

## The (Re)production of the Industrial Labor Force in Early Republican Turkey: The Case of Sümerbank and Etibank\*

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### Abstract

One of the major problems of the statist industrialization policies in 1930s and 1940s in Turkey was both the quantitative and qualitative deficiencies in terms of industrial labor force. State-run enterprises of Sümerbank and Etibank, which were established in that period, did not only lead the drive for industrialization, but also for handling the labor force problems including high rates of worker rotation, lack of skilled workers, or the issue of peasant-workers, and initiated several programs and facilities which had crucial consequences as far as the formation of an industrial working class and the reproduction of industrial labor force were concerned. The article focuses on three of them -housing, nutrition and health programs- by examining the evaluations of the bureaucrats and factory managements as well as the experiences and reactions of the Etibank and Sümerbank workers.

**Keywords:** Industrialization, Sümerbank, Etibank, Industrial Working Class, Reproduction of Labor Force

### Cumhuriyetin İlk Yıllarında Sanayi İşgücünün (Yeniden) Üretimi: Sümerbank ve Etibank Örneği

### Öz

Türkiye’de 1930’lu ve 1940’lı yıllar boyunca devletçi sanayileşme politikasının başlıca meselelerinden biri, sanayi işgücünün nitel ve nicel yetersizliği olmuştur. Bu dönemde kurulan Sümerbank ve Etibank kamu iktisadi teşekkülleri, sadece dönemin sanayileşme hamlesinde değil, aynı zamanda yüksek işçi devir oranları, kalifiye işçi eksikliği ya da köylü-işçilik gibi sorunlarla baş etme çabasında da öncü roller üstlenmiş, sanayi işçi sınıfının oluşumu ve sınıai emek gücünün yeniden üretimi açısından önemli sonuçları olan bir dizi program ve faaliyet yürütmüştür. Makalede bunların üçüne -konut, gıda ve sağlık alanındaki faaliyetlere- odaklanılmakta; bu bağlamda gerek dönemin bürokratlarının ve işletme yönetiminin değerlendirmeleri, gerekse Etibank ve Sümerbank işçilerin deneyim ve tepkileri değerlendirilmektedir.



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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sanayileşme, Sümerbank, Etibank, Sınai İşçi Sınıfı, Emek Gücünün Yeniden Üretimi

## Introduction

The advance of the modern industrial capitalism is not merely a change in the production process, or an economic transformation in its narrow sense, but creates a new social world of experiences and identities, including those of the industrial working class. Accordingly, the factories are not just places of production, but also of the formation of this new social world along with the formation of industrial working class.

Considering the effects of the Great Depression on the international trading volume and capital mobility as well as the limited capital accumulation inherited from the Ottoman period, protectionism and statist industrialization appeared to be only option for the newly-established Turkish republic to institute industrial capitalism in the 1930s. One of the basic problems of the industrialization in Turkey were the supply and stability of the labor force throughout the 1930s-1940s. The fact that the slow process of industrialization did not pave the way for generation of mass employment on the one hand, and by extension, the continuing prevalence of small property in land ownership, on the other hand, made the public enterprises to find solutions to the problem of the labor force supply. Housing facilities, health services and nutritional assistance were among the instruments developed to this end.

Before discussing those facilities and services with focus on the special case of Sümerbank and Etibank, it would be useful to portray a general picture of the Turkish industrial proletariat. According to the 1927 census, total population of the Turkey was approximately 13.5 million, 39 percent of which constituted active labor force. And only 5.59 percent of this labor force was working in the industry. Furthermore, 67 percent of the industrial workers was employed by small workshops rather than factories (if we call only those workplaces which employed more than 10 workers a factory). The rate of those workplaces which employed less than 5 workers was as high as 90 percent.<sup>1</sup>

In general, we can say that the Turkish republic initiated statist industrialization in 1930s with a limited number of workers who, furthermore, were largely divided between small enterprises. So, how did the statist industrialization change this picture? Although available statistics regarding working class from those years are not sufficient,<sup>2</sup> they manage to give a general idea. While there was not a considerable increase in the number of the industrial workers within the scope of the Labor Code (from 249,414 in 1937 to

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, Ankara, İmge Yayınevi, 1999, p. 213, 216; Yıldırım Koç, *Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Tarihi*, Ankara, Epos Yayınları, 2010, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Labor statistics of 1937, 1938 and 1943 involved only the workplaces and workers which were in the scope of Labor Code (1936). But only those workplaces which employed more than 10 workers were included by this code, where as the majority of the them employed less than 5 workers.

268,851 in 1943) especially until the end of the Second World War, the number of the industrial workplaces was, however, halved (from 5,204 in 1937 to 2,791 in 1943), which resulted in the doubling of the average number of the workers per workplace (from 42 in 1937 to 86 in 1943).<sup>3</sup> As several reports by the Sümerbank and Etibank inspection committees and other sources indicated, large-scale public enterprises played a considerable role in this concentration.<sup>4</sup> In discussing the fusion that gathered the mine enterprises in the basin under the umbrella of Etibank in 1940, "managing labor force issues under a single administration" was specified among the expectations.<sup>5</sup> One of those "issues to be managed" was securing a regular labor force for the industry.

## 1. The Problem of Rotation

The early republican Turkey was, to a large extent, an agricultural country, with a rural population of 75.8 percent in 1927. This rate changed on a very limited scale throughout the 1930s and 1940s (75.6 percent in 1940, and still around 75 percent in 1950).<sup>6</sup> The labor force was distributed among different sectors correspondingly: While the agriculture employed 89.4, 86.7 and 86.5 in 1933, 1939 and 1944 respectively, the same rate was 4.9, 8.0 and 8.3 as far as the industry was concerned. But more importantly, those who worked in the industry were seasonal workers, that is, a great part of them did not quit agricultural employment even if they worked at the factories for few months.

Considering the fact that in the universal experience of the advance of industrialization, the basic source of industrial labor force was the proletarianization of peasants and artisans, this would create a difficult problem to deal with. This process of proletarianization and the emergence of factory workers were determined by different dynamics of capitalist development in different places. In early republican Turkey, small scale land property was still prevalent. Although partial developments could be observed during those years towards dispossession in agriculture, they were not to the extent that changed the general picture.<sup>7</sup> The prevalence of small enterprises in agriculture impeded the emergence of paid labor in the rural economy, as well as of a mass of workers who would join the industrial proletariat. Turkey had a relatively enhanced tradition inherited from the Ottoman era, as far as the artisan segment of society was concerned. Several feasibility reports prepared during the foundation of textile and weaving factories referred to this potential

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<sup>3</sup> Makal, *Tek Partili Dönemde*, p.308.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Başvekâlet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Sümerbank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu*, Ankara, Başvekâlet Devlet Matbaası, 1943, p. 1; Zafer Toprak, *Sümerbank Holding A.Ş.*, Creative Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1990. p. 168.

<sup>5</sup> Başvekâlet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Etibank Ereğli Kömür İşletmeleri Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu*, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Koç, *Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Tarihi*, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> Ahmet Makal, "Türkiye'nin Sanayileşme Sürecinde İşgücü Sorunu ve Sosyal Politika ve İktisadi Devlet Teşekkülleri: 1930'lu ve 1940'lı Yıllar", *Toplum ve Bilim*, No: 92, Spring 2002, p. 39.

as a possible resource of labor force.<sup>8</sup> However, researches on this topic indicates that there was no considerable transfer of regular labor force from artisans to the newly established industry neither.<sup>9</sup>

In that case, from where and how did those factories recruit the labor force they needed? Although it did not result in a massive dispossession as said before, the damaging effects of the long and successive wars on the traditional rural economy, the attempts to pay high taxes and compensate the reduced agricultural incomes with a salary led to the seasonal migration of peasants and farmers. But, on the other hand, this very recruitment model based on seasonal migration of the peasants who worked in factories for a certain period of time and then turned back to their villages during the harvest resolved the problem only partially, and in fact, became a problem in itself, that is, an obstacle to the formation of a permanent industrial labor force.

The most important indication of this problem was the high rotation rates and absenteeism, that were the subject of many complaints by the authorities in those years. Available data regarding worker rotation rates were spectacular. The absenteeism rate in Sümerbank reached at 93.58 percent in 1944. This figure was 165 percent for Etibank in 1941. According to the records of the High Arbitrage Board, an organ that resolved collective labor disputes, the majority of the 11,500 workers in Ereğli coal enterprises worked six months in the mines and six months in their villages. The same rate was approximately 300 percent in the state-owned sugar factories in 1940.<sup>10</sup> Relevant complaints were very common in the inspection reports for Sümerbank and Etibank. An important difficulty caused by the high rotation rates was the low efficiency and profitability rates resulting from the inability to train qualified workers. For example, the report on Etibank (1940) mentioned the lack of professional workers in Zonguldak basin, and that approximately 80 percent of the workers were farmers from nearby villages.<sup>11</sup>

One of the explanations for the inadequate transfer of the regular labor force to industry which was frequently referred by the intellectuals, bureaucrats and politicians of that time was the conservative mindset and resistance by the peasantry against modernization. According to Sarç, who gave one of the typical examples of this reasoning, "... the opinions of the peasantry were far from being materialistic. It can be said that, as a rule, our farmers

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Soviet reports mentioned the access to the unemployed weavers as the advantage of Denizli and Kayseri, which were among the proposed places for a textile factory. See "Türkiye Pamuk, Keten, Kendir, Kimya, Demir Sanayii Hakkında Sovyet Mühassısları Tarafından Verilen Raporlar", quoted by İlhan Tekeli, Selim İlkin, *Uygulamaya Geçerken Türkiye'de Devletçiliğin Oluşumu*, Ankara, ODTÜ İdari İlimler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1982, p. 153, 189.

<sup>9</sup> See Makal, "Türkiye'nin Sanayileşme Sürecinde İşgücü Sorunu".

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Y.N. Rozaliyev, *Türkiye Sanayi Proletaryası*, İstanbul, Yar Yayınları, 1974, p. 62; Nusret Ekin, "Memleketimizde İşçi Devri Mevzuunda Yapılan Araştırmalar ve Ortaya Koydukları Neticeler", *İ.Ü. İktisat Fakültesi Sosyal Siyaset Konferansları*, Dokuzuncu-Onuncu-Onbirinci Kitap, İ.Ü. İktisat Fakültesi Yayını, pp. 135-136.

<sup>11</sup> Başvekâlet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu*, Ankara, Başvekâlet Devlet Matbaası 1940, p. 21.

prefer staying on their land rather than improving their level of welfare [...] high wages do not always attract them to the factories."<sup>12</sup>

Yet this image of improvement in the level of welfare was, at least, highly controversial. Yerasimos depicts the discouraging conditions of working in industry as follows:

Considering the relatively more elaborate form of exploitation in general and the despotic image of industrialization in the beginning in particular, working conditions in factories, lack of work security and difficulties of adapting to the big cities forced the proletariat not to fully give up their occupations in agriculture as long as possible. This continued as long as they became entirely devoid of the means of production, and were not able to keep these activities.<sup>13</sup>

The reasons referred to by the inspection reports for leaving the factories confirmed this explanation. They reported complaints about working conditions, lack of housing facilities nearby, and the misery of the city or factory life which led to the common belief among workers that "anyone who enters the factory gets ill".<sup>14</sup>

## 2. The Reproduction of Labor Force

It was the very need for securing a regular industrial labor force for the factories which brought up the improvement of living conditions by offering publicly-funded facilities and services such as housing, health and nutrition for factory workers. Those practices were, of course, not only meant to be incentive for the factory work, but also instruments for the reproduction of labor by providing discipline and control over the workers and securing a physically capable as well as regular workforce for the industry. Especially the latter was a concern frequently referred by many reports like the following: "The main issue regarding the social affairs of Sümerbank is to eliminate the worker instability. Without achieving this, methods for improving the conditions, no matter how useful they prove to be materially or morally, can only have a partial and indirect contribution to the solution of the main issue."<sup>15</sup> Providing peasant-workers with housing facilities was designed particularly to solve this problem.

### 2.1. Housing Facilities

The low-cost housing policies remained limited throughout the country in the early republican period due to the scarcity of construction materials and real estate speculation schemes, which brought about a question of housing for the workers who came to the cities to work at the factories. Therefore, this

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<sup>12</sup> Ömer Celal Sarç, *Türkiye Ekonomisinin Genel Esasları*, İ. Ü. İktisat Fakültesi Yayını, 1962, p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> Stefanos Yerasimos, *Az gelişmişlik sürecinde Türkiye: I. Dünya Savaşı'ndan 1971'e*, İstanbul, Gözlem Yayınları, 1976, pp. 164-165.

<sup>14</sup> Başvekâlet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Sümerbank*, 1943, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

need had to be met by the state-owned companies themselves by constructing housing facilities nearby the industrial complexes.

The adequacy of the number and the living conditions of those housing facilities were, however, questionable. In the journal published by the Ministry of Labor, it was stated that only 20 percent of the worker domiciles were convenient for housing, whereas the rest was fully deprived of any basic amenities and hygienic conditions.<sup>16</sup> But one should also consider the housing conditions of the workers employed by the private sector so as to have a more comprehensive idea about the general situation of the workers in those days and make a comparison between the private and public sectors. In his work on the conditions of working class during the World War period, Can Nacar provides valuable information regarding the housing opportunities among private sector laborers. Although the Health Law of 1930 and the corresponding directory of 1941 specified some statutory obligations about providing housing facilities for the workers, private companies did not take any noteworthy measures in terms of offering that opportunity to their workers. Migrant tannery workers in Istanbul had to rent ruined "rooms" at inns along Kazlıçeşme or Zeytinburnu coasts, where four or five workers had to sleep in the same room. And despite the miserable conditions, rents were considerably high. Some homeless factory workers spent the night in available places in the factory. Sleeping in public baths, ruined buildings and public spaces such as mosques or theaters were among "alternatives" for workers. Some workers even chose to spend the cold winter nights in prison. Although sometimes the municipalities took initiative to provide temporary shelters for homeless people including workers, those measures mostly proved to be insufficient.<sup>17</sup>

As for the state-run companies, the housing question was on the agenda from the very beginning, even in determining the location of the factories. For instance, in marking Denizli as a proper location for textile industry, the report referred to the fact that the city was quite large, that would facilitate the settlement of the workers.<sup>18</sup> The motive underlying the construction plan was, obviously, the need for the recruitment of the labor force from outside due to the paucity of local workers. The fact that Sümerbank factories in Istanbul did not provide such facilities demonstrated that the concern was this paucity rather than the well-being of workers. Another factor which was taken in consideration was the number of the workers to be employed. Sümerbank's Kayseri and Nazilli, and Etibank's Ereğli enterprises, which run the largest housing projects, were also the enterprises which employed most workers. Nonetheless, the fact that Sümerbank's Merinos, Defterdar and Bakırköy factories which also employed considerably high number of workers (around

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<sup>16</sup> Anon., "Prodüktivite ve Memleketimizde Prodüktiviteyi Artırmağa Matuf Tedbirler," *Çalışma Vekaleti Dergisi*, September-October-November-December, Vol. 1, no. 3, 1953, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> Can Nacar, "Working Class in Turkey During World War II Period: Between Social Policies and Everyday Experiences", Unpublished Master Thesis, İstanbul, Boğaziçi University, Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History, 2004, pp. 66-69.

<sup>18</sup> *Sümerbank X'uncu Yıl: 1933-1943*, Ankara, Cumhuriyet Matbaası, 1943, p. 239.

2000) did not provide housing facilities demonstrated that the numbers were only partially explanatory.<sup>19</sup> With its relatively more rooted textile industry, Istanbul had been hosting a large number of factory workers, as a result of which worker settlements and neighborhoods had already been established. The common mark of these three factories was that they were located in the cities which already reserved a permanent array of factory workers. Factories in Anatolia, on the other hand, were mostly located in underdeveloped and under-urbanized areas with a deficit of permanent industrial labor force. Therefore, both recruiting workers from outside and providing them with housing was a question to be handled.<sup>20</sup>

Although several attempts were made to handle the question, they proved to be insufficient and sometimes even counteractive as far as securing a permanent and regular industrial workforce was concerned. Main problems which undermined the efforts were the inadequacy of the number of and the uneven access to housing as well as the inequalities between the standards of different housing types.

In Etibank case, particularly after the adoption of compulsory wage work regime in 1940 as a part of the National Protection Law and the consequent increase in the number of workers employed, available houses felt short of covering the need. The inspection report on Etibank, which began to employ 23,000 workers in total after the fusion, and became the largest industrial enterprise, pointed out the company's inability to provide housing for its workers. According to the report dated 1940, the total number of dormitories was 106, and merely 62 percent of the workers could be accommodated there. In the Zonguldak coal basin which employed 58,000 workers, dormitories offered only 20,000 beds. Workers slept on a wooden floor, using pieces of wood as pillows. In 1949, the number of the Etibank workers living in the dormitories still did not exceed 18,000. Furthermore, those figures also included the workers in the port construction run by a private company. Etibank constructed a new pavilion for the port workers and covered the construction expenditures on its own. Private companies constructed some

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<sup>19</sup> For the employment rates of Sümerbank and Etibank enterprises between 1936 and 1951, see Kemalettin Apak, *Türkiye'de Sanayi ve Maden İşletmeleri*, İzmit, Selüloz Basımevi, 1952, p. 88.

<sup>20</sup> A closer look at the effects of housing policies reveals the interplay between industrialization, migration and urbanization as well. The rate of urban population which was 16 percent in 1927 increased merely to 17,7 percent in 1945, and that movement was not towards the big cities but to the newly established industrial centers. For instance, the population increase circulating around 40 percent in Bursa reached at 100 percent in Nazilli and Malatya (two then small towns of Turkey, which hosted new Sümerbank factories), the majority of which was composed of villagers-come-to-the-factory. But the residential areas and the factories were so distant from each other that it could affect production levels and efficiency negatively. Therefore, the construction of the complexes was accompanied the construction of new cities that were located close to the factories. Karabük and Hereke were two prominent examples of that fact. For a more detailed discussion of Sümerbank and Etibank factories' influence on the urbanization see Ahmet Ali Özeken, "Türkiye Sanayiinde İşçiyi Barındırma Problemi", *İçtimai Siyaset Konferansları*, Third Volume, İstanbul Üniversitesi İktisat ve İçtimaiyat Enstitüsü, 1949, p. 111; Esra Üstündağ-Selamoğlu, "Bir Sözlü Tarih Çılgısı: Hereke'de Değişim", *Toplumsal Tarih*, 8, 45, p. 30; Mübeccel B. Kıray, *Ereğli Ağır Sanayiden Önce Bir Sahil Kasabası*, İstanbul, Bağlam Yayınları, 2000, pp. 87-93.

worker barracks as well, but with much worse and miserable conditions than those run by the state.

The problem of inadequacy of housing was not limited to the Etibank enterprises. Nazilli, one of the most active factories in offering housing facilities, experienced similar problems. In 1949, at a time when the factory employed nearly 3,000 workers, the dormitories were capable of hosting only 300-350 workers.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to these deficiencies, the inequalities in terms of the standards of and access to the housing, which reflected inter- and intra-class stratification and hierarchy, aggravated the housing problem. In his work on housing activities in Kayseri and Nazilli complexes, Burak Peri describes different housing types including those for administrative officers (*şef evleri*), employees and single workers (*bekar evleri*). Among those, the first ones offered much higher living standards with five rooms, compared to the barracks for single workers which provided only a bed and a washbasin.<sup>22</sup> A similar hierarchical discrimination could be observed among the blue-collar workers themselves. The most comfortable places were reserved for the foremen, and the rest of the barracks were distributed according to the hierarchy among specialist workers (*mütehassis işçiler*), first class, second class and third class workers. As for the unskilled workers, they were accommodated in the pavilions in isolated and remote places.<sup>23</sup>

Similar class-based inequalities were at stake as far as the access to housing was concerned, which did, in fact, reinforce the very problem those policies were supposed to resolve, that is, the formation of a permanent workforce. A common complaint among workers about housing was that *bekar evleri* was the only option available particularly to the unskilled workers. According to the figures given by Ahmet Ali Özeken, the rate of the Sümerbank workers who had the opportunity to live in those houses with their families was only 7 percent.<sup>24</sup> Although one of the primary rationales for public housing was detaching the labor force from villages, this policy reinforced the seasonal employment, considering the fact that the workers left their families back in the villages. But on the other hand, the selection of the workers who were allowed to move in with their families suggested that the original rationale was taken into consideration within the bounds of possibility. For, while establishing the Karabük factory, the administration chose 400 workers who had worked before in chrome and copper factories, and were proper candidates to work permanently. They were sent to England to be trained and become skilled, and

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix 2 in Mustafa Görkem Doğan, "Governmental Involvement in the Establishment and Performance of the Trade Unions During The Transition to Multi-Party Politics: The Case of The Worker's Bureau of the Republican People's Party", Unpublished Master Thesis, İstanbul, Boğaziçi University, Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Burak Peri, "Building the 'Modern' Environment in Early Republican Turkey: Sümerbank Kayseri and Nazilli Factory Settlements", Unpublished Master Thesis, Ankara, Middle East Technical University, Institute of Social Sciences, 2002, pp. 75-76.

<sup>23</sup> N. Baydar, "Kombina ve Şehir", *Ulus*, 19 September 1935, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Özeken, "Türkiye Sanayiinde İşçiyi Barındırma Problemi", p. 117.



when they came back to the Karabük, they became the only fortunate workers who dwelled with their families in the houses constructed by the factory.

## 2.2 Health Services

Medical facilities were another service provided by the state-run companies. In 1947, Sümerbank owned 13 hospitals and employed 188 medical professionals. These hospitals offered service not only to the factory workers, but also to the people who resided in neighboring villages and towns.<sup>25</sup>

Yet, in the case of health services, one could observe the same insufficiency (and even, from time to time, negligence) as in housing. The testimony of Sabire and Hulusi Dosdoğru who worked as doctors in Zonguldak coal basin during the compulsory wage regime presented dramatic data about the negative health conditions in Etibank companies.<sup>26</sup> One of the major causes of this situation was the unhealthy housing conditions. Because of the 24-hours workday with three shifts, workers shared the same beds consecutively, in the order of their shifts. Workers who could not find available bed in the pavilions slept outside, or took shelter in the privately-run barracks, where, as was mentioned before, the living standards were much worse -the public housing provided the workers, at least, with bathing and sterilization facilities. The fact that workers who spent the night outside or in those other shelters started work without any prior sanitary control paved the way for epidemics.<sup>27</sup>

Another fact that fueled the epidemic diseases was the rotational or seasonal work, that is, the continuing bond with the villages where the factory's inspection of hygiene could not extend: "[...] the workers rotating every 45 days have another miserable 45 days in their villages, deprived of any sanitary facility after the allegedly clean 45 days, and then start to work without isolation and collective sanitary inspection [...] Therefore, using rotational forced labor is an irrecoverable mistake in respect to social hygiene."<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, since there was no spare bed and pillow slips, workers had to use the same materials throughout the 45 compulsory working days. The request made by the workers for additional clothes during a typhus epidemic received no response.<sup>29</sup>

Epidemics spread not only from villages to the basin, but also in the reverse direction. The inspection report of 1949 comprised figures on epidemic

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<sup>25</sup> Ahmet Makal, "65. Yılında Milli Korunma Kanunu, Çalışma İlişkileri ve İş Mükellefiyeti Üzerine Bir İnceleme", A.Ü. SBF-GETA *Tartışma Metinleri*, No. 76, September 2004, p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> The two doctors who managed to publish a series of articles in *Tan* newspaper attracted attention of both the administration of the company and the People's House, and evoked anger among them. They were accused of betraying the country. They told in their books that after they warned the administration about the unhealthy conditions, they were not let enter the mines. See Sabire Dosdoğru, Hulusi Dosdoğru, *Sağlık Açısından Maden İşçilerimizin Dünü Bugünü*, İstanbul, BDS Yayınları, 1990, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

diseases and especially tuberculosis which affected also the workers' families. Of thirty-eight people who died of tuberculosis, thirty were workers and the rest, their family members. The committee criticized the company for declining to install a tuberculosis clinic despite the seriousness of the situation.<sup>30</sup>

A further reason for the spread of epidemic diseases from mines and factories to villages was the fact that those who were being treated were sent to their home before they fully recovered, because of the lack of available beds. Additionally, many compulsory workers who were dragged from their homes and led to the mines were afraid of being "detained" there, and kept their diseases secret in order to return home as soon as possible.<sup>31</sup>

Work accidents, which peaked especially during the compulsory work regime, were a very common source of health problems, as well. During the war, the companies tended to compensate the lack of technical capacities with increasing the pressure on the labor force so as to increase production rates. In his memoir, the then director of compulsory work in Etibank said that the unfortunate colliery explosion in Çamlık mine in 1943, where 63 workers died, was mainly the consequence of these pressures. Considering the additional fact that as a result of the compulsory work regulations, a great number of peasant, soldiers and convicts who had no professional experience or training in mining at all were forced to work underground, the causes of increasing numbers of accidents became more conceivable.

According to the data Makal derived from the inspection reports, more than 700 workers died and almost 30,000 workers were injured in the work accidents during the compulsory work period.<sup>32</sup> In the inspection reports commenting on the work accidents, it was argued that the safety measures were adequate, the dust risk in the mines was minimum, and the number of conflagrations not terrifying; so, the accidents were caused by the inexperienced workers.<sup>33</sup> Yet there are several other reports and evaluations demonstrating that the safety measures in the mines were not as adequate as was claimed, and this deficiency was, partly if not largely, responsible for the rise in the accidents. Among the problems, Dosdoğru mentioned bad ventilation. He further argued that the salvage station was nothing but a "museum visited by touring groups", and some closed galleries and granaries were indicated on paper as first aid stations.<sup>34</sup>

The debates on the need for an investigation of workers' blood groups due to the injuries in those frequent work accidents showed the negligence even among some doctors working for the Etibank companies. Few doctors held that such an investigation was superfluous, and instead, their parents' or family members' blood could be transplanted without any prior blood test.

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<sup>30</sup> Başvekâlet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Etibank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu*, Ankara, Başvekâlet Devlet Matbaası, 1949, p. 92.

<sup>31</sup> Dosdoğru, *ibid.*, p. 19, 36.

<sup>32</sup> Makal, "65. Yılında Milli Korunma Kanunu", p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Başvekâlet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Etibank Raporu*, 1940, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> Kadri Yersel, *Madencilikte Bir Ömür*, İstanbul, Yurt Madencilikini Geliştirme Vakfı & Maden Mühendisleri Odası, 1989, pp. 25-26.

Dosdoğru's insistent attempts for making those tests were impeded indirectly by not allocating the cars owned by the company for this purpose. Dosdoğru told that he was criticized for wasting 10 liras for 10 piasters worth workers.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of these examples of negligence, the state-run companies offered a health insurance mechanism which paid a part or the whole of the treatment expenses of the ill and injured workers. Nacar came across relevant documents during his inquiry into the workers' files in Sümerbank. For instance, a worker named Osman Koral in the Bakırköy Sümerbank factory who injured his right hand in a work accident was given nine days leave, and was paid 30.15 Turkish liras to compensate him for the wage loss. Another worker, Ali Göral, having had a work accident, was paid for the days he did not work, even though this time the payment was lower than his average daily wage. In some cases, ill or injured workers were provided food for their recovery, as well. For example, a foreman at the İpekiş factory who suffered from tuberculosis was given 30 grams of cutlet, one egg, 500 grams of milk, 300 grams of rice and 250 grams of butter every day. In addition, his wife and daughter were hired by the factory.<sup>36</sup>

Nonetheless, there were several other cases demonstrating that the factories abstained from paying regard to the medical needs of the sick workers. One common example of that was the attempt to minimize the loss of workdays by limiting the recovery period in the hospital, ignoring the medical requirements. For instance, Sümerbank's Bakırköy factory administration wrote a petition to the Cerrahpaşa Hospital where it sent a worker for an operation, and warned that the worker could not stay at the hospital for longer than two weeks.<sup>37</sup>

An additional component of the health system was the Zonguldak Workers Union Relief Fund, which was funded with one percent deductions from the workers' wages. Dosdoğru asserted that this fund functioned, in fact, just like the Dilaver Pasha Code enacted during the Ottoman period. The code had basically stipulated that ill workers "be mounted on a horse and sent back to their homes."<sup>38</sup> He reported that a worker suffering from cancer or anemia rested for a definite period in his village, and was able to obtain monetary assistance from the Union only if he recovered and acquired a certificate of disability from hospital.<sup>39</sup>

Workers' families were also beneficiaries of the Union's health insurance in case of sickness or delivery, but only if they reside within the boundaries of the Zonguldak basin.<sup>40</sup> Considering the fact that only single-room pavilions were available for the unskilled workers, this prerequisite prevented a huge

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> Nacar, "Working Class in Turkey", p. 116.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> For the regulations of the Dileaver Pasha Code, see Ahmet Naim, *Zonguldak Havzası: Uzun Mehmet'ten Bugüne Kadar*, İstanbul, 1934.

<sup>39</sup> Dosdoğru, *Sağlık Açısından Maden İşçilerimiz*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>40</sup> "Ereğli Kömür Havzası Maden Ocaklarında Çalışan İşçilerin Sıhhi İhtiyaçlarının Teminine Dair Nizamname", No. 2/3811, Düstur 3, Cilt 17.

number of workers' family members from being a beneficiary. Moreover, the ambiguity of the frontiers of the basin mostly caused the decisions to be made to the detriment of the workers' interest.

Diseases caused by malnutrition were another health problem. It was reported several times that the low quality foods distributed by the factories disturbed the workers' digestive system, and some workers suffered from malaria due to the malnutrition.<sup>41</sup> So, in order to capture the living conditions of the factory workers, it would be useful to scrutinize the state of nutrition in those factories as well.

### 2.3 Nutritional Assistance

Workers employed by the state-run companies were provided with nutritional assistance, including free meals and the opportunity to shop from the cooperatives at a lower price. The main reason for this provisioning was that, especially during the war years, worker wages felt short of covering basic nutritional needs, and this malnutrition decreased productivity rates. As the inspection committee's report on Etibank stressed, this was particularly the case in the mining sector, where heavy work increased daily calorie needs.<sup>42</sup> Also in the sugar factories, one "had to offer a generous portion of warm and meaty food in every shift for all workers, since they were unable to work because of the malnutrition, otherwise" wrote Muammer Tuksavul, a chemical engineer who pioneered the institution of and administered several sugar factories in Turkey in 1930s and 1940s<sup>43</sup>

Wage levels were taken into consideration in regulating this provisioning: Free meals were offered for those workers being paid below the minimum wage, and low-priced meals for those being paid higher wages. The minimum wage level was determined by the company administration. At Sümerbank, it was 160, 200 and 300 piasters in 1941, 1942 and 1943, respectively. At Etibank, while the workers who resided in the factory houses and were daily paid less than 400 piasters were provided two meals a day and 600 grams of bread, those who resided in their private houses were given one meal a day in addition to the 600 grams of bread.<sup>44</sup>

As mentioned before, those being paid higher than the minimum level obtained cheaper rather than free meals. The inspection committee report on Etibank proposed drawing up monthly personal ration cards for the workers in order to cover part of the costs directly from their wages.<sup>45</sup> The problem was that while the foods were bought by the company at wholesale price, the cost was calculated according to the market prices in subtracting them from the

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<sup>41</sup> Başvekâlet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Etibank Raporu*, 1949, p. 92.

<sup>42</sup> Başvekâlet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Etibank Raporu*, 1940 and 1949, pp. 31 and 71-72, respectively.

<sup>43</sup> Muammer Tuksavul, *Doğudan Batıya ve Sonrası*, İstanbul, 1981, p. 360.

<sup>44</sup> Makal, "65. Yılında Milli Koruma Kanunu", p. 269.

<sup>45</sup> Başvekâlet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Etibank Raporu*, 1949, p. 269.

wages. As a reaction to that, the workers demanded a role in supervising the food purchase.<sup>46</sup>

There were many complaints about the nutritional and hygienic quality of the foods, as well. For instance, almost every memoir or novel depicting factory life in those years mentioned a meal called *malay* (a low-cost pastry), of which nutritive value was very low. Especially considering the heavy working conditions in mining, foods distributed by the administration could hardly cover half of the daily calorie needs, which caused many health problems resulting from malnutrition.<sup>47</sup> Main reason for that was, of course, the attempts to lower the costs of the food, which provoked reaction among the workers. For instance, the inspection committee report of 1949 noted that workers reacted very negatively to the replacement of pure oil with refined oil, and compensation of the paucity of meat with additional oil.<sup>48</sup>

In another example in Etibank, Dosdoğru took a sample of the meal which the workers complained about and poured into the toilets. When he examined it, he noticed that beans were hard and bitter. The doctor brought the sample to the administration and received the following reply:

Yes, you are right. They mistakenly bought animal feed instead of beans [...] What can we do but eat these until they are finished [...] I have warned the relevant people to be careful from now on.<sup>49</sup>

Yet, the provisioning facilities also received positive feedback from the workers. For instance, in an interview with the employees, a worker at the Hereke factory, Müjgan Pekgirçek talked about the cooperatives thankfully because "it did not matter whether you had cash at the moment."<sup>50</sup> Factory cooperatives provided workers and other employees with consumer goods at lower prices. Workers could pay for what they bought after they received their paychecks. So, those cooperatives functioned as a formal way of charge-account, and the price was cut directly from their wages. Moreover, the profits made by them were distributed among the employees at the end of the year.<sup>51</sup>

Nonetheless, there were rumors that the loose auditing in the cooperatives, where huge amounts of goods flowed in and out, paved the way for abuses, and directors of the cooperatives sometimes prospered and moved up thanks to the illicit business. As a measure against this, the inspection committee proposed tightening the control over the bookkeeping.<sup>52</sup> In telling his experiences in the Turhal sugar factories, Tuksavul talked about the story of a clerk named Raif who was in charge of purchasing and transporting tons of oil

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<sup>46</sup> Rozaliyev, *Türkiye Sanayi Proletaryası*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>47</sup> Dosdoğru, *Sağlık Açısından Maden İşçilerimiz*, p. 27.

<sup>48</sup> Başvekâlet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Etibank Raporu*, 1949, p. 83.

<sup>49</sup> Dosdoğru, *Sağlık Açısından Maden İşçilerimiz*, p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> Galib Fuad, "1200 Metre Yerin Altında Yürüdükten Sonra Kömür Amelesi Taramacı Devrekli Mehmet Küçükçkaya ile Konuştum", *Kara İnci*, No. 3, June 1941, pp. 10-11.

<sup>51</sup> Üstündağ-Selamoğlu, "Hereke'de Değişim", p. 34.

<sup>52</sup> Başvekâlet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti, *Etibank Raporu*, 1940, p. 32.

and food for the cooperative. After a while, he became first the director of the casino in the factory, and then the mayor of Turhal.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

The rationales and effects of the social facilities offered by the public enterprises in 1930s and 1940s can be discussed in different terms. On the one hand, there is a tendency of considering the facilities as instruments of social policy and then discuss the sufficiency in respect to their effects on the welfare of working class. It is argued that, although the opportunities provided by the public factories felt short of covering and satisfying the needs of the workers, they were sufficient enough to enhance the working and living conditions of the workers compared those employed by the private sector, and they aimed at forming a permanent industrial working class and securing workforce stability. For instance, Makal focuses on the positive impacts of statist industrialization on the formation of the Turkish working class, albeit considering its shortages.

On the other hand, Nacar rightly emphasizes the disciplinary policies underlying those facilities: "Although there were insufficiencies and unevenness in the application, the goal of these facilities was to form a new subject who came to the factory regularly, worked in a disciplined manner, and had a high productivity level. However, fulfillment of this goal depended not only to the facilities aiming to improve the welfare of individuals, but also to the control and discipline processes, both in and outside the workplace."<sup>54</sup> For example, the factory management and the government frequently resorted to coercive and detective measurements such as hiring their own sergeants to chase runaway workers and bring them back to the factory, or constructing prisons on the estate of the industrial complexes, whenever the "incentives" felt short.<sup>55</sup>

Undoubtedly, disciplinary concerns about the "new subject" did not only aim at securing the productivity level, but included the elites' political cautions about the possible consequences of the emergence of an industrial labor force. Indeed, those cautions were sometimes at such levels that bureaucrats and managers even considered calling off or at least undermining the policies which would consolidate permanent ties to the factory. In some cases, housing programs were questioned and avoided because of the political anxieties about a possible radicalization of class identity. For, as is witnessed in the universal experiences of industrialization, the social world created by the massive gathering of workers have always been a strong impetus as far as the development of a collective working-class identity is concerned. It seems like the historical consciousness of this fact made the elites of the newly-established republic excessively cautious in designing the policies regarding industrial

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<sup>53</sup> Tuksavul, *Doğudan Batıya*, pp. 365-367.

<sup>54</sup> Nacar, "Working Class in Turkey", p. viii.

<sup>55</sup> E.g. see Tuksavul, *Doğudan Batıya*, p. 358.

labor force.<sup>56</sup> One debate in Karabük was the epitome of this: After the technical assessment on the Zonguldak mine basin in the mid-1940s, it was concluded that 55 percent of 26,000 workers had to be settled close to the mines in order to avoid any paucity of labor force after the production level increased. But this suggestion was objected on the ground that settling such a huge amount of workers collectively in Zonguldak would probably lead to "social disturbances and instabilities in the remote future", including the possible infiltration of subversive groups and ideologies. Alternatively, a small group of workers, who were selected on account of their "obedience to social establishment" as well as their skill levels, were placed in the permanent houses. For the rest of the workers, a road connecting their villages to the mines was constructed.<sup>57</sup>

So, one of the questions which engrossed the minds of elites was, most probably, this tension between political drawbacks and the efforts to "cultivate" permanent factory workers from peasants –or as Lilo Linke, who was a witness to the period, puts it:

Peasants and casual workers, hitherto living without any regular order, sleeping in hovels or, during the summer months, out in the open with nothing but their dirty quilts to cover themselves, half animals in their dumbness and ignorance –such were the men who were slowly to become a self-conscious working class, forbidden at the same time to become class-conscious. Would the experiment succeed?<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Actually, this political alarmism about modern class formation go back further to the Ottoman industrialization. In referring the discussions during the establishment of the *İslah-ı Sanayi Komisyonu* (1860), İlber Ortaylı attributes the efforts for sustaining the guilds to the Ottoman elites' fear of the import of the traumatic class struggles in the mid-Victorian period in Europe. See İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı*, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2004, p. 207.

<sup>57</sup> See Özeken, "Türkiye’de Sanayi İşçileri", p. 67.

<sup>58</sup> Lilo Linke, *Allah Dethroned: A Journey Through Modern Turkey*, London, Constable & Company, 1938, p. 303-304.

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#### **Özet**

*Cumhuriyetin ilk yıllarında Türkiye’de sanayileşme; sermaye birikiminde ve sanayi altyapısındaki kısıtlarıyla ve 1929 Büyük Bunalımı’nın uluslararası ticarete yarattığı daralma sonucu temel tüketim mallarını ülke içinde üretme basıncıyla baş etmeye çalışmıştır. Bu basınçlar ve ihtiyaçlar karşısında 1930’lu yıllarda, en başta Sümerbank ve Etibank’ın kuruluşuyla, korumacı ve devletçi bir sanayileşme rotasına giren genç cumhuriyetin karşılaştığı önemli sorunlardan biri de, sanayi işgücü alanındaki nitel ve nicel yetersizlik olmuştur. Sümerbank ve Etibank işletmelerinde çalışan işçilerin büyük bölümü uzunca bir süre köyle ekonomik ve toplumsal bağlarını sürdürmüş, fabrikada çalışmayı mevsimlik bir iş olarak görmüştür. Bu tablo, yeterli sayıda kalifiye ve düzenli bir sanayi işgücü oluşumunun önüne geçerek ciddi verimlilik sorunları yaratmıştır. Makalenin birinci bölümünde bu sorunlar, işçi devri ve devamsızlığı ile köylü-işçilik tartışmaları üzerinden ele alınmaktadır.*

*Sanai işgücünün devamlılığını sağlamak için özellikle İkinci Dünya Savaşı döneminde İş Mükellefiyeti Kanunu gibi örneklerle beraber, ücretli angarya, jandarma zoruyla işbaşı gibi zora dayalı araçlar geliştirilmiş olmakla beraber, işçi konutları, ucuz gıda, fabrika işçilerine ve ailelerine dönük sağlık kurumları, temel ve mesleki eğitim gibi uygulamalar da geliştirilmiştir. Bu tür uygulamaların detaylarına bakıldığında, başlıca hedefin işçi refahından ziyade işgücünün bedensel ve zihinsel yeniden üretimini*

*gerçekleştirme, üretim ve yeniden üretim sürecinde disiplin sağlama ve işçileri fabrikaya "bağlama" ihtiyacı öne çıkmaktadır. İşçilere sunulan imkanların yetersizliği ve eşitsiz dağılımı, çoğu zaman sanayi işçiliğini "özendirmeye" yetmemiş, işçi devri sorunu 1950'lerin sonlarına kadar varlığını korumuştur. Söz konusu yetersizlik ve eşitsizliklere dikkat çekmek için, makalede tüm bu uygulamaların işçiler tarafından somut olarak nasıl tecrübe edildiğine yakından bakılmaktadır.*

*Öte yandan konut, sağlık, beslenme ve benzeri alanlarda sunulan hizmetlerin yetersizliğine odaklanmak, tartışmayı sadece bir "yetememe" sorununa, bir başka deyişle mevcut imkanlar ile ihtiyaçlar arasındaki açığa kilitler. Oysa dönemin CHP popülizminin temel ideolojik düsturlarından olan, Türkiye toplumunda sınıfların olmadığı tezi, işçileşmenin olası siyasal ve toplumsal sonuçlarına dair aşırı bir temkin ile birleşmiş, bu temkin kimi zaman söz konusu uygulamalara sekte vurur hale gelmiştir. Sonuç bölümünde, bazı somut örnekler üzerinden kısaca bu noktaya da dikkat çekilmiştir.*