

Revolutionary Marxism 2023

The position of the Fourth International towards the Palestinian problem remains clear and plain as in the past. It will be the vanguard of the struggle against partition, for a united, independent Palestine, in which the masses will supremely determine their own destiny for electing a Constituent Assembly.

"The Partition of Palestine", *Fourth International*, 1947

R. Carleton: Why won't your organization engage in peace talks with Israelis?

G. Kanafani: You do not exactly mean peace talks, you mean capitulation, surrendering.

R. Carleton: Why not just talk?

G. Kanafani: Talk to whom?

R. Carleton: Talk to the Israeli leaders.

G. Kanafani: That is kind of a conversation between the sword and the neck you mean

[...]

R. Carleton: Better that way than death though.

G. Kanafani: Maybe to you, not to us. To us, to liberate our country, to have dignity, to have respect, to have our mere human rights; these are something as essential as life itself.

From the interview which was conducted by the journalist Richard Carleton in Beirut in 1970 with Ghassan Kanafani



Revolutionary Marxism 2023

Revolutionary Marxism 2023

A JOURNAL OF THEORY AND POLITICS



RM Editorial Board
Fourth International
RCL (Palestine)
Rakovsky Center – RedMed
Levent Dölek
Alp Yücel Kaya
Özgür Öztürk
Sungur Savran
Hasan Refik

Red as a Palestinian watermelon
The partition of Palestine
Against partition!
Stop the genocide in Gaza!
Turkey's 2023 elections
Bourgeois revolution in Turkey
Labor aristocracy
Mapping classes
Urban revolt in France

*Without revolutionary theory
there can be no revolutionary movement.*
V. I. Lenin, *What is to be done?*

Revolutionary Marxism 2023

Special annual English edition

www.devrimeimarksizm.net
contact@devrimeimarksizm.net

Devrimci Marksizm
Üç aylık politik/teorik dergi
(Yerel, süreli yayın)
İngilizce yıllık özel sayı

Sahibi ve Sorumlu Yazı İşleri Müdürü: Şiar Rıřvanoğlu

Yönetim Yeri: Adliye Arkası 3. Sokak Tüzün İşhanı No: 22/2 ADANA

Baskı: Net Copy Center, Özel Baskı Çözümleri, Ömer Avni Mh., İnönü
Cad./
Beytül Malcı Sok. 23/A, 34427 Beyoğlu/İstanbul
Tel: +90-4440708

Yurtdışı Fiyatı: 10 Avro Kıbrıs Fiyatı: 150 TL

Fiyatı: 100 TL (KDV Dahil)

Revolutionary Marxism 2023

CONTENTS

	In this issue	5
<u>Palestine: The origins of the catastrophe</u>		
RM Editorial Board	As red as a Palestinian watermelon	11
Fourth International	The partition of Palestine	15
RCL (Palestine)	Against partition!	19
Rakovsky Center – RedMed	Stop the genocide in Gaza!	23
<u>Turkey</u>		
Levent Dölek	A class-based analysis of Turkey’s 2023 elections	27
Alp Yücel Kaya	Bourgeois revolution in Turkey (1908-1923)	57
<u>Capitalism and classes</u>		
Özgür Öztürk	Rethinking the aristocracy of labor	105
Sungur Savran	Mapping classes: How to distinguish between classes	145
<u>France</u>		
Hasan Refik	Revolt of the urban poor in France	185

In this issue

Since October 7, the Palestinian question has come to the forefront of global politics. The counter-offensive of the Palestinian resistance was followed by a genocidal onslaught by Zionist Israel against the civilian population of Gaza, which in turn met with heroic resistance within the Gaza Strip. A people living in a space no bigger than an average Western city, counting 2 million souls with most of them children, have spent the last two months under the incessant attacks of one of the most well-funded armies on earth, lavishly supplied and encouraged by the imperialist world. Yet the resistance and resilience of Gaza against this ongoing slaughter have been nothing short of historic. Whereas Zionist Israel's list of allies reads as a "who's who" of imperialist countries, it turned out that Palestine, too, had its friends. Neither in the shiny headquarters of an alphabet soup of international institutions nor in the palaces of reactionary Arab regimes, the slogans of freedom chanted in Gaza found their echoes on the streets across the world. In addition to colossal acts of solidarity in the Middle East, North Africa, and almost all predominantly-Muslim countries on earth, one would be hard-pressed to find an imperialist capital that did not witness a mass mobilization in support of Palestine. Popular support across the world and resistance in Palestine – by any means necessary – offer us glimmers of hope in the midst of one of the biggest atrocities of the 21st century.

Accordingly, the 2023 issue of *Revolutionary Marxism* starts with a dossier, particularly close to our hearts and minds, titled "Palestine and Revolutionary Marxism." The dossier consists of three crucial documents. The first two are from 1947, just before the Nakba or the Catastrophe of Palestinian people, and immediately after the infamous partition decision. The first document, published as the editorial of the official French publication of the Fourth International (FI), *Quatrième Internationale*, clearly illustrates the principled stance of the FI, and stands in stark contrast with Stalinist support for the Partition and the creation of the state of Israel. The second, published the same year, is the expression of the same revolutionary Marxist position but this time uttered by the Palestinian section of the FI. The final document is the joint statement by the Christian Rakovsky

International Socialist Center and the RedMed web network, issued on October 2023 as the irrefutable proof that revolutionary Marxists remain steadfast in their anti-Zionist fight.

2023 was a special year for Turkey. The 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic coincided with the five-year presidential and general elections, which were characterized by many people as a matter of life and death. The opposition forces were generally optimistic about the results, since the weary Erdoğan was deteriorating in every poll. After 20 years of his rule, the economy was in a very bad shape, inflation had spiralled out of control, prices were increasing almost daily, and the discontent of the masses was evident. The pandemic process of the previous years had caused more than 100 thousand deaths (officially 102.000, but in reality perhaps two or three times this figure). To make matters even worse, a series of earthquakes had hit the mid-Eastern parts of the country in February, affecting more than 10 million people, and killing tens of thousands (the official figure is around 50 thousand, but a more realistic estimate is around 200 thousand or more).

Under the circumstances, one would normally expect the end of an already exhausted reign. Yet Erdoğan managed to continue his presidency, with some decrease in his party's share of the vote, but no significant change in the overall balance of forces. Five years ago, he had won the presidency by an easy 52 per cent in the first round. This time he got 49.5 per cent in the first, and again 52 per cent in the second round.

The results proved the incapacity of the bourgeois opposition. This point is beyond dispute. However, the almost complete submission of the Turkish socialist left to this bourgeois opposition from the start was also remarkable. There was no left candidate for presidency, and only a minority (primarily the Revolutionary Workers' Party) stood for the political independence of the working class. To be sure, there is a long tradition of "sitting on the tail of the bourgeoisie" in the Turkish left, yet this time even the "revolutionary" rhetoric was laid aside. Like the Biden vs. Trump, or Macron vs. Le Pen races, the Kılıçdaroğlu vs. Erdoğan constellation also worked its magic on the so-called "left", which supported a bourgeois leader and programme even in the first round, but to no avail.

Our readers will read the back story and class analysis of these elections in Levent Dölek's article, which is the first one in our dossier on Turkey. The article goes beyond an evaluation of the election results, and by using the elections as a starting point, it reveals the class foundations of the political alignment in Turkey, pointing out a great contradiction: "The economy, which is the main burning and decisive issue for the working people (we can also say the vast majority of the electorate), has been the least debated issue of the election period". The explanation for this situation lies in the reconciliation and even unification of the conflicting camps of the bourgeoisie against the working class. In the article, the fact that socialists, who are supposed to be the representatives of the working class, have joined this bandwagon and stayed as far away from class agendas as the bourgeois parties, is explained by the petty bourgeois class character of most of the socialist movement. Dölek's class analysis demolishes the widespread myth that not supporting Kılıçdaroğlu would help Erdoğan and demonstrates with evidence that,

on the contrary, supporting Kılıçdaroğlu, i.e. the TUSİAD wing of the bourgeoisie, has helped Erdoğan win the election.

As mentioned above, 2023 marked the 100th anniversary of the Turkish Republic. Our second article by Alp Yücel Kaya, entitled “Bourgeois Revolution in Turkey (1908-1923)”, analyzes the making of bourgeois revolution in Turkey. Kaya argues that although 1908 was the first and 1923 the final stage of this revolution, it is a product of class struggles that spread over an even longer period of time, and which emerged in the process of the development of capitalism. In the article, he therefore discusses the main stages of these struggles and the making of the bourgeois revolutions of 1908 and 1923. Accepting that there are some very competent studies on the question of the bourgeois revolution in Turkey and the revolutions of 1908 and 1923 (those of Hikmet Kıvılcımlı and Sungur Savran) he proceeds through the framework laid out by these studies, but unlike them, he pays more attention to the making of the bourgeoisie, intra-class and inter-class conflicts, and especially to the legal regulations that these conflicts have produced; in other words, he discusses the making of the bourgeois revolution through the making of bourgeois law. He focuses on the making of bourgeois law to reveal better the struggles within the bourgeois class as well as the struggles between classes, and in this way, he develops a different perspective on Turkey’s long bourgeois revolution.

The submission of the Turkish “left” to the political guidance of the bourgeoisie is not an accident, nor this tendency is limited to the Turkish case. Indeed, this is a global problem with deep roots in the class composition produced by contemporary capitalism.

Our second dossier in this issue is on the class structure of modern capitalist societies. In the first article of the dossier, Özgür Öztürk examines a critical issue that is not often discussed among socialists. He re-evaluates the theoretical and practical aspects of the phenomenon of labor aristocracy, which is an objective obstacle to revolutionary aspirations, especially in imperialist countries. According to Öztürk, the labor aristocracy thesis in its original form in Marx and Engels actually includes two interrelated phenomena. One is the “labor aristocracy”; the split in the working class, the privileged upper layer(s) of this class socially and politically “arm in arm” with the petty bourgeoisie. The other is the “embourgeoisement” of the entire working class in the context of colonialism-imperialism; the workers of the oppressor nation moving closer (again, both socially and politically) to the bourgeoisie. These two phenomena make it necessary to address the stratification within the working class in both its national and international dimensions.

Öztürk then evaluates Lenin’s concept of labor aristocracy and argues that the two dimensions of Marx and Engels are combined in Lenin. More specifically, Lenin does not speak about the “embourgeoisement” of all workers in the core countries, but rather of the bribery of some of them through imperialist surplus profits. Throughout the twentieth century, various Marxists have criticized this approach, claiming that the workers in the core countries as a whole constitute a reformist aristocracy. In a comprehensive assessment, Öztürk critically analyzes the interpretations of writers ranging from Tony Cliff to Herbert Marcuse, and from Third Worldists to Western Marxists such as Mark Neocleous and Charles Post.

After this theoretical-critical tour d'horizon, Öztürk discusses the question of how to think about the labor aristocracy today. By evaluating issues such as the labor aristocracy, labor bureaucracies, trade unions, and social democracy from a historical perspective, he tries to develop some original formulations. He then examines, using concrete data, the stratification of the world working class today, the evolution of the traditional labor aristocracies, and the new sections of the labor aristocracy. In this context, he pays particular attention to the position of public sector workers. In the most general terms, he discusses the possibilities for revolutionary struggle created by the weakening of the traditional labor aristocracies in the core countries in the neoliberal period.

In the second article of the dossier, Sungur Savran takes up the question of the division of society into the different classes in a typical capitalist country of the early 21st century, whether of the imperialist type or those countries that are described as “emerging” or “middle-income”. Apart from the major classes of capitalist society, the capitalist class and the proletariat, Savran dwells carefully on the state bureaucracy as a category on its own. Turning to the petty-bourgeoisie, he draws a distinction between the traditional petty-bourgeoisie, i.e. the small peasant, the artisan and the petty tradesman, and the modern petty-bourgeoisie, that is to say the entire set of professions in which highly-educated and highly-skilled individuals run small businesses of their own, pharmacies, doctors' cabinets, vet clinics, small software companies etc. Savran attributes great importance to this class together with its “soul mate”, the highly-educated semi-proletariat. He thinks these two strata, often in collusion culturally and politically, are a new force in capitalist society to be reckoned with and should be studied very carefully. Savran goes through many other strata such as the workers' aristocracy and the workers' bureaucracy, the lumpen proletariat, the urban poor, as well as two of the non-class groups in modern society, the intellectuals and students. He ends up stressing that the constitutive locus for class is neither the family nor the neighborhood, but the workplace. So the organizing of the proletariat should attribute a special priority to the workplace.

Our last dossier on this issue covers the recent political developments by focusing on important political developments that unfolded in France.

Hasan Refik's article focuses on the revolt of the urban poor that shook France to its core. The article initially delves into the context of the revolt and analyzes the recent years in France, marked by the rise of both fascism and working-class militancy. Refik argues that France has reached a critical turning point that could potentially change the political landscape of Europe, although foreseeing which side will prevail is a challenging task.

Following this general context, the article offers an analysis of the state, bourgeoisie, and various reactionary forces. He points out that the cracks within the French state have become more pronounced in the wake of the rebellion, and French President Emmanuel Macron has found himself mired in a struggle for hegemony, particularly to maintain control over the police apparatus. Then, Refik observes the peculiarities of the trajectory of French (and Italian) fascism. Hasan Refik, while discussing the growth of fascist organizations hand in hand with proto-

fascist parties, concludes that the uneasy alliance between these two forces could be one of the determining factors in the future development of fascism.

The final part of the article is dedicated to assessing the performance of the French left during the uprising. Our comrade draws attention to the exceptional role played by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, highlighting that French organizations rooted in the revolutionary Marxist tradition have wasted invaluable 18 years since 2005, dooming them to irrelevancy during the revolt this summer.



A 2023 poster by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the socialist resistance movement that is fighting against the Zionist entity in Gaza today, along with other Palestinian factions. The Arabic text reads: “We are carrying our revolution forward to victory”.

Artist: Guevara Abed Al Qader

Source: <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/posters/forward-victory>

As red as a Palestinian watermelon

RM Editorial Board

The 2023 issue of *Revolutionary Marxism* is presenting an important dossier to its readership, which should offer a glimpse into the unflinching anti-Zionist tradition of revolutionary Marxism. The dossier has been put together under the conditions where the heroic people of Palestine has been facing a genocidal onslaught for six weeks and counting, under thunderous applause of imperialist states, euphemistically called the “international community.” Yet, the Zionist terror and the bloodshed it entails is but one part of the story. True to form, Palestinians resist – in Palestine with arms and in the diaspora with massive mobilizations, as popular movements in their support rock the imperialist world, with their brothers and sisters of all creeds and nations taking to the streets under the chants of “Free Palestine.” In this watershed moment, as revolutionary Marxists, we march, organize, and fight with the slogans of destruction of imperialism and Zionism written on our banners for a Palestine where Arabs and Jews will live fraternally.

Yet, our struggle against Zionism and for a free Palestine is nothing new: For the standard bearers of revolutionary Marxism that we are, it is a time-honored tradition, older than the Zionist state itself, to be precise. Accordingly, we would like to introduce episodes from this proud history of ours in this issue with three crucial documents. The first, from the Fourth International (FI) itself, clearly illustrates the organization’s adamant and principled opposition to the partition of Palestine in 1947, on the eve of its dismembering by imperialism with active

support of Stalinism. The second, published the same year, further illustrates this position – this time uttered by the Palestinian section of the FI, the Revolutionary Communist League. However, these are no mere historical curiosities separated from us by decades of history. To recall the actuality of our anti-Zionist struggle, we proudly present a statement signed by the RedMed Web Network and the Christian Rakovski International Socialist Center.

A brief timeline

To fully appreciate the meaning of the documents presented here, their contextualization and an emphasis on their stark contrast with the Stalinist position is in order. Let us start by recalling the timeline, albeit in an admittedly schematic manner.

The Zionist movement itself emerged at the end of the 19th century, mainly as a product of increasing anti-semitism and pogroms in Europe, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe as well as Russia. Reflecting its emergence as a European organization directly resulting from anti-semitism in Europe, approximately half of the delegates at the First World Zionist Congress held in 1897 in Basel were from Eastern Europe and around one-fourth from the Russian Empire.

The Bolshevik tradition's fight against Zionism started well before the October Revolution, with Lenin himself penning a number of articles against Zionism – still a relatively marginal international current – which he correctly identified as a reactionary movement, harmful to both for the international working class and the Jewish people.¹ The communist movement held this anti-Zionist credo high, even (and particularly) when a sizeable number of militants came to communism from a sort of left-Zionism gathered around the organization called Poalei Zion and constituted the initial cadre of the communist party in Palestine. It was patent for all within the communist movement, including those who had a stint in Zionism in their youth, that any remnant of Zionist ideology would be anathema to communism. Notably, the communist's uncompromising attitude towards the Zionists remained steadfast, even in the immediate aftermath of World War II and the horrors of the Holocaust, which created a renewed interest towards Zionism.

The principled position would only be compromised by the Stalinist bureaucracy in 1947, just as British colonialism – hastily leaving Palestine and terminating its mandate over the country - decided to partition Palestine to placate the Zionists, with whom it had an uneasy alliance since the Balfour Declaration in 1917. To give the partition the cloak of impartial international mediation, a sub-entity of the fledgling UN dispatched a mission to advise on the post-mandate transition. Some members of the mission (delegates of India, Iran, and Yugoslavia) proposed a federal one-state solution, while others suggested a partition. In 1947, the UN voted for a revised version of this so-called majority plan, giving the planned Jewish state more than 55 percent of historic Palestine. At that point, Jews formed merely one-third of the country's population. The Arab Higher Committee (AHC), representing

¹ See Jean Allemand and Jean-Claude Sage, *Lénine et la lutte contre les agents sionistes dans le monde ouvrier*, Paris: Editions Le Communiste, 1971.

the Palestinian side, resolutely rejected the offer. It was clear that the AHC position had the backing of the Palestinian population, as the Palestinian revolt had persisted between 1936 and 1939, notwithstanding ferocious British oppression and only dwindling with the conflagration of World War II.²

It is in this precise context that Stalinism displayed one of its numerous about-faces, trampling on yet another cornerstone of communist politics. When the Soviet delegate to the UN, Andrei Gromyko, announced that his state would vote for the partition plan (even if he said that they were still for a one-state solution in principle, hence duly paying lip service to the correct political position before sacrificing the Palestinian nationhood), also carrying four other members of the newly-forming “Eastern bloc,” this amounted to nothing less than Stalinism severing one of its few remaining ties to historical positions of communism.

Make no mistake, it was no one-off blunder nor a mere diplomatic compromise. After the proclamation of the state of Israel in 1948, the Soviet Union moved all in to establish itself as the biggest ally of the Zionist dystopia incarnate. It was the first state to extend *de jure* recognition to Israel (even if the US had offered its *de facto* recognition via a phone call a few minutes after the proclamation). Through the proxy of Czechoslovakia, it supplied arms and munition to the Zionist armies, giving them an edge over the ill-equipped and poorly-trained Arab armies. ***This infamy alone would have been enough for us to never forgive Stalinism: the workers’ state’s arms served in the Nakba***, in which up to 750 thousand Palestinians were forcibly displaced by Zionist armies.³ Let the extent of vileness be crystal clear: the first prime minister of Israel and the butcher of Palestinian civilians, David Ben-Gurion, would go so far as to say that the Soviet aid had “saved the country.”⁴ This was not the first occasion – nor would it be the last – where Stalinism saved the enemies of the working class and of oppressed peoples.

Now, with this dossier, we want to introduce our reader to another strand of communism – one that stood by the Palestinian cause through thick and thin, sometimes with humility due to the modest extent of its forces, yet without apology. In other words, a communist tradition as red as a Palestinian watermelon: our unsullied banner of revolutionary Marxism.

2 Ghassan Kanafani, “The 1936-39 Revolt in Palestine”, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kanafani/1972/revolt.htm>

3 For Nakba, see Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oxford: Oneworld Books, 2007, 2nd Edition.

4 Marin Kramer, “Who Saved Israel in 1947”, <https://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/israel-zionism/2017/11/who-saved-israel-in-1947/>

Friends of Palestine Against Imperialism and Zionism



The Friends of Palestine Against Imperialism and Zionism platform is fighting Zionism and its lackeys in Turkey since 2018.

It aims to support the Palestinian cause in the quest for the total destruction of Israel and the foundation of a free, democratic, secular and socialist Palestine from the river to the sea, for Arab and Jewish Palestinians.

It seeks to unmask the fake support of the despotism regime in Turkey of the Palestinian cause and to expose its complicity with Zionists by not heeding the boycott, divestment, and sanctions call of the Palestinians, and by maintaining economic, military, and diplomatic relations with Israel.

Follow! Support! Join!



[filistinindostlari](#)



[filistindostlari](#)



[anchor.fm/filistin-dostlari](#)



[friendsofpalestine.info/](#)



[filistindostlari.org](#)



[friendsofpales_](#)



[Filistindostu_](#)



[friendsofpal_AR](#)

The partition of Palestine

Editorial of Quatrième Internationale (Fourth International), November-December 1947

The vote at the United Nations was no more than a formality after the “Big Three” had reached agreement, the partition of Palestine was virtually an accomplished fact. British imperialism withdraws in the Near East to a second line of defence, comparable to that which was put in place when India was divided. In the two states, Jewish and Arab, Great Britain retains the whole of its economic and financial positions.

The Arab Legion of the hypothetical Arab state and the Haganah equally will operate in close agreement with the British War Office, as do the armies of the Hindus and the Moslems in India. And, as in India, partition has proved itself to be the most effective way to divert, at one and the same time, the struggle of the Arab masses and the discontent of the Jewish working population from an anti-imperialist explosion in the direction of a fratricidal struggle.

The manoeuvres of British imperialism have been made necessary by its dwindling resources. This obliges the imperialists to reduce its “international commitments”, so as, at one and the same time, to save dollars, manpower and tanks. This is presented under a still more favourable aspect in the specific case of Palestine. The establishment of an Arab state independent of Palestine is, in fact, highly unlikely. For this reason, King Abdullah of Transjordan, the no.1 pawn of the City of London in the Arab world, could very well succeed in unifying Eastern Palestine to his present kingdom, and thereby bring about the first stage towards the formation of the Empire of Greater Syria, the final objective of his dynasty and of the British bourgeoisie in the Near East. London will continue to rule without that

costing the British taxpayer a single penny. The only people to suffer from it, of course, will be the masses of Palestine themselves.

For American imperialism, as for the Soviet bureaucracy, to accept partition means above all the liquidation of the British mandate and the opening of a struggle to inherit the abandoned position. The Kremlin welcomes the opening of a period of troubles in the Near East, through which it will do its best to weaken further the British positions and to prepare its own penetration, whether under the cover of a “Mixed Commission of the United Nations” or of a “trusteeship of the Big Three” over Jerusalem.

American imperialism finds itself placed in Palestine, as earlier in Greece, before the problem of seeking a replacement to occupy the positions on the imperialist front which the British ally finds itself obliged to abandon. After the British troops are evacuated, Haganah will be the only military force in possession of modern equipment, a force foreign to the Arab world and which would serve if the occasion arose, to combat a native insurrection or a Russian thrust threatening the sources of oil.

We should not therefore be surprised from now on if American imperialism attempts, whether by the method of financing or by that of forming a “Jewish League”, to become the predominant influence on the leadership of Haganah and to make it an instrument of its own imperialist policy in the near East. However, it remains evident that the minute Jewish state, like the Zionist movement which preceded it, is considered by the great powers merely as a stake in their power game towards the Arab world.

This state, far from receiving open and permanent “protection” from any one of these powers, will never cease to find itself in a precarious, uncertain position, and for its people from now on will open up a period of privations of terror and of terrible tension, which will only become sharper as the forces fighting for emancipation of the Arab world increase.

The partition of Palestine and the clear overthrow of the Zionist positions – including those of most of the extremists – in the face of British imperialism, have struck a mortal blow to all the impressionist theories which bloomed in the light of the bombs of the Irgun. The fundamental solidarity of the Zionist movement, of Haganah and even of the Irgun with imperialism against the Arab masses has revealed itself in the clearest fashion.

The whole crime of Zionism appears clearly in the fact that, thanks to its reactionary function, the first movements of the Arab masses in favour of a united, independent Palestine, are directed against the Jewish population, and not directly against imperialism. The most reactionary leaders of the Arab Committee for Palestine will thus have the opportunity to re-gild their coat of arms by spilling the blood of the unfortunate Jews who are victims of the Zionist deception. The Zionist leaders throughout the world feted the establishment of the miniature state as a great victory. What a miserable mistake: The trap that Palestine constitutes for the Jews, according to Trotsky’s words, today quite simply has closed.

Without a radical reversal of the world situation and of the Zionist tendency of the Jewish workers’ movement in Palestine, the complete extermination of the

Jewish people, on the outbreak of the Arab revolution, will be the price paid by the Jewish people for the sad victory won at Lake Success. And, by a bitter irony of history, the establishment of an independent Jewish state, which, according to the profound Zionist theoreticians, was definitively to undermine world anti-Semitism, has been the beginning of a savage pogromist outbreak in Aden and a new rise in anti-Semitism throughout the world.

The position of the Fourth International towards the Palestinian problem remains clear and plain as in the past. It will be the vanguard of the struggle against partition, for a united, independent Palestine, in which the masses will supremely determine their own destiny for electing a Constituent Assembly. Against the effendis and the imperialist agents, against the manoeuvres of the Egyptian and the Syrian bourgeoisie, who try to divert the struggle for emancipation of the masses into a struggle against the Jews, it will issue calls for the agricultural revolution, for the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggle, which are essential driving forces of the Arab revolution. But it can only wage this struggle with the possibility of success on condition that it takes up its position, unequivocally, against the partition of the country and the establishment of the Jewish state.

More than ever, it is necessary at the same time to call on the working people of America, Britain, Canada and Australia, the working people of every country, to struggle for the frontiers of their countries to be opened without any discrimination to the refugees, the displaced persons, to all the Jews who wish to emigrate. It is only on condition that we seriously, effectively and successfully carry on this struggle that we can explain to the Jews the reasons for which they should not go into the Palestinian ambush. The terrible experience which awaits the Jewish masses in the "miniature state" will at the same time create the premises for wider layers to break from criminal Zionism. If this break is not made in time, the "Jewish state" will go down in blood.

The Mediterranean: new basin of world revolution!



RedMed

www.RedMed.org

About us

RedMed (Red Mediterranean) is a website that publishes news, opinion, commentary, and political declarations from around the Mediterranean Sea, the Balkans, the Middle East, the Black Sea region, Transcaucasia, and the broader Eurasian region.

It works hand in hand with the Christian Rakovsky International Socialist Centre to establish links between socialists and revolutionaries from these regions.

It aims to link up with revolutionary organisations and militants in the countries of the Mediterranean basin, which has proved its revolutionary potential since the 2010s with different waves of the Arab revolution and the class struggles taking place in response to the havoc wrought by the capitalist economic crisis in Europe. To this end, we provide our analysis of the events in southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. We try to understand the forces, in particular the class forces, that have gone on to shape the different upheavals in the Arab world, in Palestine, Iran, Turkey, Kurdistan, and Southern Europe so as to be able to draw the correct conclusions regarding the way to move forward in establishing workers' power in the whole region.

We welcome letters, comments, news about struggles, debates, and material in different languages. We are also happy to welcome people who would volunteer to translate different articles and declarations that we publish on the website into their native tongue.

Let us join hands to bring down the yoke of imperialism and capitalism in the Mediterranean and extend the revolution to other climes!



@RedMedOrg



/RedMed



@contact@redmed.org

Against partition!

Revolutionary Communist League, Palestine, 1947

The members of the UN committee showed “understanding” and “did a wonderful job in a very short time”. With these words the Jewish Agency’s representative, Golda Meier, endorsed the partition proposal. Most of the Zionist parties agreed with them, with certain reservations regarding the “form” of the solution.

The American Foreign Secretary Marshall also shared this opinion. It is well known, however, that the fate of the persecuted peoples is not usually the main concern of the American Foreign Secretary. So his reaction might cause apprehension among those who believed in the good intentions of the UN committee.

What gives the UN proposal to the Jews? At first sight, everything: an immigration quota of 150,000 and more; political independence; about two thirds of Palestine; three big ports and almost all the coastline. That is more than what the optimists among the Jewish Agency members dared to ask for.

Are not this “understanding” and “friendliness” a bit suspicious? Why voted for this proposal the representatives of Canada, Holland and Sweden, who have close ties with the Anglo-Saxon powers? And why voted for it the representatives of Guatemala, Peru and Uruguay, whose policies are dictated from Washington? All the Zionist periodicals, as well as the semi-Zionist ones (the Communist Party of Palestine organs) refused to pose this question. And of course they did not answer it.

But that is precisely the determining question. More important than the contents of the proposal are the motives of those who submitted it. Let us make no mistake! Behind the – in Marshall’s words – “neutral” countries, stand the powers, which are most interested in this issue. The calculations that produced the partition proposal are precisely the same that brought about the partition of India.

What are these calculations? In our period, the period of social revolutions and

revolts of the enslaved peoples, imperialism rules by means of two main methods: ruthless and brutal repression (as in Indonesia, Indochina and Greece), or by breaking the **class** war through **national** conflicts. The second way is cheaper and more secure, and enables imperialism to hide behind the curtains.

Imperialism has till now successfully employed *divide et impera* methods in this country, by using Zionist immigration as divisive factor. In this way, national tension was created, which, to a large extent, directed the anger caused by imperialism among the Arab masses in Palestine and the Middle East against the Jews. But lately this method ceased to produce the desired results. In spite of the national tension, a strong and combative Arab working class developed in the country. A new chapter in the history of Palestine opened when the Arab and Jewish workers cooperated in large-scale strikes, in order to force the imperialist exploiters to make concessions. And the failure of the latest attempt, to force the inhabitants of Palestine into a new whirlpool of mutual bloodshed by means of provocations, taught the imperialists a new lesson. Now they drew their conclusions: if you refuse to fight each other, we will put you in such an economic and political position that will force you to do so! That is the real content of the partition proposal.

Perhaps the partition proposal will materialize the Jewish people's dream of political independence? The "independence" of the Jewish state will boil down to choosing, in a "free" and "independent" way, between two options: to starve or sell itself to imperialism. The foreign trade – both imports and exports – remains as before under control of imperialism. The key sectors of the economy – oil, electricity and minerals – remain in the hands of foreign monopolies. And the profits will continue to flow to the pockets of foreign capitalists.

A Jewish statelet in the heart of the Middle East can be an excellent instrument in the hands of the imperialist states. Isolated from the Arab masses, this state will be defenseless and completely at the mercy of the imperialists. And they will use it in order to fortify their positions, while at the same time lecturing the Arab states about the "Jewish danger" – i.e. the threat represented by the inevitable expansionist tendencies of the tiny Jewish state. And one day, when tension reaches its highest peak, the imperialist "friends" will leave the Jewish state to its fate.

The Arabs will also receive "political independence." Partition will bring about the creation of a backward feudal Arab state, a sort of Trans-Jordan west of the Jordan River. In this way they hope to isolate and paralyze the Arab proletariat in the Haifa area, an important strategic center with oil refineries, as well as to divide and paralyze the class war of all the workers of Palestine.

What about the "salvation of the refugees from the concentration camps"? Imperialism created the problem of the refugees from the concentration camps when it closed the gates of all countries to them. The fate of refugees is its responsibility. Imperialism is not philanthropic. If it sends as a "gift" the refugees to Palestine, it will do it for one reason only: to use them for its own purposes.

The partition proposal, apparently so "favorable" to the Jews, contains several aspects that are highly desirable from the point of view of imperialism: 1) The concessions to Zionism will be used as a bait in order to get the approval of the Jewish majority; 2) It includes several provocations, such as the incorporation of

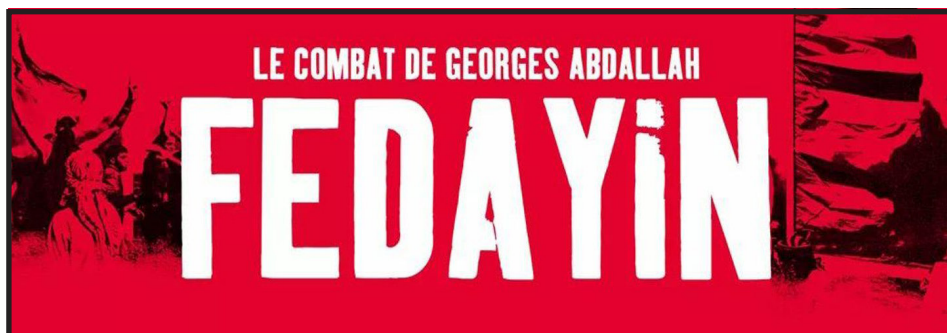
Jaffa to the Jewish state and the denial of any port to the Arab state, which infuriate the Arabs; 3) These provocations enable Great Britain to appear as a “friend of the Arabs”, which will “struggle” for a second, more just partition. This in turn will help them swallow the bitter pill. In other words, we have here a pre-arranged division of labor.

To sum up: the proposal of the UN committee is a solution neither for the Jews nor for the Arabs; it is a solution pure and exclusively for the imperialist countries. The Zionist policy-makers avidly seized the bone imperialism threw to them. And the “left-wing” Zionist critics, in the name of removing the mask from the imperialists’ game, attack half-heartedly the partition proposal, and call for ... a Jewish state **in the whole** of Palestine! A bi-national state according to the *Shomer HaTsa’ir* (*Young Guard*) proposal is just a fig-leaf for the right of the Jews to impose on the Arabs – without their consent and against their will – Jewish immigration and Zionist policies.

What about the Communist Party of Palestine? It apparently waits for the “just” UN solution. In any case it continues to sow illusions regarding the UN, and in that sense helps to hide and implement the imperialist programs.

Against all this, we say: Let us not fall into the trap! The solution of the Jewish problem, like the solution of the problems of the country, will not come “from above”, from the UN or any other imperialist institution. No “struggle”, “terror”, or moral “pressure” will make imperialism abandon its vital interests in the region (oil stock gave 60% dividends this year!).

In order to solve the Jewish problem, in order to free ourselves from the burden of imperialism, there is only one way: the **common** class war with our Arab brothers; a war which is an inseparable link of the anti-imperialist war of the oppressed masses in all the Arab East and the entire world. The force of imperialism lies in partition - our force in international class unity.



The documentary film “Fedayin: George Abdallah’s Combat” by Vacarme(s) Films collective has been projected in more than 20 countries and translated into several languages. Now, it’s available on Youtube.

The documentary, originally in French, is available with English, Arabic, Farsi, Spanish, Catalan, Italian, German and Turkish subtitles (Turkish subtitles were translated by militants of the Friends of Palestine against Imperialism and Zionism).

The documentary follows the life and struggle of George Abdallah, Lebanese communist revolutionary and a supporter of Palestinian cause jailed in France for 39 years. As a revolutionary who dedicated his life since his youth to the liberation of Palestine, he fought the Zionist occupiers alongside the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) during the invasion of Lebanon by Zionist Israel. He was convicted in France, with the accusation of being one of the founders of the armed organization Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Faction, that fought the Zionist invasion of Lebanon not only in Lebanon but also in the imperialist countries supporting the invasion, including France.

He became eligible for release in 1999 and the Lebanese government officially asked for his release and deportation to Lebanon, yet he is still being held in prison by French imperialism.

Available free on Youtube:



@collectifvacarmesfilms4009



**Stop the genocide in Gaza!
Stop a second Nakba!
Freedom and victory to the
Palestinian people!
No justice, no peace!**

International Socialist Center “Christian
Rakovsky” – RedMed web network
October 15, 2023

1. The Palestinian armed upsurge of October 7, 2023 breaking – literally and metaphorically – the barriers of the occupation surrounding long-martyred Gaza marks a breaking point in Middle East and world politics.

After decades, it imposed a humiliating defeat to the Israeli occupying army, exposed not only the failure of the all-powerful, high tech armed Israeli intelligence but above all of the bankruptcy of the far-right Zionist Netanyahu government and of the entire Zionist project and settler colonialism. The enormous shock of the mass consciousness of the Israeli Jewish population itself, in front of the civil casualties, dead and hostages, comes with recognition that occupation and repression of the Palestinian people by a supremacist “Jewish State” cannot provide any “national

haven for Jews” but a deadly trap and disaster.

Despite the war conditions and the pressures for “unity”, already Netanyahu himself, his discredited ultra-right Zionist government, his fascist allies and pogromist settlers are taking the main blame. To cover up its own culpability the Zionist regime is now seeking to exact most cruel of revenges. The Gaza strip, home to 2 million souls with half of its population consisting of children, is now being bombed relentlessly by the occupiers. The carpet-bombing campaign, which also includes the use of white phosphorus in densely-populated urban areas, as attested by Human Rights Watch, aims at nothing less than the ethnic cleansing of Gaza. In the latest iteration of this criminal campaign, Israeli occupiers just bombed a hospital which also served as a safe haven for thousands of displaced people. Initial estimates indicate a death toll approaching thousands. Moreover, occupiers overtly cut off the water, fuel and food supplies of Gaza, already languishing under 17 years of almost total blockade. The cynical ultimatum for an “evacuation of Northern Gaza by its civilians” is nothing else than announcement for imminent destruction.

This inhuman ethnic cleansing unfolding under the eyes of the entire humankind is met by the thunderous applause of world imperialism – euphemistically called the “international community”. From the US to France, imperialists and open fascists like Meloni, Le Pen and Zemmour, try to criminalize peaceful objections, threaten even to disband left political parties, organizations, and movements that condemn the genocide of Palestinian people presenting them as defenders of... “terrorism”.

The war conflagration is not between Hamas or Gaza and Israel but between Palestinian slaves in their own land against Zionist Occupation, apartheid, inhuman repression and sufferings of 75 years.

It is an absolute hypocrisy to distinguish between “good” civilians dead to be mourned and “bad” civilians dead to be ignored. The real culprits of the crime and the real roots of the tragedy have to be revealed and fought back. ***No justice, no peace!***

Without giving any political support to Hamas, its reactionary methods and strategy (or the lack of it), ***we are not neutral in the clash between slaves in rebellion and their oppressors***, those who are calling now to “erase Gaza” and to exterminate Palestinians as “human animals” according to the Nazi language used by Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. ***We stand with the Palestinian resistance, in its rightful struggle against the Zionist occupier and its international imperialist backers in the “collective West”.***

Against the imperialist-Zionist coalition of genocide, and notwithstanding police terror and interdiction orders, we join forces with workers and youth all over the world taking the streets to stand with Palestine, for ***freedom and victory to the fighting Palestinian people.***

2. The new Palestinian upsurge is interconnected with the advanced process of exhaustion of the Zionist settler colonialist project that is breaking apart. Throughout 2023, from January to October 7, a majority of the Israeli Jewish population was mobilized in non-stop mass demonstrations against the judicial coup by the Netanyahu far right government. The split both in the State and society was

and remains deep, transversal and irreparable. The unseen “elephant in the room” was the fate of the Palestinian people until the moment of truth. ***No freedom for any people can exist with Occupation, settler colonialism, apartheid and ethnic cleansing of another people in its occupied land.***

Netanyahu accommodated his policies to the demands of his fascist allies in power such as Itamar ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich to concentrate the main repressive forces and escalate all military, police and settler paramilitary violence in the West Bank with the deliberate strategic aims of expulsion of the Palestinians, annexation of the West Bank, even of... Jordan as publicly declared the minister Smotrich! They had the illusion that they had under control Gaza, the greatest open air prison in the world, with a starving overcrowded population surviving in appalling conditions, under permanent asphyxiating siege, submitted to 6 bloody wars of aggression in 17 years. It was not Iran (which was surprised as well on October 7, according even to Western sources) but protracted hellish national oppression and social destruction that led to the war explosion and the “Al Aqsa Flood” operation named after the recent Al Aqsa Mosque profanation by the provocateur Itamar ben Gvir and his fascist thugs and for the liberation of the Palestinian prisoners.

3. The geopolitical map in the region and internationally has dramatically changed., bringing again at the center the just Palestinian cause that US imperialism, Zionism, and the Arab reactionary rulers tried to totally eliminate.

On September 22, Netanyahu, full of arrogance, had presented in the United Nations the green map of a non-existent “New Middle East” composed by Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain, with a “Prosperity Road” from Dubai through Israel to Southern Europe, and where the Palestinian people was absolutely eliminated. On the eve of the new war, United States imperialism mediated a critical “normalization” between Saudi Arabia and Israel as the culmination of the infamous misnamed “Abraham Accords” initiated by Trump, and as a counter-measure against the surprising new approach between Iran and Saudi Arabia made possible by China. All these machinations are now in ruins.

After the counterrevolution that followed the revolutionary tide of the Arab Spring, the reactionary Arab ruling classes and governments are again threatened by the millions of the Arab masses demonstrating in the streets their solidarity to the fighting Palestinian people.

US imperialism and NATO sent their air-carriers and battleships near the coasts of Gaza and Lebanon, threatening Hezbollah and Iran to not intervene in defense of the Palestinians. The EU Commission chair Ursula von der Leyen went to Israel and provocatively stood by Netanyahu and his genocidal war policies, although the EU as a whole is deeply divided on the issue. Blinken comes and goes to Israel and there is an international diplomatic frenzy to avoid a generalized chaos threatening their geopolitical interests. An extension of the war to Lebanon or Iran and the entire Middle East will supersede what so far brought the NATO proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, and it will accelerate the imperialist drive of a global “hybrid” war.

The two combined war conflagrations at the heart of Europe and at the heart of the Middle East clearly demonstrate the historic decline of US and global capitalism.

The fiasco of the US “terror” wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the “pivot to Asia” against the rising China initiated by Obama, and continued by his successors Trump and Biden marked the abandoning of the centrality of the Middle East in the US strategy to save its world hegemony. Now the new volcanic eruption in the Middle East not only brings it to the center of world developments but also gives a huge blow to the US strategy for world hegemony.

Above all, a new spiral of the spiraling, still unresolved but sharpening post-2008 global capitalist crisis has started bringing great dangers but also great revolutionary possibilities.

4. It is the immediate duty and historical task of the international working class and of all oppressed of the world to mobilize against the threatening international catastrophe, ***against the destruction of Gaza and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians by the revengeful reactionary war of the imperialist and Zionist culprits of the tragedy, and for their defeat.*** Accordingly, we call all the working-class organizations and trade-unions to heed the call of Palestinian trade-unions, and show solidarity in action by refusing to produce and carry armaments for Israel and by actively refusing any activity that might help Israel’s genocidal military campaign.

People across the world, should also immediately move to organize and support the international call to boycott Israel and implement divestments and sanctions on it. In any way we can, the time is to cripple Israel’s imperialist-backed genocide.

Despite the growing rivers of blood, we have to make a tiger’s leap over the abyss: to fight ***for the unity of all oppressed [Palestinian Arabs and Jews]*** that only an international socialist perspective, program and organization can fight for and achieve. ***For the national liberation of the Palestinian people in a Free, Independent and Socialist Republic, living together with the Jewish toilers, in the framework of a Socialist Federation of the Middle East.***

A class-based analysis of Turkey's 2023 elections

Levent Dölek

The 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections in Turkey offer us many lessons within a complex political landscape that demands scrutiny. However, any attempt to analyze these elections as if they were conducted fairly and lawfully would be highly misleading. There is conspicuous evidence that, from the very beginning to the aftermath, they have been manipulated both by the incumbent president and the unofficial coalition of AKP and MHP, who imposed the unconstitutional candidacy of Erdoğan and enacted election laws designed to favor themselves. While we will elaborate on electoral fraud later, for now, it suffices to say that no comment can be taken seriously if it ignores the fact that the elections were rigged.

Nevertheless, exposing the fraudulent character of the election by itself is not enough to explain how the AKP's manipulations succeeded and, more importantly, why the opposition accepted the results without any objection. That entails us to do a class-based analysis of the elections which needs to focus on what class interests the political programs and actions of the parties represent, rather than on the respective voting bases of the parties.

It is obvious that no bourgeois party can even receive 1%, let alone win the elections, being only voted by the capitalist class. The bourgeoisie, therefore, has to establish a political hegemony over the working class and other classes and strata by convincing them that its own interests represent the public ones. That policy manifests itself in various ideological guises, such as religious fundamentalism,

nationalism, militarism, and secularism. An “identity-based leftism” entirely stripped of class politics may also be exploited by the ruling class similarly. Each bourgeois party utilizes them, depending on their political inclinations and on the factions of the capitalist class they represent. For example, in the US, capitalist factions under pressure from international competition support Trump’s protectionist policies and his trade war against China, as epitomized in the nationalist MAGA (Make America Great Again) ideology, while capitalist factions having been damaged by the fragmentation of the world market promote the so-called liberal ideologies such as globalism, cosmopolitanism and “rainbow of identities”.

These ideologies function more to bring the working masses under the hegemony of the bourgeoisie than to reflect the worldview of individuals or groups belonging to different factions of the bourgeoisie. It is no longer even newsworthy for a boss who seems to be very tolerant in private life to support hardline policies and to take a position in favor of racist, fascist, religious, etc. parties, even if he or she himself or herself belongs to a minority sect or ethnic group. In addition, bourgeois factions also have a hinterland within the population that they can address more easily. In this sense, the Westernist-secular bourgeoisie in Turkey can appeal to the educated modern petty bourgeoisie much more easily and directly. Islamist capital, on the other hand, has a significant hegemonic influence on the traditional petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry.

36 political parties and five alliances participated in the May 14-28, 2023 elections. In the presidential elections, there were four candidates. In reality, the people did not have as many options as the number suggested. In terms of the parliamentary elections, the People’s Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*), the Nation Alliance (*Millet İttifakı*), and the Labor and Freedom Alliance (*Emek ve Özgürlük İttifakı*) led by the HDP competed as the three main rivals. Since the current regime is shaped by a strong President and a “chained” parliamentary structure, the main issue of the election was the presidential election. As a matter of fact, the Labor and Freedom Alliance was directly aligned with the Nation Alliance for the presidency, and Erdoğan and Kılıçdaroğlu came to the fore as the two candidates. The fact that the elections were held in two rounds reinforced this bipolar political picture. Muharrem İnce¹ and Sinan Oğan,² on the other hand, were not an alternative to power, neither de facto nor with their programs. Their aim was just to increase their bargaining power. It was of course inevitable that this dual structure would create an atmosphere of political polarization. This was not just a de facto situation, it

1 Muharrem İnce, who had been a presidential candidate against Kılıçdaroğlu in the CHP, and had led an opposition within the party, was surprisingly made the CHP’s presidential candidate by Kılıçdaroğlu himself in 2018. İnce lost the election. He blamed the lack of support from Kılıçdaroğlu and the CHP organisation for his failure. 3 years later, he founded the Homeland Party (*Memleket Partisi*).

2 In 2016, during the split in the MHP, he took part in the opposition wing against the current leader Bahçeli. He became a candidate for the presidency. However, he was not among those who left the MHP and founded the Good Party (*İyi Parti*). Although he was expelled from the MHP in 2017, he continued to aim to return to the MHP and aspire to the leadership of the MHP.

was mainly the result of the fact that the entire electoral process was marked by the interests of the two opposing camps of the bourgeoisie, the Westernist-secular bourgeoisie and the Islamist bourgeoisie. These interests, of course, did not manifest themselves directly but in an ideological guise, often hidden behind a demagogic rhetoric.

The grand contradiction of the elections

Political polarization during the elections has been shaped by four issues, in the order of from the most to the least propagandized: the regime change, the Kurdish question, refugees, and deteriorating economic conditions. In order to properly grasp the political meaning of the electoral process, we need to expose the great contradiction in this ranking. That is, the economy, which is the main burning and decisive issue for the working people (we can also say the vast majority of the electorate), has been the least debated issue of the election period, so to speak. It is interesting that none of the rival alliances made the economy the main axis of its program and propaganda although polls showed that in the run-up to the elections, the public had seen the economy by far as the most important problem.³ There was indeed no need for a survey to see how burning the problems such as the cost of living, housing and unemployment were. So what kept political actors away from bringing up those problems? Since we cannot say that those who produce policies based on these issues and on the interests of the broad working masses and the poor would lose votes for this reason, what was the reason then?

The answer is class politics. The economy is the area where the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are polarized along the lines of their respective interests. The election process has not been marked by this contradiction but by the internal contradictions of the bourgeoisie. The contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is objectively irreconcilable. This objective reality does not change, even though the proletariat is lined up in masses behind the parties of the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the internal contradictions of the bourgeoisie are not irreconcilable, no matter how harshly they manifest themselves. In the context of the elections, the clearest expression of this reconciliation is seen in the fact that the economy is not put at the center of politics. Because putting the economy at the center of the alignment means inviting the proletariat onto the political stage. The political representatives of the bourgeoisie have consciously avoided this. They have acted in agreement, almost in coordination, on this issue.

The devastating earthquakes in southeastern Turkey also remained absent from the election agenda, as the state left the people alone under the rubble for days. Reflecting its oppressive nature, the regime gave priority to implementing security

³ For example, in the Metropoll survey conducted in April, 56.1 per cent of the respondents said that the economy was the biggest problem (almost 60 per cent if you include the 2.9 per cent who said that it is unemployment!), while those who gave priority to terrorism (2.2 per cent), migrants and refugees as the biggest problem (2.2 per cent) did not even reach 5 per cent. Many other polls and surveys have been showing similar results for a long time, <https://twitter.com/ozersencarl/status/1650850268261543939?s=20>.

measures aimed at quelling potential mass protests. This took precedence over search and rescue efforts and the immediate procurement of goods for the victims. The government's focus seemed more aligned with creating lucrative investment opportunities for the construction sector, which appeared to be profiting from the rubble. These policies had the potential to incite a popular reaction against the oppressive government and the bourgeoisie, were it not for the overwhelming urgency of survival amidst the debris and the struggle to afford basic necessities. While the AKP suffered significant losses in earthquake-stricken cities like Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, Adıyaman, and Gaziantep, it still secured the most votes in those constituencies.

The bourgeois opposition played a significant role in preventing mass indignation from finding its political expression. For instance, the CHP controls the local government in Hatay, the region most severely affected by the earthquake. The mayor of Hatay has been linked to fatal crimes during the earthquake due to his ties with construction capital. Furthermore, the Nation Alliance placed "reconstruction" at the forefront of its political agenda, with Ekrem İmamoğlu, a CHP Mayor of Istanbul and a construction contractor by profession, leading this initiative. Consequently, not only in terms of their political stance but also in terms of their class reflexes, the opposition mirrored the government. This resulted in a shared interest between the government and the opposition to keep the earthquake, much like the economy, out of the election discourse.

Intra-class economic war of the bourgeoisie

The contradiction between the Westernist-secularist capital represented by TÜSİAD and Islamist capital, which has marked almost the last 30 years of the country's political life, has been decisive in the alignments in the elections. In the recent elections, this class divide played a decisive role in the political alignment. The People's Alliance, primarily supported by Islamist capital, consists mainly of small and medium-sized provincial capitalists along with some monopolistic finance-capital groups. On the other hand, the Nation Alliance stands as the direct representative of the interests of Westernist-secularist capital, which still holds a dominant position within the Turkish capitalist class. While this class cleavage was broadly represented by the People's Alliance and the Nation Alliance in the recent elections, there is interplay and permeability between the two sides. The internal contradictions of the bourgeoisie can manifest themselves in various ways, not just through political alliances but also within the power centers of the state. Hence, the electoral success of the People's Alliance did not result in a decisive victory for MÜSİAD capital over TÜSİAD capital. It is evident that Erdoğan's new economic policies have, in fact, contributed to strengthening TÜSİAD's influence in economic management, to the detriment of MÜSİAD.

Erdoğan's economic policies substantially align with the interests of Islamist capital, which predominantly consists of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with limited equity, reliant on loans for their survival. His adoption of a low-interest rate policy is, in essence, a response to their pragmatic economic

needs, regardless of his frequent reference to Quranic verses prohibiting interest for ideological justification. This policy benefits producers for the domestic market, fueled by increased demand driven by loans. Additionally, export-oriented businesses gain a short-term competitive advantage due to the favorable ratio between low interest rates and a high exchange rate, which effectively lowers labor costs. These groups also reap the benefits of tenders opened by local authorities and other public entities, whether for large or small-scale procurement of goods and services.

Conversely, Westernist-secularist capital monopolies, as represented by TÜSİAD, also require financing. However, they simultaneously generate revenue from interest rates by providing loans. Moreover, as these capital groups expand in size, they fulfill their financing needs through substantial syndicated loans from abroad. Erdoğan's policy of maintaining low interest rates and a high exchange rate, resulting in an increase in the country's risk premium, leads to a substantial rise in financing costs for Westernist secular capital. This is the reason why TÜSİAD is calling for an increase in interest rates. Such a move would inevitably lead to a significant economic slowdown. However, if this path is pursued, it poses a risk of bankruptcy or the declaration of a concordat for Islamist capital. Simultaneous economic contraction and corporate bankruptcies would create a scenario where larger capitalists absorb smaller ones, further consolidating their monopolistic control. What is a matter of life and death for one side represents an opportunity for the other.

The “gang of five” or oligarchs of the despotic regime

Holdings such as Cengiz, Limak, Kolin, Kalyon, and Makyol, often referred to as the “gang of five” due to their extensive involvement in public tenders and their close ties with the government, should be analyzed separately from the Islamist capitalist faction represented by MÜSİAD. In reality, there are more than just five of these influential entities. These oligarchs differ significantly from MÜSİAD's small and medium-sized enterprises. While MÜSİAD-affiliated businesses maintain their economic strength through their social influence, the aforementioned oligarchs rely primarily on their close connections within the state.

These groups have been awarded the most significant infrastructure tenders in Turkey and occupy half of the top 10 positions in the list of companies receiving the highest number of public tenders globally. Despite amassing immense wealth through these tenders, they appear unable to utilize this wealth without seeking the state's guidance, let alone establishing themselves as autonomous political power centers. It's worth noting that there's a distinction between the oligarchs associated with the government and MÜSİAD regarding state-backed projects. While TÜSİAD silently endorses these projects, MÜSİAD openly and vehemently supports them. However, MÜSİAD believes that it isn't receiving a sufficient share of the benefits from these projects. To gain a portion of the oligarchs' rewards, MÜSİAD proposes that financing should be facilitated through Sukuk, an Islamic finance instrument, rather than relying solely on transition and utilization guarantees. This way, not

only a handful of oligarchs but also thousands of small and medium-sized members of MÜSİAD capital can benefit from these projects.

Erdoganomics: Fuite en avant

The economic approach known as “Erdoganomics” globally and promoted as the “Turkey model” within Turkey challenges the macroeconomic assumptions found in established economic literature. Erdoğan defends this policy with a pseudo-theoretical approach, coupled with Islamic references, asserting that interest serves as the cause while inflation is its effect. To truly understand the essence of “Erdoganomics,” it is essential to analyze the trajectory that Erdoğan’s economic policy has taken.

Starting in the second half of 2021, Erdoğan initiated an economic policy initially referred to as the “China model” and later officially labeled the “Turkish economic model.” However, this policy eventually faced setbacks as the Central Bank’s foreign currency reserves were depleted due to the economy’s inability to generate the expected foreign trade surplus needed to control the exchange rate. As a result of these challenges, the management of the Central Bank underwent a transformation, with the appointment of “orthodox” experts tasked with setting interest rates based on supply and demand dynamics in the money market, with a primary focus on preserving price stability. However, it is crucial to note that this policy shift occurred against the backdrop of the ongoing pandemic. During the initial phases of the pandemic, marked by significant uncertainty, the concept of turning the crisis into an opportunity gained traction. The disruption of global supply chains, triggered by China’s “zero COVID” policy, presented Turkey with a chance to strategically position itself within these chains. Turkey’s advantageous logistics location, particularly its proximity to Europe, played a pivotal role in this strategy.

One of the most critical strategies for capital to seize a competitive advantage in this situation involves the suppression of labor. The government has implemented several policies to achieve this goal, including the imposition of unpaid leave under the guise of banning layoffs, the depletion of the unemployment insurance fund, the introduction of flexible working arrangements facilitated by the pandemic, and the prohibition and repression of strikes and workers’ actions. Furthermore, during the pandemic, the working class was exempted from the “stay at home” campaign and was sent to work in groups, even in the face of life-threatening conditions. Both major capitalist factions, MÜSİAD and TÜSİAD, stood in full agreement on these matters.

TÜSİAD sought to leverage the opportunities arising from the pandemic by focusing on the modernization of the Customs Union with the EU. They supported and actively advanced this process with the ultimate goal of achieving full integration with the EU. In parallel, MÜSİAD put forth a proposal suggesting that Europe could utilize Turkey as a central production and supply hub. Simultaneously, MÜSİAD pointed to an alternative geographic strategy, highlighting Islamic countries where it holds a relative competitive advantage.

Erdoğan's new monetary policy, which favored MÜSİAD, marked the end of the tight monetary policy era. During the summer season, foreign currency revenues played a crucial role in supporting this policy. Consequently, the government opted to open the country, taking a gamble with people's lives while concealing the true number of Covid-19 cases. However, as the tourism season concluded, a new juncture emerged. Touristic revenues fell short of expectations. MÜSİAD proposed taking on this risk, a decision influenced in part by the approaching 2023 elections. Cooling the economy in the run-up to the elections could result in economic contraction and increased unemployment, posing a significant political risk.

The "Turkey model" involved a calculated risk, one that could lead to a severe currency crisis and hyperinflation. Neither Erdoğan, the appointed technocrats overseeing the economy, nor the Palace's economic advisors were oblivious to these inherent risks. They consciously opted to embrace this risk, relying on the hope that fortune would favor their endeavor. Under the banner of a "competitive exchange rate," the deliberately undervalued Turkish Lira was expected to stimulate exports, supported by economic growth in Turkey's key export markets, particularly the EU. Record-breaking tourism figures were also part of the equation. Additionally, as long as energy prices—the linchpin of the current deficit—did not experience a significant surge during this process, they believed they could simultaneously manage inflation and foreign exchange rates. However, during this gamble, they did not wager their own funds; instead, they put the nation's savings on the line. Unfortunately, the dice didn't roll in their favor. When the Central Bank's gross reserves were rapidly depleted, a form of state guarantee was introduced for Turkish Lira deposits. This arrangement meant that if the exchange rate increase exceeded the interest rate, the Treasury and the Central Bank would compensate for the difference. Consequently, the financial burden arising from the depletion of foreign exchange reserves was effectively converted into Turkish Lira and placed upon the Treasury. Predictably, this led to an uncontrollable spiral of inflation.

When the nation's savings were exhausted, they resorted to trading their integrity. The financiers of the July 15th incident found reconciliation. The Jamal Khashoggi murder case was closed and handed over to the perpetrators who brutally killed the journalist inside the Saudi Arabian consulate, seemingly on a platter of gold. With foreign currency deposits from the Gulf, Erdoğan managed to keep the economy afloat until the May 14th elections. However, the exhaustion of reserves made it increasingly difficult to continue with business as usual. As a result, the policy based on Islamic principles was replaced by the discourse of "financial management with international credibility." Following the elections, a new economic management team was appointed, led by Mehmet Şimşek, a British citizen with strong credibility in the eyes of imperialist capital. Şimşek effectively rejected Erdoğanomics and called for a "return to rational policies."

The "empty pot" discussion and the electoral economy

One of the most prominent right-wing leaders in Turkish bourgeois politics, who has been elected prime minister several times and also served as president,

Süleyman Demirel, is known for his phrase “there is no government that an empty pot cannot topple,” which became very popular during the election process. This phrase reflected the opposition’s hope that Erdoğan would lose the election. However, while the Nation Alliance was counting on the empty pot to ensure Erdoğan’s departure, he was already looking for a way to keep the pot boiling, even if temporarily. The “Turkey model” largely contained elements of an electoral economy.

As the elections were approaching, the strategic aspects of the “Turkey model” gradually became overwhelmed by a purely electoral economy. TÜSİAD reacted critically to this orientation, and its criticism of “economic management breaks away from the realities of economic science” became the main discourse of the Nation Alliance (unfortunately, this criticism also resonated with a large section of the left). At one stage, when the credit policy that prioritized consumption made it difficult for SMEs to access commercial loans, even MÜSİAD seemed to embrace a critical stance. In the end, however, MÜSİAD, which was convinced that the continuation of Erdoğan’s rule is preferable to the interests of its own class faction, adopted a much milder attitude towards bearing the costs of the electoral economy.

The electoral economy was largely aimed at manipulating, or more accurately, distorting the perception of the working masses. Moreover, the burden of this extremely expensive method of deceiving the masses has been compensated for by the workers and laborers themselves due to the rising cost of living. In the end, in a narrow sense, the electoral economy served Erdoğan’s most basic aims. However, in general terms, despite the fact that the Central Bank and the Treasury have been turned into party coffers, and all public resources have been mobilized for the elections, Erdoğan has not been able to create (even phony) prosperity. Hence, he failed to convince his voters of the so-called economic success. The People’s Alliance’s electoral economy policy nonetheless succeeded relatively in diverting their voters’ attention to other political spheres through religious, militarist, and nationalist demagogy.

The Nation Alliance’s economic policies were one of the most important factors that made that demagogy influential because its program, which was thoroughly shaped by TÜSİAD’s demands, was in no way a veritable alternative to that of the People’s Alliance. For example, the meeting held by the CHP to inaugurate its vision statement, featuring figures such as Jeremy Rifkin, Daron Acemoğlu, Selin Sayek Böke, and Hacer Foggo, was an attempt to garner the trust of imperialist finance capital. The popular masses were not convinced that these names would solve their problems.

The CHP’s statement, integrated with the Deva Party’s (*Deva Partisi*, founded by Erdoğan’s former Minister of Finance Ali Babacan, who later defected to the opposition), anti-labor liberal program, has become the manifesto of the Nation Alliance. Instead of evoking a TÜSİAD report, it neither mentioned how to entrench the right to unionize nor provided a place for the taxation of capital gains. Conversely, the most regressive anti-labor measures (such as generalized flexible work without seniority indemnification and a government budget exclusively in

harmony with the interests of capital and imperialism).⁴ Any citizen of the Republic of Turkey could conclude, upon reviewing the program, that the Nation Alliance has been a loyal servant of capital and that the policies it has proposed would not improve the lives of working people. This conclusion proved to be accurate.

In short, the “empty pot” served its political function, but the opposition could not challenge the government with a pro-labor programme because the class interests of the big bourgeoisie it represents prevented it from doing so. It thus helped Erdoğan and the front of despotism to shift the political agenda to other areas, and to cling to power again.

Foreign policy and the class interests of the bourgeoisie

We also see a bifurcation within the bourgeoisie in terms of the trajectory of foreign policy. Westernist-secular capital is in favor of the strategic integration of Turkish capitalism with Western imperialism. Islamist capital, on the other hand, is generally in favor of protectionist policies. The Customs Union is profitable for the TÜSİAD-affiliated capitalists who already have partnerships with foreign corporations, but it subjects SMEs to an unbearable competition. Islamist capitalists being deprived of foreign partnership is not the manifestation of an ideologically-informed political stance, but of the inability to offer attractive opportunities to foreign capital. That does not simply mean that they only operate in the domestic market. Islamist capital exports not only goods but also capital (largely as construction capital) abroad. However, the partner of Islamist capital in its integration with the world market is the state rather than foreign capital.

Clearly, the reach of Westernist-secular capital extends beyond just the EU, the US, and Britain. Koç's Arçelik has investments in South Africa, while Otokar is a primary arms supplier to the United Arab Emirates. If it offers access to Middle Eastern markets, a touch of “Rabiism” might indeed prove profitable for Westernist secular capital.⁵ However, the key point is that the opportunities presented by a “Rabiist” foreign policy to Islamist capital are significantly greater.

The Westernist-secularist bourgeoisie doesn't fundamentally oppose Erdoğan's pragmatic ties with Russia and China. It is widely recognized that Tuncay Özilhan's Anadolu Group is instrumental in fostering relations with Russia. Moreover, TÜSİAD itself is a stakeholder in China's “Belt and Road Initiative.” As such, a policy that maintains a balanced relationship with Russia and China—and secures these commercial opportunities—is also in the interests of Westernist-secularist capital. However, the S-400 crisis and the subsequent cancellation of the F-35 project had significant financial repercussions. Companies in Turkey, responsible for producing 188 parts for these aircraft, lost billions in potential revenue. This economic setback was politically manifested in the overt and stern opposition of

⁴ For a criticism of the Nation Alliance's programme, see *Gerçek Gazetesi*, “Millet İttifakı Ehveni Şer Bile Olmadığını Gösterdi”, <https://gercekgazetesi1.net/politika/millet-ittifaki-ehveni-ser-bile-olmadigini-gosterdi>.

⁵ For an analysis of the political character of the AKP based on the concept of Rabiism, see Sun-gur Savran, “Faşizm mi Rabiizm mi?”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, no. 27, Summer 2016, pp. 19-69.

Kılıçdaroğlu and the Nation Alliance to the S-400s. In essence, while TÜSİAD capital is strategically oriented towards integration with the EU and Western imperialism, as a dominant force in Turkish capital, it also seeks to capitalize on global opportunities. Many TÜSİAD members have invested in Russia.

Consider another example: Turkey's recently strengthened ties with Azerbaijan and its proactive approach to the Turkic republics of Central Asia are not primarily motivated by the Turanian ideal, but by the bourgeoisie's pursuit of energy resources. The Westernist-secular bourgeoisie supports these policies, provided they do not jeopardize relations with NATO and the EU. For instance, the Azerbaijani army's victory in the Karabakh War aligns well with the foreign policy priorities of the Westernist-secularist bourgeoisie.

In summary, the collective interests of the bourgeoisie lean towards an expansionist foreign policy. The era of "peace at home and peace in the world" seems to have passed. Yet, questions arise: Under whose guidance and against whom will this expansionist approach unfold? And who will be the primary beneficiary of this policy? These issues are the subjects of intense debate. Concurrently, this situation affords foreign powers an opportunity to continuously influence Turkish politics. The trusted allies of Western imperialism in this context are the Westernist-secular bourgeoisie and the Turkish Armed Forces, given their intrinsic association with the NATO. Islamist capital has yet to propose a strategic foreign policy alternative that could challenge this status quo. Its closest approach was the Muslim Brotherhood's endeavor to influence the Arab revolution, particularly in Egypt. It could even be argued that this direction was indirectly supported by dominant Western forces like British imperialism. However, it is evident that Turkey encountered disagreements with the USA and Israel during this period, albeit on a tactical front. The diminishing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood suggests that Turkey might find it challenging to alter the limits set by Western imperialism within the Islamic world. A parallel outcome can be anticipated for Turkey's Azerbaijan strategy, which is driven by Turkic-Turanist ambitions.

Militarism as the common ideology of the bourgeoisie

Another ideological theme prevalent during the election process revolved around militarism. Militarism has increasingly become the shared ideology of capital. Erdoğan's primary campaign focus was Turkey's achievements and ventures in the arms industry. The Nation Alliance did not ideologically counter this; instead, they delegated the militaristic rhetoric to Mansur Yavaş, the MHP-affiliated Mayor of Ankara. He delivered speeches at rallies lauding UCAVs (unmanned combat aerial vehicles) and promised to sustain the arms industry and its associated expenditures. Kılıçdaroğlu's critique of the current administration is not centered on militarism per se. His principal contention is that the Westernist-secularist capital has not secured a significant portion of the military investments. This is why he vowed during the campaign to promote competition within the arms industry.

Turkey's reliance on external energy resources not only deeply influences its foreign policy but also presents a comprehensive strategic challenge for its economic

infrastructure. This dependency becomes more acute given that primary production inputs are purchased using foreign currencies, leading to a persistent current account deficit. This deficit, in turn, hampers the stabilization of the exchange rate, posing a strategic concern for capitalists operating within Turkey. Rising inflation and fluctuating exchange rates make labor more affordable but energy significantly costlier. Consequently, both Western-oriented secular capitalists and Islamist capitalists aspire for the Turkish state to expand its influence into the neighboring energy-rich regions. In this endeavor, the primary leverage of the Turkish bourgeoisie is its military, which boasts the distinction of being the second-largest land army within NATO. Viewing the situation from a capitalist interest standpoint, the assertion by renowned international financier George Soros that “Turkey’s most valuable export is its army” appears to hold true. However, despite the substantial military prowess Turkey possesses, it lacks the decisive edge, both in quality and quantity, to operate autonomously. Additionally, other powerful entities already dominate the regions Turkey aims to influence. Without external support or alliances, the Turkish state’s solo influence in these areas seems unattainable.

There is no difference between the Nation Alliance and the People’s Alliance in their actions under the auspices of Western imperialism. The Nation Alliance is highly critical of moves that create tensions with countries in the European Union, such as Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, France, and Germany, as well as with the USA, especially in the Mediterranean. In contrast, the People’s Alliance adopts a more aggressive stance in regions like Libya, the Caucasus, and Idlib. These are areas where British imperialism competes with EU powers, attempting to carve out a niche for itself.

One might wonder why Islamist capital would show a preference for Christian Britain over Christian Continental Europe. The answer lies in British imperialist foreign policy, which transformed London into an Islamic finance haven for Gulf money. Moreover, Britain has historically used the Muslim Brotherhood as an instrument in the Middle East, continuing to do so until the organization lost its prestige and influence. This distinct and pragmatic approach of British foreign policy also aids Turkey’s arms industry in securing a pivotal position within NATO. The collaboration of British capital, and even the direct involvement of the British state in Turkey’s arms industry, particularly in projects like the National Fighter Aircraft, is a reality that often goes unnoticed. Between 2018 and 2022, Turkey’s arms exports surged by 69 percent. Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman are significant recipients of these exports. Furthermore, Turkey is venturing into the markets of NATO’s Eastern European members, which have bolstered their defense spending in the wake of the war in Ukraine. India, being one of the world’s most heavily armed nations, is another market that beckons the Turkish arms industry. The support of British imperialism appears crucial for Turkey as it seeks to penetrate all these markets.⁶

⁶ In the article entitled “Made in Turkey but British” in the 161st issue of *Gerçek Gazetesi* dated February 2023, we mentioned the special relationship that the arms industry in Turkey had established with British imperialism. See <https://gercekgazetesi1.net/politika/yerli-ve-english>.

Following the failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016, the gradual emergence of a quasi-military regime has placed militarism at the forefront of political discourse. While militarism has become a cornerstone of the People's Alliance's propaganda, the Nation Alliance has similarly adopted this stance. This adoption can be attributed to two main reasons: firstly, the interests of the capital factions they represent demand such an alignment, and secondly, they acknowledge the powerful impact of militarist propaganda on the general populace.

Anti-immigrant politics

Another dominant theme during the election process was anti-immigrant sentiment. This sentiment was exploited by Sinan Oğan, the third candidate in the presidential election supported by Ümit Özdağ's Victory Party (*Zafer Partisi*), which attempted to introduce European-style fascist politics to Turkey. The class interest behind this anti-immigrant sentiment stems from the bourgeoisie manipulating the anger and tension caused by the economic crisis among the working people, redirecting it against the immigrant population. Undoubtedly, the rapid arrival, settlement, and social integration of millions of migrants would create social tensions in any country. Fascist and proto-fascist movements worldwide are best poised to exploit such tensions. This has been evident in Turkey as well. Following the second round of the presidential vote, anti-immigrant sentiment became central to the Nation Alliance's propaganda. One reason for this pivot was to appeal to the 5 percent of voters who had previously supported Sinan Oğan. But, naturally, there is more to it than just that. The issue should also be examined through the lens of class interests.

In Turkey, the bourgeoisie takes advantage of migrants from countries like Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Central Asian nations by employing them as cheap labor. This influx of migrant labor also has the effect of suppressing the wages of domestic workers, further illustrating that the bourgeoisie generally benefits from the presence of immigrants. The People's Alliance's pro-migrant stance is fundamentally influenced by class interests from top to bottom. It's primarily the small and medium-sized enterprises that exploit migrant labor. The industries where migrants are predominantly employed include garments (31.1 percent), trade and accommodation (17.7 percent), other manufacturing (17.1 percent), construction (13.2 percent), and agriculture (7.8 percent).⁷ Within these sectors, it's primarily the small and medium-sized enterprises that employ migrant labor more extensively. This trend can be attributed to the fact that migrant labor is largely informal. In this context, the statement from AKP's Yasin Aktay, representing the Islamic bourgeoisie, is particularly telling: "If Syrians leave, the country's economy will collapse."⁸ A considerable number of Syrian migrants are also small

7 Mahmut Hamsici, "Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler hakkında güncel bilgiler neler?", *BBC News Türkçe*, August 26, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-58329307>.

8 *Cumhuriyet*, "Erdoğan'ın Danışmanı Aktay: Suriyeliler Giderse Ülke Ekonomisi Çöker", <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/erdoganin-danismani-aktay-suriyeliler-giderse-ulke-ekono->

capital owners. They have set up company partnerships in several provinces, most notably in Gaziantep, with the number of these established companies approaching 1000.⁹ Another group that has benefited from the influx of migrants is property owners, who have seen significant increases in their income due to rising rents and housing prices. Notably, property owners in the border provinces, where migrants have predominantly settled and where there has been a marked uptick in housing demand, have particularly benefited.

It is also important to emphasize that not all migrants are individuals fleeing from war. Those who deposit \$500,000, purchase government bonds of the same amount, or buy real estate valued at \$400,000 can acquire Turkish citizenship. The revenue generated from selling citizenship in this manner has reached 7.5 billion US dollars.¹⁰ From these figures, it is evident that the sale of citizenship plays a significant role in financing the despotic regime, especially given its shortage of foreign currency. These details provide clear insights into the class dynamics underlying the purported “immigrant-friendly” stance of the capital represented by the People’s Alliance.

The capital affiliated with TÜSİAD, which employs migrant labor only to a limited extent, indirectly benefits from the competition brought about by the increased supply of migrant labor. As the economic crisis deepens and the cost of living surges, exacerbating class contradictions, this particular segment of capital reaps direct and strategic advantages from the growing hostility towards immigrants, thereby diverting and misdirecting class anger. The specific class interests of TÜSİAD-aligned capital form the foundation for Ümit Özdağ’s fascist, anti-immigrant rhetoric becoming the cornerstone policy of the Nation Alliance.

In conclusion, the conspicuous silence of the socialist left on this issue demands an explanation. The EU-funded illusion of “fraternity” with migrants, as popularized within left-liberal circles, was swiftly deflated under the weight of order-based politics. Anti-immigrant sentiments resonated easily with the self-interest of the modern petty bourgeoisie, the primary demographic that the left targets. Examining the class relationship between the modern petty bourgeoisie and migrants, we observe that they neither garner rent from migrants nor exploit migrant labor directly. Their economic interaction might extend to employing a Central Asian babysitter, and when this babysitter requests a pay raise due to a soaring dollar, it is animosity, not empathy, toward immigrants that gets stoked. While anti-immigrant sentiment is undeniably prevalent among the working class, their objective interests do not lie in opposing immigrants. Instead, they should be aligning in class unity with immigrants to challenge the bourgeoisie. In a society where the bourgeoisie, the ruling class, governs culture, ideology, and intellectual discourse, it is not surprising that the masses might be oblivious to their objective

misı-coker-1855405.

9 *Yeni Şafak*, “Göçle Gelen Ekonomi”, <https://www.yenisafak.com/ekonomi/gocle-gelen-ekonomi-2991973>.

10 Nedim Türkmen, “Satılan Vatandaşlık Sayısı: 25.969”, *Sözcü*, May 16, 2022. <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2022/yazarlar/nedim-turkmen/satilan-vatandaslik-sayisi-25-969-7136848>.

interests. So, if the past chauvinism of the masses during imperialist wars did not deter socialists from denouncing those wars, it is untenable for them to now remain silent in the face of rising anti-immigrant sentiment.

Furthermore, even if the working class is swayed by chauvinism, the inherent dynamics of the class struggle possess the potential to unify both migrant and native workers in opposition to capital. History provides numerous examples of this. One personal experience worth noting is the Adkotürk strike in Çerkezköy. Here, Syrian workers sided with the strike against a Syrian company partner, highlighting an intention to include these migrant workers in the strike. Although this particular strike did not culminate in a united front between migrant and local workers, the potential for such unity was evident.¹¹ On one side, the animosity exhibited by Syrian employers towards their workers fueled anti-immigrant sentiments. Yet, on the flip side, workers passionately applauded and backed the agitation of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (*Devrimci İşçi Partisi*, DİP), which urged immigrant workers to strike and championed unity. Such a dynamic is hard to discern in the political stances backed by the Western secular bourgeoisie, or in the day-to-day lives of the modern petty bourgeoisie steeped in self-centeredness. This explains why the identity-centric, post-modern, post-Leninist narrative of “brotherhood”—championed by social-democratic and green parties of the European Union (like Die Linke in Germany, NPA in France, Syriza in Greece, and others)—dissipated so readily. It's been reaffirmed that the most effective path to freeing the working class from chauvinistic influences lies in genuine proletarian class politics.

The Kurdish question

The Kurdish question emerged as one of the pivotal issues during the election process. Yet, instead of engaging in discussions about potential solutions, the Kurdish political movement, primarily through the PKK, was vilified. Even critiques of the unlawfully appointed officials in HDP municipalities were framed as acts in concert with terrorism. In this context, the People's Alliance predominantly wielded the tool of chauvinism. The HDP's endorsement of Kılıçdaroğlu, along with the press coverage of statements from PKK leaders echoing this sentiment, became central to the People's Alliance's propaganda campaign.

In contrast, the Nation Alliance did not counter this wave of chauvinism with proposals to address the Kurdish issue. Instead, it attempted to use chauvinism to its advantage. The alliance spotlighted Erdoğan's inclusion of Hûda-Par, which has ties to the Kurdish Hezbollah — a political Islamist group that historically received state support as a counter to the PKK. They consistently brought up Erdoğan's past peace initiatives and the events that unfolded during those times. All these tactics only amplified the prevailing chauvinism in the political discourse.

11 From our first-hand experience, we're fully aware of this dynamic's existence. At one point during the strike, there was a decision to create a banner in Arabic, urging Arab workers to join the strike alongside their Turkish counterparts. Our video recording from the strike site serves as a testament that the working class can indeed overcome anti-immigration sentiments. See *Gerçek* newspaper's Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_Ki0Ty3i0.

Interestingly, the HDP, which stands as the primary representative on the Kurdish question, did not prioritize this issue in their agenda. The HDP seemed to believe that the rising chauvinism would naturally consolidate Kurdish votes in their favor. With this strategy, they were almost certain to secure their position as the third-largest party in the new parliament. Yet, political power seemed to lean towards the party perceived as “less chauvinist” among the chauvinistic alternatives. To be more precise, even if a party’s political stance was rooted in chauvinism, the influence leaned towards the victory of the party perceived to be more aligned with the Kurdish issue.

The political dynamics surrounding the Kurdish question demand a class-based explanation. Central to this analysis are the colonial interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie. These interests extend beyond the Kurdish regions within Turkey’s borders, reaching into northern Iraq (Bashûr) and, to a degree, northern Syria (Rojava), both of which are rich in energy resources. The bourgeoisie shares a common interest in exerting influence over these regions, accessing their energy resources, and integrating them into the Turkish economy in a manner that allows transactions in local currency—akin to the model employed in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, even if it does not involve direct conquest. While there is general agreement within the bourgeoisie regarding these overarching interests, the divergence arises when determining the method and alliances necessary to achieve them. It is important to consider that, in the post-July 15 quasi-military regime, the decision-making power regarding the Kurdish question within the People’s Alliance is not solely in the hands of the AKP leadership or Beştepe. Instead, the crucial decisions are largely influenced by the military wing of the government, including the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, and the National Intelligence Organization. Consequently, it is logical for the People’s Alliance to base its Kurdish policy on the military and political neutralization/suppression of the Kurdish movement’s tradition, as broadly represented by the HDP.

We must also consider the following historical perspective. In the past, a line of thinking widely held within the military rejected the language, culture, and identity of the Kurds. This stance, as perceived by the Kurdish movement, was termed as the “policy of denial and annihilation.” Ideologically, it resonated with the Kemalist principle of “peace at home, peace in the world,” accompanied by a firm declaration that not “a single pebble” would be conceded. Conversely, this approach viewed the second republican project—with figures like Turgut Özal leveraging the Iraq war to engage in imperialist aggression and support Iraqi Kurds, and Tansu Çiller suggesting discussions around the BASK model—as jeopardizing national security. However, there has always been an inherent tension between the military’s concept of national security and the Turkish bourgeoisie’s colonial aspirations extending beyond national borders. Currently, this tension has largely been reconciled. The “denial” aspect of the “denial and annihilation” policy has been largely abandoned. The MHP’s ideological reconfiguration, even in its most pronounced form, serves as an example of this shift, aligning more closely with these evolving interests.

The strategy of partnering with Barzani against the Kurdish political tradition, represented by the HDP, has transitioned from being tactical to becoming a core

strategic approach. Within Turkey, this cooperation manifests as strengthened ties with Kurdish landowners and pro-government village guard tribes. There is a clear carrot-and-stick approach aimed at pulling the political Islamist faction of the Kurdish movement away from the HDP. This was evident with Hûda-Par's shift first towards the People's Alliance and subsequently into parliament. This strategic pivot goes beyond the People's Alliance's mere rejection of Kurdish politics, and it actively pursues a specific Kurdish political agenda. At its foundation, this strategy is built upon the Kurdish bourgeoisie, tribal leaders, and landlords, many of whom are interconnected with Islamist capital. This political trajectory is set on the military and political neutralization of the PKK. In parallel with this, it seeks to either eliminate the HDP from the political landscape or, if that proves challenging, to minimize its influence, especially at the local governance level. Such decisions and directives will not merely be the domain of the civilian arm of governance. Instead, they will be executed directly by the Ministry of Defense and the National Intelligence Organization. The appointment of trustees in HDP-led municipalities, the incarceration of Selahattin Demirtaş, the successive arrests of HDP members, and most recently, the move to disband the HDP, all epitomize this policy in action.

This policy starkly contrasts with the Kurdish strategy of the Nation Alliance, which reflects the interests of the Westernist-secular bourgeoisie. This segment of the bourgeoisie perceives an initiative process, overseen by the USA and the European Union, as more congruent with its strategic objectives. Consequently, it is predisposed to view the HDP and its foundational policy as potential partners. The Good Party (*İyi Parti*) emerges as the wildcard in this equation. Given its fascist origins, one might anticipate the İyi Parti to fundamentally oppose this strategy. Yet, that is not the case. The party's main shortcoming is its inability to defend this stance against the critiques of the MHP. Nevertheless, the İyi Parti has consistently engaged with the HDP, including during constitutional discussions. In fact, the inaugural effort to align the İyi Parti and the HDP in a tacit and unofficial coalition during the 2019 local elections was both initiated and realized. But with the intensifying chauvinistic undertones in politics, the İyi Parti initially adopted a defensive position, and as that proved insufficient, it amplified its anti-HDP rhetoric.

As events unfolded, we observed the CHP similarly aligning with the chauvinist campaign. At a certain juncture, the Nation Alliance was primarily accompanied by parties such as the Deva Partisi, the Future Party (*Gelecek Partisi*), and the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*). These parties acknowledged the legitimacy of Kurdish politics and voiced the demands of the Kurdish people, albeit from a liberal and bourgeois standpoint. Given that the HDP, with its support base grounded in the Kurdish vote, has garnered around 10%, it is evident how crucial their support is for the Nation Alliance to achieve the 50+1% threshold, especially in the presidential elections. However, there exists a palpable contradiction. The Nation Alliance, while recognizing the importance of the HDP's support, not only refrained from addressing the Kurdish question during the electoral period (with the issue being conspicuously absent from the joint consensus text of the Nation Alliance) but also seemed to rival the People's Alliance in its demonization of the Kurdish movement and its endorsement of chauvinism. When we endeavor to unpack this paradox, we

are met with the profound dilemma faced by the Kurdish movement.

This is the crux of the tragedy: For a long time, the Kurdish movement viewed the global imperialist powers—primarily the USA, EU, and NATO—as not only potential solution-brokers to the Kurdish question but, more gravely, as allies to the Kurdish people. Such a reactionary and perilous policy was rationalized as a tactical necessity borne from the situation. Over time, this stance evolved into an ideological and political endorsement of Western imperialism. We have consistently posited that for the Kurdish people, seeking the aegis of imperialism is not only an act of betrayal against other nations, but it also bears direct repercussions for the Kurdish people itself.¹² Today, the repercussions of this dynamic are evident. When the Kurdish movement placed its trust in the patronage of imperialism, the Westernist secularist bourgeoisie felt little need to genuinely engage with Kurdish politics to secure its support. They operated under the assumption that the intermediation of the USA and the EU would suffice to bring Kurdish politics onboard. Regrettably, this exact scenario played out. The Kurdish movement operated under the belief that, despite the Nation Alliance's escalating chauvinistic rhetoric, if the alliance ascended to power, negotiations would ensue through the mediation of the USA and the EU. This misplaced confidence culminated in a conspicuous self-censorship throughout the electoral phase, where the Kurdish question was notably sidelined.

Nationalist votes or fascist danger?

A prevailing narrative in the post-election analysis was that nationalism emerged as the dominant sentiment. To illustrate, the MHP garnered 5.4 million votes (10%), the İyi Parti 5.2 million (9.7%), the Zafer Partisi 1.2 million (2.23%), and the Great Unity Party (*Büyük Birlik Partisi*, BBP) 530 thousand (1%), amounting to a collective 12.6 million votes or 23.2% of the total. It is worth noting, however, that the authenticity of the MHP's 10% share is a matter of debate. Nevertheless, cumulatively, this marks the highest vote share historically achieved by the MHP's political lineage. But the significance goes beyond mere numbers. The chauvinistic rhetoric championed by parties stemming from the MHP tradition influenced both the AKP and CHP, the election's primary contenders. This influence was unmistakable. Numerous articles and commentaries have highlighted this trend, but a fundamental flaw persisted in these analyses: a misdiagnosis. If the discourse is centered on nationalism and nationalist parties, then the focus should not be limited to the 23.2% vote share. Rather, it should encompass the combined votes of both the People's Alliance and the Nation Alliance, which, throughout the election, were embroiled in a tug of war over nationalist sentiments. Together, their vote share approached 90%. What is truly at the heart of this discourse is the combined vote share of the four parties with MHP roots, as well as the influential political position

¹² The resolution of the 5th Congress of the DİP, which expresses our policy on this issue, titled "The Historical Decline of the Kurdish Movement and the Requirements of a Proletarian, Anti-Imperialist, and Internationalist Politics" can be read here: <https://gercekgazetesi1.net/dip-bildirileri/kurt-hareketinin-tarihsel-geriledi-ve-proleter-anti-imperyalist-internasyonalist>.

of the third presidential candidate, Sinan Oğan, also of MHP origin, who secured 5% of the votes.

When discussing parties and figures that trace their roots to the MHP, the conversation should pivot towards fascism rather than mere nationalism. The MHP stands as the foundational fascist entity from which the other parties have branched out. These parties often reaffirm their ties to this fascist lineage by referencing “idealism” (*ülküçülük*). While it is debatable whether these offshoots (with the notable exceptions of the MHP and BBP, which historically had paramilitary affiliations) can be fully categorized as fascist in the traditional sense, their trajectory suggests an inevitable evolution into a distinctly fascist movement. It is crucial to recognize that branding such a movement—historically antagonistic to workers, responsible for violent actions, and intertwined with NATO’s counter-insurgency strategies against progressive movements— as simply “nationalist” is a significant misrepresentation.

When analyzing the electoral success of fascist (MHP-BBP) and proto-fascist (İyi Parti-Zafer Partisi) parties, a recurring assertion is the inherent right-wing and nationalist predisposition of the Turkish populace. This perspective is misleading. It fails to account for the global upswing in fascism and proto-fascist movements as a response to the severe downturn in world capitalism. Attempts to explain this trend through sociological lenses—highlighting conservatism or cultural codes—oversimplify the issue, sidestepping the crucial class dynamics and interests underpinning the rise of fascism. In the current era, the nationalism and racism we witness aims to obscure the deepening class divisions exacerbated by the Great Depression, substituting these class-based tensions with racial and nationalist divides, notably between indigenous populations and immigrants.¹³ Driven by this underlying class interest, both conflicting factions of the bourgeoisie not only incorporate fascist and proto-fascist parties within their ranks but also embed chauvinism, fascism, and overt racism into their policies and narratives.

It is a grave mistake to overlook these class interests. Those who do are entirely vulnerable to the threat of fascism, confusing the claims of “democracy” made by a faction of the bourgeoisie for its own legitimacy with genuine democracy. They fail to recognize the discrepancy between the subjective statements of the bourgeoisie’s political agents and their objective interests, and thus, do not derive the essential inferences. The problem is expecting freedom, democracy, etc., from the internal contradictions of the bourgeoisie. At present, it’s unreasonable to even anticipate the separation of powers from the bourgeoisie. Why? Because the significant downturn of capitalism makes it exceptionally challenging for the bourgeoisie to govern the vast majority of the working and impoverished individuals. The fear of revolt and revolution intensifies the bourgeoisie’s inclinations toward autocracy, dictatorship, imperialism, war — in essence, all forms of reactionary measures. This explains the disillusionment of those who hoped for democracy from Biden as opposed

13 For an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of the rise of pro-fascist movements in the period we live in, see. Sungur Savran, “The Return of Barbarism: Fascism in the 21st Century (2) The Rise of Proto-Fascism”, *Revolutionary Marxism* 2020, p. 65-102.

to Trump, or from Macron as opposed to Le Pen. In Turkey, the expectation of democracy from Kılıçdaroğlu was shattered without him even coming to power. His advancement to the second round of the election was enough. Kılıçdaroğlu quickly aligned with Ümit Özdağ, inspired by the growing fascism in Europe, displaying posters proclaiming “Syrians will leave.”

The absurd political orientation of allying with fascists against “fascism” has emerged. The socialists have remained silent when they should have exposed the real face of fascism, when they should have explained the crimes of the fascist movement in Turkey against the working class, that the bosses use fascists as strikebreakers, as fratricides for the imperialists and that they are the most significant source of personnel for the NATO counter-guerrilla. It would be completely wrong to think that taking a stand on this issue would cut socialists from the masses. The opposite is true. When socialists are engaged in the class struggle, they are fighting shoulder to shoulder with the workers who vote for all these parties, and they can discuss all sorts of political issues thanks to the confidence gained in the struggle. The target of the socialists should be the fascist parties and their leaders who serve the bourgeoisie. Not the workers and toilers who vote for these parties. But we observed the opposite. The leftists who supported the Nation Alliance treated the fascist parties and leaders as if they were democrats who had repented of their hostility against the workers and the people and did not raise their voice against Kılıçdaroğlu's propaganda with the symbol of “bozkurt” (grey wolf) and “nationalist” rhetoric. This reckless attitude paved the way for an approach that insulted and belittled those who voted for the People's Alliance or for Sinan Oğan and supported Erdoğan in the second round. Once again, while identity politics paralyzed the left, it became the lifeblood of reaction; fascism, the most extreme expression of reaction, gained mass support, and fascist discourses gained hegemonic influence.

The class dimension of electoral security

At this stage, we can examine electoral security from a broader perspective. As mentioned at the outset of this article, our discussion encompasses more than just repression, irregularities, and fraud in elections. Why did these events transpire? This is the question we seek to answer. Electoral security emerged as a hotly debated topic throughout the election process. Members of the Nation Alliance unanimously advocated for strengthening the parliamentary system in their political program. However, in practice, they repeatedly emphasized their joint preparations for election security from the outset. After most of the “Table of Six” meetings, it was reported that election security commissions had been established and that collaborative preparations were underway.

The elections have concluded. During the first round, it was discovered that thousands of ballot boxes lacked representation from the opposition. In these boxes, Erdoğan secured a significant lead. While the security of the ballot boxes was a topic of concern, the primary issue that emerged was the integrity of the voters' registers and lists. Recent studies revealed an alarming trend: the number of registered voters has increased at twice the rate of the population growth, hinting at the possibility

of double registrations. Ever since the adoption of the address-based population registration system in 2007, the number of voters has grown disproportionately compared to the population. Furthermore, since 2009, the use of fingerprints was eliminated, leaving only voter ID cards and wet signatures as means to verify voting authenticity. In the 2023 elections, this discrepancy between the population growth rate and voter turnout widened to 6.7 million, and no logical explanation for this gap has been provided to date.¹⁴

It is inconceivable that the Nation Alliance, which boasts of its rigorous preparations for election security and established a special commission a year earlier, failed to spot these anomalies in the voter lists. Neither the Supreme Election Council (SEC) nor any other state institution has offered an explanation for the inexplicably high voter count, which defies the natural course of events. Yet, even more concerning is the absence of any significant pressure from the opposition on the SEC and the state regarding this matter.

While the Nation Alliance claims to be highly committed to electoral security, its actions suggest a more passive acceptance of the prevailing electoral conditions. The People's Alliance highlighted this passive stance when it openly endorsed Erdoğan's bid for a third term, disregarding the constitutional mandate. Moreover, the People's Alliance approved the new electoral law, which largely favored them. Astonishingly, this law was enacted for the upcoming elections even though it was introduced less than a year prior, again bypassing constitutional protocols.

The Nation Alliance's claims to champion electoral security seem to be undermined by underlying class interests. The evidence is unmistakable. The "front of despotism" has tailored the electoral process to its liking. This is evident from the voter lists, the electoral campaign process, the participating parties, the composition of the opposition, and even the political campaign against İmamoğlu — including the selection of the contender to run against Erdoğan. This control was achieved by harnessing state institutions, armed state bodies, and the judiciary.

For genuine election security, a force capable of challenging and overturning the current situation is essential. This force can only arise from the mass mobilization of the working class operating within legitimate frameworks. Yet, the very idea of such a mass political mobilization terrifies the bourgeoisie. The Westernist secular bourgeoisie, which underpins the Nation Alliance, would rather tolerate even the harshest, least meritocratic, anti-Western, pro-Islamic capital, and undemocratic governance of Erdoğan than see the working class mobilized for freedom, both at the polls and in public squares. They fear the empowerment of workers, their newfound confidence, and their direct pursuit of their interests. This core issue clarifies why the Nation Alliance never genuinely intended to confront the "front of despotism" decisively on election security from the outset.

Rather than genuinely safeguarding electoral security, the Nation Alliance's fervent claims seem more intent on preempting any significant confrontation. They

14 For comprehensive research on this subject, see Füsün Sarp Nebil, "Seçmen sayısı nüfusa göre neden 6,7 milyon fazla?", <https://yetkinreport.com/2023/05/24/secmen-sayisi-nufusa-gore-neden-67-milyon-fazla/>, 24 May 2023.

have artfully cultivated confidence in the electoral system, effectively stifling the autonomous spirit of the masses in the process. Such a feat could not have been accomplished by either Erdoğan or Bahçeli. When Minister of the Interior Süleyman Soylu, a figure closely associated with repression and capricious governance, proclaimed that “the security of the ballot box is entrusted to us,” the implications were unmistakable. Thus, the Nation Alliance was instrumental in ensuring that intense electoral battles among various bourgeois factions never escalated to a point that could jeopardize the capitalist order.

In reflecting upon the outcome, the conclusion is unambiguous: The Nation Alliance deceived the public. Tragically, even some socialists fell for this deception. Drawn into opposing Erdoğan, the socialist movement mistakenly viewed the Nation Alliance as a natural ally. By adopting the Nation Alliance's rhetoric, they reduced election security to a mere technicality rather than recognizing it as a pivotal class issue. The DİP, however, advocated a distinct perspective, urging socialists to rally for electoral security independently of the bourgeoisie. This is because ensuring electoral security through mass mobilization before, during, and after elections requires acting not alongside bourgeois political entities, but in defiance of, and often in opposition to them. Furthermore, one must be wary: the bourgeoisie might manipulate popular sentiment for their own gains or resort to provocations to justify illicit actions. To counteract these tactics, both class and political independence are imperative.¹⁵

15 The DİP's “Detach from the Politics of Order! Let's Unite to Defeat Despotism, Defend the Will of the People, and Oppose Sibling Fighting!” It would be meaningful to quote the relevant part of the paper: “The ‘Front of Despotism’ is evidently willing to deploy every conceivable provocation and manipulation throughout the electoral process to maintain its grip on power, as evidenced by recent occurrences. Amid such a provocative and repressive climate, forging an independent front, distanced from mainstream politics, is paramount. Alliances outside the dual bourgeois centers within the prevailing political landscape must craft a separate fulcrum, especially when confronting threats to ballot security and the potential subversion of the popular will. This is the only avenue to prevent the theft of votes, the stifling of public sentiment outside of polling booths, and the dangerous pitfall of internal strife irrespective of electoral choices. To think of collaborating with the institutional opposition in safeguarding ballots would be as misguided as endorsing the presidential candidate from the Table of Six. We recall with clarity the muted stance of the establishment's opposition, seemingly aligning with the AKP, during the tumultuous period between June 7 and November 1, 2015, characterized by violence and intimidation. We remember the unchallenged, unsealed referendum that ushered in the presidential system, with established parties seemingly in acquiescence. Memories remain fresh of Kılıçdaroğlu, post his ‘March for Justice,’ swiftly leveraging his newfound prestige to back Abdullah Gül as a consensus candidate. Likewise, Muharrem İnce's quick concession to Erdoğan on election night, after portraying himself as the sole contender, is not forgotten. Aligning with establishment politics cannot effectively champion the will of the people! Only by standing apart from this mainstream narrative can the true desires of the populace be safeguarded. Even if erstwhile allies fail to find common electoral ground, unity in defending ballot security and preventing the theft of the public's will is crucial. The focus must be on fostering worker solidarity and promoting communal harmony against potential divisions. In light of these reflections, the DİP reiterates its call to all forces championing the interests of the working class, laborers, and the marginalized, especially socialists. We urge the establishment of a center

What should the socialists not have done?

Let's reiterate our core argument. We have provided evidence that the political polarization seen in the electoral process arose from the internal contradictions and conflicts of the bourgeoisie. This occurred even though the primary contradiction in society during this electoral period was between labor and capital. With class politics that prioritize and place the working class in direct opposition to capital, this situation could have been reversed. However, it is pointless to seek political entities capable of this within the established order of politics. Such potential could only be located within the socialist realm of politics. But in this electoral process, the socialists not only distanced themselves from the working class but also appeared to abandon socialist principles. Both the Labor and Freedom Alliance and the Union of Socialist Forces (*Sosyalist Güç Birliği*) exemplify this trend. With the HDP at the center of the Labor and Freedom Alliance, it was normal that left-liberalism would dominate the main direction of this alliance. And so, it was. The participation of non-HDP parties such as the Labour Party (*Emek Partisi*, EMEP), the Labour Movement Party (*Emekçi Hareket Partisi*, EHP), the Social Freedom Party (*Toplumsal Özgürlük Partisi*, TÖP) and the Federation of Socialist Assemblies (*Sosyalist Meclisler Federasyonu*, SMP) in the alliance in addition to the Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP) did not have the opposite effect. On the contrary, these socialist parties gradually distanced themselves from class politics and surrendered to the left-liberal line. The political platform of the Labor and Freedom Alliance was, in many points, even behind the CHP, not to mention that it did not put the class contradiction at the center.¹⁶ Although TİP participated in the elections with separate lists, it did not draw a different profile from the Labor and Freedom Alliance in terms of its political program.

The Union of Socialist Forces appeared on the scene as an alliance of the Communist Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Komünist Partisi*, TKP), Communist Movement of Turkey (*Türkiye Komünist Hareketi*, TKH), and Revolutionary Movement (*Devrimci Hareket*), which came from the SİP-TKP tradition, and the Left Party (*Sol Parti*), which was founded as a continuation of the Freedom and Solidarity Party (*Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi*, ÖDP). However, the Union of Socialist Forces differed from the Labor and Freedom Alliance only in its emphasis on secularism. The political positioning of the Union of Socialist Forces did not correspond to a class distinction, and the adjective "socialist" did not go beyond the defense of socialism as an identity. In the economic sphere, where the class conflict was most acute, the Union of Socialist Forces made its political debut

distinct from the prevailing political order, covering everything from presidential candidacies to ballot security" (https://gercekgazetesi1.net/dip-bildirileri/dip-bildirisi-duzen-siyasetinden-kopun-istibdadi-yenmek-halkin-iradesini-savunmak-kardes_kavgasina).

16 A more comprehensive criticism of the political position of the Labor and Freedom Alliance was made in the declaration of the DİP Politburo titled "An Alliance of Labor and Freedom Cannot Be Established Without Breaking with Capital and Imperialism." The declaration can be accessed on the website www.dip.org.tr and from this link: <https://gercekgazetesi1.net/dip-bildirileri/dip-politburo-bildirisi-sermayeden-ve-emperyalizmden-kopmadan-emegin-ve-ozgurlugun>.

with a vague defense of nationalism that pointed to left Keynesianism rather than socialism and used middle-of-the-road formulas such as transforming the economy. As a result, the working class was not even mentioned in the Union of Socialist Forces's political platform. The working class was dissolved into concepts such as "workers" and "toilers", typical of petty-bourgeois socialism.¹⁷

To understand how the socialists reached their current position, we must trace back to the initial misstep. The crux of this misjudgment lies in not running a distinct presidential candidate against the People's and Nation Alliances. This decision marked the beginning of a political surrender to the established political order. Why? Primarily because, in the existing system, the presidential election is of paramount significance, given the executive power vested in the president. Consequently, any entity aiming to present itself as a viable alternative for solving social problems must do so through the presidential candidacy. In this context, supporting Kılıçdaroğlu, the TÜSİAD's candidate, while simultaneously upholding a socialist agenda aligned with the working class' interests, is not only contradictory but also unrealistic. The gravity of this decision goes beyond mere political strategy. Backing Kılıçdaroğlu essentially equates to renouncing socialist ideals and sidelining class-based politics. We have already emphasized that the bourgeoisie's class interests necessitate this shift, evident in the Nation Alliance's decision to remove economic considerations from their political focus, even if it inadvertently aids Erdoğan. So, the real question arises: What is holding the socialists back? The answer: Kılıçdaroğlu!

At this stage, for the sake of clarity, it would be best to leave it to the owners of this policy. Erkan Baş, the leader of the TİP, argued that it was necessary to support the Nation Alliance candidate in the first round, justifying it as follows: "We have experienced the 2018 elections and a perception has been formed: If there are many candidates, Tayyip Erdoğan cannot win in the first round, and whichever opposition candidate is left in the second round, we will all vote for him. It looks good on the surface, but in practice, the opposition candidates fought against each other instead of fighting against the government. It became a race to see who would make it to the second round. In the meantime, we forgot our real duty and Tayyip Erdoğan won." This statement is a very clear political position. The TİP made it very clear that the real task was to defeat Erdoğan. It subordinated everything else to this task. It criticized the opposition candidates for fighting against each other. The suggestion for the future was also clear: the opposition should not fight each other. It is understandable for an opposition party to produce policies against the government and to focus on these policies. But what does it mean to condemn the opposition parties for fighting each other? How can a workers' party not deal with the policies of the opposition bourgeois parties, which are based on the interests of the bourgeoisie and imperialism? How can a workers' party not deal with the

¹⁷ A more comprehensive criticism of the Union of Socialist Forces was made in the DİP Politburo's declaration titled "The Union of Socialist Forces Should Not Be a New Two-and-a-Half Front." The declaration can be accessed on the website www.dip.org.tr and the following link: <https://gercekgazetesi1.net/dip-bildirileri/sosyalist-guc-birligi-yeni-bir-iki-bucukuncu-cephe-olmali>.

policies of the opposition bourgeois parties that are based on the interests of the bourgeoisie and imperialism? It can't and won't because the only real task that TİP set for itself and the opposition was "defeating Erdoğan." In other words, the task was to make Kılıçdaroğlu win. Therefore, nothing should be done to make Kılıçdaroğlu lose votes. Kılıçdaroğlu's NATOism, his TÜSİADism, his hostility towards the workers, and his program to abolish severance pay would be ignored. Let's go on; his concessions to political Islamism would be ignored. It is not over yet. In the second round, when Kılıçdaroğlu replaced the liberal demagoguery of "spring will come" with the fascist demagoguery of "Syrians will leave," when he negotiated ministerial deals with fascists, when he became a partner in the policy of shackling the will of the Kurdish people with trustees, they remained silent. Because the calculation was clear!

We need to emphasize that suggesting one can vote for Kılıçdaroğlu without endorsing his program is misleading. The presidential election, by design, directly determines the executive body. In this system, the government is formed directly by the president, not by parliamentary selection. Therefore, the traditional parliamentary vote of confidence has been replaced by the presidential election. Voting for Kılıçdaroğlu, in essence, means endorsing the Nation Alliance's consensus document, which he announced as his program. Some argued they saw the election as a referendum. They contend they supported Kılıçdaroğlu as they favored a shift from a single-man presidential system to a parliamentary system. However, this assertion lacks weight. We have already outlined the hollow political substance behind Kılıçdaroğlu's and the Nation Alliance's pledges of a parliamentary system. Notably, they first sidelined this promise in practice and then formally abandoned it in their 12-point declaration that named Kılıçdaroğlu as the shared candidate. Despite the Nation Alliance distancing itself from the idea of shifting to a parliamentary system, socialist factions persisted with their referendum rhetoric. Kılıçdaroğlu's messaging was inconsistent. He oscillated between calls for a "new era" and others like "halalization." Meanwhile, TİP framed its election campaign around the slogan "You will be judged" – not "We will judge." This implies that some officials might be tried, though individuals like Süleyman Soylu might be exempted due to their parliamentary immunity. Ultimately, this approach might not be as radical as it first appears. The underlying theme is consistent with class collaborationism.

The class collaborators' stance evidently mirrors the broader left's perspective. We heard various slogans like "you will be judged," "we will send you away," and "they will go away." Yet, these slogans culminated in one overarching implication: political opposition to the Nation Alliance from the left became taboo. A stark example of this was the Labor and Freedom Alliance's passive stance, even in the face of Kılıçdaroğlu's chauvinism. The Sol Parti's position encapsulates this trend. Claiming "Let Erdoğan lose" is essentially the same as asserting "We should ensure Kılıçdaroğlu wins." The Sol Parti's stance did not end there. Alper Taş clearly articulated the prevailing tendency of the left to align with the bourgeoisie, stating: "The Nation Alliance will wield power in the coming era, and the Sol Parti aims to

be its revolutionary opposition.”¹⁸

The underlying sentiment of class collaborationism in voting for Kılıçdaroğlu was widespread. However, various entities that advocated this policy differed in the degree to which they justified their stance. Take, for instance, TKP. While they championed a vote for Kılıçdaroğlu, they adopted a notably more critical position than either TİP or the Sol Parti, their ally. The TKP openly commented on the Nation Alliance, stating, “The Nation Alliance is endorsed by both local and foreign capital which, years ago, propelled the AKP into power. Moreover, this alliance neither outwardly upholds secularism and republican values nor diverts from a NATO-centric worldview.” These are quite strong assertions. Rewording their stance for clarity gives us: “We are endorsing Kılıçdaroğlu, the representative of an alliance that has the backing of capital sources that once elevated the AKP. This alliance does not even pay lip service to secularism or republican ideals and adheres to a NATO-centric view.” Can any group backtrack and claim they never made such a statement? Certainly, individuals and parties are free to interpret statements as they wish. However, socialism does not provide the luxury of confession or selective memory!

The class character of the left's policy of support for Kılıçdaroğlu

Many socialists' decision to back Kılıçdaroğlu was not merely incidental. It was the culmination of a deliberate and sustained political strategy. The recurring theme of seeking and endorsing a progressive faction within the bourgeoisie—regardless of the various justifications like freedom, democracy, or respite—has deep roots in the socialist movement. Sungur Savran aptly described this phenomenon as “Menshevization.” Recognizing and naming it as such is crucial. When Menshevism becomes the prevailing strategic direction, assertions like “this election differs from that one” or “this will be the final time” lose their significance. The cycle will continue ad infinitum unless the socialist movement decisively breaks away from Menshevism. Without this break, the movement will invariably find itself leaning on a section of the bourgeoisie for one reason or another, resulting in history repeating itself.

When the left detaches from Marxist foundations, it struggles to understand the depth of global economic downturns like the Great Depression. If one prioritizes macroeconomics over Marxist class analysis—a trend seen in much of the left's economic thinking—the furthest they can journey in leftism is left-Keynesianism. Labeling it “publicism” does not alter its essence. By shedding Marxism, there is an implicit belief that bourgeois-led economic policy decisions can resolve crises. It

¹⁸ While we recognize that Alper Taş speaks of a “revolutionary opposition,” we don't need to wait for a Nation Alliance government to anticipate the nature of this proclaimed opposition. Hayri Kozanoğlu, a prominent figure within the Sol Parti, has already given us glimpses. In his articles published in the *Birgün* newspaper, Kozanoğlu endorsed Kılıçdaroğlu's austerity measures under the guise of achieving macroeconomic balance. Additionally, he portrayed NATO and a European Union-focused foreign policy as the “lesser evil” when compared to the AKP's current policies. See <https://www.birgun.net/makale/14-mayis-secimi-neden-onemli-435587>.

is concerning to see many leftists naively assume that the bourgeoisie can navigate out of crises by merely raising wages and boosting aggregate demand. These leftists hold that if only the bourgeoisie heeded social democrats, prosperity would ensue. This outlook overlooks the larger debate on the role of the bourgeoisie in revolutions. In fact, we seem to lag behind even the discourse Lenin had with the Mensheviks about the bourgeoisie's place in democratic revolutions. Within the prevailing leftist milieu, the focus is not on crafting a revolutionary strategy. Those discussing revolution are often deemed delusional. The prevailing sentiment seems to be resignation, a quest for respite rather than revolutionary change.

A Marxist analysis reveals that during depressive economic periods, the bourgeoisie typically intensifies the pressure on labor, reduces wages, and amplifies flexibility and deregulation in economic policy. Additionally, the political landscape sees a rise in autocratic, militaristic, imperialistic, and eventually, fascist elements. In other words, no class struggle, no bread, no freedom! Regardless of how some bourgeoisie factions might label themselves—be it democratic, libertarian, or champions of social justice—in today's era, the bourgeoisie symbolizes retrogression. Having lost its revolutionary vigor after 1848, the bourgeoisie, in the 21st century, now threatens the very essence of human progress. In the face of this rising imperialist brutality, the call is not just for reactionary measures but revolutionary ones. As the bourgeoisie strategizes global insurance against uprisings and prepares for systemic risks—crises potent enough to jolt the entire capitalist framework—many socialists remain in denial, doubting the possibility of a genuine revolution.

The current trajectory of many socialist movements can be attributed to a class-based root cause: the widespread abandonment of both Marxism and the working class. Nowadays, the stances and priorities of the socialist movement often align more with the perspectives of the modern petty bourgeoisie and the educated semi-proletariat. The modern petty bourgeoisie is a class stratum characterized by individuals who possess specialized higher education in fields like health, law, finance, and informatics. They deploy their skilled labor in the realm of service production and subsequently sell their services/products to secure relatively high incomes. On the other hand, the educated semi-proletariat represents individuals who offer their educated intellectual labor in exchange for compensation. However, they differ from the classical proletariat in significant ways. While they are skilled, they do not necessarily receive compensation commensurate with their education level. Additionally, they possess the potential for upward mobility, perhaps even joining the petty bourgeoisie. This potential is further bolstered by familial support and resources, allowing them the luxury of surviving without continually selling their labor.¹⁹

The modern petty bourgeoisie and the educated semi-proletariat represent broad

¹⁹ For a detailed definition of these class layers and the Marxist classification of social classes in general, see. Sungur Savran, "Mapping Classes: How To Distinguish Between Classes", in this issue. See also for an analysis of the political and ideological orientations of these class strata. Sungur Savran, "The Age of Egoism", *Revolutionary Marxism 2022*, p. 53-89.

social strata with a significant degree of interconnectedness. Their political stances are characterized by ambivalence and a middle-of-the-road attitude, stemming from their position between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Consider the social organizations where the socialist movement holds considerable sway: Professional Chambers, Medical Chambers, Bar Associations, and university branches of the Education and Science Workers' Union. However, their influence is not as pronounced in the metal, petrochemical, textile, and food unions.

While these strata can often find common ground with the proletariat, they can also diverge just as swiftly. For instance, the ease of obtaining visas from European countries holds significant importance for the modern petty bourgeoisie and the educated semi-proletariat but is largely irrelevant to the proletariat. Issues related to lifestyle resonate more with these intermediate groups than with the proletariat. The proletariat, on the other hand, is deeply enmeshed in the class struggle, with pressing class-related concerns at the forefront of their concerns. For academics, the proletariat often becomes merely an object of sociological study. Similarly, for lawyers, engineers, and doctors, their perspective on the proletariat is somewhat detached. Geographically, there is a notable divide: the modern petty bourgeoisie, the educated semi-proletariat, and the working class typically reside in different parts of a city. A cursory glance at districts where the TİP garners the most votes in major cities illustrates this point. This spatial distinction is also observed in the case of socialist parties belonging to various alliances. In conclusion, the modern petty bourgeoisie and the educated semi-proletariat tend to gravitate towards identity politics due to their specific class position, whereas the proletariat leans more towards class politics.

For the identitarian, petty-bourgeois socialist, the conservatism of the working class becomes merely an object of sociological study. Time and again, social realities underscore – not just for Marxists but for everyone – that there can be no genuine progressive transformation without winning over and mobilizing the proletariat. Yet even the most sincere petty-bourgeois socialist, without the guiding principles of Marxism, often finds themselves seeking that elusive formula, those magic words, to sway the right-leaning proletariat towards the left. The typical approach? Watering down leftist ideology with a conservative twist, downplaying its radical aspects, and marketing it to the working class or, broadly, the economically disadvantaged. This strategy does not bear fruit. It has not in the past, and it is unlikely to in the future. When such endeavors inevitably fall short, the initial zeal to win over the working class often sours, eventually morphing into resentment.

We have painfully observed this phenomenon manifest in the opposition's accusatory stance towards earthquake victims. The fact that votes in earthquake-affected regions favored Erdoğan and the People's Alliance prompted a flurry of derogatory remarks about these people from certain opposition groups. Delving into the specifics of these insults is a task too distasteful to even consider. Yet, to underscore the pitfalls of identitarianism, consider this: Did the voting behavior of İzmir residents significantly shift after the devastating İzmir Seferihisar earthquake in 2020? Did those who deride people voting for the AKP/MHP also demand the resignation of the CHP mayor in Hatay? The answers are telling. Furthermore, it is

paradoxical for those who expect votes in return for aid—and disparage those who do not vote as anticipated—to accuse the government’s social assistance policy of being mere bribery. It is evident that they, too, perceive their own assistance as a form of political bribe.

What should the socialists have done?

It is evident how baseless is the assertion that supporting Kılıçdaroğlu is the sole strategy to counter Erdoğan. Equally groundless is the notion that withholding support from Kılıçdaroğlu would bolster Erdoğan’s position. It is startling that socialists are perceived as potential voters for the CHP and Kılıçdaroğlu. Why should socialists inherently back a bourgeois party, even if it self-identifies as social-democratic? One might think that, as socialists, they would naturally be disinclined to support the CHP. For instance, throughout its history, DİP, and its forerunners, has never advocated voting for the CHP or its affiliated entities. Sadly, this stance is now an anomaly. The tradition of the socialist movement’s support for the CHP and similar entities has largely ceased. The true anomaly, however, is the prevalent belief that if socialists don’t sway their base, their audience might drift to the AKP or even the MHP. While this might be inconceivable for those involved in politics in areas like Kadıköy, Çankaya, or Karşıyaka, it is a palpable reality in places like Gebze, Çerkezköy, İzmit, and Kocaeli. For socialists rooted in class work, this is a primary concern. Yet, those genuinely engaged in this endeavor are in the minority. Among them, a smaller subset, like us, does not rally behind Kılıçdaroğlu but focuses on class politics. We are confident that our efforts do not benefit Erdoğan. In fact, it is likely the contrary. Had the socialists focused on class issues and created an alternative, Erdoğan might have lost more support than what Kılıçdaroğlu could have achieved. Consequently, the votes drifting away from Erdoğan would not have necessarily gone to the likes of Sinan Oğan or Muharrem İnce.

While Erdoğan and Kılıçdaroğlu each represent distinct class interests within the bourgeoisie, it is crucial to clarify that we do not view Erdoğan’s despotic regime, in which he has played a pivotal role, as equivalent to other bourgeois regimes that leaned more towards parliamentary forms. Our stance is that relying on the bourgeoisie to dismantle this despotic regime and advance freedoms is a misplaced trust. Such expectations are bound to end in disappointment. We contend that their resistance to despotism pales in comparison to their animosity towards the working class. We argue that they neither possess the strength nor the intention to truly challenge and overcome such despotism. Hence, we believe it was misguided to cast a vote in favor of Kılıçdaroğlu. This stance, however, is not because we equate both sides, but due to our evaluation of their inherent limitations and motivations.

We envision the path forward in the following manner: Socialists must ground their efforts in class politics, establishing a focal point free from bourgeois influence. Class politics means directly opposing the interests of both MÜSİAD and TÜSİAD. It signifies countering the anti-Western demagoguery of despotism with a genuine and robust opposition to imperialism and NATO. Pursuing this agenda involves reaching out to the vast majority of workers, laborers, and the economically disadvantaged

who have shown support for Erdoğan, and who identify closely with the People's Alliance, to present an alternative vision. We posit that had socialists chosen not to align with the Nation Alliance and instead presented their united presidential candidate, Erdoğan's victory might have been less certain. Regardless of the election outcome, strategically, curtailing the momentum of fascism, as represented by the positions of Sinan Oğan and the Zafer Partisi today, would have been a significant achievement. This approach would have foregrounded the class struggle as a central issue in the nation's discourse.

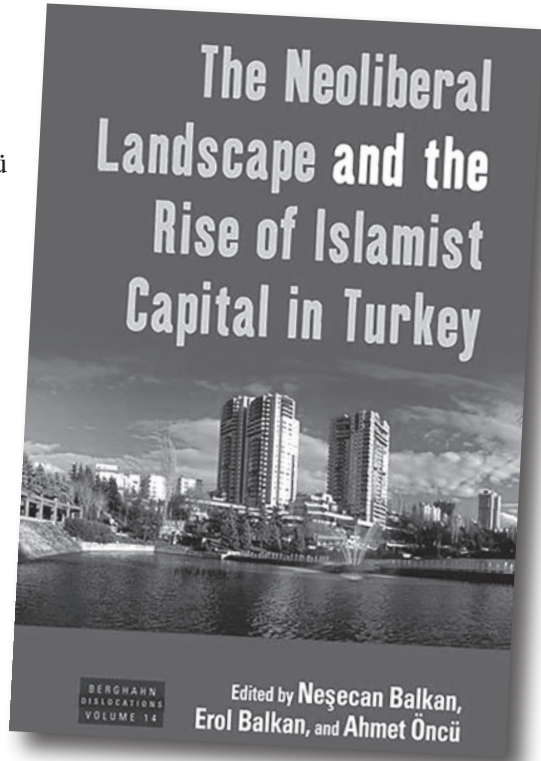
Erdoğan might have still secured a win. However, the aftermath would have been vastly different. Instead of an opposition mired in despair, disappointment, and poisoned by resentment against 52 percent of the population, we could have advanced with a stance that resonated with, or at least grabbed the attention of, workers and laborers across the spectrum. We would have confidently positioned ourselves as a force that appeals to both sides, breaking the mold of traditional politics. We would have asserted that we were the sole entity championing the majority's interests, rather than being merely part of the 48 percent against Erdoğan. Even in a scenario where Kılıçdaroğlu emerged victorious, significant momentum would have been garnered for rallying workers and laborers, further widening the divide within the bourgeoisie. When the CHP critiqued strikers for aligning with the AKP, it would have been the socialist direction that gained traction, not the AKP. And when the CHP displayed its overt capitulation to imperialism and NATO, the proletariat's discontent could have been channeled toward the socialists' anti-imperialist stance, rather than being ensnared by political Islamist and nationalist rhetoric. Granted, some might view this as mere speculation. But it is far from that. We are convinced that solid evidence exists, both in the palpable shortcomings of today's bourgeois-centric politics and in the working class' favorable response to our unwavering dedication to class politics, pursued against considerable odds and with limited but steadfast resources.

The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey

Berghahn Books,
New York, 2015

Edited by Neşecan Balkan,
Erol Balkan and Ahmet Öncü

Chapters by Burak Gürel,
Sungur Savran,
Kurtar Tanyılmaz,
Özgür Öztürk,
Evren Hoşgör and others



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey and the party he leads, the AKP, have been analyzed in many different ways. What was lacking was a materialist analysis using the methodology of Marxism. This is what this book does: it provides the reader the complex class dynamics that lie behind the rise and resilience of this leader and his party.

The hardback edition was published in February 2015 and the paperback edition came out in January 2017. The book has already been published in Turkish translation. It has also been published in two different Farsi translations in Iran.

Bourgeois revolution in Turkey (1908-1923)

Alp Yücel Kaya

*There was a revolution in Turkey: The bourgeois revolution.
This revolution was a step forward in the course of
Turkey's historical development, but it was not the last step.¹*

Introduction

There has been a bourgeois revolution in Turkey; 1908 was the first and 1923 the final stage of this revolution. However, the revolution is a product of class struggles that spread over an even longer period of time, and emerged in the process of the development of capitalism.² In this article we will discuss the main stages of these struggles and the making of the bourgeois revolutions of 1908 and 1923. There are some very competent studies on the question of the bourgeois revolution in Turkey and the revolutions of 1908 and 1923.³ We will proceed through the framework

1 Nazım Hikmet, “Türkiye’de Amele Sınıfı ve Amele Meselesi”, *Yazılar [Articles] (1924-1934)*, *Yazılar 2*, İstanbul: Adam Yayınları, 2001 [1991], pp. 9-12.

2 E.P. Thompson, in his intervention in the debate on the bourgeois revolution in Britain in the 1960s, sees the bourgeois revolution as a long-term process interwoven with class struggles (“pieces of that great arch which in fact, in the epochal sense, make up the bourgeois revolution”), E.P. Thompson, “The Peculiarities of the English”, *The Socialist Register*, vol. 2, 1965, p. 321. In this sense, our analysis follows Thompson’s perspective.

3 Sungur Savran, *Türkiye’de Sınıf Mücadeleleri, Vol I: 1908-1980*, İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2016

laid out by these studies, but unlike them, we will pay more attention to the making of the bourgeoisie, intra-class and inter-class conflicts, and especially to the legal regulations that these conflicts have produced; in other words, we will discuss the making of the bourgeois revolution through the making of bourgeois law. Focusing on the making of bourgeois law will allow us to reveal the struggles within the bourgeois class as well as the struggles between classes, and in this way we hope to develop a different perspective on Turkey's long bourgeois revolution.

The making of the bourgeoisie in the Ottoman Empire⁴

As in other parts of the world, developments of a capitalist nature began to emerge in the Ottoman geography in the eighteenth century (before Britain began to dominate the world economy), albeit with different rhythms.⁵ The underlying dynamics here emerged through domestic trade in the context of the provisioning of Istanbul and other cities, and through foreign trade developing in response to the dynamism in the European market; however, it is also necessary to take into account the dynamics triggered by the transformations in the Ottoman public finance that made the tax-farming system dominant, covering economic activities in agriculture, craftsmanship, manufacturing industry, mining and trade, and even to underline that the capitalist development specific to the Ottoman geography was a development dependent on the financial sector operating through the public finance. The literature on Ottoman economic history agrees that a new “entrepreneurial” class emerged in the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century within such a context.⁶ However, entrepreneurship was not something new in the Ottoman geography; what was new in the eighteenth century was the change in the nature/structure of the entrepreneur: The new “entrepreneurial” class, coming from among the local notables and fed by the tax-farming system, began to overtake the old entrepreneurial class, which in the fifteenth-seventeenth centuries consisted of the ruling classes associated with the central bureaucracy.⁷ These old and new entrepreneurs did not develop

(1992), pp. 51-166; Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, *Yol Kitap 2: Yakın Tarihten Birkaç Madde*, İstanbul: Sosyal İnsan Yayınları, 2009; Hikmet Kıvılcımlı, *Türkiye’de Kapitalizmin Gelişimi*, İstanbul: Sosyal İnsan Yayınları, 2007 [1965].

4 In this section we follow the framework we developed in our previous article, see Alp Yücel Kaya, “Balkanlar ve Batı Anadolu’da İlk Birikimin Gelişimi (1839-1914)”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, no 45-46, 2021, pp. 11-66.

5 Elena Frangakis Syrett, *Trade and Money: the Ottoman Economy in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*, İstanbul: Isis Press, 2007; Elena Frangakis Syrett, *The Port-City in the Ottoman Middle East at the Age of Imperialism*, İstanbul: Isis Press, 2017; Özer Ergenç, *Osmanlı Tarihi Yazıları: Şehir, Toplum, Devlet*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2013.

6 Gilles Veinstein, “Çiftlik Tartışması Üzerine”, *Osmanlı Toprak Mülkiyeti ve Ticari Tarım*, Çağlar Keyder and Faruk Tabak (Eds.), İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998, pp. 36-38; Özer Ergenç, “18. Yüzyılda Osmanlı Taşrasında Yerel İlişkilerin Yeniden Şekillenmesi” (unpublished paper), 21. CIEPO Symposium, Budapest 7-11 October 2014.

7 Halil İnalıcık, “Çiftliklerin Doğuşu: Devlet, Toprak Sahipleri ve Kiracılar”, *Osmanlı Toprak Mülkiyeti ve Ticari Tarım*, Çağlar Keyder and Faruk Tabak (Eds.), İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998, p. 21; Halil İnalıcık, “Centralization and Decentralization in the Ottoman Administration”,

independently of each other; what tied them together, especially the latter, was the proliferation of the tax-farming system and the *malikâne* system that emerged when some *mukataas* (tax units) began to be farmed out on a lifetime basis. “The *malikâne* owners were a group of bureaucrats, soldiers and ulemas, the majority of whom resided in Istanbul, numbering around 1,000, and whose connection with the central authority was close to the point of identity”.⁸ However, the owners of the *malikâne* did not undertake the management of the *mukataa* themselves, but farming them out; in this way, the tax-farmers involved in the system consisted of the notables of the provinces in the *mukataa* region, thus constituting a multi-layered subcontracting relationship and networks. One pole of this relationship is composed of a capitalist class, which we call bourgeois-bureaucrats (composed of pashas depending on the central bureaucracy and being in office either in the center or in the provinces), whose “connection with the central authority was close to the degree of identity”, and the other pole is composed of a capitalist class, which we call the provincial bourgeoisie (composed of local notables coming from local dynasties or parvenus), which develops as a “new type of entrepreneur” in the provinces.⁹ In sum, the tax-farming system played a decisive role in the transformation of the entrepreneurial classes and the emergence of the bourgeoisie in the Ottoman geography, which conditioned the bourgeoisie’s dominance in finance and trade as well as the organization of production. On the other hand, this system, which made capitalist development possible, also harbored intra-class conflict dynamics within the capitalist class.¹⁰ The dynamics of the conflict and struggle between them are quite clearly revealed by Mehmet Genç:

As a highly integrated social group identified with the central authority and capable of acting jointly in terms of unity of interests, communication and solidarity, the owners of the *malikâne*, as a highly integrated social group, determined their proportional share of the tax revenue at the end of a struggle with the tax farmer notables, another group that had influence in local social relations and made extensive use of this influence in terms of efficiency in taxation, such as knowing the region, receiving information and being able to use appropriate personnel cheaply...¹¹

Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History, Thomas Naff and Roger Owen (Eds.), Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977, p. 41, 366; Halil İnalcık, “Military and Fiscal Transformation in the Ottoman Empire, 1600-1700”, *Archivum Ottomanicum*, no 6, 1980, p. 329.

8 Mehmet Genç, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Devlet ve Ekonomi*, First Edition, Istanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2000, p. 167.

9 According to estimates based on tax-farms, the number of Istanbul-based entrepreneurs during the 18th century ranged between 1,000 and 2,000, while the number of provincial entrepreneurs with all their elements ranged between 5,000 and 10,000, see Ariel Salzmann, “An Ancien Régime Revisited: ‘Privatisation’ and Political Economy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire”, *Politics and Society*, vol. 21, no 4, 1993, p. 402.

10 Rifa’at Ali Abou-el-Haj, *Modern Devletin Doğası, 16. Yüzyıldan 18. Yüzyıla Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*, trans. by Oktay Özel and Canay Şahin, Ankara: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, 2000, p. 121.

11 Genç, *The Ottoman Empire...*, p. 168.

Confiscations observed regularly during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can be read as a reflection of the bourgeois-bureaucrats' political power and a practice they resorted to when the balance in this struggle tipped against them.¹² The first effective intervention of the bourgeois-bureaucrats to regain the economic and political power that was slipping out of their hands was the reforms introduced under the heading of *Nizam-ı Cedid* (New Regime) at the end of the eighteenth century. In this period, large and highly profitable *mukataas* were removed from the *malikâne* system, and at the same time, second-hand farming out of *mukataas* was tried to be prevented. It should also be underlined that the number of landed estates (*çiftlik*s) gradually began to increase among the *mukataas* that were seized and administered by the Imperial Treasury in the 1780s.¹³ In this way, both the economic resources of the provincial bourgeoisie began to shrink and a new investment portfolio for the bourgeois-bureaucrats began to emerge, a development that would ensure that the investments of the bourgeois-bureaucrats in landed estates would be especially significant in the *Tanzimat* (Reforms) period starting from 1839 onwards. These and similar unsettling interventions resulted in the mobilization of the provincial bourgeoisie and the signature of a settlement called the *Sened-i İttifak* (Charter of Alliance) in 1808, which emphasized their partnership with the central power. This power partnership was short-lived as Bayraktar Mustafa Pasha, who served as the grand vizier and was the representative of local forces, was killed in the uprising that broke out in the same year. Afterwards, the interventions of bourgeois-bureaucrats became more dominant.¹⁴

In this context, mentioning Katipzade Mehmed Efendi, the voivode of Izmir, will be useful to illustrate the economic and political dynamics of the period as well as the intensity of the intra-class struggle. Despite all the prohibitions imposed by the Ottoman central administration during the war with Britain (1807-1809), Katipzade continued to be in close contact with the Levant Company, which monopolized British trade with the Ottoman Empire. In response to the order from the capital to identify and confiscate all British goods in Izmir, voivode Katipzade not only reported that "no British goods or the like were detected in Izmir", but also protected British goods and sent them to their owners on his own chartered ships. Later, at Katipzade's request, he was even granted permission by the British government to export cotton from Izmir to Trieste in exchange for this cooperation. There is evidence that Katipzade also cooperated with American merchants. As evidenced

12 Yuzo Nagata, *Tarihte Ayanlar, Karaosmanoğulları Üzerine Bir İnceleme*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 1997, pp. 26-33.

13 Yavuz Cezar, *Osmanlı Maliyesinde Bunalım ve Değişim Dönemi (XVIII. yüzyıldan Tanzimat'a Mali Tarih)*, İstanbul: Alan Yayıncılık, 1986, pp. 102-103.

14 Although we cannot go into detail here, we should note that the artisan classes (intertwined with the Janissary Corps), which had begun to dissolve due to competition from European manufactured goods, also became a hindrance to the bourgeois-bureaucrats who took it upon themselves to remove the obstacles to marketization; the liquidation of these classes, which emerged as a strong focus of opposition within the context of the events of 1808, was to take place with the dissolution of the Janissary Corps in 1826.

by the drowning of Katipzade by the Admiral in chief Koca Hüsrev Pasha on a ship in the gulf of Izmir in 1816, the bourgeois-bureaucrats did not tolerate such self-interested initiatives of the provincial bourgeoisie, which were not very sharing.¹⁵

The real blow to the notables in the provinces came with the granting of *mukataas* to bourgeois-bureaucrats. The *mukataas*, the control of which was transferred to the central treasury, began to be granted to centrally appointed governors, trustees, and voivodes from 1811 to 1839.¹⁶ In the meantime, the process that began with *Nizam-ı Cedid* should also be seen as the bourgeois-bureaucrats changing their shells (we must also think about an intra-class struggle centered in Istanbul): In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the entrepreneurial bourgeois-bureaucrats depending on the “households” of viziers and pashas who rose through the ownership of *malikâne* were replaced by individual bourgeois-bureaucrats who rose through farming out *mukataas*.¹⁷ As a result of this process, “the central state and those acting on its behalf, which became the sole distributor of all tax-farms in the first half of the nineteenth century, succeeded in controlling to a great extent the rents previously received by the *malikâne* owners and provincial notables”.¹⁸ However, the fact that this control was not fully achieved is evident from the fact that the bourgeois-bureaucrats declared (with the Edict of Gülhane proclaiming the reforms in 1839) that the system of tax-farming was “nothing but injustice and cruelty ... for those who look after their own interests”.¹⁹ In this case, by abolishing the system in 1839, they would even attempt to cut the branch they themselves were riding on. Of course, the financial crisis of 1840-1842 led to a compromise with the political crisis, and tax-farming was reintroduced in 1842, again under the reins of the bourgeois-bureaucrats.²⁰

15 Gülay Tulaşoğlu’s research from US and British archival sources is very important in terms of revealing Katipzade’s activities that do not appear in the Ottoman archives, see Gülay Tulaşoğlu, “Merkezi Kısıtlamalar Yerel Özgürlükler: İzmir Voyvodası Katipzade Mehmed Efendi” *İzmir Belediyesi’nin 150. Kuruluş Yıldönümünde Uluslararası Yerel Yönetimler Demokrasi ve İzmir Sempozyumu*, 15-16-17 Kasım 2018, *Bildiriler*, İzmir: İzmir Akdeniz Akademisi, 2019.

16 Mehmet Genç, “İltizam”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı (TDV) İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 22, İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2000, p. 157. It should also be noted that the centralization of the administration of pious foundations under the *Nezaret-i Evkaf-ı Hümayun* (Ministry of Imperial Waqfs), established in 1826, was a development in the same direction.

17 We will not go into detail here, but it must be said that this transformation is very important for discussing the making of the bourgeois-bureaucrats. The pioneering work on the vizier and pasha households is by Rifa’at Ali Abou-el-Haj: “The Ottoman Vezir and Pasa Households 1683-1703: A Preliminary Report”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 89, no. 3, 1974, pp. 467-475. For an important study of the transition to the dominance of households in Ottoman society under the title of *Second Empire*, see Baki Tezcan, *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. On the shell change that we briefly mentioned, see also Fatma Eda Çelik, *Kişisel İktidardan Millet Meclisine Saltanattan Cumhuriyete*, Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2022, pp. 248-251, 256.

18 Genç, “İltizam”, p. 157.

19 “Tanzimat Fermanı (3 Kasım 1839)”, *Tanzimat (Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu)*, Halil İnalcık and Mehmet Seyitdanlioğlu (Eds.), Ankara: Phoenix Yayınevi, 2006, p. 2.

20 Alp Yücel Kaya, “In the Hinterland of Izmir: Mid-Nineteenth Century Traders Facing a New

As we mentioned above, capitalist development specific to the Ottoman geography was dependent on the financial sector through public finance. In this framework, we should not forget the banker-merchants²¹ who played a key role in the tax-farming system and financed the investments of bourgeois factions.²² However, the banker-merchants representing the financial bourgeoisie remained in the shadow of other bourgeois factions. The struggle is primarily between the bourgeois-bureaucrats and the provincial bourgeoisie, and the fate of the banker-merchants depends on who they cooperate with in the struggle for power. It can be easily generalized that the bourgeois-bureaucrats were closely aligned with *haute finance* (Galata bankers) and the provincial bourgeoisie with *petite finance*. Although the tax-farming system was abolished between 1839 and 1842, the banker-merchants in collaboration with the bourgeois-bureaucrats continued to play an important role in the public finance and financial system through the issuance of bills of exchange;²³ and thanks to the continuing collaboration they succeeded in managing the tax-farming system between 1842 and 1852 with the Anatolia and Rumeli Companies they established.²⁴ When the central governments started to auction the tithes (*öşür*) revenues after 1842, the bourgeois-bureaucrats squeezed the provincial bourgeoisie through the banker-merchants; such an offensive even led to investments in landed estates among the banker-merchants.²⁵ The other intervention of the bourgeois-bureaucrats and the banker-merchants, both in collaboration against the provincial bourgeoisie, was through the usury bylaws (dated 1848, 1852, and 1864) regulating the local credit markets. These bylaws not only aimed at disintegrating the local power network on which the provincial bourgeoisie was based, but also at redirecting local borrowing from the provincial

Type of Fiscal Practice”, *Merchants in the Ottoman Empire*, Suraiya Faroqhi and Gilles Veinstein (Ed.), Leuven: Peeters, 2008.

21 Our definition of banker-merchant is reminiscent of Hikmet Kıvılcımlı’s definition of “*tefecibezirgan*” (“usurer-merchant”), which has an important place in his theoretical framework, and we would like to point out that the class we define in this way represents a more limited circle, a subcategory of usurer-merchant.

22 At this point, it would be useful to emphasize the intertwining of the tax-farming system with financial markets and trade. In the tax-farming system, the entrepreneur (tax-farmer) who receives the tender for a tax unit in Istanbul makes this investment with a loan from the banker (*sarrafi*); while he pays the tender amount to the Treasury, he himself returns to the tax source for tax collection, as the nature of the business (profitability) requires him to collect more than he gives; in the tax-farming system, taxes are collected (most of the time) in kind in villages/landed estates by the tax-farmers and then stored and transported by merchants. Thus, tax-farming was realized through the intertwined activities of the banker, tax-farmer and merchant.

23 Alp Yücel Kaya, “Les racines agraires d’un entrepreneuriat capitaliste, Les domaines fonciers de la famille Baltazzi à l’arrière-pays d’Izmir au XIXe siècle”, *Rives méditerranéennes*, no 59, 2019, p. 122.

24 For the Anatolia and Rumeli Companies, see Araks Şahiner, *The Sarrafs of Istanbul: Financiers of the Empire* (unpublished MA thesis), Boğaziçi University, 1985, p. 84. Also see Onnik Jamgoçyan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Sarraflık: Rumlar, Museviler, Frenkler, Ermeniler (1650-1850)* (trans. by Erol Üyepazarcı), İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2017.

25 Kaya, “Balkanlar ve Batı Anadolu’da...”, pp. 24-29.

bourgeoisie to finance capital (i.e. banks) based in Istanbul.

Among these bourgeois classes in competition and conflict, it is necessary to add the commercial bourgeoisie, which developed through foreign trade, especially through the ties they established with European markets. As of the end of the eighteenth century, this class was not satisfied with the domestic market and the intermediation role played between domestic and foreign markets and raised demands for liberalization (“*laissez-nous passer*”) towards foreign markets, and these demands began to find an echo in the central administration under the bourgeois-bureaucrats from the very beginning of the 1800s. By obtaining trade certificates and being called “European Merchant” (non-Muslims) and “Hayriye Merchant” (Muslims), they were able to gain ease in travel, trade and taxation, and began to carve out a place for themselves in the traditional division of labor of foreign trade led by foreign merchants.²⁶ To this group should be added the merchants of European origin (later to be called Levantines) who began to settle in the port cities of the Eastern Mediterranean from the nineteenth century onwards and whose foreignness remained almost on paper.²⁷ The 1838 Anglo-Turkish Convention (and other successive conventions), which abolished the ban on exports, the monopolies, and the certificate procedure for the transportation of goods, as well as adjusting customs duties to facilitate the trade of foreign merchants, further privileged the latter group; within the framework of the privileges and exemptions that these merchants enjoyed, oscillating between foreignness and localness, the Europeans in port cities such as Izmir and Salonica became more localized and the locals became more Europeanized. In this process, the rising commercial bourgeoisie almost eliminated the old intermediary classes, including the provincial bourgeoisie, and became active in foreign trade, from the producer to sales at the port, on the one hand, and in domestic trade, both wholesale and retail, on the other.²⁸ As of the mid-nineteenth century, this class, which emerged as the other rival of the provincial bourgeoisie, diversified its investments, especially in port-cities²⁹ where the volume of trade increased exponentially, and began to gain the characteristics of finance

26 Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-İngiliz İktisadi Münasebetleri, cilt I 1580-1850*, Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1974, pp. 71-73; Musa Çadircı, “II. Mahmud Döneminde (1808-1839) Avrupa ve Hayriye Tüccarları”, *Türkiye’nin Sosyal ve Ekonomik Tarihi (1071-1920)*, Halil İnalcık and Osman Okyar (Eds.), Ankara: Meteksan, 1980, pp. 237-241; Ali İhsan Bağış, *Osmanlı Ticaretinde Gayri Müslimler*, Ankara: Turhan Kitabevi, 1983, pp. 87-100; M. Macit Kenanoğlu, *Ticaret Kanunnamesi ve Mecelle Işığında Osmanlı Ticaret Hukuku*, Ankara: Lotus Yayınevi, 2005, pp. 22-23.

27 Marie-Carmen Smyrnelis, *Une société hors de soi: identités et relations sociales à Smyrne au XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, Paris: Peeters, 2005.

28 Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, “Tanzimat Devrinde Yabancıların İktisadi Faaliyetleri”, *150. yılında Tanzimat*, Hakkı Dursun Yıldız (Ed.), Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1992; Elena Frangakis-Syrett, “Implementation of the 1838 Anglo-Turkish Convention on Izmir’s Trade: European and Minority Merchants”, *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no 7, 1992, pp. 91-112.

29 Between 1840 and 1910, Izmir became the largest export port in the Eastern Mediterranean, with exports increasing 3.4 times (in monetary terms) and imports 5 times, see Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Turkey 1800-1914*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 82.

capital, which was also prominent in shipping, insurance, tax-farming, banking, mining and large-scale manufacturing industries.³⁰ While Levantines and non-Muslim Ottoman subjects dominated this class, it should be underlined that there was also a growing number of Muslim capitalists.³¹ On the other hand, when talking about diversifying investments, it would be remiss not to mention the company *Şirket-i Hayriye* (Auspicious Company) founded by bourgeois-bureaucrats in 1850 to operate ferries on the Bosphorus. The idea of establishing the Company originated with Fuad Efendi (chief in the office of correspondence of the Imperial Council) and Cevdet Efendi (member of the Council of Education), both of whom would later become grand viziers and ministers, and whose capital, consisted of shares of, aside from the sultan and the mother-sultan, high-ranking bureaucrats (the chief commandant of the army, the chief of artillery, the admiral in chief, the Sheikh-ul-Islam, the governors, etc.), including the grand-vizir Mustafa Reşid Pasha, and bankers.³²

Within this context defined by the dynamics of uneven and combined development, we see that two different factions emerged within the developing capitalist class, both of which pursued different paths to building their own power. While the bourgeois-bureaucrats, the financial bourgeoisie (banker-merchants) and the commercial bourgeoisie in collaboration with them were in search of a general and universal law, the provincial bourgeoisie relied on the customary law of the countryside and tried to protect it.³³ While the first class had revolutionary characteristics in their quest to break away from feudal ties, the second class showed a development that could not break away from feudal ties in order to maintain their

30 Kütükoğlu, “Tanzimat Devrinde Yabancıların...”, pp. 97-99; Elena Frangakis-Syrett, “Western and Local Entrepreneurs in Izmir in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries”, *Son Yüzyıllarda İzmir ve Batı Anadolu*, Tuncer Baykara (Ed.), Akademi Yayınevi, İzmir, 1994, pp. 83-84; Reşat Kasaba, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Dünya Ekonomisi*, İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1993, pp. 62-66.

31 Of the 52 people whose wealth was determined to be above 50,000 kuruş in the İzmir kadi court between 1851 and 1896, 36 were Muslims, and an analysis of their economic status shows that, assuming prices are constant, the person with the lowest wealth among them could buy two shops in the İstanbul Grand Bazaar, and the person with the highest wealth could buy a hundred shops in the same place. Abdullah Martal, *Belgelerle Osmanlı Döneminde İzmir*, Ankara: Yazıt Yayıncılık, 2007, pp. 78-79; the average value of the shops in the İstanbul Grand Bazaar, as determined by the authorities of the Ministry of Finance in 1874, was 24,000 kuruş, see BOA, ML.VRD. 3812. The İzmir Chamber of Commerce, established in 1885, and the İzmir Commodity Exchange, established in 1892, were both initiated by Muslim as well as non-Muslim capitalists who were prominent in the city’s economy. In 1884, the 15-member committee preparing to establish the İzmir Chamber of Commerce consisted of 8 Muslims and 7 non-Muslims, see Erkan Serçe, Feriâl Örs and Mehmet Şakir Örs, *19. Yüzyıldan 21. Yüzyıla İzmir Ticaret Odası Tarihi*, İzmir: İzmir Ticaret Odası, 2002, pp. 33-34.

32 Haydar Kazgan, *Galata Bankerleri*, vol. 1, İstanbul: Orion Yayınevi, p. 33. The establishment of *Şirket-i Hayriye* is a topic that Hikmet Kıvılcımlı focuses on in his discussion on the development of capitalism in Turkey, see Kıvılcımlı, *Türkiye’de...*, p. 28-29.

33 Christoph Kletzer, “Custom and Positivity: An Examination of the Philosophic Ground of the Hegel-Savigny Controversy”, *The Nature of Customary Law*, Amanda Perreau-Saussine and James Bernard Murphy (Eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2007.

position in the provinces and in intra-class competition. In this context, we see the first *Nizam-ı Cedid* period and reforms in the Ottoman Empire at the end of the eighteenth century and then the *Tanzimat* period and reforms in 1839 not as centralization, modernization or westernization processes and efforts in line with the reigning evaluations in the literature, but as a reflection of class conflict. After 1839, the *Tanzimat* period emerged as a period in which the competition within the bourgeoisie increased in intensity and the bourgeois-bureaucrats, financial and commercial bourgeoisie attempted to suppress the competing bourgeois faction in the provinces with the construction of a general and universal legal order.

Law in the intra-bourgeois struggle

In the nineteenth century, the expansion of commodity production compelled the constitution of a property law based on private property rights. In this framework, the *Tanzimat* Edict, which prioritized the establishment of the security of life, wealth and property, projected a comprehensive codification movement by the legislative assemblies, and the codification of codes containing general and universal rules and regulations reflecting the liberal atmosphere of the period (Penal Codes of 1840, 1851, 1858; Code of Commerce of 1850; Code of Maritime Commerce of 1863; Land Registry Regulations of 1847 and 1860; Land Code of 1858; *Mecelle*-Civil Code- of 1876; even the Constitution of 1876, etc. marked the post-1839 period). Among these, the Code of Commerce of 1850, the Penal Code of 1858, and the Code of Maritime Commerce of 1863, which were borrowed from French laws, are legal regulations that emerged by drawing a line to the past as a result of the demands of an alliance composed of bourgeois-bureaucrats, financial and commercial bourgeoisie.³⁴ The others are more reflective of the class struggles that emerged. Despite all these general and universal regulations, it is also observed that local commissions were established to regulate and codify social and economic relations in general, and property relations and forms of labor in particular, within the context of the conflicts and tensions that emerged, especially in regions where landed estates (*çiftlik*s) were concentrated.³⁵ These commissions, chaired by a representative of the central government, brought together social groups with varying and conflicting interests in the region. The commissions produced regional regulations by rewriting the local sharecropping regulations defined by customary law in line with the interests of the landed estate owners; they did not transform the social hierarchy but they redefined it within the context of contemporary conflicts. These were approved by the central government to be implemented on a regional scale, while at the same time leaving their mark on the social history of the region to which they belonged (at least in the Balkans, where they found more application,

34 Hıfzı Veldet Velidedeoğlu, “Kanunlaştırma Hareketleri ve Tanzimat”, *Tanzimat I*, İstanbul: Maarif Vekaleti, 1940; Gülnihâl Bozkurt, *Batı Hukukunun Türkiye’de Benimsenmesi: Osmanlı Devleti’nden Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’ne Resepsiyon Süreci, 1839-1939*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1996.

35 For a detailed analysis on this subject, see Kaya, “Balkanlar ve Batı Anadolu’da...”, pp. 17-24.

at least until the land reforms after World War I). Such commissions convened in 1862 in Thessaly, in 1842, 1849 and 1859 in Bosnia, in 1847 in Ioannina, in 1850 in Vidin, in 1855 in Canik, in 1859 in Niş and Leskofça, in 1865 in Karaferye (Veria), and in 1875 in Parga, and region-specific “landed estate bylaws” (*çiftlikat nizamnameleri*) were prepared. The bourgeois-bureaucrat class of the *Tanzimat* period, which came to the forefront with its investments in landed estates, sought to expand its own sphere of action, as reflected in the laws and regulations that set forth general rules and regulations; but the provincial bourgeoisie also sought to preserve its privileged position based on customary law. What is seen with the landed estate bylaws is nothing other than the imposition of reign of all landed estate-owning classes by means of conserving the privileges of all of them against the laboring classes working on the landed estates. The provincial bourgeoisie accepted to act collectively with bourgeois-bureaucrats only in exchange for the conservation of their privileges; the bourgeois-bureaucrats coming from outside did not raise their voices against the privileges that the provincial bourgeoisie used to benefit vis-à-vis the working classes for centuries, they pushed even for the limitation of laborers’ subsistence rights in favor of landed estate owners, and they did not hesitate to show their class alliance in this field.³⁶

In this context, it should be noted that the Land Code of 1858, to which the literature attributes importance within the codification movement, did not say anything of substance on landed estates (except for Article 99, which stipulated that the pastures on landed estates were completely under the control of the landed estate owner), so much so that Ömer Lütfi Barkan regretted this silence: “It is regrettable that the Land Code does not mention the relations of the peasants working on the land of these landed estates with the landowner”.³⁷ In fact, there is not much to regret; the ruling classes of the period, who owned large property or were in alliance with these classes, had, in line with their own interests, only regulated with the Land Code the land in the possession of small peasants, leaving the room for maneuver in the landed estates flexible. It was only when tensions over the landed estates escalated (when intra-class conflicts between landed estate owners flared up) that regulations in the form of provincial bylaws came to the fore.³⁸ As Ahmed Cevdet Pasha (the architect of the Land Code), who was already in close contact with the landed estate owning class, admitted in the context of the Parga Landed Estate Bylaw, “Rumelia would be turned upside down if the execution of precepts of the general laws and regulations were to be carried out on these landed estates”.³⁹ In other words, the silence of the Land Code on landed estates, or the absence of any other general regulation on the agenda, was meant to prevent landed estate owners from becoming restless and Rumelia, and of course Anatolia, from being turned

36 For the details of this process, see Kaya, “Balkanlar ve Batı Anadolu’da...”.

37 Ömer Lütfü Barkan, “Türk Toprak Hukuku Tarihinde Tanzimat ve 1274 (1858) Tarihli Arazi Kanunnamesi”, *Türkiye’de Toprak Meselesi, Toplu Eserler 1*, İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1980, p. 369.

38 Kaya, “Balkanlar ve Batı Anadolu’da...”, pp. 13-31.

39 Ahmed Cevdet Paşa, *Tezahir, 40-Tetimme*, Cavid Baysun (Ed.), Ankara: TTK, 1991, p. 143.

upside down.⁴⁰

Along with this fierce struggle waged by the provincial bourgeoisie in the pursuit of its economic interests, it is also important not to overlook the law constituted by its other rivals, the financial and commercial bourgeoisie, working in cooperation with foreign capital: The 1850 Code of Commerce, the 1860 Addendum to the Code, the 1861 Code of Commercial Judicial System, the 1863 Code of Maritime Commerce, the 1879 Law on the Organization of Courts, and the 1879 Regulation on Notary Public all emerged in succession to establish a bourgeois order in the world of capitalist exchange that the country was rapidly entering.⁴¹ In this framework, it is important to underline that while the provincial bourgeoisie followed a line based on customary law through their reign on land ownership and relations of production on land, it also began to intertwine with the line based on universal law, as it was connected to commercial networks through the tax-farming system. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the “Regulation on the appropriation of property by foreign subjects” dated June 10, 1867, which paved the way for the property dispositions of foreign capitalists and incorporated the already *de facto* dispositions of the Levantines into the legal framework, opened an important hole in the law that the provincial bourgeoisie was trying to build.

So, while the world of exchange is organized in such a way, how will the lack of a civil code that defines the active companies in this world and the contracts that set out the relations between them and regulates them in the bourgeois world be remedied?⁴² The preparation of the civil code in the Ottoman Empire was very controversial, reflecting the dual structure of both the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy. While the commercial bourgeoisie, financial bourgeoisie and bourgeois-bureaucrats were committed to the adoption of the French Civil Code, the provincial bourgeoisie and their representatives in the bureaucracy were successful in codifying and enacting (1876) the civil code (*Mecelle*) based on Islamic law that would cover the law of transactions. Of course, such a codification was incompatible with the Commercial Code, which had been imported, and exacerbated the intra-class struggle in the market sphere. To summarize, it can be said that the intra-bourgeoisie struggle,

40 Therefore, we argue that focusing on the Land Code, which limited itself to regulating small peasants' land holdings, offers a limited perspective for understanding the social conflicts and developments in the nineteenth century; as Oya Köymen warns, focusing on large property and landed estate, which were the main determinants of social transformations, will give us a broader perspective (Oya Köymen “Bahattin Akşit, Çelik Aruoba ve Nühket Sirman-Eralp’in Tebliğlerine İlişkin Yorum”, *Türkiye’de Tarımsal Yapılar (1923-2000) (Türk Sosyal Bilimler Derneği Kongresi, 28-29 Nisan 1987, Ankara)*, Şevket Pamuk and Zafer Toprak (Ed.) Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1988). For a similar approach (as well as a comprehensive discussion) on the Land Code, see E. Attila Aytekin, “Agrarian Relations, Property and Law: An Analysis of the Land Code of 1858 in the Ottoman Empire”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 45, no 6, 2009, pp. 943-4.

41 Kenanoğlu, *Ticaret Kanunnamesi...*; Fatmagül Demirel, *Adliye Nezareti, Kuruluşu ve Faaliyetleri (1876-1914)*, İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi, 2007.

42 Seven Ağır ve Cihan Artunç, “Set and Forget? The Evolution of Business Law in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey”, *Business History Review*, vol. 95, no 4, 2021, p. 713. See also Kenanoğlu, *Ticaret Kanunnamesi*, pp. 132-139.

which is fed by the dynamics of uneven and combined development, gives rise to a conflict in the field of law, and this conflict further exacerbates the dynamics of uneven and combined development.⁴³

It would be useful to underline an observation of Niyazi Berkes regarding the codification movement of the *Tanzimat* period that has not been taken into consideration by the literature until now:

The conflict between the proponents of adopting the French Civil Code and those of Cevdet Pasha's opinion on the question of codification of civil law reminds us of a famous debate that took place half a century before that time on the issue of civil code in Germany. In response to an article written in 1814 by Anthon Thibaut (1722-1840) on the "Necessity of a Civil Code for Germany", Friedrich Karl von Savigny (1779-1861), who had taken up the question of a German civil code following the groundbreaking of the Napoleonic Code (Code Napoléon) in Europe, had argued that the law of a nation does not arise, for example, by establishing rational rules based on the philosophy of natural rights. For him, the law was not the product of the judgment of lawmakers. The law was born out of folk beliefs, established by folk customs, and solidified by the practice of justice. Law is the manifestation of the national self (Volksgeist), which lives silently in the life of a nation, which is itself the national self. The making of civil laws could be nothing more than giving them only a formal appearance, provided that they conformed to the practices that lived in the national self. In other words, for Savigny, law reflects what is and what lives, not what ought to be according to reason. In this Thibaut-Savigny debate, the rational or revolutionary view of law clashed with the romantic and traditionalist view of law. Half a century later, Cevdet Pasha's view was similar to that of Savigny's.⁴⁴

In accordance with Berkes' observation here, we can easily say that the bourgeois-bureaucrats, who were among the classes in competition and conflict, followed a Thibautian (essentially Hegelian) path, while the provincial bourgeoisie followed a Savignyian path. However, it should be emphasized that the codification movement, which emerged in the clash of the two factions of the bourgeoisie as capitalism

43 Here it is worth recalling Trotsky's explanation of uneven and combined: "Unevenness, the most general law of the historic process, reveals itself most sharply and complexly in the destiny of the backward countries. Under the whip of external necessity, their backward culture is compelled to make leaps. From the universal law of unevenness thus derives another law which, for the lack of a better name, we may call the law of combined development—by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of the separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms." Leon Trotsky, *History of Russian Revolution* (trans. by Max Eastman) London: Penguin, 2017 [1931-1933], pp. 24-25.

44 Niyazi Berkes, *Türkiye'de Çağdaşlaşma*, (Ed. by Ahmet Kuyaş), Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2012 (1973), p. 225. Interestingly, there is no reference to the Thibaut-Savigny debate in his *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press), published in 1964, on which this book is based.

developed, remained more faithful to the Savignyian path in the codification of both general and local regulations.⁴⁵ Although the bourgeois-bureaucrats began to rule in 1839, their supremacy was mainly limited to the political and economic spheres; in the legal field, they had to make concessions to the provincial bourgeoisie and accept the Savignyian path under certain conditions. Cevdet Pasha was the most characteristic statesman of this period and the bourgeoisie. This is also an observation of Niyazi Berkes:

Cevdet Pasha is perhaps the greatest statesman of the *Tanzimat* period, as well as the true symbol of the duality of that regime. This open-minded man, who understood Islamic sciences and, by the way, jurisprudence, not as a technician, but as one who grasped it, knew its essence and scope, and understood the march of the history of modernization, appears from our present perspective as a progressive compared to the followers of Sharia, and as a traditionalist compared to the supporters of unrestricted westernization (more precisely, Frenchification). As he tried to show in many parts of his *History* [his book on Ottoman history, *Tarih-i Cevdet*], Cevdet Pasha was a man who believed that both of these two attitudes were extreme and dogmatic. For this reason, he was not willing to let the field of Sharia law go unattended in the hands of the ulema and kadis, nor was he willing to accept (as Minister of Trade Kabuî Pasha did) the translation of the French Civil Code as it was, under the pressure of the French ambassador.⁴⁶

Savigny and Hegel in the constitution of nineteenth century bourgeois law

In this part of the article, it would be useful to step away from the Ottoman geography and think about the bourgeois revolutions in general and the making of bourgeois law in particular. In the eighteenth century, the bourgeoisie's efforts to expand its sphere of action were also aimed at ensuring absolute dominance in the disposal of economic resources. In the field of law, this situation brought about a process of codification in which, on the one hand, common and hybrid property structures were dissolved and evolved into private property structures, and on the

45 In his interpretation of the 1858 Land Code, Ömer Lütfi Barkan does not refer to Savigny's understanding of codification as Berkes does, but he offers an explanation that evokes it and implicitly criticizes Hegel's understanding of codification: "In this respect, the first point we observe is that the actions of this period [Tanzimat] attempted to produce a uniform Land Code based on an original legal system with a tradition in this field and not a work of imitation... In this way, the Land Code of 1274 [1858], which is a remarkable work of the *Tanzimat*, emerged as a reasonable and moderate act of enactment that strictly adhered to the traditions of land law."; "As a matter of fact, this code can in no way be considered to have carried an energetic and revolutionary spirit that consciously systematized all its provisions according to specific objectives under the command of an ideology that clearly defined its objectives and wanted to impose a new order of its own on events. Custom and tradition completely dominated this code", Barkan, "Türk Toprak Hukuku...", p. 372, 374.

46 Berkes, *Türkiye'de...*, p. 224.

other hand, justice mechanisms gradually became centralized and decentralized customary legal regulations with particular and local characteristics were replaced by general and universal regulations to the extent that the market domain expanded and deepened.⁴⁷

In this context, the dynamics of uneven and combined development brought about by capitalism rendered debatable two paths for the making of bourgeois law in nineteenth century Prussia: The historical conception of law (the Historical School of Law), led by Friedrich Karl von Savigny, which finds its origins in the historical development of societies, customs, traditions and beliefs, attributes a special importance to Roman law, underlines historical and social continuities, and therefore is based on the construction of a law that will regulate person-to-person relations. The idealist conception of law represented by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and his follower Anton Friedrich Justus Thibaut, which, based on the theory of natural law, underlines historical and social ruptures in the example of the French Civil Code of 1804, and is based on universal and rational codification in regulating person-thing relations. It is useful to explain the bases of these two approaches.⁴⁸

In the nineteenth century property debates, Savigny's book on possession occupies an important place.⁴⁹ In this book, Savigny distinguishes between interpreters and systematists, discusses the decisions and interpretations of ancient and contemporary legal authorities, especially the Pandects, and then elaborates on his own interpretation. He focuses on the rights that possession gives rise to (differentiating form and content) rather than the rights that give rise to possession (the path from content to form). In other words, possession is discussed in the context of the relationship of persons to persons, rather than the relationship of persons to things. Such discussion is based on an analysis of legal concepts of Roman property law such as civil possession, possession and natural possession, and acquisition by prescription (*usucapio*) and interdiction, i.e., the protection of possession.⁵⁰ In fact, such a study aims to directly intervene in the property question of the period by preserving the existing structure of property disposition. Because the property-based conflicts that emerged in the process of the establishment and legitimization of a new property regime and the concepts of possession and prescription that transfer possession to ownership were quite actual and came to the fore in the problematic constitution of private property. At this point, Savigny differs from other jurists in that, although he ultimately legitimizes the given structure of

47 Peter A.J. van den Berg, *The Politics of European Codification, A History of the Unification of Law in France, Prussia, the Austrian Monarchy and the Netherlands*, Groningen: Europa Law Publishing, 2006.

48 See also Alp Yücel Kaya, "Genç Marx ve 'Odun Hırsızlığı Kanunu Tartışmaları' ", *İktisatta Bir Hayalet: Karl Marx*, Sevinç Orhan, Serhat Koloğlugil ve Altuğ Yalçıntaş (der.), İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012.

49 Friedrich Karl von Savigny, *Traité de la possession d'après les principes du droit romain*, (trans. from German by Jules Beving) Brussels: Société belge de librairie Hauman et comp., 1840 [1803].

50 Donald R. Kelley, "The Metaphysics of Law: An Essay on the Very Young Marx", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 83, no 2, 1978, p. 357.

property disposition through possession, he sees possession as both fact and law against the common liberal interpretation that property begins with possession, and denies the property-possession nexus.⁵¹ In other words, while protecting the possession of the large landowner on the one hand, it also recognizes the rights of poor peasants arising from possession on the other. However, within the framework of liberal understanding, society is defined by private property. Either the individual is a property owner, or he is not, which means that poor peasants are deprived of the resources they save through possession.

Savigny's work on possession, which was translated into French in 1840, was the subject of a public debate in 1839 with Eduard Gans, a follower of Hegel, a proponent of idealist codification, and one of the main critics of the Historical School of Law. In his work in defense of an idealist codification,⁵² Gans argued that possession was a fact, not a right, and completely rejected Savigny's empiricist and historicist view of the possessor's entitlement by virtue of possession. By defining possession in terms of interdiction and acquisition by prescription (*usucapio*), he said that the question had been taken out of philosophy (which was the basis and purpose of the legal profession in his time) and that theory had nothing to say about it.⁵³ In line with Hegelian legal analysis,⁵⁴ possession should be defined in terms of the relation of persons to things, because his/her relation to things, that is, property, is what makes a person a person: "[t]he rational aspect of property is to be found not in the satisfaction of needs but in the superseding of mere subjectivity of personality. Not until he has property does the person exist as reason."⁵⁵

The debate here is locked in the problematic of the bourgeois revolution as much as the constitution of bourgeois law; the new law that the French Revolution gave birth to is directly related to the new class configuration and class domination: Hegel defends the codification of private law that emerged with the French Revolution, Savigny defends the continuity of customary law against such revolutionary regulations; thus, while Hegel demands the consolidation of the rule of the bourgeois class and the preservation of the revolution, Savigny demands a conservative revolution with the restoration of the pre-revolutionary class order.⁵⁶ But it should be noted that when it comes to Prussia or the Kingdom of Württemberg, things change, if not for Savigny, then for Hegel. In the post-Napoleonic "*Tanzimat*" period of the German states, Hegel would favor the preservation of the political order (under the

51 Donald R. Kelley, *Historians and the Law in Post-Revolutionary France*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 214, 219-220.

52 Eduard Gans, *Ueber die Grundlage des Besitzes*, Berlin: Eine Duplik, 1839.

53 Kelley, "The Metaphysics...", pp. 357-358; Kelley, *Historians...*, p. 214; Olivier Jouanjan, *Une histoire de la pensée juridique en Allemagne (1800-1918), Idéalisme et conceptualisme chez les juristes allemands du XIXe siècle*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2005, pp. 55-63.

54 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (Ed. by Allen W. Wood; trans. by H. B. Nisbet), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 [1821].

55 Hegel, *Elements...*, p. 73 (§ 41).

56 Kletzer, "Custom and Positivity...", p. 147.

kingdom and its institutions) while maintaining his revolutionary position in law.⁵⁷

Intra-bourgeoisie struggle in the nineteenth century Ottoman Empire

The conflict among the bourgeoisie intensified between 1839 and 1871, the bourgeois-bureaucrats together with merchants and banker-merchants being part of their inner circle (example par excellence is the Baltazzi family) left their mark on the period and shaped the law in line with their economic interests. The tax-farming system still played a key role at this point, but the important factor that facilitated the investments of this class in the provinces was that the central administration started to seize by the end of the eighteenth century the landed estates held by the notables. These landed estates, called “imperial landed estates” (*çiftlikât-ı hümâyûn*), which were auctioned or sold to suitors by the Ministry of Finance, began to constitute an important investment portfolio, especially with the seizure of Tepedelenli Ali Pasha’s landed estates in the 1820s. The landed estates in Thessaly, Ioannina, Karaferye and Parga, which were subject to the bourgeois-bureaucrat involved landed estate bylaws, were under the control of Tepedelenli Ali Pasha before 1820. Therefore, when periodizing the intra-bourgeoisie struggle, it would be more consistent to extend the period from the 1820s to 1876, considering the Parga Bylaw of 1875. The decisiveness of 1876 is more evident at the beginning of Abdülhamid II’s rule than the beginning of the First Constitutional Monarchy. The Sultan took the landed estates, which were usually controlled by the bourgeois-bureaucrats, under his own control by means of the Ministry of Sultan’s Treasury (*Hazine-i Hassa Nezareti*). The Ministry no longer tendered the landed estates as it had done in the past, but began to operate them under its own management, removing them from being a source of income for bourgeois-bureaucrats. However, the Ministry was not content with this and expanded its landed estate portfolio by adding new ones. Let us underline in this context that the Sultan’s Treasury seized in the 1880s many of the landed estates of the Baltazzi family which had close relationships with bourgeois-bureaucrats. The reasons behind Abdülhamid II’s policy of taking the landed estates under his control and expanding them are miscellaneous in the literature,⁵⁸ but cutting off the economic leg of a possible political rival plays a key role. Furthermore, in the period after the 1870s, the Ministry of Finance started to farm out of the tithe revenues to smaller units and local tax-farmers.⁵⁹ Such a change in the direction of tax-farming dealt a blow to the

57 Shlomo Avineri, *Hegel’s Theory of the Modern State*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1994 (1972), pp. 72-80; Daniel Lee, “The Legacy of Medieval Constitutionalism In the “‘Philosophy of Right’”: Hegel and the Prussian Reform Movement”, *History of Political Thought*, vol. 29, no 4, 2008, pp. 601-634.

58 François Georgeon, Sultan Abdülhamid, (trans. Ali Berkta) Istanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2006, pp. 189-195.

59 Nadir Özbek, *Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e Aşar Vergisi ve Tahsilatı Ekseninde Toplum ve Siyaset, 1839-1925*, TÜBİTAK Proje No: 113K142, 2016, pp. 113-138.

financial bourgeoisie (banker-merchants) and the bourgeois-bureaucrats allied with them. Thus, the economic base of the pashas, both through the Sultan's Treasury and the tax-farming of tithe revenues, was almost dried up. In other words, 1876 is the date of limiting the investments of the bourgeois-bureaucrats. The dominance of the financial bourgeoisie, which was in collaboration with the bourgeois-bureaucrats, was extinguished with the establishment of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration in 1881 (when foreign capital began to control domestic and foreign borrowing in Ottoman public finance following the debt default in 1875). Thus, an era in the intra-class struggle was completely closed. In the alliance of bourgeois-bureaucrats, the financial and commercial bourgeoisie, it was only the commercial bourgeoisie that was able to resist the developments we have listed and survive.

On the other hand, as the Sultan's landed estates expanded after 1876 and the tenders for the tax-farms changed addresses, the provincial bourgeoisie began to gain relative strength as a result of the elimination of their competitors and the opening up of a new investment area for themselves, and their ranks tightened with the inclusion of the newly emerging ones among them. In the period after 1876, the landowning groups were joined by those who flourished within the commercial bourgeoisie and foreign capitalists seeking investment opportunities in different geographies. Both capitalist groups carved out an important place for themselves, especially with the increasing agricultural investments in Western Anatolia.⁶⁰

Another actor that emerged as part of the landowning class, and it is appropriate to consider it under the heading of foreign capital, was the Ottoman Public Debt Administration and the *Régie* (*Société de la régie cointéressée des tabacs de l'Empire ottoman*), which began to control silk and tobacco production (operated mainly by small peasant producers) under a kind of contractual production discipline.

Although these three landowning actors (the Sultan, the provincial bourgeoisie, the commercial bourgeoisie/foreign capital) shared common demands in their exploitation of the peasant farmers and their gradual dispossession, their relationship was clearly in conflict.⁶¹ The fact that the Ottoman Public Debt Administration monopolized the collection of silk and tobacco tithes alone is enough; the provincial bourgeoisie, which was engaged in their production and trade, was almost handcuffed. It is clear that the Sultan and the government were helpless in the face of this situation; indeed during the negotiations held between 1881-1907, in the 26 years, Ottoman governments under the pressure of the Great Powers could not even succeed in raising customs duties.⁶² In 1901, the Sultan expressed his helplessness

60 Orhan Kurmuş, *Emperyalizmin Türkiye'ye Girişi*, İstanbul: Yordam Yayınları, 2007 (1974).

61 To give a few examples from the Ottoman Archives of the Presidency of State Archives (BOA), Mısırlıoğlu Edvard Bey over the use of commons in his landed estate of Gülbahçe, in Urla District (BEO 3187/239019/13.10.1325), Haleblizade Hüseyin Agha over the tobacco production in his landed estate in Alaşehir District (ŞD 2920/38/17.03.1304), İbrahim Agha, a merchant in İzmir, over tobacco production and trade (ŞD 1383/12/06.05.1305), and Atanas son of Yorgi from Bayındır, a merchant in İzmir, over tobacco trade (ŞD 3007/3/25.12.1318) were all in disagreement and conflict with the Ottoman Public Debt Administration.

62 Engin Deniz Akarlı, *The Problems of External Pressures, Power Struggle and Budgetary Defi-*

as follows:

What a horrible injustice this is! The Europeans deny to us the rights that they so easily acknowledge among themselves. We have to improve our financial situation fast. We want to raise the import duties from 6% to 11%. This is our manifest right! Nobody can argue against it. Yet the Ambassadors oppose. We must blush for having been subjected to this kind of injustice! Who operates the very vague mechanism of our state?⁶³

Again, within the framework of administrative transformation brought about by the Anatolian Reforms (1895) and Rumelia Reforms (1902), which came to the fore with the pressure of the Great Powers, foreign capital put the provincial bourgeoisie in a tight spot.⁶⁴ But the provincial bourgeoisie was not about to give up. Especially, the 1904 Gendarmerie Statute, which was to replace the 1869 Gendarmerie Statute by borrowing from the French gendarmerie statute after the 1903 Mürzsteg Agreement (signed between the Great Powers and the Ottoman Empire following the Ilinden uprising in Macedonia), shows the fierce struggle here very clearly. Although it was thought that the Hegelian path would prevail as a result of the legal transplantation, the provincial bourgeoisie and the Savigny path maintained their dominance with two articles that infiltrated the Statute and determined its spirit: gendarmerie forces would remain subordinate to local councils in the hierarchy of duties as before; gendarmerie forces would act under the authority of local councils, not judicial units, in the search of dwellings.⁶⁵

On the other hand, the period between 1876 and 1914 was also a period in which transportation networks were developed to facilitate the circulation of commodities in the Ottoman Empire, and the construction of highways, railways and docks accelerated. These investments pioneered by foreign capital also led to the institutionalization of insurance and banking operations.⁶⁶ The foreign

cits in Ottoman Politics Under Abdulhamid II (1876-1909): Origins and Solutions, (unpublished PhD Dissertation) Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 178.

63 Akarlı, *The Problems of External Pressures...*, p. 178. The original text is in French: *Avant la débâcle de la Turquie, Pensées et souvenirs de l'ex-sultan Abdul-Hamid recueillis par Ali Vahbi Bey*, Neuchâtel: Attinger Frères, 1914.

64 Nadir Özbek “‘Anadolu Islahatı’, ‘Ermeni Sorunu’ ve Vergi Tahsildarlığı, 1895-1908”, *Tarih ve Toplum Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no 9, 2009, pp. 59-85; Gül Tokay, “Makedonya Reformları ve Güvenlik Güçleri”, *Türkiye’de Ordu, Devlet ve Güvenlik Siyaseti*, Evren Balta Paker and İsmet Akça (Eds.), İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2010, pp. 124-146.

65 Kaya, “Balkanlar ve Batı Anadolu’da...”, pp. 57-59; see also Alp Yücel Kaya, “Les enjeux de l’institutionnalisation de la Jandarma ottomane face aux conflits agraires au début du XXe siècle”, *Les gendarmeries dans le monde de la Révolution française à nos jours*, J.-N. Luc and A.-D. Houte (Eds.), Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2016.

66 Elena Frangakis-Syrett, “The Role of European Banks in the Ottoman Empire in the Second Half of the Nineteenth and in the Early Twentieth Centuries”, *Banking, Trade and Industry in Europe*, A. Teichova, G. Kurgan van Hentenryk, D. Ziegler (Eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

trade surplus that emerged as a part of these developments created resources for local capital accumulation, and both investments in urban infrastructure and the production of urban consumer goods came to the fore in an increasingly urbanized economic structure.⁶⁷ The production of capital goods developed, although not to the extent of the production of consumer goods.⁶⁸ The activities of iron factories and foundries, which would create backward and forward linkages to the established industrial structure, developed together with other industries. On the other hand, investments in the textile industry gained momentum with the growing domestic demand, as well as with the growth in cotton cultivation during the raw material shortage that emerged during the American Civil War.⁶⁹ These developments considerably expanded the scope of the commercial bourgeoisie composed of local and foreign capitalists. In fact, with the industrial investments that gained momentum towards the end of the nineteenth century, it became possible to talk about the emergence of an industrial bourgeoisie. However, this process is not only an industrialization process created by commercial capital, it is an industrialization process in which productive capital is also involved. In other words, this process was not only driven by the commercial bourgeoisie, but also by the provincial bourgeoisie, which controlled the sphere of production (either directly or through the tax-farming system). In this context, the development of spinning, serging and weaving investments in Karaferiye (Veria in the Balkans) and Uşak (in Western Anatolia) is quite striking.⁷⁰ Of course, these capitalists, fed by different channels, were engaged in intense economic competition. Although the provincial bourgeoisie once again began to engage with the Hegelian path through industrial investments (in addition to its connection to the trade networks highly associated with tax-farming), the rivalry between Savignyian and Hegelian paths also manifested itself in this field. As a result of the escalation of the rivalry, the provincial bourgeoisie would take a revolutionary position in 1908 by allying with the working classes

67 Eyüp Özveren, “Büyük Buhranda Bir Liman Kenti: İzmir, 1929-1932”, *İzmir Kent Kültürü Dergisi*, no 6, 2003, pp. 264-272; A. Gündüz Ökçün, “XIX. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında İmalat Sanayii Alanında Verilen Ruhsat ve İmtiyazların Ana Çizgileri”, *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi*, vol. 27, no 1, 1972, pp. 135-166; Salih Başkutlu, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Değirmencilik Endüstrisi ve Buhar Değirmenleri*, İstanbul: Libra Kitap, 2022; Ruhat Alp, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Bir Endüstri Hamlesi: Modern Konserve Sektörünün Doğuşu (XIX. Yüzyılın Son Çeyreğinden XX. Yüzyıla)*, İstanbul: Libra Kitap, 2022; Ruhat Alp, *Bakraçtan Şirkete Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Süt ile İmtihanı (XIX. Yüzyılın Son Çeyreğinden XX. Yüzyıla)*, İstanbul: Libra Kitap, 2021.

68 A. Gündüz Ökçün (Ed.), *Osmanlı Sanayii 1913, 1915 Yılları Sanayi İstatistik*, T. C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, Ankara, 1997, pp. 179-180.

69 Kurmuş, *Emperyalizmin Türkiye'ye...*, pp. 181-186. Abdullah Martal, *19. Yüzyılın İkinci Yarısında İzmir ve Çevresinde Sanayi ve Ticaret*, (PhD Dissertation), İzmir: Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, 1992, pp. 123-133.

70 Pınar Çakıroğlu-Bournous and Costas Lapavitsas, *Capitalism in the Ottoman Balkans: Industrialisation and Modernity in Macedonia*, Londra: I.B. Tauris, 2019; Biray Çakmak, “XX. Yüzyıl Başında Uşak'ta Kurulan İplik Fabrikaları”, *Uşak Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, no 1/2, 2008, pp. 41-58; Donald Quataert, “Machine Breaking and the Changing Carpet Industry of Western Anatolia, 1860–1908”, *Journal of Social History*, vol. 19, no 3, 1986, pp. 473–489.

against the Sultan, who was unable to protect its interests against the commercial bourgeoisie and foreign capital.⁷¹ The commercial bourgeoisie and the developing industrial bourgeoisie, on the other hand, would support the revolution on the way to overcoming the limits set to them by the Savignyian path.

The 1908 Revolution of Liberty

The bourgeois law that emerged as the divisions and struggles between the bourgeois classes developed in this way and tended towards the Savignyian path determined the dynamics of primitive accumulation in the Ottoman geography: Between 1839 and 1876, landed estate owners either tried to bound sharecroppers on land, as in the Balkans, or resorted to slave labor, as in Western Anatolia; between 1876 and 1914, while they continued to use slave labor in Western Anatolia, they also sought the bondage of dispossessed laborers along with sharecroppers in both regions. In both periods, the landed estate owners in the Balkans created the conditions for bondage to the soil through the landed estate bylaws, while those in Western Anatolia created the conditions for bondage to the soil through debt services. What really marked the second phase of primitive accumulation between 1876 and 1914 was the attack of the landed estate owners on the peasantry's subsistence rights and the commons peasantry was benefiting. In other words, in the first phase, landowners searched for labor discipline on the reserve land on the landed estate, and in the second phase, they searched for the expansion of the reserve land (at the expense of other lands where subsistence rights were defined) as well as labor discipline. The reflection of both phases on the commons was also different; in the first phase, landowners restricted the use of the commons under land tenure conditions, while in the second phase, landowners searched for the elimination of the commons. Under these conditions, peasants who were expelled from their landed estates, as many documents of the period use the term, became miserable in the "inn corners" of Salonica or Izmir, in other words, they became proletarianized.⁷² Based on our research, albeit not as in-depth as in the Balkans and Western Anatolia, we can safely say that similar dynamics were valid for the laboring classes of Eastern Anatolia. In fact, we think that the conditions of rural laborers in the Balkans and Eastern Anatolia are quite parallel to each other.

It is important to underline that the emergence of primitive accumulation and the development of agrarian capitalism in the Ottoman Empire were determined as much by the struggle and competition between the landed estate owning classes as by the acceleration of the mobilizing power of foreign markets in the nineteenth century. The struggle between the provincial bourgeoisie and the bourgeois-bureaucrats came to a head with the *Tanzimat*, and the ignition of this struggle was the farming out of the tithe revenues by the central bureaucracy. The struggle on the upper level

71 For an interpretation in this direction, see Donald Quataert, "The Commercialisation of Agriculture in Ottoman Turkey, 1800-1914", *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, vol. 1, no 2, 1990, p. 53.

72 For example, the inhabitants of Istavroz and Viraste landed estates in Langaza District of Salonica Province, BOA, TFR.I.SL 115/11479/15 C 1324.

was between the landed estate owners and the banker-merchants. At the lower level, it was between the landed estate owners and the sharecroppers who were under heavy obligations. The latter conflict was exacerbated during this period, as the distribution of shares and obligations to be imposed after the deduction of one-tenth (the tithe) from the produce constituted the crux of the tension and brought a new labor discipline to the agenda. The provincial bourgeoisie, who used to receive tax-farms of the tithe revenues on their own landed estates, lost this resource to financial capital (banker-merchants) and found nothing but as a solution to recover their losses in increasing the exploitation of laborers. This resulted in the aggravation of obligations already defined in the customary law and unfree forms of labor (such as bondage to the soil and debt bondage). Thus, the labor discipline created within the competition between the provincial bourgeoisie and the bourgeois-bureaucrats between 1839 and 1876 brought about a capitalist structuring in the landed estates that would go beyond the compensation for the loss of income from farming out tithe revenues. This capitalist structuring gained a new momentum after 1876 when foreign capitalists replaced the bourgeois-bureaucrats in the field of competition and gained a new depth with domestic and foreign market traction. In this framework, in addition to labor discipline, the enlargement of the reserve lands in the landed estates at the expense of peasant's subsistence lands and commons came to the agenda and the proletarianization of sharecroppers accelerated.

These developments of different rhythms which were caused by the struggle among landed estate owners, were mere reflections of uneven and combined development in Turkey. Evaluating this gradual process of primitive accumulation within the framework of the long waves of world capitalism provides another opportunity to reveal the specificity of the geography we are dealing with. In 1848-1873 and 1896-1914, when capitalism gained momentum and profit rates increased, it is seen that landed estate owners increased the production pressure on the land, and especially emphasized labor discipline through bondage to the soil and/or debt bondage. The expansion of 1896-1914 led to deproletarianization⁷³ along with proletarianization. Of course, as a result of such an orientation, social restlessness in the Balkans and Anatolia was marked by revolts and uprisings in both waves of expansion.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO) was founded in 1893 with the agrarian question as well as the national question fanned by social dynamics and conflicts on landed estates in the Balkans, and the uprising organized by the Organization in 1903 had a great impact

73 Deproletarianization is the subordination of free workers to unfree forms of labor, or the substitution of the latter for the former. It is capital's "struggle from above" to discipline the working class. The organized power and consciousness of the working class are dismantled in order to drive down labor costs. For the concept, see Tom Brass, *Labour Regime Change in the Twenty-First Century: Unfreedom, Capitalism and Primitive Accumulation*, Leiden: Brill, 2012. For a detailed discussion on unfree labor and deproletarianization, see Özdeniz Pektaş, "Emek Tarihi: Özgür Olmayan Emek Tartışmaları", Ulaş Karakoç ve Alp Yücel Kaya (Eds.), *İktisat Tarihinin Dönüşü: Dünyada ve Türkiye'de Yeni Yaklaşımlar ve Araştırmalar*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2021.

around the city of Bitola, mobilizing approximately 30,000 people in the uprising.⁷⁴ In Eastern Anatolia, where almost the same social dynamics and conflicts were observed, the Sason Rebellion of 1894 broke out after the uprising of Armenian peasants, who were under obligations that went beyond bondage to the soil, with the involvement of the Hunchaks, against Kurdish landlords (aghas and beys); with the massacres committed by the Hamidiye Regiments, the events spread to a wider geography in the region and lasted until 1897.⁷⁵ Although there were no similar uprisings in Western Anatolia in the same period, it was social banditry that came to the forefront as a reflection of the social question faced by the agricultural laborers in the region (Çakırcalı Mehmet Efe being the first name that comes to mind as a symbol of such a social bandit).⁷⁶ This social restlessness became widespread throughout the Empire in the early 1900s with tax revolts that took on the character of a popular uprising.⁷⁷ Again, the strikes that gained momentum in the cities (especially in port cities that were intertwined with foreign markets), which became more and more dominated by capitalist forces after 1900,⁷⁸ show the extent of the social shaking coming from below. The spring of 1908 was quite heated: In March 1908, the workers of the Imperial Shipyard not only went on strike for 2 months, but also wanted to march to the Imperial Palace to voice their demands;⁷⁹ again in March 1908, in Uşak (in Western Anatolia), up to 1500 carpet yarn laborers (consisting of mostly women and children) not only attacked the Tiridzade, Bıçakzade and Yılancızade spinning mills that had left them unemployed, but also broke the machines and rendered the mills inoperable.⁸⁰ With the military revolts⁸¹ that began to erupt in 1907, the Ottoman geography was already in the throes of revolution.⁸²

74 İlhan Tekeli, “Makedonya İç Devrimci Örgütü ve 1903 İlinden Ayaklanması”, *Birlikte Yazılan ve Öğrenilen Bir Tarihe Doğru*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2007, pp. 68-69, 76; Nadine Lange-Akhund, *The Macedonian Question, 1893-1908, from Western Sources*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 130.

75 Mehmet Polatel, “The Complete Ruin of a District: The Sasun Massacre of 1894”, *The Ottoman East in the Nineteenth Century, Societies, Identities and Politics*, Yaşar Tolga Cora, Dzovinar Derderian and Ali Sipahi (Eds.), Londra: I.B. Tauris, 2016.

76 Sabri Yetkin, *Ege’de Eşkiyalar*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996.

77 Aykut Kansu, *1908 Devrimi*, (trans. by Ayda Erbal), İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001.

78 Can Nacar, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Emek ve İktidar, Tütün İşçileri, İşyeri Yöneticileri ve Devlet, 1872-1912*, İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2022, pp. 83-106; Kadir Yıldırım, *Osmanlı’da İşçiler (1870-1922), Çalışma Hayatı, Örgütler, Grevler*, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınevi, 2013, pp. 218-230.

79 Yıldırım, *Osmanlı’da İşçiler...*, p. 223.

80 Quataert, “Machine Breaking...”.

81 H. Zafer Kars, *1908 Devriminin Halk Dinamiği*, İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1997 (1984), pp. 53-57.

82 The worsening economic crisis and the high inflation and decline in purchasing power faced by the population must also be taken into account, see Donald Quataert, “The Economic Climate of the ‘Young Turk Revolution’ in 1908”, *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 51, no. 3, 1979), pp. D1147-D1161; Carter Vaughn Findley, “Economic Bases of Revolution and Repression in the Late Ottoman Empire”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1986, pp. 81-106.

In this revolutionary situation, the provincial bourgeoisie, which did not feel safe in the face of the commercial bourgeoisie and foreign capital, turned its back on Abdülhamid II's despotic regime (*İstibdat*) and took a revolutionary position. The commercial and developing industrial capital, which was stuck on the Savignyan path, also supported the revolution for a Hegelian transformation. The leading force of the revolution was the Committee of Union and Progress, which, under the influence of these classes, was in close contact with and in cooperation with Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek, and Armenian political organizations, especially the IMRO, Dashnaks and Hunchaks.⁸³ With the participation of rural and urban working masses of all nationalities in the movement, the revolution took on the character of a people's revolution, and was called the Revolution of Liberty, in the sense of breaking away from despotism (*İstibdat*).

According to recent archival research, urban laborers, who had gone on strike 44 times between 1870 and 1900, went on strike 38 times between 1900 and June 1908 alone; in 1908, following the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy on July 23rd, this number jumped to 143 strikes; in such an environment where reactions against the despotic regime and capital surfaced in almost every business sector, 59 of the strikes were in Istanbul, 37 in Salonica, 10 in Izmir, and others spread from Skopje to Beirut.⁸⁴ It is obvious that the bourgeois factions did not delay in reacting to this rise in social fervor. Even before the first month of the revolution, *Ahenk*, one of the Izmir newspapers, characterized all laborers, especially porters and shipment workers, who raised their demands for better working conditions as "rabble violating public freedom";⁸⁵ and on October 8, 1908, about 2.5 months after the proclamation of the Constitutional Monarchy, the Ad-Hoc Law on Strikes was enacted, which severely restricted strikes and the formation of trade unions. Although the number of strikes decreased and the organization of the working classes slowed down as a result of the construction of a regime of oppression against the working classes, it is quite clear that the genie was out of the bottle.

After 1908, the bourgeoisie showed its pressure on the working classes, and especially after 1913, under the National Economy policies of Ottoman governments, it became burning with the fire of investment and competition. In this period, the number of joint-stock companies in particular amplified. Of the 129 joint stock companies active in 1918, only 9 of which were established before 1908, 42 were operating in commerce, 41 in industry, 16 in finance, 15 in construction and

83 Özer Özbozdağı ve Nizam Önen, *İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti'nin 1908 Siyasi Programı, İmparatorluk Nasıl Kurtulur?*, Ankara: Detay Yayıncılık, 2020.

84 Yıldırım, *Osmanlı'da İşçiler* ..., pp. 226-227, 264-265, 357-367. Cevdet Kırpık's research gives similar figures (1976-1900: 33 strikes; 1900-1908: 33 strikes; July-December 1908: 119 strikes), see Cevdet Kırpık, *Osmanlı Devletinde İşçiler ve İşçi Hareketleri: 1876-1914*, (Unpublished PhD Dissertation), Isparta: Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi, 2004, pp. 250-253, 256-263 (I am grateful to Can Nacar for informing me about this study). In his new book, Zafer Toprak confirms the acceleration in strikes but identifies fewer strikes (54) in 1908 after the Revolution, Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfı, 1908-1946*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2016, pp. 15-18.

85 *Ahenk*, 14 and 15 August 1908.

transportation, 9 in insurance, and 6 in agriculture.⁸⁶ These include the Izmir Cotton Manufacturing Ottoman Joint Stock Company and Cotton Textile Factory, founded in 1910 in Izmir by the Giraud family of Levantine origin from the commercial bourgeoisie, and the cotton and flour factories founded in Adana in 1918 by Subhi Pasha, the Mayor of Adana before 1908 from the provincial bourgeoisie (whose family, Ramazanoğulları roots go back to the Middle Ages), then Adana MP, are striking examples of the different adventures of the bourgeoisie.⁸⁷

While the provincial bourgeoisie continued its struggle against the commercial bourgeoisie and foreign capital, it intensified its investments in trade and industry by the end of the nineteenth century. As a result, intra-class rivalry intensified during the National Economy period, but it transcended the provincial and commercial divisions and intensified in a different dimension through the distinctions between local and foreign, Muslim and non-Muslim. While domestic capitalist groups struggled against foreign capital, the Muslim bourgeoisie launched a fierce offensive against non-Muslims in the struggle within domestic capitalist groups. We can exemplify the dynamics of the first struggle through the developments in Izmir and its hinterland: In 1912, Smyrna Fig Packers Ltd. and *Société anonyme de figues*, two companies prominent in the fig market in and around Smyrna, established a company (in fact a trust) called “Fig Syndicate”. Their aim was to become the sole buyer (monopsony) in the growing fig market and set the price. Against such organizations of exporters, merchants and middlemen, cooperatives played an important role within the framework of the National Economy policies, and the organizations of producers were supported by the Union and Progress governments. In such an environment, the producers organized under the leadership of local capitalists (Nazmi Topçuoğlu, Kazım Nuri Çörüş and Ahmet Sarı), consisting of large landowner producers and merchants, against the Trust in order to secure a high price for the figs they produced, first establishing the “Osmanlı Anonim Aydın İncir ve Himaye-i Zürra Şirketi” (Ottoman Joint-Stock Company of Aydın Fig and Protection of Cultivators) in 1912, the “Millî Aydın Bankası” (National Aydın Bank) two years later and finally the “Kooperatif Aydın İncir Müstahsilleri Anonim Şirketi” (Joint-Stock Company of Cooperative of Aydın Fig Producers) in 1915. The same process was also experienced by raisin (namely sultana) producers who faced another trust, the “Raisin Syndicate”. Again, under the leadership of local capitalists, the “Manisa Bağcılar Bankası” (Manisa Viticulturalist Bank) was established in 1917 to sell the raisin growers’ goods, provide loans at low interest rates and find new markets in foreign trade.⁸⁸ The establishment of this kind of

86 Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de Ekonomi ve Toplum (1908-1950)*, Milli İktisat-Milli Burjuvazi, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1995, pp. 117-118.

87 Both factories were owned and operated by the same owner-managers during the Republican period. Melih Gürsoy, *Tarihi, Ekonomisi ve İnsanları ile Bizim İzmirimiz*, İstanbul: Metis Yayıncılık, 1993, p. 267; Bülent Varlık, Kudret Emiroğlu and Ömer Türkoğlu, *Adana Sanayi Tarihi*, Adana: Adana Sanayi Odası, 2008, p. 76.

88 *Tariş Tarihi: İncir, Üzüm, Pamuk, Zeytin-Zeytinyağı Tarım Satış Kooperatifleri Birlikleri*, İzmir: Türkiye Toplumsal ve Ekonomik Tarih Vakfı. 1993, pp. 26-65; Zafer Toprak, *Milli İktisat-Milli*

incorporations/joint-stock companies was a reaction of the provincial bourgeoisie (agricultural and commercial capital), which was in a weaker position compared to organized foreign capital. Among the founders of Ottoman Joint-Stock Company of Aydın Fig and Protection of Cultivators and the National Aydın Bank were large fig orchard and olive grove owners and merchants. Among the founders of Manisa Viticulturalist Bank, landed estate owners and merchants such as Halid Pasha of Karaosmanoğulları and İbrahim Efendi of Katipzades were the par excellence representatives of the historical provincial bourgeoisie in Western Anatolia.⁸⁹ It can be seen that it is possible to diversify investments on land with industrial investments like Subhi Pasha, and commercial activity with industrial investments like the Girauds, as well as diversifying investments on land with trade and banking.

In the intra-bourgeoisie rivalry, the second struggle of the domestic capitalist groups took place within itself. The Muslim bourgeoisie launched a major offensive against the non-Muslim bourgeoisie, especially the Armenian bourgeoisie, even going as far as confiscating their property. The testimonies of Emin (Sazak) Bey (also an ardent defender of the “Constitutional Revolution”, a member of the local court and administrative council in Mihalıçcık -of Eskişehir- the Committee of Union and Progress, and the president of the Mihalıçcık Chamber of Commerce after 1908), who was a member of the provincial bourgeoisie that had grown from landowning to tax-farming and commerce, written in 1918, reveal the intensity of the intra-class conflict in a striking way:

My father was always in debt to the Armenians Tonisyan, Hacı Ohannes and Karabetler. The Armenians would never get him out of debt because he didn't keep accounts himself.

If Armenians do business with an agha, they turn him into an empty shell. First, they become partners in his cattle, increase his debt to a level that his entire gen-

Burjuvazi..., pp. 132-144.

89 At the beginning of this article, we mentioned Katipzade Mehmet Efendi's struggle with bourgeois-bureaucrats, which ended in his death in 1816. For the social basis of these companies and banks, see A. Gündüz Ökçün, “1909-1930 Yılları Arasında Anonim Şirket Olarak Kurulan Bankalar”, *İktisat Tarihi Yazıları*, Ankara: Sermaye Piyasası Kurulu, 1997, pp. 228-230, 236-239. 228-230, 236-239. See also Feroz Ahmad, “The Agrarian Policy of the Young Turks 1908-1918”, *Economie et Société dans l'Empire Ottoman (fin du XVIIIe-début du XXe siècle)*, Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Paul Dumont (Eds.), Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1983. The contradiction of the cooperative(s) organized as the Joint-Stock Company of the Cooperative of Aydın Fig Producers is expressed by the Board of Directors of this cooperative in 1929-1930 as follows: “In general, it is necessary to divide our members into two groups: the producers who are also engaged in the trade of figs and those who have nothing to do with this trade. ... It is impossible to reconcile the interests of a merchant and a cooperative member. Among our members, this conflict of interests is manifested in the fact that those who are engaged in the fig trade have one eye on the market and the other on the market.” İlhan Tekeli ve Selim İlkin, “Türkiye’de Devletçi İktisat Politikasına Geçişin Ekonomik Nedenleri: Devletçi Deneyimin Ege Bölgesine Çeşitlenmesi”, *1885-1985 Türkiye Ekonomisinin 100 Yılı ve İzmir ve İzmir Ticaret Odası Sempozyumu*, İzmir: İzmir Ticaret Odası Yayını, 1986, p. 197.

eration cannot pay, and then dispossess him of his land and property.⁹⁰

I had seen the sons of Hacı Halit Agha and Hacı Mehmet Agha and others herding away their cattle with their shepherds and dogs. I was afraid that our cattle would also belong to the Armenians. Getting rid of the debt, or more precisely, getting rid of the Armenians, was on my mind day and night.⁹¹

At one point, we were going to have a wedding (in 1904). We needed money for the wedding. And we were owing Tonisyan 230 liras. He [my father] asked Tonisyan to help him with 200-300 liras for the wedding expenses. When Tonisyan told my father that the debt would be too big and offered him to put up some of the cattle, I lost my mind. I immediately fired Tonisyan with all kinds of insults and told him that if he did business with my father again, I would do all kinds of evil to him, so my father was forced to leave. Thank God, we paid the debts and were saved.⁹²

Although Emin Sazak does not give a date for the payment of debts, he implies that 1908 was the turning point: “Until the declaration of the Constitutional Monarchy, very few Turks were interested in trade. And those who did trade were violent and vicious”.⁹³ After 1908, it is clear from Emin Bey’s narrative (written between February 28 and March 4, 1918) that the bourgeoisie went on the offensive as the hierarchy of relations with Armenians based on indebtedness changed:

Tonisyan Matyos was a clerk for us in Ankara, and his brother was buying fleece and grain for us in Çankırı... One day suddenly, together with Kigıms and Kalpakdjian, they gathered Armenians from Sivrihisar and Mihalıççık and imprisoned them. Then we understood the matter... The next day the matter was understood. Now the incident had widened. They rounded up all the Armenians...

Matyos and his brother were very dangerous for us. God forbid, there was a danger of a Russian invasion in our country. There was no doubt that Armenians would do a lot of evil at such a time. Matyos and Kams were the worst enemies. Because I had broken their ruling supremacy in Yazır and started to dominate Yazır.

In 1904, they did not consent to my building a highland house in Yazır and had it demolished. After the Constitutional Monarchy, we built a house, haystack and barn. For twenty years the animals of Sazak Village could not be grazed in Yazır. When I built houses and barns, they became enemies of mine.

I was also disrupting the Armenians’ trade. I was not deceiving myself, I was deceiving, and since I encouraged the people to deceive, all Armenians became enemies. When the villages of Sazak and Ahur, which the Tonisyans considered as their landed estates, were also lost and their wealth disappeared, of course Matyos and Kams became even more hostile.

90 M. Emin Sazak, *Emin Bey’in Defteri, Hatıralar*, İstanbul: Bilgeoğuz Yayınları, 2009 (2007), p. 67.

91 Ibid, p. 67.

92 Ibid, p. 69.

93 Ibid, p. 71.

Necessity had forced Matyos to become a clerk and his brother to work in our business. Their presence was very harmful to us and we had made up our minds to kill Matyos and Kams immediately if, God forbid, the country suffered an evil. But they were eliminated without our knowledge, and we suffered a loss.

Meanwhile, Çaputlu Hüseyin Ağa, who was in Ankara, told us to help remove the Armenians from our region. I accepted it as a patriotic service. I left my important work in Ankara and came to Mihaliçcik. On the second day of Eid, I was in the center of Mihaliçcik. The Armenians are unaware. There is no movement from the authorities yet. The district governor was a Greek named Yovanaki. We told him about Ankara.

Since the district governor was a Christian, he took into account our every application in order to show that he was loyal to the government's policy and to rob the Armenians.

There were no Muslim shopkeepers/craftsmen in the country. If the Armenians left, their shops would be completely closed. In order to prevent the closure of the shops, I decided to distribute the Armenian textiles, hardware and herbal goods to the shopkeepers and to buy a shop myself. Hacı Hüseyin Ağa was very happy about this situation. I was sitting in the inn room and he was always at my disposal. Anyway, I would call the Armenians and mediate the negotiations. Whoever wanted to buy or give what to whom, I would call them and find them, and I would take care of everyone's business.

At that time, no one had any money except me. If I wanted to, I could have taken all the Armenian shops. If it is up to the government, let the government lose two thousand liras. If we train three or five tradesmen/craftsmen, the country will be saved from a completely dull state. I calculated this, and so we bought all the Armenian shops, cheap and expensive. Hacı Hüseyin and I bought two shops together. Actually, I didn't buy them, Hacı Hüseyin did, he said, "We are partners." Our main idea was this: If the government pardoned the Armenians, so that they should not come back, we decided therefore to buy their houses and we had the title deed procedures done. We will write more later, God willing.⁹⁴

As Emin Bey himself relates, with the Armenian deportation in 1915, the provincial bourgeoisie usurped Armenian property. This *de facto* usurpation took on a legal dimension with the "Ad-Hoc Law on the Abandoned Properties, Debts

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 113-114. Sazak continues his words as follows: "Let's see how the generations and grandchildren who will come after me will judge our actions. If it were possible, I would listen to their evaluations. I regret it now, because I don't see it as a fair behavior. Let the government do it, but I shouldn't have interfered with their property and so on (...). For three or five years, I did not want to and did not intentionally violate anyone's law. I was known in the country as someone who knew the right and the law. If an Armenian right amounting of a thousand liras was passed on to me, then we gave five hundred liras to the State, we paid the tax of one thousand five hundred liras from the deficiency of fleece. I suffered losses in my business. I lost a lot, but unfortunately, I was considered as a thief in the eyes of the public and suffered from remorse of conscience. I was the target of accusatory thoughts of the state administrators such as 'He established a sultanate, organized a Court of Appeals, beat up the district governor, and did things by force...' Ibid., p. 115.

and Claims of the Persons Transferred to Other Places” dated September 26, 1915, briefly known as the Abandoned Properties Law. Emin Bey describes this process as follows:

When Armenians petitioned the Abandoned Properties Commission, claiming that the buildings were not paid for as a result of the transfer process, we paid the commission one hundred and fifty liras for the buildings and one hundred liras for the shops.

In any case, I am not satisfied with my behavior now. Naturally, the houses would have been destroyed. Thank God the chances of them coming back have diminished.⁹⁵

This kind of *de facto* and *de jure* usurpation, as Sungur Savran stresses, represents a process of primitive accumulation that emerged predominantly in the urban area as a result of intra-class struggle.⁹⁶ It is also obvious that a similar process of primitive accumulation emerged in the rural areas as a result of an inter-class struggle, especially in Eastern Anatolia, where poor Armenian peasants who were under heavy obligations to Kurdish aghas and beys were dispossessed after the deportation. However, unlike the dispossession in urban areas, dispossession in rural areas developed through legal regulations codified long before the Abandoned Properties regulations (and beyond the actual social conflicts). In this context stands out the legislation on the resolution of property disputes introducing decisions of “administrative prohibition” (*idareten men*) to be taken by local councils.⁹⁷ Developments in this regard date back to pre-1908. With the increase in property conflicts across the country, real estate and land disputes, on the basis of the resolution of the Council of State (*Şura-ı Devlet*) in 1902 and 1906, and coppice forest and pasture disputes, on the basis of the resolution of the Grand Vizier’s Office in 1903, were resolved by “administrative prohibition” decisions of local administrative councils. In the same direction, the governments of the Second Constitutional Monarchy issued an ordinance on August 7, 1909 (on the “administrative settlement” of disputes arising from the disposition of real estates and lands) and an instruction for that ordinance on April 20, 1910. Accordingly, in the occurrence of any interference or encroachment on real estate and land disposed of with an “imperial deed”, the administrative councils would issue a decision of “administrative prohibition” and expel the perpetrators of the interference or encroachment from the real estate or land; the control of deeds and the determination of possession on the basis of the deed would be essential; if only one of the parties

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 116.

⁹⁶ Sungur Savran, “Sınıf Mücadelesi Olarak Ermeni Soykırımı”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, no 23, 2015, p. 78.

⁹⁷ Kaya, “Balkanlar ve Batı Anadolu’da...”, p. 59-63; Alp Yücel Kaya, “Beylik Arazi Köylü Arazisini ve Ortak Alanları Nasıl Yuttu? 20. Yüzyıl Başında Balkanlar’da İlk Birikim ve Mülksüzleştirme”, *Mülkiyeti Yeniden Düşünmek: Türkiye’de Özel Mülkiyetin İnşası, İcrası ve İhlali*, Begüm Özden Fırat ve Fırat Genç (der.), İstanbul: Metis Yayınevi (to be published in 2023).

is the holder of a deed, he/she is the owner; if both parties have a deed, the owner of the old dated deed is the owner; if both parties do not have a deed, the owner is the one who pays the tax on the property and land; if the dispute still persists, the parties will carry their cases through the relevant levels of the regular courts, from the first instance to the appeal, and then to the appeal. In 1912, the Ministry of Internal Affairs noted that the term “immovable properties” (*emval-i gayrimenkule*) in the Ordinance of 1909 and the Instruction of 1910 included pastures and coppice forests, and therefore, administrative prohibition decisions would also apply to disputes over such properties that could be classified as commons. In 1913, the legal regulations based on the administrative prohibition decisions in the resolution of disputes on real estate and land resulted in a more general codification, and laws on immovable properties were prepared under different headings. The introduction and implementation of the “administrative prohibition” decision increased the power of administrative councils in the Ottoman provinces, especially in the Balkans, and made them dominant in disputes over real estate and land. The fact that both the administration of title deeds and the related judiciary regarding the disposition of real estate and land were embodied in the administrative councils rendered the regular courts ineffective in cases arising from real estate and land disputes, and made the large landowners who dominated the administrative councils (“whose members were able to distinguish between good and bad, and persons of good reputation and payers of a considerable amount of direct taxes”)⁹⁸ absolute power holders.

As of 1909, the Ottoman countryside returned to its pre-1908 atmosphere full of social conflicts, despite all the expectations created by the 1908 Revolution among the working and poor people. In the petition dated May 29, 1909 of the Polina peasants, victims of the administrative prohibition decision in Görice Sanjak in the Province of Bitola, the expression of their disappointment after the Revolution of Liberty is clear: The gentlemen (*beys*) of the Polina landed estate had “usurped” the land in their village “during the time of the despotism, or rather plunder”, and nothing had changed “after the proclamation of liberty”; they complained about “the behavior and cruelty of the gentlemen, which continued in one form or another every day, since we could not benefit in any way from the equality and liberty and other things that the constitutional administration had granted...”⁹⁹

Similarly, the inhabitants of the village of Kalyon in Kozana District of the Province of Bitola, in the petition sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on December 13, 1911, stated that they were expelled from their households and

98 According to “Vilayetlerin İdare-i Mahsusası ve Nizamının Suver-i İcraiyesi Hakkında Talimat-ı Umumiye” (Public Instructions on the Administration of Provinces and the Forms of Application of the Regulations) of June 21, 1867 (18 Safer 1284), the requirements for being elected as a member of the provincial administrative council were being a subject of the Ottoman state, being able to distinguish between good and bad, being a person of good reputation, paying at least 500 kuruş in direct taxes and being literate (*Düstur*, 1st Collection, 1st Volume, 1872, p. 623). In the Ottoman provinces, these conditions were mainly met by large landowners.

99 BOA, DH.MKT 2843/20/25 Ca 1327; DH.MKT 2672/42/7 Za 1326.

villages by Kani Pasha with an administrative prohibition decision:

Last year, 8-10 families were thrown out on the streets in the wintertime by the decision of the district's administrative council. Today, with the decision of the council, all of us were thrown out on the streets again and today the gendarmerie commander of Kozana came to our village with 15-20 gendarmes and 15 or so unruly villagers (bashibazouk) and 15 or so Albanians. They immediately found the village headman, tied him to a tree with his sash and entered our houses so to say in his presence, did not free any of us, threw our belongings on the roads, hit our screaming women and children and hit us all together with rifle butts and whips, leaving us all covered in blood and bruises. Finally, they drove us out of the houses where we had been living for thousands of years. When we went to the Kozana government to ask for protection, we found the same treatment, and tonight about four hundred of us, women, and small children, were left on the streets of Kozana, and we do not know where we will stay from now on. The reason for our expulsion from the houses was supposedly because it [the village] was a landed estate [çiftlik], there are many other landed estates, why are they not treated the same way and if they are landed estates, do we not have the same dignity as other animals?¹⁰⁰

Dispossession was not limited to the Balkans; in their petition dated March 26, 1909, the inhabitants of Avranderesi, Çileme and Zeytun villages in Seydiköy, Izmir, also demanded the annulment of the decision of administrative prohibition issued by the administrative council working in collaboration with Madame Adamopoulo, a Levantine descendant having U.S. citizenship: "With the force of the gendarmerie, she has removed us from our houses for which we were paying our taxes, and not content with this transfer, she has also destroyed our houses in this important rain, leaving us destitute and homeless, and this encroachment on our agriculture and residence, which is our livelihood, by the government should be immediately refused..."¹⁰¹

The petition of the peasants of Çakırbeyli village in the Sanjak of Aydın, dated December 18, 1909, sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, states that they suffered from a similar process regarding the pasture dispute they had with Adnan [Menderes] Bey, the owner of the landed estate having the same name as the village, and expresses their victimization and demands justice:

Although the pasture with known boundaries and belonging to our village of four hundred inhabitants based on judgment with the official document reserved in our possession, was to be delivered to our village; in violation of this adjudication, on the basis of the decision of the administrative council it was delivered to Adnan Bey, the owner of the landed estate in the vicinity of our village; he did cultivate it by force by means of a gendarmerie detachment dispatched to the village by the decision of the administrative council of the province. It is known to all of you

100 BOA, DH.H 25/52.

101 BOA, ŞD 2791/30.

that it is not legally permissible at this time of Constitution[al Monarchy] that the issues adjudicated by the courts were to be dealt with and seen by the administrative council. Our livestock are in the open air and our agriculture has failed, we have no other pasture or place allocated for our livestock, we ask for your mercy and expect justice...¹⁰²

The provincial bourgeoisie is not pleased with this quest for justice by the rural laborers. In a petition dated December 29, 1910 sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Kani Pasha talks about the injustices he had suffered and emphasizes his disappointment with the [Second] Constitutional Monarchy: "One of the guarantees of law promised by our revolution was the complete protection of the right of [property] disposition. However, an incident I will present in the following ... is a clear proof that there have sometimes been blatant injustices in this regard." According to him, "with the encouragement of extremist socialists and at the same time with the encouragement of extremist nationalists" the peasants demanded "division of land based on an unreasonable and unfair theory". Such a practice would result in "no landed estate owner being able to dispose of his property anymore", "he would abandon it to the Christian people who have been working as sharecroppers and farmers for a long time," and such an attempt must be prevented.¹⁰³

The landed estate owner class was one of the leading classes of the 1908 Revolution. As we have seen in the examples above, although their demands were met by the government before 1908, it was only after 1908 that they began to steer the Constitutionalist governments, moving forward like a truck with the brakes off. The story of the codification of the administrative prohibition decision, which started in 1902 and gained momentum between 1909 and 1913, is a clear expression of this process. But the landed estate owners were not content with dispossessing the landed estate laborers, they also brought the Laborer Regulation (*Amele Nizamnamesi*), which they prepared to discipline those who were already dispossessed and turned into workers on the landed estates (under unfree labor conditions), to the Parliament in 1909 and 1912. The report sent by the Governor of Aydın on the subject provides a clear expression of how the working classes were viewed by the Administration:

The majority of the laborers engaged in agriculture in villages and landed estates in this province are vagabonds, who work as laborers in the summer and, when they have the opportunity, commit all kinds of outrages such as extortion, robbery, theft and so on. Therefore, in order to keep them under surveillance continuously, was requested from the owners of the landed estates in the province a book containing the names and, as far as possible, the identities of the laborers employed, and was ordered to inform the government of any changes that might occur after these books were given.¹⁰⁴

102 BOA, DH.MUI 47/41.

103 BOA, DH.H 52/9.

104 BOA, DH.MUI 72/74/1326.

The concern over the transformation of the “laborious classes” into “dangerous classes” in this way was not limited to the governor. In April-August 1912, Tekfurdağı Deputy Bedreddin Bey and his colleagues proposed that the draft law, the “Laborer Regulation”, which the Council of State had disapproved in 1909, be immediately brought to the Assembly for enactment:

In spite of the fact that it has been repeatedly observed that people with unknown identities are brought in under the name of servitude, and that they often leave the service suddenly after receiving their wages and salaries and/or after serving for 3-5 days, the government is neither able to take administrative action due to the lack of a law, regulation and instruction, nor can the judiciary take criminal action against such an act, which can easily take the form of fraud; the complainant and the defendant are referred to the court of law. Since this abandonment of service coincides with the time when the farmer [landowner] is at work, the farmer [landowner] has neither the time nor the cash to deal with the courts for a long time. Even if he could, it is unlikely that he gets his rights from a poor foreign man. If the following is nothing more than a reiteration of a need that is no doubt known to their delegation, the approach of the harvest season and the fact that we have been informed that the situation we have presented is becoming more and more bizarre, therefore, it is necessary to provide mutual guarantees to the farmers [landowners] and servants. We hereby request and propose that it be decided that the draft law, which was prepared by the Ministry of Interior and is currently in the Council of State, be immediately completed and submitted to the National Assembly.¹⁰⁵

The class hatred of Bedreddin Bey and his friends is evident; unidentified people receive high wages working as servants, then abandon and defraud the landed estate owners by running away in the middle of work. The draft law pending in the Council of State should be sent to the Assembly and enacted as soon as possible. However, the Balkan Wars that broke out in the fall of 1912 would completely prevent this.

Transcending the struggle between the provincial bourgeoisie and the commercial bourgeoisie and foreign capital, the struggle that intensified over the distinction between local and foreign, but mostly Muslim and non-Muslim, marked the post-1913 period, and the Savignyite vein of Muslim capitalists within the provincial bourgeoisie swelled like never before. As a result, both non-Muslim capitalists and rural Muslim and non-Muslim laborers (without distinction) were dispossessed (most of them subjected to unfree labor categories). If we make a balance sheet assessment, Muslim representatives of the provincial bourgeoisie, who were increasingly inclined towards commercial and industrial investments over time, became part of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie by appropriating the abandoned properties; Muslim representatives of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie expanded their portfolios by taking advantage of either the National Economy policies or the abandoned properties; Jews and some of the Levantines who were part of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie also resisted and

105 BOA, BEO 4053/303938/4 B 1330.

survived this process; foreign capital, on the other hand, was battered in this process, but it clearly prevailed until the new economic context that would emerge after the Great Depression of 1929.

The Revolution of 1923

The Ottoman government and the Allied Powers of World War I signed on October 30, 1918 the Armistice of Mudros. Accordingly, the Allies were to occupy the Straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, would occupy Ottoman territories in case of disorder and a threat to Allied security; the Ottoman army was demobilized; ports, railways and strategic points were made available for use by the Allies. The occupation of Istanbul in 1918 was followed by that of Izmir in 1919. Feeling highly threatened, the bourgeoisie (no matter its faction) started to organize itself in the form of societies and/or committees for the defense of rights (*müdafa-i hukuk*) and/or the refusal of occupation (*redd-i ilhak*). These organizations formed the basis of the National Struggle (*Milli Mücadele*) starting from 1918 onwards; they also prepared the way for the foundation of the National Assembly on April 23, 1920, in Ankara challenging the Ottoman government in occupied Istanbul. After this brief historical review, let us return to the dynamics of class struggle during the period of the National Struggle.

Until 1876, the provincial bourgeoisie tried to maintain and even aggravate the unfree forms of labor defined by bondage to the soil and debt bondage by relying on customary law. After 1876, however, as seen especially in the draft “Labor Regulation”, it was eager to construct a new law by departing from customary law. The provincial bourgeoisie’s search for a new law again pursues unfree forms of labor, but in a period when the class struggle intensified and led to deportations and genocide, it aims to transform free forms of labor by pushing its limits even further. It was in such a period that “laborers”, “most of whom were vagabonds”, took to the mountains and took on the role of social banditry as “efe” and “zeybek”.¹⁰⁶ As another actor of the social question caused by the class struggle in Anatolia, we should not forget another group, the deserters, who were devastated by the war years of the 1910s and turned into social bandits.¹⁰⁷ To these should be added the small producers who carried out contract farming under the pressure and control of the *Régie* (in a way, they became workers of the *Régie*), and who had no choice but to smuggle tobacco, risking fighting with the *Régie*’s guards in order to make a living.¹⁰⁸

In such a context, the impact of the 1917 October Revolution and Bolshevism

¹⁰⁶ Yetkin, *Ege’de Eşkiyalık*.

¹⁰⁷ Masayuki Yama’uchi, “Reflections on the Social Movements during the National Liberation War of Turkey: A Tentative Analysis of Partisan Activities in Western Anatolia”, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, no 15, 1978, pp. 15-50; Sungur Savran, “Bir İhtilal Olarak Millî Mücadele 2: Anadolu’da Sürekli Devrim Dinamikleri”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, no 44, 2020, pp. 31-89.

¹⁰⁸ Donald Quataert, “Reji, Kaçakçılar ve Hükümet”, *Osmanlı Devleti’nde Avrupa İktisadi Yayılımı ve Direniş (1881-1908)*, Yurt Yayınları, Ankara, 1987, pp. 23-43.

in Anatolia was quite strong.¹⁰⁹ The 1920 Declaration of the Green Army Society, which was very active in Anatolia, as did the Workers' and Farmers' Socialist Party of Turkey and the People's Workers' Party of Turkey,¹¹⁰ directly addresses the social question we have tried to put forward above and calls the working classes to struggle by citing the "New World" established in Russia after the October Revolution as an example:

What is the old world? What is happening in the new world? The old world is nothing but a few rich people making millions of people work like slaves, providing for their own comfort at the expense of the hunger and misery of these millions of people.

Peasants, farmers, viticulturists, gardeners, shoemakers, headscarf makers, bricklayers, carpenters, carriage drivers, in short, all workers who work with their feet and arms, workday and night, strive, and they can barely fill their stomachs with great difficulty with dry bread. They fall ill, go hungry and go without medicine. There is no one to give them bread, medicine, and no one to bring them a doctor. Everything that is eaten and worn in the world is created by the poor. Houses, mansions, and palaces are built by laborers. But he himself is hungry, naked, miserable, roofless, and homeless. They take it as tithe, they take it as aid. The poor peasant endures all kinds of taxes. Neither his roads are built, nor his countryside repaired, nor his children educated.

Nothing is done for the poor. No one will take up his cause, nor will anyone look at him as a human being. It is as if God created the peasant, the laborer, the poor to be servants of the rich.

O peasants, poor people, hard-working farmers, honest laborers, and workers, open your eyes, look carefully around you! Do you know who are the beys, pashas, and aghas around you? They are human beings like you. There is no difference between you in the sight of Allah. Allah has created all people equal. To get rid of the evil of these cruel men who have made you poor and ignorant, raise your head a little, raise your voice, do not be afraid of them! They cannot do anything to you if they are left to themselves. From the news coming from Russia, everyone is gradually learning about the work of farmers and soldiers in Russia and Azerbaijan. They are building a new world. They have completely changed the old administrations and governments. They are establishing new administrations, new governments. The new world is completely different. In the new world,

109 For a detailed analysis of this process, see Savran, "Bir İhtilal Olarak Millî Mücadele 2...", p. 68 and the following pages. On the leftist movements during the National Struggle, see also Erol Ülker, "Millî Mücadele'de Sol Akımlar Üzerine Genel Bir Değerlendirme", *100. Yılında Millî Mücadele'de Eskişehir'de Sol*, Mehmet Ö. Alkan (Ed.), İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2022.

110 Paul Dumont underlines that *Türkiye Halk İştirakiyun Fırkası* (the People's Socialist Party of Turkey) privileged the participation of the peasant population in the revolution in line with the framework outlined by the Comintern at its Congresses in 1920, see Paul Dumont, "Le mouvement communiste anatolien en 1922", *Du socialisme ottoman à l'internationalisme anatolien*, İstanbul: the ISIS Press, pp. 361-362.

the government is always in the hands of the poor. The poor choose the men of government. Governors, sanjak governors, district governors have all disappeared. Rich, poor, big, small, bey, pasha have all become equal. Ranks have always been abolished.

Since it was forbidden to own property, bribery, illicit profit, theft, lying, fraud were completely eliminated. Everyone understood humanity, everyone was equal to each other. This is what we will do, this is what we will be. We are also walking on this path.¹¹¹

In this context, the following articles found in the Green Army's Regulations regarding the new law of the new world to be established are noteworthy:

3. The Green Army strives to ensure that all people benefit from land and public wealth only in proportion to their personal, material and spiritual capabilities.
4. It considers the state administration of land, which is considered to be one of the vital benefits such as water, air, light and heat, and which is public, and leaving it to the free common labor of the people, as one of the fundamental reforms.
5. It is in favor of the state's involvement in the whole economic life in order to ensure that the benefits arising from movable and wealth-generating capitals are distributed among all citizens and not to some individuals and some families.¹¹²

Here, it would be useful to recall what Çerkez [the Circassian] Ethem, the prominent leader of the National Struggle who would be also part of the Green Army in 1920, who visited Karacabey in April 1920, said to Albanian Galip Pasha, who did not contribute to the aid money collected by the Balıkesir Central Committee to the best of his ability:

At a time like this, everyone must sacrifice their wealth for the salvation of the homeland. You, on the other hand, I see with regret that you continue and insist on being a bad example for those who are far inferior to you in terms of wealth. Moreover, I know your past and you very well. You are a man who bribed tens of thousands of liras to win an unjust case. You are an extravagant person who spent as little as [1]50 liras in Istanbul beer houses and Bursa in one night. Isn't your stinginess for the sake of the homeland astonishing and hateful?¹¹³

111 Quoted by Dimitir Şişmanov, *Türkiye İşçi ve Sosyalist Hareketi*, (Eds. Ayşe and Ragıp Zarakolu), İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1990 (1978), pp. 75-76 from *Yakın Tarihimiz Dergisi*, vol. 1, 1962, p. 71.

112 Quoted by Şişmanov, *Türkiye İşçi...*, p. 76 from *Yakın Tarihimiz Dergisi*, vol. 1, 1962, p. 107.

113 Çerkes Ethem, *Anılarım*, (edition in Modern Turkish), İstanbul: Berfin Yayınevi, 1993 (1962), pp. 26-27. The archival documents on Galip Pasha's land dispute with the villagers and the Sultan's Treasury (in the context of the Çamandıra landed estate he owned) and the related lawsuit are voluminous, and although we have not yet made a detailed analysis, it would not be surprising if Galip Pasha, in the context of this or other lawsuits, like the landowners we have seen above, manipulated everyone and everything in line with his own interests (cf. BOA, DH.MKT 1149/2/20.06.1325;

Galip Pasha said, “Sir, this is help. And help depends on desire and demand. And I cannot give more than that”; he was then arrested and spent the night in prison. He was released only after one of his men delivered 5,000 liras on behalf of the Pasha.¹¹⁴ Galip Pasha, who had increased his aid from 150 liras to 5,000 liras, must have been very uneasy.

The mobilization of the popular masses in the 1920s made not only Galip Pasha but also the entire provincial bourgeoisie uneasy. The uneasiness of the bourgeoisie was of course also reflected in Mustafa Kemal, the President of the Grand National Assembly. On September 16, 1920, in an encrypted telegram he sent to Ali Fuat Pasha, the Commander of the Western Front, he drew attention to the “reforms” that the government should make in order to “protect the country”:

At the same time, the Bolsheviks have started extraordinary activities to create a Bolshevik organization in our country. (...) Their aim is to bring about a social revolution in the country. (...) The men of our country who are supporters of ideas and revolutions or who pursue various purposes under this veil are facilitating the Bolshevik organization without realizing these dangers. In these circumstances, we must first and foremost preserve the country in our hands and prevent Russian subordination through anarchy and revolution by making whatever reforms are necessary through the government.¹¹⁵

Exactly 18 days later, on October 4, 1920, the draft Law on Village Coppice forests, which came to the agenda of the Parliament session, is an excellent example of the “reforms” to be made in order to “protect the country”. The bill was presented to the Parliament directly by the President of the National Assembly:¹¹⁶

To the Presidency of the Grand National Assembly
In order to give the peasants the opportunity to benefit more freely from their legal rights and to ensure the protection and orderliness of the hereditary forests, the draft law on the allocation and delimitation of coppice forest to neighboring villages and villages whose inhabitants are engaged in woodcutting and charcoal making and its justification was approved by the Committee of Deputies in its meeting held on 22.9.1336 and is attached herewith and I kindly request the necessary action to be taken.

President of the Grand National Assembly M. Kemal¹¹⁷

The Parliament could not remain silent in the face of the social pressure it faced

DH.MKT 1168/88/14.04.1325; DH.MUİ. 6/2/24.01.1328).

114 Çerkes Ethem, *Anılarım*, pp. 26-27.

115 Quoted by Savran, “Bir İhtilal Olarak Millî Mücadele 2...”, p. 78 from Ahmet Efe, *Çerkes Ethem* (Revised 2nd edition), İstanbul: Bengi Kitap Yayın, 2007, pp. 102-103.

116 The moderator of the session is Mr. Hasan Fehmi (Ataç), second deputy chairman.

117 *T.B.M.M. Zabut Ceridesi*, 1st Period, 1st Meeting Year, vol. 4, (3rd edition), Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 1981, p. 518.

and enacted the Coppice Forest Law No. 39 on October 14, 1920.¹¹⁸ The law was not a top-down concession, but an achievement forced from the bottom up, reflecting class conflicts and social unrests in Anatolia during the period of the National Struggle¹¹⁹ when the dynamics of revolution were constantly in motion.¹²⁰ While *de facto* dispossession that was rapidly taking place in rural areas had been legalized through the resolution of property disputes with decisions of “administrative prohibition” since 1902 and with the Law on Abandoned Properties in 1915, the Coppice Forest Law promised almost a land reform to the poor peasants:

ARTICLE ONE – To villages that are engaged in lumbering, charcoaling and timbering and that are either adjacent to or within a maximum distance of twenty kilometers from large forests, by the work of a committee consisting of the local engineer, land registry officers and two members from the village council elders, as of maximum of eighteen old *dönüms* (decare) per household, the coppice forest is allocated and the existing coppices are re-delimited by expanding to this proportion and the official registration is carried out free of charge in the name of the village; the proper conservation and utilization of these coppice forests shall belong to the people of the village under the supervision and responsibility of the council of elders. All waqf forests without discrimination are exempt.

ARTICLE TWO - If it is not possible to allocate coppice forest from the state lands in the amount specified in the first article due to the fact that the forests in the vicinity of the village are under individual ownership, on the basis of the value to be evaluated by a total of three judges (the forest officer -acting as supervisor-, two persons to be elected among the villagers and the forest owners

118 Yalçın Küçük also drew attention to this law and its social and political dimension in the first pages of his *Türkiye Üzerine Tezler (1908-1978)*, Istanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 1980 (1978), pp. 17-26.

119 Savran, “Bir İhtilal Olarak Milli Mücadele 2...”, p. 34 and following pages.

120 It should be emphasized that the Law was not just ostensible; the statements of Mahmud Celal (Bayar) Bey, the Minister of Economy, indicate that it was thought through and studied in detail: “I am convinced that forests belong directly to the nation. That poor nation, which today has not been able to obtain in any way its right to benefit (Bravo voices). After calculations we have decided on these two hectares, which is twenty new *dönüm* (decare). We calculated each villager’s share in benefit in seven years, calculating the natural cycle of the forest in three years, calculating that an oak forest would grow in every (7) years, taking into account that each household would have three *dönüms*, we estimated that each villager would receive about ten thousand kilos of wood or coal per year, and in this respect, the villagers would receive enough money to live on compared to the current market. At the same time, while setting this amount, we wanted to leave the villagers in a saturated state so that they would no longer enter the state forests. As you may know, preserving the state forests is an important issue that is strongly related to the health and economy of the country today. If we do not leave the peasants in a difficult situation in terms of the wood and coal they need to transport in order to provide their own tools and equipment for agriculture, to procure easily what they will burn themselves, to ensure their own economy and to provide for the maintenance of their children, we will not only serve the well-being of the peasants, but we will also save the remaining state forests from destruction.” *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*, 1st Period, 1st Meeting Year 1, vol. 4, (3rd Edition), Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 1981, p. 523.

with the consent of both parties, if there is no consent, they are to be appointed by the forest officer in an impartial manner), the coppice forest is registered in the name of the village after the cash payment of the amount of expropriation by the villager. If the villager is unable to pay the price in cash, it shall be repaid by means of loans to be made from the Agricultural Bank by means of the Ministry of Economy.

If the parties do not agree with the value, they can only apply to the court for an increase or reduction of the value. But this application cannot prevent the enforcement of the decision.

On October 4, 1920 (1st period, 1st meeting year, 28th session), Hamdi Namık (Gör) Bey, Member of Parliament for Izmit, who took the floor in the Assembly during the discussions on the law, clearly reveals the spirit of the law:

HAMDÎ NAMIK BEY (Izmit) - Sir, today is one of our happiest days. Because today, with this law, I realize that there is a government that wants to go towards the people. Until now, no law has been drafted for the benefit of the people to this extent. Therefore, I congratulate the honorable deputy of the Ministry of Economy, and then the Committee of Deputies. I do not want to occupy your Committee with more words. I request that the Committee accept this law.¹²¹

Mr. Tevfik Rüştü (Aras), the Member of Parliament for Menteşe (Muğla), provides an excellent detail of the law's impact on the field:

TEVFİK RÜŞTÜ BEY (Menteşe) - In my opinion, one of the most soulful articles of the law is the second article. Because we know that in many places the state forests are very remote and the state coppice forests of the village have been destroyed. Now it is necessary to give them a forest. Especially because of that particular black stone¹²² question, it has come under the noses of the villages and has become everyone's personal forest, I know them very closely. For example, the district of Marmaris is like this. A whole district center has absolutely no forest. Because Şerif Efendi, one of the notables, has moved that black stone further and further and he has become the owner of everything there is in the name of trees. Now, if we do not give the people the right of expropriation as such, at least as the Government thinks, it will mean that you will die of cold and suffer from lack of firewood. Therefore, I find the second article very favorable and ask for its acceptance.¹²³

Indeed, Article 2 of the Coppice Forest Law is a fundamental article, which envisages the expropriation of the land of the provincial bourgeoisie consisting

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 522.

¹²² Here, Tevfik Rüştü Bey refers to "black stones" as boundary stones (whether cadastral or not) that mark land boundaries (as well as local power struggles).

¹²³ Ibid., p. 525.

of aghas and beys and its distribution to the working classes. The introduction of a piece of legislation that threw out the administrative prohibition decisions that dispossessed the rural laborers and turned them into subsistence producers is a concrete example of the dynamics of the permanent revolution of the period in actuality. Throughout the history of the Republic, no other law “in the interest of the rural people” would be enacted to such an extent. Article 2 of the Coppice Forest Law brings a regulation in the interest of the people even beyond the famous Article 17 of the Farmers’ Land Law No. 4753, which was enacted in 1945 despite hot debates, but could not be implemented due to the great opposition of the bourgeoisie.¹²⁴

It was in this uncertain, worrisome atmosphere for the provincial bourgeoisie that Emin Bey wrote the following notes in his notebook in 1920:

In the meantime, the question of Bolshevism arose. We have been inclined towards the Bolsheviks for a long time. The reason is that they are enemies of the British and the French. After all, we say, our enemies are one. But now there are more people who will follow and implement Bolshevik principles. They are almost in control of the Parliament and they have all the power in their hands. These men are in favor of practicing the destructive form of Bolshevism, as in Russia, and they are organized accordingly. Even if the Greeks invade the country, they want to establish Bolshevism in the country at any cost. They want to completely destroy the rich, the village aghas, the more or less well-off, the religious, especially the hodjas, who would resist this. They want to do this - may Allah the Almighty protect them - right now.¹²⁵

Naturally, Emin Bey, like the rest of the provincial bourgeoisie, is anxious about his own property and possessions: “I do not favor the abolition of property rights, because I would personally suffer losses. My known land and property at hand were acquired through our own work and labor”.¹²⁶ Despite this uneasiness, Emin Bey (as other representatives of the bourgeois class) did not take the floor during the debates on the Coppice Forest Law and did not respond to the speeches of Hamdi Namık and Tevfik Rüşti in support of the law. However, a few months after the Coppice

124 Article 17 of the Law reads as follows: “Land cultivated by landless or landless sharecroppers, tenants or agricultural workers may be expropriated to distribute to the above-mentioned farmers and workers, provided that three times the amount taken as the basis for distribution in accordance with Article 39 in that region is to be given to the owner in the place of his choice. The land to be left to the owner shall not be less than 50 *dönüm* (decare). The provisions of Articles 15 and 16 shall not apply in the implementation of this article. This provision shall not apply to temporary seasonal workers. The Ministry of Agriculture shall determine whether the worker is a temporary seasonal worker or not.”

125 Sazak, *Emin Bey'in Defteri...*, p. 161. In the same period, Emin Bey’s hometown Eskişehir was very open to Bolshevik movements; for a new compilation book on this subject, including rich archival material, see Mehmet Ö. Alkan (Ed.), *100. Yılında Milli Mücadele’de Eskişehir’de Sol*, İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2022.

126 Sazak, *Emin Beyin Defteri...*, p. 162.

Forest Law, on April 18, 1921 (1st period, 2nd meeting year, 22nd session), he did not hesitate to reveal his class position as an enemy of the working classes during the debates on the law “on the sale of coal dust from the Zonguldak and Ereğli basins for the benefit of the workers” (Law no. 114, which was enacted into law on April 28, 1921). The law, in line with the description in its draft, envisages the sale of coal dust to generate income for the laborers, which “was deemed essential as it would help the poor laborers, who had been left unprotected until now, to lead a humane life”. In line with the content of the law, the wind continues to blow in favor of the working classes in the Parliament, but the following discussion during the debate on the law is striking to see the heated atmosphere of the period as well as the opposition of Emin Bey, the par excellence representative of the bourgeoisie, who emphasizes bourgeois law based on private property:

EMİN B. (Eskisehir) - Sir, this issue should be analyzed in detail. First of all, does the government have the right to leave the dust to the workers in these mines? Is there such a record in the [mine] concession? Or do these dusts belong directly to the owners of the mines? Secondly, who is most in need of assistance in our country? Is it only the laborers in Zonguldak? Or is it the fifteen million Turkish people? Today, I know very well that after two months - even including your Assembly - no one will receive any money.

ABDÜLKADİR KEMALİ B. (Kastamonu) - How do you know this?

EMİN B. (Continued) - Look, I know why: In Eskisehir, the people are being pressured for the sheep tax, and they are selling yearling lamb for one lira. Let the remedy for this be considered. I am not saying that we should hide these problems, please, did I not say that? Should the law not be respected? First of all, there is the law. Sir, let us think carefully. If Bolshevism is really going to save this nation, the paths taken by the Mr. Minister of Economy are very correct. If not...

Minister of Economy MAHMUT CELAL B. (Saruhan) - What kind of language is this, Mr. President? Please, I did not mean it and I did not say it.

EMİN B. (Continued) - If not, according to the capability of this country, I am not in favor of keeping the old government and I would never want that...

TUNALI HİLMİ B. (Bolu) - He is only an apostate.

EMİN B. (Continued) - I am a person who is interested in my country, I am not a vagabond. If we are going to do something according to the ability of the country, such economic issues cannot be a toy. Let us not make laws blindly without estimating the percentage of this dust. This is the Assembly and it holds the destiny of the nation in its hands. We cannot make laws in a haphazard manner.

MINISTER OF ECONOMY MAHMUT CELAL B. (Saruhan) - No one touches the law and rights acquis.

TUNALI HİLMİ B. (Bolu) - I do not make laws blindly. Please, Mr. President, this is a scientific issue (noises).

EMİN B. (Continued) - I came with the seal of the council of elders. I came with the will of the nation.

TUNALI HİLMİ B. (Bolu) - I reject the term blindly.

EMİN B. (Continued) - The economy of the country is so shaken that we think of

nothing but the defense of the country. “This is a gift from my Lord”. Our enemies have also appreciated this.

Today the economy of the country is shaken. This, gentlemen, is the only thing our enemies are watching, and there is of course a remedy for this. Let us think about that too. Let us not play with the economy like this. (What is the remedy? voices) There is a remedy, gentlemen. The laws of the economy must be respected and the people must be safe. Therefore, I propose that this be rejected.¹²⁷

We said that there were a few months between the two laws, from October 14, 1920 to April 28, 1921, it was the elimination of Çerkes Ethem and his forces in January 1921, but mainly what happened on the night of 28 Kanunusani 1337 (January 28, 1921) that left Emin Bey silent in October and revealed his class hatred in April when defending bourgeois law...¹²⁸ As Nazım Hikmet said (in his poem) “28 *Kanunusani*” (January 28), history is the struggle of classes, 28 *Kanunusani* is the history of the struggle of the bourgeoisie against the laborers:

ta ata aa ta ta ta ha ta tta ta

History

is the struggle
of classes

1921

January 28
black sea
bourgeoisie
us

127 *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*, 1st Session, 2nd Meeting Year, vol. 10, Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 1958, p. 29. Emin Bey was not alone in his rejection of the law, there were several other MPs who began to raise their voices in the Parliament after 28 *Kanunusani*, among them Vehbi Efendi, MP for Konya (in the same session), another rising voice of the bourgeoisie: “VEHBÎ Efendi (Konya) - Sir, we will exempt the laborers working in Zonguldak from military service. I can understand that. Because it encourages and incentivizes the laborers there. Then we gave an allocation to build a hospital to protect the health of the laborers there. A hospital can be built. I can understand that too. But since I do not know the wisdom of providing an additional benefit from coal dust for Zonguldak laborers who work and earn a daily wage, I propose that both the Minister of Economy and the author of the report give explanations about this. The laborer is willing to work with a daily wage, he works. Then their comfort in other matters is also considered. What is the reason for allocating this coal dust for their benefit?”, *ibid.*, p. 26.

128 For a detailed analysis of the events see Savran, “Bir İhtilal Olarak Millî Mücadele 2...” ve Sungur Savran, “Bir İhtilal Olarak Millî Mücadele 3: Mustafa Suphi’leri Kim Öldürdü?”, *Devrimci Marksizm*, sayı 45-46, 2021, s. 67-135.

dangling on fifteen butcher's hooks
fifteen severed heads
comrade

of these you

don't remember their names

but

Remember the 28th of January!
"black night
"white snow
"wind
"wind".

Shoving off a motor from trabzon
Crowd-on-the-shore!
they stone the motor
they're starting the final act!

the bourgeois riding on the shoulder of kemal
went kemal into commandant's lanyard
the commander into the butler's pocket
the butler into men's underpants
howling

hav... hav... hak... tü
Comrade, don't forget, bourgeoisie

whenever he deceives us
that's how he cries out:

- hav...hav...hak...tü

The conditions that required reforms for the preservation of the country were thus softened, and the social and political atmosphere in favor of the working classes changed rapidly after "28 Kanunusani".¹²⁹ Especially after September 9,

129 The "Law No. 151 dated September 10, 1921 on the law of the mining workers of the Ereğli basin", which brought improvements in the working conditions of the miners of the Ereğli basin, shows that the atmosphere in favor of the working classes partially continued. However, during the 28th session on May 2, 1921, when this law was discussed, the following words of Mr. Mazhar Müfit (Kansu), MP for Hakkâri, reflect the changing atmosphere in the parliament well: "Now, sir, is such a labor union inspectorate necessary or not? Some people say: Why should we make

1922 (the Turkish Army entered Izmir, occupied since 1919 by the Greek Army), the bourgeoisie seems to have declared its dominance. Exactly 10 days after September 9, on September 19, 1922, an entrepreneurial group consisting of 55 parliamentarians and 37 merchants (mostly engaged in trade, such as Yunus Nadi and Tunalı Hilmi) founded the Turkish National Import and Export Corporation.¹³⁰ From the Parliamentary minutes of November 27, 1922, Minister of Finance Hasan Fehmi (Ata) Bey's report on the situation of regions of production after his visit to Izmir reveals the new property order and class hierarchy determined by the abandoned properties after the National Struggle and the migration of the Greeks:

They are talking about a fig issue in Aydın. A man became the temporary deputy governor, another man became the gendarmerie commander, the first officer there, and both of them said that the season of these unclaimed figs was passing, they would be ruined. They found five contractors. They negotiated with these contractors, and they said that they would collect the fig crops, sixty percent of which would belong to the warehouses of the abandoned property - the Government - and forty percent to themselves, and that they would also appoint an officer, and that sixty percent of the figs collected would belong to the Government and forty percent to these contractors, and they made such a transaction. After a little while, the people realized that there was a great profit, a great benefit. There was a complaint, this complaint came when I was here. I asked about this complaint of Aydın and I had not received an answer yet. When I went to Izmir, I called the accountant of Aydın and the inspector there to Izmir. They divided the fig orchards that were left unclaimed into five or six parts. It was announced that sixty percent of the fig orchards would be collected and upon this announcement, two parts were taken and collected directly by the people and villagers in

such a law when we don't have such an organization yet? I would like to answer that: Indeed, we do not have a labor organization and if we leave the laborers like this - as you can see - they will be crushed under the oppression of the so-called bosses. The laborers need such a guidance, sir... But if we make such a record in the law, that is, from the point of view of creating unity among the laborers, I find it very favorable. There is only one thing: Some people here are heroes of the laborers: For example, Mr. Refik, Mr. Tunalı Hilmi, and even the secretary of the committee. As soon as we objected, words like fear of the laborers, worry of the laborers, suspicion of the laborers, and so on... There are words like that. I ask you not to be afraid of the laborers. Sirs: All of us here, all of us, all of us know the situation of the laborers today; we all know how much they are persecuted by certain officials and - in order to fill the pockets of their superiors - how much they are persecuted. All we are, we want the welfare and comfort of the laborers, all the people, all of them; why should we be afraid of the laborers?... Therefore, I would like to ask Refik Bey and the other members of the group, when they come up here and often address the right: (laughs) There is no need for them to say fear of the laborers, anxiety of the laborers. I return this to you, we have no fear (Applause)." *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*, 1st Session, 2nd Meeting Year, vol. 10, Ankara: TBMM Basımevi, 1958, p. 212.

130 Selim İlkin, "Türkiye Milli İthalat ve İhracat Anonim Şirketi", *METU Studies in Development*, no 2, 1971, pp. 229-230. For a discussion on the company, see also Küçük, *Türkiye Üzerine Tezler...*, pp. 60-73.

the neighborhood of those orchards, sixty percent was brought to the government and forty percent was eaten by them. (O, may it be halâl, voices) The other part was collected by us - by having the people collect it - in accordance with the decision.

HAFIZ HAMDI B. (Biga) - Again the people are becoming laborers, Hasan Bey.

As before, landowners and contractors seized property and assets, while the people continued to work as laborers. In such a context, the bourgeoisie declared its republic (power) on October 29, 1923. It was in this environment that the masses of people lost the gains they had previously made. With Law No. 484 dated April 15, 1924 on the “Law on the Right of Peasants to Benefit from State Forests”, the Coppice Forest Law of 1920 was repealed. According to the new law, those in need could benefit from the state forests (with a license to be given according to scientific endurance), but the distribution of forests from the state forests to villages and the expropriation of land/forest owners’ land, as envisaged in the old law, were completely off the agenda. The provincial bourgeoisie thus breathed a sigh of relief. On the other hand, unlike the Coppice Forest Law, which prioritized the needs and interests of the poor people, the new law put commercial interests on the agenda, so much so that it was as if it was addressed to timber merchants and winked at the commercial bourgeoisie:

ARTICLE THREE - Each of the inhabitants of the villages within and around the forests who will produce timber for commerce shall be granted a license for a period of one year, without auction and with a tariff price, in the amount that he can process from the nearest State forests that are scientifically tolerable.

However, in matters other than auctions, they are subject to the same rules and conditions as merchants. These timbers are free to be exported anywhere and their price is paid in installments. When forests in the vicinity of villages engaged in lumbering are sold to merchants through auctions, it is obligatory to allocate the amount needed by the villagers.

However, the provincial bourgeoisie gained the main guarantee against possible land reform concerns with Article 74 of the 1924 Constitution:

Article 74.- No person’s [movable and immovable] property shall be expropriated unless its necessity for the public good has been duly established and its value has been paid in advance in accordance with the law.

No person shall be compelled to make any sacrifice, except for the obligations in cash, in kind and in labor to be imposed by law in extraordinary circumstances.¹³¹

131 The obstacle imposed by Article 74 in the way of land reform would only be overcome with the addition made to this article by Law No. 3115/ Art. 7 on February 5, 1937: “No one’s [movable and immovable] property may be expropriated unless it is duly recognized as necessary for the public interest and unless the value of the property is paid in advance in accordance with a special law. The expropriation values of land and forests to be expropriated in order to make farmers landowners and

Nevertheless, for those who think of resisting the trend against the working classes, Article 1 of the *Takrir-i Sükûn* Law (The Maintenance of Order Law) of March 4, 1925 offers a warning to suppress the working classes (which in practice may include measures such as the prevention of strikes and union activities and the arrest of trade unionists) in addition to reactionism and rebellion:

ARTICLE ONE - The Government, with the approval of the President of the Republic, is authorized to prohibit, ex officio and administratively, all organizations, incitement, attempts and publications that may lead to insurrection and rebellion and violate the order of society, peace and tranquility, security and public order of the country. The Government may refer the perpetrators of these acts to the Independence Court.

Of course, it is important to underline here the concept of “administrative prohibition”, which was the engine of dispossession before and after 1908, which the working people in rural Anatolia will remember well. On the other hand, property law, which had been defined since the pre-1908 period within the framework of administrative prohibition decisions that were “excessively individualistic”, that “favored individual interests to the detriment of the public interest”, and that overlooked the fact that “in the conflict between two interests, the interest of society must always prevail over the interest of the individual”, was codified from scratch with the Civil Code in 1926.¹³² The Civil Code, borrowed from the Swiss Civil Code, completely abolished the legislation based on customary law. Moreover, with the simultaneous entry into force of the Commercial Code No. 865 with the Civil Code, the incompatible legal framework in which the bourgeois world had been operating since the Tanzimat period also disappeared. Thus, as Niyazi Berkes underlines, Turkey was freed from the oscillations between Savignyan and Hegelian paths that had been going on since the Tanzimat period.¹³³ In the preamble of the Civil Code, Mahmut Esat Bozkurt summarizes the Hegelian path that Turkey had reached as follows:

There are no fundamental differences between the needs of nations belonging to the family of modern civilization. Continuous social and economic relations have united a great mass of civilization into a family. It should not be forgotten that the Turkish nation has decided to accept modern civilization and its living principles as they are... The Turkish nation, marching with a firm decision to join modern civilization and to adopt it, must not adapt itself to modern civilization, but must

forests to be managed by the State, and the method of payment of these values shall be determined by special laws. No person shall be compelled to make any sacrifice, except for the obligations of money, property and labor to be imposed by law in extraordinary circumstances.”

132 Choukri Cardahi, “La possession en droit ottoman, son caractère, ses effets et les actions possessoires (avec un aperçu de Droit comparé)”, *Revue critique de législation et de jurisprudence*, (new series) vol. 46, 1926, pp. 261-262.

133 Berkes, *Türkiye’de Çağdaşlaşma*, p. 531.

adapt itself to the requirements of that civilization at all costs. The purpose of this law is not to preserve the rules of religion or customary traditions, but to guarantee all political, social, economic and national actions.¹³⁴

According to Berkes, with the Civil Code of 1926, a new political law was constructed, and this is where the revolutionary nature of the Code lies:

We see that the aim of the Civil Code was not to regulate the civil relations of the people in accordance with traditions, habits and religious rules, but on the contrary, to reorganize these relations according to what they should be. This is the revolutionary character of the law. Cevdet Pasha considered civil law as the basis of political law; now civil law has been codified with the obligation to comply with the requirements of a new political law.¹³⁵

Berkes refrains from saying it, but the process that resulted in the Civil Code is the process of the bourgeois revolution in Turkey. The nineteenth century witnessed the struggle between the provincial bourgeoisie and the alliance of bourgeois-bureaucrats, financial and commercial bourgeoisie; over time, while the bourgeois-bureaucrats were politically eliminated and the financial bourgeoisie weakened with the establishment of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration, the commercial bourgeoisie made a leap in the context of its relationship with the developing capitalist world and started to pursue trade and industry together. Together with the intensifying competition after the 1908 revolution, the National Economy policies made it possible for the provincial bourgeoisie to evolve into a commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, and this emerging class did its best to outplay the existing non-Muslim-dominated commercial and industrial bourgeoisie. After the October Revolution of 1917, the old provincial, new commercial and industrial bourgeoisie feared the overthrow of its dominant order under the fear of the popular movement and communism, and switched from the Savignyist path, which it had already become unable to fit into its mold, to the Hegelian path that would facilitate its relations with the capitalist world. The force in land law rooted in customary law has now become defined in the private property regime constituted by the Civil Code of 1926 and protecting the bourgeoisie.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 531.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 531.

¹³⁶ Law No. 552 dated February 17, 1925, "Law on the abolition of the tithe and the tax to be substituted for it" abolished not only the tithe [aşar] but also the collection mechanism of the tithe, the tax-farming. This had two consequences for the provincial bourgeoisie: Large landowners were freed from the burden of the tithe, even though they were subject to a new (not very long-lasting) tax on agricultural production instead of the tithe; the abolition of the tax-farming eliminated a field of investment that was completely under their control, and as a result, some of them accelerated the commercial and industrial investments that they had begun to privilege after 1908, while others found the solution in switching from being a tax-farmer (which was not much different) to a business contractor. The new class configuration that emerged as a result of the abolition of tax-farming brought about the mutual feeding of the provincial bourgeoisie with the Hegelian path and

On the other hand, the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, which was already following the Hegelian path, seems to have thrown up bile with the erasure of the Savignyian path. Süleyman Ferit (Eczacıbaşı) Bey, who was appointed as the pharmacist of the hospital of the Muslim poor (Guraba-ı Müslimin) in 1903, bought Eczane-i Umumiye (Public Pharmacy) in 1909 and Şifa Eczanesi (Cure Pharmacy) in 1911, was a member of İzmir Müdafaa-i Hukuk-u Osmaniye Cemiyeti (Society for the Defense of Ottoman Rights) in 1919,¹³⁷ participated in the İzmir Economy Congress Exhibition in 1923 with medical and cosmetic products of his own production, and served as the Chairman of the Board of Directors of İzmir Chamber of Commerce between 1926 and 1933.¹³⁸ Yılancızadeler, whose factories were destroyed by the carpet yarn laborers in March 1908, were active in the political organization of the Revolution of Liberty, the Committee of Union and Progress, and not only took part in the *Uşak Merkez-i Heyetiyesi* (Uşak Central Committee) during the National Struggle,¹³⁹ but also had their factories weave serge for use at the front.¹⁴⁰ After the Kemalist revolution, they opened a branch in London and became one of the leading businesses in İzmir. In 1927, they became founding members of the İzmir Industrial Union (the predecessor of today's Aegean Region Chamber of Industry).¹⁴¹

Of course, the triumph of the Hegelian path did not prevent the repression caused by the Maintenance of Order Law (*Takrir-i Sükûn*) and the subsequent assault on the rights of the working masses. Nevertheless, it is obvious that things were not so easy for the bourgeoisie, and that the working masses did not leave the field empty, as in 1908 they broke the machines, in 1926 they grabbed the bosses by the collar when necessary:

the Hegelian path with the provincial bourgeoisie. While making these preliminary assessments on Law No. 552, we would like to underline the need for more in-depth research on the abolition of tithe and tax-farming. For an instructive study on the subject based on a rare source, see Sadık Sarısan, "Mahkeme Kayıtlarına Göre Cumhuriyetin İlk Yıllarında İltizam Problemi: Afyonkarahisar Örneği", *Afyon Kocatepe Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, vol. 6, no 2, 2004, pp. 122-130.

137 The organization of the bourgeoisie during the period of the National Struggle was based on congresses and associations, for a detailed discussion on this issue see Sungur Savran, "Bir İhtilal Olarak Millî Mücadele 1: Burjuvazinin Güçleri", *Devrimci Marksizm*, no 41-42, 2020, pp. 62-70.

138 Gürsoy, *Tarihi, Ekonomisi ve İnsanları...*, pp. 202, 282-283; Mustafa Albayrak, *Millî Mücadele Döneminde Batı Anadolu Kongreleri, (17 Mart 1919-2 Ağustos 1920)*, Ankara: Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi, 1998, pp. 30-31; "Süleyman Ferit Eczacıbaşı Şifa Eczanesi", https://eczacilik.ege.edu.tr/tr-3090/suleyman_ferit_eczacibasi_sifa_eczanesi.html (date of access 25.03.2023).

139 *Uşak Merkez-i Heyetiyesi* was one of the leading organizations of the bourgeoisie during the period of the National Struggle, just like the *İzmir Müdafaa-i Hukuk-u Osmaniye Cemiyeti*, see Savran, "Bir İhtilal Olarak Millî Mücadele 1...", pp. 62-70.

140 İlhan Tekeli ve Selim İlkin, *Ege'deki Sivil Direnişten Kurtuluş Savaşı'na Geçerken Uşak Heyet-i Merkeziyesi ve İbrahim (Tahtakılıç) Bey*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1989, pp. 254-255, 344.

141 Gürsoy, *Tarihi, Ekonomisi ve İnsanları...*, pp. 203, 292-293; R. Funda Barbaros, *1830-1930 Döneminde Sosyo-Ekonomik Çözüm Arayışları Çerçevesinde İzmir'de Sanayileşme*, İzmir: Ege Bölgesi Sanayi Odası Yayını, 1995, pp. 87-90.

This factory, located in a damp and dirty neighborhood of Halkapınar, surrounded by high walls and with a sign above its door (Şark Halı Kumpanyası- Oriental Carpet Manufacturers Limited),¹⁴² 95 % of the producers are women and children; it has been operating twenty-four hours a day since August 1926, in response to recent orders for blankets, rags, etc. from military purchases. By increasing the number of workers to six hundred, the factory raised the duration of working hours to twelve hours and at the same time closed the factory doors to fifty poor people who refused to work twelve hours. The legitimate complaints of these abandoned poor people to the government of the country and the Chamber of Commerce were not taken into consideration. One day, five women and two men workers attacked the factory director's automobile and demanded their rights, which resulted in their imprisonment for three months each.¹⁴³

In this context, the laboring classes, the drivers of the 1908 Revolution of Freedom, could not be the drivers of the 1923 Revolution as they were defeated during the National Struggle; but they were able to build their own law in 1923, albeit limited, through the bourgeoisie, in contrast to their failure in 1908. This is why “[t]his revolution was a step forward in the course of Turkey’s historical development, but it was not the last step”.

142 The company was founded in London in 1907 but is a foreign-owned company with its administrative headquarters in İzmir. In addition to its factory in İzmir, it controlled an extensive production network spread across Western Anatolia. In March 1908, yarn manufacturers in Uşak attacked the factories, which was attributed to the increasing pressure on laborers as a result of the company's intra-capitalist competition. See Elena Frangakis-Syrett, “Modernity from Below: The Amalgamated Oriental Carpet Manufacturers Ltd. of İzmir, 1907-1922”, *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, no 14, 2015, pp. 413-429; Emrah Yılmaz, “Weaving Carpets in Anatolia Once Upon a Time: The Oriental Carpet Manufacturers Limited and its Importance in Ottoman Carpet Weaving (1907-1914)”, *Eskişehir Osmangazi University Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 21, no 2, 2020, pp. 291-333; Quataert, “Machine Breaking...”.

143 For the TKP İzmir Provincial Committee's report on the subject, see Erden Akbulut and Erol Ülker, *Türkiye Komünist Partisi'nin Bolşevikleşmesi 1925-1928*, İstanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2021, p. 367.

Rethinking the aristocracy of labor¹

Özgür Öztürk

Socialism has become a vital necessity for humanity. We are fighting not only against the pandemic but also against the deepening economic, political, and ecological crises. However, capital's need for profit takes precedence over social needs. Although we have the material means to solve all our urgent problems of unemployment, poverty, hunger, the environment, health, etc., they remain unresolved within the capitalist system. It is becoming clear that capitalism has fulfilled its historical mission.

But socialism, which shall displace capitalism for the salvation of humanity, faces a difficult road full of obstacles. On a global scale, perhaps one of the most important of these obstacles is the following: If the process of socialist construction does not include the core capitalist (imperialist) countries, it will come under the constant attack of imperialism and face difficulties in the long run.

Although the socialist movement emerged in Western Europe in the 19th century, there has been no successful socialist revolution in the advanced capitalist world. From the revolutions of 1848 to the Paris Commune, the German and Italian revolutions in the 20th century, the Spanish revolution, and the protests of 1968 that shook Europe and the U.S., there have been many socialist breakthroughs in these regions. But the imperialist center has somehow managed to extinguish all

¹ First appeared in Turkish in *Devrimci Marksizm*, no 40, Winter 2021-2022.

these revolutionary flare-ups, sometimes through war, sometimes through fascism, and sometimes through the ballot box. The failure of socialism in the capitalist centers has facilitated the defeat of socialist attempts in the underdeveloped world. If the socialist revolution had triumphed in one of the core countries (for example, in Germany in 1918-19), we would be living in a very different world today. Unfortunately, this did not happen.

Over the past one hundred and fifty years, the workers of the imperialist world have generally tended toward reformism rather than socialism. In Britain, the cradle of capitalism, the working class adopted a reformist approach after the defeat of the Chartist movement in 1848 and has maintained this attitude to the present day. Continental Europe was a region of stronger revolutionary currents, and Eastern Europe even came under the influence of the Soviet Union for almost half a century. In the central countries of the continent, however, the negative impact of the Second International and the subsequent social-democratic line prevailed. In the U.S., which took over the leadership of capitalist hegemony from Britain, the labor movement was generally ineffective despite occasional flashes of strength.

If the working people of the imperialist world have a long-standing tendency toward reformism, it must have material foundations. Such a tendency, one of the main obstacles to world revolution, cannot be understood in terms of elements such as “false consciousness” or ideology but in terms of the underlying relations of production. In fact, the Marxist tradition has attributed the new detrimental political trends –such as reformism, opportunism, and social chauvinism, which spread like a plague at the end of the 19th century– to the influence within the working class of a privileged layer of “labor aristocracy” that received a share of the imperialist profits in the core countries. The emergence of this layer, a minority but highly organized and influential, was seen as dependent on certain temporary, contingent conditions (which I will briefly discuss below). When these conditions changed, the labor aristocracies would weaken, and revolutionary tendencies would prevail. I think this thesis needs to be updated in some respects, and this will be the main point of this article.

In the post-Lenin period, the “aristocracy of labor” thesis has not been the subject of intense debate among Marxists. Instead, it has remained a concept that each tendency has used or avoided according to its vision. Some Western Marxists, especially the most pessimistic schools such as the Frankfurt School, argued that the working class in the core countries had been absorbed into the system and had lost its revolutionary character. There was, therefore, no need to speak of a separate “labor aristocracy.” The next step in this direction was to abandon the working class and class politics altogether.

On the other hand, most of the so-called “Third Worldist” currents, which in many ways opposed Western Marxism, transferred the analysis directly to the world scale, claiming that all the working people in the core capitalist countries constituted a labor aristocracy, as opposed to the poor workers and peasants in the periphery. Therefore, according to these approaches, the working class in the imperialist world –as a whole– had ceased to be a revolutionary subject. Under these circumstances, the peripheral countries became the natural address for revolutionary hopes. But as

the once underdeveloped countries made some progress in capitalist development and industrialization, these hopes would also take a hit.

As a result of the adverse developments of the last four decades, the organized power of the working class has been weakened throughout the world. The traditional labor aristocracies in the core countries have also suffered from this weakening. In this paper, I will suggest how we should think about the labor aristocracy today. It is not possible to resolve such a crucial issue in one article, but I hope to at least contribute to moving the debate forward.

Origins

In the mid-19th century, Marx and Engels observed first-hand the defeat of the Chartist movement in England and the subsequent descent of the labor movement into reformism. In a review in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in 1850, after noting that the “Chartist Party” was in a state of dissolution, they wrote: “The members of the petty bourgeoisie who still adhere to the party, together with the labor aristocracy, form a purely democratic faction whose programme is limited to the People’s Charter and a number of other petty-bourgeois reforms. The mass of the workers who live in truly proletarian conditions belong to the revolutionary Chartist faction”.² In other words, according to Marx and Engels, two strata had emerged within the British proletariat: a revolutionary underclass and an elite layer inclined towards reformism (and the petty bourgeoisie). However, Marx and Engels did not feel the need to give a clear definition of who and which groups made up the upper layer, the “labor aristocracy”, and they used the term for descriptive purposes only. For example, in the first volume of *Capital*, Marx refers to the labor aristocracy at just one point as “the best-paid” of the working class, without going into detail.³ Actually, the term “labor aristocracy” was already being used in this sense by the general public at the time.⁴

In the second half of the 1850s, Engels, in a letter to Marx, again referring to the Chartist movement, had written that the English proletariat was “actually becoming more and more bourgeois”: “The ultimate aim of this most bourgeois of all nations would appear to be the possession, *alongside* the bourgeoisie, of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat. In the case of a nation which exploits the entire world, this is, of course, justified to some extent”.⁵

2 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Review”, *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, vol. 10, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 514. This source is cited by Tom Bottomore, the editor of *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, in the entry “Labour Aristocracy”, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers 2001, p. 296.

3 Karl Marx, *Capital I*, *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, vol. 35, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 660. According to Eric J. Hobsbawm, at the time Marx wrote *Capital*, more than three quarters of Britain’s population of 24 million were manual laborers; among these workers, a skilled and relatively well-paid 15 percent constituted the labor aristocracy. *Industry and Empire: The Making of Modern English Society, Vol. II 1750 to the Present Day*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1968, p. 128.

4 Historian Robert Gray states that the term came into use in the 1830s and 40s: *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-century Britain c. 1850-1914*, London: Macmillan Press, 1981, p. 32, 37.

5 Letter from Engels to Marx dated October 7, 1858. *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, vol. 40,

These two phenomena, mentioned “in passing” by Marx and Engels in the 1850s, reappear constantly and interrelatedly in their later writings and in the class struggles of the last one hundred and fifty years. One is the “labor aristocracy”; the split in the working class, the privileged upper layer(s) of that class socially and politically “arm in arm” with the petty bourgeoisie. The other is the “becoming bourgeois” of the entire working class in the context of colonialism-imperialism; the workers of the oppressor nation moving closer (again, both socially and politically) to the bourgeoisie. In short, part or all of the working class becomes open to the influences of the ruling class and moves away from the revolutionary line for various reasons. In addition, some political and trade union rights, the “social reforms” that the bourgeoisie grants (is forced to grant) to the workers reinforce this situation. Contradictions arise both between classes and sections of classes and between nations.

Marx and Engels paid particular attention to the Irish struggle for independence in the 1860s, seeking to link the anti-colonial struggle to the class struggle in the center.⁶ In this context, Marx argued that Irish independence was a precondition for the triumph of socialism in Britain – and, therefore, should be supported by the British working class. In a letter written in 1870, he wrote: “The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker, he regards himself as a member of the *ruling* nation, and consequently, he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination *over himself*.”⁷

These sentences by Marx reflect almost perfectly the attitudes of the working class in capitalist countries today. The prevalence of racism and chauvinism among the workers of the oppressor nations is not a matter of chance or “false consciousness” but an objective fact based on material foundations. Like reformist tendencies, racist approaches can also easily take root among the workers of the oppressor nation. But the conditions of existence of the working class also give it the potential to overcome such differences and illusions, to unite, and to build solidarity against capital. The boundaries and hostilities between different class sections can be instantly overcome, especially in revolutionary situations or collective actions. Therefore, an effective struggle can prevent harmful tendencies such as reformism, racism, etc. Achieving this will be a huge step towards the socialist revolution.

In the 1860s, through the efforts of Marx and Engels, the [First] International abandoned the chauvinist approach and supported the Irish struggle for independence. But this stance could not be sustained in the long run, and the British working class began to favor the liberal policies of the industrial bourgeoisie and colonialism. In fact, from the mid-19th century onward, the British bourgeoisie, recognizing the growing power of the working class, sought to contain and integrate this class

Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 344.

6 See Özgür Öztürk, “Hindistan ve İrlanda: Marx ve Sömürgecilik” [“India and Ireland: Marx and Colonialism”], *Dipnot*, no 10, 2012.

7 Cited in: Lucia Pradella, “Imperialism and Capitalist Development in Marx’s *Capital*”, *Historical Materialism*, volume 21, no 2, 2013, p. 136.

into the capitalist system through a series of measures. By the end of the century, many Chartist demands, once considered impossible, had already been realized. According to Engels, Britain's power in the world economy, notably the monopoly profits from the colonies, made such an incorporation strategy possible. By playing on the divisions within the British proletariat, the bourgeoisie was able to win over the most organized and advanced section of it. In 1882 Engels complained in a letter to Kautsky: "There is no workers' party here, there are only Conservatives and Liberal-Radicals, and the workers gaily share the feast of England's monopoly on the world market and the colonies".⁸

Engels summarized the reasons for this turn in an 1885 article on the last forty years of the British working class (quoted at length in the preface to the 1892 English edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* in 1844). First, there were improvements for two "protected" sections of the working class. Factory workers were better off than before 1848, thanks to factory legislation and strikes. Skilled adult male workers organized in major unions were also better off. This second group, the "labor aristocracy", included "the engineers, the carpenters and joiners, the brick layers".⁹ Having had the right to vote since 1867, these were mainly artisans who enjoyed economic, social, and political privileges.¹⁰ But Engels attributed the defeat of socialism in Britain to a more general cause, its monopoly position in the world economy:

The truth is this: during the period of England's industrial monopoly the English working class have, to a certain extent, shared in the benefits of the monopoly. These benefits were very unequally parcelled out amongst them; the privileged minority pocketed most, but even the great mass had, at least, a temporary share now and then. And that is the reason why, since the dying-out of Owenism, there has been no Socialism in England. With the breakdown of that monopoly, the English working class will lose that privileged position; it will find itself generally—the privileged and leading minority not excepted—on a level with its fellow-workers abroad. And that is the reason why there will be Socialism again in England.¹¹

8 Cited in: Martin Nicolaus, "The Theory of the Labor Aristocracy", *Monthly Review*, volume 21, no 11, April 1970, p. 92.

9 Cited in: Frederick Engels, "Preface to the 1892 English Edition of *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*", *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, vol. 27, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 265-66.

10 By this time, the scope of suffrage had been extended by the Second Reform Act. Mark Neocleous states that this was a kind of controlled experiment and when it was seen that it did not lead to the seizure of political power by the working class, reforms were continued: *Administering Civil Society: Towards a Theory of State Power*, London, Macmillan Press, 1996, p. 127. According to Eric Hobsbawm, "The rulers of Britain ... were prepared to accept it [the reform], because they no longer regarded the British working class as revolutionary ... The great mass movements which mobilized all the labouring poor against the employing class, like Chartism, were dead. Socialism had disappeared from the country of its birth". *Industry and Empire*, p. 103.

11 Cited in: Engels, op. cit., p. 268.

Note that Engels speaks of two distinct “privileges”. One is the privileged position of the English worker relative to workers in other countries, to which Engels attributes the defeat of socialism in England (i.e. the phenomenon of the “working class becoming bourgeois”). The second refers to the stratification within the British working class, or rather the “labor aristocracy”. This group had adopted a reformist political line, but Engels believes that the socialist movement could overcome this obstacle, as he notes in the next paragraph that by the early 1890s, socialism was once again present in all its shades in England. What he finds most significant in this context is the revival of the East End of London and the masses of unskilled workers organizing and forming trade unions. While the old unions, the home of the labor aristocracy, took the “wage system” for granted and tried to improve their position within it a little, Engels notes that the new unions were working in a socialist direction.¹²

Between 1885 and 1892, the British industrial monopoly certainly declined, or rather continued to decline. But it cannot be said that this decline caused the sudden revival of the socialist movement (the revival was short-lived anyway). Engels’ main emphasis was on the organization of unskilled workers. Behind this process, which accelerated with the dockers’ strike of 1889, lay the Great Depression of the last quarter of the 19th century and widespread unemployment.¹³ What strengthened the socialist movement in Britain was not the collapse of its industrial monopoly in the world economy, but the organization of large sections of the working class outside the labor aristocracy and the formation of trade unions. ***The key issue is not about the international level, but the class sections within the country.*** In this respect, the condition expressed by Engels in 1885, which implies that socialism cannot be effective in an imperialist country with an industrial monopoly, is problematic, as he himself implicitly recognizes.¹⁴ The real issue is to neutralize the labor aristocracy, which Engels calls the “privileged and leading minority” that leads the entire working class into reformism and other harmful habits; and moreover, to win this most organized section of the class (if not entirely, then partially) to the revolutionary side. To do this, the unprivileged workers (and the unemployed), who form the bulk of the class, must be organized and given a revolutionary orientation. We shall see that Lenin, writing twenty-five years after Engels in the context of the world war, points in a similar direction.

¹² Engels, op. cit., p. 268-9.

¹³ Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought 1895-1914*, New York: Anchor Books, 1968, p. 9, 98.

¹⁴ Kautsky would later put forward the bizarre argument that war was unnecessary because Britain’s industrial monopoly had ended. But as Lenin points out, industrial monopoly is only one form of monopoly. The colonial monopoly of an imperialist country that has declined in terms of industry can continue, or the monopoly position can be maintained by financial (or military, diplomatic, political, etc.) means. See V.I. Lenin, “Imperialism and the Split in Socialism”, in *Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, vol. 23, 1974, p. 114-5.

Lenin's interpretation

The framework for studying the contemporary labor aristocracy is provided by Lenin in his theory of imperialism. Based on the statements of Marx and Engels, Lenin analyzes the split within the world socialist movement in the context of the First World War. In today's terms, social democracy had abandoned the communist movement, turned its back on the working class and revolution and become complicit in the bloody imperialist adventures and crimes of the bourgeoisie. Lenin argues that the roots of this betrayal lie in imperialism, which means the exploitation of the whole world by a handful of countries, in the excessive profits made in this way, and in the "bribes" given to a small section of the working class from these profits. In the "Preface" to the 1920 French and German editions of *Imperialism*, written during the First World War, he summarizes his position. According to him,

out of such enormous *superprofits* (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their "own" country) it is *possible to bribe* the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy. And that is just what the capitalists of the "advanced" countries are doing: they are bribing them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert.

This stratum of workers-turned-bourgeois, or the labour aristocracy, who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook, is the principal prop of the Second International, and in our days, the principal *social* (not military) *prop of the bourgeoisie*. For they are the real *agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement*, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, real vehicles of reformism and chauvinism. In the civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie they inevitably, and in no small numbers, take the side of the bourgeoisie, the "Versaillais" against the "Communards".¹⁵

Lenin, too, seems to speak in general terms and does not give precise definitions. Indeed, in another text from the same period, he writes, again in general terms, that "to a thin crust of the labor bureaucracy and aristocracy, and also to the petty bourgeoisie (the intelligentsia, etc.) which 'travels' with the working-class movement, it promises morsels of those profits".¹⁶ Apart from general categories, he does not refer to a specific group such as "carpenters." Because, this "bourgeois" layer of workers, "quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their entire outlook" does not constitute a fixed group. In fact, the main issue is not their "mode of life" or their wages, but their political attitudes derived from these. Imperialism "has the tendency to create privileged sections also among the workers, and to detach them from the broad masses of the proletariat"; this

15 V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, in *Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, vol. 22, 1974, p. 193-4.

16 V.I. Lenin, "Opportunism, and the Collapse of the Second International", in *Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, vol. 21, 1974, p. 442.

privileged group of workers is, in fact, the product of imperialism.¹⁷ By positioning itself against the masses and on the side of the bourgeoisie, it formed the basis of social chauvinism and opportunism within the Second International. According to Lenin, the “trend nurtured and supported by the bourgeoisie, and expressing the interests of a small group of intellectuals and members of the labor aristocracy that have joined hands with the bourgeoisie” is very strong, and due to “the objective conditions of the ‘peaceful’ period of 1871-1914, it has become a kind of commanding, parasitic stratum in the working-class movement”.¹⁸ Lenin notes that these elements can keep the masses under control by resorting to revolutionary rhetoric when necessary. In other words, this privileged group can pull the broad mass of the working class along with it. This became clear when the world war broke out.

Lenin’s view combines (and updates) the two phenomena mentioned by Marx and Engels (the labor aristocracy and the “becoming bourgeois” of the working class in the colonialist country) and links the formation of the labor aristocracy to imperialist policies. The excessive profits made possible by imperialism may bring some gains to all the workers in the core country, but these are insignificant things that can only last for a short time; there is no “becoming bourgeois” of the class as a whole. It is only a section of the proletariat in the core countries that really benefits from imperialism. “A privileged upper stratum of the proletariat in the imperialist countries lives partly at the expense of hundreds of millions in the uncivilised nations”.¹⁹ Therefore, it is possible for the laboring masses to take a political stand *against* imperialist policies, even in advanced capitalist countries.

Saying that something is possible does not, of course, provide a recipe for how it can be realized. Moreover, according to Lenin, “bourgeois workers’ parties” (or groups, tendencies, etc.) exist in all the major capitalist countries, and it is certain that they will not disappear by themselves. As the revolution comes closer, “the more strongly it flares up and the more sudden and violent the transitions and leaps in its progress, the greater will be the part the struggle of the revolutionary mass stream against the opportunist petty-bourgeois stream will play in the labor movement”.²⁰ Engels has already laid out how this struggle should be waged, on the example of England: “Engels draws a distinction between the ‘bourgeois labor party’ of the old trade unions—the privileged minority— and the ‘lowest mass’, the real majority, and appeals to the latter, who are not infected by ‘bourgeois respectability’. This is the essence of Marxist tactics!”²¹ According to Lenin, the task of socialists is to reach the lowest strata of the working class, the real masses, to show them where their real interests lie, and to expose the social chauvinists and opportunists.²²

17 Lenin, *Imperialism*, p. 283.

18 V.I. Lenin, “The Voice of an Honest French Socialist”, in *Collected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, vol. 21, 1974, p. 355-6.

19 Lenin, “Imperialism and the Split in Socialism”, p. 107.

20 Lenin, op. cit., p. 119.

21 Ibid, p. 120.

22 Ibid, p. 120.

As in the case of economism, in the case of opportunism the conditions of existence of the working class produce certain tendencies in favor of capital. The spontaneous development of the working class does not automatically lead to a turn towards socialism - this requires a revolutionary political organization. In the absence of such an organization, the working class will seek solutions to its problems within the existing system (economist, reformist, and social chauvinist tendencies are the result). Moreover, there is no guarantee that the revolutionary organization will succeed; the outcome of the struggle is not predetermined. What matters, however, is the existence of the revolutionary potential of the working class. This potential may be waiting to be awakened, and it often is, but apart from it, there is no other force capable of overthrowing capitalist society. The working class in the imperialist world has historically failed to play the revolutionary role expected of it but the blame for this lies not with the workers but with the socialist movement, which has failed to awaken the sleeping giant.

Critiques of the labor aristocracy thesis

The classical Marxist view of the relations between the labor aristocracy, imperialism and reformism has established the basic principles. However, it needs to be updated because it naturally fails to take into account some 20th century processes such as social policy and the internationalization of capital. I will briefly discuss below the direction(s) such an update must take. But first, it will be useful to outline the critique of the labor aristocracy thesis by Marxists since the second half of the 20th century. For, over time, the labor aristocracy thesis has appeared increasingly inadequate to both Marxists and non-Marxists.

The criticisms and questions raised by various currents against the labor aristocracy thesis can be summarized as follows:²³ First, it is not clear who exactly the concept includes or who counts as a “labor aristocrat”.²⁴ Is it high-wage earners, unionized industrial workers, white-collar workers, or all of them? The source of the privileges of the privileged strata is also unclear. The working class in the imperialist countries leads a much more prosperous life than the miserable masses in the “Third World.” Is this due to higher labor productivity, or does the “Western worker” participate in the exploitation of the underdeveloped countries? If so, how does this happen? In other words, how is the “bribe” Lenin spoke of distributed? For example, do multinational corporations prefer to pay higher wages to workers in their own countries? Is the only or main reason for the tendency toward reformism in the imperialist countries the fact that the leadership of the labor movement has been bought off with direct or indirect bribes? On the other

23 Most of these criticisms can be found in Charles Post’s article rejecting the labor aristocracy thesis: “Exploring Working-Class Consciousness: A Critique of the Theory of the ‘Labour-Aristocracy’”, *Historical Materialism*, no 18, 2010.

24 Timothy Kerswell notes that the term “labor aristocracy” has been used for many different groups, such as union leaders, skilled workers, all First World workers, and high-wage earners in the Third World countries. “A Conceptual History of the Labour Aristocracy: A Critical Review”, *Socialism and Democracy*, 2018, p. 17.

hand, the idea that privileged workers are more prone to reformism and lower-class workers to revolutionism seems wrong in light of historical experience. The most radical actions are often led by so-called “privileged” workers, while poorer sections of workers are often politically indifferent. Worse, they come dangerously close to racist-fascist politics.²⁵

Cliff and Marcuse’s criticisms of Lenin

Criticism of the labor aristocracy thesis was particularly widespread in the period after the Second World War. The failure of the working class in the imperialist world to make the expected revolutionary breakthrough and the experience of fascism resulted in the questioning of the labor aristocracy thesis. It was generally accepted that Lenin had defined the labor aristocracy too narrowly. Was Lenin trivializing the problem and being over-optimistic?

As we shall see, this critique came from very different wings of the political spectrum. In 1957, for example, Tony Cliff argued that the economic and social roots of reformism were not confined to a very small section of the proletariat, as Lenin had suggested. According to Cliff, “[i]n the final analysis the base of Reformism is in capitalist prosperity” (emphasis in the original). Over the past hundred years, the conditions of the working class as a whole have improved. And this has not been confined to the major imperialist countries. A large section of the workers’ bureaucracy has emerged, which has tended to mediate between the bosses and the workers, ensuring a kind of “class peace”. Moreover, even if the economic basis for reformism disappears, there is no guarantee that the tendency toward reformism will end – for that to happen, revolutionary action is necessary.²⁶

A year after Cliff, Herbert Marcuse, writing from a very different tradition, made similar observations:

Lenin’s retention of the classical notion of the revolutionary proletariat, sustained with the help of the theory of the labor aristocracy and the avant garde,

25 For example, a significant part of the electoral base of the new generation of racist-fascist parties in Europe today, which have risen on the basis of anti-immigrant sentiments, is made up of “lower class” workers. According to one study, 57% of those who voted for the racist Front National (FN) in France in the 2010s were workers, compared to only 39% of Socialist Party voters. In the Netherlands, almost half of the voters for the racist Party for Freedom (PVV) were workers (48%), compared to around a third for the Labor Party and the Socialist Party (34% and 37% respectively). The recent electoral successes of the AfD in Germany, the Conservative Party in Britain and Donald Trump in the United States have been largely due to the working-class vote. Workers who vote for “far right” parties are generally non-unionized, while unionized workers tend to vote for socialist or social democratic parties. On the other hand, non-voting behavior is very common, especially among factory workers (not boycott as an explicit political attitude, but rather indifference, i.e. implicit boycott). See Line Rennwald, *Social Democratic Parties and the Working Class: New Voting Patterns*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 60-1.

26 Tony Cliff, “Economic Roots of Reformism”, *Socialist Review*, volume 6, no 9, 1957, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/cliff/works/1957/06/rootsref.htm>.

revealed its inadequacy from the beginning. Even prior to the First World War it became clear that the “collaborationist” part of the proletariat was quantitatively and qualitatively different from a small upper stratum that had been corrupted by monopoly capital, and that the Social Democratic Party and trade union bureaucracy were more than “traitors”—rather that their policy reflected pretty exactly the economic and social condition of the majority of the organized working classes in the advanced industrial countries. And indeed, Lenin’s strategy of the revolutionary avant garde pointed to a conception of the proletariat which went far beyond a mere reformulation of the classical Marxian concept.²⁷

Marcuse argues that as the tendency toward “class collaboration” of the organized sections of workers in the core countries grew stronger, the idea of the “proletariat as revolutionary subject”, which was the basis of Marxist strategy, was endangered. To overcome this danger, the working class was rethought in terms of an “internal” and “external” proletariat on a world scale, and the external proletariat, consisting of the unprivileged proletariat and semi-proletariat in the countryside and the cities (the bulk of which was actually the peasantry), was baptized as the new historical “subject”.²⁸

Although starting from different positions, Cliff and Marcuse seem to converge on the same point. In order to explain the objective basis of developments such as party and trade union bureaucracies, reformism, etc. that have emerged in capitalist industrial societies, both authors have taken Marx and Engels’ observation of the “working class becoming bourgeois” out of the context of imperialism and applied it directly to class relations within the core country. From such a perspective, Lenin seems to have downplayed the problem of the labor aristocracy, and pushed the course of history a little too far. But while this perspective seeks to extend the labor aristocracy (or the reformism attributed to it) to the working class as a whole, it forgets the “lower strata” that Engels and Lenin emphasized and hoped for. As a result, Marxist political strategy is left without a basis. Thus, in line with his own argument, Marcuse would look for new revolutionary subjects outside the working class (oppressed groups, minorities, the student movement, etc.).

Critiques from Third Worldism

In the post-World War II period, another objection to the classical Marxist position came from the rising Third Worldist movements. The fact that the working class in the West was generally acting along reformist lines shifted the focus of expectations of world revolution to the underdeveloped countries. For example, in *Monopoly Capital*, published in 1966, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, two leading figures of the *Monthly Review* school, had argued that the starting point of the world revolution would be the underdeveloped world. The U.S. would do everything in

27 Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1969, p. 30-1.

28 Marcuse, op. cit., p. 31-35.

its power to suppress new revolutions, but “in this struggle there can be no real victories for the counter-revolutionary side”.²⁹

Not surprisingly, the idea that the road to world revolution lay through the independence of the “peripheral” countries became widespread at a time when national liberation struggles in the Third World were gaining momentum and winning victory after victory. This idea was defended and developed by writers of the Dependency School, notably Andre Gunder Frank and Samir Amin. In the context of the labor aristocracy thesis, Arghiri Emmanuel’s 1972 book *Unequal Exchange* is particularly important. In this work, Emmanuel takes the step that other writers, such as Samir Amin, are reluctant to take and argues that there is no objective basis for workers’ internationalism.

Emmanuel points out that capital is mobile across countries while labor is immobile. As a result, while rates of profit are equalized across the world, wage levels remain institutionally different. With the strengthening of the trade union movement in the core countries from the 1860s onwards, differences in wage levels between countries began to widen (even within the same country, wage levels vary widely according to ethnicity). The unequal exchange between countries is rooted in the monopoly position of workers in the core countries, i.e. the privileges of being unionized.³⁰ Emmanuel notes that, in order not to undermine the international solidarity of workers, Marxists explain unequal exchange in terms of differences in the organic composition of capital. The restriction of the labor aristocracy to the imperialist stage and the upper stratum of the working class (Lenin’s view) is based on the same concern. But international workers’ solidarity is a historical misconception.³¹ Not only the “aristocratic workers”, but even the most ordinary workers (even the unemployed) in the core countries have a standard of living far above the average of the world proletariat.

Emmanuel’s explanation, based on comparative wage levels rather than on the relationship of exploitation, received much criticism, but it certainly reflected the prevailing mood in the world at the time. The first criticism came in the preface to the French edition of the same book from Charles Bettelheim, who argued that differences in wage levels were not independent variables but a function of differences in labor productivity and labor intensity between countries. Bettelheim also pointed out that Emmanuel’s theses implied that ***the working class as a class does not exist in the core countries***.³² This striking idea is shared by Zak Cope, who today defends the theses of the Dependency School in a more radical way.

29 Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968, p. 365-6.

30 Arghiri Emmanuel, *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade*, translated by Brian Pearce, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972, p. 25, 37, 47, 49-50, 64, 116, 119, 121-123.

31 Emmanuel, op. cit., p. 169, 177-178, 189.

32 Charles Bettelheim, “Appendix III: Preface to the French Edition”, in Emmanuel, op. cit., p. 352. A much more comprehensive critique of Emmanuel’s theses and an alternative model has been presented by Nail Satlıgan in: *Emek-Değer Teorileri ve Dışticaret [Labor-Value Theories and Foreign Trade]*, Istanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2014, p. 157.

The Dependency School, so influential in the 1960s and 70s at the height of national liberation struggles in the Third World, fell out of favor as the underdeveloped countries embarked on the path of capitalist development and industrialized to some degree. The subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union and other attempts at socialist construction led to a period of frustration for alternatives of all kinds. Once there was talk of “three worlds”, but today there seems to be only “one world.” However, the misery caused by neoliberal globalization policies, the gradual recognition that Third World industrialization is, in fact, limited to performing labor-intensive manufacturing jobs in the global value chains, and the new Great Depression that opened with the 2008 crisis are paving the way for the resurgence of both socialism and Third Worldism.

The most prolific and provocative figure in this renewed Third World perspective seems to be Zak Cope. Cope argues that the entire “working class” in the core countries should be characterized as a labor aristocracy (actually a petty bourgeoisie), and there is no exploitation in the so-called First World today. Almost the entire population of the core countries lives off the exploitation of the workers in the dependent countries.³³ The “workers” in the imperialist countries (who are actually petty bourgeois) maintain their high wages and standard of living by actively supporting aggressive imperialist policies. This class, which constitutes a de facto “bourgeois working class”, has no interest in anti-imperialism (and thus socialism).³⁴

How should one interpret the thesis that there is no exploited working class in the imperialist countries, except for minority elements? In the past, socialists who adopted a Third Worldist perspective did not deny that workers in the core countries were exploited. Samir Amin, for example, had no doubt about this,³⁵ and H.W. Edwards, who wrote extensively on the subject of the labor aristocracy, pointed out that workers in capitalist countries (even the labor aristocracy) were subject to exploitation, while in colonial countries there was super-exploitation.³⁶ Moreover, at that time the gains of the working class in the core had not yet been eroded by neoliberal policies. Cope, on the other hand, argues that even under today’s conditions there is no exploitation in the core. According to him, the peoples of the imperialist countries exploit the peoples of the periphery. In such a framework, there is no point in using the concept of “class” - it functions as a sociological tool

33 Zak Cope, *Divided World Divided Class: Global Political Economy and the Stratification of Labour Under Capitalism*, Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2012, p. iii, 114, 156; *The Wealth of (Some) Nations: Imperialism and the Mechanics of Value Transfer*, London: Pluto Press, 2019, p. 10, 86. As a parallel example, Marx had written that in the context of the incorporation of female and child labor into the production process, the (male) worker becomes a slave-dealer (*Capital I*, p. 399). But he had not concluded from this that male workers could no longer be considered workers. Cope draws precisely this conclusion.

34 Cope, *Divided World Divided Class*, p. 174, 207-208.

35 For example: Samir Amin, *Class and Nation: Historically and in the Current Crisis*, translated by Susan Kaplow, New York: Monthly Review Books, 1980, p. 229.

36 H.W. Edwards, *Labor Aristocracy, Mass Base of Social Democracy*, Stockholm: Aurora Press, 1978, p. 53, 210.

for classification, not as a means of changing the world.

So what is to be done? According to Cope, it is necessary to abandon hope in the core countries and rely on the national liberation movements that unite all classes (especially workers and peasants) against imperialism in the Third World.³⁷ In a long process of what Samir Amin calls “delinking”, once the peripheral countries break their links with the center and the excessive profits and exploitation that are the basis of imperialism are eliminated, the working classes in the center countries will be able to turn back to socialism.³⁸ In a sense, since there is no class/social basis for socialism “from within”, capitalism/imperialism will be brought to its knees by surrounding it from the outside.

While Samir Amin is explicit about this strategy involving “at least part of the bourgeoisie”,³⁹ Cope prefers not to focus on such class alliances for the moment. For example, he does not mention which class or class sections within the peasantry will form an alliance with the workers. In fact, he does not even have such a question because, accepting that the main contradiction is between the core and the periphery, he does not see the need to examine “contradictions within the people” separately. In fact, despite the rich historical material he presents and the original methods of calculation he develops, Cope’s entire analysis is confined to the limits of the Dependency School framework, which substitutes countries for classes. Moreover, he attempts to do so at a time when the rationale for national liberation wars has weakened considerably. A hundred years ago, Lenin argued that national liberation wars would play an important (if not decisive) role in the defeat of imperialism. Today, Cope argues that they are the only road to socialism.

The basic problem is this: In the 20th century, after the two world wars, humanity experienced huge waves of revolution. A very important part of these revolutionary waves were the national liberation movements. After the First World War, in the process of the disintegration of empires (such as Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire), and after the Second World War, as a result of the loss of power of former colonial empires (such as Great Britain and France), many countries gained their independence. The national liberation movements that built on and strengthened the waves of revolution were part of the socialist strategy to defeat imperialism. In fact, the geography of socialist construction gradually expanded throughout the world. Later examples, such as the Cuban Revolution, showed that democratic revolutions could be transformed into socialist revolutions in a short period of time. In brief, there was synergy and complementarity between the socialist revolution and the national liberation movements. In such an environment, currents such as the Dependency School were objectively within the broad field of socialism.

However, the transition from colonialism to modern imperialism is largely completed as of the last quarter of the 20th century. Unlike colonialism, which was

37 Cope, *Divided World Divided Class*, p. 213; *The Wealth of (Some) Nations*, p. 86, 212.

38 Samir Amin, *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World*, translated by Michael Wolfers, London, New Jersey: Zed Books, 1990, p. 13, 28, 54-55, 104, 122, 132.

39 Samir Amin, *The Law of Worldwide Value*, translated by Brian Pearce, Shane Mage, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010, p. 93.

based on direct occupation, and classical imperialism, which also relied heavily on this method, modern imperialism, which became increasingly dominant in the post-World War II period, establishes its dominance through more indirect economic-political mechanisms. Such a framework, in which the capital of the core country can appropriate (through various methods) a large part of the surplus value produced in dependent geographies, also makes the content of the demand for “national liberation” problematic. In a country that has gained political independence and is integrated into the world capitalist system through commodity, money, capital and even labor markets (e.g. Turkey, India, Brazil), the class agent of the call for “national liberation” today is naturally the working class, not the bourgeoisie. In such countries, which produce and export a significant part of the world’s industrial production and are integrated with imperialism in many ways, only the working class can lead the break with imperialism. But in this case, we should no longer speak of “national liberation” but of socialist construction. In the absence of a strong world socialist alternative, it seems inevitable that such “national liberation”, if it does not meet a revolutionary wave and turn to socialism, will soon turn to re-establishing its old ties with world capitalism. Cope predicts a new wave of “delinking” over a long period, in a sense calling for a stage of “national capitalism” (without using the term) that would precede socialist construction, but wishful thinking aside, he does not discuss how this movement would bring about the end of imperialism. Questions and criticisms can be multiplied. But one point is clear: Cope’s analysis ignores the political and scientific achievements of Marxism. His whole work gives the impression that he is trying to prove that class categories are invalid.

Critiques from Neocleous

A third line of criticism of Lenin’s conception of the labor aristocracy in the new period concerns what is now usually called “social policy.” The work of Mark Neocleous, a British Marxist known for his work on the state, is a case in point.

According to Neocleous, the labor aristocracy is “a concept in search of a theory.” This is especially true of Lenin’s conception, since Lenin was unable to theorize the incorporation of the working class into the capitalist system because he did not use the concept of civil society and focused on the external relations of the state (imperialism). Like Hegel, Lenin (and Bukharin) failed to foresee that the capitalist state could create the internal political structures necessary to manage class antagonisms. Further, he defined the labor aristocracy as narrowly as possible, basing his analysis not on the modern capitalist state but on the obsolete Russian state.⁴⁰

I think there is a certain anachronism in Neocleous’ critique, since he actually bases his critique on “socio-political” developments that were still in their infancy in Lenin’s time. For example, he argues that the process of incorporating the working class into the capitalist system was almost complete by 1918 (page x). What he means by this is that workers (only male workers!) were given the vote in Britain at

40 Neocleous, *Administering Civil Society*, p. x, 32-3, 102-106, 170 n.33.

that time. In other words, if Lenin defined the labor aristocracy too narrowly (which is debatable), Neocleous, in trying to criticize it, oversimplifies the integration of workers into the political sphere. And even then, the criticism misses the point, since at the time Lenin wrote *Imperialism*, for example, political participation (in the sense of universal suffrage without property or gender distinctions) was the exception, not the rule, worldwide. Even a generation later, at the outbreak of the Second World War, only eight countries had universal suffrage.⁴¹

In one of his most important writings on imperialism, Lenin states that the “desertion of a stratum of the labor aristocracy to the bourgeoisie” has matured and “become an accomplished fact” in economic terms. Such a change in class relations will undoubtedly “find political form”. The economic privileges provided by imperialism will be matched by political “privileges and sops”; representatives and supporters of the “bourgeois labor parties” will be given seats and rewards in various committees and boards (and later in governments).⁴² Lenin goes on to say:

The mechanics of political democracy works in the same direction. Nothing in our times can be done without elections; nothing can be done without the masses. And in this era of printing and parliamentarism it is impossible to gain the following of the masses without a widely ramified, systematically managed, well-equipped system of flattery, lies, fraud, juggling with fashionable and popular catchwords, and promising all manner of reforms and blessings to the workers right and left—as long as they renounce the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie. I would call this system Lloyd-Georgism, after the English Minister Lloyd George, one of the foremost and most dexterous representatives of this system in the classic land of the “bourgeois labour party”.⁴³

Contrary to what Neocleous thinks, the integration of the working class into the capitalist system had only just begun at the beginning of the 20th century. Lenin was only partially able to see this process, which he called “Lloyd Georgeism” (he thought that the labor aristocracy, not the working class as a whole, was being integrated into the system).

The late 19th-century discourse on “imperialism and social reform” was an expression of the bourgeoisie’s awareness of the need to make certain concessions to the masses in order to gain support for imperialist policies. The debate was over the extent and nature of these concessions. In Britain, now that the “industrial monopoly” had been broken, the debate within the ruling class was between the liberal proponents of free trade and the pro-tariff reform industrialists who wanted to pursue a German-style mercantilist policy. The intra-capitalist alignment was similar to today’s, but unlike today, the working class supported the liberals for

41 Ian Gough, *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*, London: The Macmillan Press, 1979, p. 60.

42 In Britain, for example, the bureaucrats of the TUC were on 6 government committees in 1935, 60 in 1949, 81 in 1954 and 115 in 1968. Edwards, op. cit., p. 54, note.

43 Lenin, “Imperialism and the Split in Socialism”, p. 117.

historical reasons.⁴⁴ Both sides agreed, however, that workers should be given certain rights.

In fact, since the beginning of capitalist production, capital, through the state, has had to make certain arrangements in the face of the organized struggle of the working class. Since the 19th century, the field of social policy, based on the state-bourgeoisie-proletariat triangle, has gradually expanded to include social, economic and political dimensions.⁴⁵ This expansion has been carried out in such a way as to foment divisions within the working class. For example, rights such as the right to a pension, unemployment benefits, etc. were practices that started as specific to certain groups of workers and later became widespread. What is important in the context of our subject is that social policy practices have become one of the main sources of working-class reformism.

In this sphere, the economic organization of the working class took the form of trade unions and the political organization took the form of social-democratic parties. At the time of the First World War, social democracy was to break away from the communist movement, integrate with the bourgeois political apparatus and eventually abandon the goal of socialism. Since then, it can generally be said that the unorganized section of the working class in the core countries has tended toward right-wing conservative parties, the organized section toward social democracy, and the most class-conscious “vanguard” section toward communist parties. In other words, the organized labor movement is generally divided on the political level into social democracy (majority) and the revolutionary communist movement (minority).

This influence of social democracy on the organized labor movement has gradually weakened during the neoliberal period. Since the 1990s, with the disappearance of the “threat” of socialism, the main social-democratic parties in Europe (the Social Democratic Party in Germany, the Labour Party in Britain, and the Socialist Party in France) have openly embraced liberalism. (There is no effective social-democratic party in the USA; this role is partly taken over by the Democratic Party, as in the case of the CHP in Turkey). On the other hand, the masses of workers, disorganized in the neoliberal period, have also begun to move away from social democracy. In short, the historical link between the labor movement and social democracy has weakened on both sides, and “the monopoly of social democracy on the votes of the working class has clearly come to an end”.⁴⁶ This situation is both an opportunity for and a threat to the revolutionary socialist movement. As the post-2008 global crisis environment provides the ground for the strengthening of nationalist currents, some of the workers who distance themselves from social democracy may turn to

44 Semmel, op. cit., p. 133-134, 137-138.

45 In Britain, social service expenditure as a percentage of national income was only around 4 percent before the First World War, but by the 1970s it had risen to almost 30 percent. Gough, op. cit., p. 76.

46 Asbjørn Wahl, *The Rise and Fall of the Welfare State*, translated by John Irons, London: Pluto Press, 2011, p. 197.

racist-fascist movements.⁴⁷

Back to Neocleous, he is right that the modern capitalist state has been able to contain class struggles within an administrative form. Through the establishment of labor ministries, collective bargaining and contracts, labor laws, etc., the state maintains the political stability of bourgeois society by shifting the contradictions of the sphere of production within the state.⁴⁸ To be sure, the working class is not merely passive in this process. In fact, it is the working class that forces the transformation of the state. Therefore, the working class must be seen both as the subject that shapes the state and as the object that is shaped by it.⁴⁹ The state power of capital makes it possible to shape the gains of the working class according to the interests of the bourgeoisie.

Where Neocleous's analysis becomes problematic is in his assertion that the state succeeds in "administering" the class struggle by confining both capital and the working class within certain forms. In effect, Neocleous attributes to the state the organization of capital in the form of corporations and of labor in the form of trade unions.⁵⁰ I think there are two problems with this view. The first, and relatively minor, is that the state is presented as an omnipotent power over the classes. This is, of course, a matter of emphasis, and Neocleous can dispel this impression. The second problem is the idea that antagonisms arising from capital relations can be "administered" indefinitely within certain political-economic forms. Given the lack of successful socialist revolutions, especially in the core countries, this claim may have some truth, but it also means absolutizing the social democratic position that the interests of the working class and capitalists can be reconciled. Such a claim might have been understandable (if not accepted) fifty years ago, but after forty years of neoliberal destruction it has gradually lost its meaning. It is certain that the antagonisms between the classes can be softened within a certain *modus vivendi*, that they can be brought into a sustainable form, otherwise the political power of the bourgeoisie would have no meaning; but it is also certain that any such attempt has its limits.

47 Academic studies that focus on voting behavior find that low levels of education are effective in voting for right-wing parties, while low levels of income are effective in voting for left-wing parties (education level is of course related to income level, but which factor is effective in which decision can be distinguished by statistical methods). It is emphasized that in the neoliberal period, issues such as the environment, women's rights, civil society, etc. have come to the fore in voter behavior, and the basic right-left distinction has gained new content. However, it is noted that in the U.S., for example, there has been no decline in "voting left" for economic reasons. See Dick Houtman, Peter Achterberg, Anton Derks, *Farewell to the Leftist Working Class*, London: Routledge, 2017, chapter 5.

48 Neocleous, op. cit., p. 5-6, 11-2.

49 Neocleous, op. cit., p. 105-6. The conception in the literature on the "welfare state" is very different, and the working class is not seen as an active subject, but as the passive object of social policy. See Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, p. 108.

50 Neocleous, op. cit., p. 144-5.

Critiques from Friedman and Post

Another recent critique of the labor aristocracy thesis suggests that this layer is not as reformist as one might think. As far as I know, Samuel Friedman and Charles Post are the authors who have most forcefully voiced this criticism. The critique is laid out in two articles, one from 1986 (Friedman) and the other from 2010 (Post). In Friedman's succinct words: "the labor aristocracy is no less revolutionary than the lower strata; the lower strata are no less reformist than the aristocracy." For Post, too, the idea that the well-paid sections of the North are conservative while the low-paid sections are radical is false. Even if one can speak of a "labor aristocracy", it does not necessarily support reactionary policies.⁵¹

Both Post and Friedman turn the labor aristocracy thesis on its head by citing examples of struggles led by skilled, unionized industrial workers throughout the 20th century. Friedman, in particular, emphasizes that unionized and "privileged" industrial workers have led the revolutionary wave in Europe immediately after the First World War. Post further argues that most members of the Bolshevik Party during the October Revolution were also urban industrial workers (especially in the metal sector).⁵² Moreover, in the second half of the 20th century, it was often the industrial working class that took the lead in mass movements on a large scale, both in the core countries like France and Italy and in peripheral countries like Chile and Argentina.

In my view, this line of critique does a good job of drawing attention to the revolutionary potential of the labor aristocracies in the core countries. What is often forgotten, however, is that this remains a mere potential and that this section also has a certain predisposition to reactionary politics. It is argued that the examples of militant activism of unionized workers in imperialist countries refute the thesis of a labor aristocracy, an argument implicitly based on the opposition between conservative and militant (or radical) attitudes. But this is a misleading point of departure. For in the context of the labor aristocracy thesis, "revolutionary" means going beyond the "economist" or "syndicalist" limits and moving toward proletarian political power. A militant line of struggle is not necessarily revolutionary. For example, the Luddite machine-breaking struggles in the early stages of industrialization were very militant, radical actions, but historically they were events that hardly went beyond an instinctive defensive reflex, showing the immaturity of the movement.

Friedman and Post are not wrong in arguing that skilled, organized, relatively well-paid industrial workers have led many mass movements in the 20th century. They do a valuable job of reminding us of the revolutionary potential of the working class (and labor aristocracy) in the central countries. But they ignore the problem of political mediation, the fact that these mass movements have failed to make the revolutionary leap. (To be fair, Friedman does emphasize the lack of revolutionary

51 Samuel R. Friedman, "Labor Aristocracy Theories and Worker Politics", *Humanity and Society*, no. 10, 1986, p. 129. Post, op. cit., p. 28. For an interpretation close to these two, but less emphatic, see John Evansohn, "Workers and Imperialism: Where Is the Aristocracy of Labor?", *Critical Sociology*, volume 7, no 54, 1977.

52 Friedman, op. cit. p. 129-133; Post, op. cit. p. 30-31.

goals in these mass movements and the negative effects of the labor bureaucracies). Such a leap is only possible with revolutionary political organization that goes beyond the limits of the trade unions. Moreover, as many historical examples show, without such a leap the movement inevitably regresses and ends up in a worse position than before. In the exemplary case of the U.S., the CIO (which actually split from the AFL in 1936), which was able to carry out nation-shaking strikes from the 1930s to the mid-1940s despite the Great Depression and World War, reunited with the AFL during the Cold War and set about undermining revolutionary workers' movements around the world.⁵³

In short, the occasional militant mobilization of the core labor aristocracy proves the existence of revolutionary potential. As Post rightly points out, the class struggle has an essentially "episodic" character.⁵⁴ Within a general confrontation, maneuvers (or battles) take place from time to time.

It is precisely in periods of such struggles that the revolutionary power of the lower layers of the working class emerges. The course of the class struggle over time can be divided into "normal" periods of stasis and "revolutionary" periods in which the struggle intensifies. The results of the preparations made (or not made) during the "normal" period are realized during the revolutionary periods. The unprivileged layers of workers, who form the main body of the working class, tend to remain unorganized and inactive during the "normal" periods, but they are the real fighting force of a revolution.⁵⁵

Efforts to clarify and update the concept of "labor aristocracy"

In the post-World War II period, in addition to criticisms of the labor aristocracy thesis, there have been attempts to clarify the concept. An important development is the debate about the composition of the British working class in the second half of the 19th century, which began in the 1950s with the work of Eric Hobsbawm.⁵⁶ Hobsbawm argues that skilled male workers, particularly in the capital goods, engineering and shipbuilding industries, formed the labor aristocracy, and that this

53 For the CIO and the US trade union movement in general, see Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class*, London, New York: Verso, 1991.

54 Post, op. cit., p. 34.

55 Wolfgang Abendroth notes that in the context of the German workers' movement in the 19th century "political action was almost always undertaken by a small section of the workers either in co-operatives or in trade unions, led generally by intellectuals ... those active in them came mainly from the ranks of the skilled workers who had better opportunities to continue their education because of their higher earnings. Those workers who suffered increasing immiseration, on the other hand, were for the moment only able to demonstrate their militancy and vitality at times of crisis". *A Short History of the European Working Class*, translated by Nicholas Jacobs, Brian Trench, Joris de Bres, New York, London: Monthly Review Press, 1972, p. 25. I think that these remarks can be generalized to other countries.

56 E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, New York: Anchor Books, 1967. For a summary of these debates see H. F. Moorhouse, "The Marxist Theory of the Labour Aristocracy", *Social History*, volume 3, no 1, January 1978.

group gradually expanded over the period. After reaching its peak in the early 20th century, this “old” and conservative labor aristocracy turned to the left as it saw its position undermined and the wage gap between it and unskilled workers closing.⁵⁷ In Hobsbawm’s analysis, the political attitudes of different sections of the working class were driven by economic reasons, particularly wage levels.

The British debate has, over time, become bifurcated and mired in a mass of empirical data in an academic style. According to historian John Foster, the debate has focused not on political processes but on the (endless) details of class stratification. But interest in the internal stratification of the working class is fundamentally a political, not “sociological” question.⁵⁸ In this respect, trying to identify who exactly constitutes the labor aristocracy at any given moment may be illuminating in a limited sense, but it is actually an insufficient approach. What is really needed is to be able to identify the political positions taken, or likely to be taken, by different class sections at different conjunctures. This can provide useful input for political strategy and tactics.

In the second half of the 20th century, another line of development, based on the monopolistic character of imperialism, attempts to prioritize the concept of “monopoly” in the definition of the labor aristocracy. We have seen how Engels spoke of the super-profits of Britain’s industrial monopoly on the world market. In the new interpretations, attention is drawn to the super-profits of the giant monopoly corporations and to the fact that these profits are mainly generated in the core country itself.⁵⁹ Monopolies are able to pay high wages and provide extra social benefits to their own workers. Firms that produce a new product or apply a new technology can make above-average profits and be more “generous” to their workers, while those that enter the field later face more intense competition.⁶⁰ Similarly, there may be huge differences in wage levels and workers’ rights between the main firms and subcontractors (or permanent and contract/temporary workers).⁶¹

However, restricting the labor aristocracy to monopoly firms raises questions about the definition of monopoly and profit rates. For example, many monopoly firms can only make average profits in the long run (in some sectors, such as iron and steel, a huge amount of capital is required for investment, but this large amount of capital, which creates a barrier to entry into the sector, becomes an “exit barrier” in times of crisis, driving down the profit rate). There are also examples of low

⁵⁷ Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p. 95, 247.

⁵⁸ John Foster, “The Aristocracy of Labour and Working-Class Consciousness Revisited”, *Labour History Review*, volume 75, no 3, 2010, p. 258.

⁵⁹ Max Elbaum, Robert Seltzer, *The Labour Aristocracy: The Material Basis for Opportunism in the Labour Movement*, Newtown: Resistance Books, 2004, p. 26-7, <https://readingfromtheleft.com/PDF/LabourAristocracy.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers’ Movements and Globalization Since 1870*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 78-9; see also Sungur Savran, “Sınıfları Haritalamak: Sınıflar Birbirinden Nasıl Ayrılır?” [“Mapping Classes: How are Classes Separated from Each Other?”], *Devrimci Marksizm*, no 6-7, Spring-Summer 2008, p. 31 (English translation in this issue).

⁶¹ For the examples of Germany and Japan, see Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011, p. 41.

wages in “monopolistic” firms and vice versa.⁶² In particular, most of the workers, such as architects, engineers, doctors and lawyers, who come from the ranks of the new petty bourgeoisie and become workers, are already part of the labor aristocracy, regardless of the nature of the company they work for.

Another interpretation, again based on the concept of monopoly, is that the labor aristocracy itself is a monopoly. In the 19th century, workers in predominantly artisanal trades were joining together and attaining bargaining power.⁶³ Such unions were exclusive, unlike the modern unions that try to cover all workers in a sector. They were therefore organizations that sought to limit competition between only one group of workers. According to Martin Nicolaus, a labor aristocracy is a monopoly within a monopoly, i.e. workers with monopoly privileges in an imperialist country with an industrial monopoly.⁶⁴ However, this interpretation does not shed much light on the present, since it implies that with the disappearance of the old-style craft unions, the labor aristocracy has effectively disappeared.

Rethinking the labor aristocracy

We have seen various criticisms of Lenin’s interpretation and attempts to update the concept of the labor aristocracy. The critics agree that this interpretation defines the labor aristocracy in the imperialist countries too narrowly and underestimates the integration of the working class as a whole into the “system.” In this regard, it can be said that while the critiques emphasize the “working class becoming bourgeois” phenomenon, the stratification within the class and its political consequences are generally relegated to the background. On the other hand, in the attempts to clarify and develop the content of the concept, we do not encounter very enlightening insights into the present.

In the remainder of the paper, I will first discuss intra-class stratification at the national and international levels, to update the labor aristocracy thesis. The discussion of the labor bureaucracy will complement this framework. I will then briefly assess the transformation of the working class and labor aristocracy in the neoliberal era and try to draw some conclusions.

Stratification within the class

It is difficult to define the labor aristocracy in a given conjuncture because this group does not constitute a class segment with definite boundaries. Since intra-class stratification is both a relative and dynamic process, the boundaries of the strata cannot be precisely defined. The axes that divide the working class hierarchically are many and varied. Wage levels are obviously important, but factors such as occupational position, ethnicity, gender, age, skills and geography also have the potential to create privileged sections within the class.

Moreover, these axes of class division interact with each other. For example (and

62 See Friedman, op. cit., p. 126-7; Post, op. cit., p. 25-28.

63 Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p. 134.

64 Nicolaus, op. cit., p. 95.

many examples can be given), in the post-World War II period, Japanese industrial firms employed a small number of skilled workers with relative security and subcontracted out the rest of the work. Most of the low-paid subcontracted workers were the wives of skilled male workers in the main company. The class division was thus reinforced by gender differentiation, and the two axes fed each other within a patriarchal division of labor. Over time, with the exhaustion of additional labor resources within the country and the increased bargaining power of workers, the lower layers of the subcontracting pyramid were shifted to East and Southeast Asian countries. Thus, the dual structure that characterized the labor process ceased to be a “family issue” and acquired new dimensions such as nationality and ethnicity.⁶⁵

Sometimes even those who do not receive high wages can find a place in the labor aristocracy. In Turkey, the wages of civil servants are only slightly above the average, but due to their “privileges” such as job security, weekends, pensions, etc., they are and see themselves as different from the general mass of workers. However, these differences have not prevented civil servants from carrying out very powerful actions in some periods.

A group that is part of the labor aristocracy in one period (e.g. the bricklayers mentioned by Engels) may later lose that position because of technological and other developments. It is more productive to think of the labor aristocracy not as a fixed class segment, but as elite elements that act as a kind of intermediary or “transmission belt” between the working class and the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, undermining or diverting the workers’ independent and united class struggle. Such “aristocratic” elements can sometimes carry out very militant actions. But especially in revolutionary periods, they can also act as a kind of brake, holding back the masses. The political equivalent of this attitude is the social-democratic approach which seeks to keep the struggle within its usual limits when the working masses rise up.

To think of the labor aristocracy in this way is not to define it (in the style of Poulantzas) in terms of political and ideological levels. What makes the labor aristocracy a labor aristocracy is precisely its relatively privileged position within the relations of production. Because of this position, it seems to have a direct interest in maintaining the status quo. Thus, it seeks to limit the struggle of the working class as much as possible, preferably to purely economic struggles, and it acts as an agent of the bourgeoisie within the class. However, to the extent that it is part of the working class, it is also capable of transcending these narrow sectional interests, and uniting its destiny with that of the class as a whole. Therefore, it is both possible and necessary to partially “win over” or at least neutralize this aristocratic section, the most organized component of the working class.

The historical record supports this judgment. Metalworkers (especially autoworkers), for example, have led mass labor movements in many countries, even though they tend to be a highly paid, well-organized “aristocratic” minority.⁶⁶ Since

65 Silver, op. cit., p. 70-72.

66 Silver, op.cit., p. 72-3; Alex Callinicos, “Introduction”, in Alex Callinicos and Chris Harman, *Neo-liberalizm ve Sınıf: İşçi Sınıfı Değişti mi?* [*The Changing Working Class: Essays on Class*

the labor aristocracy is not a stable layer, it can be drawn into violent struggles when its position is shaken. “Moreover, since this layer is usually the most educated, skilled and unionized part of the class, its entry into the struggle is of great importance for the course of the class struggle”.⁶⁷

This is the main difference between the labor aristocracy and the labor bureaucracies (party and trade union): While it is possible to mobilize or neutralize certain elements within the labor aristocracy, the labor bureaucracies cannot be won over. They are, by definition, elements whose task is to suppress the revolutionary aspects of the class struggle.

Labor bureaucracies and social democracy

Working-class bureaucracies take two main institutional forms: political party and trade-union bureaucracies. In many European countries, there are social-democratic or now openly liberalized parties that were born as mass workers parties (including parties that bear the name “communist” but are *de facto* social-democratic). Such parties and their cadres (the party bureaucracy) are openly hostile to the revolutionary workers’ movement. The tendency toward opportunism, already identified by Lenin, has spread like a cancer throughout the body of the workers’ movement in the imperialist world over the past hundred years.

Historically, the formation of trade unions has been followed by the formation of trade union bureaucracies. These are elements that come from within the working class but rise above it and begin to represent it.⁶⁸ Just as the state emerges from within society and rises above it, so the union bureaucracies form a ruling segment, with its own interests, separate from the masses. The institutionalization of the class struggle brings organizational permanence, but it also places the masses in a passive position. The representatives, who negotiate with the employer on behalf of the masses and often make decisions on their own initiative, are in an active position (in cases like Germany, union bureaucrats are even given seats on the company board). Over time, the trade union bureaucrat (usually male) distances himself from the masses he represents. He now has a secretary, an office car, a daily allowance, etc. and has joined the ranks of the ruling elite. In Turkey, there have been many deputies and ministers with a trade union background in both the ruling and opposition parties and in the governments. The appointment of the Minister of Social Security (Sadık Şide) from the trade union Türk-İş by the military junta after the 1980 coup is one of the most striking examples.

Due to the circumstances, the union bureaucrats can be forced to lead mass or even historical struggles (the president of Maden-İş, Şemsi Denizler, who led the “Great March” of the Zonguldak workers at the end of 1990, was a typical example of a corrupt union bureaucrat, and had the union buy a Jaguar luxury car). In such cases, the union bureaucrat tries to meet the expectations of the mobilized masses

Structure Today], translated by Osman Akinhay, Istanbul: Salyangoz, 2006, p. 24.

67 Savran, op. cit., p. 33.

68 See Adam Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 [1985], p. 14; also, Savran, op. cit. p. 31, 33.

at least minimally and, at the same time, tries to weaken the movement. It is well known that many great historical strikes have been realized *against* the opposition of the trade union leadership.

One of the greatest successes of the modern capitalist state has been to contain and tame the class struggle. This is where the labor bureaucracies come in. Within the economic-political distinction between these two complementary institutional forms, trade unions generally focus on economic demands in the narrow sense, while social democratic parties pursue reformist policies. Undoubtedly, many revolutionary, socialist and Marxist people participate in such organizations. In the capitalist society, however, the labor bureaucracies basically fulfill the task of “confining the consciousness and struggle of the working class within the limits of capitalist society.” This task becomes particularly important at “revolutionary” junctures: “At sensitive turning points, when the question of the survival of the state and the order is at stake, the integration of the labor aristocracy and the trade-union bureaucracy into the state forces the trade unions to side completely with the order”.⁶⁹

The labor aristocracy and the labor bureaucracies are like the “threshold guardians” who in myths have the task of preventing the hero from crossing into unknown realms.⁷⁰ When a revolutionary situation arises, both try to prevent the crossing, to return the working class to “normal” methods of struggle. Mythological heroes defeat the threshold guardians with a variety of different tactics (some are defeated in battle, some are neutralized with magic words, and some are even won over to this side). Without stretching the literary analogy too far, it can be said that the working class must also eliminate the threshold guardians through appropriate tactics. One (the labor bureaucracy) must be defeated and the other (the labor aristocracy) must be neutralized or drawn into the struggle. In this context, recognizing and fighting the labor bureaucracy is a relatively easy task, since the “aristocratic” elements can easily disguise themselves in various forms.

Revolutionary situations are chaotic and confusing periods when the rules of normal everyday life no longer work and are even reversed. In such situations, not only the labor aristocracy but even the petty-bourgeois masses, though inconsistent and unstable, can side with the working class. But the fundamental question is who is leading whom, which classes or sections of classes are at the forefront of the revolutionary process.

Stratification on a world scale

The stratified structure is similar when we look at the global working class. The workers of the core countries form a privileged segment compared to the workers of the underdeveloped world. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that all the

69 Trotsky quoted by Sungur Savran, “Sendikal Hareketin Krizi mi, Sosyalistlerin Krizi mi?” [“Crisis of the Trade Union Movement or the Socialists?”], *Devrimci Marksizm*, no 8, Winter 2008/2009, p. 18, 21, 37. Savran gives examples of the betrayal of the unions at critical junctures (p. 36-7).

70 Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 71.

workers in the imperialist countries form a labor aristocracy *in this relative sense*.

The entire population of a country can benefit from imperialist relations. Lenin also states: “The export of capital, one of the most essential economic bases of imperialism, still more completely isolates the rentiers from production and sets the seal of parasitism on the whole country that lives by exploiting the labor of several overseas countries and colonies”.⁷¹ Workers in the core can derive benefits from imperialist exploitation other than higher wages. For example, their job prospects increase and they enjoy relative prosperity thanks to the cheap consumer goods that flow into the country. But such benefits do not necessarily come from monopoly profits. It is also important to remember that the “welfare state”, which is seen as a symbol of the relative prosperity of workers in the center countries, is in fact essentially a mechanism for redistribution within the working class.⁷²

The workers of the core countries form the aristocratic section of the world working class. But one cannot go directly from the national to the international scale. This is because the “world working class” is an abstraction; it expresses an abstract unity, not an organic, living unity. It does not consist of elements that can directly relate to each other, such as the “Japanese working class.” The borders between states also divide the world’s working class into different national “compartments.” Beyond the national level, workers cannot relate to each other directly, but only indirectly.⁷³ This mediation is basically provided by three institutions: capitalist states, corporations, and labor bureaucracies. (The International as a revolutionary mediator against these three institutions must, of course be added to the picture, but unfortunately, these experiences were short-lived).

Basically, the first mediation (states) makes the workers of different countries enemies, and the second mediation (corporations) makes them rivals. Both formations are enemies of the international unity of the working class. They try to prevent it and if they cannot, they try to put it under forms they can control. In this context the third mediation comes into play. This third mediation consists of the international organizations of reformist trade unions (today the ITUC, ETUC, Global Unions, etc.) and political structures such as the Socialist International. Their main task is to keep the labor movement in order throughout the world.⁷⁴

In short, today capital is highly organized at all levels on a global scale, while the working class is unorganized. The fact that workers can only relate to each other indirectly at the international level means that they remain permanently

⁷¹ Lenin, *Imperialism*, p. 277.

⁷² Gough, op. cit., p. 114.

⁷³ In the words of Beverly Silver, in indirect relational processes “the affected actors are often not fully conscious of the relational links”, *Forces of Labor*., p. 27.

⁷⁴ Especially during the Cold War, unions in newly industrialized countries such as Turkey were trained by AFL-CIO cadres to be anti-communist. It is known that during this period the AFL-CIO, in close cooperation with the CIA, focused its energy on the fight against communism worldwide. On international trade union organizations in general, see Dimitris Stevis, “International Labor Organizations, 1864-1997: The Weight of History and the Challenges of the Present”, *Journal of World-Systems Research*, no 4, 1998.

unorganized, unconscious, and weak in this sphere. As the historical experience of the Internationals has shown, no formation other than a revolutionary International (and a “Red Trade Union International” to coordinate with it) that overcomes the national isolation of the workers will be able to expand the political horizons of the workers beyond the national level. A revolutionary international is also necessary to draw the workers of the imperialist centers into the struggle, i.e. the sections of the global labor aristocracy in a relative sense.

Undoubtedly, national borders can be and are constantly crossed through processes such as migration between countries. But this is a marginal phenomenon and does not provide a permanent organization that transcends state borders. In its “normal” functioning, the working class in each capitalist country is isolated by national borders and stratified into privileged sections (the labor aristocracy) and other (lower) layers. This is the basic level. It is worth emphasizing once again that this is a dynamic and relative process: Capital has no tendency to create privileged layers of workers in a country or in the world; on the contrary, one can speak of a negative tendency to constantly “create” new sources of cheap labor, which leads to the movement of some sections from the ranks of the labor aristocracy (or petty bourgeoisie) to the lower strata of the proletariat and vice versa.

Engels and Lenin attached particular importance to the organization of the unprivileged layers of workers in the struggle against the labor aristocracy. If, on a world scale, the workers in the imperialist countries have stuck to the reformist line for so long, one of the most important reasons is the inefficiency of the international structures (a revolutionary international could have promoted the organization of the unprivileged layers of workers in many countries; Stalinism, which abandoned the internationalist perspective and liquidated the Comintern, has a major share in this deficiency). Only with the fulfillment of two conditions, (i) the organization of the unprivileged layers of workers and (ii) a revolutionary international organization, will the masses of workers in the core countries be able to break out of the reformist lethargy. These two conditions are certainly mutually reinforcing.

If the workers in the core countries constitute the international labor aristocracy, those in the dependent countries are undoubtedly the lower layer of the “world working class.” Nevertheless, we can say that privileged sections of workers have emerged in every country that has embarked on the path of capitalist development. In the post-World War II period, in the context of the internationalization of capital, there have been significant changes in the composition of the world working class (a new phenomenon that Lenin did not have the opportunity to see). First, the world’s working class expanded quantitatively. Along with this expansion, especially in late industrializing countries (such as Turkey), new layers within the class have emerged and existing ones have been transformed. In these countries, it can be said that the unionized, well-paid industrial workers and white-collar workers, especially those working in the industrial enterprises of multinational companies, constituted a new labor aristocracy.⁷⁵ Undoubtedly, these workers had a much lower level of welfare than their counterparts in Western countries, but they were clearly

⁷⁵ See Savran, “Mapping Classes”, p. 31.

“privileged” strata in the societies in which they lived. Moreover, in many cases, it was this group that organized the first and most violent workers’ struggles (e.g., the metal workers in Turkey).

Compared to the core, the labor aristocracies in the late industrialized world are much smaller in number and much more fragile in terms of their position within the production process. This fragility has become more apparent in the neoliberal period. As industrial production shifted to the periphery, informal, precarious, low-wage jobs became the rule in these new geographies, and the overwhelming majority of the working class suffered wage and rights losses. It can be said that the labor aristocracies in the periphery -where they existed- have today been considerably weakened.

In 1980, half of the world’s industrial workers were in Europe, Japan and North America. Today, 80 percent are in the periphery. This ongoing shift is driven by low wages and weak social rights in emerging markets. Workers in countries like China and India earn 10 to 20 times less than those doing the same work in the center. The majority of India’s nearly half a billion industrial workers work informally, and the majority of China’s nearly one billion industrial workers work in precarious conditions.⁷⁶

The migration of industry from the center to the periphery has been accompanied by a huge wave of internal migration in these peripheral countries, with hundreds of millions of new proletarians entering the cities and industrial zones as a result of the dissolution of the countryside. In the same process, women workers have also been drawn into the sphere of production in large masses, in a way that can also be called “internal migration.” All these processes have been characterized by precarious, unregistered, informal forms of work. But the same developments have also provoked mass protests in the new centers of world industry. The scope not only of capitalist production but also of class struggle has expanded.

Neoliberal destruction and the labor aristocracy

After forty years of neoliberal aggression, is it possible today to speak of a labor aristocracy? If so, which groups does it include? In this section, I will try to make some observations on this question.

“Traditional” labor aristocracies and social democracy

In some studies of contemporary capitalism, one finds the observation that the traditional labor aristocracies in the imperialist countries have vanished or are on the way to dissolution.⁷⁷ This is generally true, but there have also been changes in

76 John Smith, *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century: Globalization, Super-Exploitation, and Capitalism’s Final Crisis*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2016, p. 138; Immanuel Ness, *Southern Insurgency: The Coming of the Global Working Class*, London: Pluto Press, 2016, p. 29-30, 85-6.

77 For example: Ernesto Screpanti, *Global Imperialism and the Great Crisis*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014, p. 80, 208; Alp Altınörs, *İmkânsız Sermaye: 21. Yüzyılda Kapitalizm, Sosyalizm ve Toplum [Impossible Capital: Capitalism, Socialism and Society in the 21st Century]*,

the composition of the working class.

In the 19th century, the first “labor aristocrats” were skilled male workers with high bargaining power, united in craft unions. In Britain, the old type of unions that Engels referred to were exclusive organizations based on occupations and did not aim to include all workers in a trade. By the early 1870s, only half a million workers were organized in unions. Despite a revival of trade unionism in the 1880s, by the early 1890s the unionization rate was barely above 10 percent (1.5 million out of some 14 million workers).⁷⁸

The shift from craft unions to mass unions (the AFL was formed in the U.S. during this period) allowed the labor movement to take a truly revolutionary turn for a time. The first mass working-class parties emerged in this context. In Britain, at the turn of the century, the Independent Labour Party, socialist associations, and trade unions united under the TUC (Trades Union Congress) brought their forces together to form the Labour Party, which won 30 seats in Parliament in the 1906 election. At the time, the SPD in Germany had more than one million members (mostly skilled male union members) and the trade unions had more than 2.5 million.⁷⁹ Even in the U.S., socialist presidential candidate Eugene Debs had won 6 percent of the vote in the 1912 election.⁸⁰ The path of socialist politics based on the labor movement seemed open. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, despite the economic depression, workers’ wages in the Western world had risen for the first time in a long period, while the countries of continental Europe were launching one “social reform” program after another.

Beverly Silver, who has studied labor movements around the world, notes that two peaks of action occurred in the two years following the two world wars.⁸¹ Usually, mobilization begins to increase just before the wars, is partially interrupted by the war, but then picks up where it left off and turns into a full-blown storm. But we also know that the central countries have somehow managed to weather these storms. Social democracy played an important role in this “success.” (No doubt the specific strategic calculations of the Soviet Union also played a role. It is well known that the communist parties under the influence of Stalinism, especially in the center countries such as France and Italy, adopted a moderate attitude in the post-Second World War conjuncture).

Social democracy’s betrayal of the working class and socialism is undeniable, and became clear with the start of the First World War. But the betrayal has deep structural causes. In Germany, the process signaled by the revisionism debate within the SPD was that the working-class party was becoming part of the bourgeois

Istanbul: Yordam Kitap, 2019, p. 219.

78 Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, p. 128-9; Jonathan Strauss, “Engels and the Theory of the Labour Aristocracy”, *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, no 25, January-June 2004, <http://links.org.au/node/45>.

79 Abendroth, op. cit., p. 43, 56, 63.

80 Debs came from a railroad union background. In the last quarter of the 19th century, the Knights of Labor organization took that sector by storm. See Davis, op. cit., p. 30-32.

81 Silver, op. cit., p. 128.

political order. The SPD's votes were steadily increasing: 125,000 votes in 1871 had risen to 4,250,000 just before the world war. The SPD had become a mass party, but at the same time, it had lost its class identity. The mechanism of parliamentary democracy, which transformed the "worker" into a "citizen", was precisely the negation of class identity and its replacement by a universal identity. If you wanted votes, if you wanted to come to power, you had to flirt with everyone, even if you alienated your own audience a little. In such a political context, the theme of "class contradiction" was inevitably weakened.⁸²

In the interwar period, with another turn of the screw, social democracy began to participate in governments in Europe. This was a period when the Soviet Union had become a serious alternative, and Rudolf Hilferding, who famously wrote that "taking possession of six large Berlin banks would mean taking possession of the most important spheres of large-scale industry, and would greatly facilitate the initial phases of socialist policy during the transition period" was appointed finance minister (in Germany) for two terms.⁸³ In practice, however, there was no significant difference from bourgeois parties. Adam Przeworski notes that in the interwar period, social-democratic governments in Western Europe did not nationalize any enterprises (except for the armaments industry in France in 1936). With the emergence of Keynesianism during the Great Depression, social democracy would find the economic program it was looking for, and a new era would begin in which the implementation of economic policies that favored aggregate demand would be considered "left-wing".⁸⁴

The decline of the industrial worker at the center

From roughly the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, the labor aristocracy consisted mainly of unionized factory workers. During this period, the "white-collar unionist" was not a common figure. The spread of the "Fordist" assembly line from the turn of the century onwards brought with it both the decline of the skilled workers of the old era and the rise of the semi-skilled (usually first- or second-generation immigrant) factory worker. In the new system, a relatively small

82 Przeworski, op. cit., p. 13, 18, 28, 71; Esping-Andersen, op. cit., p. 46. For communists, elections are processes that must be evaluated according to the concrete political context. It is essential for the working class to go beyond its own narrow class interests and to lead other classes and oppressed sections, and thus to become massive in the political sphere; elections and parliament are only moments in this general movement. The class-mass dilemma that social democracy faces is precisely related to it turning its back on this Marxist insight. However, a revolutionary electoral strategy that does not surrender to "parliamentarism" is possible. In Leninist political accounting, which starts from the assumption that the decisive events in politics usually take place outside parliament, taking part in elections is of value to the extent that it advances the independent action of the working class, and "the costs outweigh the benefits" when it hinders it. August H. Nimtz, *Lenin's Electoral Strategy From Marx and Engels Through the Revolution of 1905: The Ballot, the Streets – or Both*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 135.

83 Rudolf Hilferding, *Finance Capital: A Study of the Latest Phase of Capitalist Development*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, p. 368.

84 Przeworski, op. cit., p. 33, 36-37, 208-209.

number of strategically located workers could disrupt the entire production process. U.S. autoworkers won one major victory after another, most notably in the wave of sit-down strikes of 1934-37.⁸⁵

That time is long gone. Industrial capital has taken a number of steps to break the organized power of the workers. One of the most obvious strategies has been to locate new factories in places where trade unions are weak. In the industrial restructuring after World War II, the conservative “Sun Belt” in the central regions of the U.S. and the south of England in Britain were the favored areas.⁸⁶ But class struggle intensified even in the new industrial centers. In the early 1970s, the international migration of capital accelerated because of the general crisis in which profit rates were steadily falling. For example, automobile production, which peaked in the U.S. in the first half of the century and then in Europe and Japan, moved from the 1970s to countries such as Brazil, South Africa, South Korea, India and China.⁸⁷ Looking at total industrial production, not just automobiles, in 1970 more than half of the world’s production took place in Western countries and one-fifth in Asia (including Japan), while today these percentages are 37 (Western) and 43 (Asian), respectively.⁸⁸

The decline of industry in the imperialist center is undeniable. The decline is very large at the level of employment and relatively small at the level of production. In the U.S., for example, while manufacturing output tripled between 1972 and 2016, the sector’s share of national income fell from two-thirds to two-fifths and the number of workers employed halved. In the 1980s, McDonald’s employed more workers than the U.S. steel industry.⁸⁹

Today, the service sector accounts for about three-quarters and manufacturing for between one-fifth and one-sixth of total employment in the core countries. In the neoliberal era, labor-intensive manufacturing jobs in particular have been relocated to low-wage Asian countries such as China, India and Vietnam. This has intensified the class struggle in the late industrialized countries and led to wage increases.

85 Silver, op. cit., p. 15, 52; Davis, op. cit., p. 52.

86 Capital’s only response is not simply to shift production to other regions. Firms can turn to capital (technology) intensive investments that reduce the amount of live labor used in production. They can leave one branch of production and move to another (the shift from textiles to automobiles is a historical example). They can leave industry and turn to finance (there have been many examples of this since the 1970s). They can use direct pressure to break the power of the unions. In short, capital can use many different methods to defeat workers’ resistance. See Silver, op. cit., p. 48, 95-6, 131-2; see also Davis, op. cit., p. 121; Callinicos, “Introduction”, p. 23; Michael Zweig, *The Working Class Majority: America’s Best Kept Secret*, Ithaca, London: ILR Press, 2nd edition, 2011, p. 187; Dennis L. Gilbert, *The American Class Structure in an Age of Growing Inequality*, 10th edition (epub version), London: SAGE Publications, 2018, p. 279.

87 Silver, op. cit., p. 45, 72.

88 Between 1990 and 2016, the average annual growth rate of per capita income was 8 percent in China, 6 percent in Vietnam and only 2 percent in the United States. See Branko Milanovic, *Capitalism, Alone: The Future of the System that Rules the World*, Cambridge, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019, p. 9, 86.

89 Gilbert, op. cit., p. 80; Davis, op. cit., p. 215.

Indicators such as per capita income show that some countries, such as South Korea and China, have been able to close the gap with Western countries. For example, the gap between per capita income levels in Britain and China increased from the 1820s to the 1970s and then decreased; today we are back to where we were in the 1820s (about 3:1, or by some calculations 4:1).⁹⁰

The working classes in the center (the international labor aristocracy) have maintained their relative advantages in the neoliberal period, but these advantages are gradually diminishing. An interesting development is that the global auto monopolies have resumed production in the countries of the center, where they had previously fled.⁹¹

There are many interrelated reasons for this historic decline of the industrial proletariat in the center. These include the migration of capital, the reorganization of the labor process (such as lean production techniques) and automation, the relentless pressure on trade unions, the heavy reliance on immigrant labor and, finally, the global discrediting of socialism after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the U.S., for example, union density exceeded one-third of the workforce in 1955, when the AFL and CIO reunited, but began to decline rapidly thereafter, especially from the late 1970s onward. In the U.S., a new four-billion-dollar industry has sprung up to provide legal services to corporations to prevent unionization. More than 80 percent of employers buy such “services”.⁹² This process is complemented by laws that make it more difficult to form unions, and lobbying and attacks against trade unionists. In short, the American bourgeoisie gives no respite to the working class in its own country. Today, only 10 percent of all wage earners in the U.S. are unionized, and in the private sector the rate drops to 6 percent (4 percent among young people). Unionization rates are higher in the public sector. In fact, while overall unionization rates have been declining for four decades, they have surprisingly been rising among public sector workers.⁹³

In the U.S. and in the core countries in general, we are witnessing a gradual erosion of the position of the “classical” skilled, unionized industrial labor aristocracy that characterized the 20th century. With the internationalization of production, the reorganization of the work process, automation, de-skilling, subcontracting, de-unionization and the consequent decline in wages, workers in industries such as metal, chemicals and oil have both become fewer in number and lost most (if not all) of their privileges. The labor aristocratic character of these groups, which used to be the leading elements of the trade union movement, has

90 However, these developments do not justify the claim of economists such as Branko Milanovic and Thomas Piketty that “Asian countries are catching up with the West.” Imperialist exploitation, the transfer of surplus value from the periphery to the center is continuing. Moreover, “national income” is a category that hides inequalities between classes, whereas income inequalities within each country are increasing. Finally, it is worth remembering that the level of inequality between countries in 1820 was already high (as a legacy of the classical colonialism that preceded it).

91 Silver, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

92 Wahl, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

93 Zweig, *op. cit.*, p. 163, 183; Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

weakened. In the coming period, this group, with its high fighting power, is likely to play an important role in the organized revolutionary movement.

The rise of public sector workers

Sectorally, the decline of industry in the central countries has been accompanied by the expansion of the service sectors. But in terms of class positions, the rise of public employees has been remarkable. Indeed, Beverly Silver, an expert on labor movements, has argued that in the new century teachers will take over the leading role played by textile workers in the nineteenth century and auto workers in the twentieth.⁹⁴

I think it is more accurate to speak of public sector workers in general rather than a single occupational group such as teachers. Silver rightly points to the strategic position of educators in the social division of labor, the fact that they make up a significant part of public sector employment, the fact that education, unlike manufacturing, is less affected by technological developments, and the advantages of dealing with a single employer (the state). These advantages have led to an increase in activism in education, while it has declined in other sectors in the new era. But, since the 1990s, privatization, subcontracting, precariousness, etc. have also accelerated in the education sector, and the position of teachers (and academics) has been weakened by technological developments such as computers and online lectures.

The rise of the civil servant began with the “welfare state” after World War II and became more pronounced over time. The expansion of government intervention led to an increase in the number of teachers, health workers, social workers and so on. In fact, these are relatively labor-intensive sectors that are less conducive to mechanization. In the core countries, the public sector now employs more workers than manufacturing (one-third of the total workforce in the Nordic countries). Compared with other sectors, the public sector also has a higher proportion of female workers and unionized workers. Public sector workers, like all workers, have been hit in the neoliberal period, but they are still the best-organized and *relatively* well-paid section of the working class. Today it can be said that public sector workers are perhaps the largest component of the labor aristocracy in the imperialist countries.⁹⁵

Because public workers, by virtue of their position in the relations of production, often deal with public institutions rather than “private” capitalists, they tend to solve their problems through the channels within the system. Public workers, whose superiors are also “public servants” like themselves, are perhaps the most conscious and advantageous group in terms of protecting their rights. In fact, it is precisely because of this situation that they have in many cases fought fierce battles. But to the extent that this line of struggle is limited to the protection of rights and privileges, it is doomed to decline, and indeed it has declined in the neoliberal period. The petty-

94 Silver, op. cit., p. 113-8.

95 On the “welfare state” and public workers, see Gough, op. cit., p. 82, 106, 142; Esping-Andersen, op. cit., p. 149; Standing, op. cit., p. 52.

bourgeois lifestyle and level of affluence of this section have not prevented its class consciousness from being relatively advanced.

Hegel had once described the bureaucracy as a “universal class” because he believed it had the capacity to rise above narrow group interests and see things from the point of view of the state. It is well known that the young Marx, in contrast to Hegel, saw the proletariat as the “universal class”. Today, it is safe to say that public servants (especially teachers, health workers, etc.) have the capacity to rise above narrow group interests and see issues from the perspective of society (not the state). Precisely because of their position in the social division of labor, they are able to develop a “social” perspective. In revolutionary periods, some elements of this group can provide the most militant sections of the working class. In “normal” periods, however, they can be expected to play a negative role in the class struggle, with patterns of behavior typical of labor aristocracies.

Petty bourgeoisie, old and new

In the neoliberal period, we witnessed the rapid proletarianization of the traditional petty bourgeoisie (artisans of all kinds, as well as self-employed small producers and peasants). The petty-bourgeois workforce, such as grocers, butchers, greengrocers, and even taxi drivers, is now employed mostly in non-privileged jobs, mainly in the service sectors like retail, transportation, and logistics. In addition, with the waves of rural-urban migration that have accelerated again since the 1990s, a significant part of the peasant smallholder class has also become workers by moving to the cities or industrial zones. As a result, the traditional petty bourgeoisie has recently largely melted into the lower strata of the proletariat. In countries like China and India, this mass is in the hundreds of millions.

On the other hand, members of professions such as lawyers, engineers, physicians, etc. who come from higher income groups (i.e. from the “new petty bourgeoisie”) and become proletarians are included in the new labor aristocracy. For these people, the opportunities for self-employment are much greater; a significant number of them move back and forth between the petty bourgeoisie (or even the bourgeoisie) and the working class throughout their “careers.” For this reason, they never see themselves as full members of the proletariat; their class consciousness is weak. They prefer to rely on their personal skills and have more opportunities to emigrate to other countries. This group, which has a high visibility in social struggles and a high potential for radicalization, is nevertheless an obstacle to a united and independent workers’ movement. This is because they glorify disorganization, see struggle only as protest, do not value equality and see themselves as superior in many ways. Many recent movements around the world (including the Gezi uprising in Turkey) have been characterized by the influence of this group.⁹⁶ It can be said that this is one of the main reasons why these movements have failed. The identity of the social segments (and the organizations representing these segments) leading

96 See Sungur Savran, “Arap Devriminin Dirilişi: Türkiye İçin Dersler” [“The Resurgence of the Arab Revolution: Lessons for Turkey”], *Devrimci Marksizm*, no 39-40, Summer/Fall 2019, p. 41-43.

the uprising is crucial for the course of the movement. This will continue to be the case in the coming periods.

Lower layers of the proletariat

As a result of the neoliberal offensive against the working class, the lower layers of this class have grown enormously in the neoliberal era, both in the core and in the periphery. In the last four decades, proletarianization has accelerated all over the world, with most of the new entries into the working class taking place in precarious, temporary, low-paid, flexible forms. It is fair to say that the once important distinction between white-collar and blue-collar workers has become virtually meaningless. There are undoubtedly many differences between the office and the factory, between manual and intellectual work. Within the white-collar workforce, however, there is a deep differentiation between highly-paid administrative positions and low-paid routine work, mostly done by women workers.⁹⁷ Workers, the overwhelming majority of the population in capitalist countries, form a heterogeneous community differentiated along many axes. But in the “egalitarian” perspective of capital, these distinctions lose their meaning. Just as the minimum wage has now become the “average” wage for the majority of the workers in Turkey. The majority meets at the bottom.

Marxists have sometimes distinguished between the “working class” and the “proletariat”, using the term proletariat to refer to the politically active, revolutionary elements. This raises the question of which sections should be considered the proletariat, the revolutionary subject. For example, Nicos Poulantzas’s attempt to limit the proletariat to productive workers (factory workers in the narrow sense) was the product of such a search. Accordingly, a worker at Wal-Mart, for example, would be considered outside the proletariat.⁹⁸ In my opinion, it is more correct to take the opposite approach and consider all wage earners as the proletariat, and then “subtract” elements such as managers, the union bureaucracy and the labor aristocracy. Contemporary capitalism actually shapes the potential revolutionary subject with its own hands, destroying the “middle” layer and driving large sections of the working class into the lower layers.

Today, wage earners make up 80-90 percent of the working population in capitalist countries. Over the past forty years, not only has their share of national income fallen, but this falling share has become more unequally distributed. In the U.S., for example, the bottom 90 percent of wage earners received 42 percent of total wages in 1980, compared to 28 percent in 2011. Workers are forced to borrow to meet their consumption needs, while personal debt continues to rise.⁹⁹

Despite widespread criticism that the U.S. working class has become bourgeois

97 Chris Harman, “Resesyondan Sonra İşçi Sınıfı” [“The Working Class After the Recession”], in Callinicos and Harman, op.cit., p. 105-106.

98 Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, translated by David Fernbach, London: NLB, 1976, p. 20, 210-212; also, Savran, “Mapping Classes”, p. 27.

99 Milanovic, op. cit., p. 24; Smith, op. cit., p. 148, 155. Real labor wages have hardly changed since the 1970s: Zweig, op. cit., p. 88-9.

by acquiring assets such as stocks and shares, the reality is that more than 90 percent of financial assets are owned by just 10 percent of the population. One in five households has zero or negative net worth. More than half of all households own no stocks. For three out of five “wealthy” households, their only assets are their home (which they have often borrowed against) and their pension fund, if they have one.¹⁰⁰

Thomas Piketty, who has analyzed the dynamics of income and wealth inequality in the core countries over the last two centuries or so, cites the emergence of a “middle class” in the West in the 20th century, which acquired a significant share of social wealth, as one of the most important developments. Undoubtedly, for someone like Piketty who adopts a social-democratic perspective, the “middle class” is politically important. But the same author also points out that this so-called “considerable” wealth is in fact crumbs, and that inequalities have deepened over the last forty years. In short, the “middle class”, or rather the petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy, is disappearing.¹⁰¹

As the middle class disappears, the lower layers of the proletariat are growing. Since the 1980s, some have used the term “precariat” to describe the group of workers in temporary, precarious, low-wage jobs. (Guy Standing, who introduced the term to the world, sees this group, wrongly in my view, as a new layer outside the proletariat). In Japan, for example, one-third of the workforce is in temporary and irregular work, while in South Korea it is more than half. In the U.S., more than thirty million people were working part-time in 2009 (after the crisis). Standing estimates that in many countries a quarter of the adult population is in the precariat.¹⁰²

In Britain, the home of the labor aristocracy, low pay is the new normal. A third of the working population, 19 million people, live below the minimum wage. Working poverty is widespread, with more than half of poor households having someone in paid work. In more than one million households, at least one parent works on both Saturday and Sunday.¹⁰³

In the European Union, 17 percent of the population lived below the poverty line before the 2008 crisis (although there are large differences between countries). In the United States, the rate was about the same, with one in six people living in poverty. The poverty rate for children was slightly higher, at about one in five in both the EU and the U.S. More specifically, 550,000 people (one-fifth of them children) sleep on the streets every night in the U.S. More than 40 million people

100 Milanovic, op. cit., p. 26, 31; Zweig, op. cit., p. 98. In fact, this is the general picture of the central countries. Indeed, Piketty’s work also reveals the depth of inequalities. For example, in France in 2010-2011, the richest 10 percent received 62 percent of the total wealth, while the poorest 50 percent received only 4 percent. In the same years in the U.S., the top one-tenth of the richest 10 percent owned 72 percent of the total wealth, while the bottom 50 percent owned only 2 percent. See Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 257-8.

101 Piketty, op. cit., p. 262, 336-7, 346.

102 Standing, op. cit., p. 15, 24-5, 35-6.

103 Claire Ainsley, *The New Working Class: How to Win Hearts, Minds and Votes*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2018, p. 16, 57, 93, 160.

face hunger, with one in nine relying on food stamps.¹⁰⁴

One can give many examples of the fact that a significant part of the population in the imperialist countries does not really live in good conditions. But it is the comparative perspective that gives the most important insight. A temporal comparison shows that today, compared to forty years ago, inequalities have increased and workers have suffered real losses in income and rights. A geographical comparison, on the other hand, shows that the gap between workers in the center and those in the underdeveloped countries has narrowed slightly, but still exists.

A very large portion of the lower strata of the proletariat consists of migrants and women. Migrants (in the form of internal or external migration) are perhaps the most important group in the history of working-class movements. For example, many of the workers who fought so hard in Turkey in the 1960s and 70s were actually first-generation industrial workers who migrated from rural to urban areas. More generally, in many cases the first- or second-generation migrants rely on solidarity networks (fellow countrymen, kinship, neighborhood ties, various communities, and etc.) in their actions, and carry the class struggle forward.¹⁰⁵

In *Capital*, Marx talks about the tendency of capitalist development to create a surplus population and to send this surplus population to colonial countries.¹⁰⁶ In the second half of the 19th century, one-sixth of Europe's population of 400 million (70 million people) emigrated, half of them to the United States. The U.S., however, halted the flow of emigrants around 1920 over the objections of labor unions, particularly the AFL. However, the "new immigrants" (Italians, Jews and Slavs) who had come to the U.S. since the 1890s, and their children, became the bearers of the radicalism of the 1930s and 40s. A significant proportion of factory workers at that time were first- and second-generation immigrants.¹⁰⁷

As John Smith aptly observed, capital seeks to increase its rate of profit by attracting immigrants to its own location, or alternatively, it can itself migrate abroad.¹⁰⁸ In short, there are different ways of combining production with cheap labor.

After the Second World War, the expansion of capitalist production has been accompanied again by large migratory flows. During this period, millions of workers moved from neighboring countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, and Yugoslavia) to Western European countries. New migrants from the countryside in countries such as Italy and Japan, and women drawn into the production process in the United States, also provided the huge reserves of labor needed by industry. In many countries, these internal and external migrations played an important role in the new wave of labor

104 Wahl, op. cit., p. 99; Gilbert, op. cit., p. 138, 291, 299; Standing, op. cit., p. 46-7.

105 Silver, op. cit., p. 45-6.

106 "By constantly making a part of the hands 'supernumerary', modern industry, in all countries where it has taken root, gives a spur to emigration and to the colonisation of foreign lands", *Capital* I, p. 454.

107 Smith, op. cit., p. 108; Davis, op. cit., p. 55, 57; Gilbert, op. cit., p. 65, 68.

108 Smith, op. cit., p. 188.

protests in the late 1960s.¹⁰⁹

Since the 1970s, and especially since the 1990s, the United States has again attracted a large influx of new immigrants (mainly from Mexico and Latin America). Today, about one-fifth of the U.S. workforce (28 million people) was born abroad, of which about eight million are immigrants and 30 percent are illegal. The proportion of whites, who make up about three-fifths of the population, is steadily declining. Blacks and Hispanics generally occupy what can be called the “lower strata” of the working class. In Germany, another core country, one-fifth of the population (16 million people) is of immigrant origin, and in the United Kingdom one in ten people is an immigrant, with two million immigrants arriving in the first decade of the 21st century. But migration is not confined to the core countries. Indeed, in a late-industrializing country like Turkey, both internal migration (the new wave of rural-urban migration since the 1990s) and migrant labor have reached significant levels in the last decade. Both processes play a crucial role in the spread of cheap labor. Similarly, the manufacturing industries of countries like China, Indonesia and India employ hundreds of millions of people forced to migrate from the countryside (one-fifth of China’s industrial proletariat of one billion people).¹¹⁰

In today’s world, the lower strata of the proletariat include women as well as migrants (the incorporation of women into production can also be seen as a form of internal migration). In Japan and South Korea, for example, more than half of women and less than one-fifth of men (one-third in South Korea) are precariously employed. In Japan, nearly half of female workers earn less than the minimum wage. Globally, women are paid between two-thirds and four-fifths of what men are paid for the same work. These ratios are even lower for temporary or part-time work. However, women are also more likely to be employed in the public sector. Teaching, nursing and social work stand out as the public sectors with the highest concentration of female workers.¹¹¹

Conclusions

There is no doubt that the masses of workers in the core countries, however relatively poor they may be in their own countries, are much better off than the masses of workers in the Third World, even with the crumbs of social welfare that are left to them. In this sense, they are part of the labor aristocracy. However, to the extent that the struggle is not directly between the “world working class” and the “world bourgeoisie”, in other words, to the extent that it takes the form of a class struggle within national borders, it is necessary to look at the internal class relations and dynamics of each country. The organization of unprivileged workers in the core countries, which Engels once emphasized, is perhaps the most important issue in this context. In this regard, second-generation immigrants, especially those in unskilled jobs, are candidates to play an important role in the socialist struggle. If

109 Silver, *op. cit.*, p. 51-2.

110 Standing, *op. cit.* p. 91, 106; Gilbert, *op. cit.* p. 270; Zweig, *op. cit.* p. 52, 116; Ainsley, *op. cit.* p. 119.

111 Standing, *op. cit.*, p. 61-3; Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p. 82-3.

the international organization of the working class complements such a process, it is possible to mobilize in the socialist direction or at least neutralize some components of the labor aristocracy in the imperialist countries.

One of the main features of contemporary capitalism is that democracy, even minimally defined as voting every few years, is now weakened and in retreat. One hundred and seventy years ago, the main demand of the Chartist movement was universal suffrage. The British bourgeoisie initially reacted strongly to this, but over time it adopted a different strategy and turned to integrating the working class into the system. At the turn of the 20th century, the integration of trade unions and social democracy into the capitalist political order began in the context of social policy; this process gained further momentum in the form of the so-called “welfare state” after the Second World War. All of these developments represented both important gains for the working class and a growing detachment of the movement from its ultimate goals.

In the neoliberal era, however, we have seen these gains erode day by day. At this point, a significant portion of the working class, who gave their lives for the right to vote one hundred and seventy years ago, no longer bother to vote in elections that they consider meaningless. In fact, the very event called “elections” has become a mechanism for the negation of democracy. For example, in the 2016 U.S. election, which Trump won, 40 percent of all campaign contributions came from the top 1 percent of the top 1 percent (one ten-thousandth of the population).¹¹²

Today it is vital that the working class, which is the overwhelming majority of the world’s population, develop a new political perspective, and to do this it must first begin to think in class terms. Liberals, conservatives and Third Worlders all insist on referring to the working class in the core countries as the “middle class”. But workers have no problem thinking of themselves as workers.¹¹³ This tendency must be strengthened.

The weakness of the organizations, which play a fundamental role in the development of class consciousness, is a clear phenomenon in today’s conditions. But there are signs that the situation is beginning to reverse, especially in the newly industrialized countries. Generally speaking, in the imperialist countries, unionization rates have fallen to such an extent that even being unionized can be considered a privilege. In fact, unionized workers form the most important part of the labor aristocracy. Among them, the industrial proletariat has declined in the last sixty years or so, while public sector workers have become more prominent. The classic skilled, unionized, aristocratic section of industrial workers has been considerably weakened in the neoliberal period. In short, the traditional section of the labor aristocracy has lost power in recent times, but new aristocratic elements have emerged.

112 Standing, op. cit. p. 147-8; Milanovic, op. cit. p. 57.

113 In a *Fortune* magazine survey in 1940, most respondents identified themselves as “middle” class when given three options (upper, middle, lower), but answered “working class” to an open-ended question. Similar polls were conducted in 1996 (*New York Times*) and again in 2016. In short, even in a country like the United States, where the ideology of the “middle class” is pumped from morning to night, most workers see themselves as part of the “working class”. Zweig, op. cit., p. 82; Gilbert, op. cit., p. 260-261.

The central question of the world revolution is still to win the proletariat of the core countries to the revolutionary struggle. The reformism of the labor aristocracy and labor bureaucracies has of course developed and taken root over the last hundred years. However, the class transformations in the neoliberal period (the extraordinary expansion of the lower layers, the loss of some privileges of the upper layers, etc.) show that some progress can be made in this sphere. For example, precarious workers are looking for non-union organizations. It is very important to link these new forms to the political movement. On the other hand, social democracy, which used to be the main rival of revolutionary politics, has largely left the field in the last thirty years. In the coming period, a larger part of the working class, especially the newly proletarianized lower layers, will turn to communism than before, but a significant part will also turn to racist-fascist movements. The turn of the masses to fascism in the core countries is a real threat, especially in the context of the post-2008 economic depression. In both the U.S. and Europe, racist-fascist formations are gaining strength on the basis of anti-immigrant sentiment.

It is certain that the labor aristocracy will not join the revolutionary movement as a whole. In fact, it is not very surprising that some of the most advanced and organized sections of a mass class movement can side with counterrevolution in “revolutionary” periods. Therefore, we should not have the illusionary expectation of uniting the whole class. However, the revolutionary movement does not have the luxury of excluding any section of the workers (unless they openly mobilize against it). After the Cuban Revolution, for example, about two-thirds of the engineers, physicians, accountants, etc. went abroad, but another third chose to stay and serve the revolution. The labor aristocracy can be partially won over to the cause of socialism, or at least neutralized.

Again, the organization of the “lower layer” is crucial. This substratum is large, disorganized, divided into a thousand pieces, underdeveloped in class consciousness. But it is also, almost “instinctively”, the main element of the revolution. How this section can be organized today, of course, requires a more sophisticated, concrete analysis.

After forty years of neoliberal destruction, under the new conditions of the Great Depression since 2008, the working class is slowly waking up. It goes without saying that socialists have a big duty in the given conjuncture. At the same time, it is worth remembering that for a revolution to take place, the masses do not need to experience a tremendous ideological enlightenment; on the contrary, the revolution itself advances the consciousness of the masses. The masses in general, and the workers in particular, learn through practical action. Ideological prejudices, individualistic attitudes, and racist-sexist-religious illusions can be overcome through action. More precisely, they can only be overcome through collective, practical action. A hundred years ago there was racism, conservatism, and sexist prejudice among the masses who made the revolution in Russia. They were also among the masses who made the Chinese and Cuban revolutions. What is really important is that the masses are organized, that the leading elements in these organizations do not give in to racist, sexist, etc. tendencies, and that they define a truly revolutionary line and mobilize the energy of the masses along that line.

Mapping classes: How to distinguish between classes¹

Sungur Savran

One of the most important issues for revolutionary theory is to distinguish between classes, to determine the borders between them, and to grasp, on a realistic basis, the class belonging of groups and individuals that make up society. It is not sufficient to define classes in general, to posit the idea that capitalist society is divided into two main classes, and that certain middle or intermediary classes and strata also exist. To make do with the proposition that those who own the means of production under capitalist society and employ workers form the bourgeoisie and those who have to sell their labour power because they are devoid of any such means form the proletariat implies that lifeless abstractions would suffice for the purpose of revolutionary theory. This theory needs to understand, for the purposes of its daily struggles, where the bourgeoisie starts and where it mingles with the petty-bourgeoisie, what the distinctions are within the petty-bourgeoisie itself, and also what sections of the population are a part of the proletariat. What, for instance, is the class nature of the associations, sometimes semi-public bodies, of the professionals such as lawyers, medical doctors, engineers, architects or veterinarian doctors?

Another question: Is there a commonality between the class positions of public employees, say, on the one hand, of a cashier at a municipal administration or an

¹ This article was originally written in Turkish some time ago. It has been translated into English by the author himself. Many details that were of interest specifically to a Turkish audience have been omitted and the article is thus shorter than the original. Some new ideas have been introduced, but overall, the entire structure and the argumentation have remained the same.

ordinary employee of a tax administration branch or a nurse working at a publicly run hospital and, on the other, the principal of a government-run school or the president of a university or is there, on the contrary, a class opposition? Revolutionary theory needs to answer that question as well. Are employees of banks, advertising companies, hotels members of the petty-bourgeoisie or proletarians or still another category? What is the class position of army officers? These questions may be multiplied ad infinitum. Revolutionary theory cannot make do with defining classes. It has to map them.

This article will try to clarify the questions of what elements classes comprise, where to draw the borders of different classes and what kind of diversity classes display within themselves, all in countries in which capitalist society is to be found either in an advanced stage or at a medium level of development. There is no empirical research involved. It is rather an essay that tries to fix the borders between the different classes on the basis of general observations made in the course of long years of study of Marxist theory coupled with revolutionary activity. A great majority of the observations to be made in what follows will turn out to be true, we believe, both for advanced capitalist societies as well as those that have advanced to a certain degree of medium-level development, such as, for instance, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, South Africa, and South Korea, as well as our native Turkey. Naturally, there are considerable differences in terms of classes both between and within these two categories of countries we have enumerated. The purpose of the article is to present the general lines of the class structure to be observed in these two groups of countries and not to dwell on their peculiarities.

When talking of classes, we should warn against certain common erroneous conceptions regarding class. Even among those people on the left and even among many who are under the influence of Marxism, a common mistake is to think class in terms of revenue. This is a total misconception. Workers who receive high wages are not middle class, they are proletarians. Small shop-owners who can hardly survive and sometimes earn less than some workers are petty-bourgeois and regard themselves as socially superior to proletarians. Certain physicians running their own cabinet may be much richer than many a capitalist, but that does not alter the fact that they are petty-bourgeois. People's income certainly has an impact on the position they adopt in economic and political struggles. But a day will come when a worker paid the highest wage will take a much more radical stand than the poorest among the petty-bourgeois. What is decisive is the potential and actual behaviour of the different classes within class struggle, not their standard of living at a given moment in time.

Secondly, it is not what conception people have of themselves that determines their class, but the material position. A tradition that has its roots in American sociology has been carrying out research based on questionnaires for decades in order to determine the class structure of society, when, let it be added, it does not deny class totally. These are methods that are totally misguided.² These kinds of surveys provide us at most with information about how people perceive their position in society, but say nothing

² In a society where there are pockets of severe poverty, urban or rural, it is common among proletarians who have job security and a decent wage level to consider themselves as "middle class".

as to their real material existence, on the size and distribution of class positions.

Let us, then, briefly turn to the method that we apply in this article for deciding different class positions. Classes are defined on the basis of their position within social production and social reproduction, in other words the reproduction of the social order. The fundamental determinant of the location of a person within social production is the level of control over the means of production, “control” corresponding to private property over these means of production at its highest level. We say “fundamental determinant” because there are also derivative class positions, which are not directly determined by ownership of means of production, but on the relations of such persons to others’ relations to the means of production. What all this means will become clearer when we are dwelling on the different classes in what follows.

What is important for us at this stage is the following: Certain schools with roots within Marxism, to cite the Althusserian school as one instance, contend that class is not determined only by the economic instance, but that other instances, politics and ideology in particular need to be brought in. We are of the opinion that this method comes very near to the potential risk of cutting loose from the materialism of Marxism. Class positions, in our view, are determined by the relations between different groups of human beings within the *sphere of production*. In whatever way may these groups behave in the political sphere, whatever fantastic ideologies may occupy their minds and hearts, their class position defined by production and reproduction is a fundamental given.

Here of course, one should distinguish between the material *position* of a class and the *formation* of that class. Let us take the worker as an example. The workers working within a capitalist factory are proletarians, even if they do not share any cultural affinity to the rest of the work force or even if no workers within the factory have unionised. For instance, the Chinese workers thrown by the caprice of the world market to the city of Mardin in southeastern Turkey have no common points culturally with the Kurdish and Arabic workers working at the same workplace, do not, indeed, even speak their language. But this is no reason why this would become an obstacle that would rule out their status qua workers in terms of class. However, because class formation, as opposed to class position, depends on the rapport between the individuals and groups of individuals that form that class, and thereby turn that class into a social force that struggles together, many aspects come into play here, from class culture and ideology all the way to politics.

What is of interest to us in this article is not the formation of classes as totalities on their own but the mapping of classes, or, in other words, the distribution of individuals into the different classes. Understanding production relations and the place of individuals within social reproduction is decisive for us. However, in certain cases we will also have recourse to (in the sense of a check on arithmetic operations) class formation dynamics as themselves indicative of class positions.

In the process of mapping classes, or what is the same in reverse order, in the distribution of individuals and groups into classes, one needs to take up with special attention the position of individuals who are not active within the sphere of social production or social reproduction. As a matter of fact, different groups are clustered together in this category. To begin with, there are the elderly who have lost their

capacity to work. As pensioners, these individuals should still be considered part of the class they used to belong to during their working life. For instance, retired workers make up a considerable part of the working class.

Another large category, home makers (most usually women) expend a labour that is indispensable for the reproduction of the human race, but because their labour remains within the family, it is not “recorded” by the categories of the market economy and they themselves are considered outside the active population of the country in question.

Children and the young who have not yet become a part of social production, as well as the chronically ill and the disabled who cannot participate in production activities are, in this sense, very different from women. But because class position is determined by social production and social reproduction, all of these categories, despite the dazzling diversity between them, are in a similar situation when it comes to the criterion for their class belonging. The class belonging of homemakers, of children and youth, of individuals who are unable to work is determined, at most general level, through the mediating environment of their families. Thus, when we are talking of the working class (the proletariat), we do not mean only those at the point of production, but also their family members as well.

If we intend to define classes on the basis of relations within social production and reproduction, the fundamental categories of these spheres ought to become a part of the analysis. The activities of production, circulation, division of the product, consumption, the differences between these, the definition of the category of labour itself, activities relating to the reproduction of the social order, the distinction between productive labour and unproductive labour—all these are cornerstones for the effort to grasp the question of classes in capitalist society at least minimally. This article will not attempt to define these in detail. Hence it would be useful to read it together with the article we have published with E. Ahmet Tonak in the British Marxist journal *Capital and Class* on productive and unproductive labour.³ The reader will find there the requisite information for understanding the significance of categories such as production, circulation or division of the product for the fundamental distinctions for individuals participating in production and in activities that serve the reproduction of the social order.

One final point on the scope of the paper. This article limits itself to a perusal exclusively of urban-based classes. We will not discuss the class position of the population based on rural-agricultural socio-economic life. The reason is simple: our lifelong studies and political work have made us intimately familiar with the urban economy and the industrial working class in particular. The rural-agricultural economy and the classes that are shaped by that economy are, of course, not totally alien to us, but we prefer to be much more modest in that area and leave the task of doing something similar for the different relationships in the countryside and the diverse classes and strata within the peasantry to younger Marxists who would accomplish that task much more ably.

3 Sungur Savran & E. Ahmet Tonak, “Productive and Unproductive Labour: An Attempt at Clarification and Classification”, *Capital & Class*, No. 23: 2, 1999.

1. The Bourgeoisie: The agents of capital

The ruling power of modern society is capital. As a concept, capital is the generalised form, under the money form, of the ownership of the means of production. The power brought to the owner of capital this way is used to constantly extract unpaid surplus value from the direct producer, the proletarian. Hence capital is a relationship between two classes. Its sole *raison d'être* is to expand, that is to say to work for the production of and appropriate surplus value and then convert this new value into new capital, thus accumulating capital. According to Marx, capitalists are the “bearers” of the capital relation. What this implies is not some kind of independence of capital from human beings. On the contrary, capital is a definite historically specific relationship between humans. The idea that the capitalist is the “bearer” (“*träger*” in the German original) of the capital relation implies that, whatever the personality, constitution, character or upbringing of the individual capitalist as a human being, s(he) has to conform to the logic of capital as if s(he) were a functionary of the capital relation and behave accordingly *as long as s(he) acts as a capitalist*. Thus, the endeavour to constantly increase the surplus value appropriated and accomplish the accumulation of capital in as swift a manner as possible becomes the subjective aim of the capitalist as well.

It is not impossible for a capitalist to be kind or gregarious or self-sacrificing in other areas of life. But as long as this person acts qua capitalist, s(he) acts according to the logic of capital, apart from certain exceptional situations. If this is not the case, this capitalist will crumble under the weight of competition, which is a mechanism that imposes the immanent laws of capital on the single agents of capital.

There are bearers of capital of differing orders. Those with an unmediated relationship to capital form the bourgeoisie. Naturally, at the centre of these bearers sits the owner of capital or the capitalist. The capitalist is the person who organises economic activity in the sphere of production and/or circulation with his or her own capital, employs wage labour for this purpose, and makes a profit and converts this into additional capital at the end of the process. In daily language, we use the word capital, which is a relation of production, and the word bourgeoisie, which denotes a social class, interchangeably and we will continue to do so in the rest of this article.

At the dawn of the capitalist era, despite the existence of a number of large companies established for the purposes of either long-distance trade and transportation or large-scale investment, the general rule was family businesses. However, toward the end of the 19th century, the corporation began its ascendancy, joint-stock companies proliferated and finally the giant corporation became the dominating factor of capitalism. This led to a situation where the companies were too large to be managed by a single family, with a new layer of managers becoming indispensable for the professional management of the companies. From the early 20th century on new theories were developed to explain this new phenomenon.

The focal point of these theories was the idea that no longer did the owners of capital really exercise control of these big corporations. It was the managers (the so-called “managerial class”) that really took over control and thus a new type of capitalism could be said to have come into existence. There were also those who brought the role of the so-called technocracy to the foreground because of the high technological level of the new production processes and their complex nature.

Our opinion is that the top management of large corporations are the *second-order agents* of these units of capital. Their existence has diversified the ranks of the bourgeoisie. However, it would be a mistake to treat them as a class apart from the bourgeoisie. In effect, the managers of public companies, companies whose shares are freely traded on the stock market, are usually remunerated in part by turning a small share of the stock of the company to these top managers. In time, many of these people themselves become capitalists in their own right.

This is thus the first instance that shows the importance of avoiding a static mode of thinking with respect to the distribution of individuals into classes. A *dialectical* approach that embodies change and development is of the utmost importance in mapping classes. This methodological precept will come into play again and again in very different contexts in what follows. If all this is true, then one should not overlook the following point. The basic revenue of managers derives from their salary. In other words, managers are basically remunerated in the wage form. This brings another warning on our methodological agenda. The form of the revenue should not mislead us. The basic income of a CEO may take the wage form as well as those of an ordinary functionary or an unskilled worker. But in no way does this put them within the ranks of the same social class.

Thus, we have seen that the kernel of the bourgeoisie defined in the narrow sense consists of capitalists in the narrow sense of the term and of elements of the top management of large corporations. Naturally, when we say “capitalists”, we mean not only those who conduct their activities in metropolises and large cities, but also those who deal in commercial and agricultural activities in small towns or even in the countryside. At this beginning of the 21st century, not only in imperialist countries but also in countries that came to capitalism much later, such as Turkey for instance, it is a well-established fact that the hegemonic fraction of the capitalist class is monopoly capital.

Those capitalist countries in which the capitalist mode of production became the dominant mode after the early comers had moved to the imperialist epoch, but did not themselves become imperialist countries have really taken over despite that the type of development Lenin depicted for imperialist countries. In other words, imperialism helped shape capitalist countries in its own image.

Two characteristics of monopoly capital deserve special mention here. First, the leading representatives of this fraction of the capitalist class also display the traits of finance capital. That is to say, the productive activity and in particular the industrial activity here is amalgamated with financial activity in the bosom of a single actor. Secondly, monopoly capital not only brings together industrial and financial activity but very many branches of activity such as industry, agriculture, trade, foreign trade, transportation, energy etc. That is why we prefer to call this kind of capital *combined capital*. In Turkey, the most typical form of organisation of monopoly capital is the holding company.

Not only the main shareholders, but also the CEOs and their deputies, the CFOs, the marketing and sales directors, the human resources directors of holding companies as well as those of their affiliated companies should be considered as bourgeois with respect to their class belonging because their position within the sphere of production

cannot but push them to behave in line with the interests of capital. How narrow or how wide this entire set of officials should be selected can only be decided on a case-by-case approach, taking into consideration the powers of discretion, the duties, and the forms of revenue of the cadres in question. Borderline cases can always create difficulties in classification and categorisation in the social sciences and this is also true for class analysis. Yet these difficulties do not invalidate the accuracy of the categorisation itself.

Holding companies and affiliates have, alongside executives who run the business on a day-to-day basis, Boards of Directors. To these boards are elected, alongside the capitalist owners of the main shares and some top executives, people with the right kind of connection with the state and influential milieus. Among these are included former top-level bureaucrats, former executives of state-owned enterprises in countries where these are important actors, retired generals and more generally intellectuals of various stripes. These are elements that the bourgeoisie rallies to its own ranks from the bureaucratic and intellectual strata.

A professor or a general that is enlisted as member of the Board of Directors of a holding company or a large corporation naturally will not be characterised *ipso facto* as a bourgeois. But there may be cases in which the process proceeds in this direction. Here again it is the laws of the dialectic that have the last say. Any individual may change classes and undergo *embourgeoisement* even late in life. There may be frictions between the incumbents and the newcomer with respect to mores and etiquette. The newcomer may be despised by the vested, as *nouveaux riches* usually are. But this kind of friction also exists between the original members of the class, e.g. frictions between elements of the *haute bourgeoisie* and the *up-and-coming*, between the bourgeoisie of the metropolises and the “provincials” as they are called by the former etc.

At present, in all societies where capitalism has taken hold firmly, there are very large swathes of bourgeois layers outside of the hegemonic fraction of the monopoly capitalists. The great majority of these are grouped under the rubric Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), a term that has taken root in almost all countries. The SME bourgeoisie no doubt displays a lot of diversity within its ranks. There are startups that employ high tech means of production or even innovate in the field of technological change and provide inputs to the world market or large technology companies, as well as those that work with extremely backward technologies and business models to serve only the domestic or even the narrowest kind of local market. A third type of SME is one which is not completely independent and works as a supplier to domestic or foreign firms, sometimes the most famous brands, on the basis of long-term contracts. Finally, there are the so-called “sweatshops”, some of which may be SMEs, but many others are of even of smaller scale and usually categorised as micro-enterprises.

Whichever category an SME fits, each individual or family that owns these firms should be considered as capitalists and members of the bourgeoisie as long as the firm employs a certain number of workers and appropriates the surplus value they produce, thus making it possible for the owner of the firm to live off the surplus labour of others. The difficulty here is the borderline between the small capitalist and the petty-bourgeois. It is too early to dwell on this distinction here for we have not yet defined

the concept petty-bourgeoisie.

A type of relationship that has flourished under present-day circumstances has led to the emergence of a new stratum with its peculiarities within the bourgeoisie. This is the layer of sub-contractors that is spreading like an ink spot. At first sight, outsourcing to sub-contractors appears to be no different from the third type of SME discussed above, the case in which the SME produces for a large company under a long-term contract. Indeed, the two share the same function for the capitalists since both fragment the working-class collective to weaken it. However, to start with, subcontracting is different from this type of SME in that it divides the work collective at a workplace that is indivisible from the point of view of technological and economic calculation in the heart of that same workplace. In other words, the fragmentation of the work collective is not carried out by dividing the workplace, as in the case of the type of SME discussed above, but is inserted like a wedge inside the heart of the workplace.

Secondly, from the vantage point of our discussion in this article, subcontractors as a special layer of the capitalist class exhibit certain intriguing characteristics that also separates them from the SME bourgeoisie. These are capitalists that employ a small work force, but display a deep-rooted difference with respect to their class origin vis-à-vis the majority of capitalists. The boss of the mother company will usually choose them from among former trade-unionists or from within former workers of the enterprise, help them equip themselves minimally in order to manage a business from the economic and administrative points of view, and then turn over to them a part of the business as a subcontractor. Hence what emerges is the symmetrical opposite of the appellation “bourgeois workers” Engels coins for the workers’ aristocracy (to which we will later return), the subcontractor being a “worker bourgeois”! These are the turncoats of the working class, just as there exist turncoats of the left! In the same way as the intellectual turncoat of the left is thoroughly aware of what goes on in the mind of a leftist to a level no true intellectual of the bourgeoisie can detect, these worker turncoats, whether former unionists or former workers, know exactly how the mind of a worker faced with the pressure of capital works and, knowing from inside how workers will react, familiar with all the cultural-ideological forms through which the workers react, can manipulate them much more easily than an ordinary capitalist could.

The existence of these “worker bourgeois” also blurs class lines tremendously in certain working-class families. Some subcontractors have siblings or children who are plain workers! The same family finds itself on the side of both the exploiters and the exploited. This kind of “pluri-class” family may come to exist in other kinds of situations, but here it is the two major classes of the capitalist mode of production that confront each other not in an entire country but within the home!

2. The state bureaucracy

One of the greatest theoretical achievements, one of the most indispensable, is to have unambiguously brought out the class character of the state. This is a guiding star for the struggle of the revolutionary proletariat. No movement within a capitalist

country that does not aim to destroy the state can deliver the emancipation of the working class and, alongside that class, that of the labouring and oppressed majority of society. This theoretical proposition also shows us the way for properly situating certain social groups within capitalist society. Those groups that earn their living by fulfilling the duties of the state in various domains should be taken up under the rubric of the state bureaucracy as a distinct group from others. They are the guardians of the state that proletarian revolutionaries need to destroy.

Before briefly surveying the different components of the state bureaucracy let us make it clear that not all who work for a salary or a wage in a governmental service can be subsumed under the concept “state bureaucracy”. This bureaucracy consists of administrators who, while using the powers handed down by the state, have *a margin of discretion, a degree of freedom of decision on behalf of the state*.

There are, on the one hand, undersecretaries and directors general within ministries, judges and public prosecutors, provincial and district governors, the top brass of the army, police prefects and top-level municipal administrators. There are, on the other hand, workers of state-owned enterprises and tellers at government-owned banks, nurses and teachers, janitors in all governmental departments.

The public officials in the first category have discretionary powers on behalf of the state. Those in the second category are only practitioners within a predetermined division of labour. Only the first of these may be considered as part of the state bureaucracy. Of course, it is not easy to answer the question of where to draw the line between the two as one goes down the bureaucratic hierarchy. The question ought to be taken up in a differentiated manner for the different functional activities of the state. For instance, those who should be considered as part of the state bureaucracy reaches down to much lower levels of the hierarchy when it is a question of the employees of the repressive forces of the state (the army, the gendarmerie, the police, intelligence agencies, prisons etc.) On the other hand, the bureaucracy is confined to the upper echelons of the hierarchy when it comes to hospitals, schools, the tax administration, or municipalities. It has already been pointed out that in scientific enquiry the fuzziness of borders between different categories is an ever-recurring question which does not detract from the usefulness of the categorisation in question. When we come to discussing the proletariat as a class, we will see that both public workers at state-owned enterprises and a majority of public employees should be subsumed under the proletarian class.

British English provides a useful distinction for the two groups of functionaries that we are discussing here. A “public servant” is akin to the concept of the bureaucrat while the concept “public employee” directly brings to mind an ordinary functionary of the state and the so-called state sector.

Now we can pass on to a discussion of the various components of the state bureaucracy. The central nucleus of the state is composed, as Engels has squarely put it, of “armed men” (more and more “armed men and women” in an increasing number of countries.) The army, the police, intelligence agencies and the prison system together form the iron-clad nucleus of the state apparatus. The officers of the army, the ranked agents of the police, intelligence officers and the administrative cadres of prisons are all elements of the state bureaucracy.

Alongside the so-called “security forces”, all functionaries who are in a position within the hierarchy that confers on them discretion on behalf of the state in the conduct of their duties are a part of the bureaucracy as well. Parallel to the central government agencies, the professional administrative cadres of municipalities (local councils) should also be considered as a part of the state bureaucracy. The fantasy world left-wing liberalism, which projects a dream world of democratic opportunities in the local councils, should not obliterate the fact that local government is well and truly an indispensable part of the bourgeois state apparatus. The officials of the judiciary, high court justices, ordinary judges and public prosecutors, as well as the bureaucracy of the ministry of justice in every country are fundamentally important components of the state bureaucracy. Finally, all those professors who assume administrative positions at public universities (university presidents, faculty or school deans and their retinue) become, even if passingly, important elements of the state bureaucracy.

The state bureaucracy under capitalism is a social layer having the central function of protecting the class domination of the bourgeoisie. It acts as the servant of the bourgeoisie, whatever the mediations that come in as it pretends to be above classes. Precisely in the same manner as the state to which it swears allegiance, the material interests of the state bureaucracy are conditional upon the stability, the smooth functioning and the survival of capitalist society. Naturally, because the state implements its function of the protection of the domination of the bourgeoisie over the rest of society with a method peculiar to itself, carrying out many activities in areas that are never the direct responsibility of the bourgeoisie itself, such as security policies, intelligence, diplomacy, war etc., at any given moment, the spokespeople and organisations of the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy may inevitably find themselves at odds on a number of political, economic, cultural etc. issues. Despite these differences, the bureaucracy is always aware during the conduct of its business that its own survival and future are closely linked to the survival and future of capitalism itself.

As opposed to certain views, it must be asserted firmly that *the state bureaucracy is not a class*. Classes are fundamentally characterised on the basis of their relation to the means of production in terms of ownership. This is not how the bureaucracy is defined. Its existence derives from the defence and maintenance of the power of the bourgeoisie, buttressed by the sanction of the use of arms in the last instance. In this sense, it has a mode of existence that is *derivative* of other relations. The members of this social group are forever face to face with the risk of losing their socio-economic position because they have no private property over the means of production. The sanctity of capitalist private property guards against all challenges to the socio-economic power of the bourgeois, save under very special circumstances. The bureaucrat is fallible each single moment. Moreover, the bourgeois has the right to bequeath their socio-economic power to their lineage. The right of succession is a fundamental corollary of the right to private property. However, not even the most powerful of bureaucrats can bequeath their post to their descendants.

The basic revenue form of the bureaucrat is a salary (the wage form). This certainly does not imply that the bureaucrat is a worker. One reason for this is that the bureaucrat, in his or her capacity of representative of the state, is a political

agent of the class domination of the bourgeoisie. Another reason lies in the fact that bureaucrats, especially those in the upper echelons of the state hierarchy, are not under the compulsion to sell their labour power, but have simply selected this predicament themselves. (There is a third point to which we will come back.) The fact that in many languages, including of course English and our native Turkish, the wage paid to the bureaucrat is labelled by a special word (“salary” vs. the wage paid to workers) may be read as an ideological effort to register the difference of the bureaucrat from the worker. Finally, it is a mistake to consider the members of this social group as “petty-bourgeois”. The bureaucracy, as has already been stressed, may take different attitudes to many questions from the bourgeoisie in the course of the development of the class struggle. But this does not make it a variant of the petty-bourgeoisie. This kind of characterisation may hide from view the servility of the bureaucracy to the bourgeoisie and thus may even lead to conclusions that could paralyse the outlook of the proletariat.

It is not solely its objective position and the functions of the state that bind the bureaucracy to the bourgeoisie. To put it differently, it is not because the post that the bureaucrat occupies has been devised so as to ensure that the bureaucrat defend the interests of the bourgeoisie that the former voluntarily protects the latter. At the same time, the bureaucrat is *bought* in a variety of modes. One form is the possibilities provided to the bureaucrat to change classes through passageways established between the bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie. For instance, in those countries where state-owned enterprises played a rather significant part in the development of capitalism, these enterprises have always acted as incubators for future capitalists or corporate executives. Certain countries like Turkey or Egypt have an institutional nexus between the armed forces and certain publicly-owned companies that provides a wholesale corridor of transition between the military staff and the capitalist economy. Retired generals or other senior public administrators are offered seats on the boards of big corporations. A more recent phenomenon is for retired military officers, ranked police officials and intelligence gatherers to become executives or even partners at private security firms. The notorious institution of “revolving doors” also provides a constant to-and-fro for bourgeois cadres of the highest calibre.

Another form in which the bourgeoisie buys bureaucrats is through graft and bribery. All views that reduce this type of corruption to an act of immorality are alien to a scientific treatment of a very fundamental socio-economic phenomenon. Leaving aside the part it plays in competition within the ranks of the bourgeoisie because this lies outside the topic of this paper, *corruption is the major mechanism through which the state bureaucracy is integrated with bourgeois society*. At every level and in every sphere of activity of the state bureaucracy, the *systematic* method through which the bureaucrat can enjoy the worldly fruits of bourgeois society is corruption. This is, at the same time, a mechanism through which the wage form, the basic form in which the bureaucrat is remunerated, is made secondary in importance. For a majority of bureaucrats, the salary is simply a kind of rock-bottom minimum wage. What really determines their standard of living, what makes it possible as they rise through the hierarchical ladder for them to afford a consumption pattern and a lifestyle worthy of the bourgeois and thus provides the opportunity of social cohesion

between the two socio-economic groups in question is this.

Corruption is also a fact of life that makes for a more precise drawing of border lines in the process of class mapping. We stressed earlier that not all who are part of the civil service can be considered bureaucrats, but also admitted that the borderlines between the bureaucracy and the army of ordinary public employees are fuzzy and porous. With the inclusion of graft and bribery, the second major source of income for the bureaucrat alongside the wage (salary) form, the possibility of reducing the indeterminacy between the categories of bureaucrat and public employee is strengthened. Now we can add the criterion of the *corruption/salary ratio* along with our earlier criterion of “discretion on behalf of the state”. The higher this ratio is, the more plausibly may the functionary in question be considered a “bureaucrat”; the lower it is, the more likely is the prospect of considering the functionary in question an ordinary public employee.

Corruption as a systematic source of revenue for the bureaucrat sheds light on another question. Earlier, we took up the question of why the bureaucrat could not be subsumed under the proletariat despite the fact that the basic form of revenue of the bureaucrat is the same as the worker, the wage form. We talked of two different reasons there. And we briefly mentioned that there was a third reason. The higher the corruption/salary ratio is, the farther away from the mass of the proletariat the bureaucrat is removed by the nature of things. Thus, even if the basic revenue form for the bureaucracy remains the salary, it transpires that the bureaucrat does not subsist on the basis of the sale of his or her labour power. The bureaucrat gets richer not by selling labour power but himself or herself!

The police force as a special category

Now we come to a category that is explosive matter: the rank-and-file elements of the police force. The point of taking up the police separately from all other public employees should be clear. We distinguished above two main groups of employees on the payroll of the state, central and local. Those who wield a decision-making power we called the “state bureaucracy” and those who simply carry out the routine business of government departments without any power of discretion “public employees”. We will see later on, when we study the proletariat, that throughout decades and centuries, as the state has expanded and become a sprawling organisation, the mass of “public employees” evolved towards a class position of merging into the proletariat. On the basis of this scheme the rank-and-file police officer is to be seen as a member of the proletariat as well. However, this would be a facile conclusion to draw. We have to look into the police force more closely.

The reason is that the police force is distinguished from the large masses of “public employees” by certain specific characteristics. The most important point is that the police force is the direct practitioner of the armed power of the state on the masses of the people. When they are exercising their profession, on many occasions they are faced with delicate situations in which a power of discretion is indispensable. The armed power of the police force gives it a high degree of deliberation and makes the police officer even more powerful than many a civilian top bureaucrat. Secondly,

there is a corollary to this: the police always have to confront the demands of the exploited and the oppressed, starting with the major contender, the proletariat. It is a duty for the police to contain and, frequently, to repress forcibly the collective action of the exploited and oppressed masses. This alienates the police from the proletariat and other fighting masses, independently of any subjective orientation and ideological bent, simply by the nature of their material condition of existence. However, this also makes the police officer susceptible to ideologies hostile to the proletariat, including fascism. Witness the recent revolt of the French police force against what they consider the unfair attitude of the judiciary and even the Macron government to their righteous struggle against the youth of Maghrebin and sub-Saharan origin of the *banlieues* in France. It is common knowledge that more than half the French police force is organised under leaderships that extend their allegiance to the proto-fascist *Rassemblement national* (RN-National Rally) of Marine Le Pen.

Thirdly, graft and bribery, a weighty part of the top and middle categories of the state bureaucracy as we saw above, is extremely commonplace for the police. Finally, extensive sections of the police force adopt a relationship of complicity with criminal organisations in return for a share of their illicit income, which obviously again brings the police force closer to state bureaucrats rather than the ordinary public employee. It is true that this kind of relationship between the mobster or the cartel, on the one hand, and the police, on the other, is established by the ranked officers of the police, but the requirements of secrecy will, in many cases, push some of the money to be diverted to the ordinary officer as hush money. Moreover, the rank-and-file officer always has the possibility of extortion from local petty criminals. This last point brings the police officer into contact with the lumpen proletariat and often instils in the officer a whiff of gang culture, which has its reflection in the fact that police officers use a foul language full of profanities, which they then employ (at least in our native Turkey) when fighting protest movements.

It is true that the rank-and-file police officers are plebeian elements. They sometimes come from families of public employees or the traditional petty-bourgeoisie, but they are mostly the children of proletarians and peasants. Their own position bears a certain resemblance to that of the proletariat. They are wage workers, although enjoying a lot of privileges so as to persuade them that their difficult job is worth doing. The fact that their class position is akin to that of the worker is confirmed by the fact that, at least in Europe, many countries allow the police officer to join unions of their own. Naturally, it would be a mistake to put these unions in the same place as the regular trade unions of the working class. They are more like corporations that defend the professional interests of a special body of men and (increasingly also) women. Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that they are the collective organisers of striving for better conditions for the ordinary police officer, regarding wages, hours, conditions of work etc. But again, this struggle is usually consciously isolated from the rest of the union movement.

The picture we have depicted shows that rank-and-file police officers are a reactionary force by their very nature under ordinary circumstances and, despite the similarity between their material conditions of existence and those of the proletariat at large, can by no means be considered to be a part of the latter. However, under

exceptional circumstances, in times of grave political crisis or civil war or revolution, their common material conditions with that of the proletariat pushes some of them towards the rank of the proletariat. The experience of Turkey is instructive in this context. In the late 1970s, when a civil war was pushing Turkey to the brink of a final settling of the accounts between the extremely rabid fascist movement of the time and the socialist-communist-revolutionary movement (consisting of a multitude of different parties and organisations), in a country where unionisation for the police force had never been a legal right, there came into being two “associations” in the bosom of the police force, both of them welcoming all ranks (including the ordinary police officer) as members. One was the organisation hegemonized by the fascist elements and also including Islamist and the more traditional right-wing elements, Pol-Bir. This was no surprise for the Turkish state security institutions had always had multiple channels through which organic links were established with the fascist movement.

What was astounding was that another part of the police force established Pol-Der, which was far from remaining a minority tendency and recruited both ranked and ordinary police officers all around the country and used explicit “revolutionary” and “socialist” language and took entirely combative positions vis-à-vis the fascist movement. This is an experience to be closely studied and any similar experience that have arisen in other countries in times of crisis should be brought to the attention of the international working-class movement.

3. The petty-bourgeoisie and the middle classes

In all capitalist societies, outside the major classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the third social group that can be identified on the basis of its relationship to the means of production is the petty-bourgeoisie. The name petty-bourgeoisie can sometimes be misleading as it is construed to stand for the small-scale bourgeoisie. This is not true for the petty-bourgeoisie is not a part of the bourgeoisie. The petty-bourgeoisie may be said to bring together in a single economic agent both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The petty-bourgeois both owns his or her means of production and engages in production with his or her labour. The small-scale bourgeoisie, on the other hand, or the small capitalist, as we have seen when discussing the category SMEs, is the name given to the capitalist who has placed the surplus value he or she extracts from however small a workforce at the centre of economic activity. Listing some typical petty-bourgeois categories will make the difference clear: small farmers who employ family labour; groceries, green groceries, or convenience stores; car repair garages; carpenter workshops; dry-cleaning stores; newspaper kiosks; barber shops; neighbourhood pizza or burger joints etc.

These should be distinguished from the small boss, who, even with a workforce of two dozen hands, even with a minimal level of fixed capital investment, organises the labour process, keeps it under tight control, establishes the commercial connections, does all the primitive accounting, but ***does not participate in the production process***. What distinguishes the small capitalist from the petty-bourgeois is not whether the former employs labour outside the family and the latter does not. As a matter of fact,

it is possible, indeed common, for the petty-bourgeois to employ workers for help in their small business. The barber or the garage owner or the carpenter each has their apprentices, sometimes several. Very small restaurants have their waiters and chefs of sorts. To draw the lines between the small capitalist and the petty artisan or trader is not easy (as in many other cases of borderlines, as we have already seen). Nonetheless, there are certain criteria that are useful to apply when looking at borderline cases. Perhaps the easiest and most practical of these criteria is the fact that the petty-bourgeois usually participates in the production process while the small boss organises that process, oversees the labour discipline and establishes commercial links.

The petty-bourgeoisie is basically divided into two sub-categories. The old or traditional petty-bourgeoisie is a class fraction that capitalism has taken over originally from precapitalist society or from the period of transition from precapitalist society to capitalism. The most salient components of this fraction are the small holder in the countryside and the petty trader and the artisan in the urban environment. A great many of these are doomed to proletarianization over time, although at differing tempos in different countries. As technology develops and as capital organises ever newer economic branches on new bases, the capacity of the petty-bourgeois to compete with capital on matters of scale of production, new techniques and the capacity in marketing will be diminished. Almost like a natural event, the small producer or trader cedes ground progressively to the larger enterprise. This is no doubt a law that operates tendentially, sometimes even being reversed for a while for concrete reasons. But in the long run, it is inevitable that the bulk of the small peasantry, the artisan and the small trader will have to join the ranks of the proletariat.

The liquidation of the small holder farmer is a law familiar in every country. As for the urban scene, the concentration and centralisation of capital and its combined nature, a concept defined earlier, extending its activities to a multitude of different economic sectors gives it the upper hand when confronted with petty production and trade. For instance, repair and maintenance, both for cars and in areas such as white goods, plumbing etc. in the home, used to be a very important activity for the petty artisan. However, over the decades, “after sales services” by the big brands have tended to take over. The repairmen who come to the home are no longer people who have a small business of their own but more and more wage-workers who work for big companies. It is true that the proletarianization of the petty-bourgeoisie is a very long-winded and complex process. Most emphatically, it is hardly ever a question of transformation within a single generation, but extends over many generations.

The new or modern fraction of the petty-bourgeoisie, on the other hand, is born on the basis of dynamics proper to capitalism and is constantly reproduced. The modern petty-bourgeoisie, as opposed to the traditional, is recruited from the educated strata of society, leading a modern lifestyle. The typical case is that of what is called the “professionals”. Pharmacies, cabinets of physicians, dentists and veterinarian doctors, freelance lawyers’ offices, small-scale engineering, architecture and interior design studios, freelance accountants and financial consultants’ offices etc. are the mainstay of a labour force of graduates with particular skills who lead a petty-bourgeois mode of existence of working with their own means of production. These professions earn

much more than the typical traditional petty-bourgeois jobs of the traditional fraction of the same class. The liberalisation of the rules that regulate the work of many of these professions under the neoliberal restructuring of capitalist economies after the 1980s has increased the salience of this modern petty-bourgeoisie. Since these professions are, as a rule, organised within powerful professional organisations in almost all countries with a certain level of capitalist development in medical associations, bar associations, engineers and architects' chambers etc., a spirit of corporatism exists within each profession.

Besides these “professionals”, who exercise their work on the basis of very special skills within the requirements of very strict regulations, there exist other components of the modern petty-bourgeoisie as well. In the tourism and catering business (small or boutique hotels, select restaurants, an entire sector of cafés, pubs, and bars), in the fashion and *prêt-à-porter* business (high-end boutiques, perfumeries, special brand-name shops), in the accessories and gifts business, in the distribution of cars in many countries there exist a host of different strata who are part of the very presentation and service of the business and therefore are engaged in the production process but also own the means of production of the business in question. Depending on the size of the establishment, these may be the modern end of the SME sector or, alternatively, involve the work process of strata of the modern petty-bourgeoisie.

There is also another component of the petty-bourgeoisie that is a rapidly rising stratum of self-employed skilled workers, similar in this to the classical type of “professionals”. These are the small-scale self-employed entrepreneurs of the computer and software production businesses. Although they are similar to the “professionals” in terms of the particularity of their skills, the industry is much less regulated than the medical or legal or engineering sectors and without a special deontology of its own.

We have already noted that the overriding peculiarity of the modern wing of the petty-bourgeoisie is that their professions are the child of capitalist development and technological advance. This, coupled with the fact of an overall high average educational level necessary for many of the occupations within this wing of the petty-bourgeoisie, creates an increasingly international labour market for these professions. In the past, it was a small number of countries such as Canada or Australia that systematically pursued a policy of importing MDs and engineers and computer scientists and software wizards from other countries with a lower income level. This policy is now beginning to spread like wildfire. No doubt, this growth in the brain-drain from less advanced countries to the imperialist ones or even from countries like the United Kingdom to the better off countries of continental Europe will create a host of problems socially speaking, but at the individual level strengthen the hands of the members of the modern petty-bourgeoisie even further.

Politically, the modern petty-bourgeoisie shares some common characteristics with the traditional wing of the same class. The most important is the fact that they feel both squeezed between the hammer of the bourgeoisie and the anvil of the proletariat and very often oscillate between the two, depending on their perception of who is stronger at the moment and has more to offer. However, there also exist vital differences between the two wings. The most important of these differences derives from the fact that the traditional wing bitterly feels the danger of liquidation

and proletarianization. Because the development of capitalism and the rise powerful corporations confronts traditional businesses with the threat of extinction, they tend to be susceptible to anti-capitalist rhetoric of a rather superficial kind. In all the historic instances of fascism, this kind of rhetoric turned out to be quite effective on the masses of the traditional petty-bourgeoisie.

Of course, this is skin-deep anti-capitalism for the real fear of the traditional petty-bourgeoisie is the prospect of falling into the ranks of the proletariat. Hence its instinct of protecting its deeply-cherished private property in the means of production. However, unlike the modern wing, many of whom may be considered to be “wealthy” by the average standards of the societies they live in, the traditional strata have a living standard much closer to the better-off strata of the working-class, mostly share the same neighbourhoods with them, and are culturally closer to the workers than the capitalists.

The modern wing of the petty-bourgeoisie, for its part, enjoys, on the average, a much higher standard of living, even at times higher than the SME echelons of the bourgeoisie, accordingly has a consumption pattern quite similar to many members of the bourgeoisie, and shares with them the same spaces (gated estates or lakeside communities, poche restaurants, second houses in high-end summer resort towns and villages etc.), and is therefore much more closely tied to the bourgeoisie. This wing also has a much more cosmopolitan outlook on life, having, as many a bourgeois, studied abroad or worked temporarily in foreign countries at length and taken trips to many different countries, indeed continents. Knowledge of foreign languages, first and foremost of English of course, is also, more and more, a common trait among the members of the modern petty-bourgeoisie in all countries.

Frequent readers of our journal will be aware that in the previous annual English edition, *Revolutionary Marxism 2022*, in an article titled “The Age of Egoism”, we dwelled in minute detail on the modern petty-bourgeoisie both in terms of class formation, but more importantly its specific impact upon the ideological, cultural and political life of the advanced and medium level capitalist countries within the last half century. We refer the reader to that article for a much deeper study of this very important class fraction.

4. The proletariat

The main antagonist confronting the bourgeoisie under capitalism and its “grave digger”, to use Marx’s famous expression, is the proletariat or working class. Let us start out with a warning about terminology: although the proletariat and the working class are identical for the purposes of Marxism, several distinctions in some languages, for instance “worker vs. employee”, “blue collar vs. white collar”, “public worker vs. public employee” may be misleading by reducing the scope of “worker” and of “working class”. Employees or public employees may very well be proletarians but the dualities mentioned may obstruct an understanding of this. For the purposes of this article, we will assume that the proletariat and the working class refer to a single, identically same entity. After all, we are in theoretical territory here and everyday usage is something to which we attribute only secondary importance. We may leave

aside the question of how to explain to the masses that an employee and a worker may both be workers. Those are very serious questions which should best be taken up in the context of practical party politics.

As we move to define the proletariat, we should make a second warning: the proletariat is by no means restricted to the industrial working class. It is true that the industrial worker has a central place within the proletariat, both because of the vital role played by industry in the capitalist countries, but also because of the prominent place of this layer of workers has within the working class struggles as a whole. But central importance does not imply that this central actor is the only one. Moreover, at the point which the world economy has reached at this beginning of the 21st century, workers working in industries such as telecommunications, transportation, finance and some other industries have assumed great importance as well, sometimes on a par with the industrial proletariat. Hence the definition ought to be much broader.

Every person who is compelled to sell his or her labour power and does not undertake the function of an agent of capital is a member of the working class. In a footnote added to the 1888 Edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels provides a very plain definition: “By proletariat [is meant] the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live.” We have added to this the further condition “who does not undertake the function of an agent of capital”. This definition immediately excludes corporate executives who we have defined above as second-order agents of capital and yet receive their remuneration in the wage form. For even if their remuneration is made in the wage form, they are not proletarians for in most cases they are not compelled to sell their labour power but choose to do this and they are agents of capital. We will see below that there are other categories whose remuneration takes the wage form but who are not unambiguously a part of the proletariat.

This definition shows us the following: Wage workers who are not employed in industry but in a string of other sectors are also proletarians. If we were to provide a list that covers certain sectors not usually considered, workers in agriculture and animal husbandry, fisheries, transportation, telecommunications, the media, tourism, catering, construction, trade (and in particular large retail), finance, health and education, the culture industries (publishing, film, orchestras and concert halls, museums etc.) are, to a great extent, part of the proletariat. To this should be added branches that provide services to the corporate sector such as advertising and public relations and those that provide services to the consumer such as fitness centres, beauty salons, dance courses etc.

Alongside all of this, a great part of those who work for the public sector in the broad sense of the term are also a part of the proletariat. What sets state-owned enterprises apart from the rest of the public sector is that the goods and services that they produce are sold as commodities or, in other words, that they are economic enterprises under public ownership. Thus, the workers who are employed by these enterprises are *ipso facto* proletarians. To this should be added those who work both in the central government departments and local councils, ***except those who have the power of discretion on behalf of the state*** (see above under “The State Bureaucracy”). According to this distinction, the district governor is not a proletarian, but the cashier

at the tax office is. The director of the construction department of the local council who has authority for zoning and construction decisions is not a proletarian, but the garbage collector (sanitation worker) is.

It should be noted that the situation of a nurse who works for a public hospital is the same as the nurse who is employed profitably by a private hospital. The same goes for the education sector etc. Here we need to touch upon two points in order to clarify certain misunderstandings. The first point has to do with the distinction productive labour and unproductive labour. According to a conception that was dominant for a long time within Marxism, a conception held by an influential figure such as Nicos Poulantzas as well, those workers whose labour is productive are proletarians; those whose labour is unproductive, on the other hand, are petty-bourgeois. In order to grasp the meaning of this statement, let us first remind the reader what the two concepts of productive versus unproductive labour mean. Productive labour is labour that produces surplus value for capital; unproductive labour, on the other hand, is labour that does not produce surplus value even though it may be necessary for the completion of the overall circuit and reproduction of capital.

The first category involves the obvious instances of workers who work in industry, agriculture, mining etc. producing material goods, but also workers who work in services sectors, such as transportation, telecommunications, tourism, catering, health, and education. In other words, just as a metalworker produces surplus value for the capitalist who employs him or her, so does a flight attendant, the hotel bellboy, the teacher at a private language school or a nurse at a private clinic. As for the category unproductive labour, this covers, *grosso modo*, the labour of those workers who are employed by capital in circulation (trade, finance etc.) and those who work for the public sector whose products are not sold in the commodity form.

The distinction productive vs. unproductive labour carries great importance with respect to the dynamics of capital accumulation. Since capital accumulation is the conversion of surplus value into additional capital, it is of great importance to know which types of labour contribute to the production of surplus value as this will define the prospects for and the constraints facing capital accumulation. On the other hand, the distinction in question bears no importance on the class position of the workers who expend the two types of labour. We saw above that what defines a proletarian is the compulsion to sell one's labour power. It is of no relevance to the worker being a worker or not whether the labour that the worker expends as a result of this sale of labour power is productive or unproductive. Both of them are under the compulsion to sell this special commodity that is labour power because they are both devoid of means of production. This is precisely what makes both of them proletarians. In short, the young woman who bides her day away at the cash register at a large retail shop or a bank teller is as much a proletarian as a metal or textile worker or a driver of transfer coaches of a tourism company.

Secondly, there is a tendency on the left (at least this is the case for Turkey) to characterise public employees (from teachers to janitors) as petty-bourgeois. Let us first point out that "petty-bourgeois" is not a label that we should or could hang on anyone who is neither a bourgeois nor a proletarian. As we have already seen, the petty-bourgeoisie is a class with peculiarities of its own with respect to the control

of the means of production and participation in the labour process. To label everyone outside the two major classes “petty-bourgeois” would be a reductionist approach, making it impossible for Marxists to distinguish between the likely political attitudes of different classes, strata and categories in times of critical change. Going beyond this kind of problem, it makes no sense to deny that a labourer who is compelled to sell his or her labour power and is *not* an agent of capital is not a proletarian.

There are different ways in which this proposition can be tested. Let us look at two. For a great part of the functionaries of the state, it is now possible, after all the privatisation activity we have gone through in many countries in the last half-century, to do the same work in the private sector, i.e. by selling one’s labour power to a capitalist. For instance, someone who is today a teacher at a state educational institution may very well start working at a private school or what is called a charter school tomorrow. The job he or she is doing remains pretty much the same, the person has sold his or her labour power in either case, but if public employees are characterised as “petty-bourgeois”, then this person will have changed from being a “petty-bourgeois” into a proletarian overnight, all the while doing the same job for a different kind of boss.

On the other hand, people who do the same job in different governmental departments are legally classified under different categories. A person (say a driver or a janitor) may be classified as a worker working in the highway administration, but as a public employee doing exactly the same job in the tax administration. To call that person petty-bourgeois in one case and worker in the other is a caricature of class analysis.

To test the proposition that people employed by capital in unproductive sectors (trade and finance etc.) or ordinary wage workers of the public sector whose products are not sold as commodities are as much proletarian as industrial or transportation workers, we can use two different methods. One of these tests has to do with the work processes involved. Over time, the work processes of both banking and commercial workers and ordinary public employees are becoming similar to that of industrial workers. Both layers of workers are working more and more in an environment in which they have lost control of the work process and with a tempo that is typical of Taylorist labour processes in factories. Imagine a bank teller having to serve a new customer every so many minutes and also having to respond to phone calls simultaneously. Imagine also the worker at the cash register point of a big retailer having to serve one after another customer without respite. This is no different than the excruciating rhythm of the Taylorist factory. Even worse, the workday is even longer than in the factory. In certain seasons and especially at year-end, bank branches open at 9 am and the tellers remain after they close at around 5 pm to finish business off as the year end operations press the entire organisation. We are thus talking of 12- or 13-hour workdays.

As for government departments, the mechanisation and uniformization of work here is only beginning and spreading to the manifold contingents of public employees at a varied pace. But the overall tendency observed in finance and trade is valid here as well.

The same goes for class formation. The two most typical forms of the participation

of the proletariat in social struggles have advanced in the ranks of both unproductive private sector workers and public employees: unionisation and strikes. Although, historically speaking, it was the industrial workforce that first created trade unions, this tendency later on penetrated the ranks of the workers of financial and commercial enterprises. At present, in almost all countries with a certain level of unionisation of the workforce, many different strata of the working class, including teachers, nurses and other public employees are organised in unions.

Having said all this, we should not forget that the proletarianization of large swathes of public employees has come about over a long period of time. In the earlier parts of the 20th century, and *a fortiori* in the 19th century, it was almost impossible to advance the idea that public employees such as teachers or nurses, let alone medical doctors, were a proletarian layer. They were rather like a caste with special skills that had the last word to say in their own domain. It took the entire education and health systems to become mass systems with a mass workforce wielding skills that were now extensively shared by thousands and tens of thousands of other workers for the corps of teachers and nurses to become a part of the proletariat. Before that these professions were much more akin to those proper to the state bureaucracy (but never the petty-bourgeoisie contrary to legend). The translation of this into the sphere of class formation was that teachers' unions was a more recent phenomenon.

After this bird's eye view of the proletariat, we will now turn our gaze to areas that are more problematic. Among these areas are the privileged layers of the class, such as the labour aristocracy and the labour bureaucracy, the medium- and lower-level managers, semi-proletarians of different types, the unemployed and the urban poor, the lumpen proletariat. We will then wind up by looking at some special non-class categories.

The labour aristocracy and the workers' bureaucracy

Even if we limit our view to a single country, there can be no doubt that there is an infinite number of divisions within the working class. Let us make a tentative list of these, without even trying to be exhaustive. There are first layers within the class that differ from each other in terms of the conditions of employment and work. Skilled and unskilled, permanent versus subcontracted workers, part-time workers, workers on temporary contract, on-call workers, workers of large corporations versus workers of sweatshops and small firms working unregistered, unionised versus non-unionised, workers of different legal status (worker versus public employee etc., private sector versus public sector)—and the list goes on.

Secondly, there are differences that derive from migration: workers from peoples long-established on the territory of that country ("native" workers) work under very different conditions from workers who have migrated to or received refugee status from the country, regular or irregular from the point of view of their legal status. The differences often lead to contradictions, sometimes even violent conflicts.

Thirdly, there may be very deep-going contradictions between races, nations, ethnic or religious groups, between those that are in a dominant position, the position of the oppressor, and those that are the oppressed. Fourthly, great differences arise between men and women in all countries, although to a varying degree from country

to country.

Each of these divisions, as well as others we have not touched upon, plays an important part in class struggles and at times turns in certain countries into a vital, decisive, even strategic problem that hinders the unification of the working class in its confrontation with the bourgeoisie. Assessing all of these problems that arise for class struggles and revolutionary activity, fighting to rally the class around the long-term and general interests of the working class (including here the international dimension as well) rather than the short-term interests of a more limited section of the class is a duty of immense importance for proletarian revolutionaries. But there is one among these topics that is of a decisive weight in class struggle. ***This is a contradiction that renders the class weakest where in fact it is the strongest.*** Here, it is a question of the strongest forces of the class being incorporated into the social order through special interests. We are talking about the entire problem of the labour aristocracy and the workers' bureaucracy.

To begin with, let us define our terms as clearly as possible. The concept labour aristocracy was first used by Engels for certain layers of the British working class, the most advanced contingent of the international proletariat in his day, and was later attributed a very important place in Lenin's thinking. Engels named those layers of the proletariat that had great material advantages when compared with the rest and therefore considered themselves as socially superior and as a result came to terms with the capitalist social order the labour aristocracy and called them "bourgeois workers" because they had become assimilated by the system.

Lenin took up this concept of Engels and connected it with two phenomena of his day. First, Lenin regarded the privileged position of the labour aristocracy as a result of the "bribing" of these layers on the basis of the super profits made possible by imperialism, a part of which is used as hush money. Secondly, he traced the material social roots of the opportunistic, reformist, social-patriotic current within socialism that started its ascendancy at the end of the 19th century and moved to the side of the capitalist-imperialist order as soon as World War One erupted to these layers of the working classes of imperialist countries. In other words, with Lenin, the labour aristocracy became a theoretical concept that was to play a key part all throughout the imperialist epoch.

There is not a shred of doubt that the concept labour aristocracy still preserves its centrality and has shed light on many a development in imperialist countries throughout the 20th century and the most recent quarter of a century. However, today we need to extend the validity of the concept to countries outside the circle of imperialist countries and apply it to an understanding of countries which, despite having reached quite an advanced level of capitalist development, are nonetheless still subordinated to imperialism. In our day, a labour aristocracy has arisen in countries such as Brazil or India, Turkey or South Africa, alongside the large masses of workers that work unregistered for a miserable minimum wage or even lower pay or, giving up even looking for a decent job, subsist on the basis of whatever unstable employment they can lay their hand on and fall into the depths of what is called the urban poor for lack of a better name (of which more in the next section).

The labour aristocracy in question consist of workers who work in large

corporations, whether publicly owned or private, as members of a unionised workforce. This proposition immediately raises a question: if the material basis of the labour aristocracy is hush money given to the higher organised echelons of the class out of imperialist super profits, how can we talk of a labour aristocracy in countries that are not (yet) imperialist countries, that are in fact countries that are subordinated to imperialism? The answer to this question is as follows: imperialistic exploitation is not the only source of super profits. The latter may also flow from advanced technology and business models, scale economies and marketing power. The advantages that these bring to powerful individual units of capital make it possible for such units to appropriate an additional share of total surplus value, raising their profitability above the general rate of profit. Obviously, the super profits appropriated by imperialist corporations are much higher than the large corporations of these countries. But given these limits, some corporations and enterprises will obtain super profits way higher than the average rate of profit for that country. It is these that pay a part of these super profits to their work force in order to maintain “industrial peace” and also raise productivity further (a virtuous circle sets in here), if, that is, their work force is effectively unionised.

So, there is now a layer of workers in such non-imperialist industrialised countries that represents a labour aristocracy. It is possible to recognise these even from their lifestyle. Many live in petty-bourgeois neighbourhoods. They drive a recent model car. They have the possibility of taking a summer holiday trip. They strive to offer their children the same kind of opportunities enjoyed by the children of the higher classes. Some have unions which run their own hospital or health centre or if not, the unions provide private health insurance policies to their workers and their families. None of this is undeserved. In fact, apart from the private health insurance (healthcare obviously should be public, free and high-quality), these standards of living should be provided to all workers. However, the fact is that these are special privileges in a country where a majority of the working class lives from hand to mouth. They become a labour aristocracy.

As for the workers’ bureaucracy, this is an entirely different layer of the working class. As opposed to the labour aristocracy, which, despite its economic privileges, is nonetheless, by the very fact of its conditions of existence *a part of the proletariat*, the workers’ bureaucracy, despite its origins within the class for the most part, is now a layer that has *risen above the proletariat*. In societies in which capitalism has reached a certain level of development, the workers’ bureaucracy finds its main source in the trade-union bureaucracy. In many countries, including our native Turkey, the workers’ bureaucracy consists only of the union bureaucracy. Beyond the advantages in terms of pay provided by being a professional union leader, the union bureaucracy spirit is more relevantly formed by the provision of a car (as well as a driver) for personal use, special *per diem* possibilities, the payment of all kinds of expenses out of the accounts of the union etc. In other words, this is the direct product of the material benefits that accrue to the professional union leader. Not all unionists give in to the lure of such benefits to the same extent, but it must be remembered that the person who is now offered this very secure mode of existence has been a proletarian all his life before reaching this office.

Nonetheless, since the level of adaptation changes from union leader to union leader, it is not right nor fair to say that all professional union leaders are union bureaucrats. The true indicator of this mode of material existence is the quality of the relations established with the bosses' organisations and individual bosses, on the one hand, and the government authorities, on the other. If leaders that have been elected to lead the fighting organisations of the working class have created a web of relations with the bosses and the state that rather than facing the prospect of conflict is based on class collaboration, that implies a capitulation of the union leader in question to the material comfort of his or her position. This, in turn, carries the divorce of the mode of material existence of the bureaucrat from the rank and file even further. The income flow to the bureaucrat is now not confined to the salary and the perks that we have enumerated above. Receiving bribes during the collective bargaining process from the bosses or using EU funds or other sources that have been extended to the union by international donors for personal purposes tie the bureaucrat hand and feet to the interests of the capitalist social order.

It is, however, interesting to see that even the well-established bureaucracy of powerful but soulless unions sometimes start to fight the bosses fiercely under certain circumstances. This can happen not because the established bureaucracy is still composed of "honourable" individuals, but because the union is a purely working-class organisation and thus as an organism it can transmit all the strain and stress existing within the rank and file to the top leadership under circumstances favourable to a real fight. Hence one should avoid two contrasting but equally harmful mistakes. The union bureaucracy should not be identified with the bourgeoisie, but on the other hand there should be no illusions about it going all the way once it has picked up a fight.

Although the union bureaucracy forms the backbone of the workers' bureaucracy, in countries where one or more workers' parties have taken root on a mass basis, that is to say where a political workers' movement has developed, the workers' bureaucracy is also recruited from the ranks of that movement. Think of France or Italy. In these countries, mass workers' parties, whether "communist" or "social democratic", have had their members elected to positions in local councils, including as mayors, as well as to the legislative as members of parliament, senators etc. Even if these parties are constantly in opposition (which is far from being the case), their elected members, if very special measures of the type the Bolsheviks applied over their elected officials are not in place, will become, in the long run, functionaries that tend to the requirements of the reproduction of the capitalist order. The same is true for the top professional leadership of these parties. The intellectual elements of these same parties are also integrated into the bourgeois parliamentary system since they work as aides or councillors to the elected politicians. So many of the parties in question have been thoroughly bureaucratised when they finally come to power (think of the first term when Lula took office in 2003 in Brazil).

There exist two factors that set the party bureaucracy apart from the union bureaucracy in certain ways. One is that trade unions, by their very constitution, remain working-class organisations whatever happens to them while political parties may very well become bourgeois parties over an extended period of time of erosion.

The other is that the union bureaucracy is overwhelmingly recruited from within the working class while the bureaucrats that come forth from political parties may have their origins in very different classes. For instance, a professional politician with roots in the petty-bourgeoisie or an intellectual having been elected as an MP should be considered as a member of the workers' bureaucracy because they owe their position as MP or local councillor or advisor to a party that the workers have voted for on the basis of their belief, right or wrong, that this is "their" party. Hence, they are the representative, for good or bad, of the working class within parliament or the local council.

Before winding up this section, we need to touch upon a very important difference between the labour aristocracy and the workers' bureaucracy in terms of their future potentialities. Although the labour bureaucracy is a layer of the working class that feels itself privileged due to its material conditions and therefore has had its instinctive revolt against the social order pared down to a considerable extent, acts as a factor of moderation, or even of reaction (as in the case of racism in imperialist countries) its assimilation to the capitalist order is conditional: When its privileges are pruned or even squarely taken back, the labour aristocracy will have to fight back as other layers of the working class do. For its mode of existence, whatever its privileges, is still that of a proletarian. Moreover, this layer of the proletariat is usually one of the best-educated, highly skilled, and highly-unionised layers of the class. Its entry into the battlefield is of capital importance. *The labour aristocracy is not a counter-revolutionary force.*

On the other hand, the workers' bureaucracy, and in particular the union bureaucracy, has risen above the class, thanks to its mode of material existence. It lives a non-proletarian life. It has established intimate links with the capitalist social order. As we have pointed out, it sometimes happens that in daily struggles it may seem bold enough to take a tough stand. But because it has completely been assimilated by the social order, it is a counter-revolutionary force.

We hope it has become clear why we have taken up these two layers in a separate section from the rest of the class. At the beginning of this section, we said these two strata render the working class weak where it is in fact the strongest. The section, we trust, has shed light on that proposition.

Mid-level and lower-level managers

We have seen that the distinctive characteristic of the proletariat is that of selling one's labour power due to a condition of total divorce from the means of production. As a result of this condition in which he or she finds herself, the proletarian is compelled to take a job in return for a wage in order to survive. We have also seen that not everyone who works for a wage is a proletarian. Individuals from other classes may also be receiving their basic revenue under the wage form. The most important groups that we have so far come across who receive their basic income under the wage form but are not proletarians are top executives of corporations and members of the state bureaucracy. Tracing the argument further in the case of the top executives,

we should now look at the class position of the middle and lower ranks of the leading cadres of capitalist companies.

We have already characterised the top executives of corporations as members of the bourgeois class. For instance, the director of the human resources department of a big company has been promoted, so to speak, into the ranks of the bourgeoisie. Turning to those who have shouldered a part of the management but are working as mid-level or lower-level managers working either directly at the point of production or in different positions within the human resources, planning, control, marketing, sales, supplies, accounting, and other divisions, how are we going to assess their class position?

Here a first distinction should be drawn between those who take part in the production process and can apply their knowledge and skills in the field of technology from those that work in other departments. The engineers and other technical staff who take part in the production process in a large capitalist enterprise are, in a very plain sense, highly skilled workers. The mystical halo accorded to the person for being a graduate and a member of a professional chamber, of belonging to a “respectable” profession should not obliterate this simple fact. The engineer and the technical staff are, no less than any productive worker within the labour process, skilled workers that are exploited as capital extracts the surplus value that is produced in the collective production process. The fact that the engineer has acquired his skills in a modern higher institution of education, that he or she lives in an entirely different cultural world, the differences between the milieux in which the two sides live, or the fact that society attributes a special value to the profession of engineering—none of these changes the plain facts of the production process.

However, this plain fact, true as it is, is not the whole truth. The engineer and the technical staff are at the same time given the task of controlling and directing the worker at the point of production on behalf of capital. In a certain sense, they are the conveyor belt, so to speak, and the watchdog for the despotism of capital over the working class. On the basis of this specific aspect, they should be considered to be *third-order agents of capital*. Third-order agents that translate into practice the plans of the second-order agents who devise and orchestrate the production and circulation process in the interests of the first-order agents, who themselves are the true bearers of the capital relation. This shows that the class position of engineers and technical staff is a *contradictory class position*. On the one hand, they share the class position of the productive workers, work together with them to produce surplus value, but, on the other hand, they function as the representative of capital in this collective. Of course, from the objective point of view, some engineers are closer to the workers and some to the capitalist. This kind of contradictory position makes the group in question an intermediary one. In revolutionary times, these strata will, in all probability, oscillate wildly between the revolutionary camp and the counter-revolutionary one.

As we move to determine the class position of the employees that work in departments and divisions outside production we need to remember an important aspect of Harry Braverman’s analysis of Taylorism.⁴ “Scientific management” takes

⁴ Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital. The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Cen-*

away the knowledge and control of the work process from the worker and turns them over to the departments outside of the sphere of production in order to offer them to the use of the capitalist. If that is the case, then the function of at least some of these departments (planning, design, R&D, control etc.) is to improve the possibilities of the control of capital over the workers and thus increase the surplus value appropriated.

This fact makes the middle- and lower-level managers of these departments third-order agents of capital, just like the engineers. But at the same time these people themselves are exploited *qua* participants in a collective worker that together works to produce surplus value for the capitalist. Usually, this exploitation is of very high intensity. These workers, named “white-collar workers” in the bourgeois literature, are frequently compelled, especially in large corporations, that is in units of monopoly capital, to work up to 12 hours or more on a daily basis, whereas at least in unionised plants the core team of productive workers have fixed hours. Thus, just like the engineer, these workers also represent a contradictory class position.

It may surprise the reader that we should be talking about the proletarian side of a middle- or lower-level manager, say the head of the planning division or a researcher in R&D, who come to work wearing a business suit, driving a company car, and have lunch in the same dining room as top management. But we are not dwelling on the contradictory nature of this class position for nothing. These employees may really act as an agent of capital in normal times. They may mingle with the wealthier middle classes with respect to their consumption patterns and lifestyle. But trying to understand how certain strata will behave in times of extraordinary class and political struggles is perhaps the most important aim of class analysis.

These strata may start to oscillate between the proletarian and the bourgeois camps in times of revolutionary crisis. In other words, in contrast to the bourgeois and their acolytes, they may be open to being won over by the revolution, depending on a host of concrete circumstances and the tactical astuteness of the sides. Even more importantly, the knowledge and skills of these strata may be put to good use under the central planning system of the new workers’ state if the revolution is victorious. Naturally, not all of them will serve the revolution. In fact, perhaps at first only a minority will go along with the proletarian camp. Others may join the fray after the dust has settled in and all hope of returning to the *status quo ante* is lost. But what will make these engineers, business administrators, planning experts, accountants and sundry professions move closer to the revolutionary camp is precisely this contradictory position they have in the class structure, that in spite of all they do to serve capital, they have themselves a proletarian streak, that their bond with the interests of capital has only a *derivative* nature in terms of their work as wage workers.

As we are winding up, let us recall that in the specific historical development of France, these strata have formed their own trade unions, bringing together what are called *cadres* in France. They have even brought the diverse unions of *cadres* organised in different industries together in a confederation, called the Confédération générale des cadres (CGC). During certain dire moments of the class struggle this confederation takes its place together with confederations of industrial and other

workers such as the CGT, the CFDT, or the FO, along with the teachers' unions etc. This was the case, for instance, in the extended battle between the Macron government and the working masses on the question of the raising of the retirement age from 62 to 64 this past spring. In that ferocious battle, the CGC marched together with all other unions to the end. That the unions did not offer a winning strategy to the working class is tangential to our point here. This was not the making of the CGC, but of all the unions united in the same front. So even this participation goes to show that there is a proletarian streak in the middle- and lower-levels of management.

Semi-proletarians

We know that the root of the proletarian predicament lies in the selling of one's labour power in return for a wage payment. We saw above that there are significant exceptions to this nexus between wage work and the condition of being a proletarian. But as a general rule, we can say that all who sell their labour power for a wage, who do not execute the function of an agent for capital, and who is not a representative of state power are proletarians. It may not have escaped the careful reader that there is something missing in this kind of definition. This is the element of *economic compulsion* to sell one's labour. Let us recall Engels' definition in the footnote that he added to the *Communist Manifesto* in its 1888 edition, which we have already quoted once: "By proletariat [is meant] the class of modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live." The concept "reduced to" is key here. So many have gone astray in discussing class structure in modern capitalism for having ignored this key condition. The proletarian does not sell her or his labour power out of choice but because she or he is *reduced to* doing this in order to survive. Obviously, this compulsion derives from the lack of means of production. However, in some cases the compulsion may be only *partial*. In such situations we are talking of *semi*-proletarians.

The traditional class position of semi-proletarian has to do with the fact that the labourer, whether a dweller in the countryside or in an urban setting, has not been separated completely from land as a means of production. This situation corresponds to a transitional stage in the process of proletarianization of the smallholder peasant. We in Turkey know from a prolonged process of complete proletarianization that lasted from the 1950s all the way to the end of the 1970s and even further that the Turkish working class in its majority had a small parcel of land to be worked on at harvesting time, which brought in some additional income and food supplements to the working-class family. Second and third-generation workers then saw their ties to the village slowly decline although even today many workers have a piece of family land that is in some cases put to economic use through share-cropping schemes.

One significant component of traditional semi-proletarians is seasonal migrant workers. A moment ago, we were talking about city-dwellers as semi-proletarians. With seasonal migrant workers, we are moving to the countryside. These are families that have a plot of land or other means of survival (say a small herd of sheep), but the scale of that economic activity is not sufficient to support the entire family throughout the year. So, they move to different parts of the country (and sometimes cross borders as Chicanos, for instance, did from Mexico to America) in order to help the harvesting

of agricultural produce, staying in tents, living under miserable conditions, travelling in broken down pickups that violate road regulations and often have road accidents that kill many members of families. Additionally, children of school age are unable to attend their school. But they need to do this because they are compelled to sell their labour power, albeit compelled only partially.

The other type of work that seasonal migrant labour can take is construction work, whether in urban surroundings or road construction anywhere in the countryside. Here seasonal workers, especially those in the road construction area, can even unionise, so it is a different kind of situation. Construction duties are different from harvesting in that only men can take jobs here.

Leaving aside seasonal migrant labour, which never seems to diminish in our native Turkey, probably because the economic conditions of the Kurdish region are so miserable that any additional income is welcome, the traditional kind of semi-proletarian is a transitional phenomenon that will diminish progressively with complete proletarianization to disappear all but in name sometime in the future. However, there is another layer of semi-proletarians generated and reproduced constantly through the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production itself. This layer bears no resemblance to the semi-peasant semi-proletarians of the past in any aspect, economic, cultural, ideological etc. This is a layer that is recruited from among the children of the lower echelons of the bourgeoisie, the state bureaucracy, and the middle classes, including the well-to-do modern petty-bourgeoisie.

These people are usually well-educated, almost all of them graduates, a growing number fluent in English at least, and cosmopolitan in outlook. They start their working life as wage-earners. As capitalism, in its process of development, socialises all activity and increases the scale of production and circulation in all areas of life, many professions can now be practiced only as part of a working collective. So being on the payroll of some company or government agency or private health or educational establishment is almost a normal place to start one's working life. This layer of people starts working in banks, insurance companies, advertisement and public relations companies, large hotel chains, in non-production departments of manufacturing companies, in the media, in private hospitals or private schools etc.

At this stage, if we abstract from the fact that their living standards and lifestyle are very different from the working class at large, their position in the production process of goods and services makes them a layer of the proletariat, albeit with marked peculiarities. But even at this stage there is a trait that shuns the tendency to regard them as proletarians. We know that the traditional semi-proletarians living in the urban setting received some supplement to their income either in cash or in kind because their family ties in the region from which they had migrated to the city through which they also had some partial access to means of production made this possible. In other words, what made the "semi-" what they specifically were was intra-family transfer of revenue. The same goes for the modern "semi-proletarian" we are now examining.

A young person who has graduated from college and started working for a bank from the lowest echelons up receives economic assistance from his or her family since the family is one of state bureaucrats or one that is a well-to-do bourgeois or modern

petty-bourgeois family and can afford this. This may take the form of chipping in for the rent or general cash assistance or even go further and result in the purchase of an apartment and/or a car for the youngster. As a result, the person has not only benefited from the advantages of being from a family with higher standards than proletarian families in early childhood and during their youth, but can afford a higher standard of living at this early stage in life. As a matter of fact, in many cases the person has not even been compelled to sell their labour power. Had there been a desire, opening a boutique or a café or some summer resort tourism or catering establishment would possibly have been feasible. But the youngster wishes to be a renowned journalist or a powerful banker or a creative advertiser. That is why he or she has opted to try their luck in a big organisation, slowly climbing the ladder to wealth and fame in the future.

The conclusion we reach is the following: These “office workers” are, even in the early stages of their working life, semi-proletarians rather than proletarians. But as we have stressed from the beginning of this article, we need to reason dialectically and look at processes rather than frozen moments, think not statically but dynamically, ponder on not solely what has happened to the class position of an actor so far but what potentialities that position hides in waiting for the future. If we think in these terms, then two alternative routes face the person in question for the future.

One is the possibility of promotion. Even the person who has started out as a teller at a bank branch views the prospect of becoming branch manager to be then promoted eventually to the top management of the bank. A well-educated correspondent of a daily newspaper or TV channel may imagine himself or herself in the shoes of the editor-in-chief in some distant future. The lower-level manager of a manufacturing company is now given by the “human resources department” a “career plan” in every “modern” corporation, adorning the dreams of the employee to rise successively to positions of division head, then department head, to eventually rise to the top management of that or some other corporation. And not to forget the by now well-established trend of job-hopping, passing from one company and post to another every so many years, one purpose being to fill one’s CV with as many accomplishments as possible. All of these throw forth the semi-proletarian into a fantasy future of wealth and success and glamour and wrest her or him away from the drab proletarian reality of the present in which redundancies may leave the person out on the street in the wink of an eye. Such are the sly methods of capitalism.

The other possibility for the future is the prospect of a passage from the class status of semi-proletarian to that of modern petty-bourgeois. Whatever the importance of the helping hand of the family in the early stages of the youngster’s “career”, this pales into insignificance in mid-life when one or both parents pass away. And the fact that the number of offspring has secularly declined in the 20th century is of great help here. The inheritance of a rather high amount of wealth, starting with real estate, now opens the way to new possibilities in the professional life of the semi-proletarian. Even for the youngster, the decision to take a waged job was not exactly out of economic compulsion, but an early decision of “career planning”, so to speak. In other words, the educated semi-proletarian took a waged job because that would prove beneficial for future purposes and not because there was no other possibility. But now there is every possibility for the person to quit working as a “wage-slave”, as the relationship

looks to the eyes of every person who has to spend alienated labour day in and day out, and move on to a “business of my own”. The possibility alone, even if the road is not taken, removes the educated semi-proletarian light years from the position of the real proletarian, one who remains “reduced to” doing wage work their entire life.

And, this is perhaps the most important thing about the predicament of the modern semi-proletarian, it moves them tangentially close to the modern petty-bourgeoisie. These two layers of two different classes are like twins who have been separated at birth but find themselves at home with each other as soon as they are reunited. Let us now finally name this modern-day stratum of semi-proletarians clearly. This is the *educated semi-proletariat*.

A word of caution with respect to the naming. Sometimes the qualifying adjective “educated” leads people to think that *all* educated layers of the proletariat are part of this privileged social group. This far from the truth. The first very large group that comes to mind is of course the army of teachers. The typical high-school or lower degree school teacher in every country is perhaps a somewhat privileged layer of the proletariat since they are duly respected by the community and enjoy higher job security than many proletarian strata, at least if they are employed by the public school system. But no chasm separates them from the majority of proletarians because they can set up a “business of their own”, as can do the educated semi-proletarian. No such chasm exists because they simply cannot. One should not forget that the condition of “semi-” is even more important than the adjective “educated”. The educated means that we are not dealing with, for instance, the offspring of the mafiosi or mobsters in American parlance.

One more conclusion remains to draw about this class layer before we pass on to new topics. The modern educated semi-proletariat is politically closest to the proletarian cause when the individual is young and draws ever closer to the establishment and the high bourgeoisie as that individual grows older and gets settled. The reason must already have become clear. In the early years of their career, educated semi-proletarians face an objective situation much closer to the ordinary proletarian. First of all, not all of them have the possibility of setting up their own business at this early stage of their life, so the proletarian predicament is a real one and will remain so for some time to come. Secondly, if you wish to be a powerful (and rich) banker or a famous journalist, you need to carry on working for a bank or a media company according to the case. There is no alternative. One cannot set up one’s own bank or one’s own TV station out of the blue. For these reasons and others, the younger educated semi-proletarian sympathises with the woes and demands of the ordinary worker. At least much more when compared to his or her later stages in their career. But a mid-career educated semi-proletarian becomes more and more conservative in the class struggle sense of the term. (In the cultural-ideological sense of the word conservatism is not the ideological bent of either the educated semi-proletariat or its estranged twin the modern petty-bourgeoisie.)

The unemployed and the urban poor

In line with its laws of functioning, capitalism constantly breeds unemployment.

The “industrial reserve army”, in Marx’s words, exerts a tremendous pressure on the proletariat currently working through competition between workers and the unemployed. In non-unionised workplaces, workers (with the exception of those with very special skills, which would make them irreplaceable) are aware that as soon as they enter into struggle over wages or conditions of work, they may be replaced any moment by new workers from the army of the unemployed. For the same reason, in countries where in certain periods unemployment is very high, trade unions find themselves in a terrible bind. Beyond this, workers who remain jobless for a long span of time are both attracted towards the ranks of the lumpen proletariat (of which more below) and become easy prey for reactionary, even fascist ideologies. But on the other hand, as the experience of the Argentine *piquetero* movement has shown, the unemployed and downtrodden can play a very important part in class struggles if they can be organised. For all these reasons, from the point of view of class struggles, the mass of the unemployed is a delicate group that has to be handled very carefully.

Before all else we should make clear the following point: The unemployed are essentially part and parcel of the working class. Sometimes they are treated as a group apart, but that has no sense. The unemployed are compelled to sell their labour power in order to make a living, just like the main body of the working class. What sets them apart from the working sections of the proletariat is that they have not been successful in their search for a capitalist that is willing to hire them. However, the unemployed also display diversity between themselves. Revolutionary theory should be able to grasp those differences as well.

The industrial reserve army is of a magnitude that expands and shrinks according to the ups and downs of the process of capital accumulation. In countries where capitalism was established a long time ago, that is to say in imperialist countries, the main source of unemployment is these ups and downs of the capital accumulation process. Hence, an important part of the army of the unemployed will remain unemployed for a shorter or longer span of time depending on the length of the recession or slump that the economy is going through. Unless the crisis turns into a lengthy depression, that is to say if the economy recovers in six months or a year or at most two years, it becomes possible for that part of the working class who have lost their jobs to find new ones in a span of time that is not excessively long. Even that is a painful process of course, but some unemployment benefit might see a part of the jobless through this period if the crisis does not last longer. This mass of unemployed is the *conjunctural* component of the reserve army of labour. And its impact on class struggle is different from the other component.

Even within the imperialist countries, the industrial reserve army does not consist solely of that component. Unemployment even there is a much more *structural* problem within the immigrant groups and in the ranks of the oppressed nations or races and, in particular, among the younger generations of these groups. Among the young population of the ethnic groups in Europe whose origin is immigration, unemployment is endemic. In the US, among the black and native populations the unemployment rate at times reaches 50 per cent or upward.

However, the problem is much more profound in countries that are subordinated to imperialism. In these countries, the population impoverished and dispossessed

by the expansion of capitalism to the countryside migrates to cities where sufficient employment to absorb this incoming population is lacking; so, a major part of the young population remains unemployed for the long haul in a structural manner.

This long-term and structural component of the army of the unemployed leads to the formation of a group of destitute people whose conditions of existence are more difficult even than the standard proletarian layers. By its very nature, because it is the product of the ever-present threat of unemployment, the “urban poor” are characterised by extreme instability and inconstancy in the life processes of its members. The urban poor will do any job that comes along and tolerate all kinds of work conditions. At times its road will intersect with that of the lumpen proletariat (of which more in a moment). Many of the men become alcoholics or drug addicts, and some turn into inveterate gamblers, while the women do laundry for others, work as cleaning ladies, knit or weave at home, all the while tolerating the excesses of the husband. This is hell on earth.

The urban poor do not really belong to any well-defined class although, originally, they are a part of the proletariat. These are the people who are the subject matter of what is now fashionably called “deep poverty”.

The lumpen proletariat

The lumpen proletariat, at least outside the imperialist countries, is recruited from the layers of the urban poor. The almost inescapable predicament of these people suffering under conditions of abject poverty begets almost inevitably a desire to make money the easy way, which usually means recourse to exercising professions that have been outlawed such as, most notably, drug-pushing and human trafficking. The youth of the urban poor milieu is an easy prey for mobsters, for pimps, for human traffickers of immigrants and asylum-seekers and for drug pushers.

The lumpen proletariat is a layer that is the bearer of the filth that percolates in the cells of capitalist society. Alongside unorganised or amateurishly organised elements that have made robbery and theft a profession, the lumpen proletariat includes very different categories extending from the foot soldiers of the small- and large-scale mobster organisations and of the drug cartels, pushers of drugs at neighbourhood corners, the hitmen of bands organised for the collection of unpaid cheques and bills, hired professional killers, bouncers, employees of illegal casinos, all the way to those on the payroll of bordellos, streetwalkers (including trans people in many countries) and their pimps, call girls, escort services, women enslaved by international trafficking schemes, and parts of the pornography business, in particular those who work for the sub-sector of child pornography. There is also a kind of intersection of many of these professions with show business and the night club scene. A big part of the lives of many of these people is spent in prisons. Only a handful are intelligent, skilful, and brave enough to rise to leading positions in the organisations of which they are a part.

The lumpen proletariat is a hotbed of a miserable and dangerous life that might end very early on. On the other hand, it is a door to social mobility and wealth for the destitute and hopeless. The original land of the Mafia and the Camorra has a special term for this combination: “*Malavita*” or the bad life. But the bad life is not all that

bad if one is lucky and takes an immoralist's view of society and human life.

Finally, the impact of the lumpen proletariat on the class struggle is variable from country to country and from epoch to epoch. One point that is salient in many countries (starting with our native Turkey) should be emphatically noted: many mobster leaders are intimately connected to the fascist movement, which immediately should remind us that in times of crisis and confrontation, the fascist movement in those countries has battle-tested and skilful warriors ready to fight the organised working-class movement and the socialist and communist movements.

On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the lives of at least certain sections of the lumpen proletariat interpenetrate with those of the families of sundry groups of the poor and exploited. To regard a prostitute's or a drug pusher's life activity as ordinary, almost simply as "another profession" is very common within many working-class areas. However, this then infests the neighbourhood with inevitable violence and saps the morale of the working-class milieu in question through the spread of the use of alcohol and particularly drugs, which of course results in the weakening of the will to fight the ills of the social order. However, working-class militants need to tread a very fine line in their approach when confronting the presence of the lumpen proletariat. Although in many cases a pitched battle may become necessary against bands of pushers trying to establish their "business" in a working-class neighbourhood, and in such situations proletarian revolutionaries may even have to resort to violent methods since this is the only language these gangs will understand, at the level of the individual local youngster, a positive approach of offering alternatives, whenever possible, and educating is preferable to a moralising and excluding stance.

Bertolt Brecht's admonition in his *Three-Penny Opera* should never be forgotten: "Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral" or "Bread first, morals after".

The quasi-proletarians

Among those people who have to sell their labour power in order to make a living, there are certain categories of profession or employment relations that do not correspond to an unadulterated class position. There are quite a number of such cases and it is impossible to look into all of these. However, some are worth discussing briefly so as to understand their impact on class struggle.

Recent developments in bourgeois society have brought forth a new profession akin to the police force, but radically different from that force in many different ways. In the past, there used to be private security guards at factories and the mansions of the wealthy. Today this practice of using security has proliferated, from banks and shopping malls to gated estates of the upper and upper middle classes. Moreover, certain locations such as airports or train stations or the underground, which used to be guarded by the police, have now been turned over to private security. Figures suggest that the number of private security guards is competing with the national police force at least in Turkey.

Private security is an occupation that requires very challenging conditions of work (many shifts last 12 hours) and bears risks for the worker. Seen from this point of view,

this “army” of armed men and women is home to a very interesting contradiction in the bosom of capitalist society. The bourgeoisie is arming certain layers of the proletariat! These people are employed by private security companies, most often established and headed by retired intelligence personnel, police chiefs and army and gendarmerie officers, and subjected to heavy exploitation. Under ordinary conditions, it is nonetheless obvious that they will side enthusiastically with the interests of the bourgeoisie, to protect which they are hired. It is a well-known phenomenon that certain employees of five-star hotels or luxury restaurants and bars and sports clubs and fitness salons patroned by the upper layers of the bourgeoisie will often adopt the manners, the gestures and mimicry of their customers. Likewise, a part of the private security guards will probably abide willingly by the norms of the bourgeois community they are serving as a professional trick.

Since these people are accorded license to use police powers when faced with certain emergency situations, to that extent their status (and psychological bent) will resemble those of the security personnel of the state. But these people arrive at their workplace in gated communities, for instance, located in rich neighbourhoods from inside the thick web of relations of their home and family and working-class neighbourhoods and after their shift is over return there to share the fate of proletarians. Hence it is, for the moment, a mystery how they will behave in times when class struggle is on the ascendant. They may fall victim to the manipulation of the state or of fascist gangs or they may become “dangerous” elements that side with the revolutionary proletariat.

As a section of the body of private security guards works at the gates of housing estates, we can conveniently pass on to proletarians who work as domestic labourers in the same kind of environment. The “superintendents” of apartment buildings or housing estates, cleaning ladies, permanent servants in the home, private chauffeurs, gardeners, in-house handymen, nannies for young children, caregivers for the elderly and the sick are some of the categories that immediately come to mind. Whatever the differences between them, there is something that unites them. Unless they are working for grand bourgeois families who employ a small army of workers for their needs at home that could compete in numbers with small workplaces, all of them are condemned to isolated labour processes. In other words, these are not part of a work collective. There is even further irony for some of them: usually many proletarians face a single capitalist; but a superintendent of an apartment building is a proletarian who has to confront a host of bosses!

For this reason, they are not good at organising in unions. However, if we remember that cleaning ladies usually come from conservative families in which the women hardly ever participate in social life, the fact that these women get to know the lifestyle and the living standards of the upper classes may be considered a factor that may have an impact (whether positive or negative) on class consciousness. In a certain sense, these workers are intelligence officers that the proletariat sends into the private lives of the ruling classes.

Another group that shares the position of the lonely proletarian are the workers who work for the petty-bourgeoisie. Sales assistants that work in small boutiques or stationery stores, apprentices and footboys in carpenters’ workshops or auto repair

garages, secretaries employed in offices of lawyers or cabinets of MDs or dentists etc., are often isolated in their labour processes, are not part of a workers' collective, and cannot share their grievances concerning their boss' attitude towards them with other workers who experience the same thing. Moreover, they are not confronting a capitalist with a voracious appetite for surplus value. Some of them may be working for very wealthy bosses (for instance the MDs), but others' bosses may be simple people who are almost no different from the great mass of the population. These are proletarians that do not experience the confrontation with a capitalist. They participate in class struggle only on the basis of their experience at school or the neighbourhood in which they live.

Hence the smaller the average scale of workplaces in a country or a region, the less heady will be, in principle, class struggles when they break out.

5. Special social categories

There are certain categories which, although they have special weight in social and political struggles, are themselves not a class, nor do the members of these groups necessarily belong to one and the same class. Because their social position has always vexed people, it would be useful to dwell on two of these categories briefly.

Intellectual

Intellectuals are not a social class. But from the point of view of Marxism, like any other social groups, they also are to be defined on the basis of the position they hold within social production and social reproduction. Seen from this vantage point, an intellectual is someone who deals with and has become, within the social division of labour, an expert in the production and reproduction of ideas and of artworks. Scientists (of the natural or social type), philosophers, people who work in the area of social theory, political commentators, and artists and art critics form the backbone of the category intellectual.

Before going any further, let it be pointed out that the attribution of the label "intellectual" to some groups or individuals bears no implication of a positive evaluation in this context, but only an observation of their *objective* position within the social division of labour. For instance, many people who are active in an area that has nothing to do with the production of ideas or artworks within the social division of labour may be much more knowledgeable and intelligent or have a much broader horizon than intellectuals concerning many different areas. Some university teachers are extremely narrow-minded almost to the level of being "ignorant" about everything except their own field of research. Some artists may be unable to put together their ideas outside their own special field, be it literature, plastic arts, music or film. An intellectual need not necessarily be open-minded or progressive, either. Each class or each ideological current has its own intellectuals, including reactionary ones. The importance of the intellectual from the point of view of social and political life derives not from the intellectual being more intelligent than others nor necessarily from their being progressive. It simply derives from the intellectual becoming a specialist of ideas, for every ideological trend and every political movement needs ideas.

The definition of the intellectual given here implies that the bourgeoisie and the proletariat need to wage a constant struggle for hegemony over the world of the intellectuals. In this struggle, it is naturally the bourgeoisie that is at an advantage. Universities usually recognise a certain freedom for left-wing intellectuals, but are nonetheless institutions of the bourgeois established order. The press, the media, and publishing houses are to a great extent, and on an increasing scale as bourgeois society becomes better-established, subordinated to capital. Artists need money to survive and practise their art; however, this area is more and more closely controlled by the moneyed classes, through collectors, museums, galleries, biennials, and similar institutions. Universities of course have a special weight, but they implement a corporation-like rigid hierarchy and impose on the university faculty a lifestyle that will bring him or her a certain “dignity”, which encourages conformism. The university is like a factory that manufactures professors siding with the established social orders out of a raw material of young leftist intellectuals.

Students

In many countries, students and in particular university students have had a big impact on political life, particularly in the formation of left-wing movements. The tendency to regard them as petty-bourgeois is patently a mistake. It was always a mistake, but nowadays, as the university is becoming more and more a mass organisation and concomitantly the diversity of class origins of the student body is rising rapidly, the characterisation “petty-bourgeois” is even more erroneous in grasping the truth.

For students as well as for other groups, the true criterion is their place within social production and social reproduction. Here there are two main aspects. One is the common condition that students all face. Here, there are three factors that determine the position of students. First, the fact that they are for the time being outside the process of production. Second, the fact that they are part of a mass organisation, that modern institution called the “school”. And third, that they are still being acclimatised to the division of labour that exists in capitalist society, i.e. that they are still in the process of “learning” their prospective future position.

The first factor allows students to set aside ample time for politics since their time is mostly flexible. Also, they do not need to fear as much as proletarians or other poor layers of the population that they will be deprived of their livelihood (although depending on the country and the *zeitgeist*, there may eventually be other sanctions such as suspension or dismissal, but these act more loosely as deterrents). All these make it much more possible for them to develop their militancy and join radical political movements.

The second factor, that of being a part of an institution together with masses, provides them an environment where they can swiftly take up collective action and thus have an outsized impact as an actor in politics than would have been warranted otherwise. In a certain sense, students are like workers who can swiftly take collective action as opposed to peasants who are much more isolated and are therefore at a disadvantage. And they are like workers, but without the immediate threat of being

fired if the limits imposed by the law and the labour contract are trespassed.

As for the third factor, that is to say a relative freedom from the constraints of being sanctioned for anti-systemic policies defended, this gives them a freedom to question the fundamentals of the existing social order much more radically than others (which is also true for intellectuals, but for a different reason, i.e. because they can question many things radically limiting themselves to the world of ideas, in other words putting forth a critique without action, “the arm of critique” without “the critique of arms”, in Marx’s words).

Otherwise, attributing the level of radicality of student politics to their youth, to their excitable young spirits is rather abstract and excessively biologicistic. Students come from different backgrounds and in the last half-century a university degree has become the most envied asset for finding a well-paid job in the labour market. It should be obvious that students who come from upper-class backgrounds are much more reluctant to engage in radical politics that can even turn violent, for they have so much more to lose. Only if the *zeitgeist* is exceptional, as it was in 1968 all around the world, would students from all backgrounds throw themselves into politics.

Conversely, youth who do not have the possibility of going to college are also young and easily excited, but do not organise or join in easily collective action on political matters except in very special cases. So collective activity in the environment in which one is working is much more effective than the characteristics of the age group.

These are the factors that are common to the entire student body, and especially university students, in a country. The other main element that determines the political behaviour of groups of students, and not the entire student body, is very obviously the class background of different subgroups of the student population. It will be remembered that at the beginning of this article we clearly stated that for those groups of the population such as pensioners, the disabled and the chronically ill or women who are homemakers or children or youth, groups who do not participate any longer or yet in activities of social production or social reproduction, the class belonging is fundamentally determined by the class of the major breadwinner(s) of their family. This means that background is also very important for students. That is why students sometimes disagree violently on the politics they adopt.

6. Conclusion

It would not be correct to deduce unmediated political conclusions from an article that has surveyed all the major classes of (urban) society under capitalism, as well as a string of non-class categories. Rather than that, let us wind up by stressing some of the fundamental points.

To begin with, the analysis carried out in this article has shown us that the class structure of modern capitalist societies is not so uniform and neatly stratified as to be analysed by taking up only two or three classes. We saw especially when discussing what for Marxism is the engine of the revolution, that is to say the proletariat, that many social strata, despite being part of the proletariat, simultaneously feel the pressure of the interests and political outlook of other class positions. This is probably one of the

keys to understanding the phenomenon of the infrequency of the rise of revolutionary waves in the class struggle of the proletariat. It is true that especially in the imperialist countries the proletariat forms the majority of society and that in countries of a later but full development of capitalism is expanding by the day, but the proletariat is far from being a monolithic class, with a potentiality of unity in struggle that is already given *a priori*. The foundations of the unity need to be constructed.

While working for this political objective, revolutionaries also need to take up the concrete and specific attributes of the various proletarian strata with great care and attention to detail. One of the benefits of this type of class analysis is to shed light on this politically important effort.

Secondly, this complexity of the class structure of modern capitalist society must also have taught us that the kind of omnipresence of the petty-bourgeoisie that many Marxists imagine to be true for all elements outside the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is a grave fallacy. We should stop labelling any group that does not fit the definition of bourgeois nor of proletarian “petty-bourgeois”. The four-star general is a petty-bourgeois, the village teacher or the nurse in the local health clinic is petty-bourgeois, the engineer is petty-bourgeois, the intellectual is petty-bourgeois, and so is the student. There may be a psychological tendency here of despising all non-proletarian strata and categories in the name of putting the proletariat in the centre, but the result is exactly the opposite of what Marx himself tried to put forth. Whereas from the *Communist Manifesto* onwards, Marx insisted that capitalist society would become over time ever more polarised between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the ranks of the latter broadening with every passing day, this approach offers a view of capitalist society as one of an army of the petty-bourgeois.

Moreover, to the extent that this approach reduces social layers that are very different between themselves to each other, it is impoverishing in terms of the wealth and variety and nuance of the analysis Marxism has made of capitalist society. Only an analysis and a concomitant political stance that is sensitive to the relative differences between different social groups and strata can take us forward.

Finally, as opposed to the abstract analysis of social classes, the investigation of which concrete groups of people belong to which class will reveal that even the most advanced theory cannot correspond on a one-to-one basis to the complexity of the social structure. As Lenin, quoting Goethe, said, “theory is grey, but the tree of life is green”. It is a pretty easy step to define classes on the basis of their location within social production and social reproduction. But then at the first step forward, complications and contradictions and uncertainties arise as we try to apply the initial definitions to large groups of the population. The real world does not simply consist of purely bourgeois, purely petty-bourgeois and purely proletarian elements. Just to take the proletariat as our example, the labour aristocracy, semi-proletarians, proletarians with contradictory class positions, the quasi-proletarians—all these render the class structure extremely complicated but extremely rich in variety.

At a second stage, then, come the contradictions between the family, kinship, neighbourly relations, and friendship, on the one hand, and class distribution into different classes, on the other. Take the family. In principle, it would not be incorrect to say that the family of a bourgeois is part of the bourgeoisie and the family of

a proletarian is a proletarian family. If there are more than one breadwinner in the family, it may become difficult to say which class even the nuclear family belongs to if the positions of those breadwinners within social production and social reproduction are different from each other. When kinship relations are brought in the complexity will probably rise even further. Further complexities arising from the neighbourhood, relations of friendship, locality etc. may, in certain cases, make things unfathomable.

Up until this point we have only talked about complexities that arise from class belonging itself. If one then brings in differences of region of origin, ethnic solidarity and conflict, religious animosity, gender-based diversification that arise from outside the class structure, the level of difficulty facing the analyst becomes even more daunting.

Should one conclude that class analysis is so ridden with formidable difficulties that it had better be abandoned in favour of a more empirical approach to social struggles? Or that the effectivity of class contradictions will lose its urgency in this maze of complexities? Neither. These point to totally different things. For one, nothing is pure in real life as in abstractions. They point to the reality that countering every socially operating law there exist countervailing forces. To the fact that contradictions do not surface at every moment and in an unmediated manner, and become explosive only when conditions become ripe.

Secondly, precisely this kind of complexity teaches us that a fundamental approach Marxism has developed to revolutionary politics maintains its validity despite all the fashionable variety of discourses one comes across frequently. The web of relations that is woven by an entire spectrum of factors such as family, kinship, neighbourly relations, friendship, locality, and many others is so complex that a truly effective class struggle strategy cannot be built upon geographic space and the sphere of consumption. A truly proletarian revolutionary politics, without in the least neglecting this web of relations, nonetheless needs to organise the class where it is strongest and most united: in other words, in the sphere of production, in the factory, in the shipyard, in the mine, in the workplace, on the land, on the sea, and in the air.

Revolt of the urban poor in France

Hasan Refik

The streets of France were ablaze for the better part of a week. The brave young people, mostly of North African or sub-Saharan African descent, from the “banlieues” or the poor neighborhoods that surround French cities, especially Paris, Marseille, and Lyon, took to the streets with their rightful hatred, setting fire to police stations and police vehicles, or to various buildings they identified with the state. When they could not put their hands on those, they burned garbage bins, cars, and bus stops. By July 4, it was estimated that more than 12,000 garbage bins, nearly 6,000 vehicles, and over a thousand buildings were burned or damaged. So be it. One should give scant attention to material destruction when the police have killed yet another child of the working people. I am neither an insurance seller by profession nor have the habit of lamenting over buildings while working-class youth are being butchered in broad daylight. For me, the importance of the burning streets of France lies in what they signal for class struggles, first and foremost in Europe, but also worldwide.

France at a tipping point

France holds a peculiar place in 21st-century Europe. While in many European (and Western in general) countries, the bourgeoisie was able to launch its onslaughts against the gains of the working class under auspicious conditions, the belated French bourgeoisie found a formidable opponent. This was covered in depth by our comrade Sungur Savran in a Turkish-language article he penned in 2023.¹ The

¹ Sungur Savran, “Fransa’da ‘Mezarda Emeklilik’ Mücadelesi Üzerine 22 Tez”, 9 April 2023,

results were on-and-off flaring ups of the class struggle almost every year without fail since 2016, save for a short hiatus during the heyday of the Covid pandemic. The form of these struggles, and even the social forces leading them, changed from year to year. But the long and fierce battles waged by workers, public servants, and the lower strata of the petty bourgeoisie (most notably in the case of the Yellow Vests), as well as university and high school students, in differing combinations and with unequal strength from year to year, remained a constant. I made this point already well before the urban poor revolts in the summer, on the occasion of the strike movement of the French working class against the new pension bill, in a Turkish-language piece.² Now, the revolt of the poor neighborhoods, coming on the heels of the strike movement, marks an acceleration in the spasmodic movement of French politics over the last eight years.

The contractions have become ever more frequent, and the birth is imminent. A birth, or a breaking point, is looming large over French politics, yet only the course of the class struggle will determine whether the outcome of this turning point in France will be the most advanced example of the already-rapidly-rising fascism in the 21st century or the first decisive victory of the working class. This is because France, along with Italy, is the European country where proto-fascism and fascism (which go hand in hand, as I will discuss later) have reached their greatest strength. Put differently, both revolutionary and distinctly reactionary outcomes are conceivable. If the window of opportunity for a revolutionary solution is to be missed, and the French working class and working people are unable to give the coup de grace to the enemy, fascism is lurking to seize first France and then Europe by the throat. This is the crux of the matter: France cannot remain Macron's France. Either the working class will come to power and succeed in creating France in its own image, or the hideous face of fascism will rise from France.

The nature of the rebellion from 2005 to 2023

The mass mobilization that broke out on June 27, when cops shot dead Nahel, a 17-year-old North African boy, was neither the first nor will it be the last. Although they seldom turn into revolts, French banlieues often witness demonstrations, sometimes spanning more than one city, more often than not happening against police violence. So, in a sense, banlieue protests are a regular item in French politics. One may be impressed by the strength and spread of the protests now, but their existence should come as no surprise. On the very contrary, those who seek to tread the path of revolution in France should, or should have taken into account the actions of the poor neighborhoods and, as its zenith, the revolts as part and parcel of this revolution (I will come back to this later in the article.)

Let me start by contextualizing the 2023 banlieue revolt. Many observers, friends and foes alike, have rightly compared it to the revolts in 2005, which lasted

<https://gercekgazetesi1.net/uluslararasi/fransada-mezarda-emeklilik-mucadelesi-uzerine-22-tez>.

2 Hasan Refik, "Fransa'da Grev Dalgası: 31 Mayıs Taksim, En Güzel Kılığıyla, İşçi Tulumuyla", 27 March 2023, <https://gercekgazetesi1.net/uluslararasi/fransada-grev-dalgasi-31-mayis-taksim-en-guzel-kilinda-isci-tulumuyla>.

for weeks. The mere existence of the 2023 uprising is of great importance as it proves that the 2005 banlieue revolt was neither an exception nor an oddity, but that this phenomenon will continue to play a role in 21st-century French politics. Beyond this broad-brush observation, the 2023 revolt shows a number of continuities with its predecessor in 2005, as well as some differences. First, the most important one. The nature of the revolt and the composition of the classes and social strata within it are almost exactly the same. The main force of the revolt is the urban poor youth living in the neighborhoods surrounding France's big cities – also known as banlieues. The lives of urban poor youth in these neighborhoods, as in many other countries, show a significant permeability with the lumpenproletariat. On the one hand, when they can land a job, these youths work at the neighborhood doner shop or “tabac,” a kind of French coffeehouse that sells tobacco, coffee, and alcohol, or if the family has a car, they work as Uber drivers at night. Since even these precarious job opportunities are limited, when they are out of their reach, they turn to the illegal activities of the lumpenproletariat. The most common form of this is the small-scale sale of drugs, especially cannabis, in the neighborhood. The impact of this transitivity manifests itself in various ways. First of all, drug use is quite common among banlieue youth. Although I do not have statistics on this issue, I would extrapolate from personal experience that the use of drugs, particularly their low-strength and easy-to-find kind, is much higher among banlieue youth than among other social groups. Moreover, the prevalence of drug dealing and drug gangs also affects the political climate in the neighborhoods, especially in the Marseille area. During the 2005 riots, one of the most important reasons that the banlieues around Marseille remained silent was the intervention of drug gangs. The fact that this time, despite the influence of the drug gangs, the revolt has mobilized huge chunks of the local youth in the Marseille neighborhoods has attracted the attention of even the bourgeois newspapers. This must be written in the list of the rebellion's successes.

One should also note that there is a palpable proletarianization among neighborhood youth, especially with the increasing number of them working as delivery people for online apps. Working in this sector becomes an increasingly viable option among neighborhood youth, both because it does not require special training and because it does not require any upfront capital, such as, for instance, finding a vehicle for Uber. The development of this sector in the neighborhoods, which is much more suitable for collective organization than, say, working in a doner or tabac, should be noted as a trend that may have important repercussions in the future. However, this tendency is still only a nucleus and has not yet reached a decisive significance. It should be added that workers in this sector in France have not yet undertaken collective actions or mass organizing on the scale seen in Turkey, Greece, or even in various Gulf countries. The union organizing efforts in this field, which have increased rapidly in recent years, may change this situation in the future. For now, however, we note this as a trend to be followed rather than a decisive factor.

This is a youth revolt through and through. According to statistics provided by the French state, the average age of the 3,600 people detained as of July 4 was 17. I think one would be hard-pressed to find another example of a mass of tens

of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of young people, almost all of them children, taking to the streets almost on their own and fighting the police. Another importance of this statistic is that it gives clues about the relationship between 2005 and 2023. I am positive that many of the young people who participated in this uprising must have heard tales of heroism about 2005 from their older brothers and sisters in the neighborhood. However, the average age of the detainees shows that many of the young people who fought in the 2023 revolts were not even born at the time of the 2005 uprising. In other words, a whole new generation is rising up against the same problems, using the same methods, in the same neighborhoods. The conclusion should be clear: It takes no magic ball to predict that the revolt of the banlieues will play a major role on the road to revolution in France well beyond 2023.

One of the elements that gives the situation in the French banlieues its specificity is the entanglement of the class struggle and the national question. The overwhelming majority of the urban poor youth mentioned above are descendants of people from France's former colonies in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) and West Africa. This has several implications. First, most of these young people are Muslim. Indeed, a huge banner with the phrase "Allah y rahmo Nahel" - the French spelling of the Arabic phrase meaning "May Allah have mercy on Nahel" - has been seen at demonstrations at the hands of young people. This means that these young people are directly affected by the growing Islamophobia in France. Secondly, these Arab and black youth, Muslim or not, are often subjected to the most vicious racism. The third point is directly related to the previous one. These young people are indeed struggling with racism, but contrary to what Western media frames it through a liberal lens, this is not about "fighting racist prejudices within France." The poor people of these neighborhoods do not face racism simply because they look different. Unlike, for example, Chinese immigrants (who are very numerous, especially in some French cities), they are subjected to a contempt that is nothing but the venous legacy of French colonialism, since they come from France's former colonies. The police behave as if they were on colonial soil in the neighborhoods in question, and the state often acts no different than an occupying power would. In response, especially among the North African youth, embracing the national symbols of their country of origin becomes a form of challenging this oppression. Every major victory of the Algerian national team turns into a huge demonstration. From time to time, the state responds with the bizarre decision to ban the flying of the Algerian flag, for example, in Nice during the 2014 World Cup. This multidimensional national contradiction, combined with class contradictions, creates an extraordinarily explosive setting.

Another continuity between 2005 and 2023 reveals perhaps the greatest weakness of the protests. On the one hand, the youth display an almost astonishing capacity for organization. Both the videos and the eyewitness accounts display that, in many cases, groups of young people wearing some kind of uniform (usually consisting of black tracksuits) were the beating heart of the protests, quickly and cohesively determining the route to be taken and even the targets to be attacked. In some cases, these groups are said to have sub-units that use different insignia. For example, a group responsible for breaking security cameras was identified by its

different clothing. This proclivity for successful quasi-military organizations also gives hints as to how a bunch of 17-year-olds can fight armed state forces tooth and nail for days on end.

An excellent capacity for military organization, but only military organization, alas. In 2023, as in 2005, the revolt is unable to produce from within itself a self-organization similar to the forums of, say, the popular revolt in Turkey in 2013, or a leader or a committee that can formulate its demands. The conclusion to be drawn from this is not (as the French state and its media have made it out to be) that these protests are not politically oriented. But it does show that, unlike, for example, the workers' protests, the banlieue youth, which is a bit of a greenhorn actor in historical terms, is still at the beginning of its struggle and cannot base itself on a historical experience in organizing.

The disadvantage created by the movement's lack of internal organization in 2005 came to a head when state forces used this weakness to isolate the revolt. Both the state and media hammered the same misleading message time and again – that there was nothing political about the uprising, and it was but the doings of a group of *racaille*, or the scum (as put by the infamous Nicolas Sarkozy, then Minister of the Interior). Unfortunate as it is, without a counter-narrative from the revolting youth themselves, these arguments came to convince the overwhelming majority of French society. The state returned to the same tactic in 2023. It has managed to rally the likes of Fabien Roussel, leader of the French Communist Party (PCF), behind it, saying that there is no politics here, only blind violence.

Unlike in 2005, this state tactic has not produced complete success. On the one hand, the protests did fail to enlist the backing of the majority of the population in the polls, contrary to the case during the Yellow Vests or more recent labor protests. 53 percent of the public find Nahel's killing "inexplicable" and "inexcusable," according to a poll by the Elabe company. However, when asked whether they find the protesters' violence against the police understandable, only 20 percent said that they concur with the statement (although it should be noted that this percentage reaches 40 among young people under 25). As mentioned above, the inability of the youth to organize their own committees and spokespersons to challenge the picture depicted by the state plays an important role in this conundrum. However, the fact that two out of every five young people – representing the general profile of the French youth – come to the radical position of "finding the violence against the police understandable" can be seen as an accumulation of the fact that in the last eight years, a wide variety of groups in France have fought against the state and the police.

But the most important reason why the 2023 banlieue uprising could not be isolated like 2005 is that various left and revolutionary groups in the big cities showed solidarity with the uprising. We use the word "solidarity" deliberately and do not give it an absolutely positive connotation, as does the left in general. In France, a significant part of the mainstream left and the extra-parliamentary left forces, except the PCF, not to count Jean-Luc Mélenchon's party, Unbowed France (LFI), showed solidarity with the banlieue revolt. But this solidarity must be understood dialectically. On the one hand, this solidarity and symbolic actions were a first step

toward breaking the isolation. But choosing symbolic solidarity instead of rallying to the ranks of the revolt, instead of trying to mobilize the working class with the quintessential methods of this class, such as strikes and factory occupations, is also choosing not to be part of the revolt. For now, I will content myself with mentioning this issue in relation to breaking the isolation of the revolt and leave aside the second dimension of the topic to be picked up in the last part of this article.

One of the most important differences between 2005 and 2023 is the geographical spread of the revolt this time. In 2005, the revolt was limited to the neighborhoods surrounding the big cities, especially Paris. Now, it has spread to hundreds of settlements all over France. According to the reactionary French newspaper *La Croix*, 533 settlements in total have been affected.³ The proto-fascist leader Marine Le Pen has also acknowledged this spread, saying (albeit for different purposes) that until now, only the big cities were affected by this problem, whereas now smaller settlements face the same issue. For Marine Le Pen, making this point is a transparent attempt to scare the white French population into her ranks. But the fact stands, and the geographical spread of the protests points to another prospect. Just a few months ago, I wrote that the protests against the pension bill had spread to small towns across France in an unprecedented way.⁴ While the workers' actions are penetrating the capillaries of France, the revolt of the banlieue youth is also reaching the small towns, showing that it is no longer confined to the biggest cities. The form of the relationship between these two forces will be determined by the struggle for hegemony in the coming months and years. The clout of Marine Le Pen and proto-fascism in the small towns and cities where the workers' protests have recently spread, and the influence of proto-fascism on the workers in these areas, mean that there is even a risk of an internecine fight between the banlieue youth and the workers in the small towns. But if French workers succeed in reaching out to their brothers and sisters in the banlieues, if they succeed in making them understand that their interests and their bid for liberation are one and the same, then the alliance between the working class and the banlieue youth will become a frightening force to be reckoned with not only in the big cities but throughout France. This configuration would put the French bourgeoisie and rising fascism on the back foot. In other words, the daunting prospect of rural France besieging revolutionary Paris, present throughout the history of revolutions in France, will come to naught from the very beginning.

The law of war and contradictions with the French state

Now, let us turn our attention to the other side of the barricade. My first point concerns an issue that the Western press, which eagerly jumps on when the same thing happens in Hong Kong or Iran, has successfully and conveniently neglected. After the appeasement tactics of the first 24 hours, the French state applied what amounts

3 Bernard Gorce, "La carte des émeutes de 2023 n'est plus celle des « banlieues chaudes »", 07 July 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/98ux8cvz>.

4 Hasan Refik, "Fransa'da Grev Dalgası", <https://gercekgazetesi1.net/uluslararasi/fransada-grev-dalgasi-31-mayis-taksim-en-guzel-kiliginda-isci-tulumuyla>.

to the law of war against the banlieue youth both during and after the riots. Although it is not possible to get our hands on exact statistics on this, the violence against the detained protesters, both during detention and in the police vehicle and police station, is not unlike what one would see in the states that the Western media would call a “regime” in a heartbeat. Most of the protesters taken to court have marks of police violence on their faces or bodies. The courts are working like an accelerated sentencing factory. Just a week into the protests, 380 of the approximately 3,600 people detained had already been *convicted*. There is no doubt that this number has increased thereafter. But just as importantly, I believe that this situation carries meanings beyond the usual violence of the bourgeois state, betraying important contradictions within the French state, and is worth dissecting further. Let us first recall the course of the main events.

After the news of Nahel’s murder broke, in the first 24 hours, French President Emmanuel Macron employed a tactic that was meant to illustrate the purportedly benevolent face of the state. Nahel was murdered in the early hours of the morning of June 27, and protests emerged the following night with great force in Nanterre, Nahel’s neighborhood, where the murder took place, but had not yet reached the scale of a nationwide revolt. Under these circumstances, Macron and the French state evidently thought that they could defuse the protests before they escalated, perhaps even containing them in Nanterre. On June 28, after the first night of protests, Emmanuel Macron issued a statement saying that Nahel’s murder was “inexplicable” and “inexcusable” and expressed his grief. On the same day, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne expressed her condolences to Nahel’s family, saying, “there shall be no doubt that justice will be served.” Even more counter-institutively, Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin – who holds the dubious honor of giving fascist Marine Le Pen a run for her money when it comes to justifying and endorsing state violence against immigrants and minorities – said on the same day that the videos of Nahel’s murder were “shocking” and that the police officer in question had been suspended.

On the second and third nights, as the protests spread across the country and turned into a revolt, the French state changed course. When it became clear that the youth would not be fooled by the so-called benevolence of the state nor by the promises of justice that had been given a thousand times and broken a thousand times before, state brutality came into play. Apparently, misgivings within the state continued on June 29. As the protests spread across the country and the police force deployed against the protests increased drastically (even at the peak of the strikes and street clashes in March, 12,000 police were deployed, while this number was 40,000 on the evening of June 29, increasing to 45,000 by June 30), Prime Minister Borne stated on June 29 that the conditions for the state of emergency had not yet been established.

June 30 saw two striking developments. On the one hand, Prime Minister Borne indicated that the government’s position had changed within 24 hours and that a state of emergency was on the table. On the other hand, the two major police unions in France issued a joint statement saying, “we are at war against the pest” and “the cops are fighting because we are at war.” For all intents and purposes, the statement amounted to nothing less than a call for civil war. The last sentence of the

declaration, which reads, "tomorrow we will be in resistance, and the government must realize this," is particularly striking in the French context, where the word "resistance" (La Résistance) immediately brings us to the armed struggle of the partisans during the Second World War. In other words, with thinly-veiled menaces, these cop unions were threatening to take up arms – with or without the government.

Even if we do not read too much into this timing, the simultaneity of the two statements is striking for more than one reason. The two police unions that made this statement (Alliance and UNSA Police) received around 50 percent of the vote in the 2022 police union elections. When they stood independently in 2014 and 2018, their combined vote was around 45 percent. Hence, this statement cannot be explained away as a harsh declaration by a fringe police organization. Rather, it means that half of the police apparatus is challenging the government and declaring that they will act independently of the government, if need be. To this picture, one must add the statement of another, much smaller police union (France Police-Policiers en Colère) (which got around three percent of the vote in the same elections), which openly congratulated the police for killing Nahel. This means that *more than half of the police apparatus is lined up behind the program of civil war*. It has long been known that fascism, in particular Marine Le Pen's party, the RN (National Rally), held great sway over the French police. But with the crisis that began with the revolts in the banlieues, this force is raising its head and openly challenging the current rulers of the state for the first time. This may not be the last. Today, because the political crisis ended relatively quickly, the Alliance-UNSA Police alliance – which seems to be acting as a united front of the fascists within the police – has only issued an ultimatum. In the not-so-distant future, and in the event of a longer and deeper crisis, it should not be ruled out that this could go well beyond an ultimatum, and that *important sections of the police could rally under the control of the fascists*.

In my view, this threat to Macron's control over the state's coercive apparatus is one of the elements that explain the French state's application of a sort of law of war. Lest there be any confusion, this does not mean that Macron and the French state would not have used force against the revolts without the threat posed by the fascists through the police unions. Such moments of revolt and crisis are always the moments when the true limits of bourgeois democracy are revealed. What matters here is that during the revolt, the Macron government was not only fighting the revolt itself but also struggling to keep its hegemony within the state, which on the surface was a test of its control over the police apparatus (but which may also have its reflection within the French haute bourgeoisie and the army). Practices such as the conviction of hundreds of protesters within a few days and the complete carte blanche to police brutality are maneuvers at least partly designed *to come on top in the struggle for hegemony over the police apparatus*. The presence as Minister of the Interior of Gérald Darmanin, who was known to have joined fascist organizations in his youth and often responded to Le Pen's anti-immigrant statements by upping the ante and by "out-fascist-ing" Le Pen, is one of Macron's most important trump cards in this struggle for hegemony.

The repercussions of this fracture are also likely to find an echo, albeit less

visible, in the ranks of the haute bourgeoisie and the military. The MEDEF, France's main boss union, has enjoyed exceptionally good relations with Emmanuel Macron. But the fractures between the MEDEF and Macron have begun to surface, especially in spring 2023 with the protests against the new pension bill. Sometimes with intentionally leaked reports, sometimes with thinly-veiled statements, MEDEF has begun to criticize Macron. And it just so happened that as the revolts were rocking France, MEDEF held internal elections (scheduled well before the revolts). Geoffroy Roux de Bézieux, who had led the organization for five years, stepped down and was replaced by Patrick Martin, who had been de Bézieux's deputy until then. There is no sign that Martin is particularly anti-Macron. But it is noteworthy that the new leader of MEDEF promised to be "on the offensive." Under Martin's presidency, the fracture lines between Macron and the MEDEF, of which we have seen the first signs in 2023, could widen. A potential result of this tendency would be a faction of the haute bourgeoisie openly backing Le Pen's RN or another form of fascism or proto-fascism. It is possible that in France, with its concurrent crises and protests, Macron's rule will start to seem too costly for the bourgeoisie. Right now, this is but a fracture, but the increase in workers' protests and banlieue riots could lead the haute bourgeoisie to look for alternatives more suited to implement its intention to be "on the offensive" – Le Pen, with her iron fist, would be a tempting option.

There are no such concrete signs within the military at the moment. Two years ago, however, retired generals virtually issued an ultimatum to the Macron government, threatening a civil war in which "the death toll would be in the thousands," in their words. Immediately afterward, this time active-duty officers (without revealing their names) declared their support for the ultimatum and its authors, and Le Pen immediately made public her support for the soldiers who penned the declaration and called on the soldiers to join her party, the RN. Moreover, in 2017, at the beginning of Macron's rule, Pierre de Villiers, then Chief of the General Staff, openly and harshly criticized Emmanuel Macron during the July 14 celebrations, France's national holiday, revealing the tension between the military and the government. Let anyone be gullible enough to think that the military would stand aloof in a political crisis that would pit the haute bourgeoisie and the police apparatus against Macron. Let us not forget that France's current 5th Republic is also the product of a military coup in 1958, triggered by the Algerian Revolution.

Fascism and proto-fascism lurking behind

Fascism is by far the political force most prepared for this major historical turning point in France. On the one hand, the proto-fascist Marine Le Pen and her party, the RN, have spent the last 15 years growing almost incessantly under the conditions of the Third Great Depression. RN has gradually attracted the working class, historically the base of the French Communist Party, especially in the proletarian areas of northern France. It rallied the petty bourgeoisie around the party, especially in the so-called periphery of France, that is, in the small and often neglected towns. Moreover, through a systematic operation of "dédiabolisation" (un-demonization of the party) over the years, it convinced the forces that had once shown their

willingness to unite against Le Pen both at the ballot box and on the streets – not least in the 2002 elections - that RN was “just another party among parties.” It also successfully braved the storms that the party went through. In 2017, Le Pen’s right-hand man (and representative of the anti-EU wing of the party) Florian Philippot split away from the RN (then known as the FN) and founded his own party; in 2022, a second proto-fascist leader and party to rival Le Pen emerged in the person of Eric Zemmour (probably with Macron’s underhanded support to divide the fascist vote), but the rise of Le Pen and the RN continued unabatedly. Today, in the case of an eventual crisis that would create a political void – and in the glaring absence of a revolutionary alternative – the most likely force to take advantage of Macron’s undoing and come to power is Le Pen and the RN.

The crisis triggered by the murder of Nahel and the ensuing short-lived revolt enabled a number of forces in the fascist camp to make their move. We use the term “fascist camp” deliberately. Because it was not only Le Pen’s party, the RN, that was mobilized, but a number of organizations large and small. During the revolt, Le Pen was in the enviable position of sitting and letting Macron’s popular support wither away while her party stood to gain the most. Le Pen emphasized that both Macron and the LR (Republicans) party, which had been in power in the recent past (under Jacques Chirac and Nicholas Sarkozy), were responsible for this crisis through their immigration and security policies. Put differently, French fascism recalled that it was the only force on the right that was not responsible for this crisis. (Don’t be fooled by the relative moderation of the stance here; Mussolini, before he came to power, led the “moderate” wing of his own party for a brief moment in what came close to a schism, even showing tactical flexibility to the point of advocating a truce with the socialists). In a sense, RN leadership knew that unless they made a mistake, this issue would hurt Macron and increase their support, so they quietly let the crisis score political points for RN. They were not off the mark: In the first post-revolt opinion polls, Marine Le Pen is placed on top with 37 percent popular support.

But the RN was not the only one seizing the occasion. A number of overtly fascist organizations, most of them organized in only one city, took to the streets with their militias in order to crush the revolt by blunt force. In the early days of the uprising, fascist Telegram channels began to circulate the call to “reconquer Paris with 10,000 men.” This initial call went unheeded, and there was no “march on Paris,” so to speak. But in a number of other cities, local fascist groups began to organize to quash the revolting masses with knives and clubs. In Angers, members of the previously banned Alvarium organization (now called RED) went on the hunt for protesters with iron bars and baseball bats from June 30 on. In Lyon, “Remparts2Lyon,” the new name of the previously banned Génération Identitaire, and in Chambéry, members of the previously banned Bastion Social took to the streets armed with clubs.

This development is important in at least three regards. First, French fascism has made it clear that in the event of an uprising, it will emerge as the paramilitary forces of the established order. It goes without saying that in none of the examples mentioned above did the police confront fascists (with the partial exception of Lyon, where the police are said to have used tear gas when the fascist militia tried to storm

the town hall, but it is clear that this was because the fascists were targeting state institutions and as long as the target of the attack was the protesters, cops had no qualms). But beyond this, in Lorient, for example, there have been reports of militias calling themselves “groupes anticasseurs” acting in concert with the police and beating young protesters under the benevolent eye of cops. Moreover, the French army was forced to launch an investigation after reports that these “anticasseurs” included navy men (Lorient is one of France’s most important military ports, so there are around 4,000 naval personnel in the city). ***This development amounts to nothing less than the French equivalent of Baltagiya (paramilitary forces used by Hosni Mubarak to quash the Egyptian revolution manu militari) making their debut on the political scene!*** The emergence of police-sanctioned fascist violence and the French Baltagiya is not anecdotal. From this stage onwards, every major workers’ protest and every popular revolt has to take into account that it will have to fight the fascist militias and the French Baltagiya and accordingly create its own self-defense apparatus, not least the workers’ militias.

The second issue, the relationship between proto-fascism and fascism has significance transcending France. For this reason, we hope that the reader will humor my rather long digression on this issue. *Revolutionary Marxism* and its political tradition have for years called parties such as the RN in France, the Fratelli d’Italia (Fd’I) and the Lega in Italy, the AfD in Germany, and Vox in Spain proto-fascist instead of fascist. Perhaps the most decisive factor here was that these parties lacked militias for street violence for the time being, and in this respect they differed both from classical fascism in Germany and Italy, and from recent examples such as the RSS (National Volunteer Organization) in India or Golden Dawn in Greece (banned in 2020). We never excluded the possibility that, at a certain stage, these proto-fascist parties could organize their own paramilitary forces one way or another. ***I believe that the developments in France, especially in conjunction with Italy and the US, are beginning to reveal the concrete forms that the transformation of proto-fascism into fascism will take.***

The relationship between proto-fascists and fascists followed two distinctly different trajectories in Italy and France. In Italy, Italian fascism had long been a significant force, notably CasaPound and Forza Nuova. Although they lacked the votes, these organizations have long been able to organize in many cities, quickly take to the streets, use violence and, through their central organization, define an Italy-wide political strategy. The two major Italian proto-fascist parties mentioned above, Lega and Fd’I, had a significant but secondary power in Italian politics until the major breakthrough of the former in 2018-2019 and the latter in 2022 (of course, proto-fascist parties were much more massive than fascist parties, and by secondary here we mean compared to other mainstream forces in the country’s politics). In France, until the last five years, open fascist organizations were small local groups, without the power to take to the streets and without a nationwide leadership (the pro-monarchy fascist organization Action Française, which boasts of being the oldest political party in France, or the once active GUD, which had a nationwide organization but was very weak). The proto-fascist FN, on the other hand, has come out on top or as a runner-up in almost every major election since 2014.

In the last few years, proto-fascism in Italy and fascism in France have surged to create a more even equation. The Italian proto-fascists have increased their votes by leaps and bounds and have even succeeded in forming a government, something that Le Pen has been denied for years. French fascists, on the other hand, have rapidly increased their militant power. At least since the university occupation movement of 2018, it started to constitute a force that has taken to the streets at every major turn, clashed with protesters, and some of its spokespeople have become nationally known media personalities. In this process, a *Modus Operandi* in the collaboration and the alliance between the two sides has gradually become established. This relationship somewhat varies from case to case and from organization to organization. In Italy, for example, Fratelli d'Italia, the organizational successor of Mussolini's PNF (National Fascist Party), which has many fascist cadres in its ranks, can develop significantly more direct and deeper relations with fascist organizations than the Lega, which comes from a completely different political background. In France, Eric Zemmour's Reconquête, which emerged suddenly in the 2022 presidential elections, has become a shell for fascist organizations and cadres to use as a kind of united front, especially during the electoral process, given that – and unlike the RN – it does not have long-standing local organizations. But beyond these differences, in general, the *fascist organizations retained their independent existence, taking over the exercise of street violence but knowing full well that they would have the support of the massive and parliamentary proto-fascist parties - and in some cases, even a place on their ballot.* (Note that similar situations have existed even in the history of the communists, for example, in Italy after the Second World War, when armed anti-fascist groups such as “Volante Rossa” specialized in anti-fascist violence, often acting together with the Italian Communist Party, but without being subject to its discipline). So proto-fascists and fascists, in the words of an Italian journalist, “live together but do not marry.” In the US, the raid on the Capitol, led by the maverick fascist Donald Trump, saw fascist militia groups such as the Three Percenters, the Proud Boys, and the Oath Keepers cooperating with Trump's MAGA (Make America Great Again). Given how MAGA and fascists mobilized together, it can be argued that this type of relationship is not an exception limited to France and Italy, and that there is a strong possibility (but still a possibility among others) that it will emerge in countries like Spain and Germany, where proto-fascism is on the rise.

This relationship is far from smooth. Although the two sides often act together, the fascist organizations are not under the total control of the proto-fascists. This leads to disharmony between the two sides, sometimes even to mutual accusations. This relationship may take various forms in the near future. In France, the RN (or, less likely, the Reconquête, since it lacks a strong central apparatus) could absorb these organizations and turn them into militias acting within its own organizational discipline. Such a development would mean the completion of the process of proto-fascism turning into fascism. But this would be a true challenge, particularly for the fascists, who are already much more advanced in the methods of violence than the militants of the RN and might be reluctant to give up their organizational independence within the RN, whose militant base might still lack the “street credentials” that they have, as far as fascists are concerned. On the other hand,

if this challenging unity fails to materialize and if the militia forces of fascism remain fragmented and without a centralized leadership (especially in the case of France, which, unlike Italy, lacks a centralized fascist organization), this may prove to be a disadvantage for fascism in the decisive struggles ahead. Let us remember that when French fascism tried to take over power in the country on February 6, 1934, with an uprising, one of the two most important factors explaining the defeat of French fascism (along with the United Workers' Front, which was successfully implemented against fascism), was the fragmentation of French fascism at the time. Today, fascism has a united political leadership embodied in the RN (despite the presence of Zemmour and a number of smaller parties), but it remains to be seen whether it can form a united paramilitary force out of the fragmented fascist militias.

This brings us to the last point about armed fascism taking to the streets during the Banlieue revolts. I have mentioned above various examples where fascism took its militias to the streets. The fascists did take to the streets, but in most of these cases, the *youth who participated in the uprising used violence to defeat the fascist militias*. In a previous article, I mentioned the proclivity of the urban poor youth participating in the revolts to street violence. Another dimension of this skillset, as I mentioned above, manifested itself in the quasi-military organization of the youth. The result was that the fascists hit a brick wall when they tried to beat the revolt into submission. After videos of fascists taking to the streets in Chambéry, for instance, videos of fascists moaning in agony on the ground began to circulate on Twitter. In Angers, the fascists first attacked the protesters, who were outnumbered, and then had to flee to their office after an impressive attack by the mass of protesters. To add insult to injury, the youth targeted the fascists' association and rendered it unusable. Photos circulating on the internet show a ruined association building with the words "death to the fascists" written on the walls! As the French say "à la guerre comme à la guerre" (if you are at war, act like you are at war). The success of the banlieue youth in repelling the fascists by force should be an example for workers' organizations. All workers' organizations, from trade unions to political parties, must set themselves the task of protecting their actions and institutions with the same determination and discipline in the face of the rising fascist threat, and of forming workers' militias to ensure this security. Fascism and fascist terror are not invincible. A United Workers' Front that unites workers' organizations against fascism without hindering the political independence of the organizations involved, and workers' militias prepared to use any means necessary against fascist terror will have no difficulty in crushing fascist aggression. The success of the youth with their quasi-military discipline on a limited scale is proof enough.

The misery of the left

The deeds of the French left in the face of the revolt have been nothing but shameful. The mainstream left either turned its back on the revolt and the youth or took an openly hostile stance. The Socialist Party, once one of the two major political forces in the country but now moribund, first published a short and bland text signed by the party's secretary general, Olivier Faure, expressing its sorrow for

Nahel. Yet, two days later, both the party and Faure seemed to have forgotten all about Nahel and were busy condemning the “violence” of the youth! The Greens (EELV), another major force of the mainstream left, had already begun to call on the protesters for common sense and restraint, even before the riots had reached their climax.

The French Communist Party has not only called for restraint but has openly sided with the French state. This is hardly the first time the PCF has done that. The PCF’s long-standing process of taking more and more right-wing stances took a leap forward in 2018 when Fabien Roussel took the helm of the party. Under Roussel’s leadership, the PCF began to pursue a policy of “law and order,” in particular to outflank the fast-rising (and soon to be discussed) Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his France Unbowed party from the right. As a result of this orientation, in 2021, when the 150th anniversary of the Paris Commune was on the agenda of the French left, I personally witnessed at least two workers’ rallies in which Roussel and the PCF, who went and supported the police demonstrations for tougher laws, with the words “*Versillais*, get out” (referring to the Versailles government that emerged in 1871 as the center of counter-revolution against the revolutionary power of Paris). Now, the same PCF is using the revolt to prove its “respectability” in the eyes of the forces of order. Not only did Roussel and the PCF join the chorus of restraint, but they attacked Mélenchon when he took a brave stand and declared he was not calling for restraint but for justice. When Macron came out and talked about a social media blackout, Roussel immediately concurred and said he wanted a “state of emergency for social media.” A befitting trajectory for a party that will go down in the annals of history as the paramount example of treachery!

Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party, LFI, deserve special mention. Mélenchon is a politician who started his political career in an organization with revolutionary Marxist origins, then moved to the Socialist Party, even rising to the position of deputy minister in Lionel Jospin’s government in the early 2000s, before breaking away from the Socialist Party to the left and founding his own movement. After the electoral defeat of the Socialist Party in the 2017 presidential elections and the PCF in the parliamentary elections, Mélenchon and the LFI have become the biggest forces of the left in France. Mélenchon is neither a communist nor a revolutionary. He is a reformist politician who forbids the use of the red flag at his rallies, who is influenced by French nationalism, and whose main political program is to replace the current 5th Republic with a 6th Republic. But the LFI is distinguished from the rest of the left both by its occasional (albeit inconsistent) challenge to NATO and the EU and by the popular masses it reaches. ***Apart from the smaller revolutionary Marxist parties, the LFI is the only political force that can speak to the workers, some of whom are increasingly coming under Le Pen’s spell after the left has shackled itself with the straitjacket of identity politics.*** This is no coincidence but the product of a conscious strategy. Already in 2012, when his movement was still very modest in size, Mélenchon ran as a candidate in Hénin-Beaumont in northern France, where Le Pen had her own slate for parliament. He lost the election by a lopsided margin (the Socialist Party’s candidate won a razor-thin victory in the second round against Le Pen, so neither Le Pen nor Mélenchon was elected), but it

already spoke volumes that he was up to challenge Le Pen in her own stronghold and to campaign to the masses there. Today, Mélenchon's is the only left-wing force that has a meaningful impact on the working people of small towns and cities where Le Pen wields great power. For instance, in the run-up to the presidential elections in 2022, according to a poll conducted by the BVA, 44 percent of the Yellow Vests planned to vote for Le Pen, with Mélenchon coming in second with 28 percent. Not-so-close behind was the proto-fascist Zemmour with 9 percent. The rest of the left and the traditional right are completely absent! So, at the moment, only Mélenchon has succeeded (even if partially) in challenging the fascists for the hearts and minds of the working people who increasingly started to back fascism. This is a point of no small interest.

What is more important for this article is Mélenchon's influence both on the black and Arab populations of the banlieues and in French colonies such as Guadeloupe and Martinique. To illustrate the extent of this sway in the banlieues, let me mention the striking example of Seine-Saint-Denis. This administrative unit is located just northeast of Paris and includes towns like Bobigny and Saint-Denis, which were once part of the "red belt" under the absolute domination of the PCF but have now become the epitome of poor Arab and black banlieues. In this region, where the left has traditionally been strong, ***the right-wing parties won five of the 12 seats in the 2017 elections, four of which went to Macron and his allies. In 2022, the NUPES, a left-wing alliance led by the LFI (but also including the PCF, the Greens, and the Socialist Party), won all 12 constituencies.*** Nine of these 12 deputies were elected from Mélenchon's LFI, including Jérôme Legavre, a POI (Independent Workers' Party) militant, who was elected from LFI lists.

This success is a direct product of Mélenchon and the LFI's years of unwavering opposition to the weaponization of secularism in France as a means to oppress the Muslim minority. This seems to have yielded impressive results. According to Ifop, a very reliable polling organization, 69 percent of Muslims in France voted for Mélenchon in the presidential elections in 2022. During the revolt, Mélenchon's stances clearly strengthened his position in the banlieues and increased the confidence of the working people of these neighborhoods in the LFI and in him. As I wrote above, Mélenchon refused to join the chorus of "calls for restraint" and stated in no unclear terms he wanted justice, not restraint. He denounced the bourgeois intelligentsia who tried to pressure him into condemning the revolts as mere "watchdogs" (*chiens de garde*). Moreover, he asked the youth to "not burn libraries and schools" in what was seen as a tacit endorsement of violence against other targets, such as police stations. In other words, of all the political groups mentioned above, Mélenchon and the LFI were the only major forces that did not treat the popular revolt as a natural disaster to be contained, and who had the courage to side with the revolt. If nothing else, this is honor enough for Mélenchon.

What I have discussed so far was basically the mainstream left and the French Communist Party, which was moving confidently to the other side of the barricade. They sided with the order and not the revolt – there is no news here. But what about the forces that come from the revolutionary Marxist tradition and still have a socialist revolution in France in their program? To answer this question, we should go beyond

the immediate span of the revolt in the summer of 2023. The response of the extra-parliamentary left, whose major representatives are Lutte Ouvrière (LO, Workers' Struggle) and the NPA (New Anticapitalist Party), to the revolt has taken place over the last 18 years. Most crucially, these organizations have not made any headway among banlieue youth since the first revolt in 2005. During the 2023 uprising, I have not come across a single case in which these large organizations took part in the movement with their militants from the banlieue youth (if they have any), or even formulated the political demands of the uprising with their militants in the movement (we have mentioned above how the lack of political organization is a great disadvantage despite the strong quasi-military organization of the uprising), or took a step to organize the youth, for instance, in neighborhood committees. Not to mention that I have not heard any effort from these organizations – whose militants number in the thousands and whose main strength is concentrated in the Paris region – opening an association or establishing any sort of foothold in, let's say, Saint-Denis or Nanterre (where the protests started), which are accessible by metro from the center of Paris and constitute the most important center of the banlieue youth. The forms such as associations I mention here are mere examples – the main take is this: ***in the 18 years since the first revolt, these organizations have not taken a single concrete step to obtain a footing within the banlieue youth.***

We would like to underline how striking this lack of interest is. In 2005, when the youth of the banlieues rose up and fought the police for weeks, any revolutionary organization that took itself seriously and wanted to do justice to the name “revolutionary” should have analyzed what this revolt meant on the path to revolution in France and taken concrete steps accordingly. The significance of the banlieues, which have been bursting onto the scene with large and small explosions not only in 2005 but ever since that, should be obvious to any revolutionary who takes their task seriously. In an article I penned in March in Turkish, before the Nahel murder and the revolt had even taken place, I made the following observation:

In the 21st century, at the same time, the poor people of the banlieues have risen up on several occasions, most notably in 2005. As is the case all over the world, this mass movement, which also demonstrated the skill of the young urban poor in the use of violent methods, also showed how formidable an enemy it could be against the police and law enforcement agencies, especially in cases like 2005, when it was not confined to a single banlieue. But in none of these struggles that have marked the last two decades have these two great forces [working class and banlieue youth -HR] been able to reach out to each other. When the banlieue youth stood up, the organized working class stayed away, and now, when the organized working class is striking, the banlieues are silent. However, as I wrote above, in a scenario where the banlieues, which are very adept at street violence, rise up with the working class, the government in France would not last a single day! The French police, who even now lack the ability to concentrate their forces in big cities like Paris due to the spread of the protests to hundreds of cities and who are said to be facing serious logistical problems, would prob-

ably be completely inadequate against both the barricades of the workers in Paris and the revolts of the youth in the banlieues. *The conclusion to be drawn from this is clear. A revolutionary organization in France worthy of this name must set the historical goal of building an alliance between the banlieues and the organized working class under the leadership of the working class, just as the communists of the 20th century set the alliance of the working class and the peasantry as a strategic task.*⁵

So how is it that mighty French organizations missed what we saw or have not taken concrete steps that logically stem from this observation for 18 years? It is obvious that I cannot be a better observer of France than its revolutionary organizations. The answer is simple: the overwhelming majority of the once revolutionary left all over the world, including France, has long ceased seeing revolution as a concrete goal. How could those who do not organize for the goal of revolution, who do not set their sights on rallying society around the working class (the reasons for this are very different for the LO and the NPA, the examples mentioned above, but I will not go into that in this article), see different layers within the working people as essential elements of the future revolution and understand that they too have a role to play in it?

And what could have been done, you may ask? There is no need to go far for a positive example. Analyzing the defeat of the popular rebellion that started with Gezi in 2013 in Turkey, the Revolutionary Workers' Party in Turkey (DİP) identified that one of the biggest weaknesses of this rebellion was that the working class did not participate in it with the methods of the class, namely with strikes and factory occupations. As a result, the party's 3rd Congress, which convened after the rebellion, concluded that the party "should consider this prolonged silence of the working class as an 'advance' given by history to strengthen itself within the working class, and should turn it into a silver lining" and concluded that "[w]ith all our energy, we must give priority to organizing within the vanguard of the working class." The result of this is the "strategic positioning" orientation that the DİP has been pursuing for the last ten years. History gave the French revolutionaries such an advance of 18 years. This 18-year advance has been wasted. What an absolute pity.

The left in France, and particularly those coming from diverse revolutionary traditions, did not (not "could not," but "did not") fulfill this historical duty and instead called for solidarity actions in major cities, especially in Paris. Both these organizations and a number of trade unions, notably the CGT, supported the two major demonstrations for Nahel in Paris, in some cases participating in the organization of the demonstrations themselves. How so wonderful. As I mentioned above, the strength of these solidarity actions played an important role in the 2023 revolts not being completely isolated, unlike their 2005 counterparts. Not that we downplay their importance. But to get stuck in a solidarity role is also to detach your own fate from the fate of the revolt. As admirable as it is that they did not turn their backs on the task of solidarity and stood up for the youth of the banlieues, it is nothing less than

5 Hasan Refik, "Fransa'da Grev Dalgası", <https://gercekgazetesi1.net/uluslararasi/fransada-grev-dalgasi-31-mayis-taksim-en-guzel-kiliginda-isci-tulumuyla>.

criminal that these groups could only serve as a force of solidarity – despite the 18-year historical advance between the two uprisings.