

THE REVOLUTION OF 1908  
AND THE WORKING CLASS IN TURKEY

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes the emergence and escalation class antagonism between Young Turks and the working class in Turkey in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1908. Focusing on the case of the Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessalonica, the thesis demonstrates how the class antagonism affected the policies of socialists, whereas the attitude of the Union and Progress towards the workers movement is also analyzed. Starting with the description of the development and impact of the workers' actions in the Ottoman Empire in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the thesis continues with an introductory chapter on the Federation. Using these background information, the thesis studies how the antagonism between the elites of the new regime and the working class developed, paying attention both to the positioning of workers and the elites. In order to demonstrate that the class antagonism led the socialists as political representatives of workers to adopt distinct attitudes on political issues, the thesis focuses on the adoption of the idea of Balkan Federation by the socialists in Thessalonica in response to the national question and war threat. Finally the thesis uses the theory of uneven development to explain the rapidly developing class antagonism in Turkey.

Keywords: Union and Progress, working class, Revolution of 1908

## ÖZET

### 1908 Devrimi ve Türkiye’de İşçi Sınıfı

Sinan Dinçer

Bu tez 1908 devriminin ertesinde Jön Türkler ve işçi sınıfı arasındaki sınıf karşıtlığının ortaya çıkışını ve yükselişini analiz etmektedir. Selanik Sosyalist İşçi Federasyonu deneyimine odaklanan tez, sınıf karşıtlığının sosyalistlerin politikalarını nasıl etkilediğini ortaya koyarken, İttihat ve Terakki’nin işçi sınıfına karşı tutumunu da analiz etmektedir. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda 19. yüzyılda ve 20. yüzyılın başlarında işçi eylemlerinin gelişimini ve etkisini betimleyerek başlayan tez, Federasyon’a giriş niteliğinde bir bölümle devam ediyor. Bu verilerden yola çıkan tez yeni rejimin elitleri ve işçi sınıfı arasındaki karşıtlığı inceliyor ve hem elitlerin hem de işçilerin konumlanışına bakıyor. Sınıf karşıtlığının işçi sınıfının siyasi temsilcileri olan sosyalistleri kimi siyasi başlıklarda farklı konumlar almaya ittiğini göstermek için, tez Selanik’teki sosyalistlerin ulusal sorun ve savaş tehdidi karşısında Balkan Federasyonu fikrini sahiplenmelerini yakından inceliyor. Son olarak tez Türkiye’deki sınıf karşıtlığının hızlı gelişimini açıklamak için eşitsiz gelişim yasasını kullanıyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: İttihat ve Terakki, işçi sınıfı, 1908 devrimi

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The final decades of the Ottoman Empire, especially the aftermath of the revolution of 1908, has attracted the interest of many historians in Turkey and abroad. Many of these works went beyond describing general political events and attempted to track down economic, political and ideological characteristics of the republican Turkey in this period. Despite the rejection of Union and Progress by the cadres of the republic, many components of the second constitutional period, including cadres and political-ideological standpoints resurfaced in the republican era. Therefore, although the long period preceding 1908 was not neglected, it wouldn't be wrong to say that the ten years long second constitutional period attracted a disproportional attention with regard to the Ottoman history in general. Historical studies on this period mostly focused on the actions and positions of individuals, who were part of the political and intellectual elite, and on Union and Progress as a paramilitary organization and as a political party. Parliamentary rivals of Union and Progress, together with minority organizations, also found their place in the historical studies of this era.

Studies on the working class and socialist movement were virtually non-existent until 1960's, when the Workers' Party of Turkey emerged as the

representative of the working class in the political arena. Studies by scholars such as Oya Sencer and Mete Tunçay and non-scholars such as Kemal Sülker and Kerim Sadi (A. Cerrahoğlu), were the pioneers of the studies on the socialist and workers' movement. With the exception of Oya Sencer, their works were mostly descriptive and the main contribution of their works was collection of valuable data on the socialist and workers' movement. In addition to these researchers, who were affiliated with the socialist and workers' movement to varying degrees, anti-communist authors, such as Fethi Tevetoğlu, Aclan Sayılğan and Münir Çapanoğlu, also presented detailed studies on the history of socialist and workers' movement in Turkey. These studies, which pioneered and shaped future historical works on the workers' and socialist movement in the Ottoman Empire, were mostly based on the archives of mainstream newspapers of the time, available publications of socialist organizations and works of foreign scholars such as Stefan Velikov and George Harris. Other studies were published in 1970's, but only few of them made significant additions to the aforementioned works. While these works paid some attention to the relations between the working class and the state among many other things, more systematic studies in this area were made by scholars from the branch of industrial relations such as Mesut Gülmez and Ahmet Makal.

Parallel to that, Middle East and the Ottoman Empire attracted the attention of labor historians, who were influenced by E.P. Thompson's work "The Making of the English Working Class", as well. This current not only dismissed approaches based on Orientalism and Modernization theory, which focused on the impact of Western influence on Middle East and intra- and interelite conflicts<sup>1</sup>, but it also challenged the approaches of classical Marxists, who narrowed their gaze to the

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<sup>1</sup> Lockman, Zachary. *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994. p.xi

material conditions of class formation, such as the level of development of industry and quantity of industrial workers. As a result, industrial working class was abandoned as the major unit of analysis, and it was replaced by “subaltern groups”, which included any segments with subordinate social position.<sup>2</sup> The dichotomous model of class antagonism between the workers and capitalists was replaced with complex models of struggle, which incorporated other denominators such as race, ethnicity, religion and gender. Parallel to that, the emphasis on strikes and trade union activities shifted to “everyday forms of resistance” of subalterns in general.<sup>3</sup> While the unit of analysis broadened from industrial workers to subalterns, the scales of studies were narrowed to individual cases. In contrast to works by Sencer and Sülker, who attempted to draw a full picture of the working class in entire Ottoman Empire and Turkey over a long period of time, the new labor historians focused on shorter time periods and narrowed their research subjects to workers in a locality, in a workplace or sector.

Both historians with a classical Marxist approach such as Sencer and Sülker, and the new labor historians were engaged in discussions on class identity and class consciousness in Turkey (or Middle East). Classical Marxists had a universal and linear understanding of class consciousness. Once industry and capitalist relations would advance to a certain degree, working class would gain consciousness, which was expected to grow parallel to the development of capitalism in a linear way. They also expected the class consciousness to take a course similar to the experience in Western Europe. The gap between the workers movements in the Ottoman Empire and republican Turkey led Sencer to the conclusion that a conscious working class didn't exist in the Ottoman Empire. Sencer attempted to explain this shortcoming

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<sup>2</sup> Beinlin, Joel. *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. p.3

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.2

with reference to the Western European experience, and she stated that the lack of a nationally owned industry, the ethnically and religiously heterogeneous combination of workers, and the lack of adequate numbers of workers (in proportional comparison to Europe) were the main reasons for the lack of working class in the Ottoman Empire.

Neither the linear models of classical Marxists, who consider the material grounds of class, nor the approaches of new labor historians, who attempt to broaden and depoliticize the concept of working class, help us to explain the emerging class antagonism in the early years of second constitutional period. From 1908 to 1912, workers in Turkey elevated their struggle to a level, which had no comparable example until 1960's. Despite the widely accepted assumptions by historians, that the workers' action didn't have a significant impact on the establishment of class relations<sup>4</sup>, the attitude of ruling elites towards the working class and class struggle was largely shaped in this period. Moreover, the political organizations of working class were able to produce alternative policies for the country based on the interests of classes they represented. Significantly, these early socialist organizations were able to go beyond the defense the immediate demands of workers, such as wage increases and better working conditions, and they adopted policies, which considered the long term, or "historical" interests of the working class, both at national and international levels.

Socialists Workers' Federation of Thessalonica (or simply the Federation) is a unique case, which provides grounds for the above mentioned arguments. Although being constrained to Thessalonica and Macedonia, the Federation not only brought up policies extending beyond economic demands to political and organizational

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<sup>4</sup> Keyder, Çağlar. *Türkiye'de Devlet ve Sınıflar*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2005.

concerns based on the long term interests of the working class, but it was also able to rally large amounts of workers behind it causes, in contrast with the usual image of marginalized intellectuals, which was attributed to various Ottoman socialist organizations. The experience of the Federation also provides us with valuable clues to explain how this high level of politization was attained and how the class antagonism contributed to the shaping of the new regime, determining some of the prevailing characteristics of the capitalist class in Turkey.

In this thesis my aim is to demonstrate how the emergence of a strong workers' and socialist movement in the aftermath of the revolution of 1908 led to the development of a class antagonism between the working class and Young Turks. In doing that, I will focus on both actors and try to reveal how the Union and Progress understood and responded to the class struggle, and how the Federation as one of the most influential class organizations adopted distinct policies it linked with the interests of the working class on certain actual issues.

Chapter two focuses on the development of workers' actions in Turkey until 1909, and categorizes them in three periods based on certain characteristics of these actions. Special attention is paid on the strikes after the revolution of 1908, some of which are analyzed in depth, in order to reveal their impact on class antagonism in the aftermath of the revolution. In addition to that, this chapter also briefly covers the reaction of the state to these workers' actions.

Chapter three is an introduction to the Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessalonica, which is the main focus of this work. This chapter starts with a brief description of the time and space, in which this organization was born. Afterwards, the emergence of the Federation is presented with special emphasis on the federative structure of this organization.

Chapter four is an analysis of the growing antagonism between the working class and bourgeoisie in political level with regard to the experiences of the Federation and the parliamentary debates.

Chapter five demonstrates how the Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessalonica adopted the idea of Balkan Federation as a unique working class position in two crucial, interconnected issues of that era: National Question and War.

Chapter six, the conclusion, attempts to explain the findings of this work within the context of uneven development.

Before going any further, it is necessary to draw the boundaries of the argument of this thesis. Despite the justified criticisms of new labor historians on the overemphasis of strike actions and “modern” workers’ organizations working class, it was inevitable for the purposes of this paper to focus on the organized and active segments of the workers. The aim of this paper is not to draw a complete picture of the Ottoman proletariat, but demonstrating how the class antagonism in the Ottoman Empire developed.

“The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians’ intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988. p.59

This brief passage from the Communist Manifesto actually referred to entrance of British capitalism to China, yet it is also explanatory in the context of the Ottoman Empire. As a result of the signing of commercial treaties with numerous European countries at the end of 1830's and at the beginning of 1840's, Ottoman Empire started to become a free market for the European capitalism. The Ottoman industries were badly affected by cheap European imports. Numerous industries, such as the textile industry almost collapsed. Based on reports from nineteenth century, textile production had a 90 percent decline from the mid nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Not only the textile industry, but all industries, whose products could be substituted through imports were in decline. This process first affected the regions such as the European Turkey, which were more accessible for European imports in terms of transportation.

Yet the nineteenth century also witnessed growth in some industrial sectors. In an attempt to keep up with the overwhelming military power of the European countries, the Ottoman state opened several factories, in order to meet the extensive demands of a modernized army.<sup>7</sup> These factories, which were either owned by the state, or sold their products to the state, were few in numbers, but significant, since they were the first modern industrial institutions in Turkey. In addition to that, as we will see in the context of Thessalonica in chapter three, privately owned factories started to emerge in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, the intensification of trade with Europe was not only based on imports, but also exports grew throughout the nineteenth century. In order to acquire raw materials and to transport them, European capitalists, with strong political and military backing from their imperialists states, started to build modernized mines and

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<sup>6</sup> Makal, Ahmet. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Çalışma İlişkileri: 1850-1920*. Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1997. p.137

<sup>7</sup> Sencer, Oya. *Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfı Doğuşu ve Yapısı*. İstanbul: Habora Kitabevi, 1969. p.81

railroads. In addition to that, intensive exports to Europe transformed some “traditional” industries into modern industries. An example for that was the carpet industry in Uşak, which boomed as a result of the increasing demand, and even spread out to other places in Anatolia. From 1870’s to 1910’s, carpet exports from Uşak quadrupled, while the technology of the means of production developed parallel to the growth in production.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the decline of industries also destroyed the guilds, which were important elements of the traditional social order. These radical changes became not only evident in industries, but they also had a strong impact on the export oriented Ottoman agriculture, which became more and more dependent on the demands of the world market. In fact, “within its restricted zone of influence, the railroad brought many cultivators into the world market nexus [and] facilitated more extensive adoption of commercial agriculture.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, “Ottoman institutions at all levels – social, economic, ideological, political – were attacked and destroyed or drastically modified”, as Donald Quataert quotes from Andrew C. Hess.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, the Ottoman Empire, which attempted to develop the superstructure of a capitalist economy without having the corresponding base, began to face serious troubles. The incomes of the state were insufficient to maintain a large modern army, an ever growing number of civil servants and the state-owned industries, so that the state was grew unable to pay salaries. The Debt Administration (Düyun-u Umummiye) took over a large segment of the Empire’s finances. Although the despotic regime of Abdülhamid was able to suppress the discontented voices for a while, by 1906 the regime had no longer the power to rule the country. A wave of

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<sup>8</sup> Quataert, Donald. *Workers, Peasants and Economic Change in the Ottoman Empire 1730-1914*. Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1993. p.124

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p.79

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.50

tax uprisings swept through Anatolia in 1906. The state was unable to pay the salaries of civil servants and petty officers, who lived in misery. Yet, it was the climate, which triggered the collapse of Abdülhamid regime.

The agricultural production, with the exception of a few spots, was primitive and inefficient. Other than the lands with access to railroad and seaports, transportation costs increased the cost of agricultural products, to the extent that it was generally cheaper to import wheat to Istanbul from Europe or even the USA than from Anatolia. In addition to these problems, population density in Anatolia was low and a significant amount of land remained uncultivated. The impact of these limitations become evident in 1907, when a harsh winter and the following drought led to a dramatic increase in the prices of basic commodities, so that the quality of life decreased significantly.<sup>11</sup> Anatolian agricultural production, which was affected by the drought severely, was not even able to satisfy the demand of Anatolian towns, while Istanbul had to depend almost completely on imports. The prices of wheat, bread and numerous other consumption goods skyrocketed, wages remained fixed, the danger of starvation emerged, and it was followed by numerous unrests and riots in Istanbul and Anatolian towns.<sup>12</sup> As Quataert argues, this shock had a trigger effect on the Revolution of 1908.<sup>13</sup>

The peculiar development of capitalism in Turkey produced a complicated bourgeois class. Since some of the largest companies, such as the railroad companies and the Régie, were owned by the European capitalists, whose interests were under

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.46

<sup>12</sup> A riot occurred in Erzurum in September 1907; the demonstrators lynched two black marketers and plundered grain depots. The soldiers refused to shoot people, yet the leaders of the riot were arrested in October. Another riot took place in Sivas in June 1908, few weeks before the revolution. The crowd of 500 people stoned the governor's office and plundered granaries. Soldiers were again unwilling to open fire, yet in the evening 60 people were arrested. [Quataert, Donald. *Workers, Peasants and Economic Change in the Ottoman Empire 1730-1914*. Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1993. p.53]

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.47

the protection of their states. Consequently, the representatives and managers of these companies in Turkey played the role of the bourgeoisie, when it came to antagonism with workers, as we will see in chapter two. Furthermore, the special conditions of these enterprises, which obligated the Ottoman state to compensate for their losses under certain circumstances, incorporated the high ranking bureaucracy and political elite to the bourgeoisie. The “conventional” local bourgeoisie, which really owned the means of production, was economically and politically much weaker than the managers of aforementioned companies. The foreign companies possessed many means for keeping the politicians as bourgeois politicians. In fact, the Ottoman state was not only dependent on the European states for its finances, but it was also under the siege of European advisors, who virtually ruled the Ottoman economy. Yet, the regime of Abdülhamid was problematic for the European capitalists. Under the rule of Abdülhamid, the Ottoman state was lumpish and inefficient, while the new regime of Young Turks was much faster in responding to the demands of European capitalists. For example, although the Abdülhamid regime was unable or unwilling to prevent tobacco smuggling, which was a major problem for the Régie, the Young Turk regime immediately brought an end to this malfunction.<sup>14</sup> As we will see in this chapter and in chapter four, the Young Turks were more than willing to cooperate with the foreign capitalists.

The idea of economics was a new concept in Turkey, which was introduced by the revolutionaries. As opposed to the Abdülhamid regime, which tried to preserve the status quo, the Young Turk movement started with the question “What to do?” and promised change and progress. In order to achieve change, Young Turks felt the obligation to adopt a new approach to the economics of the country.

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<sup>14</sup> Quataert, Donald. *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Avrupa İktisadi Yayılımı ve Direniş (1881-1908)*. Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1987. p.32

Therefore, as opposed to the financial policies of the Ancien Régime, which focused on balancing the budget and maximizing the state's income only, the new regime aimed at developing the means of production in Turkey.<sup>15</sup> For that reason, in the new era, the political power couldn't confine itself to a purely financial perspective and had to develop economic policies to shape the country.<sup>16</sup> In addition to that, the poverty and economic backwardness of the country were among the strongest arguments of the Union and Progress in their struggle against the Abdülhamid regime, and people were expecting changes in this area.

The economic policies of Union and Progress consisted of two different periods. The first period, which lasted from the revolution of 1908 to the World War, was the liberal phase, while the period until the end of the World War was called "National Economics". Proponents of liberalism and free market economy were strong among the Young Turks. In addition to Prince Sabahattin, who was an opponent of Union and Progress, Mehmed Cavid Bey, the deputy of Thessalonica, was a strong advocate of economic liberalism, and he insisted that the state should stay away from the economic life, and remove all barriers.<sup>17</sup> In this period, Mehmed Cavid Bey, who had a great influence on the economic policies of the country, had a firm belief that the destiny of Turkey's economy was tied to cash crop export exports and foreign investment.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the main economic policy of the initial period can be summarized as providing an attractive environment for foreign investors and securing the smooth functioning of the cash crop export, which would develop agricultural capitalism in Turkey.

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<sup>15</sup> Toprak, Zafer. *Türkiye'de "Milli İktisat" (1908-1918)*. Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1982. p.19

<sup>16</sup> The idea of economic policies existed before the revolution of 1908, as well. Yet, only a few of them were implemented, and they were mostly far from leading to the desired results.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p.18

<sup>18</sup> Sadi, Kerim. *Türkiye'de Sosyalizmin Tarihine Katkı*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1994. p.387

An interesting analysis of the class character of Union and Progress was made by Yusuf Akçura in 1923. Starting with the statement that it was not the ideas, but social classes, which defined political parties, Akçura continues with the question, which classes the political parties in the Ottoman Empire, namely the Union and Progress and the Entente and Freedom parties, represented. Referring to the Abdülhamid era, Akçura describes three major social classes, who benefited from the wellbeing of the state. One of them was the components of the state apparatus, namely the soldiers, civil servants and clergy. The second class was the big Moslem merchants, and the third is identified as landowners, with emphasis on big landowners. Akçura defined these classes as bourgeoisie. In the last years of Abdülhamid's reign, these classes split in terms of their political affiliations, and various segments of these classes, namely the low ranking civil servants and officers, in Akçura's words "the proletarian civil and military servants", distanced themselves from the Porte and established ties with the Union and Progress. In addition to that, Akçura names among the supporters of Union and Progress the "non-Moslem and non-Turkish national democratic parties" and the merchants of Thessalonica, who couldn't compete with monopoly of the Greek and Armenian merchants in Istanbul. According to Akçura, another group, which supported Union and Progress, was the big landowners in Rumeli. Thus, the remaining supporters of Abdülhamid were the high ranking civil and military servants, the big merchants favored by the Porte and some land owners. Since these groups were disadvantaged by the revolution of 1908, they constituted the Entente and Freedom Party. On the other hand, Akçura stresses out the change in the class character of these parties over time. Thus, "the Union and Progress was no longer the party of the discontented civil servants, but it was the party of the civil servants, who were raised, promoted and turned into capitalists by

her”.<sup>19</sup> The landowners from Rumeli and the merchants of Thessalonica constituted “the eternal and important seniors” of Union and Progress. Throughout the time, the Union and Progress felt the need for expanding its social basis, and followed policies in order to become the representative of the entire Turkish and Moslem landowners and merchants. Akçura concludes that “it wouldn’t be wrong to name the Union and Progress Party as the representative of the Turkish bourgeoisie”.<sup>20</sup>

The analysis of Yusuf Akçura might seem disputable in a way, since he included social groups such as landowners and civil servants to bourgeoisie. Still, Akçura’s categorization can be seen as a valid argument, since most of these landowners were producers of valuable cash crops, and they were attached to the world capitalist market through exports of agricultural products. In addition to that, they had common interests with the merchant bourgeoisie, which was enriched from the export of cash crops. Yet what is significant in Akçura’s analysis is his claim that the Union and Progress didn’t dare to alienate the other merchants and landowners, who originally constituted the social basis of Entente and Freedom Party. We can conclude from Akçura’s analysis that merchants and landowners as constituents of bourgeoisie had become critical for keeping the political power. The analysis by Akçura reveals an interesting interaction between the bourgeoisie and the Union and Progress. The Union and Progress, which conquered the power through the support of a segment of bourgeoisie, needed to include the entire bourgeoisie, in order to secure its power. Throughout the time, it proved itself as a weakness that the Union and Progress was primarily supported by the bourgeoisie of Thessalonica, and landowners of Rumeli. In fact the March 31<sup>st</sup> incident and the coup against the Union and Progress in 1912 showed how costly it was for the Union and Progress not

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<sup>19</sup> Toprak, Zafer. *Türkiye’de “Milli İktisat” (1908-1918)*. Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1982 p.421

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.421

the have the full support of the bourgeoisie in the capital city. Finally, Union and Progress and the bourgeoisie didn't function as separate actors, but there was an organic relationship between them, as Akçura demonstrates.

On the other side of the coin was the working class, which was also heavily shaped by the penetration of the European capitalism into the Ottoman Empire. The increasing economic control of foreigners, who administered numerous important enterprises, such as the Régie, Railroads and the Debt Administration with thousands of employees, destroyed the social fabric of the Ottoman Empire through their employment policies with ethnic and religious discrimination. A striking example of this can be seen in the employment practices in railroads and in the Debt Administration. Although the Debt Administration mostly employed Muslims in order to avoid the reaction of the Muslim population, high ranking positions were reserved for non-Muslims and Europeans, and Muslims in critical positions were replaced with non Muslims at times of crisis, such as in the crises between 1895 and 1899, and between 1907 and 1908.<sup>21</sup> These employment policies “exacerbated the already tense relations among the Ottoman ethnic-religious communities and thus furthered the destruction of the Ottoman social fabric.”<sup>22</sup> These tensions reproduced themselves not only in large scale institutions, which usually hired “foreigners for the top jobs, foreigners and Ottoman Christians for the Middle positions, and Muslims for the lower ranks”, but also in the employment practices of foreign and non-Muslim merchants.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Quataert, Donald. *Workers, Peasants and Economic Change in the Ottoman Empire 1730-1914*. Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1993. P. 140

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.140

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.145

## CHAPTER 2

### WORKERS' ACTIONS

As a result of the penetration of capitalism into the Ottoman Empire, a new socio-economic segment, namely the industrial wage workers started to emerge. Similar to the examples of transition to capitalism in Western countries, Ottoman workers voiced their reactions and demands in the face of the hardships they suffered throughout this painful period. Starting from early nineteenth century, actions of the Ottoman proletariat demonstrate that the workers' and socialist movement in the aftermath of the 1908 revolution were not a timeless outburst as a result of political liberties and foreign influence, but a continuation and escalation of the workers' struggles in the previous periods. Workers' actions in Turkey can be classified in three periods. The first one was a period of machine breaking actions. It was followed by a period of economic demands. While the strikes of 1908 can be regarded as a transition period, the workers' actions after 1908 demonstrated a relatively conscious class character and political demands.

Although the machine breakers in Turkey never constituted a movement like the Luddites in Great Britain, their actions were significant for being the first collective workers' reaction in Turkey. Reports of machine breaking date back to 1830's, when the first factories emerged in Rumelia and Western Anatolia. The first

known machine breaking incident took place in Sliven, Rumelia, when workers attacked the woolen cloth factory of Dobrijokeslov in 1838.<sup>24</sup> The machine breaking actions had two main reasons. One of them was the hesitation of workers to work with steam engines and machines, which were unseen in Turkey until that time. Hesitation to work with machines did not immediately lead to machine breaking actions, but the workers simply refused to work at factories. An example for that was seen in Bursa in 1845, when no workers accepted to work at a factory with steam engines.<sup>25</sup> The other reason for machine breaking actions was the fear of unemployment. The replacement of large amounts of labor by steam power, and the employment of foreign workers, who were more familiar with machines, created a strong reaction, and a wave of machine breaking actions spread out throughout the country. In one instance men and women armed with sticks and axes attacked the manual machines in a textile factory in Samokov in Rumelia in 1851, and they were promised that the machines would never be used.<sup>26</sup> The workers' aim was not only to get rid of the existing machines, but they were also voicing their demands for abolishing the future use of machines. Thus, the machine breaking actions were not simply destructive mob actions, but the rioters had certain demands and they collectively negotiated with the authorities. Although the accounts of machine breaking actions mostly don't report about the results of these actions, the aforementioned example shows that the workers were sometimes able to dictate their demands and the local authorities accepted to abolish the use of machines, at least for a while. While the voicing of collective demands indicates some sort of coordination and planning among the workers, these early actions did not lead to the formation of workers' organizations, as far as we can detect from accounts

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<sup>24</sup> Sencer, Oya. *Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfı Doğuşu ve Yapısı*. İstanbul: Habora Kitabevi, 1969 p.69

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.90

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.90

Another incident took place in Bursa again, when the workers demolished a factory in 1861. Although the British Consulate in Bursa reported that the incident took place because of ethnic hostilities, the real reason was the growing unemployment in the city.<sup>27</sup> It is important to note that the machine breaking mobs did not always consist of the workers of these factories, but sometimes they were simply unemployed people.

The first known account of the government restriction against workers' action is the "Police Regulation" (Polis Nizamı), which was introduced in April 1845. One of the duties of the police force, which was initially organized only in Istanbul, was concerning the striking workers. According to the article 12, the police was obliged to prevent to work stoppages by "groups of workers and laborers", and to hinder their efforts to encourage other people to stop working. The article also gave the police the responsibility to prevent meetings and gatherings of workers, and to ban any organizations, which could create unrest and "disturb the public security".<sup>28</sup> Through this one article of the Police Regulation, the state prohibited workers' rights for striking, getting organized, assembling and demonstrating. The article also explained the aim of this ban: "to prevent the occurrence of revolution" (ihtilal vukuunun önü kestirilmesi). This article, widely seen as the first legislation against workers by the historians, was interpreted in various ways. Some historians regard this anti-worker measure as "irrelevant" and "unintentional", and argue that this Police Regulation was a word-by-word copying of a police regulation from a European country, like it was the case for many laws and regulations in the reform era. According to this argument, the article 12 was not written to respond to an existing and real threat, but it was there just because it was in the original document, from which the regulation

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.90

<sup>28</sup> Güzel, Şehmus. *Türkiye'de İşçi Hareketleri (Yazılar-Belgeler)*. İstanbul: Sosyalist Yayınlar, 1993. P.31

was copied.<sup>29</sup> Yet, Şehmus Güzel demonstrates that the duties of the police as listed in the Police Regulation demonstrated consistency and continuity with the duties of the previous internal security forces, primarily the Janissaries. Therefore he agrees with another group of historians, who argued that the law was a response to actual workers' actions of that time.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, it is obvious that the prevention of a revolution<sup>31</sup>, which was stated as the aim of this restriction, is out of place and irrelevant to the actual situation in Turkey in the mid nineteenth century. In my view, this reasoning demonstrates the overanxious character of the ruling elites in Turkey in case of workers' actions. As we will see later, the ruling elites in Turkey were aware of the revolutionary actions of the working class in Europe, and it was their nightmare that these events would one day spread to Turkey, as the working class in Turkey grew. In addition to that, Ottoman authorities might have intended to show the European countries, that Turkey was safe for investments. Güzel goes one step further and argues that the restriction of workers' actions could be the "advice" of the European diplomats, considering that it was a time of increasing foreign investment.<sup>32</sup>

The introduction of the Police Regulation coincides with a period of growing modern industry and increasing foreign and national investments. Important factories and industrial establishments were built by the state, mainly to satisfy the needs of the new modern army. The "Feshane" in Istanbul was opened in 1835, and broadcloth factories were built in İzmit and Sliven in 1840. The shipyards in Istanbul were developed from 1839 on. In addition to that, large carpet workshops were

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p.32

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.34

<sup>31</sup> With reference to Niyazi Berkes, Şehmus Güzel argues that the word "revolution" didn't correspond to a regime change, but rather to the disruption of the existing order. This is possible, but we should also keep in mind that the Ottoman authorities were probably aware of the revolutionary movements and incidents in Europe.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p.38

opened in Afyon, Bursa, Isparta, Gördes, Kayseri and Uşak after 1838. A significant employment of workers took place in the building of railroads, which started in 1850's. At the same time, mining was a rapidly developing industry as a result of the improving means of transportation.<sup>33</sup>

The second period of workers' actions was based on demands on wages and better working conditions. While the financial crisis of 1870's devaluated money and decreased wages, the flow of refugees from Balkans and elsewhere, together with the migration from rural areas to cities, created a large mass of unemployed people, and made it harder for workers to hinder their wages from decreasing. As a result of the worsening finances of the Empire, the state was unable to pay the workers, who were employed in state owned workplaces. In fact, the strikers of this period were not aiming at increasing their salaries, but they simply tried to keep their wages constant. While most of these actions were strikes or work stoppages, which sometimes ended with the interference of security forces, in some cases the workers applied to the state and voiced their concerns without starting strikes. The first known strike from this period was the strike of the telegram office workers in Beyoğlu in February 1872.<sup>34</sup> Railroad workers strike in March 1872 at the construction site of the Yarımburgaz - Ömerli railroad. The reason was workers' demand for a raise in wages, and the strike took at least three weeks. The workers were armed and they also blocked the way of the trains, which carried construction material.<sup>35</sup> Apparently, the government didn't want to interfere and the railroad company had to bring the issue to the court. Another strike of railroad workers started in İzmit in April, but this time the government sent a gendarmerie squad and a general.<sup>36</sup> Although the result of this

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p.37

<sup>34</sup> Sencer, Oya. *Türkiye'de İşçi Sınıfı Doğuşu ve Yapısı*. İstanbul: Habora Kitabevi, 1969 p.133

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.134

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p.134

strike was not reported, newspapers report in 1873 that the rails in İzmit were destroyed and workers were suspected as being the culprits.<sup>37</sup> Apparently, the demands of the railroad workers were not satisfied. In another instance, around 500 construction workers, both Muslims and Christians, from the shipyards in Istanbul, who had not received their salaries for 11 months, went to the Sublime Porte and handed a petition. The collective action of the workers demonstrates that the aim was not only giving a petition but also to warn the state with a demonstration and work stoppage of one day. In an attempt to win the support of public opinion, the workers also sent a declaration to the newspapers in Istanbul, telling about their living conditions in a touching way.<sup>38</sup> The same workers also plundered the breads of the marine soldiers, and several workers were wounded as a result of the clashes. At the end, some of their salaries were paid.<sup>39</sup> A strike was started by 1200 shipyard workers, who didn't receive their salaries for 6 months, in June 1875. In response the government accepted to pay a tiny portion of their salaries.<sup>40</sup> Foreign managers and qualified workers were targets of workers' anger at times. In August 1875, three foreign engineers were attacked by construction workers, who were arrested afterwards.<sup>41</sup>

Yet, the real wave of strikes started after 1876, when Adbülaziz was dethroned and the finances of the empire went even worse. In February 1876, 200 drivers, who were fired without being paid by the new owners of the concession, collectively handed a petition to the Sublime Porte.<sup>42</sup> A few days later, the same workers attacked one of the owners of the company, and they were dispersed by

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p.138

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p.136

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p.137

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p.138

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p.138

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.140

soldiers. A few hundreds of munitions factory handed a petition to the Sublime Porte for their unpaid wages.<sup>43</sup> In May 1876, around 2000 shipyard workers once again started a strike. They again walked to Sublime Porte to hand a petition and the Minister of Navy replied that the ones, who resumed work, would receive only a portion of their salaries, while the workers, who didn't accept that would be laid off. While some of the workers accepted the offer and resumed work, other workers, who didn't accept the minister's offer attacked the other group. Many workers were wounded and soldiers interfered. Also the wives of the striking soldiers took part at the fight. As a result, around 1000 workers were fired.<sup>44</sup> In 1878 bricklayers, shoemakers and tailors started to strike.<sup>45</sup> The tailors again sent a letter to the newspapers, explaining their demands. The tailors were also arrested by the police, but then released. The devaluation in 1879 and the consequent decrease in the purchasing power increased the strikes even more. In 1879, the striking construction workers demanded higher wages and shorter working hours.<sup>46</sup> This was the first known demand for the improvement of working conditions. Another strike of shipyard workers took place in 1879, again for their unpaid wages, and they also demanded to be paid in gold rather than the continuously devaluating banknotes. In response, the Ministry of Navy declared that it was unable to pay their unpaid salaries, but their demand for being paid in gold was accepted.<sup>47</sup> In March 1879, the demand for being paid in gold was also voiced by the workers of "Şirket-i Hayriye", the state owned passenger ship company. When the government was unable to meet the demands of the striking workers of "Mahsuse" ships in February 1880, workers

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.140

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.141

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.142

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p.143

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p.143

were laid off and soldiers were employed instead of them.<sup>48</sup> As the economic situation worsened and the government was unable to meet the workers' needs by 1880, the strikes slowed down, and workers started to voice their demands through petitions and press statements only. Another reason for that was the increasing migration from rural areas to cities and the arrival of war refugees from Balkans, so that striking workers could easily be replaced.<sup>49</sup> The year 1880 seems to be the end of this period. The increasing despotism (istibdat) of Abdülhamid era also affected the workers' movements and no records of strikes are encountered for several decades.

During the decades-long reign of Abdülhamid, some basic civil rights, such as the right of assembly were nonexistent, while the press was kept under tight control. Studies on the workers movement in Turkey before the Revolution of 1908 demonstrate that numerous attempts were made by workers to get organized in order to increase their wages and improve their working conditions. Yet, the oppressive regime of Abdülhamid was able to easily track them down, and punish the workers with prison sentences. Referring to this period, Şnurov and Rozalivay mention that “the progressive workers, who attempted to found workers' unions, paid for their courage by being exiled to Arabic lands for life, where they usually expired from malaria.”<sup>50</sup> Apart from the actual interferences of the state, the workers were terrified and discouraged from getting organized and striking. Yet, since the only reason for the lack of strikes after mid 1880's was the state pressure, workers' actions resumed once the state weakened and became unable to control the country. As reported by Dimitar Vlahov, workers of the Veles-Vrata railroad organized a strike at the

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p.144

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p.145

<sup>50</sup> Şnurov A., and Y. Rozaliev. *Türkiye'de Kapitalistleşme ve Sınıf Kavgaları*. İstanbul: Ant Yayınları, 1970. p.39

beginning of the twentieth century, which disrupted transportation between Thessalonica, Skopje and Nish for a while. Other strikes took place in 1904 and 1906 by weavers in Bitola and Thessalonica, by tailors in Strumitza and other cities. According to Vlahov some of the strikes in 1906 concluded successfully.<sup>51</sup> Some other strikes in the eve of the revolution were reported by Vasil Glavinov, the Bulgarian socialist. Among them he names the strike at arms industry in 1902-1903 in Istanbul, the strikes of 8,000 tobacco workers in Kavala and Régie workers in Thessalonica in 1904, 150 shoemakers in the same year in Bitola and in Thessalonica, and 800 tannery workers in Istanbul in the same year. In 1906, there were the strikes of shoemakers in Veles and Skopje, and the strike of the 450 workers of the Allatini Brick factory in Thessalonica. There were also some smaller strikes in Macedonia.<sup>52</sup> It is quite possible that other strikes occurred before the revolution of 1908, yet as a result of the heavy censorship on the press, none of the strikes were reported in newspapers, and some strikes might remain unreported.

In fact, early twentieth century was marked as a time, in which the Abdülhamid regime was no longer able to control its subjects. Therefore it is not surprising that other discontented segments of the society organized successful uprisings against local authorities, which resulted with compromises by the government. In some cases, these uprisings were sparked and directed by Young Turks.<sup>53</sup> Although Vlahov and Glavinov don't mentioned any interference of Young Turks to the aforementioned strikes, which coincided with the uprisings in Anatolia, an account of a riot with machine breaking was presented by Donald Quataert, who argued that the Young Turks were involved. The workers' action, which took place

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<sup>51</sup> Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977. p.270

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p.92

<sup>53</sup> Kars, H. Zafer. *1908 Devrimi'nin Halk Dinamiği*. İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 1997. p.49

in the carpet industry of Uşak in 1908, is also a valuable example to demonstrate how the Young Turks took advantage of workers' unrests and reactions against European capitalism before the revolution, although the Union and Progress government after the revolution didn't hesitate to use coercion against the workers in order to protect the interests of the European capitalism. Although carpet export from Uşak to Europe and America was not a new phenomenon, the carpet trade boomed after the connection of Uşak to Izmir port with railroad in 1877. As a result, "merchants, some Ottoman but most foreign, had restructured the Anatolian carpet industry, creating tens of thousands of new jobs, altering the employment patterns and lifestyles of vast numbers of Ottoman workers who had been or became engaged in production of carpets."<sup>54</sup> Before the intensification of carpet trade, the production units, generally families were involved in all phases of production, including the production of yarn and dye, and knitting. Although there was division of labor within the production unit, the small size of the production unit, and the family ties prevented alienation. In addition to that, producers owned the means of production, primarily the looms. After 1870's, this situation started to change. In order to increase and standardize the quality of the carpets, and in order to decrease the cost of production, merchants forced the producers to use imported chemical dye instead of the local natural dye, and provided the yarn. At later stages, merchants started to open their own workshops, provided the loom as well, and the carpet knitters were reduced to piece-workers, and in some cases to wage workers. Thus, a transformation from "independent carpet producer to dependent piece worker" occurred, although this development was uneven and gradual, so that various kinds of knitter-merchant

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<sup>54</sup> Quataert, Donald. *Workers, Peasants and Economic Change in the Ottoman Empire 1730-1914*. Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1993. p.117

relations coexisted.<sup>55</sup> While the production in traditional carpet producing localities boomed, the demand in Europe and America increased even faster, so that the merchants expanded their production basis by spreading the carpet industry to other places in Anatolia. By the end of the nineteenth century, the control of the merchants on the industry increased dramatically. Numerous steam powered wool yarn spinning factories were opened in Uşak, and knitters were forced to use the dyed yarn produced in these factories.<sup>56</sup> This increasing division of labor, the decrease in the role of labor through the introduction of machines and the expansion of the industry to other parts of Anatolia, diminished knitters' control on the production. Inclusion of other towns, such as Sivas and Burdur, and other ethnic groups, such as Greeks and Armenians, to the carpet production resulted with increased competition between regions and decreasing price of labor. As a result of the use of machines in production, especially in dyed yarn production, increasing unemployment started to become an irreversible trend in Uşak. Carpet production companies, which handled both the production and the marketing of carpets, emerged and dominated the industry. A significant example was "The Oriental Carpet Manufacturers, Ltd.", which controlled three quarters of the Anatolian carpet production by 1913.<sup>57</sup> All these dramatic changes led to a riot in Uşak in March 1908. Rioters destroyed yarn factories, and in the following days they didn't allow the factories to be repaired and reopened. In addition to that, rioters demanded the prohibition of dyed yarn import to Uşak.<sup>58</sup> While the riot took place only a few months before the revolution of 1908, it is significant that the local authorities reported the involvement and provocation of Young Turks in the riot in incident. The police and governor notified Istanbul that

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p.127

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.130

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p.131

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p.133

“soon after his arrival, İshak Tevfik Efendi”, who was a petit-governor (kaymakam), “began urging the rug workers to sack the factories and was joined by a number of local notables, including the mayor.”<sup>59</sup> While Quataert rightfully argues that the official reports were probably overestimating the role of İshak Tevfik Efendi, it is known that he was associated with secret Young Turk organizations. In conclusion, within the limitations of its uniqueness, the case of carpet industry in Uşak gives us a striking example of how a traditional industry was integrated to the capitalist world economy, how this integration transformed the industry, and how this transformation affected the social and political relations in this locality, contributing to the unrest, which fueled the revolution of 1908.

Although some workers’ organizations were founded in this period, it is not possible to say that organized working class was the characterizing feature of this period. Nevertheless, repeated strikes at some work places, such as the shipyards, indicate some kind of organized behavior, at least at workplace level. The impact of the workers’ actions in this period was much larger than the first period. While the machine breaking actions were constrained to factories, strikes happened at manufacturing plants, shipyards, railroad construction and services, in addition to factories.

Few weeks after the Revolution of 1908 a wave of strikes shook the country. From the beginning of August to the mid-October, when strikes were banned with a temporary law, over hundred strikes were reported. Although most of the strikes took place in major cities like İstanbul, Thessalonica, İzmir, Beirut and Samsun, numerous strikes took place in rural areas, especially in Rumelia and Western Anatolia. Therefore, at least for a few months, strikes became a nationwide phenomenon, and a

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p.134

significant portion of the population, especially the urban people were affected by the strikes. The strikes of 1908 shaped the class relations in the country in various ways. Firstly, although the strikes of 1908 didn't evolve into a unified workers' movement, they nevertheless revealed the existence of a working class, which possessed some power to dictate its demands. Apart from the discussions on the class consciousness, the workers were recognized by the ruling elites and public opinion as a distinct class with certain economic demands and also as the potential actors of a revolutionary threat. Secondly, the strikes of 1908 also forced Union and Progress to make an explicit choice in favor of the interests of capitalists, and revealed the new regime's vulnerability to the demands of imperialists. In other words, these strikes defined the class identity of Union and Progress, which emerged as the representative of capitalists, landlords and wannabe capitalists. Thirdly, the government's primary response to the strikes, namely the temporary law of 1908, defined the legal status of strikes until 1937.

It is hard to identify the impact of these strikes in on the future of the workers' movement in Turkey. The introduction of anti-strike law in October 1908, the oppressive rule of Union and Progress and a decade of wars from 1912 to 1922, together with the restrictions in the republican period, disrupted the continuity of the workers' actions in Turkey. Nevertheless, this period was marked by the emergence of the first permanent workers' organizations. Although some of the unions, especially the ones at the public sector, dissolved immediately after the wave of strikes was over, many trade unions were able to survive the state oppression and continued to operate in the following years. Although the wave of strikes didn't lead to a country-wide workers' organization, the synchronic occurrence of strikes in all corners of the country seems to have given some elements within the working class

the idea that it was possible to get organized throughout the country. The wide press coverage of the strikes enabled the workers in Thessalonica to know about the strikes in Beirut, and it contributed to the conception of the “Ottoman proletariat”.

A general evaluation of the strikes in 1908 reveals that three sectors, namely the railroads, seaports and tobacco, constituted the backbone of the workers’ actions in 1908. First of all, these sectors were of key importance to the economy. Foreign trade, both import and export, was dependent on railroads and ports for transportation, and also an ever increasing portion of the domestic trade depended on these means of transportation. On the other hand, tobacco was the main export article of the country, which was short of exports as opposed to imports any way. The importance of these sectors for the economy in general strengthened the hands of the workers. Another reason for the importance of these sectors within the workers’ actions was their structure. These sectors employed large numbers of workers in different places, so that the strikes in these sectors affected the entire country, and forced the government to take drastic measures. Finally, being controlled by the European capitalists, the strikes in these sectors were also decisive in the clarification of the relationship between the new regime and the foreign capitalists.

A closer look to the major strikes in these sectors not only clarifies the abovementioned arguments, but it also provides us important clues about certain characteristics of the strikes of 1908 in general.

The railroad companies in Turkey employed a large number of workers and employees in different work places. Separate groups like station workers, railroad repairmen, locomotive factory workers and brakemen spread throughout the entire country, although they were employed by the same companies. Meanwhile, Europeans not only held the managerial positions, but also numerous other high

ranking positions were generally occupied by foreigners. Finally, the railroad companies had strong backing of European states, and the administration of railroads in Turkey meant a national interest for the European countries, both economically and politically.

The first strike in Ottoman railroads was started by the switchers of the Thessalonica-Zibevece line, which belonged to the Eastern Railroad Company (Chemins de fers Orientaux), on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. On the same day, workers at the locomotive factory in Sirkeci started a strike to achieve higher wages and the company accepted their demand immediately. Although the workers resumed work three days later, they felt cheated and struck once again on August 28<sup>th</sup>.<sup>60</sup> On September 9<sup>th</sup>, 200 workers at the Yedikule locomotive factory started another strike with the same demand, and there was a fight between the workers and the German foreman, who pulled out a gun. As a result of this incident, the police interfered and arrested four workers, Mehmet and Hasan, who were probably Moslems, Aleko, probably Greek and Mihran, probably Armenian. The police was also looking for an employee of the company, Muradyan, probably Armenian, who was suspected for coming to Istanbul from Plovdiv, in order to provoke the workers.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, as the authorities found out that a strike was planned for the İstanbul-Thessalonica line for August 31<sup>st</sup>, police, gendarmerie and soldiers occupied the stations and hindered the strike on August 29<sup>th</sup>. This intervention of the security forces backfired and a strike started in Skopje on the same day, and it was followed by other strikes in the lines Thessalonica-Alexandroupolis, Vrata-Mitrovica, Skopje-Zibevece and

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<sup>60</sup> Özkara, Sami. *Türkische Arbeiterbewegung 1908 im Osmanischen Reich im Spiegel der Botschaftsberichte, der volkswirtschaftlichen und politischen Entwicklungen*. Frankfurt am Main. Bern. New York: Peter Lang, 1985. p.100

<sup>61</sup> Onur, Hakkı. "1908 İşçi Hareketleri ve Jön Türkler." *Yurt ve Dünya* 2 (March 1977). p.288

Thessalonica-Bitola.<sup>62</sup> In response, the company management accepted the demands of the brakemen and factory workers, and these strikes were called off, while the strikes of other employees were continuing.<sup>63</sup> To confront the increasing pressure by the management, workers in İstanbul, Thessalonica and Plovdiv founded three separate trade unions, and 400 workers' representatives gathered in Sirkeci on September 6<sup>th</sup>, and decided to unite these three trade unions, while Yağlıkcıyan was elected as the president of the union. The delegates also set their common demands and threatened the company with a general strike, unless their demands were accepted until September 15<sup>th</sup>. Among the demands of the railroad workers were a wage raise, promotion every two years so that a worker would be able to get the highest position in a sector, shortening of working hours, numerous demands for the improvement of health care condition, and some other social demands.<sup>64</sup> Instead of accepting the demands of the trade union, the company attempted to make separate negotiations in different workplaces. It offered a higher wage raise than demanded by the trade union, while withholding the other demands, and the workers in Thessalonica made a deal with the company and resumed work, without communicating with the delegates in İstanbul. The same thing happened in the Thessalonica-Alexandroupolis line, as well.<sup>65</sup> Yet, the attempts of the company to divide the workers failed. Delegates from İstanbul visited the workers, who had resumed work, and convinced them about the necessity of solidarity. According to the report of the British Consulate to the Foreign Office, efforts of Bulgarian

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p.288

<sup>63</sup> Özkara, Sami. *Türkische Arbeiterbewegung 1908 im Osmanischen Reich im Spiegel der Botschaftsberichte, der volkswirtschaftlichen und politischen Entwicklungen*. Frankfurt am Main.Bern.New York: Peter Lang, 1985. p.101

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p.101

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p.103

socialists were instrumental in reuniting the workers.<sup>66</sup> Since the company did not meet the demands of workers in general, the general strike was due September 18<sup>th</sup>, with the participation of the aforementioned strikebreakers. The workers also sent a representative to the Minister of War and stated that “the strike was intended to find a solution to the living of workers, that the strike shouldn’t be seen as an action against the state, and that they were ready to serve, whenever the government needed the trains for public order or similar reasons.”<sup>67</sup> Yet the government wasn’t very impressed by this declaration of workers. The General Traffic Manager Müller, asked the government to use the same measures as in the Anatolian Railroad. On September 18<sup>th</sup>, the general strike started. The government arranged a meeting with the company managers and workers’ representatives on September 20<sup>th</sup>, but the parties couldn’t make a deal. The company accepted to raise wages, but not the other demands. After that, the government decided to interfere. The workers were warned that they would be fired unless they resumed work. Further on, the government would notify other companies, so that the strikers wouldn’t be able to find another job after being fired. Any workers, who would hinder the operation of trains, would be prosecuted, and the railroad would be protected by soldiers. In order to execute this decision, the government prepared a special train full of soldiers and government representatives including the Minister of Police. An impressive show with marching soldiers and high ranking government officials was performed before the train took off on September 21<sup>st</sup>. Since the government openly sided with the company with military power, the terrified railroad workers were discouraged and they ended the strike on the same day, accepting to confine themselves with the wage raise.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p.103

<sup>67</sup> Onur, Hakkı. “1908 İşçi Hareketleri ve Jön Türkler.” *Yurt ve Dünya* 2 (March 1977). p.288

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p.289

This brief account on the strike at Rumelia Railroads indicates several important points in terms of workers' organization. The evolution of the strike from a local strike in Sirkeci to a general strike including all branches of the Eastern Railroad Company in Rumelia, demonstrates the impact of the strike process on the development of workers' common action. Despite their initial indecisiveness on their demands, workers were able to get organized in a short period and to determine common demands through delegates. The workers' representatives' ability to convince strike breakers shows that workers from different branches of the railroad became conscious about their common interests. The workers' aggression against the German foreman represents a common characteristic of the strikes of 1908, during which high ranking foreign employees of companies were often targeted. Although this brings the question of xenophobia among workers, other facts such as the participation of workers from all nations at the strike, and the involvement of Bulgarian socialists, make xenophobia an unconvincing explanation for attacks against foreign employees. On the other hand, the workers' demand regarding promotion indicates that the main concern of the workers was the company's preference of foreign workers over Ottoman citizens for high ranking positions. Furthermore, the demand on the promotion, together with demands regarding work place conditions and working hours, show that the workers went one step beyond the strikes of mid nineteenth century, during which wage raise or the payment of unpaid wages was the main concern.

This strike also gives clues about the relations between the new regime and the foreign companies in response to the strike. At first, the government only arrested a few leaders of the strike, and its attempt to prevent the strike didn't prove to be effective. Yet, once the representatives of the company asked for stricter measures,

the government ignored the appeals of workers, and threatened the strikers with military coercion and legal action.

Simultaneously, another strike was taking place at the Anatolian Railroad Company. Since the government knew in advance that a strike was planned, soldiers surrounded the Haydarpaşa Train Station on August 26<sup>th</sup>, but there was no sign of a strike, so that the soldiers went away. Yet on the same day the workers of the Anatolian Railroad Company gathered at a theater in Moda and founded the “Fraternity Association of the Employees of Bagdad Railroads” (Bağdat Demiryolları Memurin ve Müstahdemin Cemiyet-i Uhuvvetkârisi).<sup>69</sup> According to another account by Sami Özkara, a trade union was founded as early as August 17<sup>th</sup>, which later on evolved to the aforementioned association.<sup>70</sup> The workers listed their demands, and a delegation of five workers transmitted them to the government, German Embassy, German Bank (Deutsche Bank) and company management. Among the demands of the workers were the recognition of the workers’ trade union, increase of wages, shortening of working hours, vacation on Sundays, an annual vacation, payment of the medical expenses of workers and their families by the company, and the layoff of the company manager Huguenin.<sup>71</sup> A leading figure in the foundation this association and determining of these demands was Dr. Arangelos Gavrili, who worked as a physician at the company. His attempts to organize workers preceded the revolution, and he also wrote an informative and agitating pamphlet titled “The real face of the Anatolia-Bagdad Railroad Administration” (Anadolu-Bağdat Demiryolları İdaresinin İçyüzü).<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p.289

<sup>70</sup> Özkara, Sami. *Türkische Arbeiterbewegung 1908 im Osmanischen Reich im Spiegel der Botschaftsberichte, der volkswirtschaftlichen und politischen Entwicklungen*. Frankfurt am Main.Bern.New York: Peter Lang, 1985. p.91

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.92

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p.91

In addition to the usual demands of wage raises and shorter working hours, workers of Ottoman citizenship complained about mistreatment of the employees from İstanbul and of Turkish descent, for which Huguenin was held responsible. According to the workers, when they asked for a wage increase, they got a discriminating reply: “You are not used to eat steak and drink champagne; your needs are few. You can live by bread and cheese. On the other hand you don’t have toilet expenses. You don’t deserve as much wage as the European employees.”<sup>73</sup> Even though we don’t know whether this statement, which was attributed to European managers of the company, was authentic, it is valuable in any case, since it reflects the workers’ image of their European bosses, and clarifies the reasons behind the attacks against foreign employees and employers in other instances. The Ottoman workers were angry about the fact that the foreigners were paid more than the Ottoman workers for the same job, and that the company hindered the promotion of Ottoman employees by bringing European employees for high positions. The German side immediately started to act and upon the orders of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Ambassador in İstanbul got engaged in pressurizing Hakkı Paşa, the Minister of Interior, to stop the strike, and warned him about the potential negative impact of the strikes on the economy in general.<sup>74</sup>

On the same day, a meeting at the Haydarpaşa Train Station brought the delegation of five workers, the managers of the railroad company and a representative from the Union and Progress together. Huguenin didn’t dare to come, because “his life was in danger”. The administration accepted to negotiate on wage raises (they were willing to offer only 10 percent as opposed to workers’ demand of

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<sup>73</sup> Onur, Hakkı. “1908 İşçi Hareketleri ve Jön Türkler.” *Yurt ve Dünya* 2 (March 1977). p.290

<sup>74</sup> Özkara, Sami. *Türkische Arbeiterbewegung 1908 im Osmanischen Reich im Spiegel der Botschaftsberichte, der volkswirtschaftlichen und politischen Entwicklungen*. Frankfurt am Main.Bern.New York: Peter Lang, 1985. p.92

up to 40 percent), but the demand for the layoff of Huguenin was strictly rejected. The representative of the Union and Progress also adopted this position. Afterwards, workers held a general meeting, discussed the offer of the company, and decided not to negotiate unless all their demands, including the layoff of Huguenin, were accepted.<sup>75</sup>

At that point, company managers and the Ambassador were unconvinced about the commitment of Union and Progress to their cause and complained to the director of German Bank on September 10<sup>th</sup> that the Young Turks were concerned about their popularity in the eve of the upcoming general elections. According to this report, the demands of workers were so extensive that they were endangering the existence of the company. The report also suggested a solution: the German Bank should refuse to provide the Ottoman government credit, until they assumed their responsibilities to the investors. In response the director of the German Bank expressed his approval and commented that the strike could be an opportunity to renegotiate the railroad subventions with the Ottoman government, and force them to increase the subventions.<sup>76</sup> As this bitter correspondence shows, the imperialists were willing to use all their means to force the government to interfere on behalf of the companies' interests, and the Union and Progress was not given the option to remain indifferent, even for purely pragmatic purposes. Also the existing treaties, which obligated the Ottoman Empire to pay a given amount of subvention for each kilometer of railroad, enabled the German capitalists to load the entire financial burden of the strike on the shoulders of the Ottoman government.

The demands of workers were also discussed in the German press, which claimed that these workers' action resulted from the "sabotage" of French and Swiss

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.93

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p.95

employees, who allegedly wanted to hurt German interests.<sup>77</sup> This assumption of the German press not only reveals the competition between imperialist powers within the context of the Ottoman Empire, but it also demonstrates German's disbelief that the Ottoman workers would stand for their rights. Workers' actions, which were quite natural and widespread in Europe, seemed "unnatural" in the context of the Ottoman workers, who were described by the Europeans as obedient and submissive. Contrary to the assumptions of the German press, the number of foreign employees in the company was only 209, and only 30 of them were Frenchmen or French speaking Swiss citizens, as the company reported.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, the general strike started on September 14<sup>th</sup>, which extended from İstanbul to Ankara, from Eskişehir to Konya. According to the newspaper accounts, the workers also organized a demonstration: "The employees of the company withdrew from the work yesterday morning, and walked around in Haydarpaşa and Kadıköy with flags in their hands and with a band. Yet this walk took place with an extraordinary discipline, and the public applauded this orderliness of the railroad employees."<sup>79</sup> The managers of the company, who probably didn't expect the strike to be that widespread, were frustrated and asked the German Bank for permission to increase the wages by 20 percent. They also suggested that increasing the kilometer guarantees of the Ottoman government was "principally very correct, but under these circumstances impossible to execute."<sup>80</sup> Apparently the company managers were afraid of creating tensions with the Ottoman government at such a critical time.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p.94

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p.94

<sup>79</sup> Onur, Hakkı. "1908 İşçi Hareketleri ve Jön Türkler." *Yurt ve Dünya* 2 (March 1977). p.291

<sup>80</sup> Özkara, Sami. *Türkische Arbeiterbewegung 1908 im Osmanischen Reich im Spiegel der Botschaftsberichte, der volkswirtschaftlichen und politischen Entwicklungen*. Frankfurt am Main.Bern.New York: Peter Lang, 1985. p.96

Then, the workers made a daring move, and decided to send the group of workers' representatives, now called the Strike Committee, to the Prime Minister and make an offer to resume work on September 16<sup>th</sup>. Yet, they had conditions: "the strikers would take over the administration of the railroad" and "they would use the income to give all the employees wage raises and a one time gratification."<sup>81</sup> Although the details of this proposal are unknown, and although we don't know whether the workers intended to operate the railroad by themselves permanently or whether they meant to take over the ownership of the railroad or nationalize it, their offer was incredibly daring. The workers were simply demanding to take over the control of the means of production.

The German Ambassador's frustration peaked and he immediately sent a telegram to the government, strongly protesting this attempt of "robbery" (Spoliation de la Compagnie), and urging the government to take "energetic measures." He also contacted the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reported the situation and told that the German Bank should decide immediately, whether it accepted the wage suggested by the company or not. He described the Ottoman government as "impotent" and commented that the press was against the company. He reminded that government had accepted the suggestion of the company managers and insisted on an instant decision, otherwise, he wouldn't be able guarantee for anything under the existing anarchistic circumstances.<sup>82</sup>

As a result, the German Bank accepted the suggestion of 20 percent wage raise, although these conditions meant an "extraordinary heavy sacrifice for the company". On September 16<sup>th</sup>, the Ambassador talked with the minister and

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<sup>81</sup> Onur, Hakkı. "1908 İşçi Hareketleri ve Jön Türkler." *Yurt ve Dünya* 2 (March 1977). p.97

<sup>82</sup> Özkara, Sami. *Türkische Arbeiterbewegung 1908 im Osmanischen Reich im Spiegel der Botschaftsberichte, der volkswirtschaftlichen und politischen Entwicklungen*. Frankfurt am Main.Bern.New York: Peter Lang, 1985. p.97

threatened the Ottoman government that “the credit of Turkey in foreign countries would suffer incurable harms.”<sup>83</sup> Apparently the Ottoman government was more than willing to get rid of this troublesome strike, which threatened to cause unforeseen troubles with the German government. On September 16<sup>th</sup>, the army occupied the railroad, including all the train stations in Anatolia. Hakkı Paşa declared the government’s support for the offer of the railroad company, and told the workers to go back to work. Anyone, who would try to hinder the workers from resuming work, would be punished. The workers were also promised that their other demands would be negotiated later on in a commission consisting of workers’ and company’s representatives, together with a mediator from the Union and Progress. The workers, who counted on the support of the government, were discouraged and they called the strike off. The promised commission held several meetings but no conclusion could be reached.<sup>84</sup>

Similar to the previous case, the government’s initial attempts to stop the strike were ineffective. In the case of the workers’ action at the Anatolian Railways, available correspondence of German Embassy gives us a clear insight to how the relations between imperialists and the new regime developed. It is important that the Germans initially mistrusted the Ottoman government, and were suspecting that the Union and Progress would jeopardize foreign interests for the sake of popular support. To guarantee the cooperation of the new government, Germans used the threat of cutting credits. This was certainly one of the reasons which mobilized the government against the workers in favor of the interests of German imperialists, yet it was not the only reason. As mentioned above, the German Ambassador voiced his concern that the new government was impotent, or in other words unfit to govern,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p.98

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. p.99

and this could have been even more terrifying for the Union and Progress. Since it was its impotence what forced the Abdülhamid regime to capitulate, the Union and Progress understandably worried about being regarded impotent, which could destabilize and even defeat the new regime. As a result, the government changed its initial attitude towards the strikers and made decisive steps in order to bring an end to the strike.

Meanwhile the workers of the Anatolian Railroads seemed to be even better organized and prepared than the workers of the Rumelia Railroads. A workers' association was founded before the strike, and there no accounts of strike breaking as it was the case in the strike at the Rumelia Railroads. Once again, workers' demands went beyond wage increases and the demand for the recognition of their trade union demonstrated the workers' intention to maintain a permanent class organization. In accordance with the characteristics of the strikes of 1908 in general, the strikers of Anatolian Railroad also voiced demands regarding foreign domination. The demand for the replacement of Huguenin was not only the result of an emotional reaction against the personality Swiss company manager, but it was the reflection of complaints about the mistreatment of Ottoman workers, wage differences between foreigners and Ottomans, and barriers against the promotion of Ottoman employees to higher positions. Although the workers were generally cooperative towards the Union and Progress and the government, they didn't depend on these institutions. The disciplined parades of workers to promote their cause were primarily targeting to win over the public opinion, but also to show the government their determination and power. They started the strike despite the warning of the government. Finally, they suggested to take over the control of the railroad, in other words to nationalize it, which was frustration both to the company and the government.

Another strike started in the Aydın-İzmir railroads on August 30<sup>th</sup>. After a few days, the strikers were joined by the workers of Aydın-Dinar and İzmir-Kasaba lines. According to the local newspapers, the government interfered immediately and arrested the some of the strikers, and the workers were forced to call off the strike.<sup>85</sup> Yet the strike resumed at the end of September, but this time the local fig producers applied to the local authorities and complained about the strike. According to the newspapers, the strike had a destructive impact on the cultivators in Western Anatolia. On September 30<sup>th</sup>, a fight took place between strikers and strikebreakers in Develiköy, and a train was derailed. Using this incident as an excuse, the soldiers interfered and arrested Kocamanis<sup>86</sup>, the journalist of the socialist “Worker” (Ergatis) newspaper, who was suspected for being a leader of the strike, and he was taken under custody in the train station together with some other workers. On October 1<sup>st</sup>, workers gathered around the station building to save their friends, and the clash between the soldiers and workers ended with the killing of a worker, while many other workers were wounded.<sup>87</sup> The killing increased the anger of strikers, who cut the telegram lines and locked in the employees, who didn’t attend the strike. They also threatened the management with burning the warehouses, and they did so in Punta, in central İzmir. As the situation worsened, representatives of the Union and Progress interfered as mediators, but the workers refused their offers. After the governor of İzmir asked İstanbul for help, a battalion of soldiers were sent to transport the arrested workers and the journalist to the prison, while three battalions

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<sup>85</sup> Onur, Hakkı. “1908 İşçi Hareketleri ve Jön Türkler.” *Yurt ve Dünya* 2 (March 1977). p.291

<sup>86</sup> Although Hakkı Onur mentions Kocamanis as the journalist of the “Irgat” newspaper, elsewhere, Mete Tunçay tells about the Greek socialist Kocamanis, who published a news paper called “Ergatis” in Greek language. The latter information is also confirmed by other sources. Tunçay, Mete. “Osmanlı Yönetiminin Son Yıllarında Yahudi Sosyalizmi.” *Toplum ve Bilim* 3 (Güz 1977). p.141

<sup>87</sup> Özkara, Sami. *Türkische Arbeiterbewegung 1908 im Osmanischen Reich im Spiegel der Botschaftsberichte, der volkswirtschaftlichen und politischen Entwicklungen*. Frankfurt am Main.Bern.New York: Peter Lang, 1985. p.109

were on wait, and the Mecidiye Battleship came to İzmir.<sup>88</sup> All rebelling workers were arrested, but most of them were released afterwards. Özkara argues that the railroad strike an İzmir-Aydın was the decisive factor in the introduction of the temporary law, which banned strikes.

Although we can observe the same pattern in the strike of Aydın-İzmir Railroad workers, the confrontation between the strikers and the government was much more violent than the previously mentioned examples. Since the initial intervention of the government was ineffective, the strike resumed a few weeks later. Different than previous examples, it was the land owners, namely the fig producers, who asked the government to stop the strike. Although it is hard to suggest a definitive explanation for the aggressive behavior of the workers, lack of a trade union or association, which regulated the actions of workers, could be a reason. The reaction of the government and the extensive mobilization of the army demonstrate what extent the Union and Progress was willing to stop the strikes.

Another strike with violence was the strike at the Beirut–Damascus–Hama line at the end of September, which was also attended by the workers of the seaport in Beirut. Interestingly, the primary demand of the workers was to work for Ottoman companies instead of French companies.<sup>89</sup> The workers plundered the company's treasure and invaded the telegram offices. The government interfered and the workers accepted a 50 percent wage raise.<sup>90</sup>

Seaports had an importance similar to the railroads for the commerce. By 1908, ports in numerous major cities were modernized and employed large amounts

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<sup>88</sup> Onur, Hakkı. "1908 İşçi Hareketleri ve Jön Türkler." *Yurt ve Dünya* 2 (March 1977). p.292

<sup>89</sup> Özkara, Sami. *Türkische Arbeiterbewegung 1908 im Osmanischen Reich im Spiegel der Botschaftsberichte, der volkswirtschaftlichen und politischen Entwicklungen*. Frankfurt am Main.Bern.New York: Peter Lang, 1985. p.111

<sup>90</sup> Onur, Hakkı. "1908 İşçi Hareketleri ve Jön Türkler." *Yurt ve Dünya* 2 (March 1977). p.292

of workers. While the pattern in the strikes at railroads also exists in port workers' strikes,

When the port workers in İzmir started a strike in August, some bosses immediately accepted the workers' demands, while some bosses rejected to do so, and the strike spread out to other ports. In the following weeks, port workers in İstanbul, Thessalonica, Beirut, Varna and Lesbos also started to strike. Ships were unable to unload, and they had to anchor and wait in İstanbul.<sup>91</sup> Since the goods, which couldn't be unloaded and uploaded, were generally perishable, the losses of merchants were probably immense. The panicked owners of companies held a meeting in İstanbul on August 11<sup>th</sup>, and decided to ask the European countries to put pressure on the Ottoman government to end the strikes. In addition to that, a delegation of company owners went to the office of Union and Progress in Galata, and asked for an end to the strikes.<sup>92</sup> While the efforts of company owners implicate the extent of their losses, it is also significant that they immediately applied to the European countries to pressurize the Ottoman government. The strikes of port workers also echoed in the press. Tanin, the newspaper affiliated with the Union and Progress, condemned the workers and wrote about the hardships of merchants. Government interference was advised.<sup>93</sup> Finally the government publicly warned the workers and declared that the ones who insisted on continuing the strike would be arrested. Ten port workers were arrested in İstanbul. The reason for the harsh response of the government was terrorizing the workers in other sectors, who were planning to strike. Yet the wave of strikes had hit the capital city heavily. In August, the strike of port workers was followed by the strikes of tobacco workers in Cibali, glass workers in Paşabahçe, tram workers in Aksaray, Şişli and Beşiktaş, workers of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p.278

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p.279

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p.279

the water company in Kadıköy, and the print workers in Galata.<sup>94</sup> Some strikes were hindered with the preemptive interference and warnings of the government. Not only in Istanbul, but also in other cities, the strike of port workers acted like a trigger for other strikes. In Izmir, the strike of port workers were followed by the strikes of 50 carpet weavers at the Çarmado factory in İzmir on August 8<sup>th</sup>, only days after the strike of port workers They were followed by fig box makers two days later.<sup>95</sup> Again, the strike of port workers in Lesbos, which started in mid-September, was followed by the strike of soap and olive oil store workers, and the strike of tailors.

In addition to clashes with security forces, angry workers also attacked foreign employees with high positions, and representatives of foreign companies. The workers at the tobacco shops in Samsun started a strike in mid September, but they were unable to negotiate with the employers. As the strike continued, the strikers didn't let the other workers to work. A regiment was sent to disperse the workers, but the attempt failed. Apparently violence could be an effective method for workers in their struggle. Régie workers in Samsun started a strike in October, beat some civil servants of the Ministry of Régie, and stoned the offices of the ministry. The two sides shot at each other and around ten people were wounded. A battalion of soldiers were sent to the place, and some of the "provokers" were arrested.<sup>96</sup> In another instance, striking transportation workers at the copper mines in Ergani attacked an Italian engineer.<sup>97</sup>

In 1908, Thessalonica and Macedonia were hot spots for strikes and workers' actions. Workers at two tobacco offices started to strike and their demands for wage increase were met. Another strike took place in September at the Régie, and it again

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p.279

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p.278

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p.284

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p.280

concluded with the victory of workers. On September 13<sup>th</sup>, 12,000 tobacco workers in Kavala started to strike. This was the biggest strike ever in Turkey in terms of participation. All shops were closed and the workers marched through the streets of the city with a band. The porters of Régie also joined the strike, which stopped the transportation of the processed tobacco. The workers had a long list of demands, which included a wage increase, shorter working hours (9 hours in the summer, 8 hours in the winter), aeration at workplaces, clean drinking water, limitation of the number of workers at the workplace for health reasons, modern toilets and daily sanitation of the workplace, creation of a commission under the control of the government, which would inspect the workplaces every week and listen to the complaints of workers. The Union and Progress interfered as mediator. Although the employer rejected the demand for wage increase, he apparently agreed for some of the demands concerning the health situation at workplaces. Tram workers in Thessalonica started a strike at the beginning of September, demanding a wage increase and shorter working hours. As their demands were granted, they resumed work.<sup>98</sup> Another strike started at the beginning of September in Thessalonica. This time it was the telegram workers, who protested the layoff of a coworker. The workers not only demanded their coworkers back, but they also wanted that the administrator Ethem Efendi, who was held responsible for the layoff, to be fired. On September 10<sup>th</sup>, waiters of hotels, cafés, restaurants and casinos started a strike and marched through the streets of the city, upon which security forces interfered, but they were unable to disperse the workers.<sup>99</sup> 200 workers at the cloth factory of Gevgeli Boutet Brothers strike at the end of September. On September 9<sup>th</sup>, workers of the Errera Store started a strike and demanded a wage raise. Both Thessalonica

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p.284

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p.286

and İstanbul branches of Oroz di Bak Store started a strike on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, which ended without success, and eight workers, who led the strike, were fired. The workers of Allatini brick factory strike at the beginning of September.

The wave of strikes, but especially the strikes of railroad workers, made the government to restrict the right to strike. Although the legislative body, the Ottoman parliament, wasn't elected yet, article 36 of the Constitution of 1876, which was still in action, allowed the government to pass temporary laws in the absence of parliament. This article was brought into action for the first time in the context of strikes. On October 8<sup>th</sup> 1908, the government issued the "Temporary Law on the Strike Associations" (Tatil-i Eşgal Cemiyetleri Hakkında Kanun-u Muvakkat).<sup>100</sup> Although it was Gabriel Noradungyan Efendi, the Minister of Commerce and Public Works, who officially put this law on the agenda, it was officially documented that it was the foreign capitalists, who actually demanded this law. A memorandum by the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works on the temporary law stated that the railroad companies, which reported that "some experts of deception" were once again trying to launch a strike, had asked the government for "urgent measures". In addition to the complaints of foreign capitalists, the memorandum mentioned the destructive impact of the railroad strikes on the commerce and industry of the country.<sup>101</sup> Thus although the demand came from the European companies, the aim of the "immediate prevention" of strikes was stated as the "public interests".<sup>102</sup> While the interests of the European capitalists and the "public" were blessed in the official documents, the workers' actions were demonized. While the aforementioned term "experts of deception" implied the existence of a conspiracy, another memorandum

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<sup>100</sup> Gülmez., Mesut. *Türkiye'de Çalışma İlişkileri (1936 Öncesi)*. Ankara: Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1983. p.289

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p.292

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p.293

of the ministry described workers' reasons for strike as "unnecessary and weird". Further on, workers were accused for having the aim of "violating the public security and commerce, and destroying the financial reputation and political condition of the state".<sup>103</sup> The repeatedly mentioned "urgency" of the problem gave the government the pretext to issue a temporary law instead of waiting for the opening of the parliament.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p.293

## CHAPTER 3

### THE FEDERATION

In 1908, when the Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessalonica started to form, Thessalonica was a city with numerous distinct qualities, which created a suitable environment for the birth of a significant socialist organization. Apart from that, these economic, political and social qualities had a great impact on the structure and policies of the Federation. In fact, as the leadership of the Federation admitted, the “reality” surrounding the organization played a major role in the determining of organizational strategies and political actions of the Federation.

Although Thessalonica had always been a commercial center, the economic potential of the city flourished after 1840's, as a side effect of the industrial boom in Europe. Ottoman territories in Balkans, primarily Bulgaria and Serbia, were shipping the much needed raw materials and agricultural products to Europe, whereas Thessalonica became the commercial connection point between Balkans and Europe. As a result of the Crimean War, which destroyed the hegemony of Russian merchants in Black Sea, the merchants of Thessalonica took over the trade between Black Sea and Europe, and the trade grew even further with large amounts of cotton exports in 1860's, as a result of the international cotton crisis during the American

civil war.<sup>104</sup> Of course, export was only one side of the coin. Thessalonica was also the gate for the entrance of European imports into Balkans.

The dramatic growth in trade not only turned Thessalonica economically and socially into a lively place, but it also enriched the merchants of Thessalonica and gave them the opportunity to accumulate capital. By 1880's, the capital started to be invested. In addition to direct investments by merchants to industry, some big merchants founded banks, which provided the much needed capital for the promising industries. An example is the Bank of Thessalonica, which was founded by the Allatini brothers in cooperation with the Banks of Vienna and Paris in 1888. It was followed by branches of the Greek owned Bank of Lesbos, Deutsche Orient Bank, Beogradska Zadruga and many other European or Ottoman banks.<sup>105</sup> While the economic potential of Thessalonica was evidently a natural motivation for these foreign banks to open branched in the city, also the inter-communal rivalry between Jewish and Greek business communities and the competition between European powers might have accelerated this trend.

In the following decades, the industry of Thessalonica grew rapidly. In the initial period from 1870's through 1880's, numerous small factories and workshops were founded, which initially satisfied the demands of Thessalonica and Macedonia.<sup>106</sup> By the end of the century, some sectors such as textiles industry, which was controlled by Jews and Greeks, were able to dominate the local market in competition with European imports. By 1908, only one third of the total yarn output was consumed in Macedonia, while the rest was important to other parts of the

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<sup>104</sup> Anastassiadou, Meropi. *Tanzimat Çağında Bir Osmanlı Şehri Selanik*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2001. p.93

<sup>105</sup> Quataert, Donald. "Fabrika Bacalarından Tüten İlk Dumanlar." In *Selanik 1850-1918*, ed. Gilles Veinstein. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001. p.187

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* p.189

Empire and to Balkan countries.<sup>107</sup> Another rapidly growing export article was tobacco from rural Macedonia, which was followed by the cigarette industry. Other grand industries in Thessalonica were the copper industry, the brick industry, and the food and beverage industry.<sup>108</sup>

Industrial competition in Thessalonica and Macedonia was immense. Many businesses had to shut down and using the newest technologies became imperative to stay in business in numerous sectors. By the end of the nineteenth century, steam engines became common in many industries, and in 1908, many factories used electricity to operate their sophisticated machines.<sup>109</sup> Not only the grand industries, but also the smaller industries were using machinery. This technological development can be followed from the three cast iron workshops, which were producing spare parts for engines and machines.

Obviously the industry was only one part of the city's economy. It was accompanied by an ever growing trade and numerous service sectors from transports to communication, from recreation to municipal services.

It is important to note that Thessalonica partly owed its commercial success to its hinterland. Apart from being the main transportation point, the city was also the capital of Macedonia as an administrative unit. With its fertile land and relatively dense population (in comparison with the rest of the empire), Macedonia produced excessive amounts valuable agricultural products such as cotton, tobacco and grains. Wool and up to some point silk were also among the export goods of the region. The region was rich in minerals, which were mostly consumed regionally; yet chrome and antimony were exported. All these resources not only paved the way for foreign

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p.191

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p.195

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p.197

industrial investments, but they also provided a suitable environment for capital accumulation for the development of locally owned industries.

While statements about the bourgeoisie in the Ottoman Empire are usually challenged with the question who the bourgeoisie, the capital owners are, the answer to this difficult question is given quite straightforward in the case of Thessalonica, which had a diverse bourgeoisie consisting of both merchants and industrialists, who possessed and operated significant amounts of capital. The Allatini family was among the most prominent capitalists in Thessalonica. After they had acquired a significant capital by exporting agricultural products, primarily tobacco, they invested in industry. By 1860's the family owned a steam powered flour mill. In 1906, the flour mill operated with 650 steam engines and exported large amounts of flour.<sup>110</sup> Since 1883, Allatinis owned a brick factory, part of the Olympos Brewery and they had significant investments in silk industry. Other prominent capitalists of the city were Mizrahi, Fernandez and Torres families.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the working class constituted a significant portion of the city's population. According to estimates, 20,000 workers were employed in industry and another 5,000 were working in transportation sector, constituting 17 % of the entire population.<sup>111</sup> Women and children were active significant segments of the working class, and two thirds of the workers were Jewish.<sup>112</sup> While the managerial and top positions were occupied by foreigners, the working class included all ethnic and religious groups, Jews, Greeks, Moslems, Bulgarians, etc. While some sectors were dominated by certain ethnic groups, some sectors maintained balance.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p.195

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p.199

<sup>112</sup> Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977. p.18

The tobacco sector in Thessalonica employed the greatest amount of workers. 5,000 workers, mostly women, processed and packed tobacco, and hundreds of other workers were employed in the cigarette factories. Elsewhere in Macedonia, in Kavala, there were over 15,000 tobacco workers. In 1912, Allatini Brick Factory had 200 workers, and 100 worked at the flour mill of the same family. In the same year the Olympos brewery had around 80 workers, and the yarn and silk factories employed hundreds of workers.<sup>113</sup> In 1903, there were more than 2,000 railroad workers in Thessalonica.<sup>114</sup>

Although the Ottoman Empire suffered from labor shortage in general, Thessalonica housed large amounts of excess labor, which provided the industry the much needed cheap labor. Wars in Balkans caused a constant flow of mostly Moslem refugees, which peaked during the Russian-Turkish war in 1878.<sup>115</sup> In the twentieth century, the gang wars in rural Macedonia drove many peasants to the city. Also the Jews, who were fleeing pogroms in Russia in early 1890's, came to this city with a strong Jewish community. Thessalonica was an attractive destination for refugees and migrant with its diverse population and employment opportunities. Yet, for numerous factors, including the growing industry, labor started to become scarce in 1908, and the workers had the opportunity to strike and get wage raises, as demonstrated in the second chapter.

As the economy and population of the city grew, Thessalonica evolved into modern city. Despite its tragic results, the great fire of 1890, which destroyed a large segment of the city center, gave the municipality the chance for modernizing Thessalonica with large avenues, squares, orderly streets and modern buildings. In

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<sup>113</sup> Quataert, Donald. "Fabrika Bacalarından Tütün İlk Dumanlar." In *Selanik 1850-1918*, ed. Gilles Veinstein. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001. p.201

<sup>114</sup> Anastasiadou, Meropi. *Tanzimat Çağında Bir Osmanlı Şehri Selanik*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2001. p.304

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p.103

the same year, gas and sewage networks were built, which were followed in 1893 by drinking water network and horse-drawn tramways, which were electrified in 1907.<sup>116</sup> Meanwhile, the railroad arrived in Thessalonica in 1874, and connected the city to İstanbul, Edirne, Plovdiv and the Macedonian hinterland. In August 1888, the railroad connected Thessalonica to Vienna and rest of Europe.

In contrast with the other major cities in Balkans, there were no sharp differences in terms of numbers between Moslems, Jews and Greeks. A census of the Greek state in 1913 reported that the population of Thessalonica was consisting of over 60,000 Jews, over 45,000 Turks<sup>117</sup>, around 40,000 Greeks, more than 6,000 Bulgarians, while over 4,000 people were from other nationalities.<sup>118</sup> Although it is possible that these censuses might be politically or methodologically biased<sup>119</sup>, the numbers are more or less confirmed by other sources.

Furthermore, although the city was not segregated along ethnic lines, and although social and economic relations between different groups existed, each group lived in distinct neighborhoods. Yet the growth of the city's population and the incoming groups of migrants and refugees forced different communities to share same neighborhoods. As a result of the city's natural borders, the sea in South and the mountains in North, the city could only expand to eastwards and westwards. With the advance of the economy, the polarization of habitation was no longer shaped by ethnic divisions, but by class differences.<sup>120</sup> The bourgeoisie, the capitalists and the

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<sup>116</sup> Yerolympos, Alexandra, and Vassilis Colonas. "Kozmopolit Bir Kentleşme." In *Selanik 1850-1918*, ed. Gilles Veinstein. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001. p.175

<sup>117</sup> This category, which was used to define Moslems, probably included the converts as well.

<sup>118</sup> Georgiadou, Kirki. "Selanik'in Yunanlıları." In *Selanik 1850-1918*, ed. Gilles Veinstein. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001. p.129

<sup>119</sup> The Bulgarian Consulate claimed that there were 10,000 Bulgarians in Thessalonica in 1911. Ibid. p.143

<sup>120</sup> Anastassiadou, Meropi. *Tanzimat Çağında Bir Osmanlı Şehri Selanik*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2001. p.110

middle strata occupied the eastern wing of the city, while the neighborhoods of workers and petit-bourgeoisie expanded westwards.

While rival nationalist groups were involved in a bloody gang war in the Mountains of Macedonia, the rivalry in Thessalonica was intense, but less violent, with economic, cultural and ideological dimensions. This competition made a significant contribution to the enrichment of the social and cultural life of the city. In an attempt to increase its influence on the city, the Greek government was enthusiastically supporting Greek investments, banks, schools and various cultural institutions, which started to flourish by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>121</sup> In response, Bulgarians were opening their own schools and associations, while the Jewish community was involved in maintaining the balance by opening Jewish schools, commerce chambers and clubs.<sup>122</sup> Especially the secular intra-community professional organizations of Jewish artisans and qualified workers by the end of the nineteenth century made valuable contribution to the establishment of class consciousness among the Jewish workers.<sup>123</sup>

The rivalry between ethnic groups, together with the demands of the growing economy, contributed to the intellectual and cultural development of Thessalonica and Macedonia. In an attempt to indoctrinate their national identities through language and culture, Greeks and Bulgarians were in a race to open schools, while the Jewish and Moslem communities was trying to counter this trend in the same way. Jews had 50 schools with a capacity of 9,000 students (seven “Alliance Israelite Universelle” schools with French language education). Moslems had 32 primary schools and numerous high schools, while Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs and

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<sup>121</sup> Georgiadou, Kirki. “Selanik’in Yunanlıları.” In *Selanik 1850-1918*, ed. Gilles Veinstein. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001. p.130

<sup>122</sup> Molho, Rena. “Yenilenme...” In *Selanik 1850-1918*, ed. Gilles Veinstein. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001. p.82

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p.82

Romanians had their own schools. Several French and German schools were opened by France and Germany. There were also a large number of newspapers in French, Ladino, Turkish, Greek, Bulgarian and Romanian languages.<sup>124</sup>

Despite the intensive race between nationalist movements, the Jewish community wasn't very interested in the Zionist movement. Apparently, in the conformity of their wealth and security in Thessalonica, the Jews didn't feel the need to settle in an independent country in Palestine. They were also distant to this idea, since it was aiming to further disintegrate the Ottoman Empire. After Moslems, Jews were the most consistent defenders of the unity of Ottoman Empire, and Ottomanism was the dominant idea among the Jews, who supported the Ottoman army during the war with Greece in 1897.<sup>125</sup> The Jewish community also fully supported the Revolution of 1908 and the Union and Progress.<sup>126</sup> They were concerned about the nationalist movements of the ambitious Balkan states, which could try to dominate the city with their own national identity. In addition to the fear of losing their economic power, the memory of Russian pogroms terrified Jews. The Jews in the city started to support the Zionist movement only after the takeover of Thessalonica by Greeks.

At this point it is necessary to step back and view the entire picture, in which the socialist movement came into being. In the eve of the revolution, Thessalonica had an advanced capitalist economy with numerous factories, workshops, financial institutions, as well as a large service sector. The city's economy expanded into a rich, yet politically troubled hinterland. Meanwhile, the city was well connected to

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<sup>124</sup> Dumont, Paul. "Yahudi, Sosyalist ve Osmanlı Bir Örgüt: Selanik İşçi Federasyonu." In *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik*, ed. Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004. p.76

<sup>125</sup> Anastasiadou, Meropi. *Tanzimat Çağında Bir Osmanlı Şehri Selanik*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2001. p.331

<sup>126</sup> Dumont, Paul. "Yahudi, Sosyalist ve Osmanlı Bir Örgüt: Selanik İşçi Federasyonu." In *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik*, ed. Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004. p.78

Europe through railroads and a modernized seaport, and this had a great economic and cultural impact. A wealthy and westernized industrial-commercial bourgeoisie, and a well educated middle-class, were balanced by a large workers' army. The fancy hotels, restaurants and clubs in the city center, and the luxurious mansions of the eastern side of the city contrasted with the poor working class neighborhoods in the western outskirts. Although class divisions crisscrossed ethnic and religious boundaries, violent expressions of nationalist ambitions in Macedonia were translated into economic and ideological competition between rival nationalities.

In July 1908 Thessalonica and Macedonia were not only highly politicized, but they were also the center of the Young Turk revolution, and the habitants of the city were aware about its significance.<sup>127</sup> In general, the revolution of 1908 was received enthusiastically by most people in Macedonia, who were tired of the continuous fights. The overthrow of the decades-long oppressive Abdülhamid regime was finally achieved, and accounts of people from all nationalities celebrating on streets were more real in Thessalonica than anywhere else. "Freedom" (Hürriyet), which was the main ingredient of the most popular slogans, had its concrete results immediately. For the first time since decades, newspapers were published without the fear of being censored, associations were founded and public meetings became part of the everyday life in Thessalonica. Of course, in the context of the diversity of Thessalonica and Macedonia, "Freedom" promised different things for different people. For some people, mostly Turks and Jews, this was an opportunity unite the peoples of the Empire, reinstating order and to bring an end to disintegration of the country. For Bulgarian and Greek nationalists, "Freedom" meant a more liberal and

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<sup>127</sup> The significance of the revolution was not understood immediately everywhere. It is reported that people in Istanbul first didn't believe the news, and they started to celebrate a few days later.

suitable environment for propagating their nationalist ideas, while the chance of getting autonomy through peaceful means emerged as a realistic alternative.

Bulgarian socialists had been active in Macedonia for a long time. When the revolution took place, they were already organized in numerous cities in European Turkey. Yet, as far as we can see, they were mostly organized among Bulgarians. It is important to note that Bulgarian socialist in Ottoman Empire were extensions of the socialist organizations in Bulgaria. By 1908, socialist movement was already matured. The Bulgarian Social Democratic Workers' Party (BSDWP) was founded in 1891 through the unification of numerous smaller socialist groups from all over Bulgaria, and also Macedonia. The party grew rapidly, and by 1902, BSDWP had seven seats in the parliament.<sup>128</sup> As the party grew and matured, divisions became inevitable. During the months when the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party split into Bolshevik and Menshevik factions, two factions within the BSDWP, the "Narrows", led by Dimitar Blagoev, and "Broads" emerged as separate socialist parties at the 10<sup>th</sup> Congress of the party.<sup>129</sup> The differences between the two factions had emerged well before this congress. While the Broads were trying to get organized among peasants, workers and petit bourgeoisie, and were open for alliances with other progressive forces, the Narrows were focused at that time on the working class only and considered any kind of cooperation with bourgeois forces as diversion from the course of revolution. In addition to that, Narrows defended the idea of a centralized organization with actively working cadres, while the Broads kept the doors of their party open for anybody, who accepted certain principles. Another division took place in 1905, when a group of anarcho-liberals were expelled from the Narrows.

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<sup>128</sup> Çervendineva, M., S. Pobornikova, T. Koleva, B. Mitef, N. Nedef, B. Boef, G. Radev, M. Dimitroff and N. Samokovliev. *Bulgaristan Komünist Partisi Tarihi*. Ankara: Kızılırmak, 1975. p.36

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. p.39

The first socialist actions after the revolution of 1908 were started by the Narrow Bulgarian socialists. Under the leadership of Nikola Rusev, this small group, whose members were mostly printing press workers, organized a trade union, which was apparently used as a base for broader activities. In addition to organizing numerous public conferences, the group published numerous pamphlets. Meanwhile, the Bulgarian anarcho-liberals such as Nikola Harlakov, Pavel Delidarev and Angel Tomov<sup>130</sup> were also getting organized in Thessalonica. Avraam Benaroya<sup>131</sup>, who arrived in Thessalonica in August 1908, had founded a subgroup called “Sephardic Socialist Studies Circle” within the anarcho-liberals’ organization. At some point, probably in fall 1908, the Narrows and the anarcho-liberals together with Benaroya’s group, agreed to join their forces under the leadership of Rusev.<sup>132</sup> It is not clear how this new entity was called, or what its activities were, or whether it was an organization or alliance. Nevertheless this alliance started to break down in March or April 1909, and by fall 1909 the split was finalized.

The main reason of the split was the foundation of a separate Jewish “Workers’ Club” by Benaroya and his friends, around 30 people such as the tobacco workers, printing press workers, shop employees and tailors. This move started a debate on the organization of the workers and socialist in Turkey. Benaroya was advocating a federative model. “Almost all cities in Turkey included people from all

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<sup>130</sup> The organizational affiliation of Angel Tomov remains unclear.

<sup>131</sup> Avraam Benaroya was born in Vidin in 1887. After studying in Belgrade, he went to Plovdiv and worked as a teacher at a Jewish school. According to George Haupt, he was a member of Narrow socialists until he was thrown out together with the anarcho-liberals, who founded the group “Proletari”. Benaroya was this organization’s secretary in Plovdiv. Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977]. Yet İbrahim Yalimov and Şişmanov argue that he was associated with Broad socialists. [Yalimov, İbrahim. “1876-1923 Döneminde Türkiye’de Bulgar Azınlığı ve Sosyalist Hareketin Gelişmesi.” In *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik*, ed. Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004. p.147]; [Şişmanov, Dimitir. *Türkiye İşçi ve Sosyalist Hareketi*. İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1990. p.44]

<sup>132</sup> Dumont, Paul. “Yahudi, Sosyalist ve Osmanlı Bir Örgüt: Selanik İşçi Federasyonu.” In *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik*, ed. Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004. p.91

nations. The socialists had to form groups from them, unite these groups under a regional federation, and also to unite these regional federations under an Ottoman federation.”<sup>133</sup> The model as proposed by Benaroya dismissed the idea of a homogenous socialist party, as defended by the Narrows. On the other hand, Benaroya’s model was also different than the Armenian socialist parties, which were based on a single nation throughout the Empire. Benaroya’s model not only separated the organization of different nations, but it also brought decentralization, much to the dislike of Narrow Bulgarian socialists, who associated this idea with Broad socialists and anarcho-liberals. In its report to the International, the Federation laid out the principles behind this model: “For these ethnic and linguistic reasons, we thought that it would be more appropriate to found an organization, in which each nation wouldn’t have to sacrifice its language or culture. And we wanted that everybody would be able to independently develop his culture and personality, while making effort for the same socialist cause.”<sup>134</sup> Apart from that, Benaroya has a technical justification: “For example how could the Armenian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek, Jewish and the recently emerging Turkish socialist be brought together in an environment, in which there is no common language for correspondence and [propaganda]?”<sup>135</sup>

In his memoirs, Benaroya also mentions the position of Bulgarians, who advocated the foundation of a single party. The Bulgarian socialists, who were also organized in numerous other cities in the European Turkey, envisioned a centralist party, and they were strictly against the federative structure as proposed by Benaroya. The position of the Narrows was also shared by the Greek socialists in

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<sup>133</sup> Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977. p.293

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. p.83

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. p.293

Istanbul, who were organized around the newspaper “Ergatis” (Worker).<sup>136</sup> In fact the two groups acted together, and Glavinov’s report to the International in 1910 was written in the name of Rabotnicheski Iskra (Workers’ Spark) and Ergatis.<sup>137</sup>

It is interesting to see how much these discussion resembled to the conflict between V.I. Lenin and the Jewish Bund (General Jewish Workers’ Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia). Bund, which was founded in 1897, was a faction within the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ Party (RSDWP), and it stressed out the importance of the “national question” of Jews. In relation to that, Bund, which envisioned the revolutionary future of Russia as a federation of autonomous nations, wanted the RSDWP to adopt a federative structure, since it was “necessary and possible to realize the future objective for the country within the party today”, as Metin Çulhaoğlu points out in his introduction to Lenin’s book on national question and cultural autonomy.<sup>138</sup> In other words, the Jewish Bund demanded to be recognized as a federal section as the sole representative of Jewish workers within the party. When they brought this demand up during the Second Congress of RSDWP in 1903, during which the party was separated as Bolshevik and Menshevik factions, it was rejected due to the firm opposition of Lenin, who not only rejected the idea of a decentralized party, but also objected to Bund’s understanding of national autonomy as a central strategy in the building of socialism. What Bund advocated was the Austro-Marxist view of the national question. In his book “National Question and the Social Democracy” (1907), the Austro-Marxist Otto Bauer stated: “For the common rule of the nature, all nations will be united; but the wholeness will be organized within the national communities, which will be

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid. p.293

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. p.99

<sup>138</sup> Lenin V.I. *Ulusal Sorun ve Kültürel Özerklik*. Ankara: Ütopya Yayınevi, 2000. p.10

encouraged to develop autonomously and to freely make use of its own national culture.”<sup>139</sup>

Apparently, the Austrian Social Democratic Party and the Russo-Jewish Bund had a great influence on the Federation. It is evident that Benaroya was familiar with Austrian Marxism and the Bund well before he came to Thessalonica in 1908. In his book “The Jewish Question and Social Democracy”, which was published in 1908, Benaroya demonstrated great interest in the experience of Bund.<sup>140</sup> Interestingly, the title of Benaroya’s book had a strong resemblance to Otto Bauer’s book “Social Democracy and the Nationalities Question”, published in 1907, in which he finalized his thoughts about the national question. We don’t know whether Benaroya was particularly familiar with Otto Bauer’s book, but it is evident that he was in contact with the Austrian Marxists. In the correspondence of the Federation with the International, it was mentioned that the Federation “[was] maintaining its relations with the Socialist Party of Austria, and asked for a copy of its statute.”<sup>141</sup> Considering the available documents of the Federation, which never attempted to describe their idea of socialism, it seems that Benaroya and the Federation were interested in the idea of a federative organization rather in a pragmatic way to overcome the organizational difficulties posed by the multi-ethnic structure of the empire. The model of Austrian Marxists was also approved by other socialist organizations in Turkey such as ARF, which stated: “Dashnaktsutyun hopes that as Armenian, Turkish and Slavic socialists, we can constitute our own little Ottoman International at once, just like our Austrian comrades.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Bauer, Otto. “Sosyalizm ve Milliyet İlkesi.” In *Avusturya Marksizmi*, ed. Tom Bottomore and Patrick Goode. İstanbul: Kavram Yayınları, 1992. p.105

<sup>140</sup> Kentro Marksistikon Erevnon. *I Sosialistiki Organosi “Fenterasion” Thessalonikis 1909-1918*. Atina: Ekdoseis “Sigxroni Epoxi”, 1989. p.86

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. p.84

<sup>142</sup> Ibid. p.86 n.4

Despite the intense discussions on the form of organization, neither the Federation, nor the Narrows were able to reach their organizational aims. Although the narrows were organized in numerous major cities in the European Turkey, their organizational basis was constrained to Bulgarians. However, the population of Bulgarians, who lived in cities, was low; only 6,000 Bulgarians lived in Thessalonica, which had a population of 150,000. Consequently, Bulgarian socialist organizations generally remained small. According to the data provided by Glavinov, in 1910 the organization in Thessalonica had 33 members, the Skopje organization consisted of 15 people, and there were 11 members in the İstanbul organization, which was emerged in 1910, much later than the other branches of Narrows.<sup>143</sup> It is likely that the aforementioned İstanbul organization was constituted by Greek socialists, since the foundation of branch corresponds to the beginning of the publication of *Ergatis*, the socialist newspaper in Greek language. Apparently, the Narrows had smaller organizations or cells in other cities, such as Edirne, Xanti and Bitola, as well. While these numbers might seem too small, they don't exactly represent the power the Narrow socialists. As mentioned before, the Narrows were organizing as a cadre organization, which was selective of its members. In fact, the Thessalonica branch controlled four trade unions, while the Skopje organization had ties with a mixed trade union. Apart from the circulation of *Ergatis*, the newspaper of the Narrows, *Rabotnicheska Iskra* had a circulation of 800, which was a promising number considering the literacy rate of that time. Although the organization demonstrated "Bulgarian" characters in general, the *Ergatis* newspaper in İstanbul and the mixed trade union in Skopje indicated the Narrows were making effort to

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<sup>143</sup> Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977. p.96

include other nations. In this direction, Narrows also prepared several pamphlets in Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek and Spanish (Ladino) languages.<sup>144</sup>

The Federation, which was able to mobilize thousands of people at times, was nevertheless far from its aims. The main problem of the Federation was its inability in organizing non-Jewish workers. After the separation of the Bulgarian Narrow socialists in spring 1909, only the Bulgarian Broads and anarcho-liberals remained in the Federation, and according to Benaroya they were only eight or nine people. Furthermore, Benaroya admitted that the Federation's attempts to build a Turkish or Greek group had never been successful until 1912.<sup>145</sup> In 1909, the Federation had only one Greek and two Turkish members. In June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1909, Benaroya and his comrades made a daring move and organized the "Grand International Workers Feast" at the Beşçınar Gardens in Thessalonica. At this solidarity event the organization not only officially acquired the name "Socialist Workers' Federation of Thessalonica", but it also raised a significant sum from the 6,000 entrance tickets it sold. The money was to be used for the new publications of the Federation in four languages: "Jornal do Laborador" in Ladino, "Rabotnicheski Vestnik" in Bulgarian, "Efimerus tu Ergatu" in Greek, and "Amele Gazetesi" (Workers' Newspaper) in Turkish. Yet it was not only the money what made the publication of these newspapers possible. In August 1909, a group of Turks joined the Federation and it was these new recruits, who published the Turkish newspaper Amele Gazetesi. According to Paul Dumont, the chief editor of Amele Gazetesi was Rasim Hikmet. On the other hand Abidin Nesimi gives the names of these Turks as Rasim Haşmet, Enis Avni (Aka Gündüz), Ali Canip Yöntem and Ömer Seyfettin.<sup>146</sup> The editor of

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid. p.97

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. p.295

<sup>146</sup> Nesimi, Abidin. *Türkiye Komünist Partisinde Anılar ve Değerlendirmeler*. İstanbul: Promete Yayınları, 1979. p.30. Interestingly, this group would publish the journal "Genç Kalemler" with

Efimeris tu Ergatu was named as I. Gazis, but no information is provided about him. Apparently, these newspapers didn't bring the desired results. The publication of newspapers in Greek and Turkish were terminated after four issues, while the newspapers in Bulgarian and Ladino ended after nine issues.

Although the report of the Federation from 1910 identifies the problem of the newspapers as inexperience of cadres and pressures by the bourgeoisie<sup>147</sup>, the main reason seems to be the further disintegration of the Federation. Since the aforementioned Turkish supporters of the Federation were never mentioned again, we can assume that they quitted the Federation after a while, and the Bulgarian anarcho-liberals left the Federation in fall 1909. The reason for that was the Federation's relations with the bourgeoisie, which had always been a matter of disagreement between the Jewish members of the Federation and their Bulgarian comrades. Yet the cooperation of these groups received a fatal blow in fall 1909, when the Federation attended the demonstration for solidarity with Francisco Ferrer. When Ferrer, the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist and atheist, was arrested and sentenced to death by the Spanish government, socialists throughout the Europe organized solidarity actions with Ferrer, and in Thessalonica, the Federation and the Mason lodges organized a joint demonstration in solidarity with Ferrer. Bulgarian socialists within the Federation didn't receive it well that the Federation was acting together with Masons. Interestingly, also Benaroya disapproved the cooperation with Masons and rejected to make a speech at the demonstration. In his memoirs, Benaroya also admitted that although the Bulgarian socialists were few in numbers, they had "a

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Ziya Gökalp a few years later. While I was unable to find another source to verify this information, it seems likely that Rasim Hikmet and Rasim Haşmet were the same person. It is also important to note that Ömer Seyfettin had been in contact with Baha Tevfik previously, who was named among the founders of the Ottoman Socialist Party of Hüseyin Hilmi. [Tunaya, Tarık Zafer. *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler Cilt 1*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1998. p.278. A reference to socialists can also be found in Ömer Seyfettin's short story "Bomba".

<sup>147</sup> Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977. p.84

better understanding of socialism”.<sup>148</sup> In fact, also a group of Jewish members of the Federation led by Avraam Hasson strongly criticized the cooperation with Masons. Although Avraam Hasson and his group didn't quit, the Bulgarians left the Federation permanently after a short while, which narrowed the basis of the Federation to Jews.

On the other hand, although the Federation was unable to incorporate workers from different nationalities, it was able to mobilize them. This became evident for the first time during the May Day demonstration in 1909. The May Day demonstrations in Skopje and Thessalonica were the first celebrations of May Day with mass participation. In Thessalonica, a parade was organized with the participation of Benroya's group, the Bulgarian socialists and various trade unions, and workers from all nations, including Turks and Greeks, attended the rally.<sup>149</sup> This was also the case during the demonstration against the Strike Law on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1909. According the report of Benaroya and Hasson to International, 6,000 workers “without distinction of race and religion” attended the demonstration.<sup>150</sup> Although all the trade unions of Thessalonica were in the organizing committee of the demonstration, the Federation, by then the “Workers Association of Thessalonica” (WAT), was the main organizer. A leaflet in five languages, French, Ladino, Bulgarian, Turkish and Greek, which had the signature of WAT, was distributed to call the workers to the demonstration.

These two workers' rallies, which brought together a significant amount of workers in those days' conditions, demonstrate that even though the Federation was unable to organize workers of all nations, it succeeded in bringing them together in

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid. p.294

<sup>149</sup> Dumont, Paul. “Yahudi, Sosyalist ve Osmanlı Bir Örgüt: Selanik İşçi Federasyonu.” In *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Sosyalizm ve Milliyetçilik*, ed. Mete Tunçay and Erik Jan Zürcher. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004. p.91

<sup>150</sup> Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977. p.67

workers' actions. Although the Jewish workers again constituted the majority in these demonstrations, significant participation of workers from other nations, including the ones, who were members of nationalist organizations, was visible. This was also the case during the strikes of 1908, when the workers of different nations were able to join their forces during the strikes, and after the strikes were over, they turned back to their segregated organizations. In fact, as the antagonism between the working class and the ruling elites sharpened, workers from different nations demonstrated a clearer class character and more willingness to cooperate.

In comparison with the Bulgarian Narrows, the Federation was more successful in mobilizing the workers. Yet, that doesn't prove the advantage of the federative model over the one-part model in the context of Thessalonica. As mentioned before, there were only around 6,000 Bulgarians in the city, while the population of Jews exceeded 60,000. Thus, the Federation was able to mobilize comparatively large amount of workers, even if it couldn't attract the interest of workers from other nations. In turn, the ability of the Federation to organize mass demonstrations made the organization more attractive in general. Thus, the success of the Federation in mobilizing workers of other nations was not because the federative model was more attractive, but because there were more Jewish workers than Bulgarians in Thessalonica.

It was not a coincidence that that the Federation, which was the only Ottoman socialist organization with mass support, came into being in Thessalonica. As a result of the uneven development of capitalism, Thessalonica had a fairly advanced capitalist economy by 1908. A powerful capitalist class was balanced by a large proletariat. Class distinctions not only crisscrossed ethno-religious boundaries, but they were also visible in the social life of the city. As a result of the proximity of the

city to Western Europe, and a dense network of secular schools, the habitants of Thessalonica had a higher literacy rate and a greater familiarity with ideas and ideologies of European origin than the rest of the Ottoman Empire. The tense situation in Macedonia and the extent of struggle between different groups created a politicized society. The presence of large numbers of workers, awareness of the ideas and events in Europe, and the interaction with strong socialist groups such as the Bulgarian socialists, made the impact of the strike wave of 1908 stronger and more durable in Macedonia and Thessalonica.

All these factors help us to explain the emergence of an influential workers organization like the Federation in this region. The particularities of Macedonia and Thessalonica not only provided the grounds for the foundation of the Federation, but they also kept shaping the policies and principles of the organization. Especially the multi-ethnic and multi-religious structure of the population had a strong impact on the policies and organizational model of the Federation. The emphasis of Benaroya and his friends on an federative organization, and their insistence on bringing workers from different nations together doesn't mean that the Federation was liberated from the impact of particular groups in favor of a pure class identity. The suggested federative model and the support to the Ottoman identity replicated the interests of the entire Jewish community in Thessalonica, for which the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and the harmonious coexistence of different nations was essential. The differences between ethno-religious groups in Macedonia were translated in a complicated way to the socialist and workers' movement. Apparently, the Greek workers kept their distance to the socialist movement, which was dominated by Jews and Bulgarians, because of their prejudices to other ethnic groups. While the impact of Greek nationalist organizations on Greek workers is

confirmed both by the Narrows and Federation, the situation of Turkish workers is not that clear. Although the report of the Narrows to the International states that Turkish workers were uneducated and didn't join socialist organizations, it is also likely that Turks didn't trust non-Muslims and their organizations. Yet the separation of Narrows and Federation along ethnic lines, so that the former was a Bulgarian organization, while the latter almost only included Jews except for a few months in 1909, shows that ethno-religious differences also affected these two organizations, which firmly advocated the joint action of workers from different nations. Even though prejudice and mistrust were not factors in the cases of the Narrows and Federation, their national backgrounds nevertheless led them to adopt different approaches. Apparently the Narrows in Macedonia were acting based on their experiences in Bulgaria, where the conflict between the ruling elites and the proletariat was much sharper, so that common action with bourgeois groups, such as Masons, was unacceptable for them. On the other hand, the Jewish affiliates of the Federation, who were much less experienced than the Bulgarian socialists, didn't hesitate to act together with certain segments of the bourgeoisie. In fact, the Federation had members from prominent bourgeois families, such as Arditti, while the enlightened segments of the Jewish bourgeoisie maintained good relations with socialists in Europe, such as Jaurés. Also the insistence of the Federation on a federative organization of the workers and socialists in the Ottoman Empire, and their fondness about Ottomanism, were inspired by the viewpoint of the Jewish community in Thessalonica in general. In summary, ethno-religious differences proved as obstacles against the unity of socialists, although that didn't always happen through nationalist hostilities, but rather through cultural differences, which were reflected to the attitudes of different socialist groups.

Although the socialist organizations in Thessalonica never formed a united organization within the three years from 1909 to 1912, they made several attempts to overcome their differences and to bring together different organizations in Thessalonica and in the empire, beginning with a meeting at the end of 1910. Apparently, struggling under the same circumstances and facing the same challenges generated by the hostile attitude of the Ottoman government created common grounds and better understanding among socialists.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANTAGONISM

When we look to the history of the Federation from 1909 to 1912, we see that the ever increasing antagonism with the government and the nationalist organizations of minorities decisively affected the policies of the Federation. Although the Federation was an enthusiastic supporter of the revolution of 1908 and sympathized with Young Turks at the beginning, its relations with the Union and Progress soured rapidly. What characterized the antagonism between the Federation and the Union and Progress was the class positions of these two organizations.

The report of the Federation to the International in 1910 described the revolution of 1908 with great enthusiasm. According to this document, the reign of Abdülhamid was not only tyrannical and oppressive, but it was also inefficient and incompetent, so that the people lived in misery.<sup>151</sup> The revolution of July 1908 promised an end to this situation, which “threatened the very existence of the Ottoman nation”. The report especially stressed out the support of the European socialists to Young Turks, who were aided by the Armenian and Macedonian

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<sup>151</sup> Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977. p.77

revolutionary organizations in their revolutionary struggle, which led to the “salvation of the classes of the Ottoman nation”.<sup>152</sup>

As a result, for Benaroya and his friends, who arrived in Thessalonica after the strikes in 1908 with the intention of organizing the workers, the enemy was not the Union and Progress, but the nationalist organizations of minority groups, at least initially. According to this report, many workers in Thessalonica were organized in trade unions, which were not in workers’ control, especially in the public sector. “Some foremen, workshop chiefs, engineers and high ranking officials had conquered the management of these public workers’ associations, which were destined to disappear soon.”<sup>153</sup> Apart from the degeneration in the trade unions of public workers, the trust funds of workers in general were mostly controlled by the capitalists. Considering these funds as a serious obstacle against the organization of workers, the Federation waged a war against these funds. According to the report, the Federation was successful in dissolving most of them, and it tried to liberate them from the control of capitalists and transform them into trade unions.<sup>154</sup> In addition to that, workers of some nations, especially Greeks, were under the influence of nationalist and religious organizations, which was seen by the Federation as an important obstacle against the organization of the working class. Apart from its propaganda against nationalists, the Federation assumed that its federative structure would be appealing enough to recruit workers from different nations and save them from the grip of nationalist organizations.

Struggling against the nationalist organizations didn’t contradict with the sympathy of the Federation to the Union and Progress. On the contrary, Benaroya thought that the Ottoman identity, as promoted by the Union and Progress, would

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid. p.78

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. p.79

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. p.89

weaken the nationalist sentiments among workers and open the path to the common organization of workers from different nations. Furthermore, the support of the Federation to the new order didn't consist of words only. When reactionaries started a counter-revolution in early April, some socialists including Avraam Benaroya joined the Action Army (Hareket Ordusu) and marched to Istanbul, in order to defend the revolution. According to Benaroya, the socialist and worker participants of the victorious Action Army were especially impressive for the workers of Thessalonica for their heroism. Benaroya also argued that the reinforcement of the regime encouraged workers, who started a new wave of strikes after the incident of March 31<sup>st</sup>. Ironically, the incident of March 31<sup>st</sup> was the beginning of the end of the good relations between the Federation and the Union and Progress, which introduced a number of restrictive laws in the months following the incident.<sup>155</sup>

The Federation's attitude towards the Union and Progress started to change in May 1909, when the parliamentary discussions on the Strike Law (Ta'til-i Eşgal Kanunu) started. This law, which was based on the Temporary Law on Strikes of October 1908, started to be discussed in May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1909. Although the draft, which was prepared by the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works, legalized the foundation of trade unions<sup>156</sup>, the deputies decided to ban the trade unions in public sectors on June 18<sup>th</sup>. Evidently, socialists and workers' organizations in Thessalonica were prepared, and a temporary commission, which had convened already four times, decided to act. The commission organized a demonstration together with other organizations including all the trade unions in Thessalonica, 23 organizations in total, on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1909, "to protest the hostile intentions of the government against the trade union and strike rights, to demand a trade union law and to hinder the

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid. p.289

<sup>156</sup> Ökçün, Gündüz. *Ta'til-i Eşgal Kanunu 1909*. Ankara: Sermaye Piyasası Kurulu, 1996. p.10

exploitation of workers.”<sup>157</sup> With the participation of 6,000 workers from all nations, the demonstration was evaluated as “highly successful” by the Federation.<sup>158</sup> The demonstrators, who chanted the anthem International, sent a letter with their demands to the Ottoman Parliament. Therefore, the demonstration and its preparations not only signified a mass reaction by workers against the government, but it was also an attempt to interfere with the decision of the parliament, in other words a direct workers’ interference in the country’s legislative process. As Benaroya and Hasson reported, many workers, including the workers of the Eastern Railroads, didn’t go to work in order to attend the meeting, so that the demonstration classifies as the first known political work stoppage in the history of Turkey. Similar protests also occurred in Izmir, Drama and Kavala.<sup>159</sup>

The invitation leaflet for the demonstration of June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1909, which was issued in five languages and marked with the sign of the Workers’ Association of Thessalonica, complained about the insensitivity of the government towards the “social cries” of the oppressed working class. According to the statement, the government intended to pass laws, which were “against the Constitution, illogical and opposed to the country’s interest”. Further on, the statement referred to Ferid Paşa, Minister of Interior, who had argued that “it was necessary to provide the capitalists low cost manual labor through law for the development of industry in Turkey”. Afterwards, the statement expressed its disappointment: “Weird! But we thought that the Constitution, and the government, which should execute it, and finally the people’s deputies in Istanbul would issue laws in the interest of all

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<sup>157</sup> Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977. p.67

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. p.67

<sup>159</sup> Ibid. p.81

citizens, and through that justice and truth [...] would be established.”<sup>160</sup> This piece from the declaration reveals the Federation’s idea about the “country’s interest” and the new political regime. The Federation associated the country’s interest with the rights of workers and trade unions. Its idea of country’s interest didn’t overlap with Ferid Paşa’s idea of the same concept, who defined the same concept as the development of capitalism through cheap labor. This is the first instance we know, when the Federation openly questioned their cooperation with Union and Progress for the new regime. The statement also questioned the legitimacy of the parliament, which seemed to have forgotten the working class. Thus, this statement, which is addressed to “workers and laborers”, but probably intended to reach the deputies, too, marked a turning point for class conflict, and the distancing of Federation from the Union and Progress. Yet, distancing from Union and Progress in no ways meant distancing from the gains of the revolution. On the contrary, according to the Federation, the government betrayed the Constitution and the parliamentary system by betraying the workers. Therefore, the workers should “unite and protect the justice, which was approved and demanded by the Constitution.”

Despite the success of the demonstration, the parliament approved the Strike Law on August 8<sup>th</sup> 1909, and although Benaroya claimed that Ferid Paşa had resigned because of these demonstrations<sup>161</sup>, his claim cannot be verified. Although the strike law was only including workers in public businesses, it was a heavy blow for the workers’ movement. Foundation of trade unions at railroads, seaports and many other institutions, which employed the backbone of the working class, was abolished by the law. In any case, we can say that the approval of the Strike Law changed the Federation’s view of the Union and Progress irreversibly. In fact, the

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid. p.69

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. p.298

Federation decided to celebrate the first anniversary of the revolution separately on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1909. This was the first concrete action, which supported the Revolution of 1908 without any reference to Young Turks. Despite the threats of the Union and Progress, the workers led by the Federation organized a parade on their own, which was followed by the “Grand International Workers Feast” at the Beşçınar Gardens, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Jewish, Bulgarian and Greek workers from tobacco monopoly, railroads and some other sectors attended the feast and Benaroya seemed to be quite satisfied with the result in his memories. During the feast, the Federation hosted two socialist deputies, as well. One of them was Hampartzum Boyacıyan, also known as Murad, who was a deputy and also a prominent leader of Hunchakian Party. The other deputy was Dimitar Vlahov, who was a deputy of the Macedonian left-nationalist “National Federative Party”.<sup>162</sup> After his party was banned by the government, Vlahov became a member of the Federation, so that the Federation was represented in the parliament. As mentioned before, the Federation raised money from this feast in order to issue publications. The timing of this step implies that the Federation decided to struggle more intensively after it realized the direction of the Union and Progress.

The passing of Strike Law not only brought fundamental changes in the policies of the Federation towards the Union and Progress, but it also revealed the position of the Union and Progress towards the workers’ movement. Although the Strike Law of 1909 was not very different from the Temporary Strike Law of 1908, the latter was issued in a state of emergency, when many important strikes took place in a short time period. Yet the strike law of 1909 was issued at a relatively calm time, when it was impossible to claim that public security was under threat. The 13 articles

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid. p.247

of the Strike Law, which covered only the workers in public sectors, completely abolished the foundation of trade unions, while formally allowing strikes. Yet, in the case of a dispute, workers were first “obliged” to bring their disputes to the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works, which would then arrange a commission consisting of workers’ representatives, the company’s representatives and a representative from the ministry. If this commission wouldn’t be able to reach a conclusion, then the workers would be able to strike. Furthermore, the striking workers were not allowed to hinder strikebreakers from inside, and the government had the right to ban any strike in case of war or war threat.<sup>163</sup> Obviously, these restrictions made strikes in public sector virtually impossible. The mandatory negotiation process was granting time to the company to confront the strike, while the workers had to bear the burden of a strike without a trade union. Yet, the parliamentary debates on the Strike Law were actually more indicative of the position of Union and Progress than the law itself.

The liberal political atmosphere of the first few months after the Revolution of 1908, and the temporary dependence of Union and Progress on alliances with different political groups, created a parliament with a political diversity, which is unseen in the entire history of Turkey. Several deputies, who identified themselves as socialists, entered the parliament from the lists of Union and Progress. These included the deputies of the Armenian parties “Armenian Revolutionary Federation” (ARF – Dashnaktsutyun) and the “Social Democrat Hunchakian Party (SDHP)” and finally Dimitar Vlahov, the deputy of Thessalonica, who entered the parliamentary as the representative of Macedonian left nationalist “National Federative Party”, but later on became the representative of the Socialist Workers’ Federation of

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<sup>163</sup> Ökçün, Gündüz. *Ta’til-i Eşgal Kanunu 1909*. Ankara: Sermaye Piyasası Kurulu, 1996. p.111.

Thessalonica. In accepting the socialists from Armenian and Macedonian organizations, the Union and Progress was not seeking political diversity, but ethnic diversity in the parliament, which was supposed to represent the “Ottoman” character of the revolution and the new regime.

The parliamentary debate on the Strike Law, especially on article eight, which banned the trade unions, revealed the class position of the ruling elites even more than the law itself. One of the fiercest advocates of banning trade unions was Ferid Paşa, the Minister of Interior. According to him, the country badly needed foreign capital, which would be felt threatened by trade unions and wouldn't come to the country. He argued: “It was proven, wherever trade unions were founded, a base against the capital always emerged.” According to him, the intention of trade unions was destroying capitalists and they were founded only by foreigners. Therefore, trade unions were harmful and unnecessary.<sup>164</sup> It is interesting that he accused the trade unions for being founded by foreigners, while he was resting his argument on the foreign capital. Another objection of Ferid Paşa to trade unions was based on political reasons. According to his hypothesis, once trade unions were founded, they would contact the trade unions in Europe, and bring socialist ideas, which he called “intolerable” for the Ottoman Empire. The foreigners would come to the country and start actions, which was harmful for the country. In saying that, Ferid Paşa was reminding the deputies of the takeover of the Eastern Railroads by Bulgaria after the strike, in which the Bulgarian socialists were involved.<sup>165</sup> Once again, Ferid Paşa stressed out that the trade unions were associated with foreigners.

Another enemy of trade unions was Ali Bey, Deputy Minister of Commerce and Public Works. One of his strategies was denying the significance of trade unions.

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<sup>164</sup> Gülmez, Mesut. *Türkiye’de Çalışma İlişkileri (1936 Öncesi)*. Ankara: Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1983. p.329

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. p.326

He claimed that the trade unions were nothing but guilds. Similar to guilds, they appointed some prominent workers to negotiate with the capitalist. Yet, according to Ali Bey, arranging negotiations was the duty of the state, and leaving this duty to “guilds” would be the infringement of state’s sovereignty.<sup>166</sup> In connection to that, Ali Bey argued that by abolishing the trade unions, the state was protecting the interests of the workers, since the state didn’t favor any class. Identifying himself with the state he said: “I don’t recognize workers; I don’t recognize capitalists; I only think about the interests of my country. For the felicity of my country, my holy country, I try to make both the capitalist and worker tender-natured towards each other. (...) In fact [the abolishing of trade unions] is only intended to protect the workers, not the capitalists. Be assured, otherwise the workers will be enslaved in the hands of trade unions.”<sup>167</sup> Yet another argument of Ali Bey against trade unions shows that he was aware about the class differences. Referring to the incident of March 31<sup>st</sup>, he reminded the deputies that politics has entered into schools. Unless the trade unions were banned, politics would infect the workers.<sup>168</sup> His reference to the incident of March 31<sup>st</sup> implied the danger of revolutionary activities by workers.

Although numerous deputies other than Ferid Paşa and Ali Bey made speeches against the trade unions, their contributions to the debate were not much different than these two representatives of the government. In my view, the comments of Ferid Paşa and Ali Bey were resulting from hypocrisy rather than from ignorance. While their arguments on the necessity of banning trade unions for the sake of foreign capital revealed their class preference, their claims about the danger of foreign intervention and the loss of state’s sovereignty through trade unions were obviously in contradiction with their this argument. It is not clear whether Ferid

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid. p.332

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. p.331

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. p.333

Paşa's arguments about the danger of socialism or Ali Bey's warning about the revolution were just attempts to scare the other deputies or their sincere belief, yet it is evident that they were following the developments in Europe closely. In fact, both of them used numerous examples from the class struggles in Europe in their arguments.

Although the majority of the deputies ended up supporting Ferid Paşa and Ali Bey, there were also voices in favor of the trade unions. Armenian deputies, who were affiliated with Armenian parties, Dimitar Vlahov, and also some other deputies, including some Turks, objected to the ban of trade unions. Socialist deputies condemned the proponents of the ban for demonizing the socialists, and stressed out the fact that the cost of labor in Turkey was much lower than in Europe, so that an increase in the wages as a result of trade unions wouldn't scare away foreign capitalists. While the defense of trade unions by socialists and non-Moslems didn't create much frustration, there was a great reaction from the opponents of trade unions, when some Moslem deputies talked in favor of the workers' right of organization. When Lütfi Bey, the deputy of Dersim, criticized the inconsistency of anti-trade union arguments, he was accused for being "extremely unpatriotic".<sup>169</sup> Even Cavid Bey, who had been one of the most consistent and sophisticated opponents of socialism in the Ottoman parliament, was accused for being a socialist, when he defended trade unions.<sup>170</sup> At first, the defense of trade unions by Cavid Bey seems odd, but he had a different view of trade unions. According to him, trade unions would educate workers and prevent them from striking randomly. Apparently, Cavid Bey considered trade unions as an opportunity to control the working class.<sup>171</sup> Another argument of Cavid Bey was about justice. Even if the foreign capitalist

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid. p.339

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. p.328

<sup>171</sup> Ökçün, Gündüz. *Ta'til-i Eşgal Kanunu 1909*. Ankara: Sermaye Piyasası Kurulu, 1996. p.20

wouldn't want the trade unions in Turkey, the government should still allow trade unions, since "the justice couldn't be violated".<sup>172</sup> Interestingly, in a newspaper article written during the discussions on the Strike Law, Cavid Bey argued that the socialists were to blame for the anti-trade union sentiment in the parliament. Once the issue [of Strike Law] was brought to the parliament, "an unproductive discussion" started, in which "the flag of socialism" was opened by some parliamentarians, who "didn't have an adequate ground to declare their economic thoughts until then".<sup>173</sup> So, according to Cavid Bey, socialists were sacrificing the interest of the workers for the sake of their political aims.

By April 1912, when Cavid Bey, by then the Minister of Public Works, made a speech in Thessalonica, his position had changed significantly. Since this speech is maybe one of the boldest manifestations of the class position of Union and Progress, it deserves special attention. In his speech Cavid Bey warned the socialists and workers: "The ones, who want to disturb the commercial life and paralyze the industrial life in the name of the freedom of conscience, shall know that the strong and bold policy of the government will defeat their intentions."<sup>174</sup> After calling the socialists "merchants of politics", he blamed them for "using the pretext of justice and social equality" to "fortify their political position". In fact, it was the "duty of the government to protect the privileges in commercial treaties"; at this point, Cavid Bey was referring to privileges granted to foreign capitalists. Yet three years ago, when he was defending the trade unions, he argued that the rights of workers should be defended even though the foreign capitalist didn't like it.

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid. p.19

<sup>173</sup> Ibid. p.127

<sup>174</sup> Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977. p.236

Similar to the arguments of Ferid Paşa on the foreign roots of socialists, Cavid Bey described the socialists as “the ones, who get orders from the International”, and assured them that “they would be caught by their ears and thrown out of the door”. He also implied that the government was willing to break the law in its struggle against socialism: “The pouring complaints of these people will be rejected in the name of the well being and general security of the country, nobody will care about what they say.” Cavid Bey invited socialists “to give up their ideas”, which was a “patriotic duty”; otherwise they would be “crushed and eliminated”. His final recommendation was maybe the most interesting part of his speech: “And you capitalists, if you would start your own trade unions in order to defend your interests, and show the workers that you are stronger than them, you will get better results from the actions of the government. Because there is a natural law, once the workers realize that you are stronger than them and that they cannot make you bow your head, they will bow their heads and listen to you.” In turn, the capitalist were supposed to treat the workers justly.<sup>175</sup> Although Cavid Bey’s remarks about socialists were extreme but not unusual, since hate speeches against socialists have always been common, his latter advices to the capitalists were unheard of. Probably, in the entire history of Turkey, no bourgeois politician has took a position within the class conflict so explicitly. While his definition of class conflict as a relationship between capitalists and proletariat, in which one side will be subjugated to the other, is amazingly daring, it is also very interesting that he expressed the government’s choice between the classes in such an explicit way.

At the parliament, hostility towards socialism wasn’t only expressed on the occasion of issues, which involved workers and trade unions. In 1911, during the

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid. p.238

parliamentary debates on the budget Vlahov and the Armenian socialists brought up the issues of foreign capital and progressive taxing. Their contributions, which included extensive quantitative data and detailed accounts of examples on the impact of foreign capital investments and progressive taxing from the world, were the most sophisticated and informative presentations in the parliamentary debates. Even Ahmet Rıza, the President of the Parliament, had to admit the quality of their contributions: “They are giving very serious information. It would have been much better if the negotiations on the budget always went on like that”.<sup>176</sup> While the socialists had different opinions on the foreign capital (Vlahov was in favor of foreign capital investments, while Armenian deputies such as Zohrap Efendi were arguing for restrictions on foreign capital), they all were in favor of progressive taxing. In the parliament, the latter idea was immediately labeled as a socialist idea, not only because it was the socialists, who defended it, but also because it would mean proportionally higher taxes for wealthier people. Anything that resembled equality and social justice were labeled as socialists ideas at the Ottoman Parliament. When Zohrap Efendi advocated the necessity that everybody should receive the return of his labor, Cavid Bey, by then the Minister of Finance, immediately replied: “You are again bringing up your grand theory”<sup>177</sup> and argued that the intention of Zohrap Efendi was “Oppressing the rich people. Robbing the rich people. Nothing else.”<sup>178</sup> Following that, the argument of the “foreign” nature of socialism was once reminded by İsmail Paşa, who chanted: “This is not Europe! Turkey, Ottoman, Ottoman!”<sup>179</sup> The association of certain ideas with socialism was at such a level, that Ferit Bey, who was also advocating progressive taxing, felt the obligation to assure

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<sup>176</sup> Sadi, Kerim. *Türkiye’de Sosyalizmin Tarihine Katkı*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1994. p.368

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p.383

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. p.385

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p.386

his fellow deputies that he was not as socialist.”<sup>180</sup> Not only was socialism demonized, but it was also used to label and suppress certain political positions, which were not favored by the government.

Yet, when the harsh opposition of Cavid Bey to the progressive tax received strong support from the parliament, Zohrap Efendi commented: I am happy that he was applauded; and I understood that my friends at the parliament are not poor like me!”<sup>181</sup> As the sarcastic remark of Zohrap Efendi shows, the anti-socialist remarks at the Ottoman parliament were not the result of ignorance only, but they were deriving from the class affiliation of the deputies. While it is evident that numerous deputies didn't know anything about socialism, and were simply scared by their more informed anti-socialists colleagues, the Union and Progress had made an explicit choice in favor of capitalism as early as October 1908. In order to further elaborate the article 13 of the political program of Union and Progress, which stated that “laws [would] be issued in order to determine the law and mutual duties of workers and bosses”<sup>182</sup>, an article was published in the newspaper “Union and Progress”. The article started with defining to European ideas on the relations of bosses and workers: liberalism (*serbesti*) and socialism. The difference between these ideas was not only based on the extent of state intervention at a given moment, but it was also argued that socialism would constantly increase the level of state intervention, which would lead to communism (*umumi iştirak*).<sup>183</sup> The article warned that too much state intervention would discourage capitalists from investment, which would stop the economic development of the country. Interestingly, in explaining that the extensive protection workers against the bosses was no longer necessary, because of the

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid. p.387

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. p.373

<sup>182</sup> Onur, Hakkı. “1908 İşçi Hareketleri ve Jön Türkler.” *Yurt ve Dünya* 2 (March 1977). p.293

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. p.294

changes in public ethics, the article also admitted that trade unions played a role in that. Giving reference to the wave of strikes in 1908, the article declared that Union and Progress would pass laws in order to organize the relations between workers and bosses, and in order to define their obligations against each other.<sup>184</sup> According to the article, the necessity of these regulations was deriving from the importance of the main sectors in the Ottoman Empire, such as the railroads, trams, electricity, etc. Finally, the Union and Progress chose liberalism, which only required government intervention in matters with public interests.<sup>185</sup>

Despite the hysterical attacks against socialist deputies at the Ottoman Parliament, their presence in the discussions was tolerated. None of the socialist deputies, neither Vlahov, nor the Armenians were subject to physical assault or prosecution. In fact, Dashnaktsutyun once again cooperated with Union and Progress during the elections of 1912. Yet, the organization of socialist among the working class was a matter of frustration for Young Turks. Therefore the tolerance for the socialist deputies didn't reflect the overall attitude of Union and Progress towards the socialists. While government pressure against socialists took place in various major cities in Turkey, Thessalonica with its massive socialist movement was the primary target of the attacks of Union and Progress. It was not coincidence that Cavid Bey chose Thessalonica to make his aforementioned speech in 1912. Not only the central government, but also the local authorities were concerned about the socialists. This was evident in a telegram from the Governor of Thessalonica to Ministry of Interior: "Since all workers in Thessalonica are engaged in founding trade unions, (...) [and since] the gradual establishment of the idea and practice of socialism could destroy the local commerce, (...) there is hesitance about the distribution of permit

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid. p.295

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. p.294

documents [to the trade unions], (...) and finally it is necessary that the Parliament makes a decision to ban the trade unions, which were already granted permits.”<sup>186</sup> Although it is not mentioned when this telegram was sent or which specific trade unions it was referring to, it demonstrates the concern of the local authorities amid the growing influence of socialists in Thessalonica.

From 1909 onwards, the attacks of Union and Progress against the Federation increased continuously, which in turn created significant changes in the policies of the Federation. Yet, before interpreting these changes, it is necessary to focus on another organization, the Second International, which had a great influence on the policies of the Federation.

In early twentieth century, member parties of the Second International were among the most powerful political organizations in Europe. For instance, the Social Democratic Party of Germany became the strongest party in Germany in 1912, with 110 of the 409 seats in the parliament. So was the Austrian Social Democratic Workers' Party, which became the strongest party in the parliament after the elections in 1911. The Armenian parties “Armenian Revolutionary Federation” (ARF – Dashnaktsutyun) and the “Social Democrat Hunchakian Party (SDHP)” became members of the Second International at the Stuttgart Congress in 1907.

The Young Turk revolution also echoed outside the borders of the Ottoman Empire, and it created mixed reactions, concerns and hopes. Socialists in Europe and Balkans were not indifferent to the revolution of 1908, which was associated with the Russian revolution of 1905 and the Iranian revolution of 1906. By many European socialists, the Young Turk revolution was interpreted as a bourgeois revolution, which would liberate the oppressed peoples within the Empire, and prepare a suitable

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<sup>186</sup> Tüm İktisatçılar Birliği. *Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Mücadeleleri Tarihi*. Ankara: Tüm İktisatçılar Birliği, 1976. p.50

environment for socialists and workers for becoming actors in politics. Since most of the European socialists were committed to parliamentarianism, the establishment of a constitutional monarchy with a parliament was seen as an important step for class struggle. It is important to note that especially the French socialists had a good relationship with the initiators of the revolution, both with Young Turks and the Armenian revolutionaries.

As a result, the attitude of the International towards the Revolution of 1908 was quite positive. The revolution was exclusively covered and supported by the socialist press in Europe, while the International Socialist Bureau (ISB), which consisted of the representatives of all member parties of the International, issued a statement on the occasion of the Young Turk revolution on October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1908. The statement, which was prepared upon a proposal by the Belgian representative De Bruker and unanimously accepted by the ISB, declared: “The International Socialist Bureau greets with joy the fall of the infamous regime which Abdul Hamid so long maintained in Turkey with the help of the powers, and welcomes the possibility now presented to the peoples of the Turkish Empire to work out their own destinies, and the introduction of a regime of political liberty which will allow the nascent proletariat to carry on its class struggle in close unity with the proletariat of the whole world.”<sup>187</sup>

As this statement indicates, the International evaluated the Young Turk revolution as a democratic revolution, which would open the path for workers’ movements and national liberation movements. It is important to note that this statement was made during the heyday of successful workers’ strikes and close cooperation between the Union and Progress and nationalist movements of ethno-

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<sup>187</sup> Lenin, Stalin, Mao and Dimitrov. *Türkiye Üzerine*. İstanbul: Aydınlık Yayınları, 1977. p.27

religious minorities. Lenin, by then a component of the Second International, regarded the Young Turk revolution as a bourgeois-democratic revolution, which was a follow-up of the Russian Revolution in 1905, just like the revolutions in Iran (1906) and China (1910).<sup>188</sup> Yet, Lenin rather stressed out the international impact of the Young Turk revolution in response to the imperialist policies of European powers, rather than its conclusions for the minorities and workers within Turkey. According to Lenin, “the constitutional movement in Turkey threatened the wild wolves of the European capitalism in saving this private domain from their claws.”<sup>189</sup> In this early statement from August 1908, Lenin also implied that these developments in Asia could fire a revolution in Europe through weakening the European capitalism. Therefore, for Lenin, the revolution in Turkey should be defended against Russia and other European powers, which seemingly celebrated the Young Turk revolution, but in fact were afraid of it, since it could start a wave of independence movements among Balkan nations. Especially the Austrian aggression was seen as an evident action against the revolution in Turkey by Lenin. On the other hand, although the revolution in Turkey had a potential for leading to revolutionary changes in Balkans and Asia, the impact of European imperialists threatened to suffocate this potential. “The Young Turks are praised for their moderation and restraint, i.e., the Turkish revolution is being praised because it is weak, because it is not rousing the popular masses to really independent action, because it is hostile to the proletarian struggle beginning in the Ottoman Empire—and at the same time the plunder of Turkey continues. The Young Turks are praised for making it possible to go on plundering Turkish possessions. They praise the Young Turks and continue a

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid. p.29

<sup>189</sup> Ibid. p.31

policy, the obvious purpose of which is to partition Turkey.”<sup>190</sup> According to Lenin, the anti-popular and anti-working class policies of the Young Turk revolution resulted, at least to some extent, from the pressure by the European powers, and the desire of Young Turks to reconcile with them.

In response to the general sympathy of the Second International towards the Revolution of 1908, and with respect to the strength of the Second International in Europe, the Young Turks were sensitive to the opinion of this organization, at least during the first years of the revolution. In fact, before the Revolution of 1908, the International meant a lot for the exiled Young Turks in France. Young Turks, especially the refugee Ahmet Rıza, who became the President of the Parliament later, maintained good relations with Jean Jaurés, who was among the leading figures of the International. Jaurés, who was the leader of socialist in France and the editor of the influential socialist newspaper *L'Humanité*, strictly believed in pacifism, and he had a great impact on the adoption of pacifist and anti-militarist resolutions of the International.

Although it is unknown when exactly the Federation contacted the International for the first time, the first known letter, signed by Benaroya and Hasson on behalf of the Workers' Association of Thessalonica, was sent to the Central Presidential Committee of the International on June 6, 1909, which actually predated the formation of the Federation.<sup>191</sup> The eagerness of Benaroya and his friends in contacting the International, and their intention to become the Ottoman Branch of the International, which was expressed in their first letter, demonstrates that the importance of this mighty international organization was fully realized by the socialists in Thessalonica. Finally, the Federation was accepted as a member of the

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid. p.34

<sup>191</sup> Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977. p.67

International on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1909. Yet, since the Federation didn't include the entire proletariat of the country, it was recognized as the "Subsection of Workers of Thessalonica", rather than the Section of Ottoman Empire.<sup>192</sup> The two Armenian parties had also been recognized as the Turkish Armenian Subsection. In fact, it was the ARF, who facilitated the acceptance of the Federation to the International. Meanwhile the Bulgarian Narrow Socialists opposed the acceptance of the Federation to the International, whereas they called the Federation "the pawn of the Young Turks in European Turkey", and claimed that it would provide the Union and Progress access to the International. According to this argument this would be "a hindrance against the establishment of socialist formation among the working masses".<sup>193</sup> The strong reaction of the Bulgarian socialists against the membership of the Federation to the International is a further proof for the importance attributed to the International. Apparently, being member of the international provided prestige and legitimacy for an organization.

However, it was too late for the objections of the Bulgarian Narrow socialists. Almost a year after being recognized as a member, the Federation elected Saul Nahum, who lived in Paris, as the official representative of the Federation to the Presidential Committee of the International.<sup>194</sup> Nahum was not only responsible for the communication between the Federation and the International, but he also provided the International with general information on the workers' movement, other socialist organizations and political affairs in Turkey. It is also important to note that being so close to the International seems to have provided Nahum a strong position within the Federation. In fact, as we will see in this chapter, Nahum didn't hesitate to express his disagreements with the Federation on certain issues in his correspondence

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid. p.71

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. p.99

<sup>194</sup> Ibid. p.100

with the International, and he sometimes even advised the International how to approach the Federation, as if he was a paternal outsider. Apart from this task, Nahum was also responsible for the relations of the Federation with the European press, which was an important arena of struggle for the political groups in Turkey, especially since the “Young Turks had always been afraid of the European public opinion”, as Nahum notes.<sup>195</sup>

In its relations with the Federation, the International played numerous roles. First of all, it provided guidance in the policies of the Federation in several issues, especially on the relations of the Federation with the Union and Progress. The policy advices of the International were taken seriously by the Federation, as we will see throughout the chapter. Secondly, the International also provided the Federation with publicity in the European public opinion, to protect it from being attacked by the Union and Progress, through press coverage, solidarity actions and protest letters to the Ottoman government. Thirdly, the International also facilitated the regional relations of the Federation with other parties in the Balkans, and it supported the attempts towards the construction of the Balkan Federation, which will be described in detail in the next chapter. From time to time the International assumed the role of arbiter between rival parties. In one instance the Federation asked the International to act so that the Bulgarian Narrows wouldn't interfere to the internal functioning of their organization.<sup>196</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Federation also established bilateral ties with some of the member parties of the International.

Although the Federation was disappointed with the Union and Progress because of the Strike Law, it still didn't expect the Young Turks to adopt harsher measures, as long as the trade unions and the socialists obeyed the laws. In fact, the

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid. p.101

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. p.83

first issue of Amele Gazetesi stated: “The government, which recognizes that we lead the trade unions not to anarchism but to socialism, and that we respect the laws, peace and security with discipline and good intentions, provides us with all kinds of opportunities [for our struggle].”<sup>197</sup> At that time, the Federation still viewed the Young Turks as the guards of the constitutional order and freedom. This point of view was not unique for the Federation. Also Boyacıyan, who was the guest of the Federation during the feast at the Beşçınar Garden, commented in his interview with Amele Gazetesi that socialism would bring unity, fraternity, security and peace, which were also demanded by Europe, by the government, by the Committee of Union and Progress, and by the people. In other words, Boyacıyan argued that the Union and Progress still stood for the ideals of the revolution, which were also defended by the socialist movement in Turkey, and therefore defined a common point of the socialists and Union and Progress.<sup>198</sup> Even concrete attacks by the security forces didn’t awake any doubt in the Federation. When the police first arrested and then released three striking workers of Herzog Tobacco Company in August 1909, Amele reported that the police was innocent, since it was influenced by the boss, and warned that the police shouldn’t be anybody’s tool. At that time the attack of police to workers, who used their constitutional rights, was interpreted as a temporary confusion of the police.<sup>199</sup>

The memoirs of Benaroya reveal, why this position was adopted by the Federation. In fact, the Federation still remembered the strikes of 1908, in which the Union and Progress tried to keep a neutral position, and only interfered upon the pressure of the foreigners. In the absence of any laws regarding the strikes, the interventions of the Union and Progress during the strike wave of 1908 were maybe

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid. p.206

<sup>198</sup> Ibid. p.218

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. p.222

not approved, but understood. Other than a few cases with the use of coercion, the Union and Progress, together with the nationalist organizations of minorities, intervened to the workers movement in a non-violent way, advising the workers to found solidarity funds instead of starting strikes.<sup>200</sup> Solidarity funds were not only promoted to prevent strikes, but they were also regarded as a way of uniting the workers around nationalist aims. As mentioned before, the Federation was struggling against these solidarity funds and trying to turn them into trade unions.

The pressures of the government against the Federation started on the occasion of May Day in 1910. Although the Federation called the workers to attend the May Day rally, many workers didn't dare come because of the harassments of the government. The Bulgarians celebrated the day in their offices.<sup>201</sup> In the summer of 1910, the government opened a lawsuit in order to ban the Tobacco Workers' Trade Union, yet the court decided in favor of the trade union. Upon that, the government used the law on political associations as a pretext and closed the office of the trade union.<sup>202</sup> In response to pressures by the government, the Federation asked the International to condemn the oppression of "Ottoman proletariat" by the Turkish government in a letter dated August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1910. This was the first instance, when the Federation asked for solidarity from the International.

The first known attack by the government against the Federation itself took place short after the appointment of Nahum as the representative of the Federation at the International. According to a letter by Nahum to the International dated December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1910, the office of the Federation was closed by the government, and Benaroya was arrested. Nahum expressed his concern that this could lead to results,

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid. p.286

<sup>201</sup> Ibid. p.300

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. p.75

which would endanger the future of the Federation.<sup>203</sup> This concern came from Nahum's impression that the Federation was too weak, and it could be crushed easily by the government. The weakness derived from the lack of organized power of the Federation and Nahum argued that Federation should concentrate all its efforts on getting organized. He asked the International to condemn the government, and he also asked for some newspapers for denouncing the pressures by the Istanbul government. He pointed out that the "Young Turks have always been afraid of the European public opinion". Meanwhile Vlahov was bringing the incident to the parliament. According to another letter by Nahum, the government stepped back and the office of the Federation was reopened as a result of the struggle of Vlahov and two Armenian deputies at the parliament.<sup>204</sup> The Minister of Interior and the Minister of Public Works assured that the pressures on the militants of the Federation would end, and Benaroya was released.<sup>205</sup> Yet Nahum commented that "the Young Turks seem to be determined to finish the Federation off. They threaten our militants and they declare our association as illegal."<sup>206</sup> Nahum told that he would write an article for the newspaper Thessalonica Progress (Selanik Terakki), which he described as the most progressive newspaper of Macedonia. If the newspaper would decline to publish his article, he would ask for help from the International.<sup>207</sup> This attitude of Nahum shows that he preferred to ask the help of International only when the domestic struggle was inconclusive. He commented: "Before starting an opposition movement outside, I believe we should use all our possibilities and try to continue the real opposition inside Turkey." While it is hard to figure out how much Nahum's position reflected the overall attitude of the Federation, it at least showed that an

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid. p.101

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. p.103

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. p.104

<sup>206</sup> Ibid. p.103

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. p.103

important figure of the Federation was aware of the importance of having a strong basis in the country. Furthermore he argued that asking for help from the International would reveal the weakness of the Federation: “If we reveal that we are not strong enough to lead an opposition in the country, we are doomed. Because Turks only fear those they regard as strong.”<sup>208</sup> Although Nahum was not fundamentally against receiving help from the International and European public opinion, he argued that “Young Turks (...) for now respect the foreign public opinion, but once they get used to a hostile attitude, they won’t limit themselves anymore.”<sup>209</sup> Thus, the attitude of Nahum had a tactical quality. According to him, the Federation should “continue getting organized, until better days come”, while keeping a low profile in the eyes of the authorities.<sup>210</sup> Yet, Nahum’s attitude was not only tactical, but the idea of getting organized in the country first and self-reliance were consistent principles for him. When the International made a proposal for organizing a joint meeting of the representatives of the Ottoman trade unions in Europe, Nahum rejected it, since he argued that “it [was] wrong to get involved in a struggle outside the country, until the militants [didn’t] have the chance to survive in Turkey.”<sup>211</sup> Nahum assured that he didn’t undermine the contribution of “comrades abroad”, but he insisted that “as long as we can struggle by our own means, and unless we lose our hope in success, we don’t prefer to ask for help from the International”.<sup>212</sup>

The International agreed Nahum and proposed some names, who could act as intermediaries between the Federation and the government. In addition to Jaurés, whom the Young Turks respected, and some other politicians, the suggestion was

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid. p.104

<sup>209</sup> Ibid. p.104

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. p.104

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. p.105

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. p.105

made to use the Masons.<sup>213</sup> The International argued that using individual mediators would be more effective as opposed to starting anti-Young Turk campaign in Europe, which would make the government in Istanbul to increase the pressure.<sup>214</sup>

Apparently, there was disagreement between Nahum and the Thessalonica on the power of the Federation. Nahum argued “The comrades, rightfully, are proud of the victories they had until now; they managed to get a significant number of members, they held demonstrations and rallies, organized meetings without being disturbed. They think that their success comes from the strength of the organization. I believe that they are wrong. The situation of the socialist in Thessalonica is quite shaky. They don’t have a legal existence as an organized party.”<sup>215</sup> Thus, Nahum argued that Federation was at a critical point: it was strong enough to bother the government, but it was still too weak to defend its achievements in conflict with the government. Nahum stressed out that the future of the Federation was up to the relations of the government with the capitalists. “If the Young Turk government would have to give assurances to the cosmopolite finance capital tomorrow, it can ban the Federation and disperse its members.”<sup>216</sup> In this instance, Nahum once again clarified his point. Referring to the direct struggle against the Union and Progress, he wrote: “Time spent for this struggle will be lost in terms of getting organized. I think the most urgent task (...) is getting organized”.<sup>217</sup> This letter of Nahum is also significant in the sense that it mentions the relations of the government with the foreign capitalists and identifies these relations as a reason for coercion.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid. p.109

<sup>214</sup> Ibid. p.111

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. p.112

<sup>216</sup> Ibid. p.112

<sup>217</sup> Ibid. p.112

The Federation received another blow in June 1911, when Benaroya was arrested along with three militants of the Federation and he was exiled to Serbia. There was neither an investigation, nor a trial. According to Hazan, “a nationalist group called ‘Club of Friendships’, which consisted of bosses” intervened for the arrest of the militants of the Federation, and the four were arrested for “crime against the state”.<sup>218</sup> The arrest also coincided with the visit of Sultan to Thessalonica, which apparently created the government an opportunity to arrest suspected people. The Federation asked for the help of Vlahov, and asked the International to start a press campaign.<sup>219</sup> The Federation responded immediately and sent a petition signed by the Presidential Committee of Socialist International and Belgian socialist deputies to Ahmet Rıza, the President of the Istanbul Parliament.<sup>220</sup> It is significant that the International didn’t start a press campaign, and instead contacted Ahmet Rıza, who was a familiar figure for some leaders of the International. Apparently, the International intended to handle the issue as quietly as possible, or maybe they thought contacting Ahmet Rıza would be more effective. In a letter a few weeks later, Hazan kindly implied that they expected more from the International.<sup>221</sup> Interestingly, not only the International, but also Nahum contacted Ahmet Rıza, who apparently didn’t have much power, as Nahum argued. Nahum also tried to interfere through Masons, since the “Club of Friendships” was a Mason organization.<sup>222</sup> Finally, Nahum concluded that the only thing to do was “launching a strong opposition against the Young Turk government.”<sup>223</sup> Nahum wrote: “Unfortunately, these guys don’t know any other “method” but brute force. If they would accept to

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid. p.116

<sup>219</sup> Ibid. p.117

<sup>220</sup> Ibid. p.118

<sup>221</sup> Ibid. p.119

<sup>222</sup> Ibid. p.120

<sup>223</sup> Ibid. p.120

discuss, maybe we would be able to win our case”. Apparently, Nahum realized that the struggle is not a debate, but a fierce fight.

Despite the intensive pressures by the government, the May Day demonstration of 1911 was attended by around 7,000 workers from all nations. 14 trade unions and many unorganized workers took part at the demonstration. The commerce of the city was paralyzed, since the transportation workers also attended the rally. The demonstrators marched through the main streets of the city with occasional stops at crowded places, where the leaders of participating organizations made speeches.<sup>224</sup> The significance of the May Day increased significantly because of the ongoing strike of around 10,000 tobacco workers. Although the employers declared lockout in April, the strike was going on in May. One of the speakers at the May Day rally was Dimitar Vlahov, who made a speech on the Balkan Federation.

Turkish socialists suffered more from the government pressure.<sup>225</sup> Apparently, Union and Progress was more sensitive about the spread of socialist ideas among Turks. Nahum was especially concerned about the wellbeing of the Turkish socialists, since he considered the spread of socialist ideas among Turks as crucial for the success of socialist in the Ottoman Empire in general. Although he decided to write a harsh article on the persecutions against the Turkish socialists, he was once again hindered by Camille Huysmans, who again advised him not to attack the Young Turks.<sup>226</sup> Instead, the International applied to Ahmed Rıza once again. Apparently, he didn't respond very positively and defended the persecution of Ottoman socialists. In his letter dated January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1912, Nahum hinted that the real face of Ahmet Rıza was revealed, and he expected the International would be more

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid. p.115

<sup>225</sup> Ibid. p.123

<sup>226</sup> Ibid. p.141

responsive in the face of the pressures targeting the Ottoman socialists.<sup>227</sup> Nahum was also pessimistic about the dissolving of the parliament by the Union and Progress and commented that it was unknown when it would be reopened. In making this remark, he was referring to the dissolving of the parliament by Abdülhamid in 1878. This signifies an important turning point in the view of the Federation on the Union and Progress. As a result of the continuous pressures, the Federation was now comparing the Union and Progress to the Abdülhamid regime, and implying that the Young Turks could give up the parliamentary system.

The election of 1912 started a new period of oppression against the socialists in Thessalonica. The initial plan of the Federation was to establish an electoral block of socialists, which would consist of Dashnaktsutyun, Hunchakian and the Federation.<sup>228</sup> Yet, since Dashnaktsutyun insisted on cooperating with the Union and Progress, this attempt concluded without success.<sup>229</sup> In response, Hunchakian and the Federation entered a coalition with Freedom and Entente.

According to Nahum, the Union and Progress was aware of the power of the Federation in Thessalonica. As a result, many militants of the Federation became the target of government coercion, while the meetings of the Federation were hindered.<sup>230</sup> In addition to that, the secondary voters of the Federation, Benaroya, Yona, Levi, Amon, Arditti were arrested and exiled.<sup>231</sup> Benaroya was first sent to Istanbul, and was not allowed to get involved in political activities. Since he attended numerous activities of the socialists in Istanbul, he was exiled to Athens, and wasn't able to return to Thessalonica until the takeover of the city by Greeks.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid. p.144

<sup>228</sup> Ibid. p.148

<sup>229</sup> Ibid. p.148

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. p.149

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. p.308

<sup>232</sup> Ibid. p.310

An urgent telegram with the date March 31<sup>st</sup> 1912 indicated that Union and Progress continued to arrest the militants of the Federation. According to Hazan “The Union and Progress which holds the power and ignores the laws, created a big obstacle against our propaganda. It banned us from organizing election meetings, (...) [and] arrested some of our best militants. Three of them were exiled to Drama. Now it is trying to arrest the editors of our publication, Solidaridad Obradera. As far as we know, the entire committee of our Federation is next. In addition to that, they do their best in order to ban our newspaper and even our club.”<sup>233</sup> With reference to regions, in which the elections already had started, Hazan also reported that the Union and Progress was cheating. Hazan urged the International to start a press campaign and to expose the lawlessness of the Union and Progress. Yet, on April 11<sup>th</sup>, Dimitar Vlahov, the candidate of the Federation was arrested.<sup>234</sup>

According to Benaroya, the Union and Progress also used gangs, which engaged in bloody fights with socialists. Increasing threats increased the solidarity between socialists even further, and armed Bulgarian socialist militants guarded the headquarters of the Federation.<sup>235</sup>

In response, an article was published in L'Humanité, titled “The Pirates of Istanbul”, which revealed the real face of the Union and Progress. Nahum was quite happy about it, and commented that “I never understood the extreme tolerance of the International to these fierce tyrants anyway. But now I am happy that the truth is revealed.”<sup>236</sup> In the following months, other articles were issued in the newspapers, yet Jaurés and some French socialists continued to support the Union and Progress, despite the frustration of Ottoman socialists. Apparently, Jaurés and his party were

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid. p.150

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. p.152

<sup>235</sup> Ibid. p.309

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. p.154

more concerned about the upcoming Balkan wars than the domestic lawlessness of Union and Progress. They probably thought that an attack against the Union and Progress would legitimize a war in Balkans against the Ottoman Empire. For French socialists, it was especially important not to present the Ottoman Empire as an oppressive government.

Like in other places, Union and Progress won the elections with deceit in Thessalonica. Many people boycotted the elections as reaction to the pressures by the Union and Progress. It is also significant that the extremely aggressive speech of Cavid Bey, which was full of threats and indicated that the Union and Progress would act without regarding the laws, coincided with this period. Although the ones, who were arrested before the elections were released in the aftermath of the elections, Hazan wrote that the pressures continued. He said: "The Committee of Union and Progress saw us in the struggle and evaluated our power. They realized that we are now we are in a well organized and disciplined work. They think that from now on socialism is an enemy to be feared. Therefore they are engaged in a war with us for life or death. They say 'The socialists must disappear; we will eliminate them all'"<sup>237</sup> Hazan also referred to the speech of Cavid Bey in Thessalonica, and urged for the reaction of the International.

As a result of the pressures of the Union and Progress, which banned the May Day parade, the Federation had to give up a parade and made a modest celebration in its offices.<sup>238</sup> In addition to that, the Federation called for work stoppage on May Day. According to Hazan, 7,000 workers responded to this call, while 1,200 people attended the May Day speeches at the office of the Federation throughout the day. Although the Federation also attempted to organize a small demonstration, the police

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid. p.156

<sup>238</sup> Ibid. p.161

attacked and didn't allow the celebration of May Day. Union and progress also interfered to trade unions. In May 1912, the leader of the transportation workers' union was forced to retreat for being a socialist and he replaced by a manager from the Union and Progress.<sup>239</sup>

Things changed for a brief period when the Union and Progress was overthrown and replaced by Freedom and Entente in August 1912. Since the Federation was in coalition with this party during the elections of 1912, Freedom and Entente treated them well and returned them their archives, which were confiscated by the Union and Progress. On the other hand, the new government banned Azadamard, the publication of Dashnaksutyun, who had cooperated with the Union and Progress. Nahum underlined that cooperation with bourgeois parties was dividing the socialist movement. In fact he stressed out that "our organization falls on the same side as the ministry, which oppresses Armenians."<sup>240</sup> Nahum especially stressed out that he was completely against any kind of cooperation with the bourgeoisie. He also mentioned that Dashnaksutyun had terminated its relations with the Union and Progress, so that it could be possible to once again try to unite the socialist movement. According to Nahum, it was inconceivable that two members of the International were moving to opposite directions.

The increasing pressures convinced the socialist movement in Thessalonica in the necessity of unity. Upon intensive efforts by the Greek socialists in Istanbul, Bulgarian Narrows and the Federation agreed to organize a congress. The congress convened at the end of December 1910 with 29 representatives from different cities

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid. p.163

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. p.166

of the European Turkey. A few months later another congress took place.<sup>241</sup> Several resolutions were issued, yet the practical results of the congresses are unknown.

Although the clear cut class preferences and the tyranny of the Union and Progress distanced the socialists from the Young Turks, the Federation never abandoned its commitment to the ideals of the Revolution of 1908, namely the constitutional parliamentary system. With the impact of the Western European socialist parties, the Federation never questioned the validity of parliamentary system as a way of struggle for socialists. Commitment to the constitutional regime and parliamentary system made the elections a legitimate means for power struggle for the Federation. Therefore, the Federation regarded the expansion of the freedoms within the context of the election system as its duty. In fact, during the municipal elections in 1909, the Federation started a campaign for universal suffrage and a more participatory electoral system, in which all citizens would have equal and direct right for vote. 1,500 people supported the campaign, yet only one deputy, probably Vlahov, took the demand into consideration.

Commitment to the parliamentary system was also reflected to the programmatic statements of the Federation. It identified its long range aim only vaguely. In one instance, the organization's long range aim was stated as "eliminating the capitalist power and rebuilding the society on a collectivist basis".<sup>242</sup> In another instance, the Federation's newspaper in Turkish language, Worker (Amele), made a different definition of the aim of the Federation in an issue dated August 21, 1909. According to that, the Federation was trying to "save the victims of pain and disaster, which [was] a shame for workers, employees, employers, the rich and the entire history of humanity; to improve the status of real workers, these poor

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid. p.304

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. p.87

fellows, who actually [were] the main pillars of the society, materially, morally and economically, and to provide them conscience and a job; to achieve unity, and fraternity and dependency between classes, which [was] the real source of security and progress in [Turkey's] fertile land"<sup>243</sup>. According to the same article, the Federation was working for the "true interests of the nation".<sup>244</sup> It is obvious that the latter definition presents the Federation's aim quite differently than the first one, which is taken from the annual report of the Federation for the International almost a year later, in August 1910. This can be explained by the fact that at the time the latter definition of the Federation's aims was made, the Union and Progress government was just about adopting some of the first significant measures against the opposition and workers' movement. It seems that the Federation, and probably also some other socialist forces, as we will see throughout this chapter, were assuming that the anti-working class policies of the government were temporary and subject to change. Considering that the government passed several laws regulating and restricting the press, public meetings and associations from June 1909 to August 1909, the Federation also tried to present itself as a harmless organization, which didn't consider the capitalists as the enemy, but only aimed at a more just order, which was presented as a situation in the interest of the progress and peace of the country. Not the capitalist system, but its negative consequences for the workers were targeted. In summary, this article seems to be an assurance to the government about the "good" intentions of the Federation.

Another definition was adopted by the Conference of Ottoman Socialists, which stated in its resolution written in December 1910 and published in March 1911 in *Workers' Solidarity (Solidaridad Ovradera)*, stated that the socialist struggle

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid. p.206

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. p.208

“aimed at improving the material conditions of the Ottoman proletariat, acquiring social laws in the interest of workers, and saving the working class and the mankind.”<sup>245</sup> Similar to the previous definition of August 1909, this definition of socialism didn’t mention the necessity of changing the system, and put emphasis on improvements within the system. Yet in another resolution of the same conference, again published in *Workers’ Solidarity*, it was stated that “any organization, which accepted and applied socialist principles, [was] socialist. These principles were “the transformation of individual ownership of means of production into collective ownership, and the takeover of power through parliament and class struggle”.<sup>246</sup> This latter definition is significant since it clearly expresses an intention to establish a working class government, and to take over the means of production, which is much more consistent with the idea of a socialist system. This definition also clarifies the first definition we cited above, which refers to replacing the capitalist power with a collectivist system. The latter definition is also important in the sense that it defines the working class as a political subject, which has the potential to get the power, and it also stresses out the parliament as a means to achieve this end. This might raise questions in our minds on the revolutionary identity of the Ottoman Socialists, as well as the Federation, and it wouldn’t be unjust to label them as reformists with reference to the sharpening polarization of reformist and revolutionary currents within the broader European socialist movement. Yet, it is possible to think that the existence of some sort of functioning electoral system, in which socialists had the chance to get into parliament, in Turkey, as opposed to Russia for example, might have made the Ottoman socialists to assume the parliament as a legitimate way of conquering the power. It is also understandable, since the Ottoman Socialists, at least

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid. p.225

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. p.227

the Federation, were taking the West European socialist parties as an example. These parties were strong in the parliaments of their countries, and accepted the elections as a path to working class power. In my opinion, it would be unrealistic to expect the Ottoman Socialists to turn their backs to the successful Western European examples, and adopt a revolutionary strategy like the Russian Social Democrats, which were not doing very well then.

The struggle between Ottoman socialists and the political leadership of the new regime between 1909 and 1912 played an important role in the shaping of the understanding of class struggle, both for the political representatives of the bourgeoisie and workers. While some segments of the socialist movement such as the Bulgarian Narrow socialists had a clear idea about the class character of Young Turks, the Federation recognized the position of Union and Progress much later. Being much less experienced socialists than the Bulgarian Narrows, the leadership of the Federation firmly believed in the democratic, liberal character of the revolution. The Federation assumed in a naïve way that even though the government passed laws against the interests of workers, these could be reversed through the parliamentary system. Furthermore, until the beginning of the first coercive actions against socialists, the Federation believed that the deputies and cadres of the Union and Progress could be convinced about policies in favor of workers.

Although the early programmatic documents of the Union and Progress demonstrated a clear inclination towards the interests of capitalists, they used a calm language and evaluated socialism and liberalism as two competing legitimate paths for the country, from which they had to choose one. While the initial judgments of Young Turks focused on the inferiority of socialism to liberalism in terms of its economic benefits for to the country, later criticism of socialism was rather based on

political and moral arguments. By June 1909, socialists were depicted as a group, which could threaten the public security of the country and start turmoil by manipulating discontented workers. Socialism In the following years, socialists faced much harsher criticism. They were openly accused for being traitors and it was implied that they were part of a conspiracy against the Empire. In addition to the initial arguments on the economic disadvantages of socialism for the country, socialists were now seen as people, who wanted to deprive the country of its wealth by imposing absolute equality.

The main reason for the growing reaction of Young Turks against socialism cannot be explained with anything but the growing influence of socialism in certain places. In 1908, socialist were almost invisible; there were only individuals, who were socialist. By mid-1909 socialists had numerous newspapers, organizations and trade unions under their control, and they managed to mobilize thousands of workers. What bothered the Union and Progress most was that the socialists were organizing workers as a political force. The engagement of workers in politics was highly undesirable for Young Turks, as the parliamentary debates in 1909 and Cavid Bey's speech in 1912 reveal.

Yet it was the actions of the government what motivated large amounts of workers in Thessalonica to follow the Federation and to interfere to the decision making process of the country. Parallel to that the Federation also changed its position towards the Union and Progress and its understanding of class struggle in general. While getting organized among workers, not in sense of enlightening but recruiting them, became a priority of the Federation, it also started to abandon its initial optimistic thought about convincing Young Turks. Maintaining its commitment to the political ideals of the revolution of 1908, the Federation distanced

itself from the policies of Union and Progress, and started to adopt distinct positions on certain important political questions of the time.

## CHAPTER 5

### CLASS POLITICS

The case of the Federation offers us the picture of a socialist organization, which tried to build up the organization of the working class in a country, which was alien to socialism, and ruled by people who displayed strong hostility towards socialism. Yet these were not the only things which defined the Ottoman Empire. The Federation also found itself in a country, which was in the process of disintegration, whereas Thessalonica was in the middle of this problem. If the oppressive measures of the Union and Progress were one obstacle against the socialist movement, potential wars were even a bigger threat. The Federation was working hard to bring workers from different nations together and a war, in which Macedonia and Thessalonica were at stake, could erase all the gains of this struggle. Therefore, remaining silent towards the disintegration of the Empire and the danger of war was not an option for the Federation. Thus, it is not surprising to see that the Federation made its most consistent political statement on the issues of war and national question. In doing that, the point of reference of the Federation was the interests of the Ottoman working class movement. This shows us that Federation as an organization representing at least some segments of the working class was able to produce its own independent class policies. This didn't remain as the reaction of a

few socialist intellectuals, but accounts show us that Federation was able to mobilize large amounts of workers for these political positions. In order to analyze the significance and emergence of these positions, I will start with the definition of national question in the context of Ottoman Empire and how the national question related to war. Then I will briefly summarize the view of national question and war by the International and the socialist organizations in Balkans. Next step will be the description and analysis of Balkan Federation, which was the solution proposed for the war thereat and national question by the International and Balkan socialists. As a late comer among the Balkan socialists, the Federation's understanding and adoption of the idea of Balkan Federation will be treated separately. This part will summarize the Federation's view of national question and wars, and how they acted towards them.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Eastern Question (or the Oriental Question) defined the relations of the Ottoman Empire with the great powers of Europe. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this question got even more complicated, as the young Balkan states emerged as small but ambitious actors in the Eastern Question. Defined as “the question of foundation of new nation states on the soils of the disintegrating multi-national Ottoman Empire”<sup>247</sup>, the Eastern Question involved three regions, namely Middle East, Eastern Anatolia and Balkans. The latter region, for various reasons, has constantly maintained its central position in the Eastern Question until the World War I. Of course, “the foundation of new nation states” was not an isolated process. Until the end of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Balkans had been an important arena of struggle between Great Britain and Russia, and the nation state formation processes in Balkans (and

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<sup>247</sup> Yerasimos, Stefanos. *Milliyetler ve Sınırlar Balkanlar, Kafkasya ve Orta-Doğu*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2002. p.7

elsewhere) were strictly manipulated and controlled by the imperialist powers of Europe in accordance with their interests. At that time, France and Austria remained as secondary European actors. This situation changed, when Germany emerged as a unified nation state and created an alliance with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was followed by the introduction of the Austro-German policy for the Eastern Question: “Drang nach Osten” (Penetration to East).<sup>248</sup> While the motives of the interests of European powers in Balkans remain outside the scope of this paper, their strategies has a central importance for understanding the tension in Balkans. The newly emerging Balkan states were of key importance to the strategies of all these European powers. Great Britain, with its overwhelming naval power and commercial supremacy in Eastern Mediterranean Sea, was able to control Greece, and it also maintained a strong influence on the Ottoman Empire, which peaked during the Crimean War. While Great Britain predominantly used military and commercial power to maintain its political influence, the Austro-Hungarian Empire established a strong influence on Bosnia through economic means. Meanwhile, Russia, which lacked the ability of economic influence, directly used ethnic and religious sentiments, namely “pan-Slavism”, in order to establish its zone of influence in Balkans.<sup>249</sup> Backing pan-Slavism with military power, Russia was able to fire the national liberation movement in Bulgaria, and increased its influence on Serbia and Romania. In the eve of the Revolution of 1908, Albania and Macedonia were the only territories, which were under the control of the Ottoman Empire, and for numerous reasons Macedonia was a precious piece of land for all European powers, and their Balkan allies. It wouldn't be wrong to say that at least for a while, the Eastern Question was associated with the Macedonian question.

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid. p.58

<sup>249</sup> Ibid. p.60

What made Macedonia so important in first hand was its geographic location. Extending from inner Balkans to Aegean Sea, Macedonia provided direct access to the Mediterranean Sea for Russia, Bulgaria and Serbia. As a result, Russian control of Macedonia through Bulgaria or Serbia would threaten the Suez Strait, and block the way of “Drang nach Osten”, creating a serious disadvantage for both Great Britain and Austro-German alliance. Similarly, the control of Macedonia by Austrian-German alliance would again threaten the Suez channel, and bring an end to Russia’s hope for accessing the Mediterranean Sea. Yet, if Greece, the ally of Great Britain would control Macedonia, both Russia and the Austro-German expansion would be stopped. In addition to these political interests, Macedonia promised an economic reward with its relatively dense population and strong economy.

While the imperialist powers of Europe utilized the newly formed Balkan states for their expansionist ambitions, these Balkan states were more than willing to control Macedonia. In the fatal rivalry between Balkan states, the owner of Macedonia would acquire a significant advantage over the others. Although Serbia also had claims on Macedonia, the greatest effort was made by Bulgaria and Greece. The importance of Macedonia for Turkey was obvious. Thessalonica, the economic center of Macedonia, was the second largest city in European Turkey, both in terms of its population and economic contribution. Furthermore, Thessalonica and Macedonia were strongholds of Young Turks. This region not only played a key role in the revolution of 1908, but it also proved itself as the guarantee of the regime of Union and Progress after the March 31<sup>st</sup> incident was suppressed with forces from Macedonia.

In addition to its strategic and economic importance, Macedonia was vulnerable to the territorial claims of Balkan states because of its diverse population.

The claims were based on the ethnic and religious identities of the people in Macedonia, and on the consequent affiliation of these people to the nation states in Balkans. As a result, a war of demographic studies started by the end of the nineteenth century. These controversial studies defined ethnic and religious categories in accordance with their interests, and came up with conclusions, which proved this or that country's claims on Macedonia.<sup>250</sup> Yet, statistics were only one of the weapons. In the eve of the revolution of 1908, nationalist gangs were engaged in a fierce war. Greek gangs, who were directed by the Greek Orthodox Church, the Serbian gangs, which were directly supported by the Serbian state, and the Bulgarian gangs, which were trying to maintain their position, were not only fighting against each other and against the Ottoman Army, but also against the civilian peasants of rival nations. Although the Young Turk revolution created a temporary atmosphere of fraternity between nations and although the new liberties encouraged the nationalist groups to focus on the legal means of the struggle, the nationalist rivalries continued to haunt the region.

In summary, the Eastern Question was translated into national question. Territorial claims of Balkan states, which based their claims on the defense of a certain national minority, acted as vassals for the hegemony of great powers over this strategic region. Yet, as a reflection of the overlapping claims of European imperialists, the claims of Balkan states were also overlapping. Therefore, even if Macedonia could be ceased from the Ottoman Empire peacefully, it was seen as inevitable that the Balkan states would start a war among themselves to get their hands on the spoils. As a result, the "solution" of the national question in the region could lead to a regional and even continental war.

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<sup>250</sup> Adanır, Fikret. *Makedonya Sorunu*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1996. p.7

The socialist movement in Europe was sensitive towards the danger of war in Europe. Although there were various different approaches towards the war by different socialist parties, the resolution of the International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart mentions some commonly adopted assessments and principles on the war. Issued in August 1907, the resolution defined the war as a consequence of imperialist competition and militarism. The International stressed out the role of wars in the class struggle: “Wars are favored by the national prejudices which are systematically cultivated among civilized peoples in the interest of the ruling classes for the purpose of distracting the proletarian masses from their own class tasks as well as from their duties of international solidarity.”<sup>251</sup> Since wars were defined as an obstacle against the working class within the class struggle, the workers had the obligation to fight against wars. Yet, the resolution was inconsistent in terms of defining the ways to prevent wars, reflecting the disagreement within the International. Although the resolution stated that “wars [were] part of the very nature of capitalism, [and] they would cease only when the capitalist systems was abolished”, it also suggested that wars could be prevented by the struggles of socialist parties at different levels, such as parliamentary vetoes against armaments and legislation for replacing standing armies with popular militias. The International was attributed the task of coordinating anti-war activities. The resolution also mentioned the duty of the working class in a war situation: “to intervene in favor of its speedy termination and with all their powers to utilize the economic and political crisis created by the war to rouse the masses and thereby to hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule.” Again, two very different approaches towards the war, the replacement of war with peace versus the replacement of capitalism with socialism through the war, were

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<sup>251</sup> Resolution adopted at the seventh International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart. International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart, August 18-24, 1907 Vorwärts Publishers, Berlin, 1907. Available from <http://www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/1907/militarism.htm>

formulated within the same sentence as an expression of the rival tendencies within the International.<sup>252</sup>

Significantly, the Stuttgart Congress also marked the start of common action between Balkan socialist parties against the war. During the Congress in 1907, a meeting of Balkan delegates was arranged, and a decision was made to convene a Balkan Socialist Conference in Belgrade.<sup>253</sup> Although socialist parties in Balkans emerged much later than their Western European counterparts, socialists in Balkan countries had some influence by the beginning of the twentieth century. Bulgaria was the stronghold of socialist opposition in Balkans. Bulgarian socialists were not only received a relatively larger popular support than the socialist parties in other Balkan countries, but they were also ideologically and politically more educated than the rest of their counterparts in the peninsula. As early as 1902, the Bulgarian socialists divided among themselves based on a critical question, namely the question of whether the socialists should cooperate with progressive bourgeois parties, and two rival, in fact hostile groups emerged: the “narrow” Socialist Party led by Dimitar Blagoev and the “broad” Socialist Party led by Yanko Sakuzov. It is significant that this division coincided with the division of Russian socialists as Bolsheviks (minority) and Mensheviks (majority) in 1902. Not only the timing, but also the positioning of factions was surprisingly similar in Russia and Bulgaria. Despite this division, the broad and narrow Bulgarian socialist parties maintained significant power, and the received two and seven seats respectively out of 30 in the municipal elections in Sofia in 1911.<sup>254</sup> Although the socialist movement emerged relatively early, in 1870’s, in Serbia, it wasn’t until the beginning of the twentieth century

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<sup>252</sup> Lenin, V.I. “The International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart.” *Proletary*, No. 17, October 20, 1907. Available from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1907/oct/20.htm>

<sup>253</sup> Stavrianos, L.S. *Balkan Federation. A History of the Movement Toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times*. Northampton, Mass: Smith College Studies in History, 1942. p.186

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.* p.183

when the Serbian Social Democratic Party acquired significant power. In 1903, they acquired a seat in the Serbian parliament. While the Serbian socialists went through the same political discussion as their Bulgarian counterparts, a split was avoided, since the “collaborationists” left the party. In 1912, the party acquired two seats in the parliament.<sup>255</sup> In addition to that, the Serbian socialists tried to organize socialists in Croatia and Bosnia as well. Romania wasn’t a stronghold of socialists. Socialist parties were founded various times, but they were liquidated because of internal disputes and state pressure. Significant progress was achieved after the foundation of the Socialist Party in 1910. It is also important to note that despite the weakness of the Romanian socialist movement, the prominent Romanian socialist Christian Rakovski played an important role in the efforts towards the Balkan Federation. Although the socialist groups and newspapers date back to nineteenth century, the Socialist Party of Greece was founded only in 1909. The fragmented socialist movement in Greece had limited impact on the country in general.<sup>256</sup>

The idea of Balkan Federation emerged as a response of socialists to the nationalist and expansionist policies of Balkan states, which were manipulated by the European powers. Although the first concrete step towards the Balkan Federation was made during the First Balkan Social-Democratic Conference in Belgrade in January 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, 1910, in accordance with the decision made at the Congress in Copenhagen, it was the developments in 1908, which mobilized the Balkan socialists. Janko Sakasoff, one of the prominent Bulgarian broad socialists, argued that it was the Young Turk revolution, which made Balkan Federation a realistic alternative for Balkan socialists: “As in Turkey people were embracing each other fraternally, so the idea grew of a united federation of small Balkan states, including

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid. p.183

<sup>256</sup> Ibid. p.184

free, constitutional Turkey, to halt the expansion of the great powers in the North and the West.”<sup>257</sup> In addition to that, it is evident that the developments in the aftermath of the Young Turk revolution, namely the annexation of Bosnia to Austria and the full independence of Bulgaria, which escalated the tension in Balkans, were other reasons to start the work for Balkan Federation as soon as possible. According to Balkan socialists, by changing the status quo in Turkey, the revolution of 1908 could change the status quo in Balkans. The problem in the peninsula was caused by the European powers, as the resolution of the First Balkan Social-Democratic Conference stated: “Under the enforced guardianship and by the preponderating influence of European diplomacy, instrument of the political expansion of European capitalism, there has been created, in the historic past of (...) Balkan peninsula, territorial and national situations, which hinder the modern economic development and culture of the people, and which are most strenuously opposed to their interests and to their needs. From these contradictions arise all those crises, perturbations and events, which serve as pretexts for European diplomacy and its monarchic reactionary agents, to uphold their policy of interference, guardianship, conquest and reaction.”<sup>258</sup>

In summary the Balkan Federation would “amalgamate” all Balkan nations, including the entire Ottoman Empire.<sup>259</sup> It is significant that the resolutions of the Belgrade Conference avoided directly commenting on the situation of Macedonia. Although the official position of the International before the Young Turk revolution was creation of an autonomous Macedonia, it appears that this demand was

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<sup>257</sup> Sakasoff, Janko. “*Neoslavism, Balkan Federation and Social Democracy.*” *Der Kampf*, IV, 5, 1 February 1911. Journal on-line. Available from <http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/otherdox/balk/sakasoff.htm>

<sup>258</sup> Stavrianos, L.S. *Balkan Federation. A History of the Movement Toward Balkan Unity in Modern Times.* Northampton, Mass: Smith College Studies in History, 1942. p.289

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.* p.290

withdrawn in order to prevent the alienation of the Ottoman side. It is important to note that the Balkan Federation was not solely a “peace project”, which would prevent wars between Balkan states. It was rather an anti-imperialist project, which aimed at “strengthening the force of resistance of the people against the policy of conquest of European capitalism”.<sup>260</sup> According to Balkan socialists, independent Balkans could only be realized by the working class by class struggle against the capitalist, whose interests laid in the creation of national antagonisms.<sup>261</sup> The foundation of a Balkan Federation would not only liberate Balkans from the yoke of imperialists and eliminate the danger of war, but it would also bring an end to territorial and national subdivision, which was “not in accordance with the transformation which the triumphal march of capitalism has created in the conjuncture of economic life”.<sup>262</sup>

The Federation got involved in the project of Balkan Federation at a much later time than its counterparts in other Balkan countries. The Federation was not invited to the Belgrade Conference in 1910, probably because it became member of the International only a few weeks before the conference.<sup>263</sup> Still, the Federation had been one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the idea of Balkan Federation. For the Federation the Balkan Federation was not only a framework for relations with other socialist parties in Balkans, but it was one of their most important political statements through which the Federation mobilized thousands of people. The reason for that was that the idea of Balkan Federation was in accordance with the Federation’s point of view on issues like national question and war. Although the Federation’s approach to national question and war differed from the approach of International to these issues, the conclusions were the same, so that it was in the best

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid. p.291

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. p.290

<sup>262</sup> Ibid. p.289

<sup>263</sup> Haupt, George, and Paul Dumont. *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Sosyalist Hareketler*. İstanbul: Gözlem Yayınları, 1977. p.85

interest of the Federation to stick with the International and with the idea of Balkan Federation.

The Federation's approach towards the national question differed from the approach of Western European socialist parties. Since the political atmosphere in Macedonia and Thessalonica was dominated by the nationalist organizations, it was not possible for the socialist organizations to remain indifferent to the national question. Because of the continuing nationalist hostilities in Macedonia, workers of different nations rarely acted together. Instead, they remained attached to their nationalist organizations, which were under the control of the elites. As a result, the nationalist organizations constituted a barrier against the common organization of workers in Macedonia and Thessalonica. Although the negative impact of nationalism on the workers' movement was obvious, that didn't lead the different socialist groups to the same conclusion. Two reports by the Federation and the Bulgarian socialists, which were sent to the International in 1910, are significant in terms of understanding the view of nationalism and revolution of 1908 by these two rival groups.

According to the Federation, nationalism was closely associated with oppression and reactionary regimes. In its annual report to the International in 1910, the Federation describes the tyranny and oppression of Abdulhamid, who is named among the main causes of nationalist tensions. Thus, the Federation argued that "Abdulhamid, with his extensively broad and illusionary project of pan-Islamism, created a gap between various nations within the Empire, and caused brother fights and wars, which the forces north of Balkans attempted to fire and sharpen through secret propaganda as far as they could, in order to interfere to the domestic affairs of

Turkey [...]”.<sup>264</sup> So, if the Ancien Régime’s desperate attempts for survival were one reason of nationalist hostilities, the other reason was foreign interference with expansionist or imperialistic aims. On the other hand, the Revolution of 1908, described in the report as a “revolutionary coup”, was seen by the Federation as a remedy for nationalism, since it would establish a new constitutional regime, expand freedoms and therefore bring an end to the vulnerability of Turkey to foreign interferences. According to Benaroya, this was also evident in the structure of the revolutionary forces. Although the revolution was done by Young Turks, they were aided by the “Macedonian and Armenian revolutionary committees”, and Benaroya expected this alliance against tyranny to continue after the revolution, as well.

The alternative to the separatist nationalisms of ethnic groups was Ottomanism, or in other words “Ottoman nationalism”, which was supposed to be a multi-national patriotism of all ethnic and religious groups within the empire. According to the Federation, foreign pressures after the revolution, such as the takeover of Bosnia by Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the problem of Crete, etc. created an “Ottoman nationalism” for the first time in the history.<sup>265</sup> Ottomanism could serve as glue between national groups in Turkey; at least that was the expectation of Benaroya.

If these expectations didn’t fulfill, Young Turks were to blame, who were unable to seize the opportunity of creating a new Ottoman nation. According to the Federation, the “insensitivity of Young Turks” towards the social problems inherited from the Ancien Régime provoked nations against each other once again. The only difference was the use of legal methods for the spread of nationalist sentiments such

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid. p.77

<sup>265</sup> Ibid. p.79

as the “press, nationalist clubs and propaganda at schools”.<sup>266</sup> Consequently the popular support for Union and Progress weakened, which made the Union and Progress to try to win the sympathy of the Turks. In doing that, young Turks were betraying their own revolution, since the nationalist attitude of Union and Progress stripped the new Constitution of its “Ottoman identity”.<sup>267</sup> According to Benaroya, the Union and Progress not only distanced itself from the multi-national character of the revolution, but also from liberalism. The reason for that was seen as the “counter-revolution” of March 31<sup>st</sup>, which led the Young Turks to adopt strict measures. A bunch of restrictive laws, which violated “human rights”, alienated “progressive liberals”.<sup>268</sup> Benaroya, who himself was in the Action Army against the uprising of March 31<sup>st</sup>, argued in the report that there was a chance for these reactionaries to come to power anymore. Benaroya not only believed in the promises and ideals of the revolution of 1908, but he was also confident that people realized “the difference between the absolutist order and libertarian order”, so that they would “intervene to anyone, who kept freedom for himself”.<sup>269</sup> In summary, although Benaroya was already aware of the nationalist and oppressive policies of the Union of Progress, he didn’t believe that nationalism and tyranny, which he associated with the Ancien Régime, could ever come back. Benaroya demonstrated strong confidence in the consciousness of people, who he believed would defend the gains of the revolution against the Union and Progress and counterrevolutionaries.

For Benaroya, nationalism was not only important because of its general importance in the context of Macedonia, but rather because it created an obstacle against the organization of the working class. Thus, his interest in the idea of

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid. p.80

<sup>267</sup> Ibid. p.80

<sup>268</sup> Ibid. p.80

<sup>269</sup> Ibid. p.80

Ottomanism was not a naïve or coward support to Young Turks, as Glavinov argued. For Benaroya nationalism not only created divisions among the workers, but it also made the workers to collaborate with the bourgeoisies of their respective nations, and alienated them to the class struggle. According to the Federation, the clearest example for that was the situation of the Greek workers. “The trade unions of Greek bakers, tailors and shoemakers are directly under the control of nationalist organizations, and their presidents are respectively a priest, a nationalist lawyer and the Metropolitan of Thessalonica.”<sup>270</sup> Consequently, Greek workers kept their distance to the workers’ movement in the city, and their trade unions remained weak, as the Federation reports.

This situation was also verified by the report of Vasil Glavinov to the International in 1910. According to him “the Greek [workers’] organizations in Istanbul, Thessalonica, Kavala, Drama and Xanti [were] completely disconnected and under the influence and rule of the Greek nationalists in Turkey. It [was] usual that bishops, archbishops and similar individuals in the upper levels of the priests’ hierarchy, or famous Greek patriots are elected as presidents of these trade unions.”<sup>271</sup> Furthermore he mentioned that the Turkish organizations in these cities were either ruled by Young Turks, or “the nationalist prejudices of bourgeois leaders were embraced by Greek and Turkish workers’ organizations”<sup>272</sup>, which refers to the direct or indirect forms of ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie. Yet, Glavinov also argued that all [workers’] organizations, other than the Bulgarian workers’ organizations, were under the control of bourgeois political parties.<sup>273</sup> At this point, it is important to note that Glavinov considered the Armenian revolutionary

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid. p.88

<sup>271</sup> Ibid. p.94

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. p.98

<sup>273</sup> Ibid. p.93

organizations and the Federation as bourgeois organizations. He wrongfully claimed that “the influence of [Young Turks was] also felt within the Jewish organizations in Thessalonica. This [was] achieved by their trusted men, A. Benaroya, who migrated to Thessalonica after the revolution of July revolution, and by D. Vlahov, who was elected as a deputy with the blessing and assistance of Young Turks, although he didn’t qualify for the conditions in the election law (he can’t speak Turkish).”<sup>274</sup> It is evident that the latter claim of Glavinov doesn’t reflect the reality, since Vlahov could speak Turkish. Although it was true that Vlahov was elected from the list of the Union and Progress, it is unjust to call them “trusted men of Young Turks”. In my view, Glavinov had several reasons for this harsh and unjust criticism. First of all, as a result of the decade-long hostility with the Broads, the Narrow Bulgarian Socialists grew highly sensitive about any kind of cooperation with the bourgeoisie. It is possible to understand that the election of Vlahov from the list of Union and Progress was completely unacceptable for Glavinov. In addition to that, Glavinov was also much more alert about the reactionary character of the Union and Progress. Although Glavinov acknowledged some of the positive aspects of the 1908 revolution and admitted that “the revolution of July 1908 completely changed the conditions of socialist action in the European Turkey”<sup>275</sup>, in the sense that the socialist movement was able to use legal means, he didn’t believe that the Union and Progress would carry out its libertarian promises. Glavinov was especially aware of the nationalist policies of the Union and Progress.

The two organizations’ view of the nationalist policies of Union and Progress reveals the difference of the two organizations in terms of their positioning towards the Union and Progress. According to the Federation the rise of nationalist tensions

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid. p.94

<sup>275</sup> Ibid. p.96

in Turkey was a result of “the chaotic and unclear policies of Young Turks, and their insensitivity towards the social problems, which were inherited from the old order and neglected”<sup>276</sup> As mentioned before, the Federation argued that since this situation eroded the popularity of Young Turks, they attempted to win the sympathy of the Turks by favoring them, which further increased the nationalist polarizations. Therefore, according to the view of the Federation, the reason for the nationalist policies of Union and Progress was first its incompetence and then its defensive pragmatism. Glavinov had a quite different view of the situation. According to him, in terms of nationalism “the policies of Union and Progress and its parliament in Istanbul [were] in no ways different from the policies of the old administration. Aside from appeasing the enmities, it tried to artificially maintain these enmities by making laws, which will worsen the situation, and even introducing taxes, which discriminate among nations.”<sup>277</sup> As we can see, Glavinov accused the Young Turk government for intentionally provoking the nationalist tensions.

Although socialists both in Turkey and in Europe condemned militarism and war repeatedly, the invasion of Libya by Italy was the first time, when the Ottoman socialists had to struggle against the war in reality. Although the Federation planned demonstrations against the war, they were cancelled since the Federation hesitated to give Italy “the opportunity to prove their attack rightful”. Thus, the Federation declared that it wouldn’t be able to execute the decisions of the International on war and militarism.<sup>278</sup> According to the Federation the Young Turks could only be accused for not defending Tripoli properly. The attitude of the Italian socialists, who were very ineffective against the war and some of whom supported the war, was very disappointing for the Federation. In fact, the Federation asked the International to

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid. p.80

<sup>277</sup> Ibid. p.98

<sup>278</sup> Ibid. p.121

punish or condemn the Italian Socialist Party. Nahum even implied that this attitude of the Italian socialist could sever the ties between Ottoman socialists and the International.<sup>279</sup> The disappointment about the attitude of Italian socialists was also mentioned in a declaration of the federation, which stated: “The Socialist Federation of Thessalonica is deeply sorrowed about the inability of the Italian proletariat, which didn’t prove worth of the trust of the International, to prevent the bloody plans of their country’s rulers.”<sup>280</sup>

It is evident that the Federation considered Turkey as the victim of the war, so that they were not willing to struggle against the military efforts of the Ottoman Empire to defend Libya. On the other hand, the Federation was determined to comply with the decisions of the International. Thus, it declared that “if Turkey would want to escalate and spread out the clashes, which originated from the coward attack of Italians, [the Federation] will strictly fulfill its obligations demanded by the decisions of the international congresses.”<sup>281</sup> This means that the Federation was willing to struggle against the Ottoman government, if its military actions would go beyond defending Libya, including a counter attack.

The Federation’s actions against the war were generally coordinated by the International. Upon a suggestion by the International, the leftist and anti-militarist organizations in Balkans, including the Federation, decided to organize demonstrations against the war. Although we don’t know whether it represents the view of the Federation in general, Nahum was suspicious about the results of the planned demonstration. “Is the demonstration (...) going to be a demonstration, which will conclude with the approval of a ‘platonic’ agenda with fancy wording? For some days we have been seeing numerous meetings like that. The result: Zero!

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid. p.122

<sup>280</sup> Ibid. p.124

<sup>281</sup> Ibid. p.124

This way, the decisions of the International are in danger of disappearing in chatter.”<sup>282</sup> According to Nahum, actions without significant conclusions threatened the reputation of the International. What was Nahum’s expectation? He expected the Italian socialists to react as strong as the Spanish people, who rose up against Spain’s intervention in Morocco a few years ago.<sup>283</sup> On the other hand, Nahum was disappointed not only about the Italian socialists, but also about the International in general. He commented that the meeting of International in Zurich, which was held in September 1911 and didn’t suggest any significant actions other than condemning Italy, did nothing but harm the socialist party.<sup>284</sup>

At first, it is hard to understand why the Federation was so furious about the invasion of Libya, since the loss of this African territory wouldn’t directly affect the workers’ movement in Turkey. In fact, it was not the loss of Libya, but a possible chain effect it would generate. The Federation was rightfully worried that the Great Powers’ silent approval for the invasion of Libya by Italy would encourage other countries, especially the Balkan states, to get their share from the dissolving Ottoman Empire. Thus Nahum warned: “Is there no concern that the reputation of our party, which couldn’t hinder the war, would be irreversibly damaged, if a bloody war breaks off in Balkans in the aftermath of this Peace Rally?”<sup>285</sup> Apparently, the Federation’s reaction to the invasion of Libya was actually generated by their concern of a war in Balkans. Furthermore, the Federation’s frustration with the attitude of Italian socialists and the International was also related to the possible development in Balkans. The Federation observed with great concern that some segments of the “broad” socialists in Bulgaria were expressing views in favor of a

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid. p.126

<sup>283</sup> Ibid. p.126

<sup>284</sup> Ibid. p.127

<sup>285</sup> Ibid. p.127

Balkan war, which would ‘liberate’ Macedonia from the Ottoman rule. Therefore, Nahum especially stressed out the importance of actions by Bulgarian socialists. Thus, he suggested that a representative from Bulgarian socialists should attend the demonstration in Thessalonica. “I don’t feel the need for explaining in length the importance of a sincere and firm declaration by Bulgarian socialists. If there is a threat, it would come from Bulgaria.”<sup>286</sup> The insistence of the Federation for the International to punish the Italian socialists was also intended to put pressure on the Bulgarian socialists. Nahum and the Federation assumed that a strong reaction against the Italian socialists would force the Bulgarian socialists to revise their position. If the decisions of the International would be ignored once, they would be ignored all the time.

The first anti-war demonstration of the Federation was held on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1910. The Federation strongly protested the atrocities of Italian invaders and asked the International to condemn these attacks. Upon the suggestion of the International, the Federation decided to organize another demonstration on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1911.<sup>287</sup> According to the Federation, 8000 people attended the demonstration, and protested against the “imperialist policies of European powers, Italian attack against Tripoli, and the war”. The emphases of the demonstration were the Balkan Federation and international solidarity.<sup>288</sup> Interestingly, this was one of the few instances when the Federation used the word “imperialist”. Dr. Christian Rakovski from Romania made a speech in French in the name of the Presidential Committee of the Socialist International, while Vlahov made a speech in Turkish. Other speeches were made in Bulgarian and Ladino languages, as well.<sup>289</sup> The demonstrators also publicly

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid. p.126

<sup>287</sup> Ibid. p.130

<sup>288</sup> Ibid. p.134

<sup>289</sup> Ibid. p.134

approved a statement, condemned “the bandit acts of the Italian government in Tripoli, which indirectly got the approval of the great powers of capitalist Europe”, and stressed out that “this blow, which was a direct result of the expansionist policies of international capitalists, could spark a general explosion in Europe and especially in Balkans. The statement also pointed out that “every war stopped the normal development of democracy and proletariat, and forced the governments to lead a policy of armament, which crashed the people with all its weight”.<sup>290</sup> In the statement, the demonstrators expressed their determination of the Ottoman proletariat to struggle against the war in general and potential upheavals in Balkans, which could be caused by current clashes. The decision was made to struggle for a general armistice and for strengthening the solidarity ties between the working masses of Balkan peoples under the roof of a democratic federation, suggesting that a Balkan Confederation was the only way for the development of cultural and political independence of Balkan peoples.<sup>291</sup> Meanwhile, the Balkan Federation was described as an idea, which would assure the success of the “class struggle, which aimed at the salvation of the world proletariat”.<sup>292</sup>

Although the invasion of Libya and the reluctance of International to make greater effort for the prevention of the war disappointed the Federation, it didn't discourage them in their struggle against the war. At the end of 1911, Vlahov carried out the orders of the Federation and brought the issue of Balkan Federation to the Ottoman parliament. He demanded the foundation of a parliamentary group for the Balkan Federation, yet the conclusion of this attempt is unknown.<sup>293</sup> Although the Federation firmly opposed to the Balkan wars through statements and declarations,

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid. p.135

<sup>291</sup> Ibid. p.136

<sup>292</sup> Ibid. p.136

<sup>293</sup> Ibid. p.280

and insisted on the mobilization of the International against the threat of war, it was unable to organize mass demonstrations as it had done during the struggle against the invasion of Libya. Although the Union and Progress was no longer in power and the new regime seemed more tolerant towards the Federation, the organization was unable to fully recover from the intensive pressures of Young Turks during the elections of 1912. The threat of war also staggered the preparations of Balkan socialists for the Balkan Federation. In fact, the second meeting for the Balkan Federation, which was initially scheduled for 1912, could only be held in 1915.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The course of action of Union and Progress from 1908 to 1918 contains radical turns, which sometimes appear hard to explain. The organization, which introduced Turkey to multiparty system and insisted on the rule of law, turned into an oppressive paramilitary force, which established a dictatorship only five years after the revolution. While Ottomanism was the founding stone of the new regime in 1908, it was replaced by Turkish nationalism only a few years later, and coercive measures against minorities followed. A comparison of the revolution of 1908 with bourgeois revolutions in Europe and America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reveals that the Young Turk revolution gave up its initial political and social ideals quite rapidly. The economic program of Young Turks and its position towards European imperialism is also much different than the leaderships of bourgeois revolutions in Western countries, which aimed at full sovereignty, and political and economic independence. While it is not possible to state that the Union and Progress ever adopted an anti-imperialist position, it is remarkable that the new regime sought to earn the mercy and support of imperialist countries. Cavid Bey's firm belief that Turkey would never become an industrialized country and that the country's destiny was being an exporter of agricultural products, was not only Cavid Bey's personal

argument, but it was accepted by Young Turks without significant internal debates, at least in the parliament. Even though the “National Economics” period might seem to dispute these economic policies, it shouldn’t be disregarded that the World War significantly disturbed trade and Ottoman Empire didn’t have a choice but adopting a more autarkic system. The policies from 1913 to 1918 might be regarded as important steps for capital accumulation and creation of a national bourgeoisie, but it is evident that it was not a consistent policy which characterized the revolution of 1908.

All these ambiguities about the revolution of 1908 can be explained with uneven development. While uneven development was expressed as economic backwardness and lack of an advanced capitalist means and relations of production on economic level, it was also translated to the ideological level. The Young Turks, who identified the problem of Turkey as “retardation”, sought to overcome these problems with pragmatism. As opposed to earlier bourgeois revolutionaries in Europe, Young Turks were not utopists; they were not seeking new frontiers. For them, the “ideal” already existed; their model was the advanced capitalist countries in Europe.

Yet, Young Turks had a sense of the disadvantages and advantages of uneven development. While they were fully aware that it was difficult for Turkey to change the status quo and its position within the international capitalist system, as Cavid Bey’s position revealed, Young Turks also believed that they could fulfill their dreams, if they took advantage of the experience from the existing models of capitalist development in Europe. As a result, Young Turks attempted to “fit in various historical products of [bourgeoisie] to the same historical period”.<sup>294</sup> It is important to note that the choice of this path, namely becoming a developed

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<sup>294</sup> Çulhaoğlu, Metin. *Tarih, Türkiye, Sosyalizm*. Ankara: Doruk Yayıncılık, 1996. p.121

capitalist country, was not an arbitrary choice of an intellectual elite group. As cited from Akçura in the introduction, the Union and Progress had a “bourgeois” class basis, but it was quite weak, so that a gap emerged between the class basis and political aims of the Union and Progress. In other words, the Union and Progress, “being a direct extension of the process of transition to capitalism in Turkey, emerged as a political movement, which aimed at affecting and shaping this process in the final analysis.”<sup>295</sup>

The pragmatic approach to uneven development was replicated in the attitude of the Union and Progress towards the working class and class struggle. The extreme measures of Young Turks, who seemed determined to annihilate the workers’ and socialist movement from 1909 on, were far beyond the real power of the socialist organizations. While the government’s response to workers actions during the strikes of 1908 was a mixture of negotiation and coercion, the period from 1909 to 1912 was much more intolerant and restrictive. The reaction of Union and Progress to workers movement embodied the abovementioned gap between the weak class basis and inconsistent political aims. In the light of the experiences of European capitalism, Union and Progress believed that class struggle would be an obstacle against the aim of catching advanced capitalist countries. Its weak class basis, which made a struggle against the working class at ideological level difficult, forced the Union and Progress to use violence against the workers movement. Furthermore, Union and Progress also took advantage of the uneven development in its approach to the working class by creating paternalist arguments. While some arguments, which were voiced during the parliamentary debates on the strike law, stressed out the potential disastrous effects of workers movement and socialism on capital accumulation and development of

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid. p.121

capitalism by referring to the experiences in Europe, some other arguments denied the existence of class antagonism in Turkey in a paternalistic way, emphasizing the “difference” of Turkey from Europe. Although demands of European imperialists have been influential on measures against the workers actions, this cannot be regarded as a factor external to the new regime, since the leadership of the new regime combined its interests with the interests of the European imperialism in a pragmatic way. Defending the interests of the foreign capital was on one hand imposed by the military and political power of European imperialism, but on the other hand it emerged as a policy of Union and Progress, which believed in the development of capitalism in Turkey through foreign capital.

The significance of this period derives from the fact that the policies of the Republican Turkey towards class struggle and socialist (or communist) movement were a continuation of the policies of Union and Progress. The strike law of 1909 remained in action until 1937, and the ban on socialist organizations continued until 1960’s. Not only the violence, but also the paternalistic approach of the ruling elite towards the working class and the denial of class struggle in Turkey continued. Similar to the arguments of Ali Bey in 1909, Recep Peker stated in mid 1930’s that the “Republic of Turkey [was] a populist entity”, meaning that the Turkish state didn’t distinguish between classes and treated all of them with affection.<sup>296</sup>

Finally, a crucial question comes to mind: What was the legacy of the Federation, which was one of the most influential Ottoman socialist organizations? Sadly, since the impact of the Federation was limited to Thessalonica and Macedonia, the takeover of this region by Greece ended the connection between the Federation and Turkey. Although the Federation considered itself as an “Ottoman”

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<sup>296</sup> Peker, Recep. *İnkılap Dersleri*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1984. p.54

organization even after the takeover of Thessalonica for a while, it changed its position once it became clear that the city would remain under the control of Greece. In the years following the Balkan Wars, the Federation got integrated to the Greek socialist movement, and it eventually became part of the Socialist Party of Greece, which evolved into the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) in the years following the October revolution. Although the Federation didn't leave behind an organizational continuity, memories of a strong workers' and socialist movement, which were not entirely but mostly created by the socialist movement in Thessalonica, continued to haunt the elites in Turkey, and this helps us to understand why the republican regime remained alert against the class struggle even though an experience like the strike wave of 1908 or socialist organizations with mass support such as the Federation were unseen in the first decades of the republic.

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