Özgür Gökmen

The State of Labour in Turkey, 1919–1938

The divergence of the labour movement in Turkey from the Western European pattern, particularly in the beginning of the twentieth century is widely acknowledged. The emergent labour movement, vulnerable under economic conditions where commercial agriculture and trade were the most important activities in the 1920s, could not grow to be strong for various reasons: sketchy and limited character of capitalist relations of production; insignificance of the industrial workforce; and repressive and paternalist state policies.[1] Beginning with a review of the insights into the recent history of the labour movement in order to assist in understanding the dynamics of divergent social structures, this paper attempts to draw an outline of the state of labour in Turkey during the interwar period.

Labour History: Basic Premises, Crises, and New Insights

Labour movements, understood as "public projects by wage earners", denote a comprehensive concept of workers' evolutionary or revolutionary organised efforts to change capitalistic societies with the aim of changing for the better their own conditions, i.e. improving the economic, social, political and cultural situation of working class people. Having their roots in the first industrial revolution of the eighteenth century in Great Britain, labour movements entail all kinds of socialist and some non-socialist organisations, such as mutual aid societies, trade unions, political parties, cultural, and certain women's and youth organisations, etc. while basically centred on the working class. As organised activities by wage earners, labour movements comprise "groups of wage earners that attempt to realise certain wishes and demands through methods of action, possibly in a sustained organizational framework, and who may use a broader ideology to justify their actions". Forms of action vary (from saving money to campaigning and striking), as well as the forms of organisation. The latter may be informal and incidental, especially in peripheral countries and the semi-periphery, or when earlier times are taken into consideration. Nonetheless, the following are more formal and typical examples of organisational forms from the history of the labour movements in the European and North American centre: mutual aid associations, consumer and production cooperatives, trade unions, political parties, para-military groups, and cultural organisations.[2]

1 Yüksel Akkaya: Çukurova'da sendikacılık ve işçi eylemleri, 1923–1960, in: Kebikeç 5 (1997), pp. 183–200, here p. 185.

2 L. Olsson: Labor Movements, History of, in: Neil J. Smelser/Paul B. Bates (eds.): International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, vol. XII, Oxford 2001, pp. 8194–8199, here p. 8194; John R. Commons: Labor Movement, in: Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, vol. VIII, New York 1932, pp. 682–696, here p. 682; Marcel van der Linden/Jan Lucassen: Prolegomena for a Global Labour History, Amsterdam 1999, pp. 17–18.

When the experience of the European centre is considered in comparison to the semi-periphery, it is worth mentioning that just after World War I about 50 percent of all workers were organised in a formal way (i.e. in trade unions as a result of the revitalization of the international trade union movement) in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, and Italy, whereas, by and large, in the semi-periphery the seasonal and migratory nature of labour, alongside other rationales, counteracted unionisation. "The labour movement has faced enormous difficulties in the Third World. Probably, activists were treated more brutally there in the twentieth century than their colleagues in Western Europe in the nineteenth century". However, when the centre is considered, the forms of action and organisation have been well-established and have played an important role in the more traditional labour history.[3]

The deficiency of a cohesive content caused by severe fragmentation was central to the crisis in labour history. The crisis itself is generally explained with two major dynamics: First, the global transformation of the political constellation that has caused the gradual fading of the spirit of the 1960s, the collapse of the political systems in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and some other parts of the world. This change has also brought the working class-parties to a critical stage in other parts of the world. Secondly, a long-term shift in standards and values that has been experienced in economically advanced parts of the world. It has been asserted that labour was dislocated from its central status in the social life, and lost its subjective role as the motivating force in the activity of workers.[4] Even when it has been discussed that labour has not lost its vital importance, efforts to renew the definition of labour, or to underline the re-composition of the working class inherently implied the changing character of labour.[5]

Marx's analysis of working-class formation was based on nineteenth century England, and was not essentially concerned with vague and contradictory class categories (self-employment, indentured labour, etc.) or with conflicting and trans-national identities (gender, ethnic identities, etc.).[6] Thus, the majority of labour history's core categories have their roots in the late nineteenth century and "should accordingly be reconsidered", as Marcel van der Linden argues. Even the concept of "working class" itself is the "result of a complex process of social exclusion". While the concept was originally used as a plural to designate a "heterogeneous conglomerate of social groups performing various forms of wage labour", it was redefined in the course of the nineteenth century. The working class became homogenised and identified with the proletariat. Then as a group of wage earners with a relatively high sta-

3 Olsson: Labor Movements, pp. 8197–8198; Van der Linden/Lucassen: Prolegomena, p. 18.

4 Van der Linden/Lucassen: Prolegomena, p. 5. The authors quote Claus Offe's Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformation of Work and Politics, Oxford 1985, pp. 147–148 on the "displacement of work from its status".

5 For examples, see: Antonio Negri: Twenty Theses on Marx: Interpretation of the Class Situation Today, in: Saree Makdisi/Cesare Casarino/Rebecca Karl (eds.): Marxism Beyond Marxism, New York 1996, pp. 149–180; Maurizio Lazzarato: Immaterial Labour, in: Paolo Virno/Michael Hardt (eds.): Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics, Minneapolis 1996, pp. 133–147.

6 Van der Linden/Lucassen: Prolegomena, p. 6.

tus, it was alienated from other groups like "self-employed workers, so-called lumpenproletariat and unfree workers".[7]

Nevertheless, "the new labour history beginning to flourish in the semi-peripheral countries" illustrates that "‚pure' wageworkers are abstractions generated by the classical ‚labour-movement Marxism'". "The ‚authentic' working class is largely a fiction." Structural hybrid forms instead of a solid working class prevail in the semi-periphery.

To begin with, the new proletariat of the Third World consists only to some extent of free wage earners as considered by Marx, i.e. "free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale". In the semi-periphery, the majority of wage earners do not freely dispose of their own labour power.

Secondly, wage labour in the semi-periphery is integrated in households and families whose survival always remains partly dependent on subsistence labour. In many cases the "roles" of various family members are not permanently fixed, but can change rather instantly by other sources of income. Therefore households and families, not individuals, are the best point of departure for socio-historical analyses.

In the third place, the new proletariat does not exist exclusively or even mainly in the industrial sector. The agricultural sphere is more important by comparison. Rapidly advancing proletarianisation in this sphere has created a large stratum of agricultural labourers and share tenants.

The classical proletariat is surrounded by, and blended together with, a variegated semi-proletariat of peddlers, sharecroppers, home workers, prostitutes, self-employed workers, beggars, and scavengers. The boundaries between the different social segments are fluid. This also has an effect on their forms of organisation. The dynamics of social struggles in the semi-periphery requires that the following insights offered by the Third World historians be taken into consideration:

1) The dividing line between wage labour and small entrepreneurship is much more obscure than was originally thought; 2) the border between wage labourers and marginal groups is not nearly as obvious as older theories would have us believe; 3) the concept of free labour is less precise than is usually assumed; 4) the strict differentiation commonly made in advanced countries between urban and rural life must be revised; contrary to what modernisation theories like to portray, the ties of urban migrants to their home villages often do not weaken but strengthen over time most likely due to the lack of social insurance systems.[8]

7 Marcel van der Linden: Globalizing Labour Historiography: The IISH Approach, Amsterdam 2002, p. 7; idem: Working Classes, History of, in: Neil J. Smelser/Paul B. Bates (eds.): International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, vol. XXIV, Oxford 2001, pp. 16579–16583, here pp. 16579–16580.

8 Van der Linden: Globalizing Labour Historiography, pp. 7–8; Van der Linden: Working Classes, pp. 16582–16583.

Labour Historiography in Turkey

Yıldırım Koç classifies the works on the Turkish working class and trade unions under two main groups:[9] The first group consists of studies attributing a historical mission to the working class. These works basically strive to understand the structure and internal dynamics of the labour movements, an aim, which, by and large, has not been accomplished sufficiently.

The first cluster in this group contains some "unprejudiced" scholarly works, of which Oya Baydar's *Türkiye'de işçi sınıfı, doğuşu ve yapısı* (Working class, its emergence and structure in Turkey) (İstanbul: Habora Yayınevi, 1969) is one of the best-known examples. The second edition, *Türkiye işçi sınıfı tarihi* (History of the Turkish working class) (Frankfurt: Infograph, 1982) could only be prepared in exile after a period in which the author had been politically active. Although praising the scholarly merit of this study, Koç points to an important variation in the new edition of this work in order to question its "impartiality" and the problem of myth creation by exaggerating the past:[10]

In the first edition (p. 245), Baydar relates the reaction in opposition to the occupation of İzmir on 15 May 1919 as follows: "In May, in response to the occupation of İzmir, *workers were also involved* in the meetings attended by hundreds of thousands [that were organised] everywhere, particularly in İstanbul." The sources in the second edition remain the same while the narration takes the following form (p. 193): "After the occupation of İzmir in May 1919, *the immensity of the workers* participating in the demonstrations that were organised in various regions and *attended by hundreds of thousands of workers*, is noteworthy even for that period." (Translations and italics are mine in both quotations, ög.)

The second cluster in the first group consists of studies mainly oriented towards throwing the blame on the past, exposing the faults and deficiencies, instead of trying to comprehend developments. For the most part, works commissioned or authored by Türk-İş and Disk, two main trade unions of Turkey, fall into this cluster. Eulogies mostly originating from Soviet sources, or which were written under their influence belong to the last cluster. The USSR Academy of Sciences, *Ekim Devrimi sonrası Türkiye tarihi* (History of Turkey after the October Revolution) (İstanbul: Bilim Yayınları, 1978) can be mentioned as a well-known example of this cluster.

The second group is composed of informative works that are not aimed at or do not contribute to an understanding of the internal dynamics of the working class. These works are mostly histories of trade unions instead of being working class histories. They neglect or at best overlook working class organisations except trade unions. Most of these works are authored without a clear concept of the working class.

According to Koç, most of the Turkish histories of the working class and trade unions are far from grasping the reality since they leave out labourers employed under the status of "civil

9 Yıldırım Koç: Türkiye işçi sınıfı ve sendikacılık hareketi tarihleri, in: Kebikeç 5 (1997), pp. 105–115, here p. 105; Yıldırım Koç: İşçi sınıfı ve sendikacılık tarihleri, in: Türkiye'de işçiler ve sendikalar (Tarihten sayfalar), Ankara 2000, pp. 5–34, here pp. 6–7.

10 Yıldırım Koç: Sınıf gözlüğü: İstanbul sendikaları 1919'da işgale karşı çıktılar mı?, in: Aydınlık, 776 (2 June, 2002).

servants". Histories of trade union movements abound, whereas area studies, local histories, memoirs, histories of professional organisations, and histories regarding organisations other than labour unions are too few.[11] The histories of general working class and trade unions make limited reference to available area studies. Furthermore, the level of dispossession has rarely been examined. The waged, and particularly those employed under the status of "worker", were not totally dispossessed in Turkey until the 1960s. Studies overlooking this fact render working class and trade union histories inadequate.[12] Nevertheless, several works in this field cannot be ignored.[13]

The State of Labour

Unions as a form of labour organisation arrived very late in the Ottoman period; some dated back to the 1880s but most evolved only after the July 1908 Young Turk Revolution.[14] However, they were mostly organised in the regions, which were to lie beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Due to struggles of independence, wars, emigrations and deportations, most of the qualified workers were left outside of Turkey. Workers among the Greeks who were obliged to leave Anatolia constituted an important segment. Between the years 1913 and 1923, Turkey lost approximately four million people , a majority of whom were men between the ages of 18 and 50.

Seen in the light of the continuity of the working class, problems abound during the Ottoman period. "Farmer-workers" or "peasant-workers" in the mines, young women who worked until the age of marriage in the textile industry, seasonal workers in the food industry – especially in tobacco harvesting –, "soldier-workers" in railroad construction and in some military factories caused a constraint in the formation of the working class identity. The above-mentioned groups constituted an important part of the Ottoman working class. This diversity restricted the development of the class-consciousness of the workers. The Republic of Turkey inherited this past. Furthermore, during the first years of the Republic, the size of the labour force required to cultivate the agricultural fields also limited the labour force available to industry. Throughout the period of open economy between 1923 and 1929 the growth in agriculture was twice the industrial growth.[15]

11 The following book is a recent contribution to the field: Erol Kahveci/Nadir Sugur/Theo Nichols (eds.): Work and Occupation in Modern Turkey, London 1996. It includes articles on the internal migration and the marginal sector, the shoe-shine boys of İzmir, small employers and school teachers in Ankara, the car workers of Bursa, the metal workers of Gebze, and the miners of Zonguldak.

12 Yıldırım Koç: Türkiye işçi sınıfı, p. 105; Canan Koç/Yıldırım Koç: Türkiye'de grev ve eylemlere ilişkin kaynakça, in: Kebikeç 5 (1997), pp. 117–124.

13 The following are the most prominent basic reference works: Sosyalist kültür ansiklopedisi, 8 vols., Istanbul, 1979–1980; Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Türkiye ansiklopedisi, 6 vols., Istanbul 1983; Cumhuriyet dönemi Türkiye ansiklopedisi, 10 vols., Istanbul 1985; Sosyalizm ve toplumsal mücadeleler ansiklopedisi, Istanbul 1988–1990; Türkiye sendikacılık ansiklopedisi, 3 vols., Istanbul 1996–1997; Türkiye'de çalışma yaşamı bibliyografyası, Istanbul 2000.

14 Donald Quataert: The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922, Cambridge 2000, p. 181.

15 Erdal Yavuz: The State of the Industrial Workforce, 1923–40, in: Donald Quataert/Erik Jan Zürcher

Besides, being a "worker" was usually considered a secondary means of livelihood alongside agricultural income. Consequently, the worker cycle in the industry was in a state of constant flux. "Peasant-workers" who considered workmanship a temporary profession or a secondary means of livelihood were not transformed into industrial workers until the 1950s. Thus, they generally refrained from organising under the trade unions and from insisting on their rights by means of strikes or similar forms of activism.[16]

A recent study on the labour movements in Turkey reinforces this interpretation.[17] From 1923 onwards, Turkey evolved from a predominantly agrarian economy into one of the most industrialised economies in the Third world. The political system moved from mono-party rule to the multiparty system and became with time more inclusive. Democratic and labour rights were broadened, albeit with periodic interruptions and reversals. The working class grew and the labour movement emerged during industrialisation and the development of political institutions.

In the classical model often associated with Western Europe, the creation of a wage earning class separated from the means of production leads to the growth of class-consciousness that consequently guides the working class in its struggle to acquire political and economic rights. However, the developments in Turkey diverge from this "classical model of proletarianisation and labour activism". The authors argue that this model is not the norm from which the Turkish experience differs. On the contrary, the classical model may only be a special case, which serves for the authors as a theoretical point of reference and an entry point to the analysis of labour and labour movements in Turkey.[18]

They explain the divergence from the classical model of the creation of the working class and labour activism with the characteristics of industrialisation strategies in Turkey together with the particulars of Turkish history: An inward-oriented, import-substitution industrialisation strategy creating limited demand for an industrial wage-labour force, and the persistence of smallholder agriculture resulting in a limited drive for proletarianisation and the growth of working-class unity and consciousness.[19]

The main argument in this study is that the labour movement in Republican Turkey did not play an active role in the political and economic transformations of the country. Political and legal changes, which introduced labour rights, had nothing to do with the workers' struggles. Workers became a considerable force only by the 1970s, waging battles in defence of already-acquired rights, and still they were on the defensive, not pushing for new rights. It was the paternalist state motivated by several considerations that recognised and broadened

(eds.): Workers and the Working Class in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic 1839–1950, London 1995, pp. 95–125, here p. 97.

16 Yüksel Akkaya: Işçi sınıfı ve sendikacılık – 1 (Kısa özet), in: Praksis 5 (2002), pp. 131–176, here pp. 144–145.

17 Günseli Berik/Cihan Bilginsoy: The Labor Movement in Turkey: Labor Pains, Maturity, Metamorphosis, in: Ellis Jay Golberg (ed.): The Social History of Labor in the Middle East, Boulder, CO 1996, pp. 37–64.

18 Berik/Bilginsoy: Labor Movement in Turkey, p. 60, fn. 1.

19 Berik/Bilginsoy: Labor Movement in Turkey, pp. 37–8.

workers' rights even in the absence of a strong labour movement. For instance, the authors attribute the recognition of a limited number of workers' rights in the late 1940s and the1950s to the ruling parties' desire to tame and harness labour and control it as an electoral bloc. They also refer to the "central and emotional debate within the Turkish left" whether workers' rights were given from above by the government or won through hard-fought struggles.[20]

The contradictory argument from the left rejects the thesis that the labour rights' were granted from above. M. Şehmus Güzel points to the fact that the idea of labour rights, being bestowed from above is widespread among both the "nationalist-conservative" and the "social democratic-democratic leftist" circles. In their argumentation, the first group is motivated by "historical and ideological" causes whereas in the case of the second group, "their specific position" is decisive.[21] Widespread reception of the "granted rights thesis" among the second group is due to a 1963 speech by Bülent Ecevit, one of the leaders of this group, when he was the Minister of Labour in the Republican People's Party (RPP) government. Addressing the issue of trade unions on the occasion of the ratification of the new Trade Unions Law, Ecevit asserted that class contradiction was non-existent due to the non-existence of classes in Turkey – a view in line with the RPP's populist rhetoric of a "non-privileged, classless, homogenous society",[22] which was the official ideology in Turkey from the early 1920s to 1945. According to Güzel, some of the other reasons behind the prevalence of the "granted rights thesis" are as follows: Disregard of the working class and its struggles before 1947, the conscious silence practiced by the bourgeois press with respect to the struggles of the working class, and the production and reproduction of knowledge by the scholarly institutions along the lines of the dominant viewpoint.[23]

To reach the conclusion that social rights were not bestowed from above but were earned by the struggles of the working class entails a proper documentation of the continuity of working class movements. However, studies based on primary sources are quite limited, particularly for the period preceding 1960. Therefore, under the influence of the above-mentioned factors, ideas could have been formulated to correspond to the prevailing outlook. Works were published that claimed that no strikes had been organised in Turkey before 1960.[24] In the end, it was even alleged that labour movements were non-existent in Turkey,

20 Berik/Bilginsoy: Labor Movement in Turkey, pp. 38, 57–8.

21 M. Şehmus Güzel: Türkiye işçi sınıfı tarihine tasıl bakılmalı?, in: Osmanlı'dan Cumhuriyet'e: Problemler, araştırmalar, tartışmalar, Istanbul 1998, pp. 396–421.

22 The original saying, *imtiyazsız, sınıfsız kaynaşmış bir milletiz*, first appeared as one of "the mottos expressing the eminent concepts of the Turkish independence and revolution" in the brief historical account published for the tenth anniversary of the Republic. Türk istiklâlinin ve inkılâbının yüksek mevhumlarını ifade eden kısa sözler, in: C.H.F. 10 Yıl Rehberi, Ankara 1933, pp. 205–208, here p. 207.

23 Güzel: Türkiye işçi sınıfı tarihine, p. 409.

24 For an account of strikes organised before the Republican period, see: Yavuz Selim Karakışla: Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda 1908 grevleri, in: Toplum ve Bilim, 78 (1998), pp. 187–209; M. Şehmus Güzel: Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e işçi hareketi ve grevler, in: Tanzimat'tan Cumhuriyet'e Türkiye ansiklopedisi, 3, Istanbul 1985, pp. 803–828.

and that the sole idea of them was "unfamiliar" or "foreign" to Turkey.[25] The continuity of this claim with the early RPP's social perception, "we resemble ourselves", is unambiguous.[26]

A Framework of the Dominant Ideology

After the foundation of the Republic, as the new regime gained strength, the principle of populism developed into the basic criterion determining the RPP government's stand on the working class. Pronounced for the first time in 1918 by Ziya Gökalp, populism was employed in Mustafa Kemal's populist programme (*Halkçılık Programı*) as early as 1920. Although it took more than a decade for populism to appear as one of the six principles in the 1931 RPP programme, the nucleus of the principle of populism was prevalent during the 1920s. Under the common principles of the People's Party Regulations ratified on 9 September 1923, the second article was almost identical to Gökalp's formulation, which suggested that "in Turkey no one class can monopolize the title of people".[27]

From the RPP's viewpoint, the concept of people was not restricted to any class. Those persons who did not claim any privileges and generally accepted absolute equality in the eyes of the law were of the people. Populists were those who did not acknowledge privileges of any family, class, community, and person, and who recognised the absolute freedom and independence to enact laws.[28]

The principle of populism might have been devised as an adhesive element of a nationalist discourse against the Ottoman social and political structure from which the new regime attempted to break off. It might have been devised solely as a tool against socialist/communist movements to suppress class-based organisations as well. In any case, it has become the guideline for the Kemalists in their search for national solidarity and in their denial of the class struggle during the mono-party regime. The new Republic was a "populist entity and she was totally against the doctrines creating class struggle".[29] She was hostile toward workers' movements and associations, and never aspired to legitimise working-class ideology and its political consequences.[30] Almost all laws pertaining to the social sphere in Turkey during the mono-party period have borne traces of this populist ideology. Turkey was argued to be a "classless nation", and the RPP government assumed the task of sublime and ultimate regulator of social, economic, and political life.[31]

25 Güzel: Türkiye işçi sınıfı tarihine, pp. 408–410.

26 Often referred to to indicate the "uniqueness of the Turkish revolution, and thereof the social life in Turkey", the original saying, *Biz, bize benzeriz*, is attributed to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. See Şeref Aykut: Kamâlizm: C.H. Partisi programının izahı, Istanbul 1936, p. 11; Recep Peker'in inkılab dersleri notları, Ankara 1936, p. 27.

27 Taha Parla: The Social and Political Thought of Ziya Gökalp, Leiden 1985, pp. 80, 142.

28 Quoted in Zafer Toprak (ed.): Bir yurttaş yaratmak: Muasır bir medeniyet için seferberlik bilgileri, Istanbul 1998, p. 21.

29 Sınıf ihtilali karşısında bizim vaziyetimiz, in: Recep Peker'in inkılab dersleri notları, pp. 53–54.

30 Yavuz: Industrial Workforce, p. 102.

31 Fuat M. Andiç: Development of Labor Legislation in Turkey, in: Middle Eastern Affairs, 8: 11 (1957),

An Outline of the Interwar Period

The years between 1919 and 1923 witnessed "politically conscious" and organised workers' movements against foreign companies and foreigners in general. The fact that the strikes in the cities under occupation were mainly in the transportation sector is considered as a sign of the workers' consciousness to resort to strikes against the occupation.[32] During these years, the economically dominant classes were divided over whether to support the nationalists or the Allied Forces that occupied the Ottoman Empire. Various labour organisations were formed to organise workers politically and to start a union movement. However, these organisations were only associations established spontaneously as a reaction to specific events. They were far from being trade unions and had no financial means.

The Socialist Party of Workers and Peasants (*İşçi Çiftçi Sosyalist Fırkası*) was formed in 1919, and the İstanbul workers participating in meetings protesting the occupation of Western Anatolia held numerous strikes. In the early 1920s, there were strikes, protests, and demonstrations in İstanbul and other parts of the country that supported the war for the independence of Anatolia.[33] Türkkaya Ataöv regards the ratification of the Act on the Rights of the Ereğli Coal Mine Workers on 10 September 1921, prohibiting drudgery and providing for an eight-hour working day and social security, as a proof of the national government's sympathy toward the labour cause.[34] Nevertheless, given the small size of the working class, these forms of action never gained enough momentum to turn into a mass movement. Still, some of these organisations continued their activities after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.[35]

In 1922, the İstanbul General Workers' Association (*İstanbul Umum Amele Birliği*) was founded. It evolved into the General Workers' Association of Turkey the following year, which sought to work within the restrictions imposed by the Ankara government. In 1923, there were also two labour organisations with Marxist tendencies in İstanbul: International Union of Workers *(Beynelmilel İşçiler İttihadı)*, and Workers' Association of Turkey *(Türkiye İşçi Derneği)*, both having connections with the Soviet Union. Several more associations and local organisations existed in İstanbul and in other cities.[36]

The industry Turkey inherited from her predecessor was weak, and consequently, the industrial labour force was almost insignificant. The main lines of the industrial policy were drawn by the İzmir Economic Congress in 1923. It is generally acknowledged as an impor-

pp. 366–372, here p. 367.

32 Kurthan Fişek: Anayasal dönüm noktaları ve Türkiye'de işçi hareketleri, in: Kanun-u Esasînin 100. yılı sempozyumu: Türk parlamentoculuğunun ilk yüzyılı, 1876–1976, Ankara 1978, pp. 405–431, here p. 406.

33 For a list of these strikes, see Table I.

34 Türkkaya Ataöv: The Place of the Worker in the Turkish Society and Politics, in: Turkish Yearbook of International Relations 1967, 8 (1970), pp. 87–147, here p. 88.

35 Tüm İktisatçılar Birliği: Türkiye işçi sınıfı ve mücadeleleri tarihi, Ankara 1976, pp. 50, 70; Berik/Bilginsoy: Labor Movement in Turkey, p. 40.

36 Yavuz: Industrial Workforce, p. 102.

tant event for the working class, not only because the workers were also represented, albeit in small numbers among the total 1135 delegates, but also because of the fact that it was the first time that they came together to converse openly on common problems. They presented to the Congress some thirty proposals among which were an eight-hour working day, a paid day off, annual vacations, social insurance, better health conditions, a workers' hospital, and prohibition of child labour.

The importance of the formal recognition of the working class as one of the social groups in the Congress is widely admitted. Workers were invited alongside farmers, merchants, and industrialists as a social and a professional group (*mesleki zümre*).[37] However, the government appointed the workers' delegates. The delegation of the workers and industrialists, which attended the Congress were by and large chosen from official persons, bureaucrats and members of parliament. And those representing the İstanbul workers were members of the İstanbul General Workers' Association that was established by the National Turkish Commercial Association (*Millî Türk Ticaret Birliği*) with the aim of stultifying socialist movements and organisations existing at the time. According to a merchant representative, Ahmet Hamdi Başar, the Workers' Association was nothing more than the puppet organisation of the merchants.[38] The Association's members adopted the same principles as their protectors and attended the Congress to defend them.

Nevertheless, due to the propaganda of the socialist *Aydınlık* group, most of the workers' demands were accepted in the Congress. The final Congress document adopted some of the proposals of the workers' group and acknowledged the right to form unions and determined the necessity of revising the 1909 Strike Law. The eight-hour working day, paid vacation, and the adoption of May 1st as the Workers' Day were among the other proposals adopted by the Congress. Social stability was required; the young government was not that strong, thus the democratic atmosphere was relatively favourable. However, despite the conciliatory atmosphere of the Congress, state policies were hostile to the labour movement in subsequent years. Most of the adopted proposals were not enacted into law.[39]

The İzmir Congress basically took decisions that in the long run helped to create an economy principally resting on private enterprise. The working class was formally recognised as one of the social groups, and, encouraged by such tolerance, some attempted to organise a nation-wide union in which there was immediate workers' interest mainly from İzmir, Adapazarı and Zonguldak. However, the decision of the İstanbul tobacco workers to strike on 1 May 1923 and the circulation of printed labour leaflets and posters led to arrests in the same month. The suspects were acquitted on the first day of their hearing, but the unionisa-

37 Kemal Sülker: 100 soruda Türkiye'de işçi hareketleri, Istanbul 1966, pp. 14–15; Ataöv: The Place of the Worker, p. 88; Yüksel Işık: Osmanlı'dan günümüze işçi hareketinin evrimi (1876–1994), Ankara 1995, p. 59.

38 Korkut Boratav: Türk iktisat tarihi, Istanbul 1990, pp. 33–34.

39 Yavuz: Industrial Workforce, pp. 102–103; Işık: Osmanlı'dan günümüze, pp. 56–57; Berik/Bilginsoy: Labor Movement in Turkey, p. 40. For the text of the economic principles of the workers group, see: Gündüz Ökçün: Türkiye İktisat Kongresi, 1923, İzmir: Haberler, belgeler, yorumlar, Ankara 1981, pp. 167–178.

tion movement received a blow. In 1924, the General Workers' Association of Turkey, whose aim was to find conciliatory solutions to labour related conflicts, ceased its activities due to bureaucratic and political obstacles.[40] A group of workers split off from the Association and founded the Workers' Advancement Society (*Amele Teali Cemiyeti*) the same year. It organised a congress of 150 participants representing 14 labour unions with a total of 30,000 members to discuss and formulate demands for a new labour law. Until it was banned in 1928, the Workers' Advancement Society was the only alternative worker organisation, albeit weak and inadequate.[41] At that time, in spite of several liberal provisions in the new Constitution of 1924, prohibitive laws, i.e. the Work Stoppages Act (*Tatil-i Eşgal Kanunu*) of 1908 and the Law of Associations of 1909, were still in force. Moreover, the Law for the Maintenance of Order (*Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu*) of 1925 greatly restricted workers' rights and prohibited the formation of unions and political parties, except the ruling one, and effectively ended trade unionism until 1946. Banning all the "organisations, incitements, attempts and publications that might violate the social order, peace and tranquillity of the country" was the prerequisite of the claim to be a "non-privileged, classless, homogenous society".[42]

The Penal Code of 1926 extended these limitations imposed by the Law for the Maintenance of Order. During these years up to 1945, urban real wages fell by 30 percent, albeit with significant short-term variations. Especially in the light of the improvement in real wages after 1950, the earlier trend suggests that the 1923–1945 period was a difficult one for the industrial working class – indeed for all labouring classes. In this period the government continued to enact laws and policies to prevent the emergence of a strong labour movement.[43]

Although the 1926 Code of Obligations provided in theory the right to make collective agreements, generally not much beyond minimal social assistance and mutual aid arrangements were achieved for the workers. Turkey became an ILO member in 1932 and ratified the ILO conventions. However, bans on the rights to unionise, bargain collectively, and strike remained in place.[44] 1933 witnessed the amendment to the Penal Code, which proscribed all propaganda on behalf of communism and made it a criminal offence to engage in activities whose aim was to replace the rule of one class by another. Without mentioning the term, all actions that could be called strikes were clearly defined and the terms of confinement were given. The Labour Law of 1936, concerning manual workers employed in places with ten or more people, was designed "to erase all the possible mistaken ways that would en-

40 Yıldırım Koç: Türkiye'de sınıf mücadelesinin gelişimi – 1 (1923–1973), Ankara 1979, p. 47.

41 Yıldırım Koç: Türkiye'de sınıf mücadelesinin gelişimi, pp. 48–49; Lütfi Erişçi: Türkiye'de işçi sınıfının tarihi (Özet olarak), Ankara 1997 [1951], p. 18; Tüm İktisatçılar Birliği: Türkiye işçi sınıfı ve mücadeleleri tarihi, pp. 71–75; Yavuz: Industrial Workforce, pp. 103–104. In *Yol* (Istanbul 1978), pp. 162–164, Hikmet Kıvılcımlı mentions that the Society was "not a mass organisation but a café where the aristocratic workers frequented".

42 Fişek: Anayasal dönüm noktaları, p. 406.

43 Ataöv: The Place of the Worker, pp. 89–90; Berik/Bilginsoy: Labor Movement in Turkey, pp. 39–40; Yavuz: Industrial Workforce, p. 90.

44 Berik/Bilginsoy: Labor Movement in Turkey, p. 60 fn. 11.

able to give birth and shelter to class consciousness".[45] It bore a strong resemblance to the famous 1934 report of the American experts that recommended the organisation of labour under government guidance to appease the spirit of conflict causing waste.[46] The right to organise unions, make collective agreements, and call for strikes was not interpreted as the result of the conflict between social classes but rather its cause; and separate rights for the working people seemed incompatible with the populist programme of the RPP government. Finally, in 1938 the founding of all kinds of organisations based on class was prohibited with the adoption of the new Law of Associations, which forbade "the formation of associations whose aims and purposes depend on principle or name of families, communities, races, genders and classes".

Even in these repressive circumstances, strikes[47] and other forms of labour actions took place, such as the protest petition bearing 12,000 signatures of Soma-Bandırma railroad workers in 1926, the Balya mineworkers' "hunger march" to Balıkesir in 1934, or the May Day celebrations in 1938.[48] The most recent study on the labour movements in Turkey counts 145 strikes for the period 1923–1960 (97 strikes between 1923–1938)[49], whereas a previous one[50] mentions only 43 strikes for the same years.[51]

Every new study taking into account the new insights summarised in the beginning of this paper will not only unearth more strikes and other forms of labour activism, but also will contribute to the study of social history by shedding light on the specificities of class relations in Turkey.

45 Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi zabıt ceridesi, session 3, vol. 12, p. 184.

46 Bülent Varlık: ABD uzmanlarının Türkiye'de çalışma yaşamına ilişkin görüş ve önerileri (1934), in: Mülkiyeliler Birliği Dergisi, 150 (1992), pp. 42–47, here p. 45.

47 For a brief account of strikes between 1923–1938 see Table II.

48 Esat Âdil Müstecabi: İşçi sınıfına pey sürenler, in: Gerçek, 7 (5 April, 1950), pp. 1, 4; Yavuz: Industrial Workforce, pp. 104–105.

49 Akkaya: Işçi sınıfı ve sendikacılık, p. 167.

50 Şehmus Güzel: Türkiye'de işçi hareketi (1908–1984), Istanbul 1996, pp. 171–176.

51 For the interwar period, Radmir Platonovich Korniyenko's *The Labor Movement in Turkey (1918–1963)*, Washington 1967, is the best-known study on the labour movement in Turkey. [Translation of: Radmir Platonovich Korniyenko, Institute of the Peoples of Asia, The USSR Academy of Sciences, Rabocheye dvizheniye v Turtsii, 1918–1963, Moscow 1965.] A chapter of this book was published in Turkish in the journal *Sosyalist parti için teori-pratik birliği* in 1971. The journal also announced the publication of a full translation in book format. However, in the aftermath of the 12 March 1971 coup d'etat, *Sosyalist parti için teori-pratik birliği* became defunct after its fourth issue. A Turkish translation of Korniyenko's book never came out. For a detailed account of the Turkish labour movement during the interwar period, see: Chapter II: The Labor Movement in the Turkish Republic Prior to World War II (1923–1939), pp. 44–83. The following is also noteworthy for it is one of the first studies published: Hikmet Kıvılcım: Türkiye işçi sınıfının sosyal varlığı (Birinci kitap). Sayı, topoğrafya, kadın ve çocuk [Social existence of the Turkish working class (Book one). Size, topography, women and children], Istanbul 1935.

Table I: Strikes in Turkey, 1919–1923

Year	Strike
1919	İstanbul tobacco workers (18 February) İstanbul tram workers (10 May) Hisar Quay porters (13 July) İstanbul Municipality cleaning workers (13 July) Kasımpaşa dockyard workers (mid-October) İstanbul dockyard porters (30 October) Adana printing house workers
1920	Kazlıçeşme leather workers (April) Greek and French newspaper compositors (7 April) Subway [*Beyoğlu Tünel*] workers (23 April) Kasımpaşa dockyard workers (April) İstanbul dockyard porters (May) İstanbul tram workers (10–16 May) Black Coal Association workers (24 July) Oriental Railways Company workers, İstanbul & Edirne (13 October)
1921	İstanbul Electric Company workers (3 February) Zeytinburnu metal factory workers (July) İstanbul tram workers (20 September & 1–2 October) Oriental Railway Company workers, Çatalca & Edirne (9 October)
1922	İstanbul tram workers (26 January–8 February) İstanbul Municipality cleaning workers (8 February)
1923	Bomonti Brewery workers (March & July-August) Zonguldak coal miners (14 July) İzmir fig-pickers (August) İzmir-Aydın Railway Company workers (2 September) İstanbul printing house workers (6–20 September) İstanbul tram workers (October) Oriental Railways Company workers, İstanbul & Edirne (19–28 November)

Sources: M. Şehmus Güzel, *Türkiye'de işçi hareketi (1908–1984)* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1996), pp. 111–12, 171; Tüm İktisatçılar Birliği, *Türkiye işçi sınıfı ve mücadeleleri tarihi* (Ankara: Tüm İktisatçılar Birliği Yayınları, 1976), pp. 56–60; Kurthan Fişek, *Türkiye'de kapitalizmin gelişmesi ve işçi sınıfı* (Ankara: Doğan Yayınevi, 1969), p. 55; Oya Sencer, *Türkiye'de işçi sınıfı, doğuşu ve yapısı* (İstanbul: Habora Yayınevi, 1969), pp. 244–264.

Table II: Strikes in Turkey, 1923–1938

Years	Food	Trans-portation	Mining	Textile	Press	Commu-nications	Ware-house	Metal	Others	Total
1923	4	4	3	3	1		2		1	18
1924	3	4		1		1		2		11
1925	3	2	1			3			1	10
1926		2					1			3
1927	2	4					1			7
1928	1	3		1				2		7
1929	2	2			1		2			7
1930	2						2			4
1931	3			1	1		1			6
1932	3	1		1						5
1933		1								1
1934			1	1						2
1935	2	1		2			1			6
1936	2			4					1	7
1938		1					2			3

Sources: Yüksel Akkaya, "Türkiye'de işçi sınıfı ve sendikacılık – 1 (Kısa özet)", *Praksis*, 5 (2002), p. 173; Esat Âdil Müstecabi, "İşçi sınıfına pey sürenler", *Gerçek*, 7 (5 April 1950), pp. 1–4.