to organise trade unions and to strike were increasingly pronounced in political debates. In the words of a prominent sociologist of the day, who also worked as a consultant for the Ministry of Labour, the enactment of social insurance schemas was a necessity brought about by the changes in the political atmosphere:

*The worker of our time does not want a favor, he wants his right. Without giving him a chance to ask for this right through mediation (or in a peaceful manner) or by means of strikes, we should provide it intrepidly [...] That is why the idea of social insurance [...] set the Turkish lawmaker into action.*

This statement supports my argument that the Turkish state’s post-War labour policies should be understood as a means to control the increasingly politicised working classes. As such, state actions during this period were an extension of the strategy of bureaucratic reformism, the primary purpose of which was to reform the state in order to better cope with internal conflict and external pressure. Keyder’s analysis of the bourgeois-bureaucracy alliance during this period exemplifies one of the six bourgeois formats of representation Therborn defined. In the format of etatism, “In relation to the ruled classes, the state functions as does a supernotable to his clientele, holding it in check by means of petty favors, ideological isolation and physical intimidation.”

The changes in the legislative and regulative functions of the Turkish state in the post-war context, I argue, was necessitated by the increasing difficulty of basing the control of the labouring classes on the last two mechanisms defined here. Together with other strategies of the state’s mediation of the exploitation and domination of the working-class, the petty favors, mostly in the form of social insurance schemes, became a tool to contain and control the working class politics in the hands of the state. The question to ask at this point is whether this atmosphere of “democratization” had any effect on the (self-)perceptions of the workers and the way they formulated their demands.

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444 “Bizde Mecburi Sosyal Sigorta Fikri ve İlk Tatbiki”, Cumhuriyet (1 July 1946).
Changes in the Discourse: From Begging to Expecting

My analysis of Mehmet’s petitions and the management’s replies have suggested that the rules of promotion and pay rates were strictly followed at the factory. A careful look at petitions by other workers, however, reveals that this was not the case. One of these workers was a weaver also named Mehmet who had started working at the factory in 1938 and worked without any interruptions until his military service in 1942. Upon his return, he immediately came back to the factory but, after just a few days, he was laid off due to a reduction in the workforce. If it were not for the fact that someone in his department left the factory and that his superiors had favourable opinions of him, Mehmet would have been one of the thousands of Istanbul’s unemployed. But he was lucky enough to be hired with an hourly wage of 25 piastres.

However, things had changed after the war. The factory was working with shifts of eight hours now, which shortened the working day at least by three hours and thus made a considerable difference in terms of the daily wages of the workers. Moreover, years of military service cost Mehmet his right to seniority. In fact, if a worker immediately returned to the factory after completing his military service, his seniority would be calculated starting from his first arrival at the factory. However, mainly due to mistakes made in bookkeeping, many a worker had to fight for previous working days to be included in their seniority benefits. Mehmet did the same when he was laid off in order to increase the number of days on which he was given two hours of paid leave to look for another job. His claim to seniority was accepted, but his demand became redundant as the factory recruited him in the end. The point here is that Mehmet was well aware of his rights and he did not hesitate to pursue them by means of petitioning.

“… before I am obliged to sell the bed I sleep on”

The post-war years witnessed an increasing discrepancy between consumer prices and wage levels. In July 1946, a newspaper reported that prices had increased 300 per cent since the beginning of the war, while wages increased by only 25 per cent. In contradiction, Makal argues that the real wage index reached the 1938 level in 1946 by means of dramatic increases in both monetary and non-monetary wages. If we were to test these claims on the basis of

447 Mehmet Gerçeker.
449 Makal, Ameleden İşçiye, p. 132.
changes in Mehmet’s income, we see a dramatic deterioration. The following petition is from April 1947:

Substance: wage increase

The following is my wish.

Although I have been a bobbin master for ten years at your factory, I have worked at the electricity department for an insignificant wage upon my return from the military and five months ago I went back to my old personnel cadre. At the present time I receive a daily wage of 2 liras [i.e. 200 piastres] which would not suffice to get by for an individual let alone a family. In the last round of wage distributions the cleaner got 35 liras whereas I got 25 liras. In 1942 I used to earn 140 liras on average a month whereas now I only earn 52 liras. I have been tolerating this situation and had constancy in my job at the expense of selling some of my furniture. I expect from your high conscience to increase my wage in accordance with my expertise and to save me from this terrible financial situation before I am obliged to sell the bed I sleep on.

Weft bobbin foreman assistant Mehmet

The comparison of the petitions of the two Mehmets reveals two striking similarities. First, is the emphasis on being a “good worker”. While Mehmet the dyer was referring to gaining the favourable opinion of his superiors, Mehmet the weaver refers to being continuous at work and having certain expertise. The latter also cites his immediate return to the factory after military service and his acceptance of the lower pay as his positive qualities. Second, both workers compare themselves with their fellow workers while formulating their demands for an increase in the face of the very harsh financial conditions in which they were forced to live.

The resemblance between the two petitions stops at this point by giving way to a striking difference in language. In contrast to Mehmet the dyer, Mehmet the weaver is no longer begging, neither is he referring to himself as “the destitute” or “the servant.” Instead, he is raising his expertise, which, he claims, should be taken into consideration while his wage level is determined. Well aware that his level of experience and skills are not given the corresponding rewards, he wrote (or had someone write for him) with a tone of exasperation. Finally, in the last sentence of his petition, where he clearly formulated his demand, Mehmet presents himself as a worker who “expects” rather than “dares to take refuge in.”

There are four notes under this petition. The first one, probably from Mehmet’s foreman, confirms that Mehmet is indeed hardworking and supports his demand for a five piastres increase. The second, by another administrator, repeats this confirmation and support.
The third one, probably penned by the chief of the personnel department, provides information on the dates of his arrival and departure, and his wage over time. When he wrote the petition, Mehmet’s wage scale was 60 piastres; the last increase to his wage was made in December 1946. The fourth note was the shortest: “notifying [him] that he should wait since he did not complete his time”. The required time was completed in June but Mehmet did not get an increase then either. Finally in September 1947, he wrote another petition:

Substance: settling my account.
The following is my wish.
I have been working at the bobbin department as an assistant foreman for ten years. My hourly wage is 30 piastres. Although on 10th of June, 1947 both the production unit and the management ordered an increase I could not get any results. Since it is impossible for me to support my family of four with 52 liras a month I kindly request your permission to close my account.

To understand what Mehmet meant with “impossible to support my family with 52 liras a month”, it would suffice to note that in 1946, a family buying two loaves of bread a day would spend 34.6 per cent of Mehmet’s monthly income. Five months had passed after Mehmet wrote that he was about to sell his bed and although he was entitled to an increase three months before he wrote the last petition, his wage had not increased. Once more, it was noted under his petition that he was a hardworking worker without absenteeism and thus requested a 5 piastres increase in his hourly wage. Although the note had the same date with Mehmet’s petition, the increase came almost a month later. What is most striking in this part of Mehmet’s story is the fact that in his personnel file, the increase was attributed to him being a hard worker. Mehmet’s struggle to receive what he thought he deserved was thereby lost in the official records since it would be this note which the inspectors would hear about at their visits or when they asked about information on the workings of the factory. As such, his story constitutes an example on how instances of resistance are silenced in the archives.

So far, I have given examples of petitions that asked for an increase on the grounds of extremely harsh financial conditions. What is common to these petitions is their humble tone in order to convince the management that the petitioner both needs and deserves a wage increase. On the one hand, by means of describing their dire situation with details from their private and family lives, these workers appealed to the management as their protector against

the hardening living conditions. The wording of the petitions suggests that a strictly hierarchical structure of labour-management relations prevailed at the factory. Using words such as “benevolence” and “despair,” the workers mostly stayed away from the discourse of rights and obligations. On the other hand, the emphasis they put on the category of deserving an increase could be read as a sign that they were aware of the difficulty of finding experienced and skilled workers in the context of an ever-changing labour force at the factory. Likewise, by making comparisons with their fellow workers, they revealed that they had a vision of a fair management policy, which would reward the entire workforce in the same manner. At times, they used the threat of leaving the factory, which worked in some cases and did not work in others. Overall, the petitioners refrained from using a discourse of workers’ rights and any sort of implication of a collective action.

I will now introduce the stories of two workers who used far more contentious discourses in their appeal to the factory management. The timing, the vocabulary, and the addressees of their written demands and complaints illustrate the wide array of strategies used by the Bakırköy workers in their efforts to demand justice.

**One Worker, Multiple Petitions: Mustafa vs. the Management**

Mustafa’s first arrival at the factory was in 1944. After an undefined period of time, his record was erased due to absenteeism, as we learn from later-dated correspondence. When he was recruited in January 1945, a rather strange note was written in his file: recruited under the condition that he would be fired if he was seen to be undisciplined again. The note is strange because Mustafa was not a weaver. He was employed in the yarn department but was soon transferred to the dyeing department. That he was still recruited despite the situation of the labour market at the time suggests that he was a skilled worker. The next dated set of documents in his file is a series of correspondence between the factory and the Workers’ Insurance Administration on a job accident he had in September 1946. While oiling the cogwheel of a sizing machine, his hand got caught in the machine. He lost a small piece of his index finger and the last nodal of his middle finger on his right hand.

Mustafa was ‘lucky’ with the timing of the accident because the social insurance law had just been approved by the parliament on 1 January 1946 and the insurance schemes had started on 1 July. The scheme consisted of insurance against occupational diseases, accidents

451 Mustafa Arap.
and deaths as well as maternal insurance. Having lost 15 per cent of his general bodily strength in the accident, Mustafa was entitled to forty days of rest and thirty-four days of partial payment (since there were six Sundays in these forty days). He was supposed to start working again on 29 October, but as the correspondence between the factory and Worker’s Insurance Institution shows, he asked the doctor to start a day earlier due to his bad finances. The doctor’s report noted that his wound was not yet healed, but he could work if he continued to come for medical dressings for five days. Mustafa returned to work on the 28th but when the insurance agency asked him about this, he firmly denied it.

The doctor’s report noted that his wound was not yet healed, but he could work if he continued to come for medical dressings for five days. Mustafa returned to work on the 28th but when the insurance agency asked him about this, he firmly denied it.

The amount of money Mustafa was supposed to receive from the insurance was 20.41 Turkish liras for 34 days. Disregarding the differences in daily pay for the days he spent at the hospital and the days he rested at home, the daily sick pay for him was 0.60 liras, i.e. 60 piastres a day. When he was recruited in 1945, Mustafa was earning 20 piastres an hour. Thus, the sick pay he received was 37.5 per cent of his daily wage. In light of these figures, two points can be made about Mustafa’s playing a double game about the date of his return to work. First, it shows the extent of his desperation. Not only did he come to work with an unhealed wound, he also had to lie to the insurance company to get 60 piastres more. In fact, his file contains an earlier dated document demonstrating the extent of his financial desperation. Seventeen days before the accident, he had spent his seven off days working. Thus, when he had the accident, he had been working non-stop at least for one full year. Second, the whole correspondence shows that Mustafa knew the rules of the game. He seems to be completely aware of the workings of the bureaucracy and, although it was only two and a half months after the insurance payments started, he had enough knowledge to play tricks on the system.

Another incident happened in April 1947, which supports the idea that Mustafa was very quick in reacting to the changing conditions of work and pay at the factory. In February 1947, Sümerbank had decided to increase the production of woollen and cotton textiles since imports were not enough to meet the difference between national production and consumption levels. The newspaper article reporting this decision noted that the Bakırköy Factory had already started running 24 hours a day with three shifts. Mustafa was not happy with the change:

452 “İşçi Sigortaları”, Cumhuriyet (4 Jan 1946); “İş Kazaları ve Analık Sigortasının Tatbiki”, Cumhuriyet (1 July 1946); “İşçi Sigortaları”, Cumhuriyet (2 July 1946).
While I was working for 11 hours three months ago, I am employed on average for eight hours now and I am in terrible situation. Being promised an increase, I have been waiting so far and thus my deprivation has been caused. I declare and kindly request with utmost respect that my hourly wage would be increased in the light of my present situation.

The notes under the petition stated that Mustafa’s hourly wage was increased to 30 piastres more than seven months ago and that his wage scale was 40 piastres an hour. Approximately three weeks after this petition, his wage was 35 piastres. However, circumstances continued to deteriorate for Mustafa. In July 1947, he was fined 200 piastres, in other words his wage for 5.7 hours of work, for having stopped working 20 minutes before the meal break during the night shift. On top of this, by August 1948, he had not received any wage increase for sixteen months. Having made numerous attempts to ask for a wage increase at different levels of management, on 20 August, he wrote a petition addressed directly to the factory manager:

I have been working as a [worker who oils the machines] in different parts of the factory for the last four years. During this period I have not abstained from doing all the work of different departments with my conscience and efforts as well as not falling behind in my job. It is for this reason that it’s because [sic] of the care I have given to the duty lately I have lost my future by getting caught in the cogwheel. Nevertheless I still work at the same job in the weavery. I have been deceived with promises of increase for the last two or three months by my foreman, my superintendent and the chief of management [and] at my last attempt showing the way out in a threatening way, they told me it would be given when the time comes. From Ankara to the management, from the management to its chief, they said that Mr. Manager did not give it. I have been waiting for you. I have been waiting amidst all these doubts hoping that [the increase] would come at any time. I have become obliged to write this petition upon Your Worship’s return from leave.
I present and make a formal demand that an increase would be made by way of assigning and ordering the required offices.

The most telling point of this petition is the way Mustafa turns to different levels of management both verbally and written. The way he addresses the manager here shows that he is completely unsatisfied with what was going on at the level of the shop floor. Although he was told that he would receive an increase in due time, Mustafa thinks that he is being deceived and put off with, what he calls, promises. Like many others, he first asserts what a good worker he is, of course without mentioning all the problems he had had with the
management before. We can conclude from the opening sentences of his petition that he truly believes good work should not be left unrewarded. Besides, by way of citing the fact that he had not abstained from doing all the work he was given in different departments, Mustafa implies there are other workers who were doing otherwise. Above, we read such an example from Mehmet’s file. The assignment of a new task could escalate to an argument between the worker and the foreman causing the former to be fired. Mustafa is careful to make it known that even if he was assigned different tasks, he always carried them out. Later, however, we shall see that job demarcation became a problem for him as well.

**Losing a Finger or a Future?**

In contrast to the other petitioners I analysed earlier, Mustafa has one other asset to use while making a demand. He was a man with less than ten fingers still doing the same job that he had been doing before the accident. Probably thinking that it was time to take advantage of this circumstance, Mustafa attributed his accident to the utmost care he had given to his duty. From the use of the conjunction “nevertheless,” we can conclude that he finds it worth mentioning that he still works in the same job. Mustafa’s petition, in a way, has two main covert threads: First, the detailed description of his sense of duty, which he still has, although it was the reason for the accident, evokes the notion of “sacrificing for duty”, although he does not use the word “sacrifice” openly. Second, his narrative depicts the factory manager as the ruler who is actually unaware of what was going on between the lower level of management and the workers. Mustafa believes that if the manager knew what was going on he would “assign and order the required offices”. Whether Mustafa was naïve enough to think that this was actually the situation or that he was just playing along with the game, we cannot say. But the fact remains that Mustafa was not refraining from any effort to convince the manager that he was a man with no future, as we shall see below.

Although nothing is written beneath Mustafa’s petition, we understand, from another petition from the department of mechanical engineering in September 1948, that Mustafa’s petition was not successful. Apparently Mustafa created a scene in the factory that day which was described in the following manner:

*To the Factory Management,*

*An increase was not given to Mustafa Arap, a worker at the maintenance department, because of his not working and being indifferent to his job. This time on 11th of September 1948 he*
came to the machine engineering department and demanded an increase and was told that he should first work, he could get an increase after he is appreciated by his foreman and engineers, it was now required that he go back to his work. Without returning to his work, he uttered threats by saying “tell me who is not giving me the increase.” Although he was again advised in a calm way to go back to his work, he was seen to be waiting in the corridor even two hours after and although he had been warned that it would be necessary to cut his daily wage because, although he punched his card, he had not been at work from the morning to noon, he started threatening by saying: “cut two daily wages if you wish, I am not leaving.” We declare that this worker who is not working, not obeying the orders, and who dares to threaten even the engineers cannot work at our department and we present the situation to your higher thoughts.

The first thing we understand from this petition is that, although Mustafa’s petition to the factory manager was unsuccessful, it did not stop him because of his strong belief that he deserved an increase. Under the petition from the engineering department, a note ordered that Mustafa would be given a warning and informed that, if he were to repeat this behaviour, he would be fired. The warning must have been given on the same day as Mustafa wrote another petition immediately, this time addressed to the factory management. The only difference was that his demand was not limited to an increase only.

A Wage Increase and Humane Treatment

Mustafa described the incident, which we learnt about from the petition of the mechanical engineering department, in the following words:

13.09.1948

To the Management of Sümerbank Cloth Factory,

The following is my request.

I have been working at the factory for the last four years. Due to my superiors’ gratification I have received an increase in the amount of five piastres three times. Thank you but this time I again applied to ask for an increase. Unfortunately our chief put me off by threatening me multiple times and finally today he is reducing me to a bad position by way of making

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454 We could speculate that Mustafa is writing the petitions himself judging from the fact that he does not lose any time in answering the petitions from the management. Also, various language mistakes, both grammatical and verbal, and confusions, suggest that they were probably not written by a professional. When he was recruited in 1945, Mustafa wrote in his application petition that he was literate, a very rare statement in the whole sample.
Understandably, the two testimonies differ considerably in terms of pointing at the party responsible for the escalation of the situation. While in the petition from the engineering department, Mustafa is depicted as an aggressive worker who would not obey the orders of his superiors, while in Mustafa’s petition the chief of the department is accused of making threats and shouting insults. If we consider it to be credible for a moment, the engineering department’s petition signifies two very important things. First, it shows how the management dealt with the workers according to the rules and regulations of the factory. The petitioner claims that the reasons Mustafa did not receive a raise were explained clearly, as well as what he should do to get one in the future. At a later stage, when Mustafa, allegedly, started threatening the engineers in order to find out who did not give him the raise, they threatened him with a wage deduction for not attending to his work.

The second point we can infer from this petition concerns Mustafa’s response to this threat: “cut two daily wages if you wish, I am not leaving.” Remembering that Mustafa was financially so desperate that he returned to work one day before his days of sick pay had actually ended, this response is very striking in that the situation made Mustafa indifferent to the danger of losing a part of his wage. When considered together with Mustafa’s urge to find out “the responsible person” for not giving him the raise, his decision to risk his two days’ wage might signify that the situation had become highly personal for Mustafa. Indeed, his previous petition addressed to the factory manager directly implied that he did not trust the foreman, the superintendent and the chief of management. That was why he turned to the manager, the fair but uninformed overseer as Mustafa implied prior.

“… the order and the discipline of the workplace …”

In line with the above interpretations, Mustafa’s petition about the incident with the engineering department assumes a distinction between the “good” and the “bad” part of the factory management. After acknowledging and thanking the department for the three wage increases he received in four years, Mustafa singles out the superintendent as the unjust superior. In his claim, his demand for a raise was met with threats on numerous occasions. On top of this, Mustafa complained that he was insulted and was not given the raise. The final sentence of the petition has a curious tone in that Mustafa asks for his right to be defended but
does not specify how. Is he simply asking for an increase? Or is he asking for punishment of the superintendent who “is reducing me to a bad position by way of making indictments against me that do not pertain to humanity”?

Unfortunately, the management believed the engineering department’s version and wrote the following harshly formulated warning letter to Mustafa:

Mustafa Arap  
Maintenance Department, Oiler  

According to the labour contract between us, while it is required that you attend to your job at all times, it was ascertained that you left your duty with the excuse of following your petition personally and behaved against the order and discipline of the workplace as a response to your superintendent’s calling you to go back to work. In accordance with the 16th article of the internal factory regulations it is forbidden to follow your affair personally. I give you a warning about the necessity of ameliorating your situation which upsets the order and regularity of our workplace and continues despite the admonitions and warnings also made by our department: [I] notify you that in the case of reiteration of your behaviours against the factory discipline and regulations your employment will be terminated.  
Management  
14.09.1948  

The aforementioned article of the internal regulations document reads:

“It is forbidden that the workers follow their business personally. For their objections and complaints they appeal to the superintendent of their department through their supervisors. Decisions on these objections and complaints disclosed by the factory management through the mediation of the appointed clerks are absolute.”

Once more, basing the whole argument and the discourse of the warning petition on the objective rules and regulations of the factory, the management effectively closed the means of further discussion on the matter of both the wage increase and the alleged claims of mistreatment in this case. However, Mustafa was still bitter about the incident as we can conclude from the escalation of his disobedience.

455 “Sümerbank Bakırköy Sanayi Müessesinde Uygulanacak İç Yönetmelik”, Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 404, IISH.
In June 1949, Mustafa was fined the amount of his daily wage for disobedience to his foreman. Although there are other cases of fining the workers for disobeying their foreman as we saw in Chapter 2, Mustafa’s case is again unusual in that he did not agree to sign the wage deduction note. This could be read in two ways: Either Mustafa did not recognise the authority of the management in punishing him for disobeying his foreman, who was probably the same foreman Mustafa was complaining about in his petitions a few months before, or Mustafa thought that by not signing the bill he could avoid the legal sanctions. He resorted to this strategy once more, at a later stage, when he was in serious trouble with the factory management.

What Makes a Good Worker?

Article twenty-nine of the internal regulations of Bakırköy Factory states that every worker is obliged to punch his control card at the beginning and the end of the working day. In January 1948, Mustafa’s card was confiscated due to absenteeism. Having been imprisoned for fifteen days, Mustafa had not been able to come to work. Upon his return he wrote the following petition:

To the factory management,

I have been working as an oiler for the last three years. I have not been absent even for one day. This time I became drunk in Istanbul, served in prison for fifteen days. [I have heard that] they confiscated my card because I was absent. Since it is impossible that such a case will happen again I kindly ask for my card to be returned.

The internal regulations were clear stating that, in the case of three days of absenteeism in a row, the worker could be fired. This was what happened to Mustafa. Upon his release, he immediately returned to the factory where, as he had claimed before, he had been working under conditions of deprivation. Once again, he made it clear that he was a good worker who came to work regularly. The first note at the bottom of his petition concluded that in case there is no legal objection, he could be employed in his old position. A second note asked for an investigation to determine whether he was indeed a hardworking, continuous and obedient worker. The result of the investigation did not support Mustafa’s claims to be a “good” worker: “It is accepted by his foreman and fellow workers that the aforementioned worker has a nature which is apt to disorderliness. Although he works fine, he was observed to be
Despite this negative evaluation, Mustafa was recruited again a few days later under the precondition that he would be fired in case of further undisciplined behaviour.

As is clear from these statements, state factories tried to ensure that the morality of the workers was decent. An example of such practices was the evaluation of claims to marriage allowance in cases of a second marriage. Before granting the marriage allowance, the factory made a court inquiry about whether the worker was at “fault” in the collapse of the previous marriage. Another example is the requirement of a certificate of good conduct as part of the job application procedure. Once at the factory, judgments on the morals of the workers had a considerable effect at times of crisis. Consider the following example. When, in 1944, Mehmet the dyer was in trouble with the foreman of the dyeing department, because he did not do the task he was given, he was fired but he managed to return in twelve days. When, in 1950, the incident became an issue because of Mehmet’s seniority claims, the head of the personnel department opened the case again by writing that Mehmet was “not that brusque and defiant” and that “he did not think of anything else but his job.” Thanks to his proper morals, Mehmet’s status of dismissal in 1944 had been changed to temporary leave, meaning his eight years of service between 1936 and 1944 were counted in his seniority benefits.

Mehmet’s file also contains an example of the control of the factory over the workers outside the factory. In 1942, he wrote to the management the following petition:

To the management,

The following is my request.

My wife 2642 Kesire who works at the control department of your factory has run away after robbing my house, she also left the factory. I have heard that she is coming back to the factory. I kindly request from you that this woman who would infuse immorality to the humankind would not be recruited.

This petition is significant for three reasons. First, it shows how the personal lives of the workers affected their career decisions. Similar to other women at Bakırköy Factory, Kesire’s family life is an important factor in shaping her decisions about staying at the factory. She left the factory in October 1940, probably after the incident with her husband. Second, the petition illustrates how the discourse of (im)morality was strongly present in the factory. Mehmet’s request was rejected on the grounds that his wife had not done any wrong and that she had submitted a certificate of good conduct. Regardless of its result, this petition is significant in

456 Mehmet Karagözü.
that it establishes the image of the factory as the regulator of the lives of the workers in the eyes of the workers themselves. More interesting is the fact that the workers themselves also accepted the involvement of the factory in their private lives.

**Workers’ Representative as a Mediating Agency**

As I have shown above, Mustafa had an incident with the factory management in 1948 and had been warned about his behaviour over and over again. He managed to remain at the factory, however, until the final incident between himself and the management in 1950. The correspondence regarding this incident started with the following petition:

> To the worker representation agency,
> I have been penalised with 27 days of imprisonment because of a minor incident I caused on 6.3.1950 outside [the factory]. I kindly request that the required procedure is undertaken to avoid the termination of my affiliation with the factory.

The peculiarity of this petition among all others in the sample is that it is the first case in which the institution of worker’s representatives is mentioned. The institution was introduced in 1939 with the promulgation of the “Charter of Reconciliation and Arbitration of Work Disagreements” based on the 1936 Labour Law. In the absence of legal rights for workers’ self-organization to undertake collective action, the charter defined the mechanism of conflict solving between labour and capital. According to the first article of the charter, workers’ participation in the process had been ensured by the presence of workers’ representatives who were supposed to be elected every two years in their workplaces.

In practice, the mechanism did not work properly for a number of reasons. As could be expected, employers interfered in the election process. They also tried to have control over the freely elected representatives. In December 1948, for example, a worker representative sent a letter to a newspaper complaining about the employers firing the representatives they could not control. The newspaper’s response tried to ensure the representative that the new changes in the Labour Law would include solutions to that problem. Four months later, the same newspaper again tried to convince the workers that it was their right and duty to freely vote in the elections by referring to the article of the aforementioned charter which forbid

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457 “İşçi Mümessilleri İçin Yeni Hükümler ve Sigorta İş!”, İkdam-Gece Postası (25 Dec. 1948), Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 148, IISH.
manipulation of voting and counting processes in the representative elections.\textsuperscript{458} The institution of workers representatives also continued after the emergence of the trade unions since the trade unions were not allowed to take part in the negotiation process until 31 January 1950. With the change in the seventy-eighth article of the Labour Law, trade unions were recognised as an agency in collective work agreements and the workers representatives were protected against lay off. After this date, there was a dramatic increase in the collective work agreements, which were increasingly initiated by trade unions.\textsuperscript{459}

With this background information in mind, let us now return to Mustafa’s story. As mentioned above, his petition is the only document in the sample that mentions the worker representative at Bakırköy Factory. In fact, Mustafa resorted to the same institution a second time. But different from the previous one, this time he addressed the factory management through the mediation of the worker’s representative:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Through the agency of worker representation,}\\
\textit{To the higher office of Bakırköy Sümerbank Cloth Factory}\\
\textit{My request.}\\
\textit{While working in the weavery department of the factory as an oiler I have been sent to court for drunkenness and sentenced to a 150 lira fine and one month in prison. I notified the personnel [department] with a petition through the factory representatives. And now, although I applied to start my job after having finished my sentence they do not take me telling me “leave today and come back tomorrow”. I am working for three liras a day as an amele\textsuperscript{460} in the garden. Since it is extremely difficult to live on the money I get now, I request that this petition is accepted and the required formality is done in order for me to be taken back to my previous position. 15.04.1950.}
\end{quote}

As we saw earlier, Mustafa is a very alert and audacious worker in terms of learning the changes in the legal structure and fighting for his rights, both by means of personal conversations and petitioning. As the case of the accident in 1946 and the ensuing correspondence illustrate, he tried to take advantage of the then recently issued insurance scheme by playing a double game with the management and the insurance agency. In the later petitions, unlike many others who wrote for similar reasons before, he did not refrain from

\textsuperscript{458} “Mümessil Seçiminde Dikkat Edilecek Noktalar”, İkdam-Gece Postasi (2 Apr 1949), Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 148, IISH.\textsuperscript{459} Melih Göktan, “Türkiye’de İş İhtilafları ve İşgücü ile Münasebetleri”. Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 347, IISH.\textsuperscript{460} The definition of the word is given below.
using the discourse of “rights.” Thus, the reader might ask why he did not turn to the trade unions in this case and still petitioned through the representative. The fact was that even if Mustafa had wanted to use the trade union to appeal to the factory management in order to get his job back, he could not because the trade unions could only intervene in cases of collective disagreements, which, by definition, required the participation of at least one fifth of the workforce at a factory. Thus, we can read Mustafa’s case as an example of how the workers’ struggles were individualised and isolated. Despite the recognition of work disagreements in the 1936 Labour Law, in practice, workers’ possibility of claiming their rights had already been crippled from the start.

A Reversed Order: From İşçi to Amele

Returning to the content of Mustafa’s petition, we see that his employment was terminated exactly three days after what he called “a minor incident” in accordance with the thirty-fourth article of the charter of internal regulations. If we assume that he came out of prison around 3 April, he was unemployed for more than ten days when he wrote the second petition complaining about him not being recruited. Mustafa uses the word “amele” while describing the work he is doing in the garden. The Turkish Language Institution Dictionary defines amele as a worker who works for a daily wage but the term in daily usage denotes an unskilled labourer who works for low or subsistence wages. The political importance of the term within Turkish labour history stems from the pejorative meaning it acquired over time and the demands of the workers to be called “işçi”, the literal translation of worker. What Mustafa meant with amele remains a mystery. If, by garden, he meant the courtyard of the factory, perhaps he was doing some sort of portage or construction work. If he meant agricultural land, however, he might have done some agricultural work on a daily basis. Regardless of the content of the work he was doing in the garden, it is obvious that Mustafa preferred industrial work, specifically his previous work, as we shall see below.

Two weeks after this petition, Mustafa was back at the factory. In his application document, in response to “the kind of work he asks for” is specified “rib carrier.” Indeed, he was employed as a rib carrier. However, this is a curious point since Mustafa was missing

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461 The article reads as follows: “Those workers who do not show up at work without a rightful excuse may lose one day’s wage the first time this happens, and two day’s wage in the second time. The affiliation of those who do not show up for three days in a row is terminated” (“Sümerbank Bakırköy Sanayi Müessesinde Uygulanacak İç Yönetmelik.” Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 404, IISH).
parts of two of his fingers on his right hand due to the accident in 1946. Thus, it is strange for him to be employed as a carrier instead of an oiler. The situation must also have been unpleasant for him, as we learn from a letter written by the chief of the production department complaining of Mustafa’s disobedience:

11.05.1950

To the factory management,

The account of 8040 Mustafa Arap, who started working at our enterprise on 2/1/1945 as an oiler at the weavery, was settled up on 09.03.1950 due to his ten days long absence. Although he reapplied and asked for his old job having not been able to find employment somewhere else, since his position could not be left empty for a long time, he was promised to be employed as a rib carrier for the time being and to be transferred to an open position of oiler in any department later on. It has been seen that Mustafa Arap, whose entrance was made on 28.4.1950 as a rib carrier, has punched his card but did not do the task he was assigned to and had been walking around in other departments. I kindly request he is notified that if this situation continues, his employment will be terminated.

Chief of production department

Four points arise from this petition. First, it claims that the length of Mustafa’s absence was longer than he accepted. According to the petition of the management, he had been absent for ten days when his account was closed on 9 March. But, as I showed earlier in the petition addressed to the worker representative, Mustafa claimed that the incident that resulted in his imprisonment took place on 6 March. It should also be noted that this petition was not dated and since it was not addressed to the management directly but to the representative, it could have been written after the termination of employment. By now, we have enough reason to think that Mustafa was able to arrange a forgery.

The second point concerns the statement that Mustafa had not been able to find employment elsewhere, which is in tune with the news on the crisis of the textile industry in 1949 and 1950. The drought in 1949 triggered a wave of migration from Anatolia to Istanbul, which further intensified the problem of unemployment. According to a newspaper article, the number of unemployed job seekers rose from twenty thousand to twenty-five thousand in a month following the drought. In order to avoid further reductions in labour force, the Ministry of Labour took the measure of shortening the working day, among other

The severity of the pressure on the workers could be understood from the following incident reported on 7 March, 1950. A foreman in the Bakırköy Factory was fired after being reported to the management for carrying a knife and beating up a young female worker at the factory. The following day, he came to the factory with his wife and begged to be taken back, but he was told that the termination of his employment was in accordance with the charter of internal regulations, which specifically stated that disturbing the female workers constituted a reason for being fired. After two hours of waiting for the manager in the garden, the foreman had another chance to talk to him but again received a negative answer. Finally, he stabbed the manager multiple times causing minor injuries.

A Hidden Form of Resistance: Task and Time Bargaining

The third point arising from the petition concerns the manner in which the application forms are filled out. Although Mustafa’s application form states that he had asked to be a rib carrier, Mustafa turned down the position refusing to do that job and, later, he openly complained of being employed in that position. Indeed, in another application form, Mustafa’s position was first specified as an oiler, which was then crossed out and changed to a rib carrier. It might have been the case that the factory management employed Mustafa as a carrier, hoping that he would not get the job or maybe leave it after a while. Although the charter of internal regulations clearly stated that getting drunk constituted a reason for getting fired, it did not specify whether workers were not allowed to get drunk in or outside the factory. Mustafa was clever enough to specify in his first petition to the worker representative that "the minor accident" happened outside the factory.

The last point we can infer from this petition concerns the short note written beneath the original text, advising that the management should always address Mustafa with a written document. This note is unique in the sample of personnel files. Above, I cited another incident when Mustafa did not sign the wage deduction note in June 1949 and suggested two possible explanations for this behaviour: Either Mustafa did not recognise the management’s authority or he thought that by not signing he could avoid the legal sanctions. The second explanation

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466 Section C of the 37th article reads as follows: “The affiliation of those workers who disturb the women workers in their conduct, who gamble and get drunk, could be immediately terminated” (“Sümerbank Bakırköy Sanayi Müessesinde Uygulanacak İç Yönetmelik”). Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 404, IISH.)
becomes more plausible in light of the note by the management as cited above. However, as we shall see later on, this strategy did not help Mustafa a great deal.

Apparently, the petition by the chief of the production department had worked as Mustafa was warned about his rejection of working as a rib carrier. In his taxonomy of worker responses, Robin Cohen defines task and time bargaining as a hidden worker response directed to the managerial control of the labour process. Among the forms of resistance against the attempts of the management to have more control over the labour process, Cohen includes the worker’s efforts to “reduce his exploitation by adhering overstrictly to job specifications and rules detailing his work.” Mustafa’s petition exemplifies what Cohen calls a “work to rule and job demarcation dispute”, which is “often triggered off by the managerial redefinition.” In Mustafa’s case, the managerial redefinition comes after a contentious decision of termination of his employment. When he was taken back, he was given a completely different task, possibly as a disincentive. How Mustafa resisted this change constitutes the subject of the next section, which introduces us to a whole new chapter of workers’ responses to managerial control at Bakırköy Factory.

Mustafa Strikes Back

Dated 7 July 1950, Mustafa’s next petition starts with a statement indicating that he had clearly understood what he had been accused of:

I have been notified about the orders of the concerned enterprise dated 1.6.950 regarding my laying off on 15.6.1950 according to the related article of the labour law arguing that I have not been attending my job for one reason or another while I am supposed to be taking care of my assignment at all times during working hours and that I have never tried to correct my condition although I had been given both oral and written notice. I kindly ask your permission to present and declare below that there has not been any warning received by myself concerning the indictment of carelessness towards duty ascribed to myself and that no warning concerning an invitation to my job by the chief of any service [department] has been received by myself:

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468 Ibid., p. 101.
469 Ibid., p. 101.
This petition is striking, first of all, for the dramatic change in its language compared to the previous ones. The wording of the earlier petitions gave the impression that they were written in an impulsive and hasty manner. Using simple but clear statements and highly official language, this time, Mustafa shows how serious he took the matter in his choice of formal aspects of his appeal. Perhaps the seriousness of the situation made Mustafa pay more attention to the wording of this petition since his previous, somewhat sloppy but very sincere short petitions did not help him much in his struggle. Underlined with a much more official tone, this petition starts by reiterating the accusations directed towards Mustafa and then introduces his main arguments in an analytical manner.

i) Besides not engaging in any activity against direction(s) in this enterprise where I have been working for eight years, I have never been warned or chided by the chiefs of services. If I was exposed to subsequent warnings and chidings in this way as it was proven [probably he means “claimed”] in this considerably long period of service, according to the directions of the enterprise in effect it would have been necessary to enforce procedures about myself one or subsequent times and this enforcement should have been established in records.

With this assertion, my earlier argument finds support: Mustafa did know that the warnings became official when they were signed by the two parties involved. If Mustafa’s case was handled as a single-headed work disagreement in which the worker representative(s) would call a meeting between the two parties, both the worker(s) and the employer(s) would have to sign the decision indicating an agreement or disagreement. This was a requirement brought by the Charter of Reconciliation and Arbitration of Work Disagreements of 1939. In the charter of internal regulations of the factory, however, there was no clause indicating that the worker should be notified officially in the case of warnings. Rather, the latter charter was worded in such a way that the management did not have to do much before firing a worker for various reasons.

Although Mustafa’s petition does not mention any involvement of a worker representative in his correspondence with the management at this stage, it is plausible that he was referring to this institution when he claimed that he did not receive any warnings. In any case, my previous point about Mustafa being well-aware of his rights and using the right strategy at the right time is solidified with the reasoning he presented here: If he was warned, where was the proof? If he disobeyed the rules, why was no punishment enforced on him? As much as the analytical character and the convincing mode of presentation of his argument, the
underlying tone of self-confidence is also striking. It is without any doubt that Mustafa had made considerable progress compared to the workers of the early 1940s who referred to themselves as “your servant” or “the destitute.” But Mustafa’s petition has much more to offer in order for us to trace the changes in worker’s (self-)perceptions.

From the Logic of Escape to the Logic of Control

The second argument that Mustafa presents in his petition reads as follows:

\[ ii) \text{ Recently, I have had the ill fortune to be sentenced to one month in prison because of a strife I had with somebody, outside the enterprise and the service [probably meaning outside the working hours]. When I joined the enterprise upon finishing the time [in prison] I officially wrote a petition objecting my employment for the service of carrying, which I am totally unfamiliar with [and which is] different from my real job, i.e. oiling, in form and content, without any reason and requested to given back my old service, oiling. It has been stated that it was considered to be a crime and a behaviour against the labour law that a worker, who has dedicated eight years of his life to service in the enterprise and who has had the ill fortune to lose the fingers on his hand, requested to be given back his actual duty of oiling in the face of being sent to the duty of rib carrying which he completely does not know...[unreadable] it is obvious that this could not be reconciled with any form of conscience and justice, [and] this consideration [unreadable]... directly constitutes a situation that causes my deprivation.} \]

My analysis of this part of Mustafa’s petition is based on a comparison between Mustafa’s reaction and reactions by other workers who found themselves in similar situations. Thus, I put aside Mustafa’s story and visit four examples of problems Bakırköy workers had with factory management. The earliest example concerns a similar incident to what Mustafa had. In 1941, Ali Akgül was working at Bakırköy Factory as a “weaver candidate”, as his foreman called him, together with his elder brother who was a weaver. When the foreman ordered Ali to clean his loom, Ali’s brother got involved saying that Ali would not clean and take the roll on the loom to the department of control. Frustrated with the behaviour of the two brothers, the foreman immediately wrote a petition to the chief of the weavery asking for their punishment since they violated the authority of the foreman and the discipline of the factory. This was necessary, he continued, in order not to set a bad example for the other workers. Management responded quickly by fining Ali in the amount of a weekly wage, which was outrageous for

\[ ^{470} \text{Ali Akgül.} \]
such kind of disobedience. The disproportion between the act of disobedience and the severity of the punishment suggests that Ali’s case could have been used to strengthen the control the management attempted to effect in the factory. No further correspondence is recorded in Ali’s file except for a note indicating that his employment was terminated because of absenteeism. After more than a year of working without any fines and leaves, Ali’s affiliation with the factory was cut twenty days after the foreman’s petition. The next document in his file is dated September 1948 and is an entry form.

The other three examples come from 1944, 1945 and 1947, respectively. As we saw above, Süleyman471 asked for the termination of his employment only three months after he started working at the factory because he could not make ends meet with the wage he received. However, he returned three years after to work for even less than he had made before. And yet again, only after five months of working, he left the factory after submitting a petition saying that he had to go for the harvest. The pattern ensued with his third time entrance in 1951. Our second example, Cemil472, wrote that he had to go to his hometown only after five months of employment in 1945. When he returned in March 1947, he had brought a letter indicating that he had worked at a private factory. His second employment period was also short: four months. This time he was “obliged to resign since I cannot make a living for my family with the wage I am earning.” He was back at the factory a year after this. The last example of Mehmet473, the weaver, is different from the other two in the sense that he did not actually have to leave the factory because after his petition in September 1947, asking for permission to leave because “it is impossible for me to support my family of four”, he received a wage increase and stayed at the factory.

Two concepts could help us understand the changes in the workers’ responses in these examples. The first concept encompasses exit and voice, which Albert O. Hirschman coined in his study that explores alternative ways of responding to deterioration in the performance of a certain institution.474 In this context, exit denotes the choice to quit the organization, in other words, it is voluntary separation from the job based on the belief that an improvement to the situation is unlikely.475 The concept of voice, on the other hand, is essentially a political

471 Süleyman Yapıcı.
472 Cemil Kotman.
473 Mehmet Gerçekker.
475 Ibid., p. 21.
response, which is defined as “any attempt at all to change rather than to escape from an objectionable state of affairs.”

The second concept comes from the field of labour historiography and is an application of Hirschman’s logic to labour studies. Cohen and Henderson argue that the struggles of newly proletarianised workers have a dual logic:

\[\text{On the one hand they express the logic of escape – escape from the work situation and, on the other, the logic of control – the struggle to stem their diminishing control over the labour process.}\]

Let us now reconsider the above examples in light of these two sets of concepts. In the cases of Süleyman and Cemil, a pattern of commonality arises. They both left and returned to the factory multiple times. I have presented ample evidence in Chapter Two to show that this was indeed a widespread practice among workers. Important to note in these two examples are the extremely short periods of employment. It was only after three and five months that they started that these two workers either openly stated that they cannot continue working for the wages they earned or gave other reasons which turn out to be cover-up excuses for the wage argument. The same goes for Mehmet’s case, since he also asked for permission to leave. In other words, all three workers risked unemployment to overcome the situation of being working poor. As such, their responses exemplify what Hirschman calls a disbelief in the possibility of a positive change in their situation at the factory.

As for Ali’s case, which is rather similar to Mustafa’s in that they both dispute job demarcation, his file is absolutely silent on what happened after he was fired. We know that he returned in September 1948, but what he did during the seven years between 1941 and 1948 is unknown. With two more intervals in 1949 and 1950, he continued working at the factory until 1957. Compared to how Mustafa responded to managerial control, which was much milder than that exerted on Ali, Ali’s complete silence suggests that he did not have the means to resist the management in 1941. Above all, as the third point he made in the petition demonstrates, Mustafa knew his legal rights very well.

\[476\] Ibid., p. 30.
\[477\] Robin Cohen and Jeff Henderson, “Work, Culture and the Dialectics of Proletarian Habituation”, in Contested Domains 33-34.
3) since I cannot be convinced that I have been subjected to ... [unreadable] the arbitrament of the charter and the Labour Law... [unreadable] as long as... [unreadable] a clear procedure based on official records indicating a notification about myself... [unreadable] about the matter explained in the first article... [unreadable] I request your orders about my being returned to my original duty in order not to cause my deprivation.

Despite the unreadable parts and multiple grammatical and lexical mistakes, one thing stands out in this part of the petition: Mustafa perceived it as his right to be employed under the same conditions after he returned from prison. His knowledge of the legal and institutional structure gave him the confidence, which previous petitions lacked.

**Deriving Conclusions from a Tale of Woe**

As a whole, Mustafa's petition demonstrates three significant changes in workers’ self-perception and relationship with the management. First, Mustafa’s petition is fundamentally different in language compared to the petitions containing a begging tone that I analysed earlier. Although Mustafa also uses phrases such as “my deprivation,” there is an agency in his language behind that deprivation: the management. Thus, the demand is not formulated in phrases such as “I respectfully ask ... in order not to be excessively aggrieved” or “I kindly ask you ... for an increase ... to the destitute in order not to cause my damnification” used in the petitions with a pleading tone. Instead, although the language he uses is polite, Mustafa's choice of vocabulary is much more assertive.

Second, the content of the demand is very different from the previous petitions in that Mustafa’s main concern is no longer his wage. Instead, he is raising the issue of task assignment. This is a unique example in the sample of Bakırköy workers. What the application forms indicate is that workers did not have a say in determining the kind of work they were employed for. In many cases, their answer to the question “what kind of job does the worker want?” was “any kind.” Also, the changes made to the forms, usually by crossing out certain words, shows that the decisions were subject to change according to the needs of the factory. Although there is a case of a dispute over job demarcation, as we saw in the foreman’s petition about Ali and his brother, no other worker contested the type of work he was assigned in the manner and to the extent that Mustafa did. If we remember that after the first incidence of imprisonment and the ensuing termination of employment, he had written a very desperate petition to be taken back to the factory since he could not live on his “amele”
-wage, his insistence on changing his position from a carrier to an oiler becomes even more striking. What we see here is very different from the earlier petitions in which the petitioners were grateful for the small wage increases they received.

Third, Mustafa formulated his demand so assertively that the petition, despite the careful wording of the last sentence, has almost a rebellious tone. Explaining the injustices he had been subjected to by the management, Mustafa did two things at the same time: While trying to convince the readers that he has been treated unjustly, he also threatens them implicitly with taking legal action if he is not given what he demands. Hence, the last part in which he states “I cannot be convinced” signifies a very different mentality from the previous examples. Mustafa exemplifies an early Republican period state worker whose relationship to the factory is not that of servitude or appreciation for the allegedly high level of social benefits as argued by many labour historians. He is a worker who requires and explanation, who has his own ideas about the workings of the factory discipline, who learns and adapts quickly and who is not a passive recipient of decisions concerning his life inside and outside of the factory.

**Mustafa’s Fate or the Verdict of History?**

Just as many petitions with a begging tone did not help their writers in the past, Mustafa’s petition also did not help him. Similar in style to the point-by-point explanations that Mustafa provided, the management wrote an official petition explaining his bad conduct at the factory one by one with the corresponding ramifications and the warnings issued to him. As we have already learned about all the fines Mustafa was given and all the problems he had (or “caused”, according to the management), I will leave out that part of the text that repeats these problems and only quote the last part:

*Other than these clear and certain proofs, although the employer has the right to terminate the work contract of those who are imprisoned for more than 3 days and whose punishment is not reprieved such as 15 days of imprisonment you were sentenced to due to a misdemeanour in 1948 and 30 days of imprisonment because of an incident you caused outside the factory this year, according to the law number 3008 [Labour Law], our management has tried to protect you, thinking you would be on the street without any means and thus carried out its duty of conscience. It was obliged to give the final decision about you in the face of your intolerable situation.*
This is the final document in Mustafa’s file. His five years of employment came to an end on 16 June 1950, despite all his efforts he to continue it. Although he lost his struggle in the end, his file as a whole signifies a very important transformation in the self-perception of the workers at Bakırköy Factory. Above, we saw how certain changes in language were already visible in workers’ petitions after the Second World War. Instead of a vocabulary containing phrases such as “the destitute”, “your servant”, “I am begging you”, we have seen that Mehmet the weaver referred to himself in the first singular pronoun and as a bobbin master; he “expected”, not “begged.” Moreover, upon learning that he would not be given a raise, he did not refrain from asking to close his account. In other words, when he saw that his voice was unlikely to change the conditions at the factory, he chose to exit the job instead of showing loyalty to the institution.478

In Mustafa’s case, further changes in language and content occurred. First, Mustafa not only petitioned for wage increases but also for other reasons including the way he was treated by the management, for example. He had certain ideas about how labour-management conduct should be and expressed them openly. Furthermore, he insisted that his appeals should be answered. In more than one case, he tracked them personally, though he was warned that this was forbidden by the Charter of Internal Regulations. He resorted to different strategies, ranging from physically intimidating the management personnel or refusing to sign the official documents notifying him about the warnings and fines he received, in order to claim his rights. Unfortunately, despite his assertiveness and insistence, Mustafa’s struggle was bound to fail since, as I explained earlier, workers’ struggles were highly individualised and isolated in the political context of the early Republican period.

Below, I introduce the story of another worker, Mümin, whose petition was the first to be quoted in the current chapter. We left him in July 1946 when he begged the management for a raise of five piastres. He continued petitioning in the following years and finally addressed an unprecedented addressee. His story demonstrates not only the limits of tolerance by the management towards workers’ complaints but also the effects of the change in politics on workers’ struggles.

478 Loyalty is the third category Hirschman defines as a response to dissatisfaction with the organization. Choosing neither exit nor voice, some members stick with the institution for a period of time. They “suffer in silence, confident that things will soon get better” (Hirschman, Exit, Voice and Loyalty, p. 38).
Learning the Rules of the Game: Mümin vs. the Management

Mümin was 28 years old when he started working at Bakırköy in 1938. His application form states that he already had experience as an oiler and thus he was employed as such in the maintenance department. Except for a one and a half months leave in 1940, which was between late July and early September and which, therefore, possibly suggests absenteeism due to the harvest season, he was a continuous worker for a considerably long time. According to his file, Mümin was never fined during his employment; he received many non-monetary provisions between 1945 and 1952 and 15 days of paid leave in 1945, 1946 and 1947. One of his periods of leave, probably in 1949 and for 5 hours in the afternoon, was given to him because he had “worked too much.” The earliest information about his wage dates from 1941. At the time he earned 18 piastres an hour. He had to wait for more than a year to receive an increase at the amount of 2 piastres an hour. After working at this wage level for more than a year, his hourly wage was raised to 25 piastres in January 1944 and to 30 piastres in November 1945. By then, the war was over, leaving behind a 300 per cent increase in consumer prices, but in July 1946, Mümin was still working for 30 piastres an hour according to the note of the supervisor beneath his petition. Moreover, he was probably earning less since the factories slowed down after the war and Bakırköy started three shifts of eight hours a day, which meant a reduction in the daily wages of the workers.

Under these conditions, Mümin wrote a petition to ask for an increase in July 1946. His complaint was that other workers similar to him in terms of levels of skill and experience, and the apprentices he himself had trained were earning 50 piastres an hour. During the nine years and nine months he had worked at the factory, he wrote, he had worked without any intervals. A favourable comment was added to the petition: “He has been receiving 30 piastres an hour since 1.11.1945. He can get an increase.” This commentary, however, is in contradiction with other documents in Mümin’s file, which indicate that Mümin had been receiving 35 piastres an hour since February 1946. A possible explanation might be that, although workers fulfilled the required conditions for a wage increase – that is, working six months at the same wage level and gaining the approval of the supervisors – many of them still did not receive an increase. It was the case that Mümin’s file was updated without him actually receiving an increase. His next increase came six months after he wrote this petition.

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479 I have noted above that this information might not be trustworthy since we have enough reason to believe that the forms were filled out by the clerks according to the labour needs of the departments in the factory at a given time.
and his hourly wage was increased to 35 piastres. His file suggests that the success of this petition, albeit the delay in the increase, was seized upon by him in the following years. After eight years of no written correspondence, Mümin started to effectively use petitioning to pursue his demands. In September 1947, he wrote another petition complaining that his wage was not enough for his subsistence. Surprisingly, this petition had the desired effect; eight months after his last increase, Mümin’s wage was raised to 40 piastres an hour.

By August 1948, Mümin either had a high level of self-confidence because of the success of the previous petitions, or he was in a difficult situation financially. Although he had received another increase in May 1948, i.e. seven months after the last one which was highly unusual, he wrote yet another petition complaining about the high cost of living, which made it very difficult for him to get by with his large family. This time, however, the comment written underneath was not favourable at all: “His counterparts have not received an increase in one and half-two years. He should wait for a fair treatment.” How long did he have to wait? Who were these counterparts? Why did they not receive an increase? What were the rules of the management about wage levels?

**Petitioning amidst Uncertainty**

Mümin had to wait thirteen months for the next increase, which made his hourly wage to 50 piastres. A month later, however, he received another increase of 5 piastres. His status did not change; he was still an assistant foreman in the maintenance department. His file does not include any petitions demanding an increase around this date. The information on wage increases we gather from his file suggests that there were no clearly defined rules or procedures concerning this matter. Not only was each state factory autonomous in determining workers’ wages, but clerks at different levels of management appear to have had their own opinion on matters of wage increase. In Mümin’s case, for example, during the period starting in 1942 until 1949, he always received increases in the amount of 5 piastres. In 1947 and 1949, increases followed one another within a relatively short period of time. In October 1950, however, Mümin received only a 3 piastres increase, which came more than a year after the previous one. In March of the following year, the increase was 9 piastres an hour.

All this information on wage levels is repeated in a petition written as a reply to the General Directorate of Sümerbank in April 1951. The records, the factory management claimed, showed that Mümin was given increases regularly in proportion to his seniority. It
also noted that, with the last increase, the hourly wage was 67 piastres but it actually amounted to 80 piastres an hour with the addition of the dearness allowance and it was determined on the basis of seniority and skill level. Mümin’s file does not contain any other petition written by him around this date. But from other documents in the file, we understand that he wrote a petition to a rather curious addressee: the Prime Ministry. Unprecedented in the sample, this petition apparently became an enormous issue at the factory. The following transcript, entitled “the transcript of the investigation of the petition”, illustrates the multiple facets of the worker-management relations at Bakırköy Factory. Not only does it display the workings of power relations at the factory, but it also provides us with a glimpse of a worker’s mentality and strategies he could devise in the face of changing attitudes of the factory management. Hence, the transcript is quoted here in full length.

The Interrogation

Fuat Ader [chief of auxiliary operations, F.A. from now on]: There is a petition that you have written to the Prime Ministry. Let’s talk about it with you and now I am reading in the presence of Mr. Aziz and Mr. Şükrü and Mr. Hayri. You are not an assistant foreman of 14 years at the maintenance department as you wrote in your petition.

Mümin Kılıç [M.K., from now on]: No, I am not.

F.A.: Who is your apprentice getting a bigger wage than you?

M.K.: No, I meant friend. And they are those operators who are my counterparts.

F.A.: Shall we also transfer you to the operations department?

M.K.: I do not want it.

F.A.: You spoke of a mistake in your petition. What is it?

M.K.: There is no mistake. What I intended to mean here was a comparison with my friends in the operations department.

F.A.: I do not know any apprentice with an hourly wage of 80 piastres in the entire operations department in the factory, tell me if there is any.

M.K.: I did not say apprentice, it was written wrong.

F.A.: Is the signature on the stamp yours?

M.K.: Yes, it is mine

F.A.: Are there any apprentices with an hourly wage of 71 piastres among your attendants?

482 In Turkish, this line is not in the question form. The literal translation would be: “Let’s give you to the operations department then.” I chose to translate it to English in the question form since I read it as an attempt by the chief to pressure Mümin using his own line of reasoning.
M.K.: No, there are not any.
F.A.: Do you think 67 piastres an hour is a low wage?
M.K.: I am entitled to 10 more piastres.
F.A.: You are an assistant foreman, aren’t you?
M.K.: Yes.
F.A.: You know all the things that an assistant foreman does. How do you measure an area?
M.K.: I don’t know how to take measurements.
F.A.: Can you use the measuring stick—the calliper?
M.K.: No.
F.A.: Describe a joint. Can you … [unreadable, G.A.]? (holding a sample in his hand)
M.K.: [no answer]
F.A.: How is a screw defined?
M.K.: We measure it.
He was given a calliper.
M.K.: I do not know the calliper and I cannot measure.
F.A.: How many … [unreadable] screws [are there]?
M.K.: One is finger [-sized] and the other one is millimetric.
F.A.: What is the finger?
M.K.: I don’t know.
F.A.: What type is the head of the screw in your hand?
M.K.: It is bone.
F.A.: Şükrü, you define the screw in his hand.
Şükrü Yalçın [assistant foreman at the maintenance department, S.Y. from now on]: 5/16, round headed screw.
F.A.: You tell me now, do you deserve this wage?
M.K.: I have not gone to school, sir.
F.A.: You said you have been working here for 14 years, how come you do not know this?
M.K.: Sir, I have been working for 14 years but I do not know this one.
F.A.: Do you deserve this money?
M.K.: I am also illiterate, I leave it to your conscience.
F.A.: Does this friend deserve more money? What is your opinion Şükrü?
S.Y.: You know it better.
Aziz Özk [assistant foreman at the maintenance department]: He cannot work independently but he can work in the employ of a foreman.
Has been read and jointly signed.
Depicting the direct encounter of a worker with the management, this document raises a number of invaluable points about the conduct between the two parties as well as about the mentality of a state worker. But before going into these, we should attempt to reconstruct, as much as possible, the content of Mümin’s petition to the Prime Ministry using the references to this petition in the transcript to the petition.

Mümin began working at Bakırköy in February 1938 as an oiler in the maintenance department. The first question directed to him in the investigation concerns his claim of fourteen years of seniority as an assistant foreman as of 1951. Mümin’s reply to this is straightforward: No, he was not a foreman assistant with fourteen years of experience. Why, then, did he claim so in his petition?

The Implementation of Scale of Salaries

The documents concerning Mümin’s wage increases and status changes in his file indicate that he was promoted to foremanship in February 1946. Different from the previous wage increases, this increase is explained as “promotion.” His job description changed from “maintenance oiler” to “maintenance assistant foreman” on this date. However, if we return to the petition that Mümin wrote in July 1946, we see that he had claimed to have worked as an assistant foreman for the last nine months, which means he got promoted in November 1945. Indeed, Mümin had received an increase on 1 November, 1945. However, his payroll document indicates that he was still employed as an oiler in the maintenance department at the time. Earlier, I noted that the information on the changes in the employment status, and sometimes including the wage levels, is in contradiction with the testimony of the workers and/or other documents including such information in the files. A possible explanation for this incongruence might be found in the inspection reports, which cite “the scale of salaries” as
one of the sources of confusion on wage levels. Osman Okyar explains the implementation of the scale of salaries and evaluates its effects on the state economic enterprises as follows:

Decentralization and freedom of initiative were dealt another very damaging blow when in 1940 the scale of salaries in the state economic enterprises was fixed by law and connected to the scale of salaries in the central government administration, with the aim of establishing parallelism between the two types of government employees. In the early times of Étatism salaries in state economic enterprises had been determined independently and freely with the result that certain high salaries had attracted attention and drawn criticism, and in 1940 the Government yielded to this criticism. This proved to be a crippling handicap in the operation of state economic enterprises. Especially when inflation developed, rate of remuneration increased in the private sector, while the salaries of government employees remained well behind. This led to the loss of the best and most dynamic personnel in the state enterprises.

Okyar approaches the issue from the perspective of changes in the decision-making process in individual enterprises in this period, while the inspection reports mention the problems related to the application of the scales. To Okyar, the fixing of the scales in 1940 limited the freedom of initiative of the state economic enterprises. However, the aforementioned inspection report indicates extreme difference among state-owned textile factories as late as 1945. According to this, while Bakırköy Factory had fifteen different scales of salaries, Defterdar Factory had thirty-two. Consequently, the difference between the highest and the lowest pay in these two factories was considerably high: 70 and 10 piastres an hour in Bakırköy and 110 and 9 piastres an hour in Defterdar. The difference was even more striking when factories in small towns were compared with those is Istanbul. The report criticises these differences claiming that they functioned as a pull factor for workers and caused them to change their location of work.

Besides these practical problems, scattered information from the personnel files suggests that there was a division among workers in Bakırköy concerning the implementation of scale of salaries. While some files explicitly mention the changes in the scale of salary of a certain worker, others give the impression that the pay rate was independent of a

485 Sümerbank İşletmelerinde İşletmede İnsan ve İşçi Meseleleri 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 41.
predetermined system. Furthermore, in some cases, although the worker received a promotion, his wage was not increased until a position became available in the higher paid salary scale. If we consider that, in July 1946, Mümin claimed that he had been an assistant foreman since November 1945, and that the management did not contest this petition, then we can assume that his case exemplified this problem. The incongruence between the dates of Mümin’s wage increase and his promotion might stem from the fact that he had been promoted before the wage scales were adjusted. In other words, he might have been given more responsibility without due pay. The situation caused a second disadvantage for him: the records specified his hourly wage as 35 piastres, whereas he actually worked at 30 piastres an hour.

The interrogation continues with the question on the apprentices who, as Mümin supposedly had claimed, were receiving higher wages than him. In fact, we are already familiar with this claim from Mümin’s earlier petitions. In his first petition, he had written: “My counterparts, as well as the apprentices that I teach, receive fifty piastres.” Five years after this first petition, he still believes that the wage levels of workers of different skill and experience levels were not determined in a just manner. Although he gives up this claim later in the investigation, it must have been an important argument in his petition since the investigator repeats it later on. Unfortunately, these two points are the only direct references to the content of Mümin’s petition in the transcript. Had he made other comparisons or given examples of the unfair treatment of workers by the management? We cannot find the answer in the transcript. However, it provides us with a lot more understanding of what Mümin had in mind.

Investigating the Investigation

Moving from the efforts to reconstruct the content of Mümin’s petition, we are faced with two questions. First, who are those present at the investigation? Second, what sort of ideas can we gather from the transcript in terms of worker-management relations at the factory? In addition to the three main production departments, Bakırköy Factory had a repair shop and other auxiliary departments such as the canteen. From the very beginning, Mümin had been employed in the maintenance department, which was responsible for taking care of the machines and other equipment in the production units. He was still working at this department as an oiler when he retired in 1970. The investigator was the chief of the auxiliary departments, i.e. the manager of the repair shop as well as other units such as the canteen. In
the hierarchical structure of the factory management, he was probably located under the factory director and the vice-director. The signature of the chief of the workshop, most likely the repair shop in this context, is also on the transcript, although he did not talk during the investigation according to the transcript. Also present at the investigation were two assistant foremen from Mümin's department. It seems that they were there as representatives of the counterparts that Mümin had referred to more than once in his petitions. Mümin was interrogated in the presence of four other employees, including the secretary, about a petition that he had written sometime between 11 April, the date of the first reply to the Prime Ministry by the factory management, and 30 June 1951, the date of the second reply with references to the aforementioned investigation.

Addressed by the informal, second-person singular pronoun “sen,” Mümin is first informed about the reason of the gathering: “There is a petition that you have written to the Prime Ministry. Let’s talk about it.” Although the chief first says that he would read the petition, either he does not do so or the secretary does not write it down. According to the transcript, he immediately starts off by refuting Mümin’s claim of seniority: “You are not an assistant foreman of 14 years at the maintenance department as you wrote in your petition.” Mümin’s reply is short and direct: “No, I am not.” Why, then did he write so in the petition? We could consider at least two plausible answers: either Mümin deliberately lied in his petition about his seniority to strengthen his demand of a higher wage or he really made a mistake. Later in the transcript we learn that Mümin did not write the petition himself. But let us go line by line and focus on the second attempt by the chief to corner Mümin with his own words. This time, without directly refuting Mümin’s claim, the chief makes a cunning move and asks Mümin to name the apprentices who received higher wages than him. As such, he recognises the plausibility of the allegation but he demands proof to substantiate it. Probably, as he expected, Mümin retreats once more and claims he actually meant “friends”, not apprentices. This time, Mümin was most likely twisting the truth. Let me explain why.

In July 1946, four months after his last wage increase, Mümin wrote a petition to the factory management to complain about his wage. He first expressed his dissatisfaction with the amount of the increase: “Although I have been working for such a [long] time, I have received only five piastres increase.” He knew that the increases were given according to seniority and he used it to strengthen his case. After explaining the severity of his financial situation, he moved onto his second complaint: “My counterparts, as well as the apprentices
that I teach, receive fifty piastres.” Specifying the apprentices in such manner, Mümin formulated his demand also with a reference to these “friends”: “...I respectfully ask from your high office to be given wages like my friends.”

The first two questions of the interrogator went quite badly for Mümin. He had already admitted two mistakes, or better said, he had admitted one mistake and lied about another, and more was coming from the chief who gives the impression that he was completely motivated to find the gaps and contradictions between Mümin’s petition and his oral testimony. As such, he did not miss the opportunity to set a new trap for Mümin using the answer he had given to the question about the apprentices. The friends of whom Mümin was speaking were the “operators.” Most probably, Mümin meant those working in the three main production departments in the factory. The word “counterparts” must be referring to those with similar levels of seniority. The subsequent two lines give the reader the impression that the chief is putting Mümin to a test by playing the good cop: “Shall we also transfer you to the operations department?” Mümin’s answer was a clear no. Although he was very insistent on getting the raise he claimed to deserve, he was completely against the idea of changing his department. As we noted earlier, Mümin was an oiler as was Mustafa who had also protested when he was employed in another job. Why, then, was it such a big problem to change one’s department within the factory?

Factories within a Factory

Two archival documents could shed light on this matter. The first one is an anonymous handwritten document on the writer’s observations at Bakırköy Factory. Although not dated, we can assume that it was written not many years after Mümin’s petition since it specifies the hourly wage at the factory as between 66 and 231 piastres. These incomplete notes give precise information about working conditions in different parts of the factory. The weaving department, for example, is reported to be extremely noisy: “It was as if cats were screeching while fighting. Here also, a worker was responsible for attending 24 looms. When we went into the dyeing department, the roaring in our ears was still continuing.” And the main problem at the dyeing department was its levels of dampness. In the midst of such terrible conditions, a head foreman provides (us? a visitor?) information on how the factory management took care of the workers: “The workers of this department are given utmost

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486 The word he uses is “işletmeciler”.
487 Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 402, IISH.
488 The document starts on p. 14 and goes until p. 21, with p. 20 missing.
We give them boots for protection against the dampness, half a litre of milk everyday and 3 sets of work clothes every year. Their contributions [probably referring to the social security premiums, G.A.] are also differently paid from the other workers.” Apart from displaying the head foreman’s complete identification with the factory management (“We give them…”), these words reveal the dangerously difficult and damaging working conditions in the dyeing department most clearly. A similar testimony is also found in the second archival material depicting working conditions at textile factories. This is a letter written by a textile worker, who was also a trade unionist, explaining why arthritis, tuberculosis, eye and kidney problems should be listed among occupational diseases caused by working conditions especially in the yarn departments.⁴⁸⁹ If we return to the analysis of the transcript in light of these first-hand testimonies, after eleven years of work at the factory, it is not surprising that Mümin refuses to be relocated even though it might involve a wage increase.

The transcript is somewhat repetitive after this point. The chief asks Mümin to clarify a mistake he mentioned in his petition. Once more the topic is the comparison with the other workers. Mümin gives in again: “There is no mistake,” the comparison is between himself and those in the operations department. But the unconvinced chief insistently refers to the apprentices suggesting that they were openly mentioned in Mümin’s petition. This time he specifies the alleged wages they received according to Mümin. There is not a single apprentice in the whole operations department earning 80 piastres an hour; Mümin should give names if there is any. Mümin backs down yet another time but this time he gives us an important clue about the content of his petition.

**On the Question of Authorship**

Above, while analyzing Mustafa’s petitions, I mentioned the possibility of workers getting somebody to write their petitions for them. The stylistic and discursive differences between Mustafa’s earlier petitions and the last petition he submitted just before he was fired suggested that when things got more serious, in other words, when the issue was not a wage increase or a disagreement with the management but the danger of losing the job, Mustafa turned to somebody else for help. The result was a much more analytical and well-formulated text than the previous ones, which were full of simple grammatical and lexical mistakes. This could also have been the case with Mümin who obviously got somebody else to write his petition to the Prime Ministry. In the first employment document he filled out in 1938,

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⁴⁸⁹ Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 384, IISH.
Mümin stated that he was literate. The three petitions he wrote in 1946, 1947 and 1948 are clear texts with well-formulated demands unlike Mustafa’s earlier petitions. Since the petition to the Prime Ministry is missing in the file, we cannot compare it with the earlier ones. Thus, we do not have enough information even to speculate on the actual writer of these petitions. However, Mümin’s reply to the chief’s question regarding the mistake he allegedly made strongly implies that this last one was not written by him: “I did not say apprentice, it was written wrong.” With this correction, or better put, ‘confession’, Mümin must have planted seeds of doubt in the chief’s mind. Was he actually denying that the petition belonged to him? No, he was not. Even if somebody else penned it, Mümin had signed the petition himself. Whether he actually got somebody to write it for him or he gave that impression in order to save himself from getting further into trouble, we will never know for sure.

The chief returns to the topic of the allegedly better paid apprentices. It seems like for him this is really the issue, at least at the beginning of the investigation. He made so much effort to prove that Mümin was wrong and he wanted to prove this both to Mümin and to others who were present. Hence, as if it was the first time that he spoke about the subject, he formulated the following question: “Are there any apprentices with an hourly wage of 71 piastres among your attendants?” The answer is both predictable and clear: “No, there are not any.” The chief must have got what he wished for with this answer because he immediately drops the topic and moves on to a completely different one from which we learn that at the time of the investigation Mümin’s wage was 67 piastres an hour. The wording of the question “Do you think 67 piastres an hour is a low wage?” already hints at what would follow. Pretending to leave the judgment to Mümin, the chief actually paves the way for putting him to a test in front of others. But before moving on to that part, we should analyse Mümin’s very interesting reply to this tricky question.

At least since 1946, Mümin had been complaining about his wage level according to his personnel file. The main message of his petitions had been that with his family of four persons, it was impossible for him to get by. That he received the raise in his first two attempts suggests that the management saw this as a valid reason for a wage increase. Thus, one would expect him to answer positively when asked if his wage was indeed low. But Mümin refrains from giving a direct answer and says he is entitled to 10 more piastres (an hour). I take this phrase as an example of what I argued in the case of Mustafa above: different from the helpless tone of the begging petitions, we see a new language here. Speaking in a more assertive tone, Mümin expresses his ideas about how things should be in
the factory. The fact that the management did not share these ideas did not prevent Mümin from communicating them. Alas, he could not foresee that this attitude of defiance would cost him another verbal attack from the chief.

**On the Question of Audience**

The interrogator continues with a rhetorical question: “You are an assistant foreman, aren’t you?” Most likely because the secretary recorded the whole conversation, the chief stated the obvious. We can also speculate that he used these rhetorical questions to construct his whole case in the most convincing manner. Moreover, this transcript might have been planned to be submitted to the General Directorate of Sümerbank or the Prime Ministry. If so, we can argue that the investigator had three types of audience. First was the immediate audience, which was composed of Mümin and the other assistant employees. Perhaps above all, the chief wanted to convince Mümin of the invalidity of his claims. Second, the investigation was probably to be read by the higher ranked officers within the management. Thus, the chief also had to make it as clear and convincing as possible for them. Third, if the transcript were to be sent to the office of the General Directorate of Sümerbank or the Prime Ministry, the investigation must appear to be as just and official as possible. It is in this complex context that we should think of the functions of the rhetorical questions.

Having secured Mümin’s confirmation of his assistant foremanship, the chief makes his next rhetorical move: Logically, if he was an assistant foreman he should have known all the things that an assistant foreman does. As such, Mümin was slowly pushed in the direction of a procedural examination, the first question of which was on measuring a surface. Did he know how to do it? No. What about using the equipment then? He could not do that either. Could he describe a screw? No answer. Mümin's silence gives the impression of a man losing his self-confidence. Imagine a worker who spent thirteen years of his life working at the same factory and who claimed multiple times before that he “deserved” a wage increase because he is a “good” worker finding himself in a position of complete ignorance before his fellow workers. The picture that could come to mind is of a publicly humiliated worker who bows his head with embarrassment. But this does not stop the chief who goes on to corner him like a predator does its prey. He formulates the same question in a more theoretical way: “How is a screw defined?” This time, Mümin has an answer but apparently it does not help him much for the chief moves on to a practical challenge and gives him a caliper to measure. Mümin does not even attempt to do it, he admits that he cannot use the caliper and thus he cannot take
measure. The next question is not entirely readable but most probably the chief is asking about the number of types of screws. It seems like Mümin had superficial knowledge on this matter but when he was asked to define them he could not answer. At this point, the sample that the chief had a few minutes ago is in the hands of Mümin as we understand from the next question. When the chief asks him to define the head of the screw, Mümin’s answer does not satisfy him either.

From Labour vs. Management to Labour vs. Labour

The two assistant foremen who had remained silent until then suddenly became functional at that point. Mümin had been speaking of the counterparts all along. And now he was being tested before them about the skills and knowledge that he was supposed to have. When he failed, the chief directed the same question first to Şükrü who gave a technical answer. This was most probably what the chief had been planning all along since the final blow came immediately after this: “You tell me now, do you deserve this wage?” Once more, the chief is using the question form pretending to leave the judgment to Mümin. However, his answer to this rhetorical question was possibly not what the investigator expected: “I have not gone to school, sir.” Was he comparing himself with the other two foremen by saying this? We cannot know since their files were not available in the archives. But we know that Mümin was literate, at least he claimed so in 1938 in his application form, but he did not mention any formal schooling. In fact, very few workers in the sample had formal education and if they had, it was only at the level of elementary school. Thus, Mümin was the rule rather than the exception on this matter. Why then did he give this unexpected answer, apparently also unexpected by the chief, to this rhetorical question?

If we divide the transcript into three parts, in the first part, the content of Mümin’s petition was revealed and contested. The focus here was on the claims that he made about the unfairness of the wage differences between himself and his counterparts, and in particular the apprentices. The winner of this first part was clearly the chief since Mümin accepted his mistakes. Then, in the second part, the chief steered the conversation in the direction of testing Mümin’s skills as an assistant foreman since these formed the basis of his claims for a wage raise. Without any doubt, Mümin lost this part as well. But this time he took the initiative and very intelligently steered the conversation away from the mode of examination by answering a very direct question in an unexpected way. Thus, the final phase of the conversation began, which, above all, is characterised by emotional exploitation.
The chief’s reaction to Mümin’s unexpected reply is right on target since it addresses his claim of seniority which he had used before to ask for a higher wage. If he was at the factory for such a long time, he should have known the answers to the previous questions: “How come you do not know this?” Mümin must have been feeling really intimidated by now as he addressed the chief as “Sir” for the first time. The chief repeats his central question: “Do you deserve this money?” Once again, Mümin takes refuge in his ignorance. The chief is not interested in this topic, though. At this point, all he wants is to establish the fact that Mümin does not have the required skills to work as an assistant foreman. Instead of stating it himself, however, he makes another tactical move by asking the other assistant foremen whether Mümin deserved the wage he had been receiving. The first one abstains from answering by playing the docile worker: of course the chief knows it better. Perhaps he refrained from saying something that would harm his co-worker. His answer probably did not please the chief who directed the same question to the second assistant foreman. Aziz, speaking for the first and the last time, carries the issue to a completely different level by arguing that Mümin is not qualified enough to work independently. This last sentence must have been enough for the verdict to be given since the transcript finishes abruptly right after it. The parties sign the transcript, thereby making it official in order to include it in the following reply of the Bakırköy Factory to the General Directorate of Sümerbank:

To the Higher Office of General Directorate of Sümerbank, 30.06.951

Mümin Kılıç’s petition has been examined. The aforementioned, who still serves at the yarn maintenance department as an assistant, is a worker of 13 years who did not have any occupations when he was employed [and] attained the level of assistant foremanship thanks to his continuous working.

The untrue statement of this worker who had applied to the higher office of Prime Ministry about his demand for a wage increase has been found groundless. Subjected to a trial, the conviction has been that the complainant, who has not experienced any problems with promotion and has been promoted regularly to higher levels, is not equipped with the knowledge that a maintenance worker must have [and] can only achieve the given task when working with an assistant foreman.

We present it to your higher information that the 67 piastres hourly wage given to such a worker, who cannot do grading/fitting, does not know how to take measurements, has no understanding of using a calliper and who cannot place a cogwheel with instructions, has been determined according to seniority and skill level, and that contrary to his petition there is no apprentice working with him with an hourly wage of 71 piastres before the increase
By Way of Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I formulated my objective as analyzing the petitions written by Bakırköy workers in terms of their timing, frequency, addressee, content and vocabulary. Through examining the personnel files of fifty-four workers, I have found out that the petitions start in 1943 and their frequency increases with time. With the exception of Mümin’s petition to the Prime Ministry and Mehmet’s letter to the General Directorate of Sümerbank, the petitions are generally addressed directly to the factory management. They are similar to one another in terms of the opening lines. Although there are workers who only wrote one petition, or whose file contains only one petition, there are also a number of those who wrote more than one. Some workers, such as Mustafa and Mümin, effectively used petitioning after the success of their first attempt. In terms of content, the petitions are predominantly about wage increases with exceptions of those asking for child or transportation allowance. One significant exception was Mustafa’s petitions complaining about the treatment he received from the management and later about the change in the task he was assigned to. In my analysis of Mustafa’s petitions, I have argued that his case illustrates how the workers’ struggles were individualised and isolated during the early Republican period. I argue that Mümin’s case further substantiates this argument by means of showing how the management crushed a legitimate demand by a state worker through an intimidating investigation at the factory site. Insulted and isolated, Mümin had to retreat in his struggle against the factory management.

After establishing the general characteristics of the petitions by Bakırköy workers, I now would like to contextualise these petitions in terms of the wider political economic changes that took place during the last years of the early Republican period. Especially with the emergence of the trade unions in 1946, the Turkish labour scene has changed dramatically in terms of labour’s self-perception and organization. The findings presented in the current chapter substantiate this argument. One striking point in my archival findings concerns the complete silence about the trade unions in the personnel files as late as 1951. The fact that the workers’ trade union affiliations were visible in later years ruled out the possibility that the personnel files would never mention anything about them.
In the following chapter, I will portray the emergence and expansion of trade unions towards the end of the early Republican period with an emphasis on the developments in the textile sector. The questions I pose at this point are the following: What were the functions of the trade unions in this period? To what extent did they manage to reach the workers in general, and state workers in particular? How did the state workers view them and react to them? Who were those affiliated with the unions and what kind of political trajectories did they follow? The petitions I have analysed in the current chapter presented a close-up picture of state-subject interactions in the Bakırköy Factory. My next goal is to zoom out and locate these interactions within the general framework of state-labour relations.
Chapter 4
Diverging Paths of the Early Trade Union Movement:
Political Possibilities, Discursive Strategies

In the previous two chapters, I portrayed the relations of and in production inside the Bakırköy Factory by documenting workers’ living and working conditions and analyzing the written correspondence between the workers and the management. In the current chapter, I will take the reader outside the factory. My overall objective here is to detect the main characteristics of the workers’ movement in the aftermath of the legalization of trade unionism. In some ways, this means that I am further pursuing the question I raised in the third chapter, namely the changes in the self-perception and presentation of workers in the post-WWII context, in a different context, that of the labour movement. As such, I move from individual to more collective moments of resistance, but this does not mean that I lose track of the individual workers in that collectivity. As I mentioned above, the sacrifice of the individual for the collectivity has been one of the main problems of the Turkish labour historiography and in the current chapter, I also tackle that historiographical problem.

Though the chapter accounts for the development of trade unionism in Republican Turkey in general and the story of the Bakırköy trade union in particular, my aim is not to provide a complete history of the labour movement. Thus, what follows is neither a chronological nor an exhaustive account of the development of trade union movement after 1946. The reason I opted to stay away from such an endeavour is connected to the point I made above. My interest does not lie in the trade union as an organization but in workers who made the decision to become a part of that organization. Obviously these two interests are not mutually exclusive; to study the latter requires one to understand the former. Thus, the chapter portrays the course of development of the trade union movement in general terms, but retains the focus on concrete and crude experiences of the workers in that movement.

Informed by such concerns, my approach in this chapter requires rowing against the theoretical inclination to conceptualize labour as an abstract mass and to focus exclusively on the collectivity aspect of it. I start from the worker involved in the trade union movement instead of the institution of the trade union itself as a political actor. My argument is that doing so will help us a have better understanding of the collectivity itself. A similar approach is found in Selig Perlman’s *A Theory of the Labour Movement*.
A theory of the labour movement should include a theory of the psychology of the labouring man. The writings of socialists, syndicalists, anarchists, communists, and “welfare” capitalists abound in embroideries on the theme of “what labour wants” or “what labour aspires to”. But the safest method is to go to the organizations of labour’s own workings, shaped and managed by leaders arisen from labour’s own ranks, and to attempt to discover “what’s really on labour’s mind” by using as material the “working rules,” customs and practices of these organizations.

I start with this idea and take it one step further by tracing the trade union career of individual workers to depict their learning processes concerning the labour question and politics. To do so, I focus on two Bakırköy workers who were quite active both in the Bakırköy Trade Union and political parties. Representing two very different politics, the stories of these workers serve the function of challenging the monolithic view on the trade unions of the period. According to this view, trade unions were under almost total control of the state and thus presented a homogeneous picture in which alternative discourses did not exist. I not only argue that they existed, but that they were very well voiced and heard as well.

These stories should also be contextualized within the universe of labour politics characterizing the period. Thus, I also refer to the main issues around which different parties, i.e. different state actors, political parties, various sections of industrial workers, and the media, formulated arguments. Before I proceed with this section, two notes should be made, the first of which concerns the method I use here. In portraying the period through these stories and discussions, my aim is not to trace the historical trajectory of any debate. Rather, I aim to depict the general ideological atmosphere of the period in relation to its effects on the labour movement through reading beyond the surface of the discourses presented on various aspects of the labour question. As such, I adopt discourse analysis as a method to see how the language around these debates shaped the labour movement ideologically, on the one hand, and effected workers’ social perspectives and identities on the other.


Discourse is defined solely as written and spoken text in this context despite its much wider formal definition.

Albeit defined in a very different context, the definition of what a critic should reveal in a text in Fredric Jameson’s The Political Unconscious informs my methodological understanding at this point: “diagnostic revelation of terms or nodal points implicit in the ideological system which have, however, remained unrealized in the surface of the text, which have failed to become manifest in the logic of the narrative, and which we can therefore read as what the text represses.” (The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act, [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981], p. 48). I am well aware of the fact that the following examples do not qualify exactly as “nodal points … unrealized in the surface of the text.” Nevertheless, I think my analysis of the gaps, silences, disruptions and latent ideological assumptions in these examples resonates with the way Jameson explains how to arrive at the political unconscious through a symptomatic reading.
A Brief Note on the Archival Material and Its Organization

By using the factory personnel files, which included petitions written by workers themselves, I portrayed the changes in the language and the content of the workers’ demands in the previous chapter. The same files, however, were useless when it came to questions on workers’ collective actions because they do not give any information on the trade union affiliations of the workers in the 1940s and 1950s. My efforts to acquire such information from the archives of the trade unions were not fruitful either since they are almost non-existent. The only archival material I could find on trade union activity at Bakırköy Factory is a weekly newspaper, *Hürbilek*, published by the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions. This publication covered some of the trade union meetings at the factory in the late 1940s.

Collecting the names of the trade union activists from these articles, I went back to the factory archives to investigate these workers’ personnel files. There is an important problem with this method, however. Understandably, the workers mentioned in the articles are those who worked in the union management. Thus, the rank-and-file of the members are not represented here at all. Despite this drawback, this method allowed me to make a comparison between trade union members and those who were apparently not with the management in terms of their working and living conditions and relations.493

The sources used in this chapter are different from the previous two chapters in two regards. First, they extend into the 1950s partly because of the problem of availability of sources but mainly because material from the early 1950s presents a clear picture of the effects of the state politics of the late 1940s. In other words, the 1950s was the decade in which the undercurrent tendencies of the labour movement of the previous two decades were crystallized into clear political stances. Second, I use material that does not immediately relate to the Bakırköy Factory. Once more the availability of sources is a problem here. Except for scattered information concerning mainly the two protagonists of the story, it is almost impossible to document how the Bakırköy workers thought about or reacted to the development of the labour movement in relation to the wider terrain of state politics. Yet, I argue that using archival material concerning a broader range of labour movements does not diminish the credibility of the argument. There is strong circumstantial evidence in the archive to suggest that the labour movement as a whole had an extremely nationalist

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493 It should be noted that, for most of the files, it is impossible to know whether the worker was involved in the trade union movement or not. However, it would be safe to assume that most of the workers did not have direct contact with the trade union for reasons that will be made clear in the following pages.
character, for example. Thus, deductions concerning the labour politics at Bakırköy can be made from the general picture I portray below.

**The Significance of 1946 Trade Unionism**

Within Turkish labour history, the emergence of trade unions is mostly studied with reference to the enactment of the Trade Union Law in 1947. However, already in 1946, with the change in the Law of Associations (*Cemiyetler Kanunu*), a number of trade unions, which were substantially different from those which emerged after the 1947 Law, were established. The connections between these two phases of unionization are understudied in Turkish labour history and I argue that this neglect has resulted in conclusions that are of importance both theoretically and politically.

Promulgated in 1938, the Law of Associations barred the formation of organizations based on class or economic interest. According to Makal, this was the legalization of the already existing de facto prohibition of trade union movement.\(^{494}\) After its amendment on June 5, 1946, which is interpreted as one of the first legal arrangements of the transition to multi-party system,\(^{495}\) the ban on establishing associations based on class was lifted, but other limitations remained in effect. With this legal impediment coming to a halt, the number of associations increased to 820 in 1946 compared to 205 in 1938.\(^{496}\) This increase signifies a very important social dynamic: years of repressive single-party regime had not been able to destroy the ability and the desire of the society to organize into associations. The early post-War years increasingly witnessed the expansion of a critical public. From 1945 onwards, the RPP was no longer alone in the political arena since the most important organizational form of this dissidence, the Democrat Party, was growing increasingly popular among the masses. This political rivalry made it imperative for the Republican People’s Party to respond to social problems. On the level of state policies concerning the labour question, this new political atmosphere manifested itself in the establishment of the Ministry of Labour, and the enactment of insurance for occupational diseases, accidents and motherhood for workers. The opportunity thus created was also seized by the socialists who had been repressed since the beginning of the Republic. The establishment of the Socialist Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Sosyalist Partisi*, henceforth TSP) on 14 May 1946 was followed by the Socialist

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\(^{495}\) *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi* Vol. 1, (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1996), p. 293.

\(^{496}\) Makal, *Ameleden İşçiye*, p. 38.
Workers’ Party of Turkey, Workers’ and Peasants’ Party of Turkey, and the Socialist Labour and Peasant Party of Turkey (Türkiye Sosyalist Emekçi ve Köylü Partisi, henceforth TSEKP), all established in 1946.\textsuperscript{497} Among these, the first and the last parties concentrated on unionization. With different ideas on the role and the organizational structure of the trade unions, these parties organized their own unions. While the TSP argued for sectorally organized unions nationwide forming a national federation which would apply for membership to the World Federation of Trade Unions, the TSEKP criticized the top-down approach and advocated the formation of trade unions on the level of the shopfloor, which would organize in the Alliance of Trade Unions in their cities, and organize within their industrial sector nationwide. Five trade unions were organized by the TSP: Trade Union of Sea Workers of Turkey, Trade Union of TEKEL (state tobacco monopoly) Workers, Trade Union of Textile Workers of Turkey, Trade Union of Iron and Steel Workers of Turkey, and Trade Union of Press Workers and Machinists of Turkey. These five unions formed the Federation of Trade Unions of Turkey on 14 December 1946. The regional Alliances of Trade Unions organized by the supporters of the TSEKP formed the more advanced part of the unionization in the period. Five regional alliances of trade unions were formed in 1946 in Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Kocaeli and Adana. Among the trade unions that formed the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions was the Trade Union of Bakırköy Cloth Factory Workers.\textsuperscript{498}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.jpg}
\caption{Bakırköy Textile Workers Trade Union. IISH, Kemal Sülker Collection.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{497} Kemal Sülker, Türkiye’de Grev Hakki ve Grevler, (İstanbul: Gözlem: 1976), pp. 53-54.  
\textsuperscript{498} Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi, Vol. 1, pp. 169-73.
The Encyclopedia of Trade Unions of Turkey reports different figures for the total number of 1946 trade unions: While the Minister of Labour of the period mentioned the number one hundred, according to a daily newspaper, almost seven hundred trade unions were formed during a short period. A martial law prosecutor of the period wrote in 1967 that the socialists in Istanbul organized approximately ten thousand workers. As for the textile sector, a weekly publication of the TSP reported that the membership of the Trade Union of Textile Workers of Turkey rose to 4500 in a month.\(^{499}\) Regardless of the question of accuracy of these various figures, we can conclude that the socialists were very effective in organizing the 1946 unionism. As expected, the RPP tried to contain this highly politicized unionism by using the Workers’ Society of Turkey to win over the workers and thus nullify the trade unions.\(^{500}\) Apparently, this strategy was unsuccessful as both the TSP and TSEKP were closed down together with the trade unions either directly formed or aided by these parties with the enforcement of martial law on 16 December 1946.\(^{501}\) Before long, trade unions were back, but this time they were in a completely different political environment.

**The Re-emergence of Trade Unions: Beyond the Legalist Framework**

What this brief experience of labour organization showed to the Turkish state was the presence of a latent yet strong potential to organize among the workers on the one hand, and the “danger” of socialists hijacking this organization on the other. This internal factor was accompanied by the pressure created by the relative democratization of politics in the aftermath of the war years. Bringing a serious electoral pressure on the RPP, the end of the single-party regime increased the importance of the working people as part of the whole body of the electorate. Also, in the political climate of the immediate post-World War II era when Turkey became an ally of the West, it was difficult for the state to keep trade unions illegal as they were among one of the indispensable institutions of Western democracies. The enactment of the Trade Union Law on 20 February 1947, I argue, was a product of all these internal and external political factors. But was this also the perception of the workers at the

\(^{499}\) Ibid., p. 174.


... It was announced in the newspaper on 21st of February, 1947 that the Law on Trade Unions was enacted. On 23rd of February, 1947, the law on rent increases was enacted and the next day, like any other law (except for the law on trade unions), the country-wide reactions to it were published. I read it and thought to myself: “Is this law [i.e. the law on trade unions] so unimportant that it did not get any reactions in the whole country? Or was it the case that it got reactions but they were not published? If it had no importance, why was it hastily accepted? What was the reason for this haste? I wonder if it is a sin to think of these questions. No, I do not think so. According to my understanding as a worker, this law is a very important one. Let me explain.

We, the Turks, are a people who signed the San Francisco Constitution of the United Nations [refers to the adoption of the constitution for an International Court of Justice to be incorporated as a main organ of the UN at the San Francisco Conference on International Organization on 26 June 1945]. By this, we have accepted the principles of democracy. What democracy means is (whomever wants to shape it in his own way according to his own interpretation) that in a country freedom of speech, writing, direct election of political parties, organization of social classes and groups, the right to found trade unions, freedom of conscience and religion, and social institutions exist.

As a part of this, the law on trade unions is of course important. And it should also be noted that trade unions are not to be founded by the government but by the workers. It is the case all around the world. Otherwise, it is not a trade union; it becomes a Nazi concentration camp.

That this important law was accepted hastily has a significant reason: As it is known, the number of workers in industrial regions such as Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Eskişehir, İzmit, and Zonguldak is high. Those workers, who have not had any protecting mechanisms so far, desperately founded trade unions according to the last change made in the Law on Associations. [These trade unions] were closed down after a short period of organization because they had achieved great progress in such short time. The RPP government could not come to terms with this progress [because] it has been accustomed to do everything on its own for the last twenty-three years. It has got jealous of the results achieved by the prosperous efforts of the working class and closed down [the trade unions] using lame excuses. Upon seeing that the need for trade unions did not vanish when they were closed down, the sensitive RPP government took the task on itself. Let it benefit from it. And it should not be forgotten that the worker got matured enough to carry out his own job. It is time that they are noble enough to accept that the worker is also a citizen and has rights to defend. The labour
The analysis of the political factors that paved the way for the Trade Union Law to be enacted among the workers presented in this letter is significant in a number of ways. To begin with, it is important as a worker’s depiction of the atmosphere in which the law was enacted. Sülker begins by describing the way this enactment was received by the media: Comparing this reception with that of another law on rent increase, he expresses his confusion critically. It is interesting to see that the first reason he gives as to why the Trade Union Law is important concerns the signing of an international agreement. By doing so, he continues, we have accepted the principles of democracy. This direct reference to Turkey’s integration into international organizations reveals the political atmosphere of the immediate post-War years, as I argued above. By connecting the trade unions to democracy, one of the most popular words of the first years of the multi-party regime, the shoemaker tries to convince the reader of their legitimacy. A warning immediately follows this effort: “trade unions are not to be founded by the government but by the workers.” The question to ask here then is: what was his motivation to make this rather redundant note? One possible explanation is the presence of the opinion that the trade unions formed after 20 February were under government control as early as March 1947. Thus, we could assume that some workers also shared our interpretation of the enactment of the 1947 Trade Union Law as a response to 1946 unionism. According to this interpretation, the success of the socialists in the unionization movement disturbed the RPP, which wanted to contain the development of the labour movement. But closing down the trade unions was not a solution on its own since “the need for trade unions did not vanish when they were closed down.” Thus, “the sensitive RPP government took the task on itself” by preparing the Trade Union Law and gave it a completely new direction.

The final part of the letter is also important for the current study in that the ideas presented here on the features of the “new” worker support the arguments presented in the previous chapter. Consider the following words of the shoemaker: “the worker got matured enough...is also a citizen and has rights to defend.” With this open reference to a discourse of rights as citizens, we can safely generalize our findings on Bakırköy labour force: the post-War years witnessed an increasingly assertive language of the workers. By 1947, the arrow

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502 Kemal Süüker Collection, Folder No. 226, IISH. The letter, dated 1 March 1947, is published in a newspaper. The title is not specified.
had already left the bow as the new wave of unionism came with various manifestations of this new language and Bakırköy Cloth Factory also witnessed those changes.

Bakırköy Textile Workers Trade Union

In an interview he gave forty years after the Trade Union Law was enacted, one of the most prominent trade union leaders of the period notes the eagerness of the workers to unionize despite their acute lack of knowledge on labour organization and social policy. In the textile sector, which he also worked for, unionism advanced rapidly: Five regional unions were formed in Istanbul. One of them was the Bakırköy Textile Workers Trade Union (henceforth Bakırköy Trade Union). The earliest dated document on Bakırköy trade union is an article in *Hürbilek* reporting the general board meeting held on 19 September 1948. Referring to the intense debates on the activities of the union management, the article is entitled “A Very Heated Meeting” and introduces the name of a weaver: Enver Teśni.

Enver’s career as a textile worker started in 1937 at the Sümerbank owned silk factory in Gemlik where he worked until his military service in 1939. Upon his return, he entered the Bakırköy Factory where he worked for 29 years until he retired due to the age limit of workers at the factory. The positive comments in his file by his supervisors indicate that he was a diligent and disciplined worker who was promoted from being an intern at the weaving department to being a foreman in less than a year. Besides his successful career at the factory, Enver was also active in unionism and politics. His name is cited among the founders of the first trade union at Bakırköy, i.e. the Trade Union of Bakırköy Cloth Factory Workers. He was the head of the Bakırköy branch of the National Development Party (henceforth NDP), which was established in July 1945 by a prominent businessman. Ironically enough, the program of this party was based on a critique of state-led industrialization, which made Enver’s employment possible to begin with. Tez Kalkınma, the NDP’s weekly newspaper, supplies the earliest dated information on Enver’s political career. An article from

503 Interview with Bahir Ersoy, interview conducted by Yıldırım Koç, (1988), IISH Collections, BGV1/40-54.
504 “Bakırköy Mensucat İşçileri Sendikası Çok Heyecanlı Bir Toplantı Yaptı”, Hürbilek (25 Sep. 1948). This newspaper was a publication of the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions. Hürbilek could be translated into English as “Free Wrist.” In Turkish, the word “bilek” also implies the strength required for manual work.
506 Ercan Haytaoğlu, “1945’de Çok Partili Siyasi Hayata Geçişte Bir İlk: Milî Kalkınma Partisi”, Türkler, Vol. 16, 2002, pp. 783-797. Enver’s involvement in this party seems to be paradoxical with the argument that the 1946 unionism was predominantly dominated by the TSP and TSEKP. As mentioned above, the Encyclopedia of Trade Unions of Turkey lists the Trade Union of Bakırköy Cloth Factory Workers among trade unions established by the supporters of the TSEKP (p. 173). However, Enver’s politics, as it will become clear later in the chapter, was far from socialism.
507 This title could be translated as “fast development” into English.
28 May 1948 reports that the party had recently had its Bakırköy Congress, which Enver Tenşi, the head of the administrative board, had opened the previous year.508

In accordance with NDP’s opposition to etatism, *Tez Kalkınma* published various critical articles509 reporting the working and living conditions of the state factories, one of which was penned by Enver.510 Cases of beatings, malicious injury to persons, and window breaking were happening at Bakırköy Factory, according to this article published on 2 July 1948. Due to the incompatibility of the factory management, Enver continued, even the rightful workers were taken to police stations to be interrogated. As the argument unfolds, Enver raises a tension between the workers and the management, which we recognize from the stories of Mustafa and Mümü, as covered in the previous chapter. He mentions the name of a technician working as a chief who, besides coming to work late in the morning and leaving whenever he wanted, used the factory means to repair and maintain his private car. Although the management was informed about the situation, Enver asserts, it chose to condone it. This chief allegedly slapped the head foreman, whose name – İhsan – I will cite numerous times below, of the repair workshop upon his refusal to carry out the orders.511 Though the foreman made a complaint to the factory management, the matter was closed. As this article reveals, relations between the workers and the management became increasingly problematic during the second half of the 1940s. The interesting point arising from the incident cited here is the vulnerability of even the foremen, who had considerable power over the rank-and-file workers as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, before the unjust practices of management. The title of Enver’s article, “How Dare You? What is This Tyranny?”,

508 “MKP Bakırköy İlçe Kongresi Geçen Hafta Yapıldı”, *Tez Kalkınma* (28 May 1948).
510 From the content of this newspaper and another document by the NDP entitled *Workers’ Rights that the NDP will Bestow to Workers* (Milli Kalkınma Partisinin Memleketle Hediye Edeceği İşçi Hakları, Milli Kalkınma Partisi Samatya Bucak Başkanlığı Neşriyatı, No. 1, s.d.) we can conclude that the party made a great effort to appeal to workers.
511 “Bu ne cü’ret bu ne tahakküm! Sümerbank Bakırköy bez fabrikasında bir şef ustabaşyı dövübiliyormuş !....”, *Tez Kalkınma* (2 July 1948). The same incident was covered in *Hürbilek* on 19 June 1948 (“Bir Hadise Daha”), Also in the same issue, an incident between the chief of the weaving department and a foreman, who was also the head of the administrative board of the Bakırköy Textile Workers Trade Union, regarding broken windows in the latter’s department. The foreman told the chief that because of the heat and humidity in the weaving department, the workers had asked permission to open the windows. Since their appeal was ignored, in the foreman’s words, the workers had to break the windows. Although the foreman suggested paying for the recently broken windows, the chief took him to the police station alongside with an assistant foreman in the same department. *Hürbilek’s* coverage of the incident is very critical of the factory management for not following the internal regulations and the Labour Code concerning the safety of the workplace (“Özürü Kabahatinden Büyük: Bakırköy bez fabrikası idaresi basit bir meseleyi ne maksatla polise aksettirdi?”, *Hürbilek*, 19 June 1948).
summarizes the argument I presented earlier: the workers clearly switched from a strategy of exit to a strategy of voice by the late 1940s.\textsuperscript{512}

The next article on Bakırköy Factory in \textit{Tez Kalkınma} was published on 17 September 1948 and was based on a letter written by a worker “who lives in Bakırköy and works at Sümerbank Bakırköy Factory and who is a member of the textile trade union.” It was this letter that stormed the meeting of the Bakırköy Trade Union two days later according to the report of \textit{Hürbilek}. Thus, it is worth quoting in its entirety:

\begin{quote}
The textile trade union of our district has not made its presence felt and did not engage in any attempt that would solve the workers’ problems or to satisfy the workers since it was founded. Unfortunately, in the township of Bakırköy where there are 2000 textile workers, there are more or less 300 members in the trade union today. And these members cannot get anything done because of the personal fights among the administrative board. When a worker gets sick, although the trade union is supposed to help, for some reason, it does not. The worker is fired with no reason; the trade union does not care.
Those who were enrolled in the trade union by the bosses and chiefs do nothing else than informing their chiefs about the secret decisions taken for their own personal benefit. In this, the Republican People’s Party has a lot of influence.
The trade unions should only be busy with looking for solutions for the worker to live in welfare and happiness without being under the influence of any political party.
Today, the food given to the sick at the Bakırköy Cloth Factory is not as good as the food given to the clerks although each sick person should be given food according to his illness. A doctor who was favourable towards the workers was cast out from the factory.
Despite the trade union’s attempts, no result was obtained. Wishing that it [the trade union] would be managed by honest and altruistic people as soon as possible, we kindly ask you to intermediate by calling the attention of those concerned.
\end{quote}

In what follows, I analyse this letter in relation to \textit{Hürbilek}’s coverage of the September 1948 meeting of the Bakırköy Trade Union.

**Back to the Heated Meeting**

“When annual meeting of Bakırköy Textile Workers’ Trade Union was held last Sunday at 16:00 in the trade union’s clubhouse. The members, who attended the meeting on a large

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{512} See Chapter 3 for the elaboration of this idea.
\end{flushright}
scale, filled the hall.” The physical description of the meeting site was given as such in Hürbilek. Although the reporter does not give the exact number of the participants, the choice of language implies a relatively big number of union members. The mentioning of the clubhouse also suggests a well-organized and affluent trade union with its own meeting site. Enver’s account, however, does not support these implications since the tone in which he specified the size of the membership is critical: “In the township of Bakırköy where there are 2000 textile workers, there are more or less 300 members in the trade union today. According to an inspection report, the average number of workers at Bakırköy in 1948 was 1142.513 Unfortunately, we are unable to determine the percentage of Bakırköy workers among these 300 members present. The careful reader would note that the first trade union at Bakırköy, which was organized according to the shop-floor organization principle of the TSEKP, specified the name of the factory in the title. The second trade union, however, does not and, since it is one of five regional textile trade unions formed in Istanbul, it gives the impression that the union membership might not be confined to the factory in question. Enver’s argument supports this implication by specifying the target audience of the trade union as 2000 instead of 1142. Nevertheless, even if we assume that these 300 members present all worked at Bakırköy Factory, we can conclude that the factory workforce was not all that eager to participate, as Hürbilek wants us to believe.

The meeting indeed grew heated soon after the opening by the head of the administrative board when the activity report of the board received criticism from a member. Likewise, when the board of inspection failed to present an activity report, the members also raised their voices and asked for an explanation. The language of the report in Hürbilek is austere in its description of member responses. As for the manner in which these responses were received by the management, the newspaper reports that the concerned parties took it well and attributed the problems to discordance among board members. Overall, the coverage implies a relatively democratic structure in which the members, according to the correspondent, could call on the management to account for their “failures.”

Next on the agenda was a resolution presented by the foreman who was the subject of Enver’s text in Tez Kalkınma. Citing the difficulty of collecting membership fees, he proposed check-off contributions. This is interesting because, according to the report, he formulated this suggestion in such a way that the problem seemed to concern one factory, which in this case

would be the Bakırköy Factory. Also, reporting the result of the vote, which was in favour of the suggestion against 11 oppositional votes, the correspondent refers to “the factory”. The subscription fee must have constituted one of the few resources of income for the trade unions. Although we do not know the exact amount for the Bakırköy Trade Union, we could use a report on Haliç Textile Workers’ Trade Union specifying the monthly subscription fee as 50 piastres, which the administrative board found too low to meet all the needs of the union. Since the average hourly wage at Bakırköy in 1948 was 61.46 piastres, we could conclude that the monthly fee was not too high for the members. After the discussion on joining together with the other textile trade unions, which received popular support, the meeting was supposed to continue with elections of the new administrative board, that is, if a weaver did not raise the issue of Enver’s letter to Tez Kalkınma.

**Enver’s Difficulty: Political Career vs. Trade Union Membership**

By 1948, Nazif had been working at Bakırköy factory on and off for 12 years. When he started working around the age of 19, he was still studying, which suggests that he had a much higher level of schooling than most of the other workers. This could explain why Nazif was the one who brought up an article from a newspaper without a wide readership. His question to Enver was simple: under what influence did Enver publish these articles? In fact, Enver had not signed the article, implying that Enver’s connection to the NDP and thus to its newspaper was known by his fellow workers. After having someone read the letter out loud, the head of the congress asked Enver for an explanation. Enver must have been worried at this point as he first refused to discuss the issue, but soon gave in to pressure from the participants. His answer, which was basically a repetition of what he wrote in the article, did not satisfy the head of the administrative board who “responded to foreman Enver with strong language by answering his article paragraph by paragraph.” That he got excited upon hearing the part on certain union members’ betrayal implies that this was the first time he heard Enver’s claims and thus supports the prior speculation that Tez Kalkınma did not have a wide readership. This part reads as follows: “Those who were forced to enrol in the trade unions by the chiefs and the factory managers are betraying the trade unions. The Republican People’s Party has also had an impact on this.”

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515 Başbakanlık Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Sümerbank İplik ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1948 Yılı Raporu, p. 34.
As the careful reader might have noticed, the wording here is slightly different from the version *Tez Kalkınma* had published. What could be the reason for this incongruence? The simplest answer is that the correspondent just took notes during the meeting, which he shortened and thus changed in relation to what he had heard. However, since the article was published only a few days prior, and was read out loud at the trade union meeting, it was not very difficult for the correspondent to use the published version while writing his text. Three things stand out in the *Hürbilek* version of this small but significant part of the letter the first of which is the word “betraying.” In the article, Enver does not use the word “betray” although he implies it. He cites the motivation of those who inform the management as their own personal benefits, but he does not clarify this. The second difference concerns the “secret decisions” taken at the trade union meetings. This phrase is cut in the *Hürbilek* version. Enver’s more detailed explanation of what members did is reduced to an act of betrayal. The third point concerns the wording of the Republican People’s Party’s involvement in the issue. While the letter clearly addressed the RPP as the instigator of these acts, the *Hürbilek* version cites the RPP as one of the actors by using the adverb “also.” These three points might seem insignificant to the reader. However, the choice of language, especially on matters of political parties’ involvement in trade union movement, had utmost significance and effect on the direction labour movement would take. I will return to this point later in this chapter.

Excited and possibly frustrated, the head of the congress “invited foreman Enver to give the names (responsible for the betrayal).” The language of the report here becomes literary when it compares the atmosphere of the meeting to the “heavy air before the storm.” Indeed, when all the members expressed the same demand for the names to be specified, pressure on Enver increased visibly as we understand from the article. According to the *Hürbilek* correspondent, Enver faltered for a while and then stated that this happened in other trade unions, not at Bakırköy Trade Union. Far from helping him, this explanation caused him to “bog down completely” as there were “guests from other trade unions” present at the meeting. Offended by Enver’s accusations, they called him a “troublemaker”, which earned them the support of the members. I would like to take a step back here and discuss the implications of the presence of these “guests” in the Bakırköy Trade Union meeting.

The Fragmented Phase of Textile Trade Unions

When Bahir Ersoy started working at Sümerbank Defterdar Factory in Istanbul in May 1947, the Haliç Region Textile Industry Workers Trade Union had been active only for a short time.
He described the Istanbul trade unions as small organizations appealing to a narrow area close to the factories. Haliç trade union, he adds, was one of the biggest of these scattered unions. The other textile trade unions were Eyüp-Haliç, Beyoğlu, Fatih-Eminönü and Bakırköy Textile Workers Trade Union. From the very beginning, these five trade unions had been in close contact with each other as the report on the meeting of the Bakırköy Textile Workers Trade Union exemplifies. In fact, the idea to join together was discussed as early as May 1948 among the Istanbul textile trade unions. On 16 May 1948, Eyüp-Haliç Textile Workers Trade Union, which was the oldest among the Istanbul textile trade unions, invited the others to its meeting. Some of the delegates present at this meeting seemed more inclined to the idea of forming an association of textile trade unions rather than unifying them. It seems that these delegates were not that influential because, two weeks later, a second meeting was held at the same location, which determined the final goal: coming together under one trade union. By then, the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions, which brought together trade unions in different sectors, had already been active for two months. The textile workers’ efforts were going beyond this model of regional organization by aiming at unification around industrial sectors.

It is in this context that we should understand the presence of the “guests” from the other trade unions at the meeting of the Bakırköy Trade Union. That the local unions watched each other’s meetings suggests that, although they were regionally organized, they wanted to be organized beyond that immediate locality. However, as we will see below, the road to unification of trade unions in the textile sector was full of impediments, mainly stemming from the political atmosphere of the time. The trade unions were also given their share of the rising political rivalry between the RPP and the increasingly popular opposition party that came to underline all the societal relations towards the end of the early Republican period. Before going into this discussion, let us first examine the course the meeting held after Enver targeted the other textile trade unions by changing the object of his allegations.

That the head of the administrative board asked a seemingly unrelated question to another worker makes the reader assume that Enver was no longer under attack. Alas, the issue was closely connected to the previous discussion about the “betrayers”: “Gossip has it that two people from the administrative board have been engaging in espionage for the factory management.” By calling forth the worker who had claimed to know these names, he ignited the fire a second time. Among three names given was also Enver’s. In fact, Enver was

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516 Interview with Bahir Ersoy conducted by Yıldırım Koç (1988), IISH Collections, BGV1/40-54.
517 “Beş Mensucat İşçi Sendikası Birleşiyor”, Hürbilek (5 June 1948).
the one who had mentioned the other names, he claimed. Once again, Enver was at the centre of attention and was expected to defend himself. This time he complained that a recently promoted worker did not deserve promotion because he was too young. The members refuted this anonymously. True, the worker was young but he was very good at his work, the crowd argued. The two accused workers also defended themselves, which was received with loud applause. A member called Enver divisive because “he would put even two brothers against each other” and accused him of undermining the trade union. Enver was thrown out of the meeting hall to which the ex-vice-president of the administrative board responded by thanking God with tears in his eyes. The meeting finished with a secret ballot to elect the new administrative board composed of seven members, at least six of which were definitely from the Bakırköy Factory.518

Is there any Pattern to Trade Union Membership?

So far, I have tried to reconstruct one of the earliest meetings of the Bakırköy Textile Workers Trade Union using newspaper articles. In this section, I will introduce data from the personnel files of some of the trade unionists at Bakırköy Factory. In doing so, my aim is to detect the differences, if any, in terms of employment conditions and relations with the factory management between those who were active in the trade union and those who were not. I should note one methodological consideration before proceeding in this direction. As mentioned above, I collected the names of the workers active in the Bakırköy Trade Union from different newspaper articles. As expected, these are workers who had administrative positions in the union. For obvious reasons, this creates considerable problems in terms of the representativeness of this group of thirteen workers whose personnel data are discussed below. However, since the inventories do not provide information on trade union involvement, it is not possible to test this sample with another sample of rank-and-file unionists. Thus, although I am aware of the methodological problems, I choose to treat this as a more or less representative unit of analysis when making speculations about the conditions of involvement in the union.

518 If we add the substitute members, the ratio is 9 out of 12. I have determined these numbers by searching for the names of the board members in the inventory of the Bakırköy workers’ files. They are not entirely accurate, however, since the inventories are full of mistakes.
Of the 13 male workers in administrative positions in the Bakırköy Trade Union in the late 1940s, the youngest and the oldest were 24/25 and 52/53 years old, respectively, while the average age was 34.5 in 1948. If we look at the composition of the ages, three of the workers were in their late 20s, i.e. 25 and older; eight in their 30s, one in his 40s and the oldest, in his 50s. The factory inspection report from 1949 gives the age composition of the Bakırköy workers as follows: 28.56% were 18 years old or younger, 51.41% were between 19 and 40, and 20.03% were 41 or older.

Understandably, the first category is not represented in the sample I work with, although this does not exclude the possibility that workers below the age of 19 attended the 1948 meeting or other meetings in the late 1940s. For the other two age groups, however, we can speculate. If we compare the percentage of workers of 40 or more years of age in the trade union to the percentage of this age group in the whole labour force in 1949, we see that they are underrepresented in the former, which implies that the trade union appealed more to the younger workers. However, if we look at the number of years these workers had spent in the Bakırköy Factory in 1948, a different picture arises: With five years of experience, the youngest worker in the sample has the least number of working years. At the top of the list is a worker of 37 years of age with 17 years of work experience. The average length of factory work of these 13 workers is 11.5 years, which is considerable if we think that the average age is only 34.5. What these figures show us is that workers tend to have at least a few years of experience before they begin engaging in trade union activity.

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519 Since I cannot verify that all these thirteen workers were present at the 1948 meeting, I have written late 1940s. Out of the thirteen names given in Hürbilek’s article on that meeting, I have the files of nine workers. It might be the case that the other four workers either joined the union after this date or they were already members who were not in administrative positions by that time.

520 The birth years of the workers in the files are in the Hijri calendar. Since their birth month is not specified, we cannot exactly determine their birth year according to the Gregorian calendar. In calculating the average age of the workers, I have used the .5 values when there were two possible birth years. The reference year is chosen as 1948 since we can establish the presence of nine of these workers at the September 1948 meeting.


522 In calculating these numbers, I have taken the first entrance to any kind of factory work as the starting point of employment. As I discussed in Chapter 2, discontinuity of employment characterized the working span of many workers. I have ignored this fact here assuming that a worker’s experience of work starts with the first encounter with the factory, regardless of the continuity of the contract. Also, in many cases during their leave, the workers were either doing their military service or were working at other factories. Thus, it would be safe to assume that they normally did not engage in non-industrial types of work.
Differences among the Production Departments: The Weavery and the Rest

Very striking information from the 13 files concerns the department in which the workers were employed. Of 13 workers, 11 worked at the weavery, some throughout all their employment, and some starting a few years after they were recruited. Of the two remaining workers, one worked at the revision department while the other was employed in the dyeing department. The high number of the weavers in the sample might seem normal given the fact that the weavery was the most crowded department of the factory. For example in 1948, 636 out of 1162 workers were employed at the weavery. Still, a comparison between the percentages of weavers in the sample with their percentage in the whole labour force of the factory in 1948 reveals a big discrepancy, as they are 84.6% and 54.7%, respectively. While the revision department is overrepresented with 7.7% in the sample, as opposed to 4.4% in the whole factory, the dyeing department is almost represented to the point. What is striking is that the yarn department, which is the second most crowded department after the weavery with 290 workers in 1948, is not represented at all. What are the implications of these numbers?

As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 3, the weavery was seen as the most important part of the factory. What personal testimonies and job advertisements searching for weavers illustrate is that in particular, experienced weavers were the most sought-after workers and thus usually earned more. A petition from the youngest worker in the trade union members sample testifies to this fact:

01.10.947

To the Higher Office of the Management,

The following is my wish.

I have been working as a foreman controller for the last four years. That I have satisfied both my supervisors and my workers during this time is evident from my file. For some reason, I could not receive a raise for a long time now. Upon my application, I have been told that my department is not that important and that I could get a raise if I am transferred to the weavery. I leave the evaluation of my situation to your higher opinion and kindly request from your higher office that I am promoted.

Sincerely,

Foreman Controller Mehmet Hetman
When he wrote this petition, Mehmet was earning 45 piastres an hour. He was given a raise of 5 piastres but remained employed as a controller against his wish to be transferred to the weavery where a foreman was paid 55 piastres an hour.\textsuperscript{523} The practice of accord-wage in the weavery was the main reason why the weavers were paid a higher wage than the others who were paid hourly wages.

The first-hand testimony by a weaver\textsuperscript{524} on the wage difference between the weavers and the non-weavers at Bakırköy Factory reveals other aspects of this discrepancy. Although he had been employed at the weavery when he first started at the factory, upon his return from the military service, Asım was employed in the dyeing department. He earned eighteen piastres an hour in 1943 when he asked to be transferred to the weavery, mainly in order to earn a higher wage. In addition to the wage discrepancy between the two departments, there was another disadvantageous situation for workers who received an hourly wage. Even after the introduction of the eight hour working day, although the workers were forced to work eleven hours a day, they had to punch their card at the end of the eighth hour so that they would not be entitled to overtime pay. Asım explains how this administrative infraction affected the accord workers and the hourly paid workers differently in the following words: “For the accord workers it is the same thing [i.e. they still got the pay according to how much they produced]. For the hourly paid, it was 12-13 hours of work [for 8 hours payment].”

Another first-hand testimony from a revision department worker\textsuperscript{525} looks at the matter from a different angle: “The accord workers worked a lot, we did not. We had more time to rest than they did.” In fact, Asım also supports this claim when he tells the story of how they were called to work on the religious holidays: “You cannot say I am not coming. It does not work, you have something with the master foreman [sic!], it does not work...We had to go. There is no such thing as a religious festivity for you [i.e. the worker]...you go to the factory on the religious festival and get paid according to the output level...” When asked if they received extra pay for working on an official holiday, he became somewhat offended: “What overtime pay are you talking about? ... Who cares about your rest time? The guys tell you to come. I went on Sundays, there was nobody else than me, the factory was not working. It is Sunday but we went anyway because the weavery was lagging behind.”

\textsuperscript{523} Enver Teşi.
\textsuperscript{524} Interview I conducted with Asım Kocabaş on 3 Aug 2009 in Istanbul.
\textsuperscript{525} Interview I conducted with Hüseyin Yılmaz on 4 Aug 2009 in Istanbul.
Some Tentative Inferences on Membership Profile

The following are some possible inferences derivable from this scattered set of information on Bakırköy Trade Union membership: first of all, there is not a single female worker among the administrative board. Also, no female name is mentioned in the press coverage of the union activities in the late 1940s. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that there were no female members of the union. As it is the case for other areas of factory life where data on female workers do not exist – or, better put, are not yet available – women’s unionism at Bakırköy Factory in late 1940s remains unexplored.

Eleven out of thirteen workers in the sample are under the age of forty. To generalize this age composition data to the entire union membership might be misleading as the sample is composed of workers in administrative positions. By this, I refer to the possibility that these positions were given to those with a higher level of schooling and that the younger workers tended to be better educated than the older ones. Later in this chapter, I will substantiate these speculations by using the first-hand testimony of a weaver. A similar kind of reasoning could also be made about the data on years spent at the factory. That the average length of factory employment is 11.5 years does not necessarily mean that unionism was low among those who have recently been proletarianized. Rather, it could signify that the administrative board was elected from those who had experience as industrial workers.

Two things could be argued on the predominance of the weavery workers in the sample. First, the personal testimonies, referring both to the petitions presented and the interviews conducted, illustrate that the wage level at the weavery was considerably higher than at the rest of the factory. This relates to two other facts: The longer working hours for the weavers and them being the most sought-after textile workers. Both of these facts could explain the overrepresentation of weavery workers in the administrative board in different ways. It might have been the case that the weavers were more eager to unionize because of their longer working hours. However, a more feasible explanation could be found in Erik Olin Wright’s definition of working-class structural power:

*P*ower that can result simply from the location of workers within the economic system. The power of workers as individuals that results directly from tight labour markets or from the
This conceptualization of working-class power is helpful in understanding the weavers’ high participation in Bakirköy Trade Union. As I showed in the previous chapter, the strategic location of the weavery within the process of textile production and the fact that weavers were sought-after workers in a period of severe unemployment in the textile sector makes these workers more powerful in relation to their employer. Mehmet’s petition illustrates this argument most clearly – “I have been told that my department is not that important and that I could get a raise if I am transferred to the weavery.” Judging from empirical evidence, we might argue that it was this structural power that made the overrepresentation of weavers in the sample possible.

Following on from these general inferences on the character of unionism at Bakirköy factory, I will now discuss the subjective aspects of a worker’s decision first to become involved and then to remain at the trade union. What shapes the learning process of a worker before and during his trade union membership? What are his expectations from being a union member and how do these change with time? How and when does he make the decision to work for the trade union administration? And finally, a question I partly answered before in analyzing Enver’s situation within the union: What is the interplay between a worker’s politics and his ideas on unionism? Let us now turn to a weaver’s unusually detailed story, which provides invaluable insights into the mentality of a worker.

One among Thirteen: The Story of Ahmet

Ahmet Cansızoğlu was seventeen when he read about the opening of a new Sümerbank textile factory in Nazilli in October 1938 and decided to leave his hometown in Northern

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527 For an elaboration of the paradoxical situation of the labour market of the early Republican period, see Chapter 3.
528 The name could be recognized by some readers as one of the founders of the Vatan Partisi (“Homeland Party”) in 1955 under the leadership of Hikmet Kıvılcımlı. I should note that I have not chosen to follow Ahmet Cansızoğlu’s story because of his political career. Once again, the choice is dictated by the availability of the archival material. Ahmet Cansızoğlu is one of the trade union leaders Yıldırım Koç interviewed in 1987. He is the only worker from Bakırköy Factory who was active in the trade union in late 1940s and left a first-hand testimony on his career and political life. However, it is a fact that his later involvement in the communist movement enriches our understanding of the politicization of the state workers of the early Republic period enormously. I used this interview, Ahmet’s personnel file and some newspaper articles together to construct the narrative in this section.
Anatolia. Six months after the factory opened, he started working there as an apprentice weaver for 5 piastres an hour. He recalls he had to pay 20 piastres every day for two meals, and 2 liras to stay at the barracks in the factory garden every month out of his monthly wage of 10 liras and 40 piastres. The conditions were better for skilled workers, however. A job advertisement published before Ahmet started at the factory had promised 45 piastres an hour, plus food and shelter provided by the factory: “This was given to first-comers, it changed after they filled the ranks, I could not catch it. One could actually save a lot of money but we were forced to pay for food.”

In Chapter 2, we saw that the state factories had serious difficulties securing the labour force. Ahmet’s account, however, is different from this. How could a recently opened factory easily recruit 3000-3500 workers in the first six months of operation? Ahmet’s response provides important information on the question of who these workers were and where they came from: “There were experienced workers who used to be hand-loom operators from Buldan, there were those coming from the textile factories in İzmir and Kula. At the same time, the factory was also training new workers.” Although such information cannot be acquired from the study of personnel files of Bakırköy Factory, we might speculate that the geographical location of the Nazilli Factory made a difference in terms of the prior occupation of the workers. Nazilli is only seventy-five kilometres away from Denizli, the most important centre of handloom weaving in Turkey.529

In the two years he spent at Nazilli, Ahmet became a weaver and probably around the same time, he started receiving an accord wage which meant a 50% increase in his wage. However, this was not enough to keep him at the factory since he could not bear the extremely hot climate in Nazilli. He then looked for a job in Bursa but was unsuccessful. His next destination was Istanbul where he first started working for a private textile company (which was at the Sümerbank Feshane Factory)530 and then changed to Bakırköy Factory. He reports an interesting point on recruitment at state factories: He had actually wanted to work at Bakırköy since he was a cotton weaver (Feshane produced woollen textiles531) but he was not recruited because he did not have a photograph on his identification card. This is an  

530 Unfortunately, Ahmet does not elaborate on this point, which sounds very unusual in that it is not mentioned in any of the factory inspection reports on the Feshane Factory.
531 He makes an implicit comparison in terms of wage levels between working with wool and working with cotton: “Feshane made woolen textiles, I am a cotton weaver and the looms are automatic. They stop when the yarn is broken, and take the bobbin itself. [thus] a weaver can operate eight looms or even sixteen if he is good and methodical.”
interesting point in that it shows the differences in recruitment practices among state factories. Another one and a half years passed before he started at Bakırköy in September 1941.

Two years of work was followed by four years of military service. He did not go back directly to Bakırköy upon his return: “After I was discharged, I wanted to go to Karabük Iron and Steel Factory but it was a snowy winter, I could not go. I ventured working in the mines in Zonguldak, it is difficult to find a job in winter…” This is the second time Ahmet mentions the seasonal differences in finding work at factories. Before, when he talked of the Nazilli workforce, he said that most of them had rural connections and thus they left the factory in summer to come back in winter. “It was easy to enter the factory in the summer,” he adds. More than seven years after, the situation had not changed much since Ahmet, though an experienced weaver, was ready to work in the mines. Luckily, he was employed in the mechanical workshop of a mine for 215 piastres a day; the miners earned 175 piastres a day. During almost six months of work at the workshop, he notes, he heard for the first time of occupational disease insurance premium deduction: “I asked the foreman: What is this insurance for? He said he does not know. None of us knew social insurance back then. The reason for my leaving there was the backwardness of the attitudes and behaviours of the workers there. I came to the conclusion that the textile workers were much more advanced.” In the next section, I not only evaluate the validity of this conclusion but also how Ahmet reached it.

A Formative Experience

During the war years, substantial changes occurred in the working conditions at factories and mines. In addition to the financial hardship caused by increasing consumer prices, legal changes concerning working life badly affected the working population. With the enactment of the National Protection Law on 18 January 1940, the protective provisions of the 1936 Labour Law lost their effectiveness, Ekin argues. In the eight years following the enactment of the law, fifty-two regulations on working life were made. Grouped into three categories – that is, waged compulsory work, working hours and holidays, female and child labour – these regulations increased the number of wage earners, on the one hand, and increased the rate of exploitation of labour power, on the other.

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Ahmet’s story illustrates the practical effects of this legislation: Before he left for the army in 1943, Ahmet recalls, he worked for twelve hours a day. Although the Charter of Working Hours of 1943 determined the working day as eight hours, it was allowed to extend the working day to eleven hours according to the coordination commission decision dated 2 September 1942. When I asked Asim if he ever worked eleven hours a day after he came back from the army in 1943, he responded with laughter and a hand gesture meaning “always.” The extension of the working day, however, was not the only problem for the textile workers. The type of the material they worked with also changed because, during the war years, the state factories were producing mostly for the army. Although the thick cotton cloth used for this production was considerably more difficult to work with, the factory management did not make any adjustments in the accord wage, which meant a considerable decrease in the weavers’ wages. Ahmet tells what happened afterwards in the following words:

One morning at nine o’clock, the workers said “we are on strike” [which] means they stop working, they turn off the machines, the head foremen and the chiefs came, we did not start working. But I do not remember who started this. We got together, the business manager called us to the director’s office, he called us there and on the stairs he said “let one of you come as a representative” and I volunteered to go as a speaker. The factory manager told me this: “Your behavior requires martial law, those fabrics you weave are for our army. This is a serious crime.” I answered back: “We will also be in the army one day. We are also getting ready. In the end, in one or two years we will be soldiers and we will have to pay for our own expenses. Nobody else sends us money. We will try to spend there what we save here. I do not accept your word.” I said, “We want our right. The workers here have children and all…” “It is not acceptable,” he said, “You are making a big mistake, you are committing a crime.” He called the police station: “Sir, they are on strike here.” Immediately, the commissar came, saluted the manager and said: “Take these workers to the police station” but told them to leave me there. At that moment, impulsively, I said: “No, since I am the representative, I will also go.” Back then we do not know what strike breaking is, I mean the guy we chose has sold us [It is not very clear here if he means it would be strike breaking if he did not go, G.A.]. Of course I did not know this then. Most of the workers ran away when the commissar came, only three of us stayed… We went to the police station, the others got away. I told the same thing: We want our previous wages. The fabric they gave us takes too much

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534 İş MiİÇetleri Nizamnamesi. TC İktisat Vekaleti İş Dairesi, 1943: 6. Kemal Sülker Collection, IISH. The working day for enterprises, which operated on Saturday afternoon, could extend to nine hours.

535 Makal, Ameleden İşçiyə, p. 196.
time, it needs to be woven carefully, it is different from the canvas, the wage they give us is wrong. They should either give us our previous work or they should adjust the previous wage level. We struggled for three-four hours, they increased the wage for each deft from 2 piastres to 4 piastres, we got 100% increase. This was my first involvement in a strike. They used the word ‘strike’, not the workers. The phrase ‘we are not working’ is used. It concerned only our machines. Forty machines mean twenty workers, if we consider that there were two shifts, those who were there at that moment were twenty day workers. In other departments, there was no change, our machines were wide machines, with frame... When we were taken to the police station, the other 17 workers did not start working, they dispersed in the factory. [and] did not work.536

Two conclusions can be drawn from this account. The first one relates to the earlier speculations on weavers participation in collective action. This incident implies that the weavers were prone to react to changes in their working conditions which in this case concern the extension of the working day without due increase in wages. Although receiving accord-wage meant more income for the workers in general, in this case it works to their disadvantage since they have to work harder more to earn their previous wages. The second point I would like to discuss concerns the discursive aspects of the incident. In Ahmet’s account, the incident developed instantly one morning without prior planning. The fact that he did not remember who started it also implies a high degree of spontaneity in this collective action. Although, at first, he recites that the workers said “we are on strike,” towards the end he corrects this by saying “[T]hey used the word ‘strike’, not the workers.”

There are two speculative explanations for this. First is the possibility that the word was unknown to the workers at that time. The second possibility, which is more plausible, is that the workers consciously refrained from using the word, since strikes were illegal. “Your behaviour requires martial law” is the first thing the factory manager said. As strong as it is, this was not the only reason why it was a crime to engage in work stoppage according to him. “[T]hose fabrics you weave are for our army,” he continued. With this statement, the incident takes yet another twist because up until this point, this was another example of disputes between labour and management on matters of job demarcation. With the arguments presented by the manager, however, a completely different matter arises: the use of patriotism

536 Interview with Ahmet Cansızoğlu conducted by Yıldırım Koç, IISH Collections, BGV1/40-54. Although Cansızoğlu does not specify the factory here, the two names he gives are in the inventory of the Bakırköy Cloth Factory, which almost confirms that the factory where this strike took place is Bakırköy, not Nazilli.
as a means of control over labour. Examples of a similar nationalist discourse abound in the state-labour relations in this period, as we shall see below.

What I would like to note here is the response given by Ahmet to this agitation. Instead of backing down or responding using technical language on the worsening employment conditions, Ahmet chose to stay within the same discursive universe with the factory manager: “We will also be in the army one day. We are also getting ready. In the end, in one or two years we will be soldiers and we will have to pay for our own expenses.” This is a very clever answer, which completely nullifies the manager’s argument by proving that paying the workers less would not be beneficial for the army in the long run. Ahmet does not recite the manager’s response, but from the fact that he called the police, we can conclude that it did not convince him. At the police station, Ahmet gave a very clear explanation of what happened and what they wanted. He presented two options: Either the weavers are given the material they worked with previously or their wage level should be adjusted. After long debates, the latter option was adopted and the weavers received a 100% wage increase.

In evaluating this incident, Ahmet refers to it as his “first involvement in a strike”, although the workers referred to it at that time as “not working” by the workers. Despite its success, Ahmet does not consider this work stoppage experience, which is unique in the entire archival material used for this study, as a sign of workers’ consciousness when he comments on the condition of the labour movement before 1947: “We did not know what a strike, a trade union, insurance or a day nursery was. We started [learning] these in 1947. It was even the case that some workers said “sindika” instead of “sendika” [i.e. trade union]. They could not even pronounce the word “tekstil” [i.e. textile], it was “mensucat” [the Arabic word for textiles, G.A.], that is why the trade unions got organized with that name.” Let us now look at the post-1947 period when, according to Ahmet, workers started becoming aware of labour issues.

Ahmet Joins the Union

When Ahmet returned to Bakırköy in September 1947, the trade union had already been founded. He became the ninetieth member to register. He does not elaborate on why he became a union member but his previous experiences show that he was very much in favor of the strategy of voice. Upon being asked if he had any connections with the trade union established in Zonguldak in 1946, he responds negatively but recalls an incident that might have something to do with the union: “They told that Celal Bayar (one of the founders of the DP)
was coming for a meeting. On my way there, I saw people wearing gendarmerie uniforms stopping the workers but they did not say anything to me. When I arrived, the meeting was already dispersed.” This interest in the DP resulted in his enrolling in the party, which, he explains, he did after reading two articles in the party program. These were the sixth article, which argued for the possibility and necessity to build harmony among different occupational groups, and the seventh article, which argued for the necessity of forming economic and social organizations including the trade unions. The latter article, which stated the party’s favourable opinion on the recognition of the right to strike, was especially important for Ahmet, since he cites it again in the interview. The meeting took place before the 1950 general elections and was organized by the Minister of Labour to address the trade union leaders. When asked about his opinion on the right to strike, the minister “toured around before us like teachers do before their pupils, and he said: ‘Whoever thinks of striking is a traitor, a communist.’ The strange thing is that traitor is one thing, communist is another. This is the weirdness we came across there. Naturally, everybody kept silent, I mean, after such a statement, silence is kept.” A few months later, in the congress of the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions, one of the founders of the DP spoke in direct contrast to the Minister, Ahmet reported: “A trade union without strikes is like an army without weapons. It is nothing but a signboard. We tackled this in the seventh article of our program, upon coming to power; we will give this to the worker.”
Figure 5. Speech at a trade union. The two signs behind read: “Social insurances, an institution unworthy of its name” and “The institution of disputes cannot work without (the right to) strike”. IISH, Kemal Süker Collection.
As these incidents show, the recognition of the right to strike was a much debated issue in the political competition between the two parties. Ahmet’s multiple references to the DP’s promise of recognition of the right to strike imply that he had already strong ideas about the role and functions of the trade unions. Did the others in the Bakırköy Trade Union share these? In the next section, I will answer this question by introducing the story of another union meeting, which was reported in vivid detail both in the newspapers of the time and in Ahmet’s interview.

**Coffee and Coats: Are They Enough?**

Almost seven months after the meeting that was stirred by Enver’s allegations, the union was once more struck by turmoil when the administrative board resigned collectively. Similar to the first union meeting analysed above, this meeting was also reported in two different newspapers: *Hürbilek* and *Hürriyet*. However, there is also a third source reporting on this meeting: Ahmet. He tells what happened at the extraordinary congress of the Bakırköy Trade Union, which witnessed the beginning of his trade union career. Below, I will construct the proceedings of this meeting by combining information from these three sources.

The article on the congress in *Hürriyet* starts with statistical data. According to these, the trade union had 650 members in total at a district where there were 1500 workers. 78 of its members were at the meeting on 17 April 1949.537 The meeting, *Hürbilek* reported, was opened by the chair’s presentation of the activity report, which had an apologetic yet insubordinate tone:

> In approximately 210 days of the last seven months, there is not a single person who could serve [the union] without spending at least six days of the week to provide bread and butter for himself and his family. In that case, one day a week, thus twenty-eight days should be discussed here. There is not a single one of us who refrained from spending these twenty-eight days, which also include the time we need to rest and spend with our families, completely and willingly in the service of the union. However, these twenty-eight days is too short in face of the grandness of the work expected from us.538

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Unfortunately, we do not have any information on what happened in the seven months between the two meetings but the fact that the board had collectively resigned suggests a general dissatisfaction among the members. In awareness of this, the chair addresses the members as his fellow workers with whom he shares the difficult working conditions and thus asks them to be fair in their criticisms. Trying to win the members over, he lists the successes attained by the recently resigned management:

As soon as it got to work, our executive board realized that sickness, death and birth benefits were not high enough, that this should increase[^539] and it has been seen that the number of our members was too low, it has directed all our time to increase that number and increased the enrolment book it took over with 350 members to 650 members, thus attaining a 95% increase. It has found jobs for fourteen people who applied at different times, and participated in the parade on our greatest national holiday, Republic Day, with a weaving loom to represent our industry. This participation was not vouchsafed to any other trade union.

It seems that the popularity of the trade union among the workers was increasing. What was the source of discontent among the members then? Hürbilek’s coverage portrays a relatively balanced meeting by citing both agreements and disagreements with the management on the part of the rank-and-file members. Without mentioning any of these remarks, Hürriyet chose to summarize the activities cited by the administrative committee:

We opened a coffeehouse at the factory; we charged 7.5 piastres from our members for coffee which actually costs 7.5 piastres [to make]. We supplied coats [for the members] on credit. In spite of all these, there are those who said that the administrative committee is bought off, and that [the administrative committee] is not claiming the workers’ right. We believe that we carried out the duties given to us as much as possible and we face you blamelessly. This is the best we could do [and] we resign because we do not claim that it could not be done better.

As Hürbilek reported, there were members who agreed with the administrative board; Hürriyet also cites one such worker. But it also reported the long and detailed speech by another worker who did not agree at all. In the interview, Ahmet vividly remembers both this extraordinary congress and Hürriyet’s coverage of it:

[^539]: The expression here is grammatically problematic as one of the clauses lack a verb. However, the general meaning is understandable.
There was the congress and I made a speech which was published in Hürriyet. It was something like this: The administrative board says “we opened a tea house, a coffee house for the worker, the worker can drink tea now, and we also bought coats and dress fabric for the workers to be paid in instalments.” And I say, I criticize the activity report of the board. The duty of the trade union is not opening tea houses or buying coats on credit for the workers. It has to show an increase in workers’ wages.  

Scrutinizing the function of trade unions on the one hand, and the extent to which Bakırköy Trade Union fulfilled this function on the other, Ahmet continued his critique:

The Labour Law has made it obvious that it is the responsibility of trade unions to claim the rights of the worker. However, there is unfortunately nothing relating to this in the activity report. This institution was founded to avoid the unfair treatment of the workers. Finding employment for those fired and providing them financial aid are the ways the trade union helps the worker. The Turkish parliament designates the Ministry of Labour, the trade unions, and the worker representatives as the protectors of workers’ rights. [Although] they are more educated than us, our friends, whom we elected ourselves, cannot carry out these duties, I think they are under pressure. Our friends have been subjected to gross injustice at the weaving factory we work. There are times that a worker working at the frame loops for 130 liras a month, has to work for [only] 60 liras due to machine failure and none of the worker representatives take care of his situation. At the moment our worker representatives are the foremen and they do not care about our problems in order not to get harmed themselves. Personally, I am for an administrative board composed of workers who understand and agree with each other. We should not forget that the law gives us many benefactions today.

This speech raises various interesting points regarding both the inner dynamics of the factory life and the relations between the trade union and the workers. The most obvious one of these is Ahmet’s clear understanding of the legal structure and the emphasis on the need to take advantage of it. That Ahmet did not have any connections to 1946 trade unionism as mentioned before, suggests that he might have had an optimistic attitude on the development of trade unions. Indeed, that he cites the Ministry of Labour and the workers representatives as the other two protectors of workers’ rights further implies a favourable opinion on the changes in labour policy. The opportunities are out there is what Ahmet probably means, but

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540 Interview by Yıldırım Koç.
the trade union is wasting its time with trivial things. The contrast between Ahmet and the administrative board in this regard is also manifested in the following incident narrated by the chair: The board wanted to organize a new year’s party in order to improve the union’s finances but could not find the starting capital. Although the board members were willing to obtain an advance from the factory, this did not work either. Having given up on the party, the board went in favour of the idea of organizing a lottery, but apparently did not get permission from the authorities. Unfortunately, the chair continues, and those who were jealous of the union blew the whistle on the board. The board was damaged spiritually, complains the chair, and the union financially, but still the lottery was played and a typewriter was bought with the money raised.\footnote{“Bakirköy Mensucat İşçileri Sendikası Pazar Günü Olağanüstü Kongre Yaptı”, Hürbilek (20 Apr. 1949).} Let me open a parenthesis here to discuss the implications of these words by the chair.

Above, while analyzing the earlier meeting of the union, I cited a worker who proposed a check-off in order to ensure that the union fees were collected. Seven months after this proposal was accepted, the same worker, who was now the chair of the union, still cited the need to improve its financial situation. That the union organized such social events was also cited by Asım’s wife in the interview I conducted: “A party was organized, we stayed till the morning, the year could be 1947. They had everything; singers came one after another till the morning.” Of interest here is the fact that Asım himself was not a member of the union. Together, these two stories imply that there were both workers who were not unionized but participated in the social events organized by the union – workers who were somewhat hostile to the union, or at least to the union administration. It is unfortunate that we cannot establish what happened after the accusations were thrown around, but it is obvious that they lowered the performance of the administrative board. Let us now return to Ahmet’s speech and analyse it in relation to the chair’s idea of what the union “achieved.”
It is understandable that a worker like Ahmet, who was involved in or even came to lead a work stoppage some years earlier, would not be satisfied with such trivial undertakings. Opening coffee houses, buying coats on credit and organizing lotteries are not what Ahmet had in mind as the duties of a trade union. But, what about the things, such as finding jobs for fourteen people that the chair cited among their successes? Later in his speech, Ahmet discussed another incident, which he apparently thought as another injustice done by some workers to the administrative board. Illustrating the mentality of the board regarding labour-management relations, this incident further underlines the incompatibility between Ahmet and the union administration on issues regarding the workings of the trade union.

How to Deal with the Management: Two Examples

On the night of 30 December 1948, seventy-three weavers did not come to work and were thus fined to a day’s wage: “Upon hearing this, our executive board got in touch with the factory management and obtained a positive result. These seventy-three friends were to be forgiven on the condition that they would work on a holiday to compensate for the output
gap.” In Chapter 2, I showed that the workers were often fined for not coming to work without an excuse. Thus, although I could establish absenteeism of this sort as a common problem at the factory, it is not possible to determine whether, in all these cases, workers individually chose not to come to work. In this case, however, the very high number of weavers who did not show up for work implies a concerted effort.\(^\text{543}\) We shall return to this point later in this chapter.

The key word in this part of the narrative is “forgiven”. The original word he uses is “affettirilmiştir” which could roughly be translated as “were made to be forgiven”. Obviously, this expression suggests an act of persuading the management, in other words, the deal between the workers and the management was reached thanks to a compromise by the latter. The weavery was a very important link in the production chain as I showed in Chapter 3. I also referred above to the demand for experienced weavers as expressed in the job advertisements of the period. The weavers, then, had a double advantage: One, stemming from the situation of the labour market, which, as I argued earlier, provided them with structural working-class power in the sense that Wright defined it, and the other from their location within the production process. Hence, it is not surprising that they could engage in such a collective action of work stoppage. Unfortunately, we do not have information on the background of this action. Perhaps the problem was the one Ahmet addressed in his speech: There are times that a worker working at the frame loops for 130 liras a month, has to work for [only] 60 liras due to machine failure... Our friends have been subjected to gross injustice at the weaving factory we work). If that is the case, this incident is even more similar than we thought to the previous case of work stoppage. But let us leave this aside now and try to reconstruct what happened afterwards.

That this action damaged the factory financially is clear from the fact that the weavers “were to be forgiven with the condition that they would work on a holiday to compensate for the output gap.” I would like to direct the reader’s attention to the contrast between Ahmet’s uncompromising attitude during the work stoppage incident in which he was involved sometime between September 1941 and March 1943 and the chair’s conceding attitude in dealing with a seemingly similar incident. When Ahmet one day found himself in the midst of a work stoppage, he became the representative and defended his own and his fellow workers’ rights not only in front of the management but also the police. The assertiveness of his

language – “We want our right... We struggled for three-four hours... We want our previous wages.” – comes into direct contrast with the chair’s asking for forgiveness from the factory management. The contrast does not stop here, however. When we compare the workers’ reaction to these attitudes, a very interesting point rises.

It seems from the chair’s narration of what happened after the agreement between the union and the management that the “solution” did not quite work for the weavers: “…to prove that the executive board kept its word, nineteen weaver friends came to work that evening, the others did not. I owe these friends, who supported our executive board, to express my thanks in your presence.” Nineteen out of seventy-three weavers accepted the agreement, in other words, fifty-four did not cooperate with the union. Was it because they were not union members? What happened to them afterwards? Are they the workers who were fired and thus needed financial aid from the trade union as we learn from Ahmet’s story? None of these questions can be answered with certainty using the available archival documents. But, one very important thing is clear: The workers did not take the union serious enough; they did not work with it at times of crisis. Consider the response of the workers in the work stoppage earlier. Until the police got involved, it seems they stuck together. Only three out of twenty workers were at the police station. However, those who ran away from the police did not give in when they returned to the factory: “When we were taken to the police station, the other 17 workers did not start working; they dispersed in the factory, [and] did not work.” That the workers did not work with the trade union in 1949 but worked with an unofficial representative, as Ahmet called himself, four or five years earlier suggests that the emergence of the trade union did not change much at the factory in terms of workers becoming more assertive. It also shows us that they did not need the trade union in order to stick together; they already had the organizational skills to act collectively, even though they were only a group of twenty at a factory of around 1500 workers.

In his speech, Ahmet also addresses some of the speculative arguments I made above. First, he verifies the idea that the administrative board members were more educated than “us.” In trying to explain the overrepresentation of the young workers on the administrative board, I have reasoned that younger workers were elected because they tended to be more educated. Indeed, that is what we learn from Ahmet. Second, Ahmet claims that these more educated workers could not do what they were supposed to, that they failed to take advantage of the opportunities opened up by law. To stretch the argument further, they were responsible for the trade union’s failure to appeal to the workers. “I think they are under pressure,”
Ahmet continues but does not specify what he really means. In the next section, we will try to answer this question by zooming out to understand the political and ideological context in which the post-1946 trade unionism was shaped.

**The Dual Turkish Labour Policy**

The above title, which truly captures the essence of the labour policies of the Kemalist regime, belongs to the Times London’s editorial piece on the Turkish trade unions.\(^{544}\) While these policies aimed at creating a skilled workforce needed for the nationalization and modernization of the industries, they were also directed at containing the working class by the external application of force and social control. The 1947 Trade Union Law, as well as the Labour Code of 1936, was the embodiment of this two-fold policy. For example, the Trade Union Law denied unions the right to strike or to engage in political activity, either on their own or as vehicles of political parties. Article fifth of this law reads as follows: “Workers’ and employers’ trade unions cannot engage with politics, political propaganda and publication. They cannot be the vessels of any political establishment’s activities. The trade unions are national establishments. They cannot move against nationalism and national interests. They can participate in any international establishment with the permission of the Committee of Ministers.”\(^{545}\) Sülker’s interpretation of this as a precautionary measure against the socialist tendencies of the 1946 trade unions supports the argument that the prevention of the infiltration of any sort of socialistic ideology was one of the priorities of the regime.\(^{546}\) The definitional obscurity of the domain of politics became a valuable tool in the hands of the state to ensure absolute control of the labour movement.

Although Sülker is right in connecting the fifth article of the law to the 1946 experience, in practical terms, the ramifications came more in terms of the political rivalry between the RPP and the DP. The two parties accused each other at every opportunity of trying to control the trade unions. As Doğan explains in his detailed study on the Workers Bureau under the Istanbul branch of the party, the RPP took advantage of its position as the

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544 “Türk İşçi Sendikaları, İşçi Sınıfının Hukuki Durumu ve Refahi”. Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 383, IISH. This document is the Turkish translation of the editorial piece in the *Times London* on 23 June 1952. Two points in this article are worth mentioning, the first of which is its blunt anti-Soviet stance and support for the government party, the DP. The RPP, it claims, resorted to nationalism to win the support of the working class. The second point concerns the cooperation between the Turkish and British states on social policy measures in Turkey. The engagement of the services of two British specialists at the Ministry of Labour immediately after its establishment is cited as an example of this cooperation.


546 Sülker, *100 Soruda*, p. 69.
government party. The Bureau, through its schemes of financial and organizational aid gradually increased the power of the RPP within the trade unions. Sülker cites the overbearing presence of the RPP in trade unionism as one of the reasons why workers were reluctant to take part in trade union activity after the law was enacted. Doğan also makes the same connection, albeit indirectly. To him, the painful memory of the 1946 experience partly caused this reluctance.

That the early Republican state’s labour policy was based on the idea of containing the labour movement partly through petty favours, but mostly through direct, and indirect, means of suppression, is a widely cited argument. What has not been researched is how the workers perceived and acted upon these efforts. In other words, we know that the young republican state had a vision of an ideal worker to be attained through a disciplinary project of subject-formation. With regards to the workers’ perception and reaction to this project, however, we have limited knowledge, most of which concerns the trade union politics of the late 1940s that manifested a relatively homogenous picture of workers’ ideology. But, this should not make us blind to the presence of different mentalities and alternative visions within the labour movement. In the next section, I will provide two examples of these by following the stories of the two dissidents in the Bakırköy Trade Union, Enver and Ahmet. I argue that they exemplify two of the many possible ways in which a worker’s learning process could have been shaped in early Republican Turkey. The way the lives of these two workers with completely different politics were shaped in later years will provide us with a better understanding of the ideological dynamics of the labour movement of the period.

Accusation of Communism as Slander

Any study of archival material on the labour movement in Turkey in the late 1940s and early 1950s would show, without any doubt, that the second pillar of the Turkish state’s labour policy, i.e. the containment of the working classes by the external application of force and social control, had been strongly constructed. In the increasingly politicized atmosphere of the late 1940s, anti-communism came to be the most prominent ideological tool of this social control by functioning as a weapon of defamation in the context of escalating political rivalry.

547 Doğan, Governmental Involvement, pp. 136-142.
548 Sülker also cites the financial disability of workers to pay the union dues as a source of their reluctance to unionize. 100 Soruda, p. 67.
549 Doğan, Governmental Involvement, p.143.
Consider the following two examples from two different labour contexts in which practical matters, as well as labour politics, are discussed with reference to communism.

The first example is from the Karabük Iron and Steel Factory where the workers representatives’ election in 1949 became a highly politicized event because the RPP overtly tried to exert its will on the workers and undermine the popularity of the DP. In various newspapers, the workers are reported to be in great distress, which they expressed in petitions complaining about the factory management addressed to the district labour inspector as well as the president and the prime minister. Among these articles, one reports a meeting, which took place in the People’s Houses, local clubs controlled by the RPP. A certain retired colonel, who happened to be the manager of the aforementioned factory, and the head of the Karabük branch of the RPP, collected the “workers, tailors, shoemakers” at the meeting where a certain judge gave a speech accusing the DP of communism.

The second example concerns the workers at the harbour and docks of Istanbul. In a trade union meeting in August 1950, a worker, after complaining on the differential practices of paid holidays among state enterprises, criticized the RPP for its objection to sending soldiers to Korea to fight against communism. This behaviour, he asserted, did not beseech a nationalist political party. These remarks illustrate two things. First is the failure of the fifth article of the Trade Union Law to keep the workers out of the terrain of politics. As exemplified here, where and whenever they found necessary, the workers expressed their opinion about the world of politics surrounding them. The second observation supports an argument I made earlier concerning the discursive identification of nationalism with anti-communism. The dock worker in this incident provides a clear example of this identification: If a political party is nationalist, how can it refrain from fighting against communism?

550 Kemal Sülker Collection contains a number of news articles dated May and June 1949 on this much disputed election: “Karabük İşçilerinin Seçim Şikayeti İnceleniyor”, Gece Postası (27 May 1949); “İşçi Mümessili Seçimi Nizamsız Cereyan Ediyor”, Tasvir (27 May 1949); “Çelik Fabrikalarındaki İşçi Mümessili Seçimi”, Tasvir (28 May 1949); “Karabük Seçimlerinin Neticeleri Belli Oldu”, Tasvir [date not specified, most probably 3 June 1949]; “Karabükçe İşçiler Zor Durumda”, Tan (29 May 1949); “Karabükte İşçi Mümessili Seçimi”, Son Posta (17 June 1949), Folder No.148, IISH. These articles provide valuable information on the development of disputes around the election, both before and after it took place. Besides portraying the increase in tension between the workforce and the management in a vivid manner, they also provide information on the various mechanisms used by the workers to express their discontent as well as the RPP’s efforts to contain the steel workers under control by forcing them to enrol in the party.

551 For a detailed study of the People’s Houses see Asım Karaömerlioğlu, “The People’s Houses and the Cult of the Peasant in Turkey”, Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 34, No. 4, Oct. 1998, pp. 67-91. Karaömerlioğlu discusses the ideological functions of these houses as propaganda institutions of Kemalism. Among their various functions, the People’s Houses also served as adult education centres as in the case of the meeting in Karabük.

552 “Balatta dün yapılan işçi toplantısı”, [Newspaper title unspecified] (20 Aug. 1950). Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 151, IISH.
The common point between these two examples is the use of “communism” as an accusation to undermine the political rival. While in the first example the DP is the communist for it organized opposition to the RPP, in the second the RPP is criticized for not being anti-communist enough. This switch is caused by the time gap between the two incidents. The first case dates from May 1949, a time when political rivalry between the two parties was peaking. The desperate and, hence, increasingly aggressive efforts of the RPP in dealing with the Karabük election testify to the fact that the ascending tension between the two parties had spilled over onto daily social relations. The second case, however, took place four months after the DP came to power. Although communism continued to be the enemy of all parties, this time the discursive weapon was directed to the defeated party.

These two examples are not aberrant at all. The reason why I chose these two among many others is two-fold. First, stemming from two very different industrial sectors and geographical locations, they show that anti-communism was one of the pillars of the young trade union movement. Second, together these two examples present the range of this discursive weapon in contexts that are fundamentally different from each other. The first reflects the disputes surrounding an election process at a factory, while the second illustrates the wide span of the issues discussed by the workers at trade union meetings. It is interesting to note that the aforementioned weapon comes rather in handy in both cases. But there was also a third context where it also carried an important function: the trade union movement.

The Arrested Development of Trade Unionism

Two first-hand testimonies by trade unionists of late 1940s include remarks on the difficulty of working for the labour movement in the face of allegations of communism. The first comes from Bahir Ersoy, a worker from Sümerbank Defterdar Factory and a trade union activist from 1947 onwards:

If we examine the state of the public opinion in 1947 when the trade union movement started, we faced a certain lack. Who stood where on matters such as workers’ rights, workers’ movement, and social policy? The public did not have information on these. The youth did not know about this matter, the press was indifferent. We did not know anything about the university...I could learn about the Sociality Institute (İçtimaiyat Enstitüsü) only after mid-1950s although the conferences had started in 1948. I thought to myself: Who is the one who

553 An institute at Istanbul University that organized a yearly conference and published on social issues.
calls us communist when we talk of workers’ rights? Communism, under the name of betraying the homeland, was an action believed to be something like spying for the Russians [...] How could we explain ourselves to those people who did not know anything about these matters and who thought badly of us?

Apparently, this was a widely felt problem among the workers as the speeches from a rally by the textile workers in September 1949 illustrate. The rally was organized to protest unemployment in the textile sector but the speakers’ complaints reveal further problems: the Association of Istanbul Trade Unions was not taking care of workers’ problems and the labour law was still a draft while workers continued to work in unhealthy conditions. Most importantly, the workers continued, and those workers who tried to claim their rights were labelled communists.

Ahmet also cites the discursive identification of communism with the betrayal of the homeland, as we saw above. He remembers getting confused when he heard the Minister of Labour speaking to trade union leaders before the 1950 general elections: “…and he said: ‘Whoever thinks of striking is a traitor, a communist.’ The strange thing is that traitor is one thing, communist is another. This is the weirdness we came across there. Naturally, everybody kept silent, I mean, after such a statement, silence is kept.” Speaking in 1987, he called this identification strange but the fact that everybody “naturally” kept silent indicates that this was not an unusual remark as we shall see below.

Together, these personal accounts testify to the difficulty of being involved in working class politics in the late 1940s. I argue that, determined by the national intra-bourgeoisie struggles and their political manifestations and by the conjuncture of the Cold War, this

554 The following excerpt from a long article published in a well circulating daily newspaper illustrates the popular understanding of the definition of a ‘communist’ in those years:

Today, the type that comes to mind when communism is spoken of is not a theoretician committed to the social and economical principles of Karl Marx but a traitor to his homeland and to his people who tries to carry out, overtly or covertly, all the orders of Moscow, a revolutionary fifth column agent of the Soviet Russia. He would engage in propaganda among the masses as soon as he finds an opportunity, would blacken his own [country’s] political regime and government, would say that genuine democracy and populism exist only in Soviet Russia and other communist countries, would pretend to be religious or nationalist when necessary, poison the people continuously, would create an atmosphere of moral defeat by blackening all values of the homeland, and prepare the ground for a revolution. In doing these, they will mostly work among the poor and low-income sections of the people, those who are in discontent for various reasons (“Türk Vatanında Komünistliğe Yer Yoktur”, Cumhuriyet, 22 Apr 1949).

555 Interview by Yıldırım Koç.
557 Interview by Yıldırım Koç.
difficult context arrested the development of trade unionism substantially. Labour historians have written a great deal on the trade union’s ineffective and state-controlled character in this period in a critical manner and, like any other historical judgment, these conclusions are somewhat affected by the bias of hindsight. Let us now turn to two examples of insiders’ critique of trade unionism, which offer evidence on the presence of alternative visions on the development of labour politics.

**Increasing Partisanship among Workers: Revisiting Enver’s Story**

When we left Enver, he had been thrown out of the Bakırköy trade union for gossiping about and defaming other members. By now, we have enough information on Enver’s character to guess that his reaction to this would not be limited to the protests he made at the aforementioned meeting. A few weeks later, an article titled “The Voice of the Truth” was published in *Tez Kalkınma*. While the article is unsigned, there is circumstantial evidence to assume that it was penned by Enver, although in the last part of the article he is referred to as a “friend”. Given that Enver had actually accepted to have penned the unsigned report on the factory published earlier in *Tez Kalkınma*, this could simply be a trick by Enver to deny authorship if need be. The article opens with criticisms and complaints of workers given at various trade union meetings in September 1948:

> In every trade union congress, bitter complaints of worker citizens who are neglected also by the Republican regime are increasingly heard. Workers complain of their low wages, of the labour law which does not meet their needs, of the insufficiency of social insurance, of the redundancy of the employment bureau, of the inefficiency of the regional directorate of labour.

The wording of the first sentence raises a significant issue: the workers are also neglected by the Republican regime. The use of the conjunction “also” in the first sentence implies the disappointment of the workers who, according to Enver, expected the Republic to treat the working population better than before. I will revisit this point later in the chapter, while discussing the interrelations between the processes of proletarianization and state formation. For now, let us focus on Enver’s critique of the developments in trade unionism. As a whole,

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this critique portrays a serious discontent among workers with the institutional and legal practices of the RPP government concerning the labour question:

Although law number 5018 on workers’ and employers’ unions and association of trade unions say that trade unions are economic and social organizations, the governing party, with its Barkins and Seleks and other members, is trying to influence them, or, with the purpose of benefiting from them in the elections, trying to subject them to itself overtly and covertly under the guise of organization. This is why out of more than 120,000 workers in Istanbul, only ten-twelve thousand are registered in the trade unions. No worker who sees and understands that the RPP is not sincere about the labour question wants to enrol in what they call the People’s Party’s trade unions.

This brief quote is important because it supports all the above mentioned arguments on early trade union membership based on first-hand observations by Sülker. It also shows that a

559 The writer refers to Rebi Barkın, the head of RPP’s Workers’ Bureau, and Sabahattin Selek, a resigned military officer who also worked for the bureau at the time. These two names were also involved with Hürbilek.

560 In Sülker’s personal archive, there is a copy of a speech given by the chair of Istanbul Cloth Workers’ Trade Union (the former Eyüp Cloth Workers’ Trade Union which did not join the Association of the Istanbul Trade Unions because of the latter’s close connections to the RPP) at the union congress on 23 January 1949. His account of the situation strongly supports Enver’s claims. I quote the first half of this speech here:

Dear Fellow Workers,

For some reason that is unknown to us, two years ago, new trade unions were established by the old Zonguldak deputy, Dr. Rebii Barkın. We frequently talked on this matter with some friends who accepted the necessity of such an institution and supported its formation. We had many discussions on whether this move by Dr. Rebii Barkın could possibly benefit workers or not. In the end, we arrived at the conviction that a trade union that was not founded and managed by workers themselves could not benefit workers. Thus, we did not enroll in the trade union Dr. Barkın established in the name of the RPP, we chose to wait for some time [but] we never gave up the idea of founding an independent trade union that would work to benefit workers without being the instrument of any kind of politics. This was a very difficult task for us; we had neither enough money nor enough knowledge. However, our sincerity, honesty, lack of avarice and our conviction that fellow workers would only participate in such a movement which takes its strength from the working class itself gave us courage. We founded İstanbul Cloth Workers Trade Union on 16 October 1947 in the midst of numerous difficulties. This trade union was the first and only independent one founded by workers’ money and intelligence at that time. Our goal was to be useful to our fellow workers and thus to our homeland. We have always looked at things from this angle and stayed in this framework in our activities so far. But my dear fellow workers, the real difficulty actually started after we founded our trade union. As if our financial problem was not enough, there also emerged the problem of lack of qualified personnel. We knew our problems but we did not know the legal procedures. We have benefited from the help of the regional directorate of labour and its inspectors in dealing with these procedures and some other legal problems. I owe them my thanks. You see friends, we have faltered for a long time but I am honored to tell you the good news: Today, our trade union does not suffer from lack of money and personnel as much as it did before (“Sayın İşçi Arkadaşlar”. Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 121, IISH).

This speech raises a number of important points regarding some of the arguments I made above. First is the designation of the trade unions Rebi Barkın founded as the “new trade unions”. Implicit here is a reference to the trade unions of 1946. Second, the speaker makes it very clear that trade unionism was a fiercely debated
year and a half after trade unions came into being, a certain degree of awareness of the government’s direct actions on unionization and the workers’ subsequent reaction to these had already risen among the working class public. Enver cites a speech made by the chair of Istanbul Associations of Trade Unions at the Bakırköy Textile Workers’ Trade Union meeting to exemplify the workers’ reluctance to unionize. The chair told the participants about his visit to Ankara where he went to participate in discussions on the possible changes to the Labour Code and to report on the trade unions’ demands. When the RPP officials heard about the size of trade union membership, he continued, they replied harshly: “You are useless. Make sure that you enrol these 120,000 until the next general elections and bring your demands only after that!” Unfortunately, Enver does not elaborate further on this point, but we can infer that the paternalist relation between the party and the trade union seriously disturbed him.

Next on Enver’s agenda is the last meeting of the Bakırköy union.

The reader might remember the enthusiastic tone of the newspaper, Hürbilek, in reporting the trade union’s September 1948 meeting: “... The members, who attended the meeting on a large scale, filled the hall.” It would be misleading to attribute this enthusiasm to Hürbilek’s close connections to the Workers’ Bureau and the Association of Istanbul Trade Unions.561 Expectedly, Tez Kalkınma, the publishing organ of an oppositional party, did not share this enthusiasm. About the same meeting Enver wrote: “A trade union with 370 members had a congress with only 70 present 30 of whom had actually registered on the same day and there were 77 voting. For some reason, they did not feel the need to take attendance neither at the beginning nor at the elections.” With these serious allegations, Enver’s critique gains a new dimension. The problem confronting the young trade unions’ development was two-fold. On the one hand, there were the state’s efforts to steer the course of this development and, on the other, was the misdoings and the personal fights undermining the transparency of the trade union bureaucracy.

The new chair of the union, İhsan Önaslan denied these serious allegations, with a letter published in Hürbilek, fifteen days after Enver’s report.562 The letter starts with the chair...
complaining of the discrepancy between the title of the piece, “The Voice of the Truth” and the allegations directed to the union. The reporter, argued the chair, manipulated the truth because of his partisanship:

[T]here were 81 members at the Bakırköy Textile Workers’ Union, not 70. The candidate who won the elections got 77 votes. It could be checked in our registration book that 30 members were not registered on the same day but five days before the meeting. In fact, the chair of the Bakırköy branch of the National Development Party, Enver Tenși, had also filled in his application form two days before the congress, yet he talked more than any other member in our congress.

This correspondence is important for two reasons: First, it gives us a concrete idea of the size of a trade union meeting. Second, it almost points to a consensus in the elections with only four oppositional (or blank) votes according to the chair’s account. Together, these two implications suggest a strikingly different atmosphere than the one depicted by Hürbilek. Moreover, the narration of the incident, which resulted in Enver’s dismissal from the union in the last part of the article in Tez Kalkınma, adds a new dimension to the portrayal of the meeting atmosphere:

A foreman friend from the National Development Party was accused of factiousness when he criticized the RPP for being insincere regarding the labour question and he was thrown out of the meeting hall by the chair. Since this was planned before, he was treated unkindly by two foremen who also work as exactors for the RPP Bakırköy branch.

The chair also gives his account of Enver’s dismissal from the trade union:

[However] during his talk he went so far as to question the honour and esteem of some of our friends because of his partisanship. When he was asked to prove these accusations by the congress, he became speechless and faltered. The valuable members of our congress did the right thing by agreeing on his leaving the hall.

Above I noted that, although the article in Tez Kalkınma was not signed, there is circumstantial evidence to assume that it was penned by Enver. The fact that Enver’s dismissal makes up almost half of the chair’s letter, although he did not openly cite Enver’s name, adds to this evidence. We can make two observations based on this part of the letter. 250
First is the extent of the influence of Enver’s article on the union. Once again, we see that these publications were read by at least some part of the trade union members. The second observation concerns the popularity of partisanship as an accusation between opposing parties. While Enver accused the trade union of being under the influence of the RPP, the chair of the union returned this accusation by implicitly referring to Enver’s political identity. In Chapter 3, I argued that, within the context of increasing politicization of the public sphere, which came about with the end of the single-party regime, the discourses deployed by the workers also came to be highly politicized. Above, I discussed the most prominent form of this political discourse of rivalry in the case of the use of communism as slander. What the letter displays is a milder form of the same trend: Whenever there was disagreement on the workings of the trade unions, partisanship was called forth to undermine the credibility of the opponent’s opinion.

The chair’s response to Enver’s allegations is also telling in terms of what it omits. By addressing only the accusations concerning the dishonest practices of the congress, it could be said that the chair ignored the more serious allegations related to the RPP’s involvement in the movement. We learn from Enver’s article something that we could not from Hürbilek’s coverage: “Similar to any other trade union, the president of the congress of this trade union was also the vice-chief of the RPP Workers’ Bureau, Sebahattin Selek.” Although Selek was the editor of Hürbilek, his name was not mentioned in the article covering the meeting. A possible explanation could be that the discontent among the workers about such direct involvements in trade union administration was well known by the RPP officials and thus such involvements were not openly reported. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that the chair completely ignored this in his response. Focusing on only a small portion of the allegations, namely those concerning the number of participants and the enrolment practices, he ignored the core of Enver’s accusations.

Juxtaposing the two newspapers’ coverage of the meeting also reveals interesting points on the general atmosphere of a trade union event. Almost as if he wanted to make its readership feel that they were present at this “very exciting meeting,” Hürbilek’s reporter used literary expressions while describing the conduct of the participants. According to this coverage, the activity report was met with violent attacks from the participants who found it insufficient and the inspection board was called forth to account for its negligence. Enver’s

563 A similar situation also occurred in the second congress of the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions on 5 December 1948. Despite wide criticism, the Bureau insisted on the presidency of Selek at the congress (Sülker, Türkiye’de Sendikacılık, pp. 119-20). A very critical account of the day was published in Tez Kalkınma on 17 Dec. 1948, entitled “RPP’s Interventions to the Trade Unions”.

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impressions of the congress could not be more different: He claimed that there was no reaction to the activity report except for the self-criticism of the ex-chair which was motivated, according to Enver, by a desire to salvage the day.

Having thus portrayed a very docile body of membership, Enver goes on to critically evaluate the decisions made at the congress. In Hürbilek’s coverage, some of these decisions were mentioned but no critical reaction from the members was cited. Enver, on the other hand, seems to be well aware of the ramifications of decisions such as the application of the check-off method for collecting union dues. In this method, union dues are withheld by the employers and paid to the union. According to Marcel van der Linden, this practice involves the following danger: “[It] obviously does little to strengthen members’ ties with their union and, moreover, shifts the balance of power towards the employer, inasmuch as the union becomes dependent for its funds on co-operation of the employer.”

Enver, too, seems well aware of this danger: “The union will become unable to protect any worker’s right as soon as this decision is put into practice,” he continued. Moreover, it was also decided to have a union office inside the factory, which, according to Enver, would further disable the union: “Trade unions established within the factories in this way are yellow trade unions. It has been seen in trade union history that these unions do not benefit the workers at all.” With this statement, it becomes clear that Enver’s demand for trade union independence extends beyond governmental control. That he uses the term “yellow trade union” and makes a historical reference further illustrates the extent of his knowledge on the workers’ movement. Similar to Ahmet, Enver portrays the image of a self-taught worker who developed a critical stance.

At this point, I would like to remind the reader of Ahmet’s critique of the administrative board of the union meeting in April 1949. The main disagreement between Ahmet and the board was over the definition of the union’s duty. While he thought the union should strive for improving the workers’ living conditions, the board, in his opinion, wasted time with trivial activities. Enver’s critique, on the other hand, focused on administrative wrongdoings and the RPP’s involvement in trade unions. Although complaining about seemingly different aspects of the Bakırköy trade union, both workers express their discontent with the course of development of the trade union movement in general. Despite the congruence between their perceptions of the union, the two workers’ ideas and subsequent fates diverged completely in terms of what was to be done.

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In the next section, I first present Enver’s vision on the direction the workers’ movement should take. So far, I have analysed Enver’s career within the union as a dissident and presented his politicization as an alternative to the dominance of the RPP within the trade union movement. When we examine what he prescribes for the future of that movement, however, we see that he actually spoke very much from within the mainstream discourse. In what follows, I open up the analysis by way of locating Enver’s discourse in the wider discursive universe of the early trade union movement.

“The Turkish Worker does not Need a Pioneer because…”

According to Keyder, the political economy of the 1930s was characterized by two developments: The economic measures originally taken against the crisis, which I discussed in Chapter 1, and the emergence of a new state form. Vigilant against societal autonomy, the motivation behind the new institutionalization of the state was to implement policies in accordance with the implicit goal of establishing the bureaucracy’s status above the society. This goal required both a defensive and an active stance: the first led to the elimination of all societal autonomy while the second invited attempts at economic planning and ideological conformity.

Although Keyder asserts that this regime remained in force until the end of World War II, the kernel of ideological conformity, especially its ambivalent yet powerful part, which was to recognize Mustafa Kemal as the natural leader and ideologue of any societal development, has stayed intact far longer. Deprived of a clear and fixed definition, the concept has been used in Republican Turkey by various political and social groups to undermine each other’s agenda of social change. Since the nation-building process has always been identified with the persona of Kemal, any appeal to nationalism and patriotism, at least discursively, declared adherence to Kemalism. Often attributed a totally novel and unique character, the appeal to Kemalism was also instrumentalized in combating both Western liberalism and Soviet communism. Developing in the context of such a hegemonic ideology, the young trade union movement repeatedly resorted to this handy discursive weapon.

This brief background information should have prepared the reader for the following utterances by Enver:

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If nothing more than benefiting the workers is expected from the trade unions, those calling themselves organizer, vanguard, pioneer should stay away. The Turkish worker does not need a pioneer because his path is Kemalism which was drawn a quarter of a century ago. The Turkish worker is the unflappable walker on that path. He is committed to his homeland and his nation at least as much as citizens in other occupational groups. And he has proved that commitment throughout the history because among those who betray their nation and sell their homeland, there is not even a single worker.

As the publishing organ of an opposition party, Tez Kalkınma’s discontent with RPP official’s involvement in a trade union meeting is understandable. But, what made it necessary for the author of this article, most probably Enver, to resort to Kemalism as a safety valve to object to this involvement? To whom does he refer when he speaks of “organizer, vanguard, and pioneer?” Why was it not enough to argue in favour of the independence of the trade unions from any political establishment? Who did he have in mind when speaking of “betraying the nation and selling the homeland?” And, more importantly, how was the patriotism of the Turkish worker defined and what did it have to do with the development of the trade union movement? To answer these questions, we should revisit the topic of the rise of anti-communism as it came to dominate the entire political and ideological spheres of the post-War Republic.

Anti-Communism within the Labour Movement

As I briefly explained in the section on the accusation of communism as slander, in the context of the Cold War, the anti-communist rhetoric was widely used as a means of critique by different social actors. Here, I will illustrate the uses of this rhetoric within the labour movement specifically. The spirit of anti-communism also pervaded the trade union movement. The early years of the Cold War witnessed a number of anti-communist rallies organized by trade unions. One such rally was organized by The Istanbul Transportation Workers’ Trade Union on 26 August 1950 and it received a great deal of attention from other social groups as well as the media. Before describing the details of what happened at the rally, let us have a quick look at a meeting of the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions in April 1950.

When a worker asked the delegates to participate in the rally, according to Son Telgraf’s coverage of the meeting566, his offer was accepted with applause. However, there was a

problem concerning the legal aspect of this participation: The fifth article of the Trade Union Law of 1947 forbade the trade unions to engage in any political activity as I noted earlier. When another worker was reminded of this, he caused indignation among the delegates some of whom shouted: “Get down! Aren’t you ashamed?” The meeting continued with speeches damning communism by workers and the vice-president of the Turkish Youth Organization.

A few days before the rally, the chair of the Istanbul Transportation Workers’ Trade Union expressed the need for such a protest in the following letter that he sent to two newspapers, Son Telgraf and Gece Postası:

On behalf of the Turkish worker
President of the Organization Committee

The origin of the organization that corrodes the world’s nations’ constitution through secret agents and that tries to smirch its red stains [on them] is known by all of us. The Turkish worker sees communism as being more dangerous than typhus. For this reason, the untainted Turkish worker will square up to this malady with his solemnity that befits his Turkishness and will prove that the communism microbe cannot find a place in the constitution of the Turkish worker through the rally he will hold to curse communism on 26th August 1950, a historical day of our glorious army’s victory […]

This rally will also be a lesson to those pitiable ones who think badly about the Turkish worker.

The Turkish workers are always a nationalist whole.

The Turkish worker is stainless in his soul as well as his essence.

The Turkish worker pledges to crush and annihilate communism wherever he sees it with the strength and might he takes from the noble blood in his veins.

The reader might find the language of this open letter extreme in the way it identifies communism with illness. In fact, biological metaphors were very common in anticommunist rhetoric. Several such references were also made at the rally: “similar to the tuberculosis germ which would knock a healthy person down, the communism germ, being more scarier than that, is growing today to destroy the nations,” “it [communism] is such an illness that even little indifference and underestimation would be enough for it to reign the nation,” “our goal is to shout out that this cursed germ cannot diffuse among the Turkish nation and the

567 “Son Telgraf ve Gece Postası Yazı İşleri Sayın Müdürlüğüne”. Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 187, IISH.
568 The day on which the Turkish offensive against the Greeks, which resulted in the victory of the former party four days later, was launched in the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922.
Turkish workers,” “we gathered today to damn a germ which sucks the blood of humanity.”\textsuperscript{569} Within this discourse, the word “Turkish” is almost always used in an ethnic sense. It seems that in the popular imagery of the early Republican period worker, this ethnic identity worked as a leukocyte against a communist invasion of his constitution.

Another but closely related aspect of workers’ language cited here is the equation of Turkishness with anti-communism. From various examples, it could be deduced that loathing communism is a pre-requisite to be Turkish. One of the underlying reasons for this was the accusations directed against the labour movement for having communist tendencies. Examples of these accusations given by Bahir Ersoy and Ahmet Cansızoğlu are mentioned above. A similar example also comes from the letter of the chair of the Istanbul Transportation Workers’ Trade Union, as quoted above. To him, the rally was also important because it “will also be a lesson to those pitiable ones who think badly about the Turkish worker.” Thus, it is understandable that the trade unionists vehemently emphasized the

\textsuperscript{569} “Türk İşçileri Dün Komünizmi Tel’in Etti”, \textit{Vatan} (27 Aug. 1950); “Komünizme Karşı İstanbul İşçilerinin Dünkü Muazzam Toplantısı”, \textit{Milliyet} (27 Aug. 1950). Both are from Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 187, \textit{IISH}. 256
impossibility of the Turkish workers to be communists. Consider the following two examples, also from 1950:

*We, the Turkish workers who have a long and untainted history, feel the need to hold national interests above everything else. We feel this through the blood in our veins*” and “*The Turkish workers who have a bright future in front of them, will take it upon themselves to damn this cruel and disgusting ideology.*”

What these quotes show is that the anti-communist discourse was used for many more reasons than just self-defence. It also unified the government and the labour movement to a great extent as far as we understand from the complimentary comments made about the newly elected DP government at the aforementioned rally:

*Our request from the government, which has been dealing with the communists in a serious manner, is the following: We want those traitors making communist propaganda in Turkey to be detected and exiled to the Moscow heaven. Or we want them to be deemed traitors and sent to the gallows.*

According to this coverage, the chair of the organizing committee continued his speech by summoning the workers to help the government in its struggle against communism and he finished with the following words: “*Down with communism, long live the government and the people of the Turkish Republic!*” It is important to note at this point that workers were not the only social group present at the rally. *Vatan* reports that there were a couple of thousand people at the rally from different social groups such as students, civil servants and

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570 “Komünizme Karşı İstanbul İşçilerinin Dünkü Muazzam Toplantısı”, *Milliyet* (27 Aug 1950). Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 187, *IISH*. The government also used similar expressions. For example, a member of the parliament reassured a group of state workers who complained about being tagged as communist with the following words: “*The Turkish people who have spilled their blood on that holy substance called the earth can never be communists*” (“Sendikalara Politika Girmiyecek”, *Cumhuriyet*, 10 July 1950). This statement might sound inapprehensible to the reader who is not familiar with Turkish history and/or its popular imageries in the nationalist discourse. A brief clarification is thus needed. The Turkish war of Independence was seen as an anti-imperialist struggle waged against Western powers whose interests lied in the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire. The memory of land loss was very vivid in the popular imagery. Ironically, within the context of the Cold War, the threatening imperialistic power was associated with Soviet Russia, which had actually supported the groups fighting for independence in the 1920s. Consequently, references such as martyrdom, fighting for the land, spilling blood and so on were widely used in the anti-communist rhetoric.

craftsmen.\textsuperscript{572} This is a significant piece of information in that it reveals two important insights about the labour movement at the time. First, the movement sought for alliances with other social groups. Second, anti-communism was a hegemonic ideology to the extent that it managed to bring such different social groups together. We should also note the explicitly positive coverage of the rally preparations and the rally itself by the print media. One newspaper called the rally “a magnificent meeting” which was “a warning to those who wanted to take advantage of the workers’ troubles,”\textsuperscript{573} while another one used the term “red danger” to refer to communism in the caption.\textsuperscript{574}

**The Fear of Strikes**

The discussion on the right to strike, which was very heated at the time, could also be understood in relation to this ideological hegemony since a very important epiphany of the hysteria of communism within the trade union movement concerned this issue. Despite disagreements within the party, the RPP’s opposition to the right to strike continued well into the 1950s. At the beginning of the current chapter, I discussed the RPP’s efforts to contain the trade union movement within certain limits after the brief experience of the 1946 unionism. In light of the evidence provided, the anti-strike stance of the ruling party does not come as a surprise. The fact that a considerable part of the working classes also argued against the legalization of strikes, however, requires an explanation. To an extent, this attitude amongst the workers could be attributed to the fear of lockouts, which, they thought, would accompany the legalization of strikes. Examples of such fear can be found in a survey conducted by Hürbilek in early 1949 on the right to strike. Of the six workers who responded, three argued that it was not the time for the Turkish workers to have the right to strike because of inadequate financial means, on the one hand, and the immaturity of the trade union movement on the other.\textsuperscript{575}

\textsuperscript{572} Ibid. *Cumhuriyet* gives the number of trade unions present at the rally as ten (“İşçiler komünizmî dün tel’în ettîler”, 27 August 1950). It seems that among these social groups students were very actively involved in the anti-communist movement. Earlier the same month, the Association of Istanbul University Students organized another meeting to protest against communism. Political party representatives were also present at the meeting, which ended with the students reminding the DP government to keep its promise to annihilate communists (“Komünizmi tel’în için gençliğin toplantısı”, *Cumhuriyet*, 5 August 1950).


\textsuperscript{574} “Türk İşçileri Dün Komünizmi Tel’în Etti”, *Vatan* (27 Aug. 1950). Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 187, *IISH*.

\textsuperscript{575} “Grev Hakkında Resimli Anket”, *Hürbilek* (16 Feb. 1949); (2 March 1949); (16 March 1949). Later in the same year, a worker expressed his concern with the legalization of lock-outs in the following words: “Down with the right to lock-out! We also do not want the right to strike which masks the right to lock-out!” (“İşi Gözü ile: 258
Among the holders of this opinion was a worker from the Bakırköy Trade Union. A weaver from Bakırköy Factory, who was also the vice-chair of the Istanbul Textile Industry Workers’ Trade Union, made the following statement after the Minister of Labour’s assertion that “the Turkish worker knows that strike is an out of fashion weapon which, in most cases, does not harm the opponent but injures the one who holds it by blowing up in his face”:

Our workers have not matured enough to use the weapon called strike. If such a weapon is given to us, we would attempt to use it everywhere. Before that, it is required that our trade unions are strengthened and our cash boxes are filled. There is no doubt that if we are given the right to strike, the boss will also have the right to lock-out. A person with a good sense could very well think that, for today, strike would do us more harm than good. More precisely, it is harmful for workers to think of strikes not only today but also for a long time to come.

For the most part, the anti-strike stance among workers was underpinned by an adherence to the government’s labour policies. For example, in January 1950, in a meeting held by trade unions that refused to join the Istanbul Association of Trade Unions because of its close relations with the RPP, a wire was sent to the Ministry of Labour asking, on behalf of the Turkish workers, for the right to strike. Immediately afterwards, a furious Association, as well as many trade unions within the association separately, protested against this demand, thanked

Grev”, Hürbilek, 4 Nov. 1949). The year 1949 was marked by unemployment and lay-offs, especially in the textile sector. The worker in this example refers to those lay-offs in explaining his fear of further action by the employers in this regard. Also interesting to note is the discursive similarity with a speech by the Minister of Labour published three weeks before this letter (“Çalışma Bakanımız B. Sirerin Kayseri Nutku”, Hürbilek 14 Oct. 1949). While the former used the metaphor of strikes and lock-outs being the two sides of a leaf, the worker used the phrase “two sides of the same coin.” The worker also claims that he was the one who told the minister about this idea earlier in the year at an Istanbul trade union leaders meeting. The minister, he continues, noted down the suggestion and promised to examine the problem from that perspective, too. Significant here is the circulation of the ideas and discourses among workers and the state. The worker’s letter has a proud undertone. Clearly he is amazed by the fact that his idea was taken so seriously that it was even noted down by a minister. With the self-confidence he gained through this act, the worker also noted that he admired the speech by the minister referred to here. I tend to think of this incidence as an example of the early Republican workers’ identification with the state ideology through a feeling of being held in high esteem as citizens.

576 This was established on 7 October 1949 with the coming together of four local textile unions in Istanbul: Beyoğlu Textile Workers’ Trade Union, Haliç Region textile Workers’ Trade Union, Fatih-Eminönü Textile Workers’ Trade Union and Bakırköy Textile Workers’ Trade Union. All four unions were members of the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions. Eyüp Textile Workers’ Trade Union, however, was not part of this union due to its criticism of the Association for its closeness to the RPP.
the government for the recent enactment of various protective laws for workers and thus declared their loyalty.  

In the meantime, heated debates on the issue were going on in the parliament. The Minister of Labour must have been sure that the workers did not want to have the right to strike when he fiercely attacked a member of the opposition party who had earlier complained that they were denounced as communists. The Minister’s speech also exemplifies a very widely voiced peculiarity of the Turkish state-labour relations, which was one of the strongest arguments against the right to strike. Often summarized as the principle of etatism, this peculiarity, many argued, made the right to strike redundant in Turkey. To this logic, strikes were needed in a liberal economic system where labour-capital relations were subjected only to the rules of the market. In Turkey, on the contrary, the arbitration mechanism in which the state mediated between employers and workers was at work. The existence of an arbitration board thus ruled out the need for strikes.

The workers clearly did not share this positive image of the arbitration mechanism. Starting in 1949, Hürbilek conducted another survey and asked various trade union leaders four questions about the problems they have. Of the twelve sets of answers, six mentioned the urgent need for the establishment of the labour court, while three others emphasized the importance of having a trade union representative in the arbitration board. One respondent mentioned both of these. Overall, then, only one out of twelve trade union leaders did not list the practical and/or legal aspects of the state’s management of employer-employee disputes among the most immediate problems that the trade unions faced. The conclusion could be drawn that, contrary to the claims that the state mediated as a neutral arbitrator and thus ruled out the necessity of the employer and employee to struggle with each other, the trade union leaders, and probably most of the members in those trade unions, felt themselves vulnerable in this institutional setting. It is also interesting to note that, while three of those who criticized the arbitration mechanism directly advocated for the recognition of the trade unions as the legal representatives of the workers in the arbitration board, one approached the matter

579 “İstanbul İşçi Sendikası”, Akşam (28 Jan 1950).
581 See, for example, the transcript of a speech by a high-ranking RPP officer: “İşçi Meseleri Hakkındaki İddialara Bir Cevap”, Akşam (27 Jan. 1950).
582 The four questions are the following: 1) What sort of difficulties does your trade union face? 2) Are you content with your relations to the employers and their attitude towards your trade union? What are your wishes in this regard? 3) What are the main issues that you deal with as a trade union? In which of these issues were you successful and which not? What are the reasons? 4) Are there any changes that you wish to be made in the trade union or any other laws for the development of the trade unions? If so, what are these wishes? The earliest answers were published on 12 August 1949 and the latest on 2 December 1949.
from a completely different angle and gave a thorough analysis of why the arbitration mechanism could not work, even with certain changes to the advantage of the workers. 583

Exceptionally, this trade union leader questions the relation of the state to the ruling classes and comes very close to an instrumental Marxist view on the state by arguing that “the state represents the domination of the class of employers over other classes”. Thus, “when the state decides on a dispute, it is actually the employers who make the decision. The solution, he continues, lies in class struggle, which meant in practical political terms that all classes would form their own political organizations and wage the struggle to gain their rights through these organizations. But, he concludes, the contradictions within the legal framework prevented the working classes to use their democratic rights. The contrast between the law of associations, which legalized the right to form organizations based on the principle of social class, and the labour law, which banned strikes, was what he referred to as contradictions that tied the hands of the trade unions. To this trade union leader, as non-political organizations, which were formed to claim the economic interests of the workers, the trade unions were not the vessels to wage the class war. Besides, without the right to strike, trade unions could not even function properly.

What conclusions can we draw from this sketchy portrayal of the context in which workers tried to advance their working and living conditions? First, we should evaluate the emergence of the trade unions in Turkey in terms of the political context both inside and outside of the country. As I mentioned above, the enactment of the Trade Unions Law in 1947 should be understood as a strategic move by the state to control the labour movement which, as the 1946 experience had shown, could otherwise evolve into a ‘dangerous’ content and form. In terms of its content, as Sülker notes, the workers showed interest in the two socialist parties established after the ban on forming organizations on the principle of social class were lifted. 584 In terms of form, despite the manipulation of the RPP to encourage the workers to organize in associations mainly through the Workers Association of Turkey, the socialists advocated trade unions as the best form of organization for workers. 585 In this context, it becomes clear that the Trade Unions Law was aimed at a much more controlled, if not steered, process of the development of labour movement. Crippling the development of the trade unions with a law worded in such a careful way as to hinder their independent

583 “Sendika Başkanlarına (4) Sual”, Hürbilek (2 Dec 1949).
584 Sülker, 100 Soruda, p. 59.
585 Ibid., pp. 60-2.
and directly manipulating their course of development by means of appointing party officers specifically for trade union movement related issues, the RPP managed to manipulate the course of labour movement. The law remained intact until the popularity of the DP among the workers started to exert pressure on the ruling party before the 1950 election. When repression did not work, nationalism, usually evoking, if not being used interchangeably with Kemalism, was used to co-opt whenever a segment of the labour movement seemed to go astray. To these impediments resulting from such governance, we should also add, as Bahir Ersoy mentioned, the problems stemming from the organizational inexperience and the lack of intellectual guidance for the trade unions. All in all, these conditions intercepted the young trade union movement from going beyond practical work-related demands, causing it to waste a great deal of time on intra-movement struggles. While it is true that different viewpoints existed on vital matters such as the right to strike – and these differences mostly corresponded to the political rivalry between the RPP and the DP – it would be safe to argue that, again for the most part, workers of the period were contained within the dominant ideology that was first and foremost characterized by the primacy of the perpetuity of the state and the (re)production of the national identity.

One of the main epiphanies of this ideological hegemony could be found in the identification of the well-being of the self with that of the nation. The following examples are from a competition organized by Hürbilek to find the worker who would best express the characteristics of the Turkish worker in one sentence. The following selection from workers’ answers illustrates the many different forms of this identification: “The Turkish worker is the Mehmetçik of the industrial field.” This phrase, taken from a weaver foreman of a state-owned textile factory, draws a parallel between “Mehmetçik”, meaning any man enlisted in the Turkish army (the suffix ‘çik’ denotes love and compassion), and the industrial

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586 I mainly refer to the fifth clause of the law here. Besides banning the trade unions to engage in political activity and defining them as national associations that cannot act against nationalism and national interest, this clause required the cabinet decree for trade unions to participate in any international organizations. Within the context of the Cold War, this last decree could be interpreted as a preventive measure against the Turkish trade unions to affiliate to any ‘communist’ foreign labour organization.

587 In terms of the effects of the inter-party rivalry on the development of the trade union movement, Bahir Ersoy raises an important point by drawing attention to the gains of the movement from such adversaries: “We have defended the independence of trade unions from the political parties. Why? I absolutely do not think of the matter in terms of this or that party’s advocacy. It has been the case that the workers have been educated within the struggle between parties, I was also educated. I have learnt how to get organized, improved myself. The fight between the parties improved us all” (Interview by Yıldırım Koç).

588 Given the fact that Hürbilek was the publishing organ of the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions, which was itself an organization with close connections to the RPP, the reader might think that the nationalistic answers were consciously chosen by the editors to manipulate the readership and/or to please the authorities. This would be misleading because such examples could be multiplied using other dailies of the period.

589 “Müsbabakamız”, Hürbilek (7 Aug. 1948).
worker, for they both ‘work’ for the homeland. The statesmen also often resorted to this analogy. During his visit to Bakırköy Cloth Factory, the Prime Minister addressed the workers in a similar fashion:

[Referring to the then recently enacted social insurance laws] As much as we have done these as our duty, by means of paying your debt to the homeland, you not only serve both your homeland and your families but you also stop our money to go abroad by meeting the needs of the homeland.590

The phrase “the debt to the homeland” is often used for compulsory military service in Turkey. Similar to the first, the other examples from the competition of Hürbilek also refer to the interdependence between the fates of the homeland and the Turkish worker: “The strength and might of the Turkish nation is dependent on the success of the Turkish worker.”591; “If the Turkish worker contents himself with low wages, it is because he is conscious of the limit of the national wealth.”592; “The Turkish worker, who has the noble blood in his veins, is a diligent and successful estate of the homeland.”593; “The Turkish worker is a resolute and indivisible steel network which works for the sake of a national goal.”594; “The Turkish worker, who does with less without asking for more, is an entity who wants to work freely for the homeland to be free.”595; “Oh, the Turkish worker! You are the biggest entity that bears the ideal of civilization, humanity and homeland, only if you work, these will continue to exist.”596

What these statements show us is that as early as 1948, i.e. almost one and a half years after the trade union movement had started, the discursive practices of the new labour movement were firmly established. That is to say that, in order to appeal to the bulk of workers, one had to speak from within a certain discourse. By emphasizing the indispensability of the nation’s well-being to the cause of the workers, this discourse also helped to establish the workers as an inseparable part of the nation in that their labour was the basis of the country’s independence and the Turkish state’s sovereignty. Hence, I argue that this discourse has a double character. On the one hand, it is restraining because it does not

591 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (14 Aug. 1948).
592 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (28 Aug. 1948).
593 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (4 Sep. 1948).
594 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (18 Sep. 1948).
595 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (18 Sep. 1948).
596 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (18 Sep. 1948).
allow trade unions to formulate demands that would go against the national interest. On the other, it is also enabling in the sense that it allows the workers to establish themselves as the rightful (politicized) citizens by being recognized as an indispensable part of the nation. By connecting the nation’s fate to their toil, the workers could present their well-being as a national issue. Let us now return to and conclude Enver’s story, which displays the workings of this double-edged discourse in the sphere of working-class politics.

The Limits of Dissidence

The following is a lengthy letter by Enver addressing his fellow citizens and co-workers in the context of the 1950 elections:

My Esteemed Citizens,
My self-sacrificing and patriotic fellow workers,
That happy day on which the national will is manifested is approaching. I would like to submit my decision to this great and sacred cause as a working citizen by presenting this statement to the noble Turkish people and my fellow workers. I was born in 1914. After migrating from Bulgaria, I completed my secondary school education in Edirne and started working in 1934. I have worked in Alpullu Sugar Factory and Gemlik Artificial Silk Factory as a worker like you. I have been working at Bakırköy Sümerbank Cloth Factory as a weaver foreman since I finished my military service in 1941. I am a young Turk who has witnessed and known the injustices and the deprivations for a long time now. Although our workers are unparalleled exemplars of self-sacrifice, patriotism and benevolence in the world, they have not unfortunately attained the living conditions, the welfare, the happiness necessary for a civilized person and they could not get the rewards of their labour. Similar to any working person, our workers will be the recipient of the humane treatment they deserve no matter what happens. I myself have been in struggle in order to claim our workers’ rights continuously for a long time now. And I will keep struggling until I die.

My friends, I would like to state and announce that in the times of the elections everybody and all the party members will engage in numerous propaganda acts through every means by taking advantage of the good intentions of our workers, and they will try to direct their conscience in tandem with their own desires. We never have an objection to those parliament members who will be elected in a just and free way by the will of the nation. Because, in a democratic life, the will of the people, in other words, the word of the people prevails. That the people’s word be prevalent is both requisite and fundamental. Especially the big mass of
workers has an important role in this election. And there could be people who would deceive this considerable mass.

My dear fellow workers, you know it very well that after acquiring your deputation and making it to Ankara, nobody will be found to hear your problems or even to contact you. The workers could only be represented by those who are among them and who know what it means to be a worker. The time of generous promises and empty words is over. Our workers should work with confidence over their wellbeing and future and they should be saved from being the slaves of the employers and the workplaces. Only then they could yield the efficiency expected from them. Workers’ families, workers’ children, and the workers themselves are suffering from tuberculosis. They are not given the care they deserve. The education and upbringing of the children of workers, who work day and night for the development of our country, are not given the deserved importance. Many of our workers are left to live in insanitary huts near the swamps and they are consequently left to calamity. Our workers are not in a state to object to mistreatment or any other injustice they are subjected to in their workplaces. Because they are scared that their bread will be taken away immediately and their families will be left in hunger and calamity.

They accuse those workers who go too far. There is never a communist among Turkish workers. And there cannot be. In this respect, they [the workers] are always confined to live in fear, suspicion and hesitation.

I know and observe very closely all the troubles of my fellow workers and I am tormented by them. It is to struggle for these important workers’ causes that I have been a member of the National Development Party, which came up with a program that pays a lot of attention to claim workers’ rights, since its beginning and I come before you as the worker candidate of the National Development Party from Istanbul. Without any doubt, you have the last say. Only the deputy elected by the will of the people and the parliament constituted of such deputies would render the national will always prevalent and absolute. Give your vote freely to people you trust after careful consideration. Thank you very much, working and striving from us, blessing from God.

Weaver foreman at Bakırköy Cloth Factory
Enver Tenşi597

597 Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 151, IISH.
So far, I have shown Enver’s dissident position within the Bakırköy Union with reference to his critique regarding the lack of self-governance of the union and the wrong-doings by the union administration. As this public letter clearly displays, he did not seem to have any problems with the ideological underpinnings of the labour movement. Starting from the salutation, “[M]y self-sacrificing and patriotic fellow workers,” Enver embraces the hegemonic nationalist discourse. The nobility of the Turkish blood in general and the patriotism of the Turkish workers, references that we have encountered in the union meetings analysed above, are repeatedly cited in the letter as well.

Although his argument moves in the direction of a powerful critique of the working and living conditions of the workers, which he expressed rather cynically, when he addresses the problems workers face in expressing their discontent, he readily submits to the anti-communist discourse: “There is never a communist among Turkish workers. And there cannot be.” Overall, these phrases signify the limits of Enver’s critique. To him, the first and foremost problem was the rule of the RPP and its influence on the trade unions. The solution, he claimed, was to overthrow its rule by voting for the National Development Party. The irony here lies in the fact that Enver himself was a state worker, whereas the party he worked for argued against state-led industrialization. We cannot know how Enver sorted out this contradiction in his mind, that is, if he saw this as a contradiction in the first place. But, the fact remains that for Enver the problem was at the surface level, certainly, the workers were in calamity but this could be easily solved by sending workers to the parliament as deputies.

The emphasis he puts on democracy, expressed mainly by his faith in “free and just elections,” and “the prevalence of people’s will,” reflects the optimistic political atmosphere of the multi-party system. Compliant with this faith in liberal democracy, the problems of workers are not attributed to a general conflict between employer and employee but to practical mistakes in handling the industrialization process. As such, Enver’s story exemplifies a critique from within the existing system, a case of dissidence. The limits of this dissidence were clearly drawn by the hegemonic ideology of the time. There remains one question to be answered: What happened to those who refused to stay within this discourse? The answer lies in the last part of Ahmet’s story, which shows the limits of dissidence allowed by the regime.

The Story of a Dissident

We left Ahmet at a heated union meeting in 1949 where the chair of the union complained
about the weavers who did not follow the conditions of the agreement between the trade union and the factory management. I have shown that there was a considerable gap between the agenda of the union management and Ahmet’s ideas about what the union should be doing. Let us now return to that union meeting, which appears to be an important moment for Ahmet’s further involvement in the labour movement, and follow what happened afterwards based on both Hürbilek’s coverage and Ahmet’s own account.

After narrating the weavers’ incident, the chair finished his speech by stating the increase in the social benefits provided by the union for the members. He must have been confident that the workers were happy with the ‘successes’ he previously mentioned: “This should also make you happy.” According to the reporter, a number were indeed happy. The first member who addressed the audience after the chair’s speech expressed his utmost satisfaction with the work of the administrative board and added that nothing more could be expected under the conditions of the day. What sort of conditions was he referring to? I will return to this question, but first let us turn to Ahmet and find out what he had to say about the rest of the meeting.

There is no mention of Ahmet’s speech in Hürbilek’s coverage of this meeting. Although other workers also criticized the activity report, when the financial statement was read, there was a fierce round of applause from the members. From Ahmet’s account, however, we learn that it was actually his speech that received the applause. His claim is also supported by the results of the election of the new board: Ahmet was now the union’s vice-president. Contrary to the reporter’s claims that most of those who were present at the meeting wanted the old board to continue its duty, four new members were elected to the board. This new composition of the union administration indicates a clear shift in the balance of power, which we could interpret as a sign of discontent among the union members.

By this time, Ahmet had already enrolled in the DP and was working as the chair of one of its local branches. His party membership also continued after the elections in 1950, although disappointment had begun growing among workers upon seeing that the DP government was deferring the recognition of the right to strike. As for his career as a labour activist, Ahmet became the leading workers’ representative in 1951, ten years after he started working at Bakırköy, and four years after he became a trade union member. However, despite his active political life and participation in the labour movement, he claims that he started dealing with social issues after 1950. What he meant by this becomes clear in the later part of the interview.

which I will cover in more detail below. Now let us return to his file, which includes information on a significant incident within the Bakırköy weavery.

In October 1951, the Bakırköy weavery was stormed by a conflict between a foreman and a weaver. Contrary to the previous examples of a contention between such parties, it seems that this time the weaver had instigated the confrontation. We saw previously that the foremen, especially the head foremen, had utmost authority and could go so far as to exert physical violence on the workers in the name of securing the discipline of the work department. This was not the case, as we understand from the petition of the head foreman:

01.10.1951
Official report
When I went to shaft loom number 195 to pull the warp yarn, weaver Ahmet Cansızoğlu, a weaver who works there with number 4179, called me and weavers 1307 Salih and 223 Enver who were working at the same looms and used such words as “Let these friends also witness, from now on, if you engage in any unfair treatment or wrongdoing here, I will start legal procedure. Also, if you write a report about any worker or cause him to be fired, again, I will start legal procedure, afterwards it is none of my concern.”
Head foreman of the Weavery
Cemal Toksipahi
1307 Salih Balkan
223 Enver Onat

Four days later, the chief of the main production units informed the factory management with another petition: “arguing that he is the vice-president of the trade union, [Ahmet] has been interfering in the administration of his department and leaving his job unattended, he has been arguing openly with his foremen and head foremen and using threatening words.” By doing so, the chief concluded, Ahmet had badly influenced the workers, spoiled the discipline of the workplace, and thus deserved to be punished. A warning was issued by the factory manager arguing that Ahmet violated both the Trade Unions Law and the internal regulations of the factory by interfering in the administration of the workplace and arguing with his superiors about matters unrelated to his job. Upon repetition, he continued, Ahmet would be fired from the factory.

Both in the case of the work stoppage in the early 1940s and the union meeting in 1949, Ahmet had always been a self-confident and assertive worker. What this incident – the first one
of its kind in Ahmet’s file – shows is that his involvement in the trade union movement had added to these qualities. We do not know the story of the contention between the head foreman and Ahmet, but the fact that Ahmet had the courage to publicly confront him in front of other weavers suggests that this was not the first incident between them. Ahmet’s way of argumentation also supports my suggestion that this head foreman had had problems with the weavers before. By voicing his right to start a legal procedure in case any worker is fired, Ahmet not only portrays a worker who knows his rights at the workplace, he also speaks for his fellow workers who could possibly suffer because of this incident.

When the Trade Union Interferes

A letter from the trade union to the factory management sent a month after this incident proves that he had a good reason to feel confident. I quote this letter in its entirety because it is the only example of an official document submitted by the Bakırköy trade union to the factory management. As such, it is important to see the discourse employed in such a document.

10.11.1951

To the General Directorate of Sümerbank Bakırköy Cotton Textile Enterprise,

We were informed that Ahmet Cansızoğlu, who works at your enterprise with employee number 4179, was given a warning, enumerated Per/792, by your management on 10/10/1951. Since the content of your warning also concerns our trade union, submitting our grief:

1) At the general assembly meeting of the Bakırköy branch of the Istanbul Textile and Weaving Industries Workers on 01/07/1951, the members elected Ahmet Cansızoğlu, who has worked for our cause in earnest, to the administration board.
2) At its session on 02/07/1951, our administrative board made the task distribution. In the meantime, Ahmet Cansızoğlu did not commit fraud.
3) According to the third article of our union charter, our goal is to protect the rights and interests of our members within the laws. Besides, again according to the forty-second article of our charter, trade union representatives are supposed to protect the rights and interests of all the workers at a workplace. It has been confirmed through the investigation we made among workers, knowing these points very well, Ahmet Cansızoğlu appealed to his superiors in his capacity as the vice-president [of the trade union] to claim the rights of our aggrieved members.
4) The internal regulation of your workplace reads as follows: “The worker appeals to his superiors by turns to protect his right or to reveal a certain truth. If he does not get his wish or an answer, he makes a complaint to the manager.” Moreover, the e) clause of the fourth article of the
law number 5018 [i.e. Trade Union Law] states that the trade union could provide legal help for its members claiming their rights regarding the employment contract. Consequently, contrary to what you have claimed, Ahmet Cansızoğlu acted against neither your internal regulations nor the law. That he left his job unattended and wanted to claim our member’s rights is not stated as a crime in the internal regulations and the law that you have mentioned.

The aforementioned worker was at the hospital on 10/10/1951 and he was not appealed for testimony by you. As you know, our law requires in such incidents that when the plaintiff is heard, the defendant should also be heard. It is only after this that the verdict is given and the rightful party is determined. The conclusion you made based on one party’s testimony is invalid, we ask for the decision to be revoked.

Respectfully,

Executive Community of the Bakırköy Branch of the Istanbul Textile and Weaving Workers’ Union

This letter reveals important insights on many different levels of trade union activities within the factories. First and foremost, the form and language of the letter are striking in their highly official character. Compared to other petitions and letters I have covered so far, this letter stands out as the best crafted. All necessary information concerning the incident is presented in the opening paragraph portraying a serious and competent organization. Immediately after follows an effort to legitimize the involvement of the union in the incident. The content of the warning issued by the factory concerned the trade union directly. Indeed, it was clear from the warning letter that the management was frustrated with Ahmet because of his claims to authority based on his trade union representative status. Thus, the union’s letter formulates four points to clear all doubt about the legitimacy of Ahmet’s claims. First, he was elected to the administrative board. The relative clause accompanying this sentence brings a subjective dimension to the argument: “[he] has worked for our cause in earnest.”

The second point reveals the motivation behind adding this positive comment. Two seemingly unrelated sentences are used here: The first one discloses another piece of factual information, while the second states Ahmet’s innocence regarding a presupposed accusation of fraud. No further explanation is offered on this matter, however. Instead, the letter continues with a third point, which, by reference to the union charter, states the goals and duties of the union. The effort here is to establish the rightfulness of Ahmet’s actions both as the representative and as the vice-president of the union. By emphasizing that the representative is supposed to defend the rights of all members of a workplace, the letter
argues against the factory’s accusation that Ahmet “has been interfering in the administration of his department.”

The fourth point is similar to the third in that it also refers to the written rules and procedures. According to the internal regulations of the factory, the letter states, provided that he follows a certain route, a worker cannot be blamed for making a complaint. The argument is strengthened with a reference to the Trade Union Law, which specifies that the union can provide legal help to its members. The reason for this addition is to refute the chief’s allegation that Ahmet used threatening language. Indeed, Ahmet’s words “I will start legal procedure. Besides, if you write a report about any worker or cause him to be fired, again, I will start legal procedure, afterwards it is none of my concern” could have sounded as a threat but by referring to the aforementioned legal rights and the duties of the worker, the representative and the vice-president of the union, the letter objected to this interpretation. The letter finishes with another objection, this time against the factory management’s wrongdoing in handling the investigation of the incident. Again, stating the rights and duties using formal language, the letter objects the issuing of a warning for Ahmet’s behaviour.

After analyzing the language and the reasoning of this letter, we are left with one final question: How did the management receive it and, subsequently, act upon it? Did this letter, which is the first example of trade union intervention in labour-management conflict at the shopfloor in my sample, help Ahmet in handling the pressure from the management? The answer to this question can be found in the short note written below the signature line: “The management does not deem it necessary to reply.” The case was thus closed, at least for some years to follow. We will follow what happened during these years by examining the interview with Ahmet.

From DP to DWP

While Ahmet was struggling with the factory management in 1951, a lawyer named Orhan Arsal established a new political party, namely the Democrat Workers’ Party (DWP). In the interview, Cansızoğlu gives conflicting information on the date when he first met Arsal, but he recites the day when he joined the DWP in detail:

Those two articles [i.e. articles no. 6 and 7 of the Democrat Party program, G.A.]\(^{600}\) were the reasons why I enrolled in and worked for the party. But it should be noted that as the city delegate, I took the floor at the congress at Istanbul Exhibition Palace when labour issues were being discussed. Explaining that the DP did not follow its program by not [giving] the right to strike to the workers and not [following] the articles [on this matter] in the party program, I announced my resignation and left. Orhan Arsal was also there, he sent me somebody and thus I was enrolled in the Democrat Workers’ Party as such and became the provincial chairman [of Istanbul]. At another point in the interview, he revisits this act of resignation by noting its repercussions: “I resigned from the DP in 1953 at the Istanbul Exhibition Palace in front of the ministers.” The DP members threw me out of the cooperative, when I was arrested because during my speech at the trade union, I could not enter the factory anymore, I was unemployed. My protest stripped me of many rights...I became the head workers’ representative after 1951. Upon my resignation from the DP, I lost [the elections]...In 1953, we established the Housing Cooperation of the Bakırköy Cotton Industries Enterprise Workers to build 143 houses. I was then the head of the workers’ representatives. We were holding official talks in Ankara...They discarded us from the union and they did not want to give me my house.”

Cansızoğlu gives limited information on his DWP years in the interview. Upon the interviewer’s question on the party’s membership composition, he mentions intellectuals as well as workers from older organizations such as the Workers’ Advancement Society and press workers. In fact, the party program reveals that three out of four founders of the party were workers.\(^{601}\) In response to another question on the effects of the 1951-1952 detention\(^{602}\) on the DWP he answers: “I suppose it did not effect at all.” His last comment about the party is a critique arguing that the president, Arsal, did not commit to the labour question enough. As such, we cannot learn from the interview what appealed to him in the DWP so much that he immediately enrolled. Since this is an important question in order to understand the development of Ahmet’s political career and ideas on working-class politics, I propose to turn to another archival document on the DWP. A careful read of this document would provide us with a tentative understanding of what appealed to Cansızoğlu in this party and also, to an extent, what might have caused his alienation at a later stage. This document, titled The First

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\(^{600}\) See p. 22 for the content of these articles.

\(^{601}\) Two workers were fitters while the other one was a machine operator. The fourth founder was Orhan Arsal himself. *Demokrat İşçi Partisinin Programı*, (Istanbul: Üğur Basımevi, 1950).

\(^{602}\) Fifteen months after it came to power, the DP government launched a large mass-detention campaign directed at Turkish Communist Party (TKP) members on 26 October 1951. The detention continued until the end of the following year. More than 180 people were arrested, 131 of who were later sentenced to imprisonment.

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Book with Yellow Lines,\textsuperscript{603} is a publication of the party for its second general assembly in 1953. A compilation of speeches by members, newspaper articles on the party, the general assembly report and minutes, the document provides scattered information on the ideology, the membership composition and the activities of this party.

At the time of this publication, the political atmosphere was becoming increasingly characterized by anti-communism. Especially after a minister of the DP government accused the trade unions of engaging in communist propaganda in May 1952, the protests of workers increased against allegations of being Moscow’s servants. Among the accused was also the Socialist Party of Turkey (SPT). The general assembly report of the DWP starts with listing the party’s activities to protest these allegations: “We could not let our democracy, still in its cradle, to be the victim of such an assault. To return the insult done to the Turkish workers and Turkish trade unions and to deny the accusation done to the SPT and to object the violation of laws, we organized our protest meeting on May, 25\textsuperscript{th} [1952].”\textsuperscript{604} This short quotation might strike the reader with the similarity between the discourse used here and the mainstream anti-communist discourse. Once more, we see that the allegation of communism is seen as an assault, which should be rejected feverishly \textit{en masse}. This stance is continued in the report with the mentioning of a party member who was subjected to prosecution for engaging in communist propaganda at the first general assembly. The report quotes an expert report that refutes the allegations. Interesting to note here is the tone of relief for being acquitted from the allegation of communism. In the minutes of the first general assembly, we read that the vice-president names the ideology of the party as “humanitarian socialism” and that the president agrees with a proposal to change the name of the party to “Socialist Workers’ Party.” It seems from the minutes that some members were unhappy with the name of the party as it alluded somewhat to the name of the party in power, i.e. the Democrat Party. In responding to these criticisms, the president makes an interesting comment, which further illustrates the ideology of the party: “We took this name and not the name Workers’ Party to avoid attributions of fascism and Bolshevism. Our aim is not to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat, but only to elevate the working class to equality, that is in the meaning [of equality] in a complete democracy.”\textsuperscript{605}

The publication also portrays DWP’s opinion on the current situation of trade unionism in detail. First and foremost, there is the emphasis on the dominance of the political

\textsuperscript{603} Birinci Sarı Çizgili Kitap, Demokrat İşçi Partisinin İkinci Genel Kongresi Münasebetiyle Yayınlanmıştır, (İstanbul: n.p. 1953).
\textsuperscript{604} Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{605} Ibid., p. 15.
party representatives in the union movement: “The trade union leaders of today are partisans working at the disposal of the Democrat Party, the [Republican] People’s Party or the Nation Party and their duty is to put workers off with the tale of trade unions, to disorganize them by dividing them among different parties, and to stop them from being a political force.” The reader would remember the section on the 1946 trade unionism where I documented the relations between the socialist parties of the time and the trade unions. Although the DWP also claims to be a socialist party, its attitude towards trade unions is completely different from the former socialist parties, as we see from the report. The report goes on to criticize the violation of the fifth article of the Trade Union Law which reads as follows: “The labour and employer unions, as trade unions, cannot engage in any political activity, political propaganda or political publication activities, and cannot mediate the activities of any political institution.”

The situation must have worried the party management to the extent that this expression of discontent did not suffice: “our party...ordered all its members to resign from trade unions in order not to bear the blame for the same [violation]. Those members who did not follow this disciplinary order are discharged from the party.” The situation becomes more complicated; however, as we continue reading the report, since the next paragraph argues that workers should become a political force in order to protest against their poor conditions. Thus they should become members and even form the foundation of the “Labour Party.” But some trade union leaders, the report claims, view politics as a microbe that should be kept away from the trade unions, and they do it to keep the workers away from their real cause. Now, the matter is indeed complicated here as, for example, we know that by the time Ahmet enrolled in the DWP, he had already been active in trade unionism for more than five years. It seems to be that this confusion is a product of the atmosphere of trade unionism which was increasingly characterized by partisanship in those years. Though the DWP report claims that a protest meeting it organized in Istanbul in 1952 attracted more than twenty thousand people, we are talking of a small party. Thus, it could be argued that rather than trying to infiltrate into the trade unions, it might have been more rational for the DWP to argue against other, larger political parties to openly command over trade unions. In the words of the party’s president, Orhan Arsal, these were “yellow trade unions” which did not have a character of their own:

606 Ibid., pp. 12-3.
608 Birinci Sarı Çizgili Kitap, p. 12.

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It is impossible for them to understand that they [the trade unionists, G.A.] belong to a different social group, a class with contrasting interests [to those of the political parties, G.A.]. These yellow trade unions, which do not have any other means than harrumphing about the bosses and nourishing hatred and hostility to attract the workers to the unions, cannot even defend the freedom of meeting guaranteed by law and convention. As long as the trade union leaders of today, who kowtow in front of the power holder, and dishonour themselves by obeying even unlawful orders, content themselves with a doled out democracy, they cannot take an action as the defender of workers’ rights and interests even at the minor court, let alone in front of the people. They can only take advantage of the Marshall plan, receive their salaries with ease, and some of them even pocket the union subscription fees. And in return for all these labour, they are honoured with the opportunity of fawning over those in power.\textsuperscript{609}

This repulsive tone seems to have been shared by a majority of the party members as much as we understand from the choice of the design of the party emblem: \textquote{Those trade unions which work for other causes than workers’ interests are called yellow trade unions because the colour yellow symbolizes betrayal all around the world. This is the reason why we painted the signboard of the DWP yellow and we wrote the name of the party in black to mourn for those unions. Down with yellow trade unions.}\textsuperscript{610} Elsewhere in the general assembly report and in the minutes, the same tone characterizes the party management’s delineation of the trade unionists of the day as the \textquote{labour aristocracy.}\textsuperscript{611}

Above I quoted Ahmet on how he came to meet the president of the DWP, Orhan Arsal in a DP congress in 1953. Indeed, the DWP publication clearly shows that Ahmet’s growing discontent with the DP government because of its broken promises regarding workers’ rights was a recurrent topic of discussion in the party meetings. Ahmet’s feeling of betrayal by the DP is shared by party members who emphasized the role of the workers in carrying that party to power on May 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1950. In the words of the vice-president of the DWP, 14\textsuperscript{th} of May was the day of betrayal for the workers: \textquote{Those in power today promised us anything when we were walking with them shoulder to shoulder. On that day they stole our vote.”} Another party member expressed his anger in the following words: \textquote{By stealing our vote, by hypocrisy, they went to Ankara and forgot about us.”}\textsuperscript{612} Ahmet also explained the reason why he resigned from the DP by referring to the promises made to workers by the

\textsuperscript{609} Ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{610} Ibid., p. 19.
\textsuperscript{611} Ibid., pp. 12-4.
\textsuperscript{612} Ibid., p. 18.
party before the elections. As we understand from the chronology of events he offered as the story of his political career in the interview, it was this critique that attracted the attention of the DWP’s president who contacted him immediately after he resigned.

This rather brief background information on the DWP provides us with invaluable insights into the complex political world surrounding Ahmet during his politicization process. By 1953, we see him already alienated from the party which, as he emphasized in the interview more than once, he enrolled after carefully studying its program. The early years of the same decade also brought increasing difficulties in his work life and trade union career. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate much on what he read during these years, or who he was in close contact with. Neither does he give a clear account of how his professional life interacted with his political ideas. True, he had always been a self-confident and assertive man but as the decade proceeded, it seems that these features of his character strengthened. In the next section, we follow him through the final years of his Bakırköy years that witnessed another political party affiliation, a costly affiliation as we shall see below.

**Founding a New Party**

Ahmet’s DWP years did not last long as Arsal wanted to abolish the party in 1954 because of electoral failure. But this did not mean the end of Ahmet’s political career because with some other members of the party, Ahmet decided to move with one of the most prominent figures of communism in Turkey: Hikmet Kıvılcımli. In the interview, he notes that they criticized Arsal for not committing enough to the labour question. With his words on the membership profile of the Homeland Party, this criticism gains a new dimension. Before going into that, let us look at how Ahmet’s path crossed with Kıvılcımli.

The story of Cansızoğlu’s meeting with Kıvılcımli is important in three respects. First, it hints at the possible connections between the 1946 trade unionism and post-1947 unionism. Second, it gives us valuable insights as to the content and the formulation of the trade union’s demands from the factory management. Cansızoğlu cites the name of a worker who was active in this movement as the person who introduced him to Kıvılcımli. This worker, who later on became the general secretary of the Homeland Party, was class-conscious according to Cansızoğlu:
He was the one who advised us to have a day care. Once he said: “If the manager of the Bakırköy Cloth Factory Şefkati Türkekul is a man of his name, he should open a day care centre at the factory.” He woke us up. And I took this to the manager as the workers’ representative and the chair of the Bakırköy branch of the trade union. Mr. Şefkati, may God rest his soul, helped us. He said, “It is not within my authority to open this day care, it is a big investment. It is the general directorate of Sümerbank to decide on this matter.” When he went to Ankara, he presented the case to the general directorate, a subvention was allocated, and they organized the place where the personnel files were kept as the day care. That was the first day care [at Bakırköy, G.A.]. It had sixty beds.

If we consider this example in relation to Ahmet’s previous narration of the work stoppage experience in the early 1940s, we could assume that the personality of the factory manager made a substantial difference in dealing with the demands of the workers. In the earlier example, the factory manager resorted to the police force. Here, however, he co-operates with the workers by transmitting their demand to the higher authorities. The difference between the nature and the formulations of the two demands is rather obvious. Nonetheless, the fact still holds that factory managers who were more attentive to the needs and demands of the workers were popular among the workers. The interviews I conducted provide us Speaking of the same manager mentioned above, Osman Arıkan explains why the workers called him “father” [baba]: “He looked after the poor, for example, when one requested an advance payment because he has no money, and he does so by saying “Sir, I have somebody sick to take care of,” he [the manager] acted as a father, [although] he did not have to do it.” In another example, when he had a problem with one of the technicians, Hüseyin Yılmaz was asked to give an explanation by the manager, this time a different one: “I said I did not do anything, father. We called everybody father, didn’t we [asking his friend, G.A.]? The factory manager was called father.”

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613 The name Şefkati is a derivative of the word “şefkat” which could be translated as “compassion.” It is perhaps interesting to note that a speech he gave on employer-employee relations was published in 1954. The title of the speech, “Employee and Employer Relations from the Perspective of the Employer,” is noteworthy as it denotes the manager of a state-owned factory as an employer. Also noteworthy is his basic understanding of how the character of those relations should be. According to this, workers and employers should treat each other with mutual understanding and work in harmony for the development of industries. Both the content and the tone of the argument in this text are in accordance with the paternalist attitude he presented at the factory (Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları Altınıci Kitaptaın Ayırı Bası, [İstanbul: Ismail Akgün Matbaası, 1954]).
The last point we can learn from this story is one of the possible ways of the conception of an idea in the mind of an already unionized worker. Above, I have quoted Cansızoğlu on how he came to know about the social issues, including the day care service for the workers’ children, after 1947 when he was unionized. In this story, we see an example of the learning process of a worker. What seems important to note here is the after-effects of the short experience of unionization in 1946, and the role of personal relationships in shaping a workers’ learning-process. The latter note is also exemplified elsewhere in the interview when Cansızoğlu recalls his meeting with Arsal. To the question of the interviewer on the possible reasons of the passivity of the workers in late 1940s, he answers: “We rarely got information on these matters [i.e. on the legal rights of the workers, G.A.]. I [came to] deal with social issues after 1950, first we met Orhan Arsal, the lawyer.” Both his file and the interview he gave testify to the fact that his interest in social issues not only gained a momentum but also increasingly radicalized as his disappointment with the DP government grew.

The interview reveals that by the time Arsal announced he would abolish the DWP, Ahmet had already made the decision to join Kıvılcımlı in founding a new party. In fact, when the party was founded on 22nd October 1954, Cansızoğlu was the chairman but he filled this position only for twenty days and was replaced by Hikmet Kıvılcımlı on the party’s first general assembly on 11st November. Above we have seen how Cansızoğlu took the decision of founding the party. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on his meeting with Kıvılcımlı.
except for mentioning the name of the worker who was active in the 1946 trade union movement, Şükrü Kaya, as the person who introduced them. With this note, we see one more time the importance of face-to-face relations in Cansızoğlu’s political life. He also gives valuable though limited information on the membership profile and the activities of the Homeland Party in the interview:

Textile workers were in the majority in the HP. We were not well organized but we were active in Taşlıtarla and Zeytinburnu [two neighbourhoods in Istanbul, G.A.], İzmir and İzmit. In the 1957 elections, I was an MP candidate for Istanbul and İzmir. It was possible to be a candidate for two cities then. The possibility of being elected did not exist at all. But we did thirteen meetings at different places in order to set forth the party’s presence. [People] threw stones at us at these meetings.

With these words, the conversation on the HP years comes to an end and Ahmet starts narrating a new phase of his life, the phase characterized by police surveillance and imprisonment. In the next section, we will look at how his political radicalization ruined his career.

The First Arrest

The last document from Ahmet’s file I mentioned was the warning he got from the management in October 1951. Though significant developments had happened after this date, the file is silent on Ahmet’s life inside the factory for four years. The earliest dated document in this period is a petition he wrote on 24.06.1955:

To the management of Bakırköy Cloth Factory
The following is my wish.
After getting 45 days off on 22.11.1954 from your enterprise, I was living in the Kondu village in the Çaykara district of Trabzon. I was officially on leave until 01.06.1955 [i.e. 6th of January, G.A.] to take care of my family after the death [of a family member]. I was arrested on 04.01.1954 based on slanders and allegations by some people. As of now I have been released by the criminal court. I kindly request my readmission to the factory.
Yours respectfully,
Ahmet Cansızoğlu.
In the interview, Ahmet calls this “the first arrest” since he was imprisoned again in 1957 together with Kıvılcımlı and other HP members. In 1955, surprisingly, his arrest had nothing to do with his HP membership. He recalls the moment when he was approached by an undercover police while looking for a fountain pen which a fellow townsman had ordered during his visit to his village. The policeman asked him to come to the police station where he was asked questions about a speech he gave at a trade union meeting. He cites two arguments he made at that speech as the main reasons why he was accused of communist propaganda:

[I said] the workers engaged in an arduous struggle in Europe and the US and there have been fatalities. They struggled to work eight hours instead of sixteen hours. These things did not happen by themselves. I also said, in Europe, in every European country, there are socialist and labour parties; there is even a communist party. These are represented in the parliament, they have deputies. This could also happen here; in fact I think it should happen here. Because we would be able to understand who is a communist, who is a socialist, who is on the side of the workers and who is not.614

The story of the factory learning the news of his arrest is indeed noteworthy. His file contains a newspaper clipping dated January 7, 1955 entitled “Caught doing communist propaganda” which mistakes him as a coffeehouse keeper:

A coffeehouse keeper in the name of Ahmet Cansızoğlu was arrested for doing communist propaganda by the police court number 3 of Eminönü. Ahmet, who resides at Bakırköy Reyhan Street number 23, has lately started engaging in communist propaganda by praising Russia. He was arrested the other night. The police department is continuing the investigation.615

No official document is provided on what happened and the internal correspondence in the factory reveals that his arrest was learnt from the newspapers.

27.06.1955
To the higher office of the management,
It has been learnt from the newspapers that Ahmet Cansızoğlu was arrested while he was on leave between January, 1st and January, 5th, 1955 and sent to the police court of Eminönü on 7.1.1955. The above named person is among those who were laid off due to absenteeism

614 Interview by Yıldırım Koç.
according to part E of the 2nd point ((cases that do not fit rules pertaining to morality and good faith) of the 16th article of the Labour Law because he has been away from his job for 5 months and 19 days. Although, the 24th article of the Labour Law says that those persons who apply for recruitment up to two months after they left their jobs to carry out any kind of legal work obligation, are favourably recruited, the person concerned here is in no such situation. However, I respectfully present to your higher opinion and authority that he has been arrested by the court for a certain crime and was released after 5 months and 19 days and applied for a job [Bakirköy].

Chief of staff

A number of significant points arise from the analysis of this letter which basically functions to inform the manager about the history of the case and thus steer the decision-making process. I have already mentioned the first point, which is the interesting fact that the factory learnt about the arrest from the newspapers. This is a curious point, one that is hard to believe in my opinion because of Ahmet’s history at the factory. That history involves prior instances of confrontation with the management as well his career as a trade unionist and a workers’ representative. Apparently, neither the police forces nor the court bothered to inform the factory about the incident. Thus, although it was probable that his arrest was known to the management, the letter merely rephrases the newspaper report. The second point concerns the dramatic change in the topic after the reporting of the arrest. According to this letter, Ahmet was laid off due to absenteeism based on a certain article in the Labour Law.

The aforementioned article lists the cases in which the employer has the right to cancel the contract. These cases are divided into two: those which concern health issues and those which do not fit rules pertaining to morality and good faith. Interesting to note here is the fact that absenteeism is listed in the latter group. But even more interesting is the fact that the same group of cases includes imprisonment for more than three days as a sufficient reason for the termination of employment. The question that arises then is why the management chose this clause. The next point in the letter gives a partial answer to that question by closing down any possibility for Ahmet to object the decision. It is my contention that by not referring to the arrest, the management behaved strategically. Nevertheless, the chief of staff carefully reminds the manager of the criminal aspect of the case in the last sentence of the letter. The manager’s concise reply came six days later:
30.06.1955

Your petition dated 24.06.1955 has been examined. Your recruitment is not possible because as of now we do not need any weavers.

It has been deemed suitable that you are excused for not informing our enterprise about your absenteeism because of the psychological effects of your imprisonment and that you are given reparation and discharged from the enterprise from 27.06.1955 on.

You will be paid this money, which was effectuated by clause ç of the 13th article of the Labour Law, upon your application to our cash desk.

The manager

It is most probable that Ahmet never read the previous letter by the chief of staff. The references to the Labour Law and his arrest remained unknown to him. The reason for not recruiting him gets so simplified here that there is no room for dispute. The imprisonment is only indirectly referred to in the second part of the letter. It is this second part that brings a new dimension to the whole case for the tone of the letter changes dramatically from the previous texts written by the management. Above, I have documented cases of absenteeism in which workers carefully notified the management about the reason of their leave. In Chapter 2, I have argued that some of these reasons were false statements which were used by workers to keep the factory gate open in case they returned. These examples date from the 1940s. Thus, it could be assumed that by 1955 this practice of notification was fully established. In this case, the manager’s attitude is even more curious. There are two possibilities to explain this curiosity, one of which relates to the perception of the factory manager as a paternal figure by the workers as I discussed above. The sentence here has both a caring (“psychological effects”) and a fatherly (“you are excused”) tone. Moreover, the fact that the excuse is not based on any legal obligation or procedure gives the impression that the decision shows the kindness of the manager himself. A second explanation is more sceptical. The reference to the Labour Law in the final part of the letter is important here for it indicates that in the case of termination of employment contracts, the concerning party must be notified. By putting off the date of discharge, the manager might be trying to avoid law enforcement. The last sentence of the letter raises another question in this regard. The time period between Ahmet’s imprisonment and the date of discharge is slightly over five and a half months. According to the above named clause, workers are paid reparation of fifteen days wage for every full year they worked after the first five years of their employment. In Ahmet’s case, the deferral of the end of the contract does not change the amount of that reparation for it does not
round up his last year of employment. Thus, there is no financial gain for Ahmet in this arrangement.

Neither the file nor the interview informs us about what happened in the following years. As I noted above, Ahmet narrates the post-DP years as a story of losses pertaining to his career as a worker. The situation did not improve even after many years as we see in the following petition he wrote on 3 September 1967:

To the Management of Bakırköy Cloth Factory of Sümerbank Cotton Textiles Enterprise,
I worked at the weavery of your enterprise as a weaver for long years. In 1955, I was arrested by the Istanbul prosecution office because of a speech and proposals I made at a meeting of a trade union to which I was enrolled. After trial, I acquitted. I have not received any political sentence. Various times I have made written applications to your factory. Your management’s response was either that those fired are not recruited or that there is no vacancy. But now, I have heard that people who received political sentence and [thus] could not enter the factory are back to their jobs, they have been recruited again.
As for me, I am a continuous worker who does not have a political sentence and who has not given any harm to the enterprise I worked at during my entire period of employment. I respectfully request that I am recruited.
An old worker of your enterprise, 4179 Ahmet Cansızoğlu
Note: I have been unemployed for a long time.
Response: We have no vacancy for you. You should go to the Employment Agency.

This petition is the final document in Ahmet’s file. He never had stable employment after Bakırköy.

By Way of Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the early years of the trade union movement in Republican Turkey. Inherent to this analysis is a challenge to the monolithic view of this movement. According to this view, the trade unions were under the total control of the state and thus were not efficient in claiming and furthering workers’ rights. By means of bringing in a perspective from within, I portrayed the early trade union movement as a dynamic period of labour politics which included multiple visions on societal development.

I have argued that in order to explore the ideological underpinnings of the post-1947 unionism, we should pay attention to the 1946 trade union movement. Connecting these two
different moments of trade unionism has an effect that goes beyond a simple correction of the neglect suffered by the latter. It also changes our way of conceptualizing the state-labour relations in this period. Studying the Turkish state’s handling of the labour movement in relation to the content and form of that movement rescues the workers from being seen as passive recipients of labour policies. Besides, analyzing the effects of 1946 trade unionism on 1947 trade unionism shed light on the historical background of the lack of connection between the trade union movement and the political left.

The chapter analysed the stories of two Bakırköy workers representing two different politics. These two stories illustrate different types of insider’s critique of the trade union movement in the late 1940s. They also provide invaluable insights on the learning process of workers. These insights help us to understand how and why a worker decides to join a trade union, what practical and ideological effects this decision has, when and why a worker is unsatisfied with the activities of the trade union and intervenes. These two main stories and the side stories around them exemplify the multiple discursive positions within the trade union movement and the construction of the hegemonic nationalist discourse. The difference between Enver and Ahmet’s stories starts at this point. While Enver formulated his critique within the confines of this hegemonic discourse, Ahmet gradually radicalized politically and formulated his critique in class terms. In other words, for Enver, the problem of the labour movement was not systemic in character; it was rather a problem of which establishment party had the power over the movement. Thus, he expressed his critique mainly in terms of his opposition to the RPP claiming that the solutions to the problems of the trade union were offered by his own political party. Concerning the character of the state-society relations, however, he completely conformed to the dominant paradigm as we saw in his claim that the path of the Turkish worker was drawn by Kemalism. Ahmet, on the other hand, underwent a political transformation in a span of few years by joining the DP, the DWP and then the HP. During this transformation, his critique of the trade union’s inability to address the crucial problems of workers resulted in him taking the matter in his hands by trying to use the trade unionist identity to challenge the authority at the shop-floor. The two stories also differ in terms of the consequences of the dissidence of these two workers. While Enver mainly suffered from social exclusion and continued working at the factory in 1970 when he had to retire due to reaching the age limit, Ahmet not only lost his job but also had to live under police surveillance.
EPILOGUE

In the past historians could be accused of wanting to know only about “the great deeds of kings,” but today this is certainly no longer true. More and more they are turning toward what their predecessors passed over in silence, discarded, or simply ignored. “Who built Thebes of the seven gates?” Bertolt Brecht’s “literate worker” was already asking. The sources tell us nothing about these anonymous masons, but the question retains all its significance.616

Many Voices of a Turkish State Factory looks at the shop floor dynamics of a state-owned textile factory in Istanbul in order to understand the connections between the living and working conditions of its workers, their consciousness and their political language between 1932 and 1950. It conceptualises this national factory, where the institutional relationship between the apparatuses of factory and state tended towards fusion, and where labour and state came into direct contact with each other, as a microcosm of state-labour relations in the early Republican period. The study investigated the relations between the politics of production and the larger framework of state politics, especially from the perspective of discursive structuring of class consciousness. Covering such a dynamic period of social change from the perspective of social history, it dealt with multiple levels of working-class formation, including its social and cultural dimensions. But, above everything else, this has been a study on crossing pathways of individual workers and the systematic pathways of the Turkish state’s nation-building project. And it has explored both the possibilities and the constraints that rose at these crossing points.

At the heart of this study is a critical engagement with Turkish labour historiography, particularly pertaining to two of its assumptions on the workers of the early Republican period. The first assumption suggested that state workers had better working and living condition than private sector workers, which resulted in their political compromise towards the state. It has been argued that they had the position of a labour aristocracy compared to the much more precarious and difficult conditions of employment of private sector workers. Through a detailed study of the living and working conditions of Bakırköy workers, I have documented ample evidence to question the validity of this assumption. The second assumption included the supposition that working-class consciousness did not develop during

this period and the labour movement of the late 1940s remained mostly ineffective in furthering workers’ rights. The protectionist labour policies and improvements in conditions of employment were endowed on the working-classes who were nothing but passive victims of state actions. The reasons for this passivity are explained through a combination of repressive and co-optative strategies of the single-party regime. Characterized by an implicit teleological belief in the transition from a state of unconsciousness to a state of consciousness, these conclusions are based on an elitist historiography in which the political elites are given the central role. But, more importantly, the cultural and discursive developments in the worlds of labour that do not immediately concern (narrowly defined) political activity are overlooked. The over-emphasis on state actions combines with a narrow definition of resistance and struggle, giving rise to conclusions over which the working classes did not have any organizational and structural power to affect the labour policies. Political action is reduced to exceptional moments of popular explosion, while class consciousness is only recognized in its most direct and radical expressions.

This study then pushes the boundaries of Turkish labour history in three ways. The first line of distinction concerns the unit of analysis. Different from studies on state enterprises or the industrial working class, I reconstructed the experiences of a workforce at the site of production: the factory. This allowed me to see the details of the process of working-class formation that had previously been overlooked in the sweeping overgeneralizations. When factors such as the labour process, social relations at the level of the shop floor and their interactions with social relations outside the factory site are included in the analysis, a more nuanced understanding of working-class behaviour and politics becomes possible. The second difference concerns the centrality of the experiences of rank-and-file workers in the narrative. By building upon the accounts of actual people in real social formations, I documented their crude and concrete experiences of the process of proletarianisation.

The reading of multiple aspects of workers’ shop floor experiences gave rise to alternative questions and conclusions. Among them are issues such as the development of a working-class mentality, ways of living, the trajectory of workers’ political ideas and actions, and their ways of presenting them. This approach also characterizes the study of the trade union activity. Instead of studying trade unions as institutions representing a working-class collectivity that is independent of a working-class subjectivity, I opted for following the individual workers in the trade unions. This enabled me to approach the formation of class
identity, not from the perspective of teleology but of genealogy, since I did not start from an evaluation of working-class collective organizations according to a pre-determined schema; instead, I followed workers’ learning processes in its non-linear as well as linear aspects. The last line of distinction is what made the first two lines possible to pursue. This study made use of a vast collection of archival material, some of which is being presented for the first time. By bringing together state-produced material with workers’ own accounts, I questioned the former and contextualised the latter.

Overall, this study sought to connect a qualitative analysis of Bakırköy workers’ objective living and working conditions to the subjective structuring of their perceptions and representations. In other words, both the discourses and experiences of work are analysed here. I have attended to the changes in meanings and structures as inter-constitutive factors by means of using textual as well as quantitative evidence. For this purpose, a solid historical materialist analysis is combined with a discursive analysis to understand the interrelations between the dynamics of the shop floor and the development of working-class consciousness amongst those workers. In what follows, I will first summarize the conclusions I arrived at and then present my ideas on the direction that future research on Turkish labour history should take.

**Working at Bakırköy**

Turkish labour historiography is characterized by two underlying contradictory assumptions regarding state workers in the early Republican period. Based on wage calculations and the social welfare provisions, it has been argued that state workers made up the better-off segment of the industrial working-class; indeed, the term labour aristocracy was used at times to describe their social position. At the same time, though, the context of labour at state factories was characterized by extremely high turn-over rates, which labour historians explained through the persistence of workers’ rural ties. Labour stability and commitment are conceptualized as the result of the successful adaptation of rural migrants to an urban industrial environment.

What gave rise to this contradictory view of state workers is a combination of two factors. First is the dependence of labour historians on state-produced archival material. This leads not only to the reproduction of the state’s point of view, which, in this case, is also the employer’s, but also necessarily to the disregard of problems with data collection. I showed in this study that when the state-produced archival material ceases to be the only source of
information, this narrative of contradictions collapses. The second factor concerns a too simplistic equation between the class position of state workers, which is also too readily assumed, and their assumed political passivity. Cultural and political behaviour is regarded as a more or less passive reflection of the economic situation and its study is limited to instances of outbursts of collective action. In this equation, work ethics is perceived both as a condition and an epiphany of working-class consciousness. Absenteeism is seen as an indication of its absence. Behind all this reasoning lies a conception of early Republican workers occupying a transitionary position in the peasant-to-worker transformation. How was it possible that a not fully proletarianised labour force had simultaneously better work conditions? A number of problematic conclusions derive from this contradictory picture. These conclusions were the starting point of this study.

I began my analysis of Bakırköy Factory with a detailed study of the work conditions at the shop floor level and their effects on the workers’ career choices. This part of the study portrayed the ways in which men and women related to their work sphere and the meanings workers themselves ascribed to their labour. I have conceptualised the labour process as a site of struggle where workers’ practices of accommodation and resistance to factory discipline, in the first place, and to the socio-political environment surrounding the labour question in general, take place.

When historians base their analysis solely on state-produced material, they inevitably reproduce the state’s perspective. The study of labour formation processes is thus often limited to the study of the ways employers solved the problem of recruiting, organizing, and disciplining the labour force. The effects on workers’ perceptions and the ways they internalized or resisted these actions are overlooked in these studies. Moreover, although in an implied manner, these studies suggest that working at state factories was a good opportunity that could only be rejected if workers had other means of subsistence. But what if the working conditions were not good at all? This dissertation examines the labour force not from the perspective of the state’s measures to secure a stable labour force. Instead, I documented the shop floor dynamics from the point of view of the workers, especially with regard to their decisions to stay at or leave the factory.

The high labour turn-over rate at state factories has been much emphasized by labour historians studying the early Republican period. Behind this emphasis is the perception of state workers as pre-modern labourers whose ties to the land were not completely severed. The introduction of new archival material in this study seriously challenged this assumption.
Workers’ petitions provide invaluable information on the reasons for and patterns of leaving the factory. Although they received much attention in factory inspection reports, these reasons and patterns were lost due to the nature of these documents, which approached the issue to solve the problem of labour stability. A study from the issue from below, however, reveals the mentalities and strategies of workers in dealing with the difficult working conditions they were facing. As such, it became possible to understand the high turnover rate as a workers’ response to their working and living conditions.

To begin with, the workers’ reasons for leaving were manifold and the reason given to the management was not always the only one, if not the most accurate one. The information in the factory inspection reports regarding these issues conceals this complexity. Analyses based on these data are not only bound to reproduce the employer’s point of view. They also miss the strategies of workers in dealing with the factory management on matters such as absenteeism. The documentation of individual workers’ employment stories enabled me to study the issue of career choices as a site of workers’ struggle.

Another important contribution of this study has been the presentation of considerable discrepancies in working and living conditions among workers of the Bakırköy Factory. Between the unskilled workers in the preparatory departments and skilled workers such as the weavers, significant gaps existed concerning wage levels, employment conditions and bargaining position. This was also reflected in the statistics on the factors affecting workers’ career choices. Contrary to the assumptions of female labour’s higher instable character, male workers tended to leave the factory more often. In terms of the position within the labour process, weavers were the group that changed the most. Systems of pay also made a difference since workers who received hourly wages left more than those with accorded wages. The existence of these patterns further indicates the rational aspect of workers’ career decisions.

The evaluation of the persistence of workers’ rural ties fails to differentiate among workers in terms of their regional origin. I touched upon this issue by documenting the birth places of Bakırköy workers in my sample. Most of these workers were born in parts of the Ottoman Empire that were not part of the Republic. Speculatively, this would mean weaker rural ties compared to workers who were employed at factories and mines that were relatively close to their places of birth. Clearly, this argument needs further substantiation, but it is safe to assume that the proximity of the birthplace to the site of employment has significant implications concerning the availability of means of subsistence other than industrial work.
This is yet another point of difference concerning the conditions of reproduction of labour power that has not received enough attention from labour historians.

Another indication that Bakırköy workers acted as rational economic actors in making career choices is the contradiction of the information regarding the timing and duration of their leave. I provided examples of petitions asking for permission to harvest. Comparing the information in these petitions with the information provided by supervisors, however, reveals that workers used the harvest as an excuse to legitimise their periods of leave, knowing that it was recognised as such by the factory management. The two cases in which I could demonstrate that workers chose to work at other factories – one in another state textile factory and the other in a private glassware factory – most clearly illustrated the rational mechanisms behind workers’ career choices. A careful reading and weaving of the information in the files together indicates rational actors who were able to calculate the risks and gains in making employment decisions. To reduce the multiple and complex stories of workers to a by-product of incomplete proletarianisation is to deny their agency. I have argued that the reasons for the high turnover rates should be sought in the low level of wages and difficult working conditions, which also changed from department to department. The designation of these workers as peasant-workers is based more on an assumption than carefully documented archival evidence. Absenteeism and high turn-over rates were workers’ responses to the difficult conditions of work at Bakırköy Factory.

Overall, the conclusions arrived at in these analyses suggest that the perception of state workers as a transitional category, which is an intermediate stage between peasants and a classical proletariat, is misleading. Even in cases where workers combined wage work with subsistence agriculture, assuming the dominance of pre-capitalist social relations in workers’ lives would simply be incorrect. The combination of waged and non-waged forms of labour could sometimes even benefit the employers by means of transferring – at least part of – the cost of reproduction of labour power onto the workers.

In studying the issue of managerial control and work discipline, I then documented the daily practices of supervision on the shop floor as much as possible. But since information on these practices concern instances when workers made trouble or were in trouble, the ordinary circumstances of daily supervision and discipline is left out. Still, I was able to show how and why fines were issued, how the foremen secured authority on the shop floor, and when workers protested against this authority. Although acquiring information about peaceful social relations among workers was highly difficult due to selective archive keeping as well, I gave a
glimpse of the co-operation among workers to resist managerial authority and even to benefit from the quota systems. At times, workers and the foremen solved problems amongst themselves, without notifying the management. By means of maintaining the order of the workplace, this cooperation secured the maintenance of production of surplus value.

Despite the high number of fines, however, the overall picture suggests serious limits to capitalist control at the factory. First and foremost, the ease of exiting and re-entering the factory hindered the imposition of tight managerial control over workers. On top of this, workers did not internalise the level of work-discipline demanded by the management, as we understand from the high number of fines given for absenteeism. Yet there was not a single case of objection to a fine by Bakırköy workers. Whether this was because objection was seen as futile, we do not know. Yet what we know for sure is that fining workers did not solve the problem of labour instability.

Moreover, my analyses of the wages at Bakırköy Factory illustrated, above everything else, the complexity of the systems of numeration and the differences among wage levels both within a single factory and between various factories. Inspection reports, as well as the expert reports, stressed the discrepancies and confusions regarding the pay systems and their effects on the high turn-over rates. In state textile factories, differences among preparatory and production departments appeared to be the dividing line. While weavers were on accord pay, spinners were paid on an hourly basis. This corresponded to gender differences as the spinners were predominantly female.

I am fully aware that a complete rethinking of wage levels in the state textile sector requires a thorough systematic analysis of a large number of workers in different localities at different points of production. But, the analysis of how workers reflected upon their wages brings the dimension of quality of life into the picture. Incorporating their views on the issue of wages portrays a highly different picture from that drawn by labour historians. Bakırköy workers, in general, were people who could hardly make ends meet. At times they worked for the same wage for years; annual increases were made on paper, not in reality. After having an accident, they returned to work before their health improved, for the wage loss was too much to sacrifice. Especially up until the second half of the 1940s, they laboured without basic employment security or any social insurance mechanism. Their housing conditions were far from adequate. In fact, they were among the first shantytown residents of the Republic. That they had to take care of their housing needs while some workers in newly founded state factories in Anatolia enjoyed housing provisions demonstrates the considerable differences
among state workers in terms of their access to social provisions. In this regard, I have argued against the grouping of state factories as a uniform body of state enterprises. The effects of factors such as location, differential labour recruitment and maintenance policies, various labour processes and the particularities of the industries on shop floor social relations and the development of working-class consciousness still await systematic critical analysis.

I argued against the dominant view that state workers of the early republican period occupied the position of a labour aristocracy because of the benefits they enjoyed being state employers. The evidence presented in this study portrays a radically different picture than the image of state factories as places offering secure employment conditions and impersonal rules. Low wage levels, difficult working conditions and harsh managerial discipline characterised work at Bakırköy Factory.

The Emergence of a Workers’ Language

In documenting the labour-management relations on the shop floor, my motivation was to correct the confinement of the study of the ideologies and mentalities of ordinary people to the dramatic moments of collective action. The absence or limitedness of such moments gives way to the conclusion that workers were completely co-opted by the dominant classes. The emphasis here is on the development of the trade union movement. The assumption that this is the only realm where workers’ politics could have developed often results in the overlooking of the workplace and the neighbourhood, where workers manifest instances of class consciousness. Through examining workers’ petitions, I documented these instances.

My analysis is based on a chronological study of workers’ petitions, which illustrated the self-definitions and perceptions of workers, both at moments of struggle and and those of adaptation to the factory discipline. Though five aspects of these documents are analysed, namely timing, frequency, addressee, content and vocabulary, the analysis focused on the linguistic aspects of the workers’ presentation of their demands and complaints. By means of a close reading of the historical social vocabulary that was available to the Bakırköy workers against the background of the changing socio-political dynamics, I documented their political perceptions and actions. On the whole, the analysis shows that workers’ self-perceptions and the representations of that self-perception underwent a dramatic change in the early Republican period. In connection with the socio-political changes in the wider context, workers gradually developed a vocabulary that allowed them to formulate their demands more
effectively. This indicates the slow but steady development of a working-class consciousness among Bakırköy workers.

The main finding of this analysis could be summarized as follows: In a time span of less than ten years, petitions written by Bakırköy workers changed dramatically in terms of their linguistic characteristics. The road from a language of humility, characterised by such words as “destitute” or “servant,” to a language in which the petitioner recognises himself as a worker with rights and obligations, was rather short in the case of Bakırköy workers. The second half of the 1940s was characterized by increasing state intervention in labour relations and regulations due to the Turkish State’s will to integrate with the post-War international order on the one side, and the RPP’s efforts to secure its leadership in the face of increasing electoral competition from the DP, on the other. In the context of the political liberalisation subsequent to the war, workers – by building upon their short but intense experience of proletarianisation – seized the opportunity to assert themselves as the lawful citizens of the Republic. The change of image of the worker as a subject who asks for a favour, to a citizen who demands his rights was even recognized by the political authority. Thus, the post-War national politics had significant effects on both the perception of the Turkish worker by the ruling classes and on the Turkish workers’ self-perception.

The analysis helped to flesh out the shop floor dynamics of Bakırköy Factory by delving into the political practices and ideological assumptions embedded in the process of production. Petitions functioned as an entry point to an understanding of the struggles at the point of production. They illustrated the formation and reformation of identities, the perceptions and strategies of both workers and their supervisors. Increasing state regulations of the labour process and the labour-capital relations changed the modes of relations between workers and the factory management. The analysis of the petitions was also useful in terms of understanding these changes. It also detailed the practices of managerial discipline, worker-foremen relations and the mechanism of worker representation.

These findings further substantiate the arguments I made previously. In particular, the speed with which workers learned about and made use of the changes in labour legislation indicates their awareness of, first, their social identity as workers and, second, their ability to adapt to the changing conditions of employment. The workers’ complaints about their wages, the ways they formulate these complaints and their subsequent demands support my conclusions regarding the difficult working conditions at Bakırköy Factory. The discourse analysis of these formulations reveals the ways workers perceived their deprivation, made
sense of its reasons and their vision of a better life. In these petitions, we acquire a glimpse of the hard lives of those workers, their household problems, their sense of duty towards their families, and perhaps most importantly, we acquire a partial understanding of their sense of justice. The changes in the content of the petitions, from simple wage raise demands to demanding fair treatment, illustrate the increase in their self-confidence as workers who deserved to be treated with dignity.

Probably the most interesting archival material used in this dissertation is a text documenting a conversation between a worker who had repeatedly asked for a wage raise in the late 1940s and the chief of the personnel department. The uniqueness and the depth of this document deserve a few words on the contribution it made to this study. To begin with, the story of this worker presented an exceptional case in terms of the addressee of his last petition, right before what the factory management called “the investigation.” The worker wrote directly to the Prime Minister to complain about the factory management for refusing to give him a raise in 1951. Not unimportantly, this was after the 1950 general elections, which resulted in the victory of the DP. It was the increasing self-confidence of the workers due to the end of the authoritarian single party regime that made this act possible.

This has two very significant implications for labour history. The first one concerns the social class base of the DP victory. Though workers’ support for the opposition party is cited randomly, there is no systematic study of their electoral behaviour in this period. Second, this incident shows the rather immediate effects of the change in state politics on the strategies of state workers. That the opportunity created is seized by a worker who had consumed the possible ways of getting a wage increase suggests how closely changes at this level were followed and acted upon by workers. Thus, this case could be read as an indication of the effects of the political liberalisation process on workers’ self-perceptions. Obviously, the topic requires a much deeper analysis, but it suffices to note here the quick and significant effects that macro politics had on the daily struggles of workers. It should also be noted that these effects only become visible at this level of individual acts of resistance and struggle. In the larger frame, these effects seem to be imposed and directed by the ruling classes and the ways rank-and-file workers experience them fall through the cracks of analysis.

The transcript of the investigation brings us to the closest point of reconstructing the labour-management relations at Bakırköy Factory. The document creates an almost theatrical effect through the presentation of the interaction between a supervisor and his subordinate. For the first time in early Republican Turkish labour history, we hear the seemingly
unmediated words of a worker, we follow his line of reasoning, we feel his desperation and embarrassment before the supervisor and other workers and, finally, we observe the strategies he resorts to in order to defend his right to a wage increase. In a sense, the transcript exemplifies a worker’s repertoire on matters such as self-image, his perception of authority and his ideas of a fair wage.

On a different note, this document is significant for it displays the discursive structuring of managerial authority on the shop floor. In fact, through a study of the short notes on workers’ petitions, I illustrated the management’s way of thinking on factory discipline. This instance of face-to-face interaction with a worker is a first-hand account of the language and the arguments a manager used in dealing with a ‘troublesome’ worker. Another similar example, namely the work stoppage at Bakırköy Factory, is also presented. But the difference here is the seemingly unmediated presentation of the complete conversation, which makes the analysis more dynamic in terms of seeing the two sides interacting.

I illustrated the development of a workers’ language that was increasingly underlined by a working-class consciousness throughout the 1940s. While workers formulated their demands for a wage raise by appealing to the good will of their supervisors in the early 1940s, by the end of the decade they were referring to their skill levels, the discrepancy between wages amongst themselves and their co-workers, and the unfair, humiliating treatment they were subjected to as the basis of their right to a higher wage. I have argued that petitioning was used effectively as a means to struggle by Bakırköy workers. But these means could not evolve into a collective mode because of the repressive labour law that did not allow the newly emerged trade unions to handle labour disagreements. Though the mechanism of labour representatives was in use in one of the cases I analysed, the absence of trade unions on the shop floor explains the individualised and isolated character of these struggles.

The Labour Movement

This dissertation also presents a renewed understanding of the Turkish labour movement in the early Republican period. A quick glance at the archival material on trade unions in the early 1950s would already reveal its three main characteristics. First, we observed the strong and proud use of the word “worker” by workers themselves. The term is used to denote a separate yet complementary social group with clearly defined duties and rights. Second, the word “worker” was almost always qualified by the adjective “Turkish.” It appears that the category worker could not exist on its own; it was just not enough, or perhaps safe. Though
the word does not necessarily refer to ethnic identity (after all, the population of Turkey has always been very diverse ethnically), but to a shared history and culture, biological references such as “noble blood” abounded. This could be understood as an indication that the industrial working-class had already signed into national identity; its members had been incorporated into the nation-state ideology.

The third characteristic concerns the strong anti-communist rhetoric of the labour movement. That in the context of the Cold War anti-communism became a national ideology is in no sense a particularly Turkish phenomenon. Neither is the use of communism as slander to keep the labour movement under control unique to Turkey. However, the character of workers’ reactions to these accusations is striking because of their very angry, at times offended tone. It seemed that to call Turkish workers communists was the worst possible insult to make. Instead of refuting these allegations calmly, organised Turkish workers were responding hysterically, expressing their disgust for the communists. What needed explanation, in my opinion, were the mechanisms through which anti-communism became so strong within the labour movement. The extent of anger and frustration workers showed when they were accused of communism, their invoking of the Turkish identity – again by using biological and historical metaphors – as evidence against these accusations necessitated the study of the psychology of the workers.

These observations led me to further investigate the ideological formation and the discursive characteristics of the trade union movement during the last four years of the 1940s. How was it possible that the politics of the labour movement reflected the politics of the Turkish state to such a great extent? What were the reasons behind the successful integration of the labour movement to the nationalist ideology? Why did the labour movement need to refer to national identity so often? Was it the condition of its existence or was there any kind of strategic thinking behind it? With these questions in mind, I designed my final analysis of the Bakırköy Factory trade union.

Bringing the Worker back in

My analysis of the labour movement has been different from the previous ones in two regards. The first distinguishing feature is the emphasis on the individual workers’ experiences. The literature on the early trade union movement is mainly an assessment of a workers’ organisation that developed under direct and close state control. The trade union movement has been studied as a uniform collectivity, about which many overgeneralisations have been
made. The voices of unionised workers, their decisions to join the movement and the internal struggles and criticisms within the movement are lost in this historiography. In this study, on the contrary, I question the monolithic view of the labour movement in terms of its docility towards the state, its nationalist rhetoric and the frivolous character of its demands and activities. It is not enough to conclude that the labour movement could not go beyond frivolous demands. Labour historians should also explain how workers made sense of these demands, and why these demands stayed frivolous. To do so requires documenting the alternative visions of labour politics within the trade union movement and the ways they were suppressed. Using biographical accounts and following individual workers’ lives at the shop floor, I put these missing aspects of early trade unionism in Turkey at the centre of my analysis and thus fleshed out the abstract, sociological generalizations of the existing literature.

Though it brings together a wide range of archival material, both on the Bakırköy trade union and the trade union movement in general, the analysis focuses on the trade union career of individual workers to depict their learning processes concerning the labour question and politics. In documenting Bakırköy workers’ trade union activity, I have been mostly interested in workers’ decisions to join the union. Rather than evaluating the performance and politics of the trade union as an institution according to pre-determined conceptions of what a trade union movement should do, I opted to analyse the decision-making process to join the union and to take part in its administration. The personal stories I followed allowed me to trace the development of the mentality of a worker concerning the duties and rights of the trade unions.

The stories of two Bakırköy weavers who were quite active both in the Bakırköy Trade Union and in political parties were instrumental to answer such questions related to the worker’s mentality: How does a worker decide to join a trade union? When and why does he begin criticising the union management? What are the channels of objection for those criticisms and how are they met? What are the possible connections between the labour process and labour relations on the shop floor, on the one hand, and trade union careers and political engagement, on the other? I tried to understand the mentality of individual workers within the trade union movement, how they made the decision to join the union, what formative experiences they had inside and outside the workplace before they made that decision, when they started complaining about the inefficiency of trade unions, how they made sense of the changes in the state-labour relations, and how they reacted when they came
to believe that their trade union engagement was not enough to solve their problems. With this analysis, my investigation came closer to studies in histories of mentalities. I attended to the conscious as well as unconscious elements of trade unionist workers in depicting the ways in which political positions were taken, articulated, circulated and contested.

By following two dissidents’ political trajectories and career histories, their ways of dealing with not only their employer but also with their fellow workers at the workplace and in the trade union, I documented examples of insiders critique on the development of trade unions. My concern was not so much with these personalities as such but with the political alternatives they signified. Representing two very different politics, the stories of these workers challenge the monolithic view that the trade unions presented a homogeneous picture in which alternative discourses did not exist by means of revealing the multiple discursive positions within the trade union movement. As such, their stories disclose the contingent ties between class structure and political action. Although coming from similar experiences at the level of the shop floor, these two weavers had completely different political stances. The discrepancy in the career paths of these two workers delineated the accepted limits of dissidence.

**The Worker Citizen in the Making**

A second aspect that distinguishes my analysis of the labour movement of the late 1940s from other studies is the attention I paid to its discursive constructions. Different from other studies that attribute the process of national identification as a natural by-product of modernisation, I approached it as a process that requires explanation. In Turkish labour history, working-classes are assumed to be readily available for incorporation to nationalism; their subscription to the nationalist ideology appears to be an expected outcome. It could be said that description functions as the explanation in such studies: they did not resist because they were incorporated into the ruling ideology. The ways the nationalist discourse was internalised, modified and at times used to further workers’ rights are understudied. In other words, besides studying the effects of the nationalist discourse on workers, we should also examine the ways in which workers contributed to the reproduction of the nationalist discourse. Only then can we recognise the agency of workers as political subjects and present an answer to the question of how the Kemalist modernisation project diffused into the political languages of the subaltern classes. The emphasis I put on these questions in my analysis of the trade union
movement brings the research closer to a cultural study of nationalism and nation-formation from a working-class perspective.

My aim has been to examine the discursive as well as the legislative interventions into the construction of working-class subjectivity. I have argued that the discursive fields are active sites of struggles that produce the hegemonic meanings of political categories and draw the limits of political legitimacy. These are not only the places where self-perceptions and representation are shaped in this field; it is also here that they exercise their constitutive power. Thus, I have explored the ideologies and politics of nationalism as components of the working-class formation process in the early Republican period, and focused on the interconnections between the processes of nationalism and the development of working-class consciousness. In doing so, I have not only illustrated the mediation or displacement of class struggle through nationalism, I have also documented how the nationalist discourse was used by workers to legitimise their demands. Moreover, I paid attention to the ways in which the labour movement resorted to this discourse in the context of internal struggles within the movement. I have argued that the discursive structuring of class-consciousness has critical implications for political action. Besides the state’s direct control of the labour movement, it was this structuring that ensured that the demands of the movement limited themselves to practical economic issues and frivolous demands.

Since, as a state factory, Bakırköy Factory is a site where the Turkish state faces the Turkish citizen in an employer-employee relationship, the situation of Bakırköy workers perfectly exemplifies the fluid boundary between class and citizenship, and illustrates how permeable the two discourses are. Class politics were often conducted in a rhetoric of national identity and belonging. The story of the work stoppage in early 1940s, which presented a conversation between the factory manager and a worker who found himself as the natural leader of the protesting weavers, stands as an example of this fluidity. What we saw in this case was the transformation of a disagreement on production issues to a disagreement on the representation and serving of the national interest. Instead of arguing in the lines of workers’ rights, the worker opted for connecting the interests of the weavers and the nation as a whole.

The nationalist discourse emphasises the shared interest between labour and capital mobilising both parties towards that shared interest: the rebuilding of the homeland. The optimistic rhetoric of nationalism, i.e. nationalism that concerns not the “other” as the enemy but the joint efforts of a people to reach a good future, shaped the discourse of a workers’ politics and the labour movement. The workers were continuously reminded of the
importance of their duty and the bright future that awaited them. Their work-related problems were either ignored or considered necessary sacrifices for the welfare of the nation. Labour protectionist policies were often presented as the state’s recognition of these sacrifices and the significance of workers’ contributions to this rebuilding project. But at the same time, when the state asked the workers for this sacrifice, it also held the Turkish capitalist responsible for meeting the basic needs of the workers, the ‘sons of the nation’.

The worker of this period is then subjected to a double discourse regarding her identity as a citizen of the young Republic. On the one hand, she is a free Turkish citizen: the salvation of the homeland saved her from the status of a slave. The immediate experience or the memory of the European supervisors and employers was carried to the level of the perception of foreign domination. It was the same salvation that put her eternally in debt to the nation. She also has a responsibility towards the nation for its rebuilding depends on her toil. On the other hand, there is an equalizing effect of the discourse of nationalism. If one has duties towards the homeland, then, she also has rights. Thus, the nationalist discourse was also enabling in the sense that it created a political space for labour politics through recognizing the workers as the sons of the nation. If the nation’s well-being depended on their toil, the workers had the right to demand the betterment of their living conditions. When they presented themselves as Turkish workers, their demand for a better wage from their Turkish employers could well be located in the discourse of the nation as the family. In a context where industrial conflict was confined to the disinterested Turkish state’s refereeing between labour and capital, the appeal to national identity aided the labour movement in claiming its legitimacy.

The analysis here also encompasses, albeit partially, the study of the constitution of citizenship from the perspective of working-class formation. There are two aspects of this constitution. First is the constitution of a working-class through citizenship rights while at the same time endowing it with obligations. Second is the study of the constitution of citizenship from the point of subjectivity formation, i.e., the discursive constitution of working-class citizenship through representation. By way of portraying the ways in which nationalist identities overlapped with those of class, I showed how the emphasis on national identity shaped workers’ claims as citizens upon the state and their employers, and how the rhetoric of citizenship is used as a basis for claims-making.

The evidence presented indicates that the nationalist discourse had a double function for the labour movement. On the one hand, it was restraining because it obliged organised
labour to speak from within the nationalist discourse, both in order to secure its legal existence and to appeal to the working masses. This effect was best exemplified in the different endings of the career histories of the two workers I mentioned above. While one of them formulated his critique within the confines of this hegemonic discourse by arguing that the path of the Turkish worker was drawn by Kemalism and attributed the problems of the labour movement to bad governmental practices, the other gradually moved to a much more radical political position and formulated the problem in terms of capital-labour conflict. Consequently, the price they paid for their dissidence differed immensely: social exclusion and the hostility of fellow workers in the case of the former, life-long unemployment and police surveillance in the case of the latter.

In recent times, the most commonly asked question in Turkish labour history regarding the early Republican period has been whether the working-classes had been successful as political actors. It seems that the winning answer is on the negative side. I have no intention, and I am certainly not naive enough, to answer this overarching question through the study of a single factory. Rather, I would like to question the very question in terms of our ways of conceiving success and failure in a historical sense. To take an example, let us consider the failed attempt of a revolution. Looking retrospectively, how would we evaluate a past attempt that seemingly has not caused any social or political change in our present lives? Do we evaluate it in its close temporal proximity or, should we evaluate it in terms of its after effects in the sense that resistance moves like a mole burrows beneath the soil? Could we conclude that it was ineffective because it failed to overthrow certain aspects of a social order in an easily discernable manner? But what do we make of its effects on cultural memory, the ways it shaped the patina of the past, configured the limits of what is possible and impossible?

Similar to other social interpretations, interpretations of the political consciousness of the working-classes in the early Republican period are themselves a social force that shapes our political culture. I am of the belief that social historians have not been fair in evaluating the early trade union movement, which emerged under very difficult conditions. A fair evaluation would require taking these conditions into account. Our knowledge of the social and cultural aspects of working-class lives during the period is seriously limited. We, the young labour historians of Turkey, are far from being able to explain the transformation of a co-opted, state dominated labour movement to a highly militant organised labour force in the late 1960s and 1970s. This, in my opinion, is not a simple problem of the size of scholarship. The more immediate problem concerns our inability to engage with the recent methodological
and historiographical debates in the field. To begin with, we should problematise the narrative structures of labour history. More specifically, we should leave behind a narrative of progress through modernisation. The boundaries of the modernisation paradigm have limited the questions we asked of the archival material. The attempt to refute the defective historiographical representation of a “strong state” is a good starting point. But it is not enough. The study of working-class formation from below should also include the social construction of meaning.

I have examined several of these aspects of labour historiography in this study of a Turkish state factory that ceased to exist materially but continues its symbolic existence as one of the successes of the young Republic. I chose an alternative narrative structure by building upon what appear to be insignificant, minuscule and mundane instances of industrial work. This has allowed me to start from what happened instead of searching for what should have happened. An epistemology of absence gave way to a genuine curiosity for understanding human action and consciousness as socially shaped possibilities rather than pre-determined outcomes. The reward of that curiosity has been the reconstruction of a polyphonic segment of the worlds of labour, the Many Voices of a Turkish State Factory.
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SUMMARY

*Many Voices of a Turkish State Factory* looks at the shop floor dynamics of a state-owned textile factory in Istanbul in order to understand the connections between the living and working conditions of its workers, their consciousness and their political language between 1932 and 1950. It conceptualises this national factory, where the institutional relationship between the apparatuses of factory and state tended towards fusion, and where labour and state came into direct contact with each other, as a microcosm of state-labour relations in the early Republican period. It is a micro-historical actor-centred study of the working and living conditions, and the development of the political consciousness and language of Bakırköy Factory workers. This first systematic archive-driven study of a factory in early Republican Turkey introduces a whole new perspective on the study of working-class formation in Turkey in two ways. First, it analyses the relations between the politics of production and the larger framework of state politics in the contexts of a national factory, a factory that was run by the state as part of its efforts to complement its recently acquired political independence with economic sovereignty. Second, through a close reading of workers’ experiences of shop floor activity and politics, it examines the discursive structuring of class consciousness as the infusion of two different discourses: the discourse of nation-building and citizenship, and the discourse of labour politics. Thus, it tries to establish the interactions between the processes of nation-building and of industrial proletarianisation by means of examining the fluid boundaries between class and citizenship. Covering such a dynamic period of social change from the perspective of social history, it deals with multiple levels of working-class formation, including its social and cultural dimensions, thus conceptualising class formation as much a discursive as a material process.

This study pushes the boundaries of Turkish labour history in three ways. The first line of distinction concerns the unit of analysis. Different from studies on state enterprises or the industrial working class, I reconstruct the experiences of a workforce at the site of production: the factory. This allowed me to see the details of the process of working-class formation that had previously been overlooked in the sweeping generalisations. When factors such as the labour process, social relations at the level of the shop floor and their interactions with social relations outside the factory site are included in the analysis, a more nuanced understanding of working-class behaviour and politics becomes possible. The second difference concerns the centrality of the experiences of rank-and-file workers in the narrative. By building upon the
accounts of actual people in real social formations, I documented their crude and concrete experiences of the process of proletarianisation. The study of the biographical instances of the process of working-class formation not only challenges the overly-generalised conclusions on state workers; it also brings the particular aspects to the foreground against the theoretical inclination of specialists in this field to go for the more general explication. Last but not least, this study makes use of a vast collection of archival material, some of which is being presented for the first time. By bringing together state-produced material with workers’ own accounts, I question the former and contextualise the latter.

The analysis starts from an experience-distant level and gradually moves towards the study of the dynamics of the self-perceptions and representations of Bakırköy workers through the examination of petitions they wrote, speeches they gave, and personal accounts they left. First, the structure of capitalist economic development of early Republican Turkey is analysed with an emphasis on the historical roots of state-led industrialisation of the 1930s and 40s. By means of providing a bird’s-eye view of the constellation of nationalism and state-led industrialisation, Chapter 1 illustrates how the former shaped the latter. The practical applications of etatism, such as the first five-year plan and the establishment of Sümerbank, are also analysed in this chapter, within the framework of the reproductive effects of state power. The analysis here explains the process of the young Turkish state’s assuming the role of the employer in the field of industrial production. A section on the historical background of the Bakırköy Factory narrates the story of this original Ottoman enterprise that came to be an economic space defined through the Republican ideology. In a nutshell, this chapter argues that Bakırköy Factory was designed as a national factory; i.e. a factory that would be in the service of the nation, and thus its workers were expected to be diligent and enthusiastic in doing their duty towards the homeland.

This structural analysis is followed by an investigation of the main characteristics of the context of work at Bakırköy Factory. Together with the working and living conditions of workers, the relations in production, i.e. work-place social relations, are portrayed in this part of the study. Chapter 2 provides detailed information on the factory’s policy of recruitment, systems of remuneration, the managerial control of the labour process, the reproduction of labour power, the provision of social welfare and the strategies of the workers to cope with problems. Workers’ lives outside the factory are also partially analysed here, especially pertaining to their housing conditions and their rural ties. In fact, this chapter brings together a variety of archival material in order to reconstruct the working and living conditions of
Bakırköy workers and engages in a dialogue with assumptions on state workers of the early Republican period.

Chapter 3 takes an even closer step into the world of Bakırköy workers as I analyse the changes in their self-understanding and perceptions against the labour control regime imposed upon them. My analysis is based on a chronological study of workers’ petitions; that is, written words left by workers illustrating their self-definitions and perceptions both at moments of struggle and adaptation to the factory discipline. In a way, petitions function as an entry point to an understanding of the struggles at the point of production. They illustrate the formation and reformation of identities, the perceptions and strategies of both workers and their supervisors. The analysis of the petitions is also useful in terms of understanding the changes brought about by increasing state regulations of the labour process and the labour-capital relations by means of revealing the practices of managerial discipline, worker-foremen relations and the mechanism of workers’ representatives. Five aspects of these documents are analysed, namely timing, frequency, addressee, content and vocabulary. The analysis focuses on the linguistic aspects of the workers’ presentation of their demands and complaints. On the whole, the analysis shows that workers’ self-perceptions and the representations of that self-perception underwent a dramatic change in the early Republican period. In connection with the socio-political changes in the wider context, workers gradually developed a vocabulary that allowed them to formulate their demands more effectively. This indicates the slow but steady development of a working-class consciousness among Bakırköy workers.

This dissertation presents a renewed understanding of the Turkish labour movement in the early Republican period in two regards. The first distinguishing feature is the emphasis on the individual workers’ experiences. In Chapter 4, I mainly follow the politicisation processes of two weavers from Bakırköy. These two weavers represent two different alternatives to the RPP-steered trade unionism. In terms of reconstructing their experiences on the shop floor, in the trade union meetings and in the arena of formal politics to an extent, I aim to illustrate the changes in their mentality pertaining to their self-perceptions, political visions and ideas of the labour movement. I also analyse the horizontal relations among workers through their interaction on the shop floor as well as at trade union meetings. The difference in how their stories end shows us the limits of dissidence accepted by the dominant ideology.

A second aspect that distinguishes my analysis of the labour movement of the late 1940s from other studies is the attention I pay to its discursive constructions. My aim is to examine the discursive as well as the legislative interventions into the construction of
working-class subjectivity. I argue that the discursive fields are active sites of struggle that produce the hegemonic meanings of political categories and draw the limits of political legitimacy. These are not only the places where self-perceptions and representations are shaped in this field; it is also here that these perceptions and representations exercise their constitutive power. Thus, different from other studies that attribute the process of national identification as a natural by-product of modernisation, I approach it as a process that requires explanation. I address the ways in which the nationalist discourse was internalised, modified and at times used to further workers’ rights as well as the ways in which workers contributed to the reproduction of the nationalist discourse. Since, as a state factory, Bakırköy Factory is a site where the Turkish state faces the Turkish citizen in an employer-employee relationship, the situation of Bakırköy workers perfectly exemplifies the fluid boundary between class and citizenship, and illustrates how permeable the two discourses are. The emphasis I put on this fluidity in my analysis of the trade union movement brings this study closer to a cultural study of nationalism and nation-formation from a working-class perspective.

To recapitulate, there are two analytical axes to this dissertation: the intertwining of nationalisation and proletarianisation on one side, and the relationship between the process of production (broadly defined) and the emergence of a worker as a form of subjectivity in the context of a national factory. In a way, then, this study starts from where labour historians have stopped; it deconstructs their conclusions in order to view the suppressed experiences, alternative voices and political visions of the state workers of the early Republican period. It connects a qualitative analysis of Bakırköy workers’ objective living and working conditions to the subjective structuring of their perceptions and representations. I attend to the changes in meanings and structures as inter-constitutive factors by means of using textual as well as quantitative evidence. For this purpose, a solid historical materialist analysis is combined with a discursive analysis to understand the interrelations between the dynamics of the shop floor and the development of working-class consciousness amongst those workers.
SAMENVATTING

*Many Voices of a Turkish State Factory* legt de dynamiek bloot van de werkvloer in een staatsbedrijf, de Bakırköy textiefabriek, in Istanbul tussen 1932 en 1950, en meer in het bijzonder de verbanden tussen leef- en werkomstandigheden van haar arbeiders, hun bewustwording en hun politiek vertoog. De studie beschrijft hoe in deze staatsfabriek de institutionele relatie tussen het apparaat van de fabriek en die van de staat naar fusie neigen, en hoe arbeiders en staat met elkaar in contact komen, als een microkosmos van staat-arbeidsrelaties in de vroege Republiek. Het betreft hier een micro-historische *actor-centred* analyse van de arbeids- en leefomstandigheden, en de ontwikkeling van politiek bewustzijn en de taal die de Bakırköy-arbeiders hanteren. Als eerste in zijn soort, biedt dit systematische archiefonderzoek van een fabriek in de vroege Republiek Turkije op twee manieren een nieuw perspectief op de studie van de formatie van de arbeidersklasse in Turkije. Op de eerste plaats worden de relaties tussen het productiebeleid en het bredere nationale politieke kader geanalyseerd in de context van een overheidsbedrijf, een fabriek die door de overheid wordt geleid met als doel de recent tot stand gekomen politieke onafhankelijkheid met economische soevereiniteit te completeren. Op de tweede plaats worden door middel van een gedetailleerde analyse van de arbeiderservaringen op de werkvloer de discursive structuren van klassebewustzijn als belichaming van twee verschillende vertogen onderzocht: het vertoog van natieopbouw en burgerschap, en het vertoog van arbeidspolitiek. Met andere woorden, de studie tracht de interacties vast te stellen tussen de processen van natieopbouw en van industriële proletarisering door de vloeibare grenzen tussen klasse enburgerschap zichtbaar te maken. Door zulk een dynamische periode van sociale ontwikkeling te bezien vanuit het perspectief van de sociale geschiedenis, neemt dit onderzoek kennis van meervoudige niveaus van arbeidersklasseformatie, met inbegrip van haar sociale en culturele dimensies. Daarmee conceptualiseert het de klasseformatie zowel als een discursief als een materieel proces.

Deze studie verlegt de grenzen van de Turkse arbeidsgeschiedenis op drie manieren. Het eerste punt van onderscheid betreft de eenheid van analyse. In tegenstelling tot de gebruikelijke bedrijfs- of industriehistorische studies reconstrueer ik de ervaring van het personeel op de plaats van productie: de fabriek. Dit stelt me in staat om de details te zien in de ontwikkeling van de arbeidersklasseformatie die voorheen door overgeneralisering werden genegeerd. Pas wanneer factoren als het arbeidsproces, sociale relaties op het niveau van de werkvloer en hun wisselwerkingen met de sociale verhoudingen buiten de fabriek in de
analyse worden opgenomen wordt een meer genuanceerd begrip van de handelswijze en de politiek van de arbeidersklasse mogelijk. Het tweede punt van verschil betreft de centrale positie van de ervaringen van de arbeiders in het verhaal. Door de verklaringen van concrete mensen in concrete situaties als basis te nemen documenteer ik hun onverholen, directe ervaringen van het proletariseringproces. Door de ontwikkeling van de arbeidersklasse te bestuderen via biografische levensmomenten, worden niet alleen eerdere, generaliserende interpretaties betreffende de arbeiders in overheidsdienst betwist; er komen ook meer specifieke aspecten van die arbeidersklasse aan het licht die ingaan tegen de stereotypiserende neiging van vele specialisten. Ten slotte maakt deze studie gebruik van een breed spectrum aan archiefmateriaal, waarvan sommige stukken voor de eerste keer openbaar worden gemaakt. Door de bijeengebrachte overheidsdocumenten kritisch te bevragen contextualiseer ik de manier waarop van hogerhand over arbeiders werd gerapporteerd.

De analyse begint eerst ver van de ervaring en nadert daarna gaandeweg de dynamiek van zelfwaarnemingen en vertegenwoordiging van Bakırköy-werkers door verkenning van de verzoekschriften, mondeling verklaringen en persoonlijke berichten die zij ons hebben nagelaten. Vooraleerst analyseer ik de structuur van de kapitalistisch-economische ontwikkeling van de vroege Turkse Republiek met een klemtoon op de historische wortels van de van staatswege georganiseerde industrialisatie in de jaren 1930 en ’40. Vanuit het vogelperspectief van nationalisme en staatsgeorganiseerde industrialisatie illustreert hoofdstuk één hoe het ene het andere vorm geeft. De praktische toepassingen van ‘étatisme’, zoals het eerste vijf-jarenplan en het ontstaan van de Sümerbank, worden ook in dit hoofdstuk onder de loupe genomen, binnen het kader van de reproductieve effecten van de staatsmacht. De analyse geeft hier uitleg omtrent de ontwikkeling van de jonge Turkse Staat als industriële werkgever. Een sectie omtrent de historische achtergrond van de Bakırköyfabriek vertelt het verhaal van deze in oorsprong Ottomaanse onderneming die tot een door de Republikeinse ideologie gedefinieerd economisch milieu werd. Kortom, dit hoofdstuk beargumenteert dat de Bakırköyfabriek als nationale fabriek werd geconcipieerd, met name een fabriek die zich ten dienste stelt van de natie, en waarvan dus werd verwacht dat haar personeel ijverig en enthousiast zijn plicht voor het vaderland vervulde.

Na deze structurele analyse volgt een onderzoek van de belangrijkste kenmerken van de arbeidsverhoudingen in de Bakırköyfabriek. Samen met de werk- en leefomstandigheden van de arbeiders worden de relaties in de productie – met name werkplek-specifieke, sociale relaties – in dit deel van de studie in kaart gebracht. Hoofdstuk twee levert gedetailleerde
informatie over het rekruteringsbeleid van de fabriek, de beloningssystemen, de bestuurlijke controle op het arbeidsproces, de reproductie van het arbeidsvermogen, het sociaal welzijn en de strategieën van de arbeidskrachten in het oplossen van problemen. Het arbeidersleven buiten de fabriek wordt ook gedeeltelijk onderzocht, vooral datgene wat met hun thuissituatie en verbondenheid met de landbouw te maken heeft. In feite brengt dit hoofdstuk een veelheid aan archiefmateriaal samen om de arbeids- en leefomstandigheden van de Bakırköy-arbeiders te reconstrueren en mengt het zich daarmee in het debat over staatsdienaren in de vroege Republikeinse periode.

Hoofdstuk drie bevat een verdere verdieping in de wereld van de Bakırköy-werkers, en analyseert het veranderende vermogen tot zelfbegrip en –waarneming van arbeiders ten aanzien van het regime van arbeidstoezicht dat hen wordt opgelegd. Mijn analyse is gebaseerd op een chronologische studie van arbeiderspetities. Deze laten zien hoe arbeiders zichzelf en hun onmiddellijke omgeving waarnamen wanneer zij zich wilden verweren tegen aantasting van hun belangen. In zekere zin kunnen petities ons inzicht verschaffen in de sociale strijd op de werkvloer. Ze illustreren de formatie en re-formatie van identiteiten, de percepties en strategieën van zowel arbeiders als hun leidinggevenden. De analyse van de petities is zinvol voor het begrip van de verandering die teweeg wordt gebracht door de toenemende overheidsreglementeringen van het arbeidsproces en de verbanden tussen overheid en kapitaal, in die mate dat praktijken van bestuurlijke discipline, relaties tussen arbeider en ploegbaas en het mechanisme van arbeidersvertegenwoordigers worden bloot gelegd. Vijf aspecten worden in deze documenten geanalyseerd: tijdsduur, frequentie, recipiënt, inhoud en gebruikte terminologie. De analyse spitst zich toe op de taalkundige aspecten in de presentatie van de arbeiderseisen en -bezwaren. Over het algemeen laat de analyse zien, dat de zelfwaarneming van de arbeiders een dramatisch keerpunt in de vroege Republikeinse periode hebben gekend. In verband met de socio-politieke veranderingen in die context ontwikkelen de arbeiders gaandeweg een vocabulaire dat hen ertoe in staat stelt hun eisen gerichter te formuleren. Dit wijst op een trage maar gestage ontwikkeling van een bewustzijn van de arbeidersklasse onder de Bakırköy-arbeiders.

In twee deelaspecten biedt deze dissertatie een hernieuwd kritisch begrip van de Turkse arbeidersbeweging in de vroege Republikeinse periode. Het eerste, onderscheidende kenmerk is de klemtoon op de individuele ervaringen van werknemers. In hoofdstuk vier volg ik hoofdzakelijk de politiseringsprocessen van twee Bakırköywevers. Deze twee wevers vertegenwoordigen elk alternatieven ten aanzien van de door de CHP (Republikeinse Volks
Partij) aangestuurde vakbeweging. Door de reconstructie van hun ervaringen op de werkvloer, in de vakbondsvergaderingen en tot op zekere hoogte in de arena van de formele politiek illustreer ik de mentaliteitsveranderingen aangaande hun zelfwaarnemingen, politieke overtuigingen en ideeën omtrent de arbeidersbeweging. Ik analyseer ook de horizontale relaties tussen arbeiders door middel van hun interactie op de werkvloer, alsook in de vakbondsbijeenkomsten. Het feit dat de twee verhalen heel verschillend eindigen toont de grenzen die de heersende ideologie aan dissidenten oplegde.

Een tweede aspect waarin mijn analyse van de arbeidersbeweging van de late jaren ’40 zich onderscheidt van andere studies is de aandacht die ik besteed aan haar discursive constructies. Mijn doelstelling is zowel het discursive nivo te onderzoeken als de legislatieve interventies in de constructie van het arbeidersbewustzijn. Ik beargumenteer dat de discursive velden actieve plaatsen van sociale strijd zijn die de hegemonische betekenissen van politieke categorieën tot stand brengen en zorgen voor politieke legitimering. Deze velden zijn niet enkel de plekken waar zelfwaarnemingen en representaties op dit gebied worden gevormd. Het is ook hier dat deze percepties en representaties hun constitutieve invloed uitoefenen. Dus, anders dan voorgaande studies die het proces van nationale identificatie toeschrijven aan een natuurlijk neveneffect van modernisering, benader ik dit als een proces dat nadere uitleg vereist. Ik behandel vervolgens de manieren waarop het nationalistische vertoog wordt geïnternaliseerd, herzien en soms toegepast om arbeidersrechten te behartigen, alsook de manieren waarop de arbeiders bijdragen aan de reproductie van het nationalistisch vertoog. Aangezien, als overheidsinstelling, de Bakırköyfabriek een plek is waar de Turkse overheid tegenover de Turkse burger in een werkgever-werknemerverhouding staat, werpt de situatie in Bakırköy perfect licht op de dunne grens tussen klasse en burgerschap, en illustreert het hoe poreus de twee vertogen zijn. De nadruk die ik leg op die vloeibaarheid en in mijn analyse van de vakbondsbeweging brengt dit onderzoek dichter bij de culturele studie van nationalisme en de opbouw van een natie vanuit het perspectief van de arbeidersklasse.

Samengevat lopen er twee analytische assen door deze dissertatie heen: het verstrengelen van nationalisme en proletariseren aan de ene kant, en de relatie tussen het productieproces (in de brede zin) en de opkomst van een arbeider als subject in de context van een nationale fabriek. In zekere zin, daarom, begint dit onderzoek daar waar arbeidshistorici eindigen; het deconstrueert hun conclusies om de onderdrukte ervaringen te kunnen zien, alternatieve stemmen en politieke visies van de ambtenaren in de vroege Republikeinse periode. Het verbindt een kwalitatieve analyse van objectieve leef- en werkomstandigheden
van Bakırcöywerkers met de subjectieve structuren van hun percepties en representaties. Ik observeer kritisch de verschuivingen in betekenis en structuur als inter-constitutie factoren door middel van tekstuele en kwantitieve aanwijzingen. Om die reden wordt een solide historisch-materialistische analyse gecombineerd met een discursieve analyse om de interne verhoudingen te begrijpen tussen de dynamiek op de werkvloer en de ontwikkeling van een klassebewustzijn onder de arbeiders.