Many voices of a Turkish state factory: working at Bakirköy Cloth Factory, 1932-50
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In the previous two chapters, I portrayed the relations of and in production inside the Bakırköy Factory by documenting workers’ living and working conditions and analyzing the written correspondence between the workers and the management. In the current chapter, I will take the reader outside the factory. My overall objective here is to detect the main characteristics of the workers’ movement in the aftermath of the legalization of trade unionism. In some ways, this means that I am further pursuing the question I raised in the third chapter, namely the changes in the self-perception and presentation of workers in the post-WWII context, in a different context, that of the labour movement. As such, I move from individual to more collective moments of resistance, but this does not mean that I lose track of the individual workers in that collectivity. As I mentioned above, the sacrifice of the individual for the collectivity has been one of the main problems of the Turkish labour historiography and in the current chapter, I also tackle that historiographical problem.

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

Informed by such concerns, my approach in this chapter requires rowing against the theoretical inclination to conceptualize labour as an abstract mass and to focus exclusively on the collectivity aspect of it. I start from the worker involved in the trade union movement instead of the institution of the trade union itself as a political actor. My argument is that doing so will help us a have better understanding of the collectivity itself. A similar approach is found in Selig Perlman’s A Theory of the Labour Movement:
A theory of the labour movement should include a theory of the psychology of the labouring man. The writings of socialists, syndicalists, anarchists, communists, and “welfare” capitalists abound in embroideries on the theme of “what labour wants” or “what labour aspires to”. But the safest method is to go to the organizations of labour’s own workings, shaped and managed by leaders arisen from labour’s own ranks, and to attempt to discover “what’s really on labour’s mind” by using as material the “working rules,” customs and practices of these organizations.490

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

These stories should also be contextualized within the universe of labour politics characterizing the period. Thus, I also refer to the main issues around which different parties, i.e. different state actors, political parties, various sections of industrial workers, and the media, formulated arguments. Before I proceed with this section, two notes should be made, the first of which concerns the method I use here. In portraying the period through these stories and discussions, my aim is not to trace the historical trajectory of any debate. Rather, I aim to depict the general ideological atmosphere of the period in relation to its effects on the labour movement through reading beyond the surface of the discourses presented on various aspects of the labour question. As such, I adopt discourse analysis491 as a method to see how the language around these debates shaped the labour movement ideologically, on the one hand, and effect ed workers’ social perspectives and identities on the other.492

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

By using the factory personnel files, which included petitions written by workers themselves, I portrayed the changes in the language and the content of the workers’ demands in the previous chapter. The same files, however, were useless when it came to questions on workers’ collective actions because they do not give any information on the trade union affiliations of the workers in the 1940s and 1950s. My efforts to acquire such information from the archives of the trade unions were not fruitful either since they are almost non-existent. The only archival material I could find on trade union activity at Bakırköy Factory is a weekly newspaper, *Hürbilek*, published by the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions. This publication covered some of the trade union meetings at the factory in the late 1940s. Collecting the names of the trade union activists from these articles, I went back to the factory archives to investigate these workers’ personnel files. There is an important problem with this method, however. Understandably, the workers mentioned in the articles are those who worked in the union management. Thus, the rank-and-file of the members are not represented here at all. Despite this drawback, this method allowed me to make a comparison between trade union members and those who were apparently not with the management in terms of their working and living conditions and relations.  

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

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

The Significance of 1946 Trade Unionism

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

Promulgated in 1938, the Law of Associations barred the formation of organizations based on class or economic interest. According to Makal, this was the legalization of the already existing de facto prohibition of trade union movement.494 After its amendment on June 5, 1946, which is interpreted as one of the first legal arrangements of the transition to multi-party system,495 the ban on establishing associations based on class was lifted, but other limitations remained in effect. With this legal impediment coming to a halt, the number of associations increased to 820 in 1946 compared to 205 in 1938.496 This increase signifies a very important social dynamic: years of repressive single-party regime had not been able to destroy the ability and the desire of the society to organize into associations. The early post-War years increasingly witnessed the expansion of a critical public. From 1945 onwards, the RPP was no longer alone in the political arena since the most important organizational form of this dissidence, the Democrat Party, was growing increasingly popular among the masses. This political rivalry made it imperative for the Republican People’s Party to respond to social problems. On the level of state policies concerning the labour question, this new political atmosphere manifested itself in the establishment of the Ministry of Labour, and the enactment of insurance for occupational diseases, accidents and motherhood for workers.

The opportunity thus created was also seized by the socialists who had been repressed since the beginning of the Republic. The establishment of the Socialist Party of Turkey (Türkiye Sosyalist Partisi, henceforth TSP) on 14 May 1946 was followed by the Socialist

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495 *Türkiye Sendikacılık Ansiklopedisi Vol. 1*, (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1996), p. 293.
496 Makal, *Ameleden İşçiye*, p. 38.
Workers’ Party of Turkey, Workers’ and Peasants’ Party of Turkey, and the Socialist Labour and Peasant Party of Turkey (Türkiye Sosyalist Emekçi ve Köylü Partisi, henceforth TSEKP), all established in 1946.497 Among these, the first and the last parties concentrated on unionization. With different ideas on the role and the organizational structure of the trade unions, these parties organized their own unions. While the TSP argued for sectorally organized unions nationwide forming a national federation which would apply for membership to the World Federation of Trade Unions, the TSEKP criticized the top-down approach and advocated the formation of trade unions on the level of the shopfloor, which would organize in the Alliance of Trade Unions in their cities, and organize within their industrial sector nationwide. Five trade unions were organized by the TSP: Trade Union of Sea Workers of Turkey, Trade Union of TEKEL (state tobacco monopoly) Workers, Trade Union of Textile Workers of Turkey, Trade Union of Iron and Steel Workers of Turkey, and Trade Union of Press Workers and Machinists of Turkey. These five unions formed the Federation of Trade Unions of Turkey on 14 December 1946. The regional Alliances of Trade Unions organized by the supporters of the TSEKP formed the more advanced part of the unionization in the period. Five regional alliances of trade unions were formed in 1946 in Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Kocaeli and Adana. Among the trade unions that formed the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions was the Trade Union of Bakırköy Cloth Factory Workers.498

Figure 4. Bakırköy Textile Workers Trade Union. IISH, Kemal Sülker Collection.

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

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

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

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 174.

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time? The following is a letter signed by an anonymous shoemaker from the personal archive of one of the most prominent journalists of the day, Kemal Sülker:

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

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

As a part of this, the law on trade unions is of course important. And it should also be noted that trade unions are not to be founded by the government but by the workers. It is the case all around the world. Otherwise, it is not a trade union; it becomes a Nazi concentration camp. That this important law was accepted hastily has a significant reason: As it is known, the number of workers in industrial regions such as Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Eskişehir, İzmit, and Zonguldak is high. Those workers, who have not had any protecting mechanisms so far, desperately founded trade unions according to the last change made in the Law on Associations. [These trade unions] were closed down after a short period of organization because they had achieved great progress in such short time. The RPP government could not come to terms with this progress [because] it has been accustomed to do everything on its own for the last twenty-three years. It has got jealous of the results achieved by the prosperous efforts of the working class and closed down [the trade unions] using lame excuses. Upon seeing that the need for trade unions did not vanish when they were closed down, the sensitive RPP government took the task on itself. Let it benefit from it. And it should not be forgotten that the worker got matured enough to carry out his own job. It is time that they are noble enough to accept that the worker is also a citizen and has rights to defend. The labour
question in our country is such a sensitive issue that it has no tolerance for [being deceived by] rich fests, various poses, and abundant promises. »502

The analysis of the political factors that paved the way for the Trade Union Law to be enacted among the workers presented in this letter is significant in a number of ways. To begin with, it is important as a worker’s depiction of the atmosphere in which the law was enacted. Sülker begins by describing the way this enactment was received by the media: Comparing this reception with that of another law on rent increase, he expresses his confusion critically. It is interesting to see that the first reason he gives as to why the Trade Union Law is important concerns the signing of an international agreement. By doing so, he continues, we have accepted the principles of democracy. This direct reference to Turkey’s integration into international organizations reveals the political atmosphere of the immediate post-War years, as I argued above. By connecting the trade unions to democracy, one of the most popular words of the first years of the multi-party regime, the shoemaker tries to convince the reader of their legitimacy. A warning immediately follows this effort: “trade unions are not to be founded by the government but by the workers.” The question to ask here then is: what was his motivation to make this rather redundant note? One possible explanation is the presence of the opinion that the trade unions formed after 20 February were under government control as early as March 1947. Thus, we could assume that some workers also shared our interpretation of the enactment of the 1947 Trade Union Law as a response to 1946 unionism. According to this interpretation, the success of the socialists in the unionization movement disturbed the RPP, which wanted to contain the development of the labour movement. But closing down the trade unions was not a solution on its own since “the need for trade unions did not vanish when they were closed down.” Thus, “the sensitive RPP government took the task on itself” by preparing the Trade Union Law and gave it a completely new direction.

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

502 Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 226, IISH. The letter, dated 1 March 1947, is published in a newspaper. The title is not specified.

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had already left the bow as the new wave of unionism came with various manifestations of this new language and Bakırköy Cloth Factory also witnessed those changes.

Bakırköy Textile Workers Trade Union

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

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

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

In accordance with NDP’s opposition to etatism, \textit{Tez Kalkınma} published various critical articles\footnote{For example: “Devletçilik Sisteminin Kötü Örnekleri: Feshane fabrikasının şu haline bakınız!” (16 June 1948); “Madalyonun Ters Tarafi: İzmit Kağıt Fabrikası Nasıl İşliyor?” (9 July 1948).} reporting the working and living conditions of the state factories, one of which was penned by Enver.\footnote{From the content of this newspaper and another document by the NDP entitled \textit{Workers’ Rights that the NDP will Bestow to Workers} (\textit{Milli Kalkınma Partisinin Memleketi Hediye Edeceği İşçi Hakları}, Milli Kalkınma Partisi Samatya Bucak Başkanlığı Neşriyatı, No. 1, s.d.) we can conclude that the party made a great effort to appeal to workers.} Cases of beatings, malicious injury to persons, and window breaking were happening at Bakırköy Factory, according to this article published on 2 July 1948. Due to the incompatibility of the factory management, Enver continued, even the rightful workers were taken to police stations to be interrogated. As the argument unfolds, Enver raises a tension between the workers and the management, which we recognize from the stories of Mustafa and Mümin, as covered in the previous chapter. He mentions the name of a technician working as a chief who, besides coming to work late in the morning and leaving whenever he wanted, used the factory means to repair and maintain his private car. Although the management was informed about the situation, Enver asserts, it chose to condone it. This chief allegedly slapped the head foreman, whose name – İhsan – I will cite numerous times below, of the repair workshop upon his refusal to carry out the orders.\footnote{“Bu ne cü”ret bu ne tahakküm! Sümerbank Bakırköy bez fabrikasında bir şef ustabaşı dövüebiliyormu!...”, \textit{Tez Kalkınma} (2 July 1948).} Though the foreman made a complaint to the factory management, the matter was closed. As this article reveals, relations between the workers and the management became increasingly problematic during the second half of the 1940s. The interesting point arising from the incident cited here is the vulnerability of even the foremen, who had considerable power over the rank-and-file workers as we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, before the unjust practices of management. The title of Enver’s article, “How Dare You? What is This Tyranny?”,

summarizes the argument I presented earlier: the workers clearly switched from a strategy of exit to a strategy of voice by the late 1940s.512

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

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

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

**Back to the Heated Meeting**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Fragmented Phase of Textile Trade Unions

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

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

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

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

**Is there any Pattern to Trade Union Membership?**

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

01.10.947

To the Higher Office of the Management,

The following is my wish.

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

Sincerely,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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\text{[P]ower that can result simply from the location of workers within the economic system. The power of workers as individuals that results directly from tight labour markets or from the}
\]
strategic location of a particular group of workers within a key industrial sector would constitute instances of structural power.  

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

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

One among Thirteen: The Story of Ahmet

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Formative Experience

During the war years, substantial changes occurred in the working conditions at factories and mines. In addition to the financial hardship caused by increasing consumer prices, legal changes concerning working life badly affected the working population. With the enactment of the National Protection Law on 18 January 1940, the protective provisions of the 1936 Labour Law lost their effectiveness, Ekin argues.532 In the eight years following the enactment of the law, fifty-two regulations on working life were made. Grouped into three categories – that is, waged compulsory work, working hours and holidays, female and child labour – these regulations increased the number of wage earners, on the one hand, and increased the rate of exploitation of labour power, on the other.533

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

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

534 İş Müddetleri Nizamnamesi. TC İktisat Vekaleti İş Dairesi, 1943: 6. Kemal Sülker Collection, IISH. The working day for enterprises, which operated on Saturday afternoon, could extend to nine hours.
535 Makal, Ameleden İşçiye, p. 196.
time, it needs to be woven carefully, it is different from the canvas, the wage they give us is wrong. They should either give us our previous work or they should adjust the previous wage level. We struggled for three-four hours, they increased the wage for each deft from 2 piastres to 4 piastres, we got 100% increase. This was my first involvement in a strike. They used the word ‘strike’, not the workers. The phrase ‘we are not working’ is used. It concerned only our machines. Forty machines mean twenty workers, if we consider that there were two shifts, those who were there at that moment were twenty day workers. In other departments, there was no change, our machines were wide machines, with frame... When we were taken to the police station, the other 17 workers did not start working, they dispersed in the factory, [and] did not work.\textsuperscript{536}

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

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

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

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

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

**Ahmet Joins the Union**

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

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

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

The article on the congress in *Hürriyet* starts with statistical data. According to these, the trade union had 650 members in total at a district where there were 1500 workers. 78 of its members were at the meeting on 17 April 1949. The meeting, *Hürbilek* reported, was opened by the chair’s presentation of the activity report, which had an apologetic yet insubordinate tone:

*In approximately 210 days of the last seven months, there is not a single person who could serve [the union] without spending at least six days of the week to provide bread and butter for himself and his family. In that case, one day a week, thus twenty-eight days should be discussed here. There is not a single one of us who refrained from spending these twenty-eight days, which also include the time we need to rest and spend with our families, completely and willingly in the service of the union. However, these twenty-eight days is too short in face of the grandness of the work expected from us.*

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Unfortunately, we do not have any information on what happened in the seven months between the two meetings but the fact that the board had collectively resigned suggests a general dissatisfaction among the members. In awareness of this, the chair addresses the members as his fellow workers with whom he shares the difficult working conditions and thus asks them to be fair in their criticisms. Trying to win the members over, he lists the successes attained by the recently resigned management:

As soon as it got to work, our executive board realized that sickness, death and birth benefits were not high enough, that this should increase and it has been seen that the number of our members was too low, it has directed all our time to increase that number and increased the enrolment book it took over with 350 members to 650 members, thus attaining a 95% increase. It has found jobs for fourteen people who applied at different times, and participated in the parade on our greatest national holiday, Republic Day, with a weaving loom to represent our industry. This participation was not vouchsafed to any other trade union.

It seems that the popularity of the trade union among the workers was increasing. What was the source of discontent among the members then? Hürbilek’s coverage portrays a relatively balanced meeting by citing both agreements and disagreements with the management on the part of the rank-and-file members. Without mentioning any of these remarks, Hürriyet chose to summarize the activities cited by the administrative committee:

We opened a coffeehouse at the factory; we charged 7.5 piastres from our members for coffee which actually costs 7.5 piastres [to make]. We supplied coats [for the members] on credit. In spite of all these, there are those who said that the administrative committee is bought off, and that [the administrative committee] is not claiming the workers’ right. We believe that we carried out the duties given to us as much as possible and we face you blamelessly. This is the best we could do [and] we resign because we do not claim that it could not be done better.

As Hürbilek reported, there were members who agreed with the administrative board; Hürriyet also cites one such worker. But it also reported the long and detailed speech by another worker who did not agree at all. In the interview, Ahmet vividly remembers both this extraordinary congress and Hürriyet’s coverage of it:

539 The expression here is grammatically problematic as one of the clauses lack a verb. However, the general meaning is understandable.
There was the congress and I made a speech which was published in Hürriyet. It was something like this: The administrative board says “we opened a tea house, a coffee house for the worker, the worker can drink tea now, and we also bought coats and dress fabric for the workers to be paid in instalments.” And I say, I criticize the activity report of the board. The duty of the trade union is not opening tea houses or buying coats on credit for the workers. It has to show an increase in workers’ wages.  

Scrutinizing the function of trade unions on the one hand, and the extent to which Bakırköy Trade Union fulfilled this function on the other, Ahmet continued his critique:

The Labour Law has made it obvious that it is the responsibility of trade unions to claim the rights of the worker. However, there is unfortunately nothing relating to this in the activity report. This institution was founded to avoid the unfair treatment of the workers. Finding employment for those fired and providing them financial aid are the ways the trade union helps the worker. The Turkish parliament designates the Ministry of Labour, the trade unions, and the worker representatives as the protectors of workers’ rights. [Although] they are more educated than us, our friends, whom we elected ourselves, cannot carry out these duties, I think they are under pressure. Our friends have been subjected to gross injustice at the weaving factory we work. There are times that a worker working at the frame loops for 130 liras a month, has to work for [only] 60 liras due to machine failure and none of the worker representatives take care of his situation. At the moment our worker representatives are the foremen and they do not care about our problems in order not to get harmed themselves. Personally, I am for an administrative board composed of workers who understand and agree with each other. We should not forget that the law gives us many benefactions today.

This speech raises various interesting points regarding both the inner dynamics of the factory life and the relations between the trade union and the workers. The most obvious one of these is Ahmet’s clear understanding of the legal structure and the emphasis on the need to take advantage of it. That Ahmet did not have any connections to 1946 trade unionism as mentioned before, suggests that he might have had an optimistic attitude on the development of trade unions. Indeed, that he cites the Ministry of Labour and the workers representatives as the other two protectors of workers’ rights further implies a favourable opinion on the changes in labour policy. The opportunities are out there is what Ahmet probably means, but

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540 Interview by Yıldırım Koç.
the trade union is wasting its time with trivial things. The contrast between Ahmet and the administrative board in this regard is also manifested in the following incident narrated by the chair: The board wanted to organize a new year’s party in order to improve the union’s finances but could not find the starting capital. Although the board members were willing to obtain an advance from the factory, this did not work either. Having given up on the party, the board went in favour of the idea of organizing a lottery, but apparently did not get permission from the authorities. Unfortunately, the chair continues, and those who were jealous of the union blew the whistle on the board. The board was damaged spiritually, complains the chair, and the union financially, but still the lottery was played and a typewriter was bought with the money raised. Let me open a parenthesis here to discuss the implications of these words by the chair.

Above, while analyzing the earlier meeting of the union, I cited a worker who proposed a check-off in order to ensure that the union fees were collected. Seven months after this proposal was accepted, the same worker, who was now the chair of the union, still cited the need to improve its financial situation. That the union organized such social events was also cited by Asım’s wife in the interview I conducted: “A party was organized, we stayed till the morning, the year could be 1947. They had everything; singers came one after another till the morning.” Of interest here is the fact that Asım himself was not a member of the union. Together, these two stories imply that there were both workers who were not unionized but participated in the social events organized by the union – workers who were somewhat hostile to the union, or at least to the union administration. It is unfortunate that we cannot establish what happened after the accusations were thrown around, but it is obvious that they lowered the performance of the administrative board. Let us now return to Ahmet’s speech and analyze it in relation to the chair’s idea of what the union “achieved.”

It is understandable that a worker like Ahmet, who was involved in or even came to lead a work stoppage some years earlier, would not be satisfied with such trivial undertakings. Opening coffee houses, buying coats on credit and organizing lotteries are not what Ahmet had in mind as the duties of a trade union. But, what about the things, such as finding jobs for fourteen people that the chair cited among their successes? Later in his speech, Ahmet discussed another incident, which he apparently thought as another injustice done by some workers to the administrative board. Illustrating the mentality of the board regarding labour-management relations, this incident further underlines the incompatibility between Ahmet and the union administration on issues regarding the workings of the trade union.

**How to Deal with the Management: Two Examples**

On the night of 30 December 1948, seventy-three weavers did not come to work and were thus fined to a day’s wage: “Upon hearing this, our executive board got in touch with the factory management and obtained a positive result. These seventy-three friends were to be forgiven on the condition that they would work on a holiday to compensate for the output...
gap.” In Chapter 2, I showed that the workers were often fined for not coming to work without an excuse. Thus, although I could establish absenteeism of this sort as a common problem at the factory, it is not possible to determine whether, in all these cases, workers individually chose not to come to work. In this case, however, the very high number of weavers who did not show up for work implies a concerted effort.\(^{543}\) We shall return to this point later in this chapter.

The key word in this part of the narrative is “forgiven”. The original word he uses is “affettirilmişit” which could roughly be translated as “were made to be forgiven”. Obviously, this expression suggests an act of persuading the management, in other words, the deal between the workers and the management was reached thanks to a compromise by the latter. The weavery was a very important link in the production chain as I showed in Chapter 3. I also referred above to the demand for experienced weavers as expressed in the job advertisements of the period. The weavers, then, had a double advantage: One, stemming from the situation of the labour market, which, as I argued earlier, provided them with structural working-class power in the sense that Wright defined it, and the other from their location within the production process. Hence, it is not surprising that they could engage in such a collective action of work stoppage. Unfortunately, we do not have information on the background of this action. Perhaps the problem was the one Ahmet addressed in his speech: There are times that a worker working at the frame loops for 130 liras a month, has to work for [only] 60 liras due to machine failure... Our friends have been subjected to gross injustice at the weaving factory we work). If that is the case, this incident is even more similar than we thought to the previous case of work stoppage. But let us leave this aside now and try to reconstruct what happened afterwards.

That this action damaged the factory financially is clear from the fact that the weavers “were to be forgiven with the condition that they would work on a holiday to compensate for the output gap.” I would like to direct the reader’s attention to the contrast between Ahmet’s uncompromising attitude during the work stoppage incident in which he was involved sometime between September 1941 and March 1943 and the chair’s conceding attitude in dealing with a seemingly similar incident. When Ahmet one day found himself in the midst of a work stoppage, he became the representative and defended his own and his fellow workers’ rights not only in front of the management but also the police. The assertiveness of his

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language – “We want our right... We struggled for three-four hours... We want our previous wages.” – comes into direct contrast with the chair’s asking for forgiveness from the factory management. The contrast does not stop here, however. When we compare the workers’ reaction to these attitudes, a very interesting point rises.

It seems from the chair’s narration of what happened after the agreement between the union and the management that the “solution” did not quite work for the weavers: “...to prove that the executive board kept its word, nineteen weaver friends came to work that evening, the others did not. I owe these friends, who supported our executive board, to express my thanks in your presence.” Nineteen out of seventy-three weavers accepted the agreement, in other words, fifty-four did not cooperate with the union. Was it because they were not union members? What happened to them afterwards? Are they the workers who were fired and thus needed financial aid from the trade union as we learn from Ahmet’s story? None of these questions can be answered with certainty using the available archival documents. But, one very important thing is clear: The workers did not take the union serious enough; they did not work with it at times of crisis. Consider the response of the workers in the work stoppage earlier. Until the police got involved, it seems they stuck together. Only three out of twenty workers were at the police station. However, those who ran away from the police did not give in when they returned to the factory: “When we were taken to the police station, the other 17 workers did not start working; they dispersed in the factory, [and] did not work.” That the workers did not work with the trade union in 1949 but worked with an unofficial representative, as Ahmet called himself, four or five years earlier suggests that the emergence of the trade union did not change much at the factory in terms of workers becoming more assertive. It also shows us that they did not need the trade union in order to stick together; they already had the organizational skills to act collectively, even though they were only a group of twenty at a factory of around 1500 workers.

In his speech, Ahmet also addresses some of the speculative arguments I made above. First, he verifies the idea that the administrative board members were more educated than “us.” In trying to explain the overrepresentation of the young workers on the administrative board, I have reasoned that younger workers were elected because they tended to be more educated. Indeed, that is what we learn from Ahmet. Second, Ahmet claims that these more educated workers could not do what they were supposed to, that they failed to take advantage of the opportunities opened up by law. To stretch the argument further, they were responsible for the trade union’s failure to appeal to the workers. “I think they are under pressure,”
Ahmet continues but does not specify what he really means. In the next section, we will try to answer this question by zooming out to understand the political and ideological context in which the post-1946 trade unionism was shaped.

**The Dual Turkish Labour Policy**

The above title, which truly captures the essence of the labour policies of the Kemalist regime, belongs to the Times London’s editorial piece on the Turkish trade unions. While these policies aimed at creating a skilled workforce needed for the nationalization and modernization of the industries, they were also directed at containing the working class by the external application of force and social control. The 1947 Trade Union Law, as well as the Labour Code of 1936, was the embodiment of this two-fold policy. For example, the Trade Union Law denied unions the right to strike or to engage in political activity, either on their own or as vehicles of political parties. Article fifth of this law reads as follows: “Workers’ and employers’ trade unions cannot engage with politics, political propaganda and publication. They cannot be the vessels of any political establishment’s activities. The trade unions are national establishments. They cannot move against nationalism and national interests. They can participate in any international establishment with the permission of the Committee of Ministers.”

Sülker’s interpretation of this as a precautionary measure against the socialist tendencies of the 1946 trade unions supports the argument that the prevention of the infiltration of any sort of socialistic ideology was one of the priorities of the regime.

The definitional obscurity of the domain of politics became a valuable tool in the hands of the state to ensure absolute control of the labour movement.

Although Sülker is right in connecting the fifth article of the law to the 1946 experience, in practical terms, the ramifications came more in terms of the political rivalry between the RPP and the DP. The two parties accused each other at every opportunity of trying to control the trade unions. As Doğan explains in his detailed study on the Workers Bureau under the Istanbul branch of the party, the RPP took advantage of its position as the

544 “Türk İşçi Sendikaları, İşçi Sınıfının Hukuki Durumu ve Refahi”. Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 383, IISH. This document is the Turkish translation of the editorial piece in the Times London on 23 June 1952. Two points in this article are worth mentioning, the first of which is its blunt anti-Soviet stance and support for the government party, the DP. The RPP, it claims, resorted to nationalism to win the support of the working class. The second point concerns the cooperation between the Turkish and British states on social policy measures in Turkey. The engagement of the services of two British specialists at the Ministry of Labour immediately after its establishment is cited as an example of this cooperation.

546 Sülker, 100 Soruda, p. 69.
government party. The Bureau, through its schemes of financial and organizational aid gradually increased the power of the RPP within the trade unions. Sülker cites the overbearing presence of the RPP in trade unionism as one of the reasons why workers were reluctant to take part in trade union activity after the law was enacted. Doğan also makes the same connection, albeit indirectly. To him, the painful memory of the 1946 experience partly caused this reluctance.

That the early Republican state’s labour policy was based on the idea of containing the labour movement partly through petty favours, but mostly through direct, and indirect, means of suppression, is a widely cited argument. What has not been researched is how the workers perceived and acted upon these efforts. In other words, we know that the young republican state had a vision of an ideal worker to be attained through a disciplinary project of subject-formation. With regards to the workers’ perception and reaction to this project, however, we have limited knowledge, most of which concerns the trade union politics of the late 1940s that manifested a relatively homogenous picture of workers’ ideology. But, this should not make us blind to the presence of different mentalities and alternative visions within the labour movement. In the next section, I will provide two examples of these by following the stories of the two dissidents in the Bakırköy Trade Union, Enver and Ahmet. I argue that they exemplify two of the many possible ways in which a worker’s learning process could have been shaped in early Republican Turkey. The way the lives of these two workers with completely different politics were shaped in later years will provide us with a better understanding of the ideological dynamics of the labour movement of the period.

Accusation of Communism as Slander

Any study of archival material on the labour movement in Turkey in the late 1940s and early 1950s would show, without any doubt, that the second pillar of the Turkish state’s labour policy, i.e. the containment of the working classes by the external application of force and social control, had been strongly constructed. In the increasingly politicized atmosphere of the late 1940s, anti-communism came to be the most prominent ideological tool of this social control by functioning as a weapon of defamation in the context of escalating political rivalry.

547 Doğan, Governmental Involvement, pp. 136-142.
548 Sülker also cites the financial disability of workers to pay the union dues as a source of their reluctance to unionize. 100 Soruda, p. 67.
549 Doğan, Governmental Involvement, p.143.
Consider the following two examples from two different labour contexts in which practical matters, as well as labour politics, are discussed with reference to communism.

The first example is from the Karabük Iron and Steel Factory where the workers representatives’ election in 1949 became a highly politicized event because the RPP overtly tried to exert its will on the workers and undermine the popularity of the DP. In various newspapers, the workers are reported to be in great distress, which they expressed in petitions complaining about the factory management addressed to the district labour inspector as well as the president and the prime minister. Among these articles, one reports a meeting, which took place in the People’s Houses, local clubs controlled by the RPP. A certain retired colonel, who happened to be the manager of the aforementioned factory, and the head of the Karabük branch of the RPP, collected the “workers, tailors, shoemakers” at the meeting where a certain judge gave a speech accusing the DP of communism.

The second example concerns the workers at the harbour and docks of Istanbul. In a trade union meeting in August 1950, a worker, after complaining on the differential practices of paid holidays among state enterprises, criticized the RPP for its objection to sending soldiers to Korea to fight against communism. This behaviour, he asserted, did not beseeam a nationalist political party. These remarks illustrate two things. First is the failure of the fifth article of the Trade Union Law to keep the workers out of the terrain of politics. As exemplified here, where and whenever they found necessary, the workers expressed their opinion about the world of politics surrounding them. The second observation supports an argument I made earlier concerning the discursive identification of nationalism with anti-communism. The dock worker in this incident provides a clear example of this identification: If a political party is nationalist, how can it refrain from fighting against communism?

550 Kemal Sülker Collection contains a number of news articles dated May and June 1949 on this much disputed election: “Karabük İşçilerinin Seçim Şikayeti İncelemelidir”, Gece Postası (27 May 1949); “İşçi Mümessili Seçimi Nizamsız Cereyan Ediyor”, Tasvir (27 May 1949); “Çelik Fabrikalarındaki İşçi Mümessili Seçimi”, Tasvir (28 May 1949); “Karabük Seçimlerinin Neticeleri Belli Oldu”, Tasvir [date not specified, most probably 3 June 1949]; “Karabükte İşçiler Zor Durumda”, Tan (29 May 1949); “Karabükte İşçi Mümessili Seçimi”, Son Posta (17 June 1949), Folder No.148, IISH. These articles provide valuable information on the development of disputes around the election, both before and after it took place. Besides portraying the increase in tension between the workforce and the management in a vivid manner, they also provide information on the various mechanisms used by the workers to express their discontent as well as the RPP’s efforts to contain the steel workers under control by forcing them to enrol in the party.

551 For a detailed study of the People’s Houses see Asım Karaömerlioğlu, “The People’s Houses and the Cult of the Peasant in Turkey”, Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 34, No. 4, Oct. 1998, pp. 67-91. Karaömerlioğlu discusses the ideological functions of these houses as propaganda institutions of Kemalism. Among their various functions, the People’s Houses also served as adult education centres as in the case of the meeting in Karabük.

552 “Balatta dün yapılan işçi toplantısı”, [Newspaper title unspecified] (20 Aug. 1950). Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 151, IISH.
The common point between these two examples is the use of “communism” as an accusation to undermine the political rival. While in the first example the DP is the communist for it organized opposition to the RPP, in the second the RPP is criticized for not being anti-communist enough. This switch is caused by the time gap between the two incidents. The first case dates from May 1949, a time when political rivalry between the two parties was peaking. The desperate and, hence, increasingly aggressive efforts of the RPP in dealing with the Karabük election testify to the fact that the ascending tension between the two parties had spilled over onto daily social relations. The second case, however, took place four months after the DP came to power. Although communism continued to be the enemy of all parties, this time the discursive weapon was directed to the defeated party.

These two examples are not aberrant at all. The reason why I chose these two among many others is two-fold. First, stemming from two very different industrial sectors and geographical locations, they show that anti-communism was one of the pillars of the young trade union movement. Second, together these two examples present the range of this discursive weapon in contexts that are fundamentally different from each other. The first reflects the disputes surrounding an election process at a factory, while the second illustrates the wide span of the issues discussed by the workers at trade union meetings. It is interesting to note that the aforementioned weapon comes rather in handy in both cases. But there was also a third context where it also carried an important function: the trade union movement.

**The Arrested Development of Trade Unionism**

Two first-hand testimonies by trade unionists of late 1940s include remarks on the difficulty of working for the labour movement in the face of allegations of communism. The first comes from Bahir Ersoy, a worker from Sümerbank Defierdar Factory and a trade union activist from 1947 onwards:

*If we examine the state of the public opinion in 1947 when the trade union movement started, we faced a certain lack. Who stood where on matters such as workers’ rights, workers’ movement, and social policy? The public did not have information on these. The youth did not know about this matter, the press was indifferent. We did not know anything about the university...I could learn about the Sociality Institute (İçtimaiyat Enstitüsü) only after mid-1950s although the conferences had started in 1948. I thought to myself: Who is the one who*

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553 An institute at Istanbul University that organized a yearly conference and published on social issues.
calls us communist when we talk of workers’ rights? Communism, under the name of betraying the homeland, was an action believed to be something like spying for the Russians […] How could we explain ourselves to those people who did not know anything about these matters and who thought badly of us?

Apparently, this was a widely felt problem among the workers as the speeches from a rally by the textile workers in September 1949 illustrate. The rally was organized to protest unemployment in the textile sector but the speakers’ complaints reveal further problems: the Association of Istanbul Trade Unions was not taking care of workers’ problems and the labour law was still a draft while workers continued to work in unhealthy conditions. Most importantly, the workers continued, and those workers who tried to claim their rights were labelled communists.

Ahmet also cites the discursive identification of communism with the betrayal of the homeland, as we saw above. He remembers getting confused when he heard the Minister of Labour speaking to trade union leaders before the 1950 general elections: “…and he said: ‘Whoever thinks of striking is a traitor, a communist.’ The strange thing is that traitor is one thing, communist is another. This is the weirdness we came across there. Naturally, everybody kept silent, I mean, after such a statement, silence is kept.” Speaking in 1987, he called this identification strange but the fact that everybody “naturally” kept silent indicates that this was not an unusual remark as we shall see below.

Together, these personal accounts testify to the difficulty of being involved in working class politics in the late 1940s. I argue that, determined by the national intra-bourgeoisie struggles and their political manifestations and by the conjuncture of the Cold War, this

554 The following excerpt from a long article published in a well circulating daily newspaper illustrates the popular understanding of the definition of a ‘communist’ in those years:

Today, the type that comes to mind when communism is spoken of is not a theoretician committed to the social and economical principles of Karl Marx but a traitor to his homeland and to his people who tries to carry out, overtly or covertly, all the orders of Moscow, a revolutionary fifth column agent of the Soviet Russia. He would engage in propaganda among the masses as soon as he finds an opportunity, would blacken his own [country’s] political regime and government, would say that genuine democracy and populism exist only in Soviet Russia and other communist countries, would pretend to be religious or nationalist when necessary, poison the people continuously, would create an atmosphere of moral defeat by blackening all values of the homeland, and prepare the ground for a revolution. In doing these, they will mostly work among the poor and low-income sections of the people, those who are in discontent for various reasons (“Türk Vatanında Komünistliğe Yer Yokuş”, Cumhuriyet, 22 Apr 1949).

555 Interview by Yıldırım Koç.
555 Interview by Yıldırım Koç.
557 Interview by Yıldırım Koç.
difficult context arrested the development of trade unionism substantially. Labour historians have written a great deal on the trade union’s ineffective and state-controlled character in this period in a critical manner and, like any other historical judgment, these conclusions are somewhat affected by the bias of hindsight. Let us now turn to two examples of insiders’ critique of trade unionism, which offer evidence on the presence of alternative visions on the development of labour politics.

Increasing Partisanship among Workers: Revisiting Enver’s Story

When we left Enver, he had been thrown out of the Bakırköy trade union for gossiping about and defaming other members. By now, we have enough information on Enver’s character to guess that his reaction to this would not be limited to the protests he made at the aforementioned meeting. A few weeks later, an article titled “The Voice of the Truth” was published in Tez Kalkınma.\footnote{“Hakikatin Sesi”, Tez Kalkınma (8 Oct. 1948).} While the article is unsigned, there is circumstantial evidence to assume that it was penned by Enver, although in the last part of the article he is referred to as a “friend”. Given that Enver had actually accepted to have penned the unsigned report on the factory published earlier in Tez Kalkınma, this could simply be a trick by Enver to deny authorship if need be. The article opens with criticisms and complaints of workers given at various trade union meetings in September 1948:

\begin{quotation}
In every trade union congress, bitter complaints of worker citizens who are neglected also by the Republican regime are increasingly heard. Workers complain of their low wages, of the labour law which does not meet their needs, of the insufficiency of social insurance, of the redundancy of the employment bureau, of the inefficiency of the regional directorate of labour.
\end{quotation}

The wording of the first sentence raises a significant issue: the workers are \textit{also} neglected by the Republican regime. The use of the conjunction “also” in the first sentence implies the disappointment of the workers who, according to Enver, expected the Republic to treat the working population better than before. I will revisit this point later in the chapter, while discussing the interrelations between the processes of proletarianization and state formation. For now, let us focus on Enver’s critique of the developments in trade unionism. As a whole,
this critique portrays a serious discontent among workers with the institutional and legal practices of the RPP government concerning the labour question:

Although law number 5018 on workers’ and employers’ unions and association of trade unions say that trade unions are economic and social organizations, the governing party, with its Barkıns and Seleks and other members, is trying to influence them, or, with the purpose of benefiting from them in the elections, trying to subject them to itself overtly and covertly under the guise of organization. This is why out of more than 120,000 workers in Istanbul, only ten-twelve thousand are registered in the trade unions. No worker who sees and understands that the RPP is not sincere about the labour question wants to enrol in what they call the People’s Party’s trade unions.

This brief quote is important because it supports all the above mentioned arguments on early trade union membership based on first-hand observations by Sülker. It also shows that a

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559 The writer refers to Rebi Barkın, the head of RPP’s Workers’ Bureau, and Sabahattin Selek, a resigned military officer who also worked for the bureau at the time. These two names were also involved with Hürbilek.

560 In Sülker’s personal archive, there is a copy of a speech given by the chair of Istanbul Cloth Workers’ Trade Union (the former Eyüp Cloth Workers’ Trade Union which did not join the Association of the Istanbul Trade Unions because of the latter’s close connections to the RPP) at the union congress on 23 January 1949. His account of the situation strongly supports Enver’s claims. I quote the first half of this speech here:

Dear Fellow Workers,

For some reason that is unknown to us, two years ago, new trade unions were established by the old Zonguldak deputy, Dr. Rebii Barkın. We frequently talked on this matter with some friends who accepted the necessity of such an institution and supported its formation. We had many discussions on whether this move by Dr. Rebii Barkın could possibly benefit workers or not. In the end, we arrived at the conviction that a trade union that was not founded and managed by workers themselves could not benefit workers. Thus, we did not enroll in the trade union Dr. Barkın established in the name of the RPP, we chose to wait for some time [but] we never gave up the idea of founding an independent trade union that would work to benefit workers without being the instrument of any kind of politics. This was a very difficult task for us; we had neither enough money nor enough knowledge. However, our sincerity, honesty, lack of avarice and our conviction that fellow workers would only participate in such a movement which takes its strength from the working class itself gave us courage. We founded Istanbul Cloth Workers Trade Union on 16 October 1947 in the midst of numerous difficulties. This trade union was the first and only independent one founded by workers’ money and intelligence at that time. Our goal was to be useful to our fellow workers and thus to our homeland. We have always looked at things from this angle and stayed in this framework in our activities so far. But my dear fellow workers, the real difficulty actually started after we founded our trade union. As if our financial problem was not enough, there also emerged the problem of lack of qualified personnel. We knew our problems but we did not know the legal procedures. We have benefited from the help of the regional directorate of labour and its inspectors in dealing with these procedures and some other legal problems. I owe them my thanks. You see friends, we have faltered for a long time but I am honored to tell you the good news: Today, our trade union does not suffer from lack of money and personnel as much as it did before (“Sayın İşçi Arkadaşlar”. Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 121, IISH).

This speech raises a number of important points regarding some of the arguments I made above. First is the designation of the trade unions Rebi Barkın founded as the “new trade unions”. Implicit here is a reference to the trade unions of 1946. Second, the speaker makes it very clear that trade unionism was a fiercely debated
year and a half after trade unions came into being, a certain degree of awareness of the government’s direct actions on unionization and the workers’ subsequent reaction to these had already risen among the working class public. Enver cites a speech made by the chair of Istanbul Associations of Trade Unions at the Bakırköy Textile Workers’ Trade Union meeting to exemplify the workers’ reluctance to unionize. The chair told the participants about his visit to Ankara where he went to participate in discussions on the possible changes to the Labour Code and to report on the trade unions’ demands. When the RPP officials heard about the size of trade union membership, he continued, they replied harshly: “You are useless. Make sure that you enrol these 120.000 until the next general elections and bring your demands only after that!” Unfortunately, Enver does not elaborate further on this point, but we can infer that the paternalist relation between the party and the trade union seriously disturbed him.

Next on Enver’s agenda is the last meeting of the Bakırköy union. The reader might remember the enthusiastic tone of the newspaper, *Hürbilek*, in reporting the trade union’s September 1948 meeting: “... The members, who attended the meeting on a large scale, filled the hall.” It would be misleading to attribute this enthusiasm to *Hürbilek’s* close connections to the Workers’ Bureau and the Association of Istanbul Trade Unions. Expectedly, *Tez Kalkınma*, the publishing organ of an oppositional party, did not share this enthusiasm. About the same meeting Enver wrote: “A trade union with 370 members had a congress with only 70 present 30 of who had actually registered on the same day and there were 77 voting. For some reason, they did not feel the need to take attendance neither at the beginning nor at the elections.” With these serious allegations, Enver’s critique gains a new dimension. The problem confronting the young trade unions’ development was two-fold. On the one hand, there were the state’s efforts to steer the course of this development and, on the other, was the misdoings and the personal fights undermining the transparency of the trade union bureaucracy.

The new chair of the union, İhsan Önaslan denied these serious allegations, with a letter published in *Hürbilek*, fifteen days after Enver’s report. The letter starts with the chair

561 Carefully documenting the names in the editorial board, the course of the changes in the publishing policy, the transfer of ownership and administrative duties to the Association, Doğan concludes that *Hürbilek* “was a tool for the party and the Bureau’s involvement in trade unions” (*Governmental Involvement*, p. 177).

complaining of the discrepancy between the title of the piece, “The Voice of the Truth” and the allegations directed to the union. The reporter, argued the chair, manipulated the truth because of his partisanship:

[T]here were 81 members at the Bakırköy Textile Workers’ Union, not 70. The candidate who won the elections got 77 votes. It could be checked in our registration book that 30 members were not registered on the same day but five days before the meeting. In fact, the chair of the Bakırköy branch of the National Development Party, Enver Tenşi, had also filled in his application form two days before the congress, yet he talked more than any other member in our congress.

This correspondence is important for two reasons: First, it gives us a concrete idea of the size of a trade union meeting. Second, it almost points to a consensus in the elections with only four oppositional (or blank) votes according to the chair’s account. Together, these two implications suggest a strikingly different atmosphere than the one depicted by Hürbilek. Moreover, the narration of the incident, which resulted in Enver’s dismissal from the union in the last part of the article in Tez Kalkınma, adds a new dimension to the portrayal of the meeting atmosphere:

A foreman friend from the National Development Party was accused of factiousness when he criticized the RPP for being insincere regarding the labour question and he was thrown out of the meeting hall by the chair. Since this was planned before, he was treated unkindly by two foremen who also work as exactors for the RPP Bakırköy branch.

The chair also gives his account of Enver’s dismissal from the trade union:

[However] during his talk he went so far as to question the honour and esteem of some of our friends because of his partisanship. When he was asked to prove these accusations by the congress, he became speechless and faltered. The valuable members of our congress did the right thing by agreeing on his leaving the hall.

Above I noted that, although the article in Tez Kalkınma was not signed, there is circumstantial evidence to assume that it was penned by Enver. The fact that Enver’s dismissal makes up almost half of the chair’s letter, although he did not openly cite Enver’s name, adds to this evidence. We can make two observations based on this part of the letter. 250
First is the extent of the influence of Enver’s article on the union. Once again, we see that these publications were read by at least some part of the trade union members. The second observation concerns the popularity of partisanship as an accusation between opposing parties. While Enver accused the trade union of being under the influence of the RPP, the chair of the union returned this accusation by implicitly referring to Enver’s political identity.

In Chapter 3, I argued that, within the context of increasing politicization of the public sphere, which came about with the end of the single-party regime, the discourses deployed by the workers also came to be highly politicized. Above, I discussed the most prominent form of this political discourse of rivalry in the case of the use of communism as slander. What the letter displays is a milder form of the same trend: Whenever there was disagreement on the workings of the trade unions, partisanship was called forth to undermine the credibility of the opponent’s opinion.

The chair’s response to Enver’s allegations is also telling in terms of what it omits. By addressing only the accusations concerning the dishonest practices of the congress, it could be said that the chair ignored the more serious allegations related to the RPP’s involvement in the movement. We learn from Enver’s article something that we could not from Hürbilek’s coverage: “Similar to any other trade union, the president of the congress of this trade union was also the vice-chief of the RPP Workers’ Bureau, Sebahattin Selek.” Although Selek was the editor of Hürbilek, his name was not mentioned in the article covering the meeting. A possible explanation could be that the discontent among the workers about such direct involvements in trade union administration was well known by the RPP officials and thus such involvements were not openly reported. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that the chair completely ignored this in his response. Focusing on only a small portion of the allegations, namely those concerning the number of participants and the enrolment practices, he ignored the core of Enver’s accusations.

Juxtaposing the two newspapers’ coverage of the meeting also reveals interesting points on the general atmosphere of a trade union event. Almost as if he wanted to make its readership feel that they were present at this “very exciting meeting,” Hürbilek’s reporter used literary expressions while describing the conduct of the participants. According to this coverage, the activity report was met with violent attacks from the participants who found it insufficient and the inspection board was called forth to account for its negligence. Enver’s

563 A similar situation also occurred in the second congress of the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions on 5 December 1948. Despite wide criticism, the Bureau insisted on the presidency of Selek at the congress (Sülker, Türkiye’de Sendikacılık, pp. 119-20). A very critical account of the day was published in Tez Kalkınma on 17 Dec. 1948, entitled “RPP’s Interventions to the Trade Unions”.

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impressions of the congress could not be more different: He claimed that there was no reaction to the activity report except for the self-criticism of the ex-chair which was motivated, according to Enver, by a desire to salvage the day.

Having thus portrayed a very docile body of membership, Enver goes on to critically evaluate the decisions made at the congress. In Hürbilek’s coverage, some of these decisions were mentioned but no critical reaction from the members was cited. Enver, on the other hand, seems to be well aware of the ramifications of decisions such as the application of the check-off method for collecting union dues. In this method, union dues are withheld by the employers and paid to the union. According to Marcel van der Linden, this practice involves the following danger: “[It] obviously does little to strengthen members’ ties with their union and, moreover, shifts the balance of power towards the employer, inasmuch as the union becomes dependent for its funds on co-operation of the employer.” 564 Enver, too, seems well aware of this danger: “The union will become unable to protect any worker’s right as soon as this decision is put into practice,” he continued. Moreover, it was also decided to have a union office inside the factory, which, according to Enver, would further disable the union: “Trade unions established within the factories in this way are yellow trade unions. It has been seen in trade union history that these unions do not benefit the workers at all.” With this statement, it becomes clear that Enver’s demand for trade union independence extends beyond governmental control. That he uses the term “yellow trade union” and makes a historical reference further illustrates the extent of his knowledge on the workers’ movement. Similar to Ahmet, Enver portrays the image of a self-taught worker who developed a critical stance.

At this point, I would like to remind the reader of Ahmet’s critique of the administrative board of the union meeting in April 1949. The main disagreement between Ahmet and the board was over the definition of the union’s duty. While he thought the union should strive for improving the workers’ living conditions, the board, in his opinion, wasted time with trivial activities. Enver’s critique, on the other hand, focused on administrative wrongdoings and the RPP’s involvement in trade unions. Although complaining about seemingly different aspects of the Bakırköy trade union, both workers express their discontent with the course of development of the trade union movement in general. Despite the congruence between their perceptions of the union, the two workers’ ideas and subsequent fates diverged completely in terms of what was to be done.

In the next section, I first present Enver’s vision on the direction the workers’ movement should take. So far, I have analysed Enver’s career within the union as a dissident and presented his politicization as an alternative to the dominance of the RPP within the trade union movement. When we examine what he prescribes for the future of that movement, however, we see that he actually spoke very much from within the mainstream discourse. In what follows, I open up the analysis by way of locating Enver’s discourse in the wider discursive universe of the early trade union movement.

“The Turkish Worker does not Need a Pioneer because…”

According to Keyder, the political economy of the 1930s was characterized by two developments: The economic measures originally taken against the crisis, which I discussed in Chapter 1, and the emergence of a new state form. Vigilant against societal autonomy, the motivation behind the new institutionalization of the state was to implement policies in accordance with the implicit goal of establishing the bureaucracy’s status above the society. This goal required both a defensive and an active stance: the first led to the elimination of all societal autonomy while the second invited attempts at economic planning and ideological conformity.

Although Keyder asserts that this regime remained in force until the end of World War II, the kernel of ideological conformity, especially its ambivalent yet powerful part, which was to recognize Mustafa Kemal as the natural leader and ideologue of any societal development, has stayed intact far longer. Deprived of a clear and fixed definition, the concept has been used in Republican Turkey by various political and social groups to undermine each other’s agenda of social change. Since the nation-building process has always been identified with the persona of Kemal, any appeal to nationalism and patriotism, at least discursively, declared adherence to Kemalism. Often attributed a totally novel and unique character, the appeal to Kemalism was also instrumentalized in combating both Western liberalism and Soviet communism. Developing in the context of such a hegemonic ideology, the young trade union movement repeatedly resorted to this handy discursive weapon.

This brief background information should have prepared the reader for the following utterances by Enver:

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If nothing more than benefiting the workers is expected from the trade unions, those calling themselves organizer, vanguard, pioneer should stay away. The Turkish worker does not need a pioneer because his path is Kemalism which was drawn a quarter of a century ago. The Turkish worker is the unflappable walker on that path. He is committed to his homeland and his nation at least as much as citizens in other occupational groups. And he has proved that commitment throughout the history because among those who betray their nation and sell their homeland, there is not even a single worker.

As the publishing organ of an opposition party, Tez Kalkınma’s discontent with RPP official’s involvement in a trade union meeting is understandable. But, what made it necessary for the author of this article, most probably Enver, to resort to Kemalism as a safety valve to object to this involvement? To whom does he refer when he speaks of “organizer, vanguard, and pioneer?” Why was it not enough to argue in favour of the independence of the trade unions from any political establishment? Who did he have in mind when speaking of “betraying the nation and selling the homeland?” And, more importantly, how was the patriotism of the Turkish worker defined and what did it have to do with the development of the trade union movement? To answer these questions, we should revisit the topic of the rise of anti-communism as it came to dominate the entire political and ideological spheres of the post-War Republic.

Anti-Communism within the Labour Movement

As I briefly explained in the section on the accusation of communism as slander, in the context of the Cold War, the anti-communist rhetoric was widely used as a means of critique by different social actors. Here, I will illustrate the uses of this rhetoric within the labour movement specifically. The spirit of anti-communism also pervaded the trade union movement. The early years of the Cold War witnessed a number of anti-communist rallies organized by trade unions. One such rally was organized by The Istanbul Transportation Workers’ Trade Union on 26 August 1950 and it received a great deal of attention from other social groups as well as the media. Before describing the details of what happened at the rally, let us have a quick look at a meeting of the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions in April 1950. When a worker asked the delegates to participate in the rally, according to Son Telgraf’s coverage of the meeting566, his offer was accepted with applause. However, there was a

problem concerning the legal aspect of this participation: The fifth article of the Trade Union Law of 1947 forbade the trade unions to engage in any political activity as I noted earlier. When another worker was reminded of this, he caused indignation among the delegates some of whom shouted: “Get down! Aren’t you ashamed?” The meeting continued with speeches damning communism by workers and the vice-president of the Turkish Youth Organization. A few days before the rally, the chair of the Istanbul Transportation Workers’ Trade Union expressed the need for such a protest in the following letter that he sent to two newspapers, *Son Telgraf* and *Gece Postasi*:

*On behalf of the Turkish worker*

*President of the Organization Committee*

The origin of the organization that corrodes the world’s nations’ constitution through secret agents and that tries to smear its red stains [on them] is known by all of us. The Turkish worker sees communism as being more dangerous than typhus. For this reason, the untainted Turkish worker will square up to this malady with his solemnity that befits his Turkishness and will prove that the communism microbe cannot find a place in the constitution of the Turkish worker through the rally he will hold to curse communism on 26th August 1950, a historical day of our glorious army’s victory [...] This rally will also be a lesson to those pitiable ones who think badly about the Turkish worker.

The Turkish workers are always a nationalist whole.

The Turkish worker is stainless in his soul as well as his essence.

The Turkish worker pledges to crush and annihilate communism wherever he sees it with the strength and might he takes from the noble blood in his veins.

The reader might find the language of this open letter extreme in the way it identifies communism with illness. In fact, biological metaphors were very common in anticommunist rhetoric. Several such references were also made at the rally: “similar to the tuberculosis germ which would knock a healthy person down, the communism germ, being more scarier than that, is growing today to destroy the nations,” “it [communism] is such an illness that even little indifference and underestimation would be enough for it to reign the nation,” “our goal is to shout out that this cursed germ cannot diffuse among the Turkish nation and the

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567 “Son Telgraf ve Gece Postası Yazı İşleri Sayın Müdürlüğüne”. Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 187, *IISH*.

568 The day on which the Turkish offensive against the Greeks, which resulted in the victory of the former party four days later, was launched in the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922.
Turkish workers,” “we gathered today to damn a germ which sucks the blood of humanity.” Within this discourse, the word “Turkish” is almost always used in an ethnic sense. It seems that in the popular imagery of the early Republican period worker, this ethnic identity worked as a leukocyte against a communist invasion of his constitution.

Another but closely related aspect of workers’ language cited here is the equation of Turkishness with anti-communism. From various examples, it could be deduced that loathing communism is a pre-requisite to be Turkish. One of the underlying reasons for this was the accusations directed against the labour movement for having communist tendencies. Examples of these accusations given by Bahir Ersoy and Ahmet Cansızoğlu are mentioned above. A similar example also comes from the letter of the chair of the Istanbul Transportation Workers’ Trade Union, as quoted above. To him, the rally was also important because it “will also be a lesson to those pitiable ones who think badly about the Turkish worker.” Thus, it is understandable that the trade unionists vehemently emphasized the

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569 “Türk İşçileri Dün Komünizmi Tel’in Etti”, Vatan (27 Aug. 1950); “Komünizme Karşı İstanbul İşçilerinin Dünkü Muazzam Toplantısı”, Milliyet (27 Aug. 1950). Both are from Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 187, IISH. 256
impossibility of the Turkish workers to be communists. Consider the following two examples, also from 1950:

\[\text{We, the Turkish workers who have a long and untainted history, feel the need to hold national interests above everything else. We feel this through the blood in our veins} \text{ and “The Turkish workers who have a bright future in front of them, will take it upon themselves to damn this cruel and disgusting ideology.”}^{570}\]

What these quotes show is that the anti-communist discourse was used for many more reasons than just self-defence. It also unified the government and the labour movement to a great extent as far as we understand from the complimentary comments made about the newly elected DP government at the aforementioned rally:

\[\text{Our request from the government, which has been dealing with the communists in a serious manner, is the following: We want those traitors making communist propaganda in Turkey to be detected and exiled to the Moscow heaven. Or we want them to be deemed traitors and sent to the gallows.}^{571}\]

According to this coverage, the chair of the organizing committee continued his speech by summoning the workers to help the government in its struggle against communism and he finished with the following words: “\text{Down with communism, long live the government and the people of the Turkish Republic!}” It is important to note at this point that workers were not the only social group present at the rally. \textit{Vatan} reports that there were a couple of thousand people at the rally from different social groups such as students, civil servants and

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\[570\] “\text{Komünizme Karşı İstanbul İşçilerinin Dünkü Muazzam Toplantısı}”, \textit{Milliyet} (27 Aug 1950). Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 187, \textit{IISH}.

\[571\] “\text{Türk İşçileri Dün Komünizmi Tel’in Etti}”, \textit{Vatan} (27 Aug 1950). Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 187, \textit{IISH}.
This is a significant piece of information in that it reveals two important insights about the labour movement at the time. First, the movement sought for alliances with other social groups. Second, anti-communism was a hegemonic ideology to the extent that it managed to bring such different social groups together. We should also note the explicitly positive coverage of the rally preparations and the rally itself by the print media. One newspaper called the rally “a magnificent meeting” which was “a warning to those who wanted to take advantage of the workers’ troubles,” while another one used the term “red danger” to refer to communism in the caption.

**The Fear of Strikes**

The discussion on the right to strike, which was very heated at the time, could also be understood in relation to this ideological hegemony since a very important epiphany of the hysteria of communism within the trade union movement concerned this issue. Despite disagreements within the party, the RPP’s opposition to the right to strike continued well into the 1950s. At the beginning of the current chapter, I discussed the RPP’s efforts to contain the trade union movement within certain limits after the brief experience of the 1946 unionism. In light of the evidence provided, the anti-strike stance of the ruling party does not come as a surprise. The fact that a considerable part of the working classes also argued against the legalization of strikes, however, requires an explanation. To an extent, this attitude amongst the workers could be attributed to the fear of lockouts, which, they thought, would accompany the legalization of strikes. Examples of such fear can be found in a survey conducted by Hürbilek in early 1949 on the right to strike. Of the six workers who responded, three argued that it was not the time for the Turkish workers to have the right to strike because of inadequate financial means, on the one hand, and the immaturity of the trade union movement on the other.

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572 Ibid. Cumhuriyet gives the number of trade unions present at the rally as ten (“İşçiler komünizmini dün tel’in ettiler”, 27 August 1950). It seems that among these social groups students were very actively involved in the anti-communist movement. Earlier the same month, the Association of Istanbul University Students organized another meeting to protest against communism. Political party representatives were also present at the meeting, which ended with the students reminding the DP government to keep its promise to annihilate communists (“Komünizmi tel’in için gençliğin toplantısı”, Cumhuriyet, 5 August 1950).

573 “Komünizme Karşı İstanbul İşçilerinin Dünkü Muazzam Toplantısı”, Milliyet (27 Aug. 1950). Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 187, IISH.

574 “Türkiye İşçileri Dün Komünizmi Tel’in Etti”, Vatan (27 Aug. 1950). Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 187, IISH.

575 “Grev Hakında Resimli Anket”. Hürbilek (16 Feb. 1949); (2 March 1949); (16 March 1949). Later in the same year, a worker expressed his concern with the legalization of lock-outs in the following words: “Down with the right to lock-out! We also do not want the right to strike which masks the right to lock-out! (“İşçi Gözü ile: 258
Among the holders of this opinion was a worker from the Bakırköy Trade Union. A weaver from Bakırköy Factory, who was also the vice-chair of the Istanbul Textile Industry Workers’ Trade Union, made the following statement after the Minister of Labour’s assertion that “the Turkish worker knows that strike is an out of fashion weapon which, in most cases, does not harm the opponent but injures the one who holds it by blowing up in his face”:

Our workers have not matured enough to use the weapon called strike. If such a weapon is given to us, we would attempt to use it everywhere. Before that, it is required that our trade unions are strengthened and our cash boxes are filled. There is no doubt that if we are given the right to strike, the boss will also have the right to lock-out. A person with a good sense could very well think that, for today, strike would do us more harm than good. More precisely, it is harmful for workers to think of strikes not only today but also for a long time to come.

For the most part, the anti-strike stance among workers was underpinned by an adherence to the government’s labour policies. For example, in January 1950, in a meeting held by trade unions that refused to join the Istanbul Association of Trade Unions because of its close relations with the RPP, a wire was sent to the Ministry of Labour asking, on behalf of the Turkish workers, for the right to strike. Immediately afterwards, a furious Association, as well as many trade unions within the association separately, protested against this demand, thanked...
the government for the recent enactment of various protective laws for workers and thus declared their loyalty.\textsuperscript{579}

In the meantime, heated debates on the issue were going on in the parliament. The Minister of Labour must have been sure that the workers did not want to have the right to strike when he fiercely attacked a member of the opposition party who had earlier complained that they were denounced as communists.\textsuperscript{580} The Minister’s speech also exemplifies a very widely voiced peculiarity of the Turkish state-labour relations, which was one of the strongest arguments against the right to strike. Often summarized as the principle of etatism, this peculiarity, many argued, made the right to strike redundant in Turkey. To this logic, strikes were needed in a liberal economic system where labour-capital relations were subjected only to the rules of the market. In Turkey, on the contrary, the arbitration mechanism in which the state mediated between employers and workers was at work. The existence of an arbitration board thus ruled out the need for strikes.\textsuperscript{581}

The workers clearly did not share this positive image of the arbitration mechanism. Starting in 1949, \textit{Hürbilek} conducted another survey and asked various trade union leaders four questions about the problems they have.\textsuperscript{582} Of the twelve sets of answers, six mentioned the urgent need for the establishment of the labour court, while three others emphasized the importance of having a trade union representative in the arbitration board. One respondent mentioned both of these. Overall, then, only one out of twelve trade union leaders did not list the practical and/or legal aspects of the state’s management of employer-employee disputes among the most immediate problems that the trade unions faced. The conclusion could be drawn that, contrary to the claims that the state mediated as a neutral arbitrator and thus ruled out the necessity of the employer and employee to struggle with each other, the trade union leaders, and probably most of the members in those trade unions, felt themselves vulnerable in this institutional setting. It is also interesting to note that, while three of those who criticized the arbitration mechanism directly advocated for the recognition of the trade unions as the legal representatives of the workers in the arbitration board, one approached the matter

\textsuperscript{579} “İstanbul İşçi Sendikası”, \textit{Akşam} (28 Jan 1950).
\textsuperscript{580} “Grev Hakki”, \textit{Akşam} (28 Jan. 1950).
\textsuperscript{581} See, for example, the transcript of a speech by a high-ranking RPP officer: “İşçi Meseleri hakkındaki İddialara Bir Cevap”, \textit{Akşam} (27 Jan. 1950).
\textsuperscript{582} The four questions are the following: 1) What sort of difficulties does your trade union face? 2) Are you content with your relations to the employers and their attitude towards your trade union? What are your wishes in this regard? 3) What are the main issues that you deal with as a trade union? In which of these issues were you successful and which not? What are the reasons? 4) Are there any changes that you wish to be made in the trade union or any other laws for the development of the trade unions? If so, what are these wishes? The earliest answers were published on 12 August 1949 and the latest on 2 December 1949.
from a completely different angle and gave a thorough analysis of why the arbitration mechanism could not work, even with certain changes to the advantage of the workers. 583

Exceptionally, this trade union leader questions the relation of the state to the ruling classes and comes very close to an instrumental Marxist view on the state by arguing that “the state represents the domination of the class of employers over other classes”. Thus, “when the state decides on a dispute, it is actually the employers who make the decision. The solution, he continues, lies in class struggle, which meant in practical political terms that all classes would form their own political organizations and wage the struggle to gain their rights through these organizations. But, he concludes, the contradictions within the legal framework prevented the working classes to use their democratic rights. The contrast between the law of associations, which legalized the right to form organizations based on the principle of social class, and the labour law, which banned strikes, was what he referred to as contradictions that tied the hands of the trade unions. To this trade union leader, as non-political organizations, which were formed to claim the economic interests of the workers, the trade unions were not the vessels to wage the class war. Besides, without the right to strike, trade unions could not even function properly.

What conclusions can we draw from this sketchy portrayal of the context in which workers tried to advance their working and living conditions? First, we should evaluate the emergence of the trade unions in Turkey in terms of the political context both inside and outside of the country. As I mentioned above, the enactment of the Trade Unions Law in 1947 should be understood as a strategic move by the state to control the labour movement which, as the 1946 experience had shown, could otherwise evolve into a ‘dangerous’ content and form. In terms of its content, as Sülker notes, the workers showed interest in the two socialist parties established after the ban on forming organizations on the principle of social class were lifted. 584 In terms of form, despite the manipulation of the RPP to encourage the workers to organize in associations mainly through the Workers Association of Turkey, the socialists advocated trade unions as the best form of organization for workers. 585 In this context, it becomes clear that the Trade Unions Law was aimed at a much more controlled, if not steered, process of the development of labour movement. Crippling the development of the trade unions with a law worded in such a careful way as to hinder their independent

583 “Sendika Başkanlarına (4) Sual”, Hürbilek (2 Dec 1949).
584 Sülker, 100 Soruda, p. 59.
585 Ibid., pp. 60-2.
and directly manipulating their course of development by means of appointing party officers specifically for trade union movement related issues, the RPP managed to manipulate the course of labour movement. The law remained intact until the popularity of the DP among the workers started to exert pressure on the ruling party before the 1950 election. When repression did not work, nationalism, usually evoking, if not being used interchangeably with Kemalism, was used to co-opt whenever a segment of the labour movement seemed to go astray. To these impediments resulting from such governance, we should also add, as Bahir Ersoy mentioned, the problems stemming from the organizational inexperience and the lack of intellectual guidance for the trade unions. All in all, these conditions intercepted the young trade union movement from going beyond practical work-related demands, causing it to waste a great deal of time on intra-movement struggles. While it is true that different viewpoints existed on vital matters such as the right to strike – and these differences mostly corresponded to the political rivalry between the RPP and the DP – it would be safe to argue that, again for the most part, workers of the period were contained within the dominant ideology that was first and foremost characterized by the primacy of the perpetuity of the state and the (re)production of the national identity.

One of the main epiphanies of this ideological hegemony could be found in the identification of the well-being of the self with that of the nation. The following examples are from a competition organized by Hürbilek to find the worker who would best express the characteristics of the Turkish worker in one sentence. The following selection from workers’ answers illustrates the many different forms of this identification: “The Turkish worker is the Mehmetçik of the industrial field.” This phrase, taken from a weaver foreman of a state-owned textile factory, draws a parallel between “Mehmetçik”, meaning any man enlisted in the Turkish army (the suffix ‘çik’ denotes love and compassion), and the industrial

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586 I mainly refer to the fifth clause of the law here. Besides banning the trade unions to engage in political activity and defining them as national associations that cannot act against nationalism and national interest, this clause required the cabinet decree for trade unions to participate in any international organizations. Within the context of the Cold War, this last decree could be interpreted as a preventive measure against the Turkish trade unions to affiliate to any ‘communist’ foreign labour organization.

587 In terms of the effects of the inter-party rivalry on the development of the trade union movement, Bahir Ersoy raises an important point by drawing attention to the gains of the movement from such adversaries: “We have defended the independence of trade unions from the political parties. Why? I absolutely do not think of the matter in terms of this or that party’s advocacy. It has been the case that the workers have been educated within the struggle between parties, I was also educated. I have learnt how to get organized, improved myself. The fight between the parties improved us all” (Interview by Yıldırım Koç).

588 Given the fact that Hürbilek was the publishing organ of the Alliance of Istanbul Trade Unions, which was itself an organization with close connections to the RPP, the reader might think that the nationalistic answers were consciously chosen by the editors to manipulate the readership and/or to please the authorities. This would be misleading because such examples could be multiplied using other dailies of the period.

589 “Mü sabakamuz”, Hürbilek (7 Aug. 1948).
worker, for they both ‘work’ for the homeland. The statesmen also often resorted to this analogy. During his visit to Bakırköy Cloth Factory, the Prime Minister addressed the workers in a similar fashion:

[Referring to the then recently enacted social insurance laws] As much as we have done these as our duty, by means of paying your debt to the homeland, you not only serve both your homeland and your families but you also stop our money to go abroad by meeting the needs of the homeland.  

The phrase “the debt to the homeland” is often used for compulsory military service in Turkey. Similar to the first, the other examples from the competition of Hürbilek also refer to the interdependence between the fates of the homeland and the Turkish worker: “The strength and might of the Turkish nation is dependent on the success of the Turkish worker.”  

“If the Turkish worker contents himself with low wages, it is because he is conscious of the limit of the national wealth.”  

“The Turkish worker, who has the noble blood in his veins, is a diligent and successful estate of the homeland.”  

“The Turkish worker is a resolute and indivisible steel network which works for the sake of a national goal.”  

“The Turkish worker, who does with less without asking for more, is an entity who wants to work freely for the homeland to be free.”  

“Oh, the Turkish worker! You are the biggest entity that bears the ideal of civilization, humanity and homeland, only if you work, these will continue to exist.”

What these statements show us is that as early as 1948, i.e. almost one and a half years after the trade union movement had started, the discursive practices of the new labour movement were firmly established. That is to say that, in order to appeal to the bulk of workers, one had to speak from within a certain discourse. By emphasizing the indispensability of the nation’s well-being to the cause of the workers, this discourse also helped to establish the workers as an inseparable part of the nation in that their labour was the basis of the country’s independence and the Turkish state’s sovereignty. Hence, I argue that this discourse has a double character. On the one hand, it is restraining because it does not

591 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (14 Aug. 1948).
592 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (28 Aug. 1948).
593 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (4 Sep. 1948).
594 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (18 Sep. 1948).
595 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (18 Sep. 1948).
596 “Müşabakamız”, Hürbilek (18 Sep. 1948).
allow trade unions to formulate demands that would go against the national interest. On the other, it is also enabling in the sense that it allows the workers to establish themselves as the rightful ( politicized ) citizens by being recognized as an indispensable part of the nation. By connecting the nation’s fate to their toil, the workers could present their well-being as a national issue. Let us now return to and conclude Enver’s story, which displays the workings of this double-edged discourse in the sphere of working-class politics.

The Limits of Dissidence

The following is a lengthy letter by Enver addressing his fellow citizens and co-workers in the context of the 1950 elections:

My Esteemed Citizens,

My self-sacrificing and patriotic fellow workers,

That happy day on which the national will is manifested is approaching. I would like to submit my decision to this great and sacred cause as a working citizen by presenting this statement to the noble Turkish people and my fellow workers. I was born in 1914. After migrating from Bulgaria, I completed my secondary school education in Edirne and started working in 1934. I have worked in Alpullu Sugar Factory and Gemlik Artificial Silk Factory as a worker like you. I have been working at Bakırköy Sümerbank Cloth Factory as a weaver foreman since I finished my military service in 1941. I am a young Turk who has witnessed and known the injustices and the deprivations for a long time now. Although our workers are unparalleled exemplars of self-sacrifice, patriotism and benevolence in the world, they have not unfortunately attained the living conditions, the welfare, the happiness necessary for a civilized person and they could not get the rewards of their labour. Similar to any working person, our workers will be the recipient of the humane treatment they deserve no matter what happens. I myself have been in struggle in order to claim our workers’ rights continuously for a long time now. And I will keep struggling until I die.

My friends, I would like to state and announce that in the times of the elections everybody and all the party members will engage in numerous propaganda acts through every means by taking advantage of the good intentions of our workers, and they will try to direct their conscience in tandem with their own desires. We never have an objection to those parliament members who will be elected in a just and free way by the will of the nation. Because, in a democratic life, the will of the people, in other words, the word of the people prevails. That the people’s word be prevalent is both requisite and fundamental. Especially the big mass of
workers has an important role in this election. And there could be people who would deceive this considerable mass.

My dear fellow workers, you know it very well that after acquiring your deputation and making it to Ankara, nobody will be found to hear your problems or even to contact you. The workers could only be represented by those who are among them and who know what it means to be a worker. The time of generous promises and empty words is over. Our workers should work with confidence over their wellbeing and future and they should be saved from being the slaves of the employers and the workplaces. Only then they could yield the efficiency expected from them. Workers’ families, workers’ children, and the workers themselves are suffering from tuberculosis. They are not given the care they deserve. The education and upbringing of the children of workers, who work day and night for the development of our country, are not given the deserved importance. Many of our workers are left to live in insanitary huts near the swamps and they are consequently left to calamity. Our workers are not in a state to object to mistreatment or any other injustice they are subjected to in their workplaces. Because they are scared that their bread will be taken away immediately and their families will be left in hunger and calamity.

They accuse those workers who go too far. There is never a communist among Turkish workers. And there cannot be. In this respect, they [the workers] are always confined to live in fear, suspicion and hesitation.

I know and observe very closely all the troubles of my fellow workers and I am tormented by them. It is to struggle for these important workers’ causes that I have been a member of the National Development Party, which came up with a program that pays a lot of attention to claim workers’ rights, since its beginning and I come before you as the worker candidate of the National Development Party from Istanbul. Without any doubt, you have the last say. Only the deputy elected by the will of the people and the parliament constituted of such deputies would render the national will always prevalent and absolute. Give your vote freely to people you trust after careful consideration. Thank you very much, working and striving from us, blessing from God.

Weaver foreman at Bakırköy Cloth Factory
Enver Tensi

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597 Kemal Sülker Collection, Folder No. 151, IISH.
So far, I have shown Enver’s dissident position within the Bakırköy Union with reference to his critique regarding the lack of self-governance of the union and the wrong-doings by the union administration. As this public letter clearly displays, he did not seem to have any problems with the ideological underpinnings of the labour movement. Starting from the salutation, “[M]y self-sacrificing and patriotic fellow workers,” Enver embraces the hegemonic nationalist discourse. The nobility of the Turkish blood in general and the patriotism of the Turkish workers, references that we have encountered in the union meetings analysed above, are repeatedly cited in the letter as well.

Although his argument moves in the direction of a powerful critique of the working and living conditions of the workers, which he expressed rather cynically, when he addresses the problems workers face in expressing their discontent, he readily submits to the anti-communist discourse: “There is never a communist among Turkish workers. And there cannot be.” Overall, these phrases signify the limits of Enver’s critique. To him, the first and foremost problem was the rule of the RPP and its influence on the trade unions. The solution, he claimed, was to overthrow its rule by voting for the National Development Party. The irony here lies in the fact that Enver himself was a state worker, whereas the party he worked for argued against state-led industrialization. We cannot know how Enver sorted out this contradiction in his mind, that is, if he saw this as a contradiction in the first place. But, the fact remains that for Enver the problem was at the surface level, certainly, the workers were in calamity but this could be easily solved by sending workers to the parliament as deputies.

The emphasis he puts on democracy, expressed mainly by his faith in “free and just elections,” and “the prevalence of people’s will,” reflects the optimistic political atmosphere of the multi-party system. Compliant with this faith in liberal democracy, the problems of workers are not attributed to a general conflict between employer and employee but to practical mistakes in handling the industrialization process. As such, Enver’s story exemplifies a critique from within the existing system, a case of dissidence. The limits of this dissidence were clearly drawn by the hegemonic ideology of the time. There remains one question to be answered: What happened to those who refused to stay within this discourse? The answer lies in the last part of Ahmet’s story, which shows the limits of dissidence allowed by the regime.

The Story of a Dissident

We left Ahmet at a heated union meeting in 1949 where the chair of the union complained...
about the weavers who did not follow the conditions of the agreement between the trade union and the factory management. I have shown that there was a considerable gap between the agenda of the union management and Ahmet’s ideas about what the union should be doing. Let us now return to that union meeting, which appears to be an important moment for Ahmet’s further involvement in the labour movement, and follow what happened afterwards based on both Hürbilek’s coverage and Ahmet’s own account.

After narrating the weavers’ incident, the chair finished his speech by stating the increase in the social benefits provided by the union for the members. He must have been confident that the workers were happy with the ‘successes’ he previously mentioned: “This should also make you happy.” According to the reporter, a number were indeed happy. The first member who addressed the audience after the chair’s speech expressed his utmost satisfaction with the work of the administrative board and added that nothing more could be expected under the conditions of the day. What sort of conditions was he referring to? I will return to this question, but first let us turn to Ahmet and find out what he had to say about the rest of the meeting.

There is no mention of Ahmet’s speech in Hürbilek’s coverage of this meeting. Although other workers also criticized the activity report, when the financial statement was read, there was a fierce round of applause from the members. From Ahmet’s account, however, we learn that it was actually his speech that received the applause. His claim is also supported by the results of the election of the new board: Ahmet was now the union’s vice-president. Contrary to the reporter’s claims that most of those who were present at the meeting wanted the old board to continue its duty, four new members were elected to the board. This new composition of the union administration indicates a clear shift in the balance of power, which we could interpret as a sign of discontent among the union members.

By this time, Ahmet had already enrolled in the DP and was working as the chair of one of its local branches. His party membership also continued after the elections in 1950, although disappointment had begun growing among workers upon seeing that the DP government was deferring the recognition of the right to strike. As for his career as a labour activist, Ahmet became the leading workers’ representative in 1951, ten years after he started working at Bakırköy, and four years after he became a trade union member. However, despite his active political life and participation in the labour movement, he claims that he started dealing with social issues after 1950. What he meant by this becomes clear in the later part of the interview.

which I will cover in more detail below. Now let us return to his file, which includes information on a significant incident within the Bakırköy weavery.

In October 1951, the Bakırköy weavery was stormed by a conflict between a foreman and a weaver. Contrary to the previous examples of a contention between such parties, it seems that this time the weaver had instigated the confrontation. We saw previously that the foremen, especially the head foremen, had utmost authority and could go so far as to exert physical violence on the workers in the name of securing the discipline of the work department. This was not the case, as we understand from the petition of the head foreman:

01.10.1951
Official report

When I went to shaft loom number 195 to pull the warp yarn, weaver Ahmet Cansızoğlu, a weaver who works there with number 4179, called me and weavers 1307 Salih and 223 Enver who were working at the same looms and used such words as “Let these friends also witness, from now on, if you engage in any unfair treatment or wrongdoing here, I will start legal procedure. Also, if you write a report about any worker or cause him to be fired, again, I will start legal procedure, afterwards it is none of my concern.”

Head foreman of the Weavery
Cemal Toksipahi
1307 Salih Balkan
223 Enver Onat

Four days later, the chief of the main production units informed the factory management with another petition: “arguing that he is the vice-president of the trade union, [Ahmet] has been interfering in the administration of his department and leaving his job unattended, he has been arguing openly with his foremen and head foremen and using threatening words.” By doing so, the chief concluded, Ahmet had badly influenced the workers, spoiled the discipline of the workplace, and thus deserved to be punished. A warning was issued by the factory manager arguing that Ahmet violated both the Trade Unions Law and the internal regulations of the factory by interfering in the administration of the workplace and arguing with his superiors about matters unrelated to his job. Upon repetition, he continued, Ahmet would be fired from the factory.

Both in the case of the work stoppage in the early 1940s and the union meeting in 1949, Ahmet had always been a self-confident and assertive worker. What this incident – the first one
of its kind in Ahmet’s file – shows is that his involvement in the trade union movement had added to these qualities. We do not know the story of the contention between the head foreman and Ahmet, but the fact that Ahmet had the courage to publicly confront him in front of other weavers suggests that this was not the first incident between them. Ahmet’s way of argumentation also supports my suggestion that this head foreman had had problems with the weavers before. By voicing his right to start a legal procedure in case any worker is fired, Ahmet not only portrays a worker who knows his rights at the workplace, he also speaks for his fellow workers who could possibly suffer because of this incident.

**When the Trade Union Interferes**

A letter from the trade union to the factory management sent a month after this incident proves that he had a good reason to feel confident. I quote this letter in its entirety because it is the only example of an official document submitted by the Bakırköy trade union to the factory management. As such, it is important to see the discourse employed in such a document.

10.11.1951

To the General Directorate of Sümerbank Bakırköy Cotton Textile Enterprise,

We were informed that Ahmet Cansızoğlu, who works at your enterprise with employee number 4179, was given a warning, enumerated Per/792, by your management on 10/10/1951. Since the content of your warning also concerns our trade union, submitting our grief:

1) At the general assembly meeting of the Bakırköy branch of the Istanbul Textile and Weaving Industries Workers on 01/07/1951, the members elected Ahmet Cansızoğlu, who has worked for our cause in earnest, to the administration board.

2) At its session on 02/07/1951, our administrative board made the task distribution. In the meantime, Ahmet Cansızoğlu did not commit fraud.

3) According to the third article of our union charter, our goal is to protect the rights and interests of our members within the laws. Besides, again according to the forty-second article of our charter, trade union representatives are supposed to protect the rights and interests of all the workers at a workplace. It has been confirmed through the investigation we made among workers, knowing these points very well, Ahmet Cansızoğlu appealed to his superiors in his capacity as the vice-president [of the trade union] to claim the rights of our aggrieved members.

4) The internal regulation of your workplace reads as follows: “The worker appeals to his superiors by turns to protect his right or to reveal a certain truth. If he does not get his wish or an answer, he makes a complaint to the manager.” Moreover, the e) clause of the fourth article of the
law number 5018 [i.e. Trade Union Law] states that the trade union could provide legal help for its members claiming their rights regarding the employment contract. Consequently, contrary to what you have claimed, Ahmet Cansızoğlu acted against neither your internal regulations nor the law. That he left his job unattended and wanted to claim our member’s rights is not stated as a crime in the internal regulations and the law that you have mentioned.

The aforementioned worker was at the hospital on 10/10/1951 and he was not appealed for testimony by you. As you know, our law requires in such incidents that when the plaintiff is heard, the defendant should also be heard. It is only after this that the verdict is given and the rightful party is determined. The conclusion you made based on one party’s testimony is invalid, we ask for the decision to be revoked.

Respectfully,

Executive Community of the Bakırköy Branch of the Istanbul Textile and Weaving Workers’ Union

This letter reveals important insights on many different levels of trade union activities within the factories. First and foremost, the form and language of the letter are striking in their highly official character. Compared to other petitions and letters I have covered so far, this letter stands out as the best crafted. All necessary information concerning the incident is presented in the opening paragraph portraying a serious and competent organization. Immediately after follows an effort to legitimize the involvement of the union in the incident. The content of the warning issued by the factory concerned the trade union directly. Indeed, it was clear from the warning letter that the management was frustrated with Ahmet because of his claims to authority based on his trade union representative status. Thus, the union’s letter formulates four points to clear all doubt about the legitimacy of Ahmet’s claims. First, he was elected to the administrative board. The relative clause accompanying this sentence brings a subjective dimension to the argument: “[he] has worked for our cause in earnest.”

The second point reveals the motivation behind adding this positive comment. Two seemingly unrelated sentences are used here: The first one discloses another piece of factual information, while the second states Ahmet’s innocence regarding a presupposed accusation of fraud. No further explanation is offered on this matter, however. Instead, the letter continues with a third point, which, by reference to the union charter, states the goals and duties of the union. The effort here is to establish the rightfulfulness of Ahmet’s actions both as the representative and as the vice-president of the union. By emphasizing that the representative is supposed to defend the rights of all members of a workplace, the letter
argues against the factory’s accusation that Ahmet “has been interfering in the administration of his department.”

The fourth point is similar to the third in that it also refers to the written rules and procedures. According to the internal regulations of the factory, the letter states, provided that he follows a certain route, a worker cannot be blamed for making a complaint. The argument is strengthened with a reference to the Trade Union Law, which specifies that the union can provide legal help to its members. The reason for this addition is to refute the chief’s allegation that Ahmet used threatening language. Indeed, Ahmet’s words “I will start legal procedure. Besides, if you write a report about any worker or cause him to be fired, again, I will start legal procedure, afterwards it is none of my concern” could have sounded as a threat but by referring to the aforementioned legal rights and the duties of the worker, the representative and the vice-president of the union, the letter objected to this interpretation. The letter finishes with another objection, this time against the factory management’s wrongdoing in handling the investigation of the incident. Again, stating the rights and duties using formal language, the letter objects the issuing of a warning for Ahmet’s behaviour.

After analyzing the language and the reasoning of this letter, we are left with one final question: How did the management receive it and, subsequently, act upon it? Did this letter, which is the first example of trade union intervention in labour-management conflict at the shopfloor in my sample, help Ahmet in handling the pressure from the management? The answer to this question can be found in the short note written below the signature line: “The management does not deem it necessary to reply.” The case was thus closed, at least for some years to follow. We will follow what happened during these years by examining the interview with Ahmet.

**From DP to DWP**

While Ahmet was struggling with the factory management in 1951, a lawyer named Orhan Arsal established a new political party, namely the Democrat Workers’ Party (DWP). In the interview, Cansizoğlu gives conflicting information on the date when he first met Arsal, but he recites the day when he joined the DWP in detail:

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Those two articles [i.e. articles no. 6 and 7 of the Democrat Party program, G.A.] \(^{600}\) were the reasons why I enrolled in and worked for the party. But it should be noted that as the city delegate, I took the floor at the congress at Istanbul Exhibition Palace when labour issues were being discussed. Explaining that the DP did not follow its program by not [giving] the right to strike to the workers and not [following] the articles [on this matter] in the party program, I announced my resignation and left. Orhan Arsal was also there, he sent me somebody and thus I was enrolled in the Democrat Workers’ Party as such and became the provincial chairman [of Istanbul]. At another point in the interview, he revisits this act of resignation by noting its repercussions: “I resigned from the DP in 1953 at the Istanbul Exhibition Palace in front of the ministers.” The DP members threw me out of the cooperative, when I was arrested because during my speech at the trade union, I could not enter the factory anymore, I was unemployed. My protest stripped me of many rights...I became the head workers’ representative after 1951. Upon my resignation from the DP, I lost [the elections]...In 1953, we established the Housing Cooperation of the Bakırköy Cotton Industries Enterprise Workers to build 143 houses. I was then the head of the workers’ representatives. We were holding official talks in Ankara...They discarded us from the union and they did not want to give me my house.”

Cansızoğlu gives limited information on his DWP years in the interview. Upon the interviewer’s question on the party’s membership composition, he mentions intellectuals as well as workers from older organizations such as the Workers’ Advancement Society and press workers. In fact, the party program reveals that three out of four founders of the party were workers. \(^{601}\) In response to another question on the effects of the 1951-1952 detention \(^{602}\) on the DWP he answers: “I suppose it did not effect at all.” His last comment about the party is a critique arguing that the president, Arsal, did not commit to the labour question enough. As such, we cannot learn from the interview what appealed to him in the DWP so much that he immediately enrolled. Since this is an important question in order to understand the development of Ahmet’s political career and ideas on working-class politics, I propose to turn to another archival document on the DWP. A careful read of this document would provide us with a tentative understanding of what appealed to Cansızoğlu in this party and also, to an extent, what might have caused his alienation at a later stage. This document, titled The First

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\(^{600}\) See p. 22 for the content of these articles.

\(^{601}\) Two workers were fitters while the other one was a machine operator. The fourth founder was Orhan Arsal himself. *Demokrat İşçi Partisinin Programı,* (Istanbul: Üğur Basımevi, 1950).

\(^{602}\) Fifteen months after it came to power, the DP government launched a large mass-detention campaign directed at Turkish Communist Party (TKP) members on 26 October 1951. The detention continued until the end of the following year. More than 180 people were arrested, 131 of who were later sentenced to imprisonment.
*Book with Yellow Lines,*\(^{603}\) is a publication of the party for its second general assembly in 1953. A compilation of speeches by members, newspaper articles on the party, the general assembly report and minutes, the document provides scattered information on the ideology, the membership composition and the activities of this party.

At the time of this publication, the political atmosphere was becoming increasingly characterized by anti-communism. Especially after a minister of the DP government accused the trade unions of engaging in communist propaganda in May 1952, the protests of workers increased against allegations of being Moscow’s servants. Among the accused was also the Socialist Party of Turkey (SPT). The general assembly report of the DWP starts with listing the party’s activities to protest these allegations: “*We could not let our democracy, still in its cradle, to be the victim of such an assault. To return the insult done to the Turkish workers and Turkish trade unions and to deny the accusation done to the SPT and to object the violation of laws, we organized our protest meeting on May, 25\(^{th}\) [1952].*”\(^{604}\) This short quotation might strike the reader with the similarity between the discourse used here and the mainstream anti-communist discourse. Once more, we see that the allegation of communism is seen as an assault, which should be rejected feverishly *en masse.* This stance is continued in the report with the mentioning of a party member who was subjected to prosecution for engaging in communist propaganda at the first general assembly. The report quotes an expert report that refutes the allegations. Interesting to note here is the tone of relief for being acquitted from the allegation of communism. In the minutes of the first general assembly, we read that the vice-president names the ideology of the party as “humanitarian socialism” and that the president agrees with a proposal to change the name of the party to “Socialist Workers’ Party.” It seems from the minutes that some members were unhappy with the name of the party as it alluded somewhat to the name of the party in power, i.e. the Democrat Party. In responding to these criticisms, the president makes an interesting comment, which further illustrates the ideology of the party: “*We took this name and not the name Workers’ Party to avoid attributions of fascism and Bolshevism. Our aim is not to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat, but only to elevate the working class to equality, that is in the meaning [of equality] in a complete democracy.*”\(^{605}\)

The publication also portrays DWP’s opinion on the current situation of trade unionism in detail. First and foremost, there is the emphasis on the dominance of the political

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\(^{603}\) *Birinci Sarı Çizgili Kitap, Demokrat işçi Partisinin ikinci Genel Kongresi Münasebetiyle Neşrolunmuştur,* (İstanbul: n.p. 1953).

\(^{604}\) Ibid., p. 9.

\(^{605}\) Ibid., p. 15.
party representatives in the union movement: “The trade union leaders of today are partisans working at the disposal of the Democrat Party, the [Republican] People’s Party or the Nation Party and their duty is to put workers off with the tale of trade unions, to disorganize them by dividing them among different parties, and to stop them from being a political force.” The reader would remember the section on the 1946 trade unionism where I documented the relations between the socialist parties of the time and the trade unions. Although the DWP also claims to be a socialist party, its attitude towards trade unions is completely different from the former socialist parties, as we see from the report. The report goes on to criticize the violation of the fifth article of the Trade Union Law which reads as follows: “The labour and employer unions, as trade unions, cannot engage in any political activity, political propaganda or political publication activities, and cannot mediate the activities of any political institution.”

The situation must have worried the party management to the extent that this expression of discontent did not suffice: “our party...ordered all its members to resign from trade unions in order not to bear the blame for the same [violation]. Those members who did not follow this disciplinary order are discharged from the party.” The situation becomes more complicated; however, as we continue reading the report, since the next paragraph argues that workers should become a political force in order to protest against their poor conditions. Thus they should become members and even form the foundation of the “Labour Party.” But some trade union leaders, the report claims, view politics as a microbe that should be kept away from the trade unions, and they do it to keep the workers away from their real cause. Now, the matter is indeed complicated here as, for example, we know that by the time Ahmet enrolled in the DWP, he had already been active in trade unionism for more than five years. It seems to be that this confusion is a product of the atmosphere of trade unionism which was increasingly characterized by partisanship in those years. Though the DWP report claims that a protest meeting it organized in Istanbul in 1952 attracted more than twenty thousand people, we are talking of a small party. Thus, it could be argued that rather than trying to infiltrate into the trade unions, it might have been more rational for the DWP to argue against other, larger political parties to openly command over trade unions. In the words of the party’s president, Orhan Arsal, these were “yellow trade unions” which did not have a character of their own:

606 Ibid., pp. 12-3.
608 Birinci Sarı Çizgili Kitap, p. 12.
It is impossible for them to understand that they [the trade unionists, G.A.] belong to a different social group, a class with contrasting interests [to those of the political parties, G.A.]. These yellow trade unions, which do not have any other means than harrumphing about the bosses and nourishing hatred and hostility to attract the workers to the unions, cannot even defend the freedom of meeting guaranteed by law and convention. As long as the trade union leaders of today, who kowtow in front of the power holder, and dishonour themselves by obeying even unlawful orders, content themselves with a doled out democracy, they cannot take an action as the defender of workers’ rights and interests even at the minor court, let alone in front of the people. They can only take advantage of the Marshall plan, receive their salaries with ease, and some of them even pocket the union subscription fees. And in return for all these labour, they are honoured with the opportunity of fawning over those in power.609

This repulsive tone seems to have been shared by a majority of the party members as much as we understand from the choice of the design of the party emblem: “Those trade unions which work for other causes than workers’ interests are called yellow trade unions because the colour yellow symbolizes betrayal all around the world. This is the reason why we painted the signboard of the DWP yellow and we wrote the name of the party in black to mourn for those unions. Down with yellow trade unions.”610 Elsewhere in the general assembly report and in the minutes, the same tone characterizes the party management’s delineation of the trade unionists of the day as the “labour aristocracy.”611

Above I quoted Ahmet on how he came to meet the president of the DWP, Orhan Arsal in a DP congress in 1953. Indeed, the DWP publication clearly shows that Ahmet’s growing discontent with the DP government because of its broken promises regarding workers’ rights was a recurrent topic of discussion in the party meetings. Ahmet’s feeling of betrayal by the DP is shared by party members who emphasized the role of the workers in carrying that party to power on May 14th, 1950. In the words of the vice-president of the DWP, 14th of May was the day of betrayal for the workers: “Those in power today promised us anything when we were walking with them shoulder to shoulder. On that day they stole our vote.” Another party member expressed his anger in the following words: “By stealing our vote, by hypocrisy, they went to Ankara and forgot about us.” 612 Ahmet also explained the reason why he resigned from the DP by referring to the promises made to workers by the

609 Ibid., p. 5.
610 Ibid., p. 19.
611 Ibid., pp. 12-4.
612 Ibid., p. 18.
party before the elections. As we understand from the chronology of events he offered as the story of his political career in the interview, it was this critique that attracted the attention of the DWP’s president who contacted him immediately after he resigned.

This rather brief background information on the DWP provides us with invaluable insights into the complex political world surrounding Ahmet during his politicization process. By 1953, we see him already alienated from the party which, as he emphasized in the interview more than once, he enrolled after carefully studying its program. The early years of the same decade also brought increasing difficulties in his work life and trade union career. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate much on what he read during these years, or who he was in close contact with. Neither does he give a clear account of how his professional life interacted with his political ideas. True, he had always been a self-confident and assertive man but as the decade proceeded, it seems that these features of his character strengthened. In the next section, we follow him through the final years of his Bakırköy years that witnessed another political party affiliation, a costly affiliation as we shall see below.

**Founding a New Party**

Ahmet’s DWP years did not last long as Arsal wanted to abolish the party in 1954 because of electoral failure. But this did not mean the end of Ahmet’s political career because with some other members of the party, Ahmet decided to move with one of the most prominent figures of communism in Turkey: Hikmet Kıvılcımlı. In the interview, he notes that they criticized Arsal for not committing enough to the labour question. With his words on the membership profile of the Homeland Party, this criticism gains a new dimension. Before going into that, let us look at how Ahmet’s path crossed with Kıvılcımlı.

The story of Cansızoğlu’s meeting with Kıvılcımlı is important in three respects. First, it hints at the possible connections between the 1946 trade unionism and post-1947 unionism. Second, it gives us valuable insights as to the content and the formulation of the trade union’s demands from the factory management. Cansızoğlu cites the name of a worker who was active in this movement as the person who introduced him to Kıvılcımlı. This worker, who later on became the general secretary of the Homeland Party, was class-conscious according to Cansızoğlu:
He was the one who advised us to have a day care. Once he said: “If the manager of the Bakırköy Cloth Factory Şefkati Türkekul is a man of his name, he should open a day care centre at the factory.” He woke us up. And I took this to the manager as the workers’ representative and the chair of the Bakırköy branch of the trade union. Mr. Şefkati, may God rest his soul, helped us. He said, “It is not within my authority to open this day care, it is a big investment. It is the general directorate of Sümerbank to decide on this matter.” When he went to Ankara, he presented the case to the general directorate, a subvention was allocated, and they organized the place where the personnel files were kept as the day care. That was the first day care [at Bakırköy, G.A.]. It had sixty beds.

If we consider this example in relation to Ahmet’s previous narration of the work stoppage experience in the early 1940s, we could assume that the personality of the factory manager made a substantial difference in dealing with the demands of the workers. In the earlier example, the factory manager resorted to the police force. Here, however, he co-operates with the workers by transmitting their demand to the higher authorities. The difference between the nature and the formulations of the two demands is rather obvious. Nonetheless, the fact still holds that factory managers who were more attentive to the needs and demands of the workers were popular among the workers. The interviews I conducted provide us Speaking of the same manager mentioned above, Osman Arıkan explains why the workers called him “father” [baba]: “He looked after the poor, for example, when one requested an advance payment because he has no money, and he does so by saying “Sir, I have somebody sick to take care of,” he [the manager] acted as a father, [although] he did not have to do it.” In another example, when he had a problem with one of the technicians, Hüseyin Yılmaz was asked to give an explanation by the manager, this time a different one: “I said I did not do anything, father. We called everybody father, didn’t we [asking his friend, G.A.? The factory manager was called father.”

613 The name Şefkati is a derivative of the word “şefkat” which could be translated as “compassion.” It is perhaps interesting to note that a speech he gave on employer-employee relations was published in 1954. The title of the speech, “Employee and Employer Relations from the Perspective of the Employer,” is noteworthy as it denotes the manager of a state-owned factory as an employer. Also noteworthy is his basic understanding of how the character of those relations should be. According to this, workers and employers should treat each other with mutual understanding and work in harmony for the development of industries. Both the content and the tone of the argument in this text are in accordance with the paternalist attitude he presented at the factory (Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları Altnci Kitapta Ayri Basti, [Istanbul: Ismail Akgün Matbaası, 1954]).
The last point we can learn from this story is one of the possible ways of the conception of an idea in the mind of an already unionized worker. Above, I have quoted Cansızoğlu on how he came to know about the social issues, including the day care service for the workers’ children, after 1947 when he was unionized. In this story, we see an example of the learning process of a worker. What seems important to note here is the after-effects of the short experience of unionization in 1946, and the role of personal relationships in shaping a workers’ learning-process. The latter note is also exemplified elsewhere in the interview when Cansızoğlu recalls his meeting with Arsal. To the question of the interviewer on the possible reasons of the passivity of the workers in late 1940s, he answers: “We rarely got information on these matters [i.e. on the legal rights of the workers, G.A.]. I [came to] deal with social issues after 1950, first we met Orhan Arsal, the lawyer.” Both his file and the interview he gave testify to the fact that his interest in social issues not only gained a momentum but also increasingly radicalized as his disappointment with the DP government grew.

The interview reveals that by the time Arsal announced he would abolish the DWP, Ahmet had already made the decision to join Kıvılcımlı in founding a new party. In fact, when the party was founded on 22nd October 1954, Cansızoğlu was the chairman but he filled this position only for twenty days and was replaced by Hikmet Kıvılcımlı on the party’s first general assembly on 11st November. Above we have seen how Cansızoğlu took the decision of founding the party. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on his meeting with Kıvılcımlı.
except for mentioning the name of the worker who was active in the 1946 trade union movement, Şükrü Kaya, as the person who introduced them. With this note, we see one more time the importance of face-to-face relations in Cansızoğlu’s political life. He also gives valuable though limited information on the membership profile and the activities of the Homeland Party in the interview:

Textile workers were in the majority in the HP. We were not well organized but we were active in Taşlıtarla and Zeytinburnu [two neighbourhoods in Istanbul, G.A.], İzmir and İzmit. In the 1957 elections, I was an MP candidate for Istanbul and İzmir. It was possible to be a candidate for two cities then. The possibility of being elected did not exist at all. But we did thirteen meetings at different places in order to set forth the party’s presence. [People] threw stones at us at these meetings.

With these words, the conversation on the HP years comes to an end and Ahmet starts narrating a new phase of his life, the phase characterized by police surveillance and imprisonment. In the next section, we will look at how his political radicalization ruined his career.

The First Arrest

The last document from Ahmet’s file I mentioned was the warning he got from the management in October 1951. Though significant developments had happened after this date, the file is silent on Ahmet’s life inside the factory for four years. The earliest dated document in this period is a petition he wrote on 24.06.1955:

To the management of Bakırköy Cloth Factory
The following is my wish.
After getting 45 days off on 22.11.1954 from your enterprise, I was living in the Kondu village in the Çaykara district of Trabzon. I was officially on leave until 01.06.1955 [i.e. 6th of January, G.A.] to take care of my family after the death [of a family member]. I was arrested on 04.01.1954 based on slanders and allegations by some people. As of now I have been released by the criminal court. I kindly request my readmission to the factory.
Yours respectfully,
Ahmet Cansızoğlu.
In the interview, Ahmet calls this “the first arrest” since he was imprisoned again in 1957 together with Kıvılcımlı and other HP members. In 1955, surprisingly, his arrest had nothing to do with his HP membership. He recalls the moment when he was approached by an undercover police while looking for a fountain pen which a fellow townsman had ordered during his visit to his village. The policeman asked him to come to the police station where he was asked questions about a speech he gave at a trade union meeting. He cites two arguments he made at that speech as the main reasons why he was accused of communist propaganda:

[I said] the workers engaged in an arduous struggle in Europe and the US and there have been fatalities. They struggled to work eight hours instead of sixteen hours. These things did not happen by themselves. I also said, in Europe, in every European country, there are socialist and labour parties; there is even a communist party. These are represented in the parliament, they have deputies. This could also happen here; in fact I think it should happen here. Because we would be able to understand who is a communist, who is a socialist, who is on the side of the workers and who is not.614

The story of the factory learning the news of his arrest is indeed noteworthy. His file contains a newspaper clipping dated January 7, 1955 entitled “Caught doing communist propaganda” which mistakes him as a coffeehouse keeper:

A coffeehouse keeper in the name of Ahmet Cansızoğlu was arrested for doing communist propaganda by the police court number 3 of Eminönü. Ahmet, who resides at Bakirköy Reyhan Street number 23, has lately started engaging in communist propaganda by praising Russia. He was arrested the other night. The police department is continuing the investigation.615

No official document is provided on what happened and the internal correspondence in the factory reveals that his arrest was learnt from the newspapers.

27.06.1955
To the higher office of the management,
It has been learnt from the newspapers that Ahmet Cansızoğlu was arrested while he was on leave between January, 1st and January, 5th, 1955 and sent to the police court of Eminönü on 7.1.1955. The above named person is among those who were laid off due to absenteeism

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614 Interview by Yıldırım Koç.
according to part E of the 2nd point ((cases that do not fit rules pertaining to morality and good faith) of the 16th article of the Labour Law because he has been away from his job for 5 months and 19 days, Although, the 24th article of the Labour Law says that those persons who apply for recruitment up to two months after they left their jobs to carry out any kind of legal work obligation, are favourably recruited, the person concerned here is in no such situation. However, I respectfully present to your higher opinion and authority that he has been arrested by the court for a certain crime and was released after 5 months and 19 days and applied for a job [Bakirköy].

Chief of staff

A number of significant points arise from the analysis of this letter which basically functions to inform the manager about the history of the case and thus steer the decision-making process. I have already mentioned the first point, which is the interesting fact that the factory learnt about the arrest from the newspapers. This is a curious point, one that is hard to believe in my opinion because of Ahmet’s history at the factory. That history involves prior instances of confrontation with the management as well his career as a trade unionist and a workers’ representative. Apparently, neither the police forces nor the court bothered to inform the factory about the incident. Thus, although it was probable that his arrest was known to the management, the letter merely rephrases the newspaper report. The second point concerns the dramatic change in the topic after the reporting of the arrest. According to this letter, Ahmet was laid off due to absenteeism based on a certain article in the Labour Law.

The aforementioned article lists the cases in which the employer has the right to cancel the contract. These cases are divided into two: those which concern health issues and those which do not fit rules pertaining to morality and good faith. Interesting to note here is the fact that absenteeism is listed in the latter group. But even more interesting is the fact that the same group of cases includes imprisonment for more than three days as a sufficient reason for the termination of employment. The question that arises then is why the management chose this clause. The next point in the letter gives a partial answer to that question by closing down any possibility for Ahmet to object the decision. It is my contention that by not referring to the arrest, the management behaved strategically. Nevertheless, the chief of staff carefully reminds the manager of the criminal aspect of the case in the last sentence of the letter. The manager’s concise reply came six days later:
30.06.1955

Your petition dated 24.06.1955 has been examined. Your recruitment is not possible because as of now we do not need any weavers.

It has been deemed suitable that you are excused for not informing our enterprise about your absenteeism because of the psychological effects of your imprisonment and that you are given reparation and discharged from the enterprise from 27.06.1955 on.

You will be paid this money, which was effectuated by clause ç of the 13th article of the Labour Law, upon your application to our cash desk.

The manager

It is most probable that Ahmet never read the previous letter by the chief of staff. The references to the Labour Law and his arrest remained unknown to him. The reason for not recruiting him gets so simplified here that there is no room for dispute. The imprisonment is only indirectly referred to in the second part of the letter. It is this second part that brings a new dimension to the whole case for the tone of the letter changes dramatically from the previous texts written by the management. Above, I have documented cases of absenteeism in which workers carefully notified the management about the reason of their leave. In Chapter 2, I have argued that some of these reasons were false statements which were used by workers to keep the factory gate open in case they returned. These examples date from the 1940s. Thus, it could be assumed that by 1955 this practice of notification was fully established. In this case, the manager’s attitude is even more curious. There are two possibilities to explain this curiosity, one of which relates to the perception of the factory manager as a paternal figure by the workers as I discussed above. The sentence here has both a caring ("psychological effects") and a fatherly ("you are excused") tone. Moreover, the fact that the excuse is not based on any legal obligation or procedure gives the impression that the decision shows the kindness of the manager himself. A second explanation is more sceptical. The reference to the Labour Law in the final part of the letter is important here for it indicates that in the case of termination of employment contracts, the concerning party must be notified. By putting off the date of discharge, the manager might be trying to avoid law enforcement. The last sentence of the letter raises another question in this regard. The time period between Ahmet’s imprisonment and the date of discharge is slightly over five and a half months. According to the above named clause, workers are paid reparation of fifteen days wage for every full year they worked after the first five years of their employment. In Ahmet’s case, the deferral of the end of the contract does not change the amount of that reparation for it does not
round up his last year of employment. Thus, there is no financial gain for Ahmet in this arrangement.

Neither the file nor the interview informs us about what happened in the following years. As I noted above, Ahmet narrates the post-DP years as a story of losses pertaining to his career as a worker. The situation did not improve even after many years as we see in the following petition he wrote on 3 September 1967:

To the Management of Bakırköy Cloth Factory of Sümerbank Cotton Textiles Enterprise,
I worked at the weavery of your enterprise as a weaver for long years. In 1955, I was arrested by the Istanbul prosecution office because of a speech and proposals I made at a meeting of a trade union to which I was enrolled. After trial, I acquitted. I have not received any political sentence. Various times I have made written applications to your factory. Your management’s response was either that those fired are not recruited or that there is no vacancy. But now, I have heard that people who received political sentence and [thus] could not enter the factory are back to their jobs, they have been recruited again.
As for me, I am a continuous worker who does not have a political sentence and who has not given any harm to the enterprise I worked at during my entire period of employment. I respectfully request that I am recruited.
An old worker of your enterprise, 4179 Ahmet Cansızoğlu
Note: I have been unemployed for a long time.
Response: We have no vacancy for you. You should go to the Employment Agency.

This petition is the final document in Ahmet’s file. He never had stable employment after Bakırköy.

By Way of Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the early years of the trade union movement in Republican Turkey. Inherent to this analysis is a challenge to the monolithic view of this movement. According to this view, the trade unions were under the total control of the state and thus were not efficient in claiming and furthering workers’ rights. By means of bringing in a perspective from within, I portrayed the early trade union movement as a dynamic period of labour politics which included multiple visions on societal development.

I have argued that in order to explore the ideological underpinnings of the post-1947 unionism, we should pay attention to the 1946 trade union movement. Connecting these two
different moments of trade unionism has an effect that goes beyond a simple correction of the neglect suffered by the latter. It also changes our way of conceptualizing the state-labour relations in this period. Studying the Turkish state’s handling of the labour movement in relation to the content and form of that movement rescues the workers from being seen as passive recipients of labour policies. Besides, analyzing the effects of 1946 trade unionism on 1947 trade unionism shed light on the historical background of the lack of connection between the trade union movement and the political left.

The chapter analysed the stories of two Bakırköy workers representing two different politics. These two stories illustrate different types of insider’s critique of the trade union movement in the late 1940s. They also provide invaluable insights on the learning process of workers. These insights help us to understand how and why a worker decides to join a trade union, what practical and ideological effects this decision has, when and why a worker is unsatisfied with the activities of the trade union and intervenes. These two main stories and the side stories around them exemplify the multiple discursive positions within the trade union movement and the construction of the hegemonic nationalist discourse. The difference between Enver and Ahmet’s stories starts at this point. While Enver formulated his critique within the confines of this hegemonic discourse, Ahmet gradually radicalized politically and formulated his critique in class terms. In other words, for Enver, the problem of the labour movement was not systemic in character; it was rather a problem of which establishment party had the power over the movement. Thus, he expressed his critique mainly in terms of his opposition to the RPP claiming that the solutions to the problems of the trade union were offered by his own political party. Concerning the character of the state-society relations, however, he completely conformed to the dominant paradigm as we saw in his claim that the path of the Turkish worker was drawn by Kemalism. Ahmet, on the other hand, underwent a political transformation in a span of few years by joining the DP, the DWP and then the HP. During this transformation, his critique of the trade union’s inability to address the crucial problems of workers resulted in him taking the matter in his hands by trying to use the trade unionist identity to challenge the authority at the shop-floor. The two stories also differ in terms of the consequences of the dissidence of these two workers. While Enver mainly suffered from social exclusion and continued working at the factory in 1970 when he had to retire due to reaching the age limit, Ahmet not only lost his job but also had to live under police surveillance.