Many voices of a Turkish state factory: working at Bakirköy Cloth Factory, 1932-50
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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.

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.²³²

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.²³³ In other words, the second level of class formation studies the social organization of society lived by actual people in real social formations.²³⁴ 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.”²³⁵ But, similar to Burawoy’s comments on the character

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.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.”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.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.

236 Ibid., p. 17.
237 Ibid., p. 16.
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.\textsuperscript{239} 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.\textsuperscript{240} 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.\textsuperscript{241}

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

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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.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 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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:

\textsuperscript{246} A short list of newspaper articles reporting on the increasing number of unemployed migrants in Istanbul would include the following: “İşsizler: vilayet müracaat edenlerden vesika istenecek” [“Unemployed: those applying to the governor’s office will be asked for a certificate”] (Afällüm, 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”] (Afällüm, 6 Aug. 1932); “İstanbul başkentten gelen iş bulmak için gelenler” [“Those coming to Istanbul to Find a Job”] (Afällüm, 21 Nov. 1932); “İş bulmak için belediye bu sene bir iş bürosu açıyor” [“The municipality is opening an employment bureau this year”] (Afällüm, 14 June 1934). Another article published on 17 June 1934 gives a detailed explanation of why migrants came 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” (Afällüm). This was indeed the year when Sümerbank started 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” (Afällüm, 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 (Afällüm, 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.

\textsuperscript{247} Ing. Hosli, Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor, (n.p., 1943).
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>1943</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present at the</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>beginning of the year</strong></td>
<td>1098</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1121</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcomers</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1082</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1942</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>2203</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1053</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present at the</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>end of the year</strong></td>
<td>1121</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Labour Turnover at Bakırköy Factory, 1940-1943.

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)”, Praxis, 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 Sümérbank hints at the working and living conditions of female workers in the 1940s. According to this, Sümérbank 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 (Sümérbank 1948 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait Idare Meclisi raporu, bilanco, kar ve zarar hesabı, [Izmit: Selüloz Basimevi, 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.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.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 factory253.

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 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, Bakırköy Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor.
### Table 2. Workers' Length of Service at Bakırköy Factory, 1943.

<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>

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. 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?

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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\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{256} Burawoy, \textit{Politics of Production}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{257} Suat Aray, \textit{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.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.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.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.

259 Personnel file of Ahmet Çelenoğlu.
reports. 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 Personnel 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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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

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.267

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.268 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.269 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.270

267 Hosli, Nazilli Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor.
270 Sümerbank Birleşik Pamuk İpliği ve Dokuma Fabriкалari 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.

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

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273 Suat Aray, *Sanayi İşletmelerinde İşçi Hareketleri*.
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 Iplik ve Dokuma Fabrikları 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

284 Von der Porten, Max. Kayseri Fabrikasi Iplik ve Dokuma Daireleri Hakkinda. 104
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.

\textsuperscript{285} Ing. Hosli, \textit{Ereğli Bez Fabrikasi 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bakırköy</th>
<th>Ereğli</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yarn</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinning</td>
<td>14.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobbin</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warp</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaving</td>
<td>20.0</td>
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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{286} 3460 Sayılı Kanuna Bağlı Devlet Ekonomi Kurumlarının 1943 Yılı İşlemleriyle Bİlanço ve Kar ve Zarar Hesaplarını İnceleyen Genel Kurul Tutanağı, (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Matbaası, 1945).

\textsuperscript{287} Max von der Porten, Max. \textit{Bakırköy Bez Fabrikasi 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

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over workers. Von der Porten noted that the management was convinced that the current system was a proper adaptation of the accord system.  

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. 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. In 1939, for example, some spinners at Kayseri Factory were earning hourly wages, whereas all weavers were on an accord wage. 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. 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

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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 İkramiye 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 Müddetleri 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 Kocabalş 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.  

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. 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. 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. 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. 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-

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.
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

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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.
310 “Sümerbank’ın 1940 yılı muamelatı bilanço, kar ve zarar hesaplarının têtikine dair olan Umumi Murakebe Heyeti raporu hakkında İktisat Vekaleti Müdahalesi”, in Sümerbank 1940 senesi faaliyet ve hesap devresine ait Idare Meclisi raporo, 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 Müdahalar”, 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.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’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.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

311 Sümerbank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İctimai Teşkilatı Hakkında Rapor (1941), pp. 39-41.
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.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.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.³¹⁶ Another report from the same year interpreted the Ordinance as a progressive move, which shows the importance the Republican government gives to workers.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

³¹⁴ Sümerbank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İçtimai Teşkilati Hakkında Rapor (1941), pp. 39-41.
³¹⁵ Sümerbank 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, pp. 34-5.
³¹⁷ Ibid., p.6.
month increased from 0.77 to 3.16 in 1942 and to 9.90 in 1943.\textsuperscript{318} 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 Höslí’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.\textsuperscript{319} 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.\textsuperscript{320}

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\textsuperscript{318} Hosli, \textit{Bakırköy 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.

\textsuperscript{319} 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}).

\textsuperscript{320} “İplik ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu”, in \textit{Sümerbank 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu}.
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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

\(^{321}\) 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 Bakirköy 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 Bakirköy 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.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.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.”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.

329 Aydemir et al., Devlet Endüstrisinde.
330 Makal, 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.'

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, Akın 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.

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.
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 İpliği ve Dokuma Fabrikaları Müessesesi 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.\footnote{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).}

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.\footnote{Makal, Ameleden İşçiye, pp. 130-1.}

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
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.\textsuperscript{341} 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.”\textsuperscript{342}

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.\textsuperscript{343} 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.\textsuperscript{344} 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

\textsuperscript{341} At this point, it is also important to note that housing is a misnomer for the experience of taking shelter in these pavilions. İrfan 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%.

\textsuperscript{342} Sümerbank 1939 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 18. Archival Collection of the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Supreme Audit Board. Amb./Db.No: K.A./ 255.07.02.01.06.3227.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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 İçtimai 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 Bez Fabrikası Hakkında Rapor.
346 Sümerbank 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakebe Heyeti Raporu, p. 40.
347 Aydemir, Ş. Süreyya, Bülent Büktaş, 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. 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. According to the religious commissary of the Sümer Mosque 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. A petition from a worker further testifies to the difficulty of living in a gecekondu. Hayri asked for four days off in 1948 because “the wall of the house I built myself has suddenly collapsed.”

Eight workers in the sample reported their addresses as the Zeytinburnu shantytown area, 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 Kızılgüneş was the first worker to report his address as Zeytinburnu Gecekonduları 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. 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 *gecekondus*. 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. 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 townsmanship was at work for the newcomers. When Yakup returned to the factory after the completion of his military service

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361 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.

362 Sümerbank Fabrikaları İçtimai Teşkilat 1940 Yılı Raporu, p. 20-22.
in 1945, his address 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 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. 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

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amount on housing, sports facilities, baths, and recreational facilities. 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.” 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”:

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.

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. 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.

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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 muamelatı bilanço, kar ve zarar hesaplarının tetkikine dair olan Umumi Murakebe Heyeti raporu hakkında İktisat Vekaleti Mütäelası, p. 10.

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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 Bakırcıköy

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.”\(^{374}\) 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.”\(^{375}\) 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.”\(^{376}\) 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.\(^{377}\) 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

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\(^{375}\) 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

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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.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: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

383 Makal, Ameleden İşçiye, p. 53.
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 tesekkülerin 1940 yılı bilançoları ile kar ve zarar hesaplarını tetkik eden Umumi heyet zabıti, Cilt 3, 27.XI.1941 ve 22,23/XII/1941 ve 13.15,20,21,22,23,24/1/1942 tarihi 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. One Bakırköy worker states that he left Nazilli Factory in 1938 because he could not bear the climate. Another inspection report cites the effects of cultural factors on labour turnover such as the rumour that factory work would cause health problems.

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

385 Haluk Cillov, *Denizli El Dokumaçılığı Sanayi*, (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat Fakültesi, 1949), p. 149.
386 Interview with Ahmet Cansızoglu conducted by Yıldırım Koç (1988), IISH Collections, BGV1/40-54.
387 *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.
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

388 Personnel file of Murat Özcan.
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 mentioni\(^{390}\)ng 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.”\(^{391}\) 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 –

\(^{390}\) 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

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 Şükrüye wanted to change her work department because workers in the maintenance department were 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, Şükrüye 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

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393 Personnel file of Ali Akgül.
394 A detailed analysis of this incident is given in Chapter 3.
get my old job back or kindly request your orders that I am given another job in other departments.

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,396 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.

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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

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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 İzmir 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.\(^\text{399}\)

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, Şükriye 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

\(^{399}\) Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism”, p. 93.
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.\(^{400}\)

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

\(^{400}\) 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).
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.\(^\text{404}\) 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.\(^\text{405}\) 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.”\(^\text{406}\) 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.\(^\text{407}\) 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 işçi sınıfı, p. 30.
\(^{406}\) M. Şehmuz Güzel, “1940larda İşgücünün (İşçilerin) Özellikleri”, Mülkiyetler Birliği Dergisi, No. 119, May 1940, pp. 18-22.
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.

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.

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.”

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:

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408 Yıldırım Koç, Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı ve Sendikacılık Hareketi, (Gerçek Yaynevi: İstanbul, 1998), p. 34.
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.\(^\text{411}\)

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.\(^\text{412}\) 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

\(^{411}\) 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 von der Porten, Max. Feshane ve Hereke Fabrikaları Tekziklerine 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. Brahrnananda, “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.