

TURKEY IN THE
TWENTIETH CENTURY

LA TURQUIE AU
VINGTIÈME SIÈCLE

In memory of Prof. H.R. Roemer,
who was devoted to the idea of
Fundamenta up to the end of his life.

À la mémoire du Prof. H.R. Roemer,
qui jusqu'à la fin de sa vie est resté
fidèle à l'idée de Fundamenta.

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La Turquie au vingtième siècle

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The development of the working class in Turkey in the 20th century

YILDIRIM KOÇ

Emergence of the working class

There was wage-labor in the Ottoman Empire even during the 15th-16th centuries. In the construction of the Süleymaniye Mosque complex in the 1550-1557 period, 1.5 million work-days were worked by free wage-earners, in addition to 1.1 million work-days worked by 'acemi oğlanları' (newly recruited soldiers) and 140 thousand work-days by slaves Barkan 1972, 104, 105, 161). A strike of the construction workers in 1587 for wage increases is known (REFİK 1935, 73). One can even consider the uprisings of the janissaries for wage increases from 1444 onwards as a form of economic struggle of wage earners (KOÇ 1992, 20-35). But all these were sporadic phenomena, and we cannot speak of a working class movement and struggle until the late 19th and the 20th centuries. The wage-earners in the Ottoman Empire were mainly concentrated in construction, mining, agriculture and in various sectors of government industrial and administrative activity. Until the 19th century, had in a relatively privileged status, compared with the peasantry, resembling, to a certain extent, the contemporary labor aristocracy.

Most of the Ottoman guild system disintegrated under the competition of European products. Some of the workplaces managed to survive European competition and adapted to the new conditions. In the 19th century, the majority of the artisans became either unemployed, or returned to the land, which was plentiful. Thus, the 20th century did not inherit the seeds of trade unions from the guild system in the form of journeymen's fraternities. In the absence of a well-developed indigenous industry, the majority of the apprentices, journeymen and some of the masters of the guilds did not turn into an industrial working class.

At the beginning of the 20th century, there were neither large masses of direct producers deprived of land proprietorship, their means of production ('expropriated'), nor a powerful industrial capital ready and willing to exploit this free labor-power. Industrialization was mainly concentrated in Salonica and İstanbul (QUATAERT 1995). There was scarcity of labor, wage-labor and skilled wage-labor; there was plenty of land almost free; and capital preferred to reap high rates of profit through trade, usury and government securities.

The first known strikes of modern wage-earners in the 19th century were of *Ereğli Coal Mine* workers in 1863 (ISSAWI 1980, 50-51) and telegraph workers of İstanbul in February 1872 (SENCER 1969, 133). Although there is reference to strikes in the *Police Regulation* of 1845, the first explicit prohibition of strikes was in the *Regulation for Railways* in 1867 (KOÇ 1996b, 14-15).

The first known organization of workers with an economic-political aim was the *Ottoman Workers' Association* (*Amele-i Osmani Cemiyeti* or *Osmanlı Amele*

Cemiyeti) of 1894-1895, of which we know very little. This illegal organization was soon discovered by the security forces and liquidated.

Early 20th century

At the beginning of the 20th century, the working class in the Ottoman Empire was very weak in many respects, quantitatively and qualitatively.

The number of wage and salary earners was small; there was plenty of available land in relation to a small population and, thus, many of the wage- and salary-earners were not totally expropriated from their means of production, and the wars of national liberation waged against the Ottoman Empire during a period of its disintegration divided it, so that, in general, the workers of each ethnic group preferred to align themselves with their own bourgeoisie.

Until 1908, the reactions of the workers were mainly individualistic and unorganized, not leading to a working class movement. Machine-breaking was also a very exceptional practice,¹ since there was no modern industry replacing the artisanal activity and since there was plenty of land easily accessible.

1908 was a turning point in the political and social history of Turkey. It was a bourgeois democratic revolution without the active participation of the large masses of people. The uprising of the *Unity and Progress Party* (*İttihat ve Terakki Fırkası*) acted as a detonator and unleashed a wave of strikes, when any risk of reprisals from the government there was no question (KARAKIŞLA 1995). There was no working class to wage a struggle for democracy against the autocracy of Abdülhamit II. Although there were in the leading echelons of this Party many salary-earners, they acted not as part of the struggle of the working class, but as individuals in a party with a bourgeois democratic program. However, as in all cases when a crack within the ruling classes arises, the labor movement emerged. Quite differently from its counterparts in the industrialized countries, even this movement was not totally spontaneous. The socialists preceded the working class. The 1905 Russian Revolution had its impact and repercussions also in the Ottoman Empire, and the 1908 Revolution was followed by the socialists trying to organize and mobilize a nascent labor movement. New trade unions were created. Sometimes strikes preceded organization; sometimes organization preceded strikes. There was no clear-cut division of labor between trade unions and socialist parties. Trade-union activity was mainly concentrated in Salonica, İstanbul and Zonguldak. Jews, Armenians and Greeks were especially active in trade union and socialist activity. The *Workers' Federation of Salonica*, comprising mainly Jewish workers, was a successful initiative (DUMONT 1994).

However, this first spring of the labor movement was short-lived. The new Government, aware of the potential of the labor movement, prohibited in the public utilities the organization of trade unions and stipulated a stage of compulsory mediation before strikes. There was no regulation of industrial relations in the

¹ For a view on the contrary, see GÜZEL (1990).

other sectors of the economy. However, the sanctions of this Act, which was in force until 1936, were relatively mild.

According to the censuses of industry carried out in the major cities of the Ottoman Empire (excluding agriculture, mining, railways, public utilities, construction and other services) in 1913 and 1915 in 264 enterprises employing at least 10 employees, there were 17 thousand employees in 1913 and 14 thousand in 1915. Only 15 percent of the employees were Moslems; 60 percent were Greeks, 15 percent Armenians and 10 percent Jews (SIS 1973, 143, 145).

Vedat ELDEM estimates that the total numbers of employees not covered by these censuses of industry were 27.6 thousand in 1913 and 24.7 thousand in 1915, adding up to 44.0 thousand and 38.8 thousand in 1913 and 1915, respectively (ELDEM 1970, 124-125).² The workers employed in mining, construction and services were either semi-expropriated peasants or were scattered into very small workplaces.

From 1913 onwards, all trade union activity was suspended. The *Unity and Progress Party* liquidated all independent trade union activity and tried to take under its own control any organization of the working people. Since there was no strong spontaneous movement of the working class, there was no important trade union activity and labor movement in the 1913-1919 period.

During the *First World War*, the public servants lost about 60-80 percent of their purchasing power. Due to the severe labor shortage, the workers could preserve their gains; their loss of purchasing power during the War was about 20-30 percent (ELDEM 1994, 54, 148).

The *First World War* cost the Ottoman Empire about 1.5 - 2.5 million lives. In addition to these, 764 thousand had been wounded (ELDEM 1994, 132).³ This loss and the loss of the Greek and Armenian populations during *WW I* and following the *Lausanne Treaty* of 1923 had a very adverse impact on the development of the working-class movement in two ways. The expropriation process was reversed; many workers could and did acquire land and other property from those who died or left. The lack of skilled manpower and the deficiency of wage-labor prevented the fall of real wages, the wage- and salary-earners were in a relatively better position compared with the peasantry.

The 1919-1923 period is outstanding for its lively trade union activity. There was, in this period, again a weakening of the established regime due to internal strife. The Ottoman Empire had collapsed. There was no powerful state apparatus to contain the discontent of the workers. The occupying powers had internal

² ELDEM (1970), pp. 124-125. The total population of the Ottoman Empire in 1914 was estimated as 18.5 million (15,044,846 Moslems; 1,792,206 Greeks; 1,294,831 Armenians; 187,073 Jews; 14,908 Bulgarians and 186,152 of other ethnic origins (AKBAYAR 1985, 1242).

³ Yusuf Hikmet BAYUR estimates the human cost of WWI for the Ottoman Empire as follows: Killed in combat: 50,000; wounded in combat and died later: 35,000; dead due to diseases: 240,000; seriously wounded: 400,000; sick, deserters, lost: 1,565,000. 800,000 Armenians and 200,000 Greeks lost their lives during forced migration or while serving under forced labour (BAYUR, 1983, vol. 3, p. 787). Ahmet Bedevi KURAN's estimates concerning the human loss in the 1908-1918 period are 550,000 dead, 891,364 disabled, 103,731 lost, 2,167,841 wounded, 129,644 captives (KURAN 1959, 772).

conflicts which the labor movement could benefit from. The *War of Independence* had started, further weakening the Ottoman Sultan. The forces of national liberation had support from the workers in İstanbul. The remnants of the *Unity and Progress Party* and the supporters of the war of national liberation were active in various demonstrations and strikes.

The *1917 Russian Revolution* had also an impact in Turkey. Socialists, communists and anarchists competed for the sympathy of an emerging, spontaneous, working class movement. But this spontaneous movement was very weak indeed and lacked a tradition of organization and struggle. Thus, it was prone to outside control. Socialists, communists, anarchists, the forces of national liberation and the remnants of the *Unity and Progress Party* on one side, governments on another side and employers on yet another side tried to organize and control the workers, who were generally the first generation of wage-earners and were not totally expropriated from their means of production.

Although there were attempts to form organizations comprising workers of different ethnic origins, these were not successful. Cooperation of Anatolian Armenians with the Russians and the French during the *First World War* and occupation of western Anatolia by Greece in 1919 and the active cooperation of indigenous Greeks of Anatolia with the occupying forces led to a situation in which national consciousness predominated over nascent class consciousness.

In 1919, the *International Labor Organization (ILO)* was established. Its establishment was based on the *Versailles Treaty*; but the same section existed also in the *Sèvres Treaty*. Since the occupation powers were the founders of the *ILO*, there was an air of freedom for the labor movement in İstanbul.

In Anatolia a war of life or death was being waged. There were only a limited number of workplaces in the areas under the control of the Ankara Government.

The number of workers employed was accordingly very small. In Anatolia, all means were channeled into national liberation. National sentiments dominated over class interests. There were socialists and communists in Anatolia, with sympathy for the *Russian Revolution*. However, they could not find a 'working class for itself' to unite and direct towards socialism.

In İstanbul, some workers participated actively in the war of national liberation as individuals. Associations established by the *Unity and Progress Party*, directly or indirectly, were involved in the support for the war of national liberation; but these associations were not independent, genuine or bona fide organizations of the working class.

During the 1911-1922 period, there was a division within the ranks of the working class, between blue- and white-collar workers. White-collar workers employed in the private sector benefited from the scarcity of educated labor-power and kept away from trade-union activity or struggle. White-collar workers employed in the public sector (public servants or civil servants) suffered low salaries, but held credited posts. However, they did not consider themselves part of the working class and pursued a bourgeois democratic program at the most.

In the 1919-1922 period, the workers in the occupied capital of the Ottoman Empire enjoyed de facto extensive trade-union rights and freedoms. Many trade

unions were formed. Some of them were under the direction and control of the socialists and communists; some were under employers' control. The *Socialist Party of Turkey* (*Türkiye Sosyalist Fırkası*) under the leadership of Hüseyin Hilmi acted both as a trade union and a socialist party. The *International Union of Workers* (*Beynelmilel İşçiler İttihadı*) was a multi-ethnic organization affiliated with the Profintern and in theory tried to pursue a line resembling the *Industrial Workers of the World* in the United States of America. The İstanbul section of the *Communist Party of Turkey*, established in Baku on 9 September 1920, worked under the name of the *Workers' and Peasants' Socialist Party of Turkey* (*Türkiye İşçi ve Çiftçi Sosyalist Fırkası*) and organized some trade-union activity. May Day was celebrated with enthusiasm. All this activity was the reflection and result of a working-class movement under the influence of various organizations external to it. The balance of forces and the division within the ranks of the ruling classes facilitated and even promoted actions of workers.⁴ Socialists and communists, in the wake of the international revolutionary tide and with the hope of contributing to the world revolution under the leadership of the Comintern endeavored to achieve the impossible.

The *Ankara Government*, in 1921, enacted two laws to improve the working conditions of coal-miners in the Ereğli Coal Basin. Poorly implemented, these laws were the messages of the Ankara Government to workers, although their scope was limited to workers employed by foreign mining companies.

Early republican period (1923-1945)

The *War of National Liberation* against the occupation powers and the Ottoman Empire ended with victory and the Republic of Turkey was established in 1923. A new and more formidable task of creating a modern nation and state on the principles of contemporary civilization awaited Mustafa Kemal and his friends.

The Republic of Turkey started with a relatively small population, with depleted human and material resources due to wars in the 1911-1922 period. There was plenty of land, but skilled labor or labor of any kind was scarce. The migration caused by ethnic rivalries and the exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece under the *Lausanne Treaty* deprived the Republic of Turkey of both skilled labor-power and much of the accumulated experience in trade-union organization and struggle of the 1908-1922 period.

1923-1925 was a period of transition for the new regime. The fundamentalist and Kurdish nationalist uprising of Şeyh Sait, with the support of the British, provided the necessary pretext to take the measures envisaged. The *Republican People's Party* strengthened its power and embarked on a policy of cutting ties

⁴ The *Socialist Party of Turkey* supported the strike of the tramway workers in 1920, allegedly by funds received from the British occupation forces, which was trying to weaken the *French Tramway Company* (TUNÇAY 1978, 79, 80, 82). The nationalist forces and its supporters in İstanbul supported workers' organisations and actions, which they believed would be an ally. The cooperation with the Soviet Union led to tolerance for the activities of the socialist and communist groups, so long as they were not powerful enough to pose a threat.

with the Ottoman past. Having the occupation forces out of Turkey, the Kemalist leadership concentrated its efforts on breaking with the Ottoman past. Kemalist reforms followed one another.

The Kemalist governments were very dexterous in dealing with the working class. The Government faced a number of dilemmas. The Republic had inherited a religious community (*emmett*), a mosaic of ethnicities. This religious community had to be transformed into a modern nation. Political independence had been won; but preserving it required industrialization. Both processes vital for the Republic required a skilled workforce, devoted to new ideals of modernization. Anything that would obstruct this process had to be annihilated.

The leaders of the *War of National Liberation* had to create their own working class, in addition to creating their own industrial bourgeoisie. They had inherited from the *Unity and Progress Party* the practice of forming and directing workers' associations under their own control.

In Europe, when the bourgeoisie launched the struggle against the aristocracy in the late 18th century and the 19th century, there was a relatively developed working class. Trained in these struggles, the working class continued its fight for democracy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

In Turkey, the Kemalists' struggle for modernization was against the remnants of the past, and it was only through liberating the large peasant masses from the influence of the religious organizations that modernization could be achieved. Moreover, there was no working class sufficiently developed to assume and carry on the struggle for democracy. Thus, the Kemalist revolution was not and could not be democratic. But an indispensable element of modernization in Turkey was secularism, the basic weapon against the remnants of the Ottoman Empire and the basis of democracy and trade union rights and freedoms of the post *WW II* period. The working class in Turkey started to take part actively in the struggle for democracy only in the 1960s.

On the other hand, there was the *Comintern*, a world communist party, with a Turkish section. With the transition from the expectation of a world revolution to the basic objective of preserving the Soviet Union ('Socialism in one country'), all the efforts of the *Comintern* and its sections were directed towards this goal and indexed to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. Thus, any workers' association or trade union under communist leadership was considered by the Kemalists to be detrimental to the existence of the Republic of Turkey.

The leaders of the Republic, while concluding a *Treaty of Friendship* with the Soviet Union, did not refrain from arresting the leadership of the *Advancement of Labor Society (Amele Teali Cemiyeti)* in 1925, for the leaflet distributed on the occasion of the May Day and of the *Communist Party of Turkey*.

The Government launched a campaign to establish and modernize the new state. The *Code of Obligations* of 1926 replaced the *Moslem Civil Code (Mecelle)* of the Ottoman Empire, thus creating a capitalist system of labor-power sale and purchase. The dismantling of the superstructure of the Ottoman Empire through numerous legislative and administrative changes and reforms created the necessary preconditions for democracy and basic trade-union and workers rights

and freedoms. General suffrage was also granted as a component of the modernization process, rather than as a result of the struggles of the working class. However, it could not be an effective weapon of the working people until the end of *WW II*.

During the first 2.5 decades of the Republic, the Government pursued a very keen policy of dividing the working class by forming a labor aristocracy. Even the skilled blue-collar workers in the public sector were employed in the status of civil servant and were granted basic rights and a good salary. In 1931, for instance, civil servants constituted only 1.2 percent of the workforce, but received 7.1 percent of the national income (BORATAV 1989, 300; ÖMÜRGÖNSEN 1990). They had job security, social security, paid annual leave, etc (KOÇ 1996c, 153-174). This labor aristocracy severed its ties with large segments of the semi-expropriated working class and enjoyed high social status. In turn, they zealously endeavored to fulfill the national tasks: To transform the religious community (*ümmet*) into a modern nation and to construct the economic infrastructure and later the public industrial establishments.

This situation led to a discussion within the ranks of the *Communist Party of Turkey*, as well. A group from the leadership left the Party in 1927. They advocated that there was no developed working class movement in Turkey and that the Kemalist government could, through its efforts to industrialize the country, create the material basis of socialism. They propagated these views in the *Kadro Magazine* they published. This prototype of the post-*WW II* 'non-capitalist way of development' theory proved to be successful to a considerable extent.

The Government combined its attempts of modernizing the country with a policy of appeasing the wage- and salary-earners by granting them rights which were the fruits of decades of struggle in some other countries. Scarcity of wage-labor was one of the factors. The other factors were the attempt to win over the sympathy of the workers and to inhibit the development of a tradition of acquiring rights through common struggle.

In the 1925-1938 period, the formation and functioning of trade unions on a class basis were legally possible, but were prevented in practice. The *1938 Act on Associations* prohibited 'associations based on class', not specifying trade unions. Thus, under the law, craftsmen's trade unions were not banned. Besides, the sanctions for establishing associations based on class were not so severe as to prevent them. Thus, in the 1925-1938 period, the absence of trade unionism in Turkey cannot be accounted for by the *Act on Associations*. If there had been a strong spontaneous movement of the working class in Turkey in this period, such limited prohibitions would not have prevented trade union organization and activity.⁵

⁵ On 20 July 1994, TÜRK-İŞ staged a general strike to protest the government. Under the current legislation, this was an "illegal strike to protest the executive". The explicit sanction was the liquidation of the Confederation (Act No.2821/58) and dismissal without any compensation of all participants (Act No.1475/17/II and Act No.2822/45) and sentencing of all participants to at least six months in prison (Act No.2822/73). None of these could be enforced.

The Strike Act of 1909 was in force until 1936, when the *Labor Act No.3008* was promulgated.⁶ Thus, until 1936 strikes in the public utilities were to pass through a stage of compulsory mediation. There were no restrictions on the right to strike in the other establishments. However, due to the nature of the working class in Turkey in this period, there were only very infrequent incidents of strike action. Strikes were prohibited by the *Labor Act of 1936*. However, the sanctions for strikes with an economic objective were very mild. Article 127 of the Act stipulated a fine of only 10-100 Turkish Liras to each of the strikers. If the striking workers were employed by companies undertaking public services, imprisonment from one month to six months was sanctioned. The amendment to the *Penal Code in 1933* was not a strike ban, but concerned only intimidation and threats to strike.

The section of the working class employed in the status of civil servant enjoyed considerable privileges. *Act on Civil Servants (No.788) of 1926* and the acts on their salaries had the objective of preserving the employment of the skilled workforce in the public sector, which was vital for building the social and technical infrastructure of a modern independent nation and state.

Following the repercussions of the *Great Depression* in Turkey, the state assumed the main responsibility for industrialization. State economic enterprises were established. The distribution of these establishments around the country also reflects the anxiety and the objectives of the Kemalist leadership. Rather than concentrating these establishments in the İstanbul area, where the industrial infrastructure was more convenient, they were dispersed. These tobacco, sugar, textile, tea, iron-steel and other establishments were not only production-oriented. They also formed the nuclei of a modern life-style in the age-old Anatolia, like oases in a desert. They were also the prototypes of the 'social state'. Besides, the workforce was generally made up of first-generation laborers, who were not totally expropriated. Their labor aristocracy position in a poverty stricken environment discouraged any 'disruptive propaganda'. The *Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)* ideologues pursued very consciously a policy of perpetuating the land-ownership of the wage-earners.

In the period before *WW II*, labor was scarce. The *Great Depression* and the agricultural crisis did not lead to the expropriation of the peasantry. On the contrary, faced with the unstable and falling prices of agricultural products, the landlords preferred the share-cropping system to re-emerge in importance. The landless peasants or peasants with insufficient land or those who needed cash to pay their taxes and to buy basic consumer products, flocked to the labor market as temporary workers. However, this temporary flow did not and could not contribute to the development of the working class movement. The semi-expropriated peasants working for wages for a temporary period did not care about social security, protective labor legislation, trade unions or collective agreements. On the contrary, their presence might have weakened such tendencies among genuine workers (KOÇ 1996d, 27-64).

In 1933, the governor of İzmir, General Kazım Dirik, emulated the 'single and compulsory membership trade unionism' of Mussolini Italy in his region. How-

⁶ *Labor Act No.3008* repealed only those provisions of the Act of 1909 that contravened it.

ever, it was in vain, most probably because the Turkish state was not so powerful as to control and organize all of private industrial activity at a time when temporary work was quite widespread. But the *Republican People's Party* organized workers' associations under appointed persons.

Until the end of the *Second World War*, associations on a class basis were forbidden. However, there were many craft associations of blue collar-workers and associations of public servants.⁷ Some of these were turned into trade unions following the repeal on the ban.⁸

WW II changed the relations between the workers and employers in Turkey. The conscription of hundreds of thousands of productive young men further increased the labor scarcity problem the Turkish economy had faced for decades. Since the increased military expenditures and the threat of war prevented the use of material incentives to attract labor, forced labor was stipulated under the *National Defense Act of 1940* (GÜZEL 1995). Many of the gains of the *Labor Act* were suspended, as well.

Although Turkey was not actively involved in combat, *WW II* meant deprivation of all kinds for the working population in general. Among the working people, the civil servants were the luckiest. They enjoyed pay rises and additional bonuses to compensate for the price rise and they were sold some basic consumer goods produced by the public sector at prices much below the going black-market rate. The workers in the public sector lost much, but were still better off than private sector workers especially the large majority of peasants. The privileged status of the public servants strengthened further the division within the ranks of the working class.

The 1945 - 1960 period

At the end of *WW II*, Turkey allied herself with the Allies and participated in the founding of the *United Nations*. The one-party rule had to be abandoned. Following the permission to form associations on a class basis, trade unions were established rapidly in various centers, mainly in the public sector. The *Democratic Party* (*Demokrat Parti*), established on 6 January 1946 by politicians who had occupied leading posts in the *Republican People's Party* had close relations with the workers. Although they were not directly involved in the formation of trade unions, they attracted workers because they were the only legitimate and powerful anti-government organization. Two socialist parties were formed: The *Socialist Party of Turkey* (*Türkiye Sosyalist Partisi*) and the *Socialist Laborers' and Peasants' Party of Turkey* (*Türkiye Sosyalist Emekçi ve Köylü Partisi*). The latter was the legal extension of the *Communist Party of Turkey*. Both started establishing trade unions. There were also spontaneous initiatives from amongst

⁷ For a list of these associations, see KOÇ (1992a), pp. 100-120.

⁸ For instance, *İzmir Tobacco Producers Association* was established in 1926. It was in fact an association of tobacco workers which provided health service in return for a contribution and which organized about 10 thousand workers. Following the repeal of the ban on associations on a class basis, it was turned into *İzmir Tobacco Workers Trade Union*, which represented 12 thousand workers in 1951 (KOÇ 1992b, 102).

the workers. Former formal and informal provident funds, craft associations, etc. contributed considerably to the formation of trade unions by the workers themselves.

The outbreak of the *Cold War* interrupted this process. On 16 December 1946, the two socialist parties and all trade unions associated with them were liquidated. However, some of the founders of these liquidated unions were later active in other trade unions.

The *Act Concerning Workers' and Employers' Trade Unions and Higher Level Organizations No. 5018* was promulgated in February 1947. The *People's Republican Party* established a *Workers' Bureau* and started to organize trade unions using government funds. Government officials were directly involved in the establishment of many of the trade unions in the public sector. The trade unions had been non-existent for more than two decades. For the majority of workers, trade union activity was like being a communist and was full of risks. The liquidation of some trade unions in December 1946 had reinforced this fear. Although the state's direct involvement in this process was a negative factor from the perspective of independent trade unionism, on the other hand, it also contributed to the eradication of this incorrect view. Otherwise, it would have been more difficult to organize trade unions during the *Cold War*.

Trade unions were first mainly established in the public sector, mostly in the state economic enterprises. First there were work-place (house) unions. Then local councils and federations were established. The *İstanbul Trade Unions Council (İstanbul İşçi Sendikaları Birliği)* was the most important local council, which guided the activities of trade unions in other areas, as well. The state closely scrutinized the activities of the trade unions and higher level organizations.

The *Confederation of Trade Unions of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu - TÜRK-İŞ)* was established on 31 July 1952. It was the first nation-wide organization of the working class in Turkey.

At the height of the *Cold War*, the *CIA* was active in Turkey in the trade union arena. The first contacts of the alleged *CIA* agents under the cover of trade unionists took place in 1951. However, contrary to exaggerated allegations, the activities of the covert *CIA* agents had only a minor impact on the development of the trade union movement in Turkey in general and on *TÜRK-İŞ* in specific.

If there is a force that has left its imprint on *TÜRK-İŞ*, it is the Turkish state, apart from the government. *TÜRK-İŞ* has from time to time opposed the policies of the governments and has defied government authority. But it has never detracted from the general state policy and has never challenged the state.

The policies in Turkey that resemble to a certain extent the 'bread-and-butter unionism' or 'business unionism' of the *AFL-CIO* are not the result of external factors, but the outcome of the indigenous characteristics of the working class in Turkey, of the attitudes of the employers and the state. Attaching a determinant role to the influence of the *AFL-CIO* is incorrect and misleading.

In the 1946-1950 period, the government started the *Workers' Insurance Institution*. However, the blue-collar workers had negative sentiments about the *Republican People's Party*, due to their experiences either as workers or as

peasants. The *Democratic Party*, with its pro-democracy rhetoric appealed to the people. The public servants, recalling their privileged status in the past and identifying themselves with the political party in power, in general supported the *Republican People's Party*. On the other hand, the majority of the blue-collar workers were for the Democratic Party and participated actively in the party work.

When associations on a class basis were still forbidden, the *Democratic Party* advocated the establishment of trade unions. Until 1950, the *Democratic Party* propagated the right to strike, whereas the *Republican People's Party* accused those advocating the right to strike of being communists.

In the 1950-1960 period, the *Democratic Party* in power enacted legislation and pursued policies that benefited the workers. Paid weekends, paid annual leave, statutory bonuses, extension of the scope of the *Labor Act* and of social security, labor tribunals with a worker serving as judge, subsidized construction loans for workers, and minimum wages are examples of positive steps taken by the *Democrat Party* with respect to legislation. Just on the eve of the military coup d'état of 1960, Prime Minister Menderes, in a radio speech, celebrated *May Day* as the 'Workers' Day'. Besides, the government granted wage increases as a result of collective disputes initiated by trade unions or by groups of workers. Rarely were collective agreements concluded. The trade unions under the leadership of *Democrat Party* sympathizers could enjoy other privileges in the public sector, as well.

However, the *Democrat Party* did not keep its promises with respect to the right to strike. Its attitude towards the trade unions changed as the economic crisis mounted. The government suspended the activities of some trade unions in 1955. The activities of some local councils were suspended by court rulings in 1957.

In the 1950-1960 period, the rapid mechanization of agriculture led to a major exodus of semi-expropriated peasants from the land. In some regions share-cropping gave way to large farms. In the urban areas, investment in construction and industry absorbed the new entrants to the labor market. Shanty towns were constructed around the cities. The ties of the new workers with the rural areas and land ownership continued to a considerable extent. The wages and working and living conditions under wage-employment were much better than the situation in their villages. Thus, migration, shanty towns and wage-employment represented a considerable improvement in the living standard of the semi-expropriated workers. Being first-generation workers, they were totally ignorant about trade-union activity. In the absence of experience and knowledge about any other alternative, finding a job and receiving regular wages were considered a fortune to be grateful to God for.

Trade unions in this period had great difficulty in recruiting members. In the absence of the right to strike, collective negotiations were ineffective. Actually, it was the lack of the will and the power to strike, rather than the right, which caused problems. The majority of semi-expropriated workers had neither the will, nor the power to engage in industrial actions. The trade unions engaged in various forms of activities, such as starting a provident fund, organizing joint festivities, organizing craft courses etc. to attract members.

According to the 1955 population, only 14 percent of the labor-force was under the category of wage- and salary-employment; and a considerable portion of this group were still semi-expropriated direct producers.

In 1950, there were only 76 thousand workers employed by public manufacturing industry establishments employing at least 10 employees. The number of workers in similar private sector establishments was 87 thousand. These figures became 128 thousand and 169 thousand in 1960, respectively.

The number of trade-union membership in the 1946-1960 period was limited.

Trade unions and trade union membership (1948-1960) (TUNA 1964, 252).

Year	Trade unions	Membership
1948	73	52,000
1949	77	72,000
1950(1 May)	88	76,000
1951(1 May)	137	110,000
1952(1 December)	248	130,000
1953(1 July)	275	140,000
1954(1 July)	323	180,000
1955 (1 December)	363	189,000
1956 (1 December)	376	209,000
1957 (31 December)	385	244,000
1958 (1 October)	394	262,000
1959 (10 August)	417	280,000
1960 (1 September)	432	282,000

The military coup d'état of 1960 was not welcomed by the workers in general. When the armed forces, acting on behalf of the state, resorted to the coup d'état against a legitimate government, *TÜRK-İŞ* sided with the armed forces. This attitude was not only the result of the fear of arms, but also a natural outcome of its close relations with the state.

The 1961-1980 period

The *1961 Constitution* extended the right to organize to the civil servants and guaranteed the right to strike for workers. The concept of the 'social state' was enshrined in the Constitution for the first time. *Act No.274 concerning Trade Unions* and *Act No.275 concerning Collective Labor Agreements Strikes and Lockouts* were promulgated in 1963 and regulated industrial relations in the 1963-1980 period.

From the early 1960s until the end of the 1970s, there was in Turkey continuous economic growth. Although the economic crisis started at the beginning of the 1970s, serious attempts at solution were continuously delayed, until the austerity program of 24 January 1980. Turkey was endeavoring to develop through import substituting industrialization. The domestic market was continuously expanding. Turkey benefited from the bi-polar world political scene. Unemployment, especially of skilled workers, was at a relatively low and tolerable

level. Immigration to Europe and repatriation of savings relaxed social tensions especially in the rural areas. The governments used the public sector for political employment. The sympathizers of the political parties in power were recruited by the public enterprises. The phenomenon which F. Engels identifies as the 'artificial proletariat' became quite widespread. Collective agreements, which in the 1946-1963 period were exceptions, became the rule and the trade union movement concentrated on acquiring rights through collective agreements, ignoring to a large extent the political arena and the amendment of legislation.

Whereas in the 1946-1960 period new economic gains were achieved mainly through legislation, in the 1963-1980 period they were mostly through collective agreements.

During the 1963-1980 period, trade union membership grew rapidly, especially as a result of negotiated agreements. However, it is difficult to observe this development in statistics.

According to the statistics of the *Ministry of Labor*, the trade union membership developed as follows (excluding public servants trade unions):

Trade unions and trade union membership (1948-1960) (TUNA 1964, 252)

Year	Trade unions	Membership	Year	Trade unions	Membership
1961	511	298,000	1971	631	2,362,787
1962	543	307,000	1972	642	2,672,857
1963	565	295,710	1973	637	2,658,393
1964	595	338,769	1974	675	2,878,624
1965	668	360,285	1975	781	3,328,633
1966	704	374,058	1976	800	3,269,356
1967	798	834,680	1977	863	3,807,577
1968	755	1,057,928	1978	912	3,897,290
1969	797	1,193,908	1979	750	5,465,109
1970	737	2,088,219	1980	733	5,721,074

However, these figures are not reliable for the whole period under consideration. For the 1963-1966 period, the reliability of these figures is high. Following the establishment of *DİSK* in 1967, a competition to exaggerate membership figures became the rule. The possibility of being a member in more than one trade union simultaneously further aggravated the problem. Competence for collective negotiations required the membership of the simple majority in the establishment concerned. Trade unions competing for certificates of competence for negotiations resorted to various ways of exaggerating their membership figures. This tendency increased even further after 1970, when an amendment to the *Trade Unions Act* required that for any trade union to function at the national level it had to represent at least one third of the workers in that specific branch of industry. Although this provision of the amendment was later repealed by the *Constitutional Court*, the practice of extremely overstating membership figures continued.

This was a period of social and political upheavals in Turkey. The trade union movement became stronger and more influential. Public servants established their unions in 1965. *The Workers' Party of Turkey* (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi - TİP*) was

influential in the disaffiliation from TÜRK-İŞ of 3 unions and the establishment of *DİSK* (*Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey*) in 1967. *MİSK* (*Confederation of Nationalist Trade Unions*), which was closely linked to the *Nationalist Action Party* (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi - MHP*) was established in 1970, but became active only after 1975. *HAK-İŞ* (*Confederation of Real Trade Unions*), which had close ties with the *National Salvation Party* (*Millî Selâmet Partisi - MSP*) was established in 1976.

The public servants trade unions were liquidated following the amendment of the Constitution in September 1971, which expressly prohibited the establishment of trade unions by public servants. Public servants were organized in associations in the 1971-1980 period. These associations were divided along political lines.

The right to strike was guaranteed by the *1961 Constitution* for workers. The exercise of the right to strike was to be regulated by law. Before the enactment of the law, strikes began. Following the enactment of the *Act Concerning Collective Labor Agreements Strikes and Lockouts* in 1963, strikes became more extensive. Data on strikes in the 1963-1980 period are presented below. There are no reliable lists of other legal forms of industrial actions and illegal strikes.

Legal strikes (1963 - 1980)⁹

Year	Workers on strike	Work-days lost	Year	Workers on strike	Work-days lost
1963	1,514	19,739	1972	14,879	659,362
1964	6,640	238,261	1973	12,286	671,135
1965	6,593	336,836	1974	25,546	1,109,401
1966	11,414	430,104	1975	13,708	668,797
1967	9,499	350,037	1976	7,240	325,830
1968	5,289	174,905	1977	15,682	1,397,124
1969	12,601	235,134	1978	9,748	426,127
1970	21,156	220,189	1979	21,011	1,147,721
1971	10,916	476,116	1980	84,832	1,303,253

Apart from strikes, various other forms of industrial actions became widespread. For instance, the coal-miners in the Kozlu region on the Black Sea Coast started an illegal strike in 1965 leading to clashes with the security forces, in which two workers were shot dead.

In the 1968-1970 period, work-place occupations and clashes with the security forces were common. The student movement had started university occupations in 1968. Although there were no important direct links between the student movement and the actions of the workers, it is generally accepted that the university occupations of students with impunity was one of the sources of inspiration for the workers engaged in similar actions in the following days and weeks. These actions were generally not organized by the trade unions. It was mainly the workers in the work-places who started them. Sometimes the workers in a factory became members of a trade union. The leaders were dismissed. The workers

⁹ Ministry of Labor and Social Security (1995), p. 51.

started a sit-down strike. When the employer retaliated by dismissing all workers, a work-place occupation ensued. Sometimes the issue was resolved peacefully, sometimes there were clashes with the police. Sometimes the incident started when the workers took steps to change trade unions, generally from *TÜRK-İŞ* unions to *DİSK* unions.

The apex of these sets of wildcat strikes and demonstrations was the incident of 15-16 June 1970. Answering *DİSK*'s call to protest a bill to amend the Trade Unions Act, about 100 thousand workers in the İstanbul-Kocaeli region started demonstrations and clashed with the security forces. Martial law was declared. The bill was enacted, but another bill to amend the *Collective Agreements, Strikes and Lock-Outs Act* was withdrawn. Protests in the İstanbul region subsided. About 5,090 leading cadres of the trade union movement were dismissed on charges of being involved in illegal industrial actions and were blacklisted. Following the oppression of the work-place occupations in the rapidly industrializing Adana region in October 1970, silence reigned within the ranks of the working class. Anarchist tendencies within the socialist-communist movement (which had acquired a mass character for the first time in the Republican period) increased following this retreat. Some factions within the left emulated the 'foco' theory of R. DEBRAY; some started a 'vanguard war', resembling, to a certain extent, the Tupamaros of Uruguay.¹⁰

The military coup d'état of 12 March 1971 was staged under these circumstances.

TÜRK-İŞ and *DİSK* supported the coup. It was only after the Israeli Consul-General in İstanbul was abducted and assassinated that martial law was declared. *DİSK* leaders were taken into custody and trade union activities were curtailed. However, the 'workers' trade unions did not suffer much from the coup. There

¹⁰ In the 1963-1970 period, the socialist movement in Turkey acquired a mass character. From 1968 onwards, various splits in the socialist movement occurred. On the one hand, the division in the international communist movement following the confrontations of the *Communist Party of the Soviet Union* and the *Chinese Communist Party* in 1963 had an impact. The Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China, the successes of the *Vietnamese People's Liberation Army* (the famous Tet Offensive), the activities and death of Che Guevara and the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the *Soviet Red Army* all contributed to further splits in Turkey. While the *Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP)* propagated for a socialist program through legal and democratic struggle, some sections of the left (especially the young and militant leaders of the student movement) propagated for an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal program (a national democratic revolution — *MDD*). This was actually the traditional line of the illegal *Communist Party of Turkey*. However, this militant movement criticized the policies of the Soviet Union and the practices of the *Communist Party of Turkey*. After the defeat of the working class movement in 1970 and as a result of the continuous attacks of the radical right-wing groups, armed struggle became more appealing to these young militant groups. Régis DEBRAY had tried to theorize the experiences of the Cuban revolution in his widely read book, *Revolution in Revolution*. The small armed group ('foco') would repudiate the 'pacifist' traditional working methods of the communist parties and would launch rural guerrilla warfare. The Tupamaros in Uruguay, on the other hand, were waging an urban guerrilla war. Some of the leaders of the radical student movement established the *People's Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO)* and started a tragic rural guerrilla war. Some others established the *People's Liberation Party/Front of Turkey (THKP/C)* and started urban guerrilla warfare, sharing a similarly tragic fate.

were no adverse legislative changes. The prohibition of strikes for a short period of time caused a decline of a few percentage points in purchasing power. Public servants' trade unions, however, were liquidated following an amendment of the Constitution in September 1971.

The establishment of the *Workers' Party of Turkey (TİP)* on 13 February 1961 by 12 trade unionists was an important attempt to create the political wing of the labor movement. However, the decision to establish the party was not the result of a political necessity for the masses, but was an attempt by a number of trade unionists, without the democratic resolutions and approval of the competent bodies of their respective unions. It was a failure as a workers' party; it turned into a socialist party (KOÇ 1997). Until 1968, it was under the leadership of M.A. Aybar, who opposed Leninism and advocated a nationalist 'socialism with a smiling face'.

The advent of the *Workers' Party of Turkey* on the political arena had an impact on the trade union movement as well. Supporters of the *TİP* became active in the trade unions. However, as the *TİP* acquired a socialist character and openly propagated socialism, the anti-communist forces in Turkey made it a target. There started to be a division in the labor movement between the supporters of *TİP* and others. Whereas previously the division was between *Democratic Party* and *Republican People's Party* sympathizers, in the mid-1960s the parties to the confrontation had changed. This confrontation culminated in the establishment on 13 February 1967 of *DİSK*.

Another aspect of the establishment of *DİSK* was the trade union activity in the private sector.

The public sector pioneered and led the trade-union movement in the early post-*WW II* period. In the absence of legislative job security, it was only through the de facto job security in the public sector that trade unions could be established. Following the gains in wages, fringe benefits and other rights in the public sector through collective agreements, private sector workers in the large enterprises started organizing. Political relations were important in concluding successful collective agreements in the public sector. Thus, the workers and trade unions did not have to resort to industrial actions. This was in line with the traditional industrial relations in the public sector. However, this approach did not fit in with the private sector, especially with the Turkish employers who had been used to exploit the laborers without much care. The traditional trade union practice of *TÜRK-İŞ* did not satisfy the private sector workers, because this practice did not bear the same results in the private sector. This dissatisfaction created the quest for a new approach, a class approach to trade unionism. The *Workers' Party of Turkey* was the only political party preaching class struggle and socialism. Thus, the dissatisfaction with the traditional public sector unionism in the private sector created what was thought to be appropriate for itself: *DİSK*.¹¹

¹¹ In those years, the concept 'class' was used only by socialists. Therefore, it was quite common until recently to confuse class consciousness with socialist political consciousness. In order to understand the development of the working class movement in Turkey, a distinction should be made between three levels of consciousness. Semi — or non-expropriated wage — earners generally do not

In the 1965-1971 period, 658 public servants trade unions were established (Demir 1991, 58).

In the 1960-1978 period, real wages and salaries increased, thanks to the economic growth, import-substituting industrialization, the struggle of the workers and trade unions and the parliamentary system. Except for a few interruptions, there was an almost continuous improvement in the living and working conditions.

Starting in 1975, an undeclared civil war between the radical right and left forces in Turkey gradually developed. This political confrontation in society was reflected in the public sector work-places. Recruitment of new workers in the public sector based on political criteria further escalated the tension and armed clashes between the parties. Rival political groups, movements and parties competed to get control of trade unions and to use them as transmission belts in their relations with the masses or to exploit their resources. Religious sect differences (Sunnis and Turkish Shiites) increased in importance after the unfortunate events in 1978 and 1979 in Kahramanmaraş, Çorum, Malatya, etc., in which the Turkish Shiites were mainly the victims. Radical right and left groups were also active in these incidents.

In the public sector, the industrial relations changed radically in the 1975-1980 period. Thousands of sympathizers and militants of the political party in power flocked to the public sector (government offices, municipalities, state economic enterprises, agricultural sales cooperatives, etc.). There were frequent armed conflicts between various political groupings in the work-places. Workers were forced to take sides. United action of the workers in a work-place against the employers and the government became more and more difficult. Trade unions lost the initiative. Political relations became more important than all other factors in collective negotiations.

In the private sector, the repercussions of the economic crisis were felt more vigorously. The employers started to respond by resisting the demands of trade unions. Legal strikes and wildcat strikes became more widespread. The radical left influential at *DİSK* and affiliated unions tried to increase class conflicts and confrontations further.

About 2 million public servants were deprived of the rights to form and join trade unions, to bargain collectively and to strike. The confrontation along political lines was reflected in the public servants associations, as well. Rival associations spent almost all their energy to counter the attacks of each other, rather than trying to organize the masses around common demands.

consider themselves workers. They do not hold their employer responsible for their problems. Thus, the first level is the consciousness of being a worker. Until the 1960s, a considerable portion of the wage earners in Turkey considered the wage earning status as temporary, a recessive identity. Class consciousness is when workers consider the capitalist class as the creator of the problems and starts struggling together with their class brothers/sisters within the limits of capitalism. Socialist political consciousness is when the worker considers the capitalist mode of production as the creator of the problems and wants to surpass capitalism, establish a new mode of production, a new political, social and economic system. Since until the 1960s there was no strong spontaneous working class movement, the distinction between class consciousness and socialist political consciousness could not be and was not made. *DİSK* confused these two different conceptions.

The relations between the public servants associations and the trade unions were limited. The attempts to establish fronts were mainly limited to joint declarations. *DİSK*, rather than trying to unite the working class, pursued a policy of trying to unite some of the left-wingers in the trade union movement with the numerous factions within the socialist-communist left. The attempts of *DİSK* to establish in November 1979 a socialist party or to unite the socialist factions in a socialist political party were in vain.¹² The theoretical confusion between class consciousness and socialist consciousness had practical implications.

The economic crisis in Turkey deepened further during the second half of the 1970s. The *IMF*-imposed austerity programs which would solve these problems in line with the interests of international capital and which would restructure and adjust the Turkish economy to the new international division of labor, assigned a new role to Turkey as the provider of cheap labor-power. The austerity and stabilization program of 24 January 1980 was thus another turning point in the history of class struggles in Turkey.

The minority *Demirel Government* tried to implement these austerity measures under parliamentary democracy. It was mainly the working class and trade unions that resisted. The number of striking workers was only 6,400 on 25 January 1980. It had increased to 57,000 on 27 June 1980. The Government suspended the strikes of 131 thousand workers in 47 enterprises. New disputes emerged concerning hundreds of thousands of workers. The number of striking workers in the 8.5-month period reached a record-high figure of 85 thousand. It became evident that the austerity, stabilization and re-structuring program could not be implemented in peace.

The military coup d'état and after

To prepare the ground for and to legitimize the coup, armed confrontations between radical right and left were escalated. Assassinations of trade union leaders (former *DİSK* President Kemal Türkler, Sadık Özkan, Aslan Sivri and others), of journalists (Abdi İpekçi) and of others created a climate of insecurity. When the coup d'état of 12 September 1980 took place, it was welcomed by the large majority of the population, as relief from the fear of death and insecurity and from the destruction of the country.

TÜRK-İŞ supported the coup immediately. *DİSK* was informed about the coup, but did not disclose it to the public and did not try to organize and mobilize mass opposition and resistance, which was not possible. Each organization compared the new coup with the previous ones, neglecting the economic recession starting in the 1970s and the ensuing new international division of labor. The difference of thousands of them had to go through torture and were detained for months. The majority of *TÜRK-İŞ* unionists had hoped that the objective of the coup was to annihilate the communist influence in the trade union movement, cleaning the

¹² For details see Koç (1996a), 36-40.

ground for them. They started to grasp the reality when the new draft of amendments to the Constitution was prepared in 1982. This draft envisaged the restriction of basic worker and trade union rights.

The 5-member *National Security Council* immediately issued directives suspending the activities of *DİSK*, *HAK-İŞ* and *MİSK*, banned all strikes (54 thousand workers in 178 work-places resumed work) and other forms of industrial actions, replaced collective negotiations by compulsory arbitration and started a period of terror and oppression for labor and for the democratic and progressive forces in the country. The leader of the *National Security Council*, General Kenan Evren, expressly stated one of the main objectives of the coup when he said, "Had the 24 January measures not been succeeded by the 12 September period, I had no doubts that these measures would result in a fiasco; these measures have borne fruit thanks to such a strict military regime."¹³

The years 1980-1988 was a period of defeat for the working class in Turkey.

The *Supreme Board of Arbitrators* granted low rates of nominal wage increases in the 1981-1983 period and the *Motherland Party* was anti-labor; so that high rates of inflation led to a considerable decrease in the purchasing power of all wage- and salary-earners. Although there are no reliable data including all wage-earners, various observations confirm that by 1988, wages and salaries were between one-third to one-half of the pre-coup level.

Other rights and benefits were also curtailed, including those concerning social security, either by new legislation or through amendments in the collective agreements by the government-dominated *Supreme Board of Arbitrators*.

The 1982 Constitution of the military regime and the two acts (*Act No. 2821* concerning Trade Unions and *Act No.2822* concerning *Collective Labor Agreements, Strikes and Lock-Outs*) promulgated by the *National Security Council* blatantly violated basic worker and trade union rights.

Martial law ruled in the country. It was impossible even to exercise the very limited rights in the existing legislation.

MİSK was also suspended by the *National Security Council*. In spite of clear evidence of *MİSK*'s co-operation with the *Nationalist Action Party* (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*), some loopholes in the legislation were used to evade the persecution of *MİSK* leadership. *MİSK* was re-activated on 23 May 1984.¹⁴

All public servants associations that were politically active in the 1971-1980 period were liquidated, and their leaders faced persecution. Many of them served long periods of imprisonment.

Following the transition to civilian rule after the general elections of November 1983, the collective negotiations process began again in 1984, under the strict limitations of the legislation of the military period. However, the continuation of martial law and later the emergency situation further restricted the exercise of the already curtailed rights. The purchasing power of the workers continued to fall. Confidence in the trade unions eroded rapidly. The trade union leaders and the

¹³ *Milliyet*, 7 January 1991.

¹⁴ For the details of *MİSK*'s story, see Koç (1992), 314-329.

rank-and-file could not adapt to the new attitude of employers and governments and to the new sets of power relations.

Hopes that the transition to civilian rule would automatically lead to positive relations with the government and to the re-acquisition of previous rights proved to be an illusion.

A number of leaders of *TÜRK-İŞ* cooperated with the military regime. The general secretary of *TÜRK-İŞ*, Sadık Şide, served in the military government as the Minister of Social Security. It was only during the preparation of the new Constitution that the *TÜRK-İŞ* leadership started to grasp the severity of the problem. On 7 November 1982, the *Constitution* was put to the referendum, with all criticisms and anti-propaganda being strictly forbidden. The alternatives put forward by the *National Security Council* were either the approval of the undemocratic *Constitution* as the price for transition to civilian rule, or the continuation of the military regime. Şevket Yılmaz, president of *TÜRK-İŞ*, delivered a speech in favor of civilian rule, which was widely interpreted as pro-constitution. His attitude was criticized during the following period. But his criticisms would not have changed much the position of the population, who approved the *Constitution* with a 92 percent majority.

While the *TÜRK-İŞ* leadership followed its traditional state policy, some unions affiliated with *TÜRK-İŞ* were persecuted by the martial-law authorities, and the activities of some of them were suspended either by the military commanders or by the martial-law military courts.

A total of 1955 trade unionists from *DİSK* were taken into custody. The majority of them suffered torture of various degrees. The martial law military public prosecutor requested the execution of 78 leaders, imprisonment of 1399 and the liquidation of the trade unions and *DİSK*. The *DİSK* trial at the martial law military court violated the rule of law in many respects.

The activities of *HAK-İŞ* were also suspended by the *National Security Council*. However, *HAK-İŞ* was re-activated on 20 February 1981. *HAK-İŞ* advocated the necessity of the military coup d'état in the following years.

A few demonstrations organized by *TÜRK-İŞ* from 1986 onwards could mobilize only a limited number of workers and were not effective.

At the end of 1986, the 2650 workers of the *Netaş Telecommunications Company* went on strike. During the negotiations process, they had resorted to various industrial actions. The strike aroused solidarity sentiments all around the country. In spite of all difficulties and obstacles, the strike proved to be a success. The tide began to change.¹⁵

Strikes in the private sector in 1987 and 1988 further contributed to the metamorphosis. But the main blow to the working class came after the defeat of the *Motherland Party* in the local elections in March 1989. What are generally called as the 'Spring Actions' of workers organized in *TÜRK-İŞ* unions shook the country. Hundreds of thousands of public sector workers resorted to all forms of

¹⁵ See Koç (1987), 7-9.

industrial actions, from sit-down strikes, 'work-to-rules', lunch boycotts, slow-downs, late reporting-in for work to mass sick-outs.

Especially the mass sick-outs were very effective. Tens of thousands of workers marched to the health institutions and went back to work, demonstrating against the *Motherland Party* in power. Although these demonstrations violated the current legislation, the Government, weakened by the defeat in the local elections, was taken by surprise and the mass character of these industrial actions and the public support for them prevented reprisals.

The majority of the public sector workers became involved in legitimate mass actions for the first time in their lives.¹⁶ The majority of the urban settlements in Anatolia were confronted with industrial actions for the first time. The trade unions supported and united these industrial actions. *TÜRK-İŞ*, although hesitant at the beginning, later issued declarations of support, but did not become directly involved. The 'Spring Actions' constituted a milestone in the history of the working class in Turkey, especially in the history of the public sector workers. Self-confidence and confidence in the trade union movement developed within the ranks of the workers. A new tradition of united, legitimate, mass struggle against the government, in which class consciousness dominated over various differences, was built.

Starting with 1989 especially, although the great majority of the restrictions and prohibitions of the military period continued to exist in the legislation, the mass character of the actions and the public support prevented the implementation of the serious sanctions when the laws were violated quite frequently.

The 1989 round of negotiations changed the direction of real wages. The decline stopped; real wages started to rise.

These actions were reflected in trade union elections, as well. For instance, 48 percent of the branch presidents of affiliated unions of *TÜRK-İŞ* were changed during the 1987-1990 period. During the same period, 15 of the 32 presidents and 49 percent of all executive committee members of affiliated unions of *TÜRK-İŞ* were also changed.¹⁷

Mass actions, mainly for economic demands during collective negotiations, continued during the following years. Trade unions and *TÜRK-İŞ* became more directly involved in these actions. From 1991 and especially from 1993 onwards, the struggle developed under the centralized leadership of *TÜRK-İŞ*. In 1994 and 1995, almost all important industrial actions and demonstrations were directly determined by the Presidential Board of *TÜRK-İŞ*, an advisory body comprising mainly the presidents of affiliated unions and the Executive Board of *TÜRK-İŞ*.

On 3 January 1991, *TÜRK-İŞ* called upon the workers not to report for work. It was quite a success.

On 4 January 1991, the striking coal miners in the Zonguldak basin on the Black Sea Coast started their march, to Ankara together with their families, with

¹⁶ It was common in those years to differentiate between 'legality' and 'legitimacy' of these actions. They were not legal under the 1982 Constitution and other legislation promulgated by the illegitimate military regime. They were legitimate under the general principles of democracy.

¹⁷ For details, see KOÇ (1991), 124-130.

extensive public support. This struggle contributed to the history of the working class in Turkey the tradition of uniting strikes and active demonstrations during the strikes. Fifty to sixty thousand workers, their families and supporters marched for five days, to be stopped by the military.

In the public sector, the 1991 round of negotiations was a great success. The purchasing power of workers in the public sector more than doubled in one year. On the other hand, Turkey experienced the largest legal strikes in her history until 1994 in 1990 and 1991. The majority of the strikers were in the private sector.¹⁸

Legal strikes (1984-1994)

Year	Workers on strike	Work-days lost	Year	Workers on strike	Work-days lost
1984	561	4,947	1990	166,306	3,466,550
1985	2,410	194,296	1991	164,968	3,809,354
1986	7,926	234,940	1992	62,189	1,153,578
1987	29,734	1,961,940	1993	6,908	574,741
1988	30,057	1,892,655	1994	4,782	242,589
1989	39,435	2,911,407			

These increases in the labor-costs and the impunity with which the thousands of workers violated the anti-democratic and illegitimate legislation of the military period seriously disturbed the ruling classes. Turkey was on the eve of customs union with the *European Union*. The number of foreign companies operating in Turkey had increased from 78 in 1980 to 2330 in 1992 (3161 in 1995). Free trade zones with a strike ban of 10 years had been established. Export-oriented companies, especially in the textile sector were mushrooming in various parts of Anatolia. On the other hand, the fall of the Soviet system further increased the unscrupulousness of the employers world-wide and in Turkey.

The distribution of value-added in the largest 500 industrial establishments in Turkey shows expressly the seriousness of the situation for the employers.¹⁹

Distribution of value-added in largest 500 industrial establishments

All 500 establishments

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Wages and salaries	40.4	37.9	34.4	33.5	46.6	59.9	82.3	75.0	68.8
Interest	24.6	37.9	38.2	43.9	35.0	30.5	44.0	39.7	36.8
Rent	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.8	0.6	0.6
Profit	34.5	23.7	27.0	22.3	18.0	9.2 (-)	27.1 (-)	15.3 (-)	6.2

Private establishments

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
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¹⁸ For the history of *TÜRK-İŞ* in this period, see Koç (1995a).

¹⁹ İstanbul Chamber of Industry (1994), p. 57.

Wages and salaries	39.4	32.6	29.5	31.8	39.1	48.5	55.8	50.3	48.0
Interest	36.2	45.1	35.1	38.4	30.4	24.8	30.7	25.4	24.8
Rent	0.7	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1.0	0.8	0.8
Profit	23.7	21.6	34.9	29.3	30.0	26.2	12.5	23.5	26.4
Public establishments									
	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Wages and salaries	41.3	44.3	40.5	35.4	55.5	76.0	130.4	117.5	105.2
Interest	14.6	29.4	41.9	50.1	40.4	38.4	68.4	64.2	57.7
Rent	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3
Profit	43.9	26.1	17.4	14.3	3.9 (-)	14.7 (-)	99.2 (-)	82.0 (-)	63.2

The successes of the public sector workers in the 1991 round of collective agreements stimulated trade union activity amongst the public servants, as well.

The 1982 *Constitution* did not expressly prohibit the establishing of public servants trade unions. Turkey had ratified *Convention No.98* of the *ILO*. Although this Convention mainly guaranteed the right to bargain collectively of all wage and salary-earners except for those public servants engaged in the administration of the state, mainly it was used as the legitimate basis of establishing public servants trade unions in May 1990 and afterwards, after about 5 years of discussions and preparatory mass meetings in various regions. It was mainly the sympathizers and cadres of the previous or still existing communist or socialist factions, movements or political parties that showed the necessary patience, sacrifice and courage to force through these organizations. However, the dubious legal situation of these trade unions, the persecution of their leaders and the poverty of the public sector workers already organized in trade unions, and concluded collective agreements, created a climate in which becoming a member of a trade union meant high risks and doubtful benefits for the public servants.

The public sector workers secured high wage rises in 1991, which changed the relative position of wages and salaries in the public sector.

Thousands of public servants who had stayed apathetic to trade-union activity suddenly became involved. Public servants trade unions were established in new branches of industry. The existing ones increased their membership and power. Public servants trade unions organized two unofficial coordinating bodies. Some workers trade unions had supported this process from the very beginning. From 1992-1993 onwards, these contacts became more institutionalized.

The public servants started to wage a mass struggle for salary increases and democratic rights. Although their attempts to persuade the government to negotiate collectively with them failed, they were able to get relatively good salary increases in 1992 and 1993. Due to these developments, the share of personnel expenditure in the consolidated government budget increased from 37.8 percent in 1991 to 42.4 percent in 1992.

During the 1980s and the 1990s, the stabilization and austerity programs imposed by the *IMF* had their impacts in agriculture, as well. The expropriation of

the petty commodity producers from their means of production accelerated. The *PKK*'s activities in Southeastern Anatolia and the Government's counter strategy also led to the exodus of the population. This mass-scale migration created a large population generally unemployed or casually employed in the black economy. These new members of the working class did not and could not unite forces with the organized sections of the working class.

The ratification of seven *ILO Conventions* in 1993 and 1995 was an important gain for the working class. Especially *Conventions No. 87 and 158* were of significant importance. However, the national legislation was not brought in full harmony with these ratified international instruments, in spite of some important improvements in 1989, 1995 and 1997.

The ruling classes responded to the material and de facto legal gains of the working class with a new set of measures.

The 5 April 1994 austerity and stabilization program was another turning point in Turkey. Those workers directly and immediately affected by these policies responded by mass actions.

In the 1990s and under this program, privatization was accelerated. Privatized companies dismissed workers, in part or in total. Sub-contracting was systematically extended and became widespread. Black or clandestine employment increased to about half of the working class, rendering protective labor legislation totally ineffective. Precarious forms of employment were promoted. Bogus self-employment, especially homeworking, became common. The government promoted temporary contracts and labor contracts with a specific duration. Dismissals both in the private and the public sectors increased. The government attempted not to honor concluded collective agreements in the public sector. The government drafted bills to curtail social security rights. *TÜRK-İŞ* had to organize rallies in various cities to counter the new offensive of the employers and pro-employer governments.

As a result of this new offensive and rates of inflation at an annual rate of around 100 percent, the purchasing power of all wage- and salary-earners diminished in the 1994-1996 period. Public sector workers lost about 60 percent of their purchasing power in these three years. The share of wages and salaries in the value-added in the largest 500 industrial establishments decreased from 75.0 percent in 1992 and 68.8 percent in 1993 to 49.7 percent in 1995.

TÜRK-İŞ and *DİSK* celebrated May Day with two separate demonstrations in İstanbul in 1993. It was the first time *TÜRK-İŞ* celebrated *May Day* by demonstrating. It was the first time since 1952 that *TÜRK-İŞ*, as the Confederation, ever organized a demonstration in İstanbul. On 20 July 1994, *TÜRK-İŞ* staged a nation-wide general strike. On 26 November 1994, *TÜRK-İŞ* organized a march of 100 thousand workers to the Parliament to protest the budget bill, which was amended in line with the demands of *TÜRK-İŞ*.²⁰

When the government resisted the demands of trade unions during the 1995 round of negotiations, the largest strikes in the history of Turkey took place. 200,000 workers in the public sector went on strike, increasing the work-days lost

²⁰ For the details of the struggle of trade unionism in these years, see Koç (1995b).

due to strikes to a record-high figure of 4,838,241 in 1995. During the strikes, strikers and other workers under the strike ban held many demonstrations. At a rally of *TÜRK-İŞ* in Ankara on 5 August 1995, about 230 thousand workers protested against the government and the *IMF*. A rally by *TÜRK-İŞ* in Ankara on 15 October 1995 led to the loss of the vote of confidence of Tansu Çiller's minority government. Workers took an anti-*IMF* stance in all these demonstrations, accusing the *IMF* of being the main factor behind the employer offensive.

The strikes, mainly due to the absence of energy, telecommunications and banking workers, could not be successful in preserving the purchasing power of wages. The lack of political wing in the trade union movement made itself felt, as the problems mounted whose solutions could be sought only in the political arena mounted. Increased class consciousness, the new systematic and sustained attack of the employers and the inability to solve these new problems through a trade union strategy based on collective negotiations, promoted a tendency to create the political unity and party of the working class on a reformist program within capitalism, restricting the power of the bourgeoisie by the social welfare state.

All the arrested trade unionists from *DİSK* were released by the end of 1984. The *İstanbul Martial Law Military Court* convicted 261 trade unionists and employees of *DİSK* and affiliated unions to terms of prison ranging from 5 years, 6 months, and 20 days to 15 years, and 8 months. The sum total of the prison sentences was 2053 years 5 months and 20 days. *DİSK* and 28 of the affiliated trade unions were liquidated. The convicted applied to the *Military Court of Appeals*. In April 1991, the pertinent article of the Turkish Penal Code was repealed by the Parliament. The *Military Court of Appeals*, basing its judgment on this amendment, acquitted the accused. *DİSK* started to function again after an interruption of 11 years.

However, the current legislation in force favored the "most representative organization" in collective negotiations in many respects. *DİSK* also had great difficulty in re-formulating a trade union strategy. It abandoned the socialist rhetoric and this created some internal problems. Recruiting new members or re-affiliating old ones proved to be very difficult. By the end of 1998, the financial problems had also mounted.

HAK-İŞ followed a non-confrontationist policy in its relations with the government. However, the fundamentalist imprint observable during the years following its establishment was replaced by a more subtle attitude, trying to create a modern trade union image. However, in spite of controversies, it did not include the preservation of the republican and secular nature of the state as one of its objectives in its constitution.

MİSK was re-opened in 1985; but it was a failure. It changed its name to *YURT-İŞ* in December 1987 to present a new image. It was not successful and *MİSK* disintegrated in 1988. A new *MİSK* was established in 1994.

The public servants trade unions mobilized their members and non-members in mass actions in 1993 and 1994. But the expectations of the union members to increase their salaries through collective agreements were not realized. Frustration and disappointment increased within the ranks of the public servants.

The socialist and communist sympathizers who had led the public servants trade union movement in its initial stages pursued a policy of 'transmission belt' in their relations between their political organizations and the trade unions. This policy caused problems within the unions and in their relations with the rank-and-file.

KESK (*Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions*), which brought together the two informal coordination bodies, was established in 1996. Some other public servants unions followed in the foot-steps of *KESK*. *Türkiye Kamu-Sen*, *Memur-Sen* and *Demokratik Kamu-İş* were established.

Another important development in the 1993-1995 period was the establishment of the *Democracy Platform, the Common Voice of the Working People*. It was an informal co-ordination body, bringing together for the first time *TÜRK-İŞ*, *DİSK*, *HAK-İŞ*, public servants trade unions, chambers of engineers and architects, chambers of physicians and other democratic organizations. The *Democracy Platform* supported some of the industrial actions and demonstrations of *TÜRK-İŞ*. *HAK-İŞ* parted from this co-operation in early 1995. The *Democracy Platform* faded away in 1996. The May Days were celebrated by the *Democracy Platform* in 1994 and 1995. In 1996, *TÜRK-İŞ*, *DİSK*, *HAK-İŞ* and *KESK* issued a joint manifesto and organized a joint demonstration in İstanbul.

In 1996, the *Refahyol Government* (a coalition of the *Welfare Party* and the *Right Path Party*) came to power and began to pursue policies in various areas that were in conflict with the basic characteristics of the Republic of Turkey. There arose a confrontation between the government on the one side and the state on the other. In 1996 and 1997, Turkey faced the dangers of being turned into another Columbia (with drug traffickers in power), another Iran or Saudi Arabia (where democracy and basic trade union rights and freedoms are absent), or another Yugoslavia (where people of different ethnic origins perpetrated massacres against each other). The majority of the workers and trade unions took a firm stand against gangs, reactionary movements trying to destroy the secular republic and its gains, terrorists and separatism. The *National Security Committee*, a constitutional body comprising equal numbers of military commanders and members of the *Council of Ministers*, adopted on 28 February 1997 a set of decisions in line with the traditional state policies. *TÜRK-İŞ*, *DİSK* and the *Confederation of Petty Tradesmen and Artisans (TESK)* started to cooperate to safeguard the secular and democratic social state of law characteristics of the Republic and challenge the government. These three were later joined by the *Chambers of Commerce and Industry (TOBB)* and the *Confederation of Employers' Associations of Turkey (TİSK)*. This cooperation (generally named the *Civil Initiative or the Initiative of the Five*) contributed considerably to a democratic process which culminated in the resignation of the *Refahyol Government* in June 1997. The cooperation between the 5 organizations continued in 1998, as well.

As the problems of the workers increased in 1998, the necessity for a more formal cooperation between *TÜRK-İŞ*, *DİSK* and *HAK-İŞ* was felt more seriously. Thus, on 29 December 1998 the presidents of these three Confederations decided to cooperate more closely on joint issues and a standing secretariat comprising one

representative from each organization was established. It was possible to extend this cooperation to include *KESK*, *Türkiye Kamu-Sen* and *Memur-Sen*, as well, at a joint meeting and press conference on 27 January 1999.

Conclusion

The working class in Turkey is entering the new millennium with new problems and new challenges. The proportion of the labor force employed in agriculture comprised in 1998 still 42.6 percent (9.0 million of a total of 21.2 million), most of whom are self-employed or unpaid family workers (3.5 million self employed and employers, 5.1 million unpaid family workers). Due to the economic problems, the structural adjustment programs imposed by the international financial institutions and the policies pursued by governments, these figures will decline rapidly, leading to mass-scale exodus from the rural areas. This will further increase unemployment and clandestine employment tremendously, weakening the trade union movement. The new neo-liberal policies implemented on the global level further increase the problems the workers and trade unions are facing. On the other hand, the domestic political developments increased the influence of the labor movement in general. Thus, contrary to anticipations, labor's role was reinforced and seems to be further strengthened at a time when the Turkish state is trying to unite all forces against fundamentalist and Kurdish nationalist movements.

The labor and trade union movement in Turkey enjoys many of the contemporary rights and freedoms which their counterparts in many developing countries are deprived of. Although the current legislation violates the basic rights and freedoms enshrined in the ratified *ILO Conventions* in many respects, many of these bans and restrictions have been ignored by the labor movement with impunity. The level of wages and the labor cost in general are above those in many developing countries, as a result of the active struggle of the workers. Especially during the last 10-year period, a tradition of legitimate mass struggles has been developed. The mobilization of the workers for economic, social and political objectives is much easier than in most of the countries of the world. The fledgling public servants trade-union movement promises new successes. The fundamentalist and Kurdish nationalist movements, on the other hand, could not form a firm base in the labor and trade union movement and thus could not divide the labor movement along religious and ethnic lines.

The labor and trade union movement in Turkey seems to have the potential to overcome the new problems and meet the new challenges and further reinforce its role in the social and political life of Turkey in the new millennium.