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ABSTRACT

How have Turkey’s working-class capacities been evolving since the 1960s? What have been the peculiarities of Turkey’s import-substitutionalist model and later integration into the neoliberal economic landscape, as they pertain to the transformation of the Turkish working class? Our aim here is two-fold: (i) to contribute to a systematic understanding of the historical development of Turkey’s working class; and (ii) to develop a new conceptual lens for class-capacity analysis from a combined and uneven development perspective. By class capacities, we refer to the ability of the working class to develop an awareness of its long-term interests and organize to struggle for these collective interests. We employ theory-guided process tracing as the main methodological guideline to study the historical development of Turkey’s working-class capacities.

How have Turkey’s working-class capacities (WCCs) been evolving since the 1960s? What have been the peculiarities of Turkey’s import-substitutionalist model and later integration into the neoliberal economic landscape, as they pertain to the transformation of the Turkish working class? Our aim here is two-fold: (i) to contribute to a systematic understanding of the historical development of Turkey’s working class; and (ii) to develop a new conceptual lens for class-capacity (CC) analysis from a combined and uneven development perspective. Our period of examination starts with the 1960s, since these years witnessed the emergence of Turkey’s first large-scale labor movements at the national level. We employ the method of theory-guided process tracing (TGPT) to study the historical development of Turkey’s WCCs (Aminzade, 1993). In TGPT, the research focus is placed on creating ‘theoretically explicit narratives that carefully trace and compare the sequences of events’ (Aminzade, 1993, p. 108). TGPT relies heavily on logical reasoning and evidence gathering, which are used to identify important landmarks in the development of a phenomenon of interest (e.g. critical junctures). In studying the development of Turkey’s WCCs, for example, we focus on the defining instances of workers’ mobilization and major events that marked the political-economic history of this country.

Leon Trotsky’s theory of combined and uneven development (CUD) lies at the heart of our theoretical enterprise, because we think that it can help to facilitate our understanding of the evolution of the Turkish working class in a more systematic manner (Gürcan & Mete, 2017; Trotsky,

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In turn, we employ Erik Olin Wright’s notion of CC as a conceptual tool to assess how the working class responds to the changing political and economic environment under the combined and uneven impact of global capitalism and neoliberalization. By CCs, we simply mean the ability of the working class to develop an awareness of its long-term interests and organize to struggle for these collective interests (Gürcan & Mete, 2017; Wright, 1978). Put differently, the term CC refers to ‘the social relations within a class which to a greater or lesser extent unite the agents of that class into a class formation’ (Wright, 1978, p. 98).

Erik Olin Wright distinguishes between two types of CC, namely (a) structural CCs that are conditioned by socio-economic structures outside of workers’ direct agency and (b) organizational CCs. Structural CCs refer to socio-economic structures that constrain or strengthen the power of the working class to organize and struggle for its collective interests (e.g. the concentration of workers in large-scale factories as a strength factor), whereas organizational capacities relate to prevailing political arrangements and organizational forms that are directly related to labor and union organizing (e.g. the prevalence of combative rather than clientelistic union practices as a strength factor). In this article, we extend the scope of organizational capacities as the conscious organization of a social class to also include external factors—or, more precisely, top-down institutional arrangements—concerning the organization of the working class (e.g. the government’s labor and union policies).

Trotsky’s theory of CUD will be applied to the historical development of WCCs in the context of Turkish trade unionism since the 1960s. Combined development speaks to the assimilation of individual countries by world capitalism, whereas uneven development concerns contestation and differentiation among and within individual countries as a politically and culturally peculiar articulation of their global integration (Trotsky, 1957, 2008). In this paper, we thus define combined development as class (in)capacitation via assimilation into global capitalism and uneven development as class (in)capacitation via the prominence of national peculiarities.

The remainder of this paper is organized into two large sections. The first section explores the import-substitutionalist period, whereas the second focuses on the neoliberal era (1980 onwards).

**Structural and organizational class capacities until the neoliberal era (1960–1980)**

In the post-Second World War era, the combined character of global capitalism was shaped by Cold War conditions and the rise of US global hegemony (Koç, 2010a). In search for a shortcut toward rapid industrialization, Turkey thus took advantage of the Marshall Aid in order to mechanize its agriculture and build its infrastructure (highways, dams, electricity, etc.) (Mahiroğulları, 2005). In return for the US aid, Turkey opted for the liberal capitalist path and multi-party democracy, although unions were still subjected to repression (Tokol, 1994).

Turkey embarked on a much more rapid phase of industrialization in the 1960s and 1970s, also thanks to public incentives for the industrial sector and the re-introduction of five-year plans in 1963 (Güzel, 2016; Mahiroğulları, 2005). Significant economic growth was achieved via import-substitution policies and protection from international competition. Between 1955 and 1970, average daily real wages soared by almost 390%, which was accompanied by the increasing share of the industrial sector in GDP, from 14.7% in 1955 to 20.6% in 1975. Not surprisingly, Turkish society experienced a rapid process of proletarianization, as a result of which the number of workers increased by almost 242% in the period 1955–1975, from 533,216 in 1955 to 1,313,300 in 1970 and 1,823,338 in 1975 (Ataay, 1974; Ekinci, 2008; Millioğulları, 2007). Employers tolerated the increasing cost of labor and unionization to a certain extent in an enabling environment marked by economic growth and the need for satisfying the constantly increasing demand for consumer goods under rapidly expanding national markets (Koç, 2006, 2010a), hence the expansion of organizational CCs starting from the 1960s.

Structural factors at the political-economic level cannot reveal more than how external conditions have shaped the working-class (in)capacity to act as a collective actor and organize for its
common interests. A fuller account of CCs can be obtained once it is understood how class agents react to structural factors or make attempts to transcend limitations imposed by political-economic hardships. This calls for an analysis of organizational CCs in the post-Second World War era.

The industrialization of Turkey in the 1950s helped to transform the premature structure of trade unionism, which resulted in the foundation of Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederaşyonu (Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions, or TÜRK-İŞ) in 1952 as Turkey’s first nationwide union. In 1954, Turkey adopted an import-substitution strategy of development that further accelerated its industrialization process (Mahiroğulları, 2005; Tokol, 1994). Yet, economic development was not the only factor that cleared the way for higher levels of unionization. Another important factor in the strengthening of organizational WCCs was the military coup on 27 May 1960 and its 1961 Constitution. Unlike Turkey’s right-wing military coups in 1971 and 1980, the 1960 coup was made against the repressive government of the right-wing Democratic Party. Prior to the 1960 coup, TÜRK-İŞ had become a proxy of the Democratic Party governments (1946–1961), which considerably restrained the organizational capacity of Turkey’s working class. Although the Democratic Party prohibited union activity in 1956, it used trade unions as a vehicle to advance its hegemony and prevent the expansion of socialism within the working class in a Cold War environment (Koç, 2006).

Trade unions had not taken any part in grassroots mobilizations that paved the way for the 1960 military intervention. However, TÜRK-İŞ expressed its support for the military authority following the 1960 coup (Tokol, 1994). Not only was union activity tolerated—if not supported in certain instances—by the military authority, but also six democratically elected TÜRK-İŞ representatives were asked to join the Constituent Assembly for the drafting of a new constitution (Güzel, 2016; Koç, 2016). Two important events marked the aftermath of the ratification of the 1961 Constitution. The 1961 Saraçhane Rally mobilized over 100,000 workers who protested the state’s failure to carry into effect the labor-friendly constitutional rights. The Saraçhane Rally has an important place in the history of Turkish trade unionism. As Turkey’s first major workers’ rally, it evidences how organizational CCs can be expanded through mass action, given that the future leaders of the Workers’ Party of Turkey (Türkiye İşçi Partisi, or TİP) —the first socialist party that was represented in the Turkish parliament, in 1965 with 15 members—assumed a leading role in these events (Koçak & Çelik, 2016).

In the 1963 Kavel Resistance, workers at the Kavel factory protested the employer’s pressure to roll back the benefits and de-unionize the workplace. This pressure was met with workers’ firm resistance and workplace occupation—a new addition to the labor movement’s collective action repertoire (Evrensel, 2007a). Both the Saraçhane Rally and Kavel Resistance contributed at first hand to the ratification of the laws that regulated collective agreement and legalized the right to strike in 1963. They were also indicative of the extent to which the expanding freedoms of the post-1960 Coup amplified organizational CCs. Other positive developments in the post-military coup conjuncture include the appointment of Professor Cahit Talas—known for his writings on union rights and freedoms—as the Minister of Work. Moreover, in terms of the combined development of class (in)capacities, the military authority granted permission for TÜRK-İŞ’s membership to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which was denied under the Democratic Party government (Güzel, 2016; Koçak & Çelik, 2016).

The 1961 Constitution is thus considered to be a progressive opening for its general framework that promotes a ‘national, democratic, and social state of law’ along with its labor friendly section on Social and Economic Rights and Duties which guarantees the basic social rights such as the right to form unions, make collective agreements, and go on strike. In the final analysis, the labor movement was granted favorable concessions without really engaging in substantial struggles (Koçak & Çelik, 2016; Ş, 2007; Tokol, 1994).

In the enabling environment of the 1961 Constitution, Turkey saw the mushrooming of leftist labor and student movements, but this environment resulted in the 1971 military coup, one of the main justifications of which was the consolidation of the links between labor and leftist student
movements (Mahiroğulları, 2005). Relatedly, TİP’s foundation by 12 union activists represents a historical landmark in parallel with the enabling political conjuncture of the 1960 Coup. TİP’s growth was important, not only for the parliamentary representation of the socialist left, but also in terms of its impact on the socialization of left-wing ideologies and consolidation of the ties between workers and intellectuals from a CC perspective.

Of equal importance to expanding organizational WCCs in the post-1960 period was the foundation of the Türkiye Devrimci İşçilik Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions of Turkey, or DİSK) in 1967. DİSK emerged out of labor activists’ discontent from TÜRK-İş’s right-wing and pro-government stance as well as its financial and organizational ties with the USA and US labor unions (Güzel, 2016). Indeed, DİSK’s historical antecedents can also be traced back to expelled and dissenting TÜRK-İş constituents (Türkiye Maden, Madeni Esya ve Makina Sanayii İşçileri Sendikası/Mining, Hardware, and Machinery Workers’ Union of Turkey, or Türkiye Maden-İş; Türkiye Petrol, Kimya ve Lastik Sanayii İşçileri Sendikası/Oil, Petrochemicals and Tire Workers’ Union, or Lastik-İş; Basin-İş/Media Industry Workers’ Union of Turkey, or Türkiye Basin Sanayi İşçileri Sendikası) who sided with independent unions (Türkiye Gida Sanayii İşçileri Sendikası/Food Industry Workers’ Union of Turkey, or Gıda-İş and Türkiye Maden İşçileri Sendikası/Turkish Mining Workers’ Union, or Türk Maden-İş) and declared DİSK’s foundation in 1967 (Ş, 2007). It is noteworthy to mention that DİSK’s founders had also taken part in TİP’s creation in 1961, and therefore as socialists, they were opposed to TÜRK-İş’s predominant ideology of anti-communism and collaborationist style of unionism.

DİSK significantly contributed to the expansion of organizational WCCs with its radical claims for Turkey’s exit from NATO, stronger ties with revolutionary movements (especially with TİP), and taking part in resistance movements and democratic struggles (Mahiroğulları, 2005). In this environment, the data on workers’ increasing participation in strike activity between 1963 and 1970—an increase of as high as 1297% until the 1971 military coup, from 1,514 participants in 1963 to 21,156 participants in 1970—is indicative of the expanding organizational capacities of Turkey’s working class. Indeed, the same situation is valid as to the increasing number of unionized workers, which amounts to an increase of almost 175% between 1961 and 1970, from 298,000 to 819,373 workers (Milliogulları, 2007).

There occurred several important events that shaped the course of class struggle in the second half of the 1960s. The 85 days-long strike at Şişecam Paşabahçe, a glassware factory, mobilized 2400 workers who demanded wage increases and greater job security. The 1966 Paşabahçe strike is accepted as one of the main catalysts that accelerated DİSK’s emergence with the foundation of the Sendikalar Arası Dayanışma Konseyi (Council of Inter-Union Solidarity, or SADK)—the predecessor of DİSK—in order to support the Paşabahçe strike (Yeşil, 2009). During the strike, TÜRK-İş withdrew its support for the strike when workers protested TÜRK-İş officials for having signed an unfavorable protocol with the employer. Ultimately, the disillusionment with the so-called ‘collaborationist’ unionism of TÜRΚ-İŞ fueled DİSK’s emergence (Tekgözli, 2016).

The labor movement’s links with student and socialist organizations were increasingly gaining strength through impactful mobilization efforts, which reached its peak during the events known as the 15–16 June Resistance in 1970. Until the 15th–16th June events, student and socialist movements had already become acquainted with workers’ movements. In this era, factory occupations as innovative forms of struggle in the Turkish context helped to extend organizational CCs, which found its most emblematic representation in the occupation of Derby Factory in 1968 and that of Alpagut Mining in 1969. Actively supported by student movements, workers at the Derby Tire Factory occupied their workplace after the signing of an unfavourable collective agreement by the TÜRK-İş administration. Eventually, the Derby occupiers succeeded in discarding the TÜRK-İş representation via a democratic referendum, after which the occupiers’ original demands were accepted by the employer (Evrensel, 2007b; Kızıl-Bayraklı, 2016). The historical significance of the DİSK-led Derby Occupation lies in the fact that it is Turkey’s first factory occupation (Mahiroğulları, 2005).
The Derby Occupation was followed by other important factory occupations such as that organized by over 520 Singer factory workers to protest against the firing of three workers for transferring from Çelik Sanayi İşçileri Sendikası (Steel Workers’ Union, or Çelik-Iş), a TÜRK-IŞ- to Maden-Iş, a DİSK-affiliated union in 1969 (Çelik, 2016a). Worthy of special mention are the occupation of Turkish Cast Iron Factory led by as many as 2200 workers who were being forced to resign from DİSK membership in 1969 and the occupation of the Sungurlar Boiler Plant by 700 workers who were not allowed to resign from TÜRK-IŞ membership to join DİSK (DİSK, 1996). Similarly to DİSK-led occupation cases, workers at the Alpagut Lignite Mine occupied their workplace in order to protest against unpaid wages, lack of job security, and political favouritism, among others. The originality of the Alpagut Occupation is that workers not only occupied the workplace, but that they also established workers’ control to self-manage the production process for 34 days until the gendarmerie intervention (Narin, 2011). The expanding organizational CCs in the post-1960 era is also reflected in historical mass actions in which the labor movement assumed a leading role. A case in point is DİSK’s participation in the infamous protests known as ‘Bloody Sunday’ and co-organized with student movements with 30,000 participants to protest the arrival of the United States Sixth Fleet on 16 February 1969, in Istanbul’s Beyazit Square. The protesters were assaulted by the police and right-wing students, which left 2 protesters dead and several injured (DİSK, 1996).

The rapid politicization of union activism and its association with left-wing politics culminated into the historic 15–16 June events in 1970. In 1970, TÜRK-IŞ lent support for the government’s project to create a union monopoly to stop DİSK’s growing influence and the socialization of left-wing politics. Over 150,000 workers mobilized in more than 168 workplaces and occupied the streets in Istanbul and Kocaeli with the support of TİP, many TÜRK-IŞ affiliated workers, and student movements in order to protest the union monopolization attempt. Eventually, in response to growing political tensions since 1960, a right-wing section of the military organized a coup on 12 March 1971, which ceased all union activities and arrested many DİSK activists (Güzel, 2016; Koç, 2016; Mahiroğulları, 2005).

The 1971 military coup failed to achieve its intended impact. Following the first general elections on 14 October 1973, left-wing organizations came to increase their influence within the labor movement. In 1975, the then illegally organized Communist Party of Turkey (CPT) assumed DİSK’s control as a result of which DİSK started to give much greater weight to mass actions (Mahiroğulları, 2005). In 1975, DİSK initiated the Rallies of Struggle for Democratic Rights and Freedoms with the participation of tens of thousands of people in İzmir and İstanbul. The year 1976 witnessed an equally important DİSK-led mass protest that opposed the government’s attempt to revive the military State Security Courts (Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemeleri, or DGM) against left-wing activists.

The Taksim Square Massacre—which took place on the 1977 international Labor Day on Taksim Square in Istanbul—added much fuel to the socialization of left-wing politics. Over 500,000 people participated in these DİSK-led events, which ended in a minimum of 34 causalities and 126 injured people because of the panic started by anonymous shooters.

The 1977–1980 Metalware Industrialists’ Union (Madeni Eşya Sanayicileri Sendikası, or MESS) strikes—Turkey’s largest strike until 1977—played a significant role in the further escalation of class conflict thanks to its politicized demands beyond the corporate–industrial struggle constrained to the metal industry. In 1977, workers decided to go on strike during the collective agreement negotiations with the MESS. Strikes continued in waves for 3 years until the 1980 military coup. What makes the MESS Resistance unique is not only its status as the largest strike at the time: The strike demands went beyond social security rights and job/employment conditions and embraced the reinstatement of workers laid off after the DGM rallies and the recognition of the May Day as an ‘international workers’ day’ in the collective agreement. Having involved thousands of workers, this strike assumed a political tone for its refusal of large capitalist monopolies and the state’s undemocratic practices (ŞAfak, 2007; UID, 2014).
The uprising of workers at Tariş Agricultural Sales Cooperatives Union, a state-run agricultural company in İzmir is another landmark in the history of Turkey’s working-class struggle. Thousands of Tariş workers went on strike to protest the right-wing coalition government’s—the ‘Nationalist Front’ coalition’s—appointment of a new general director who was planning to lay off many Tariş workers and replace them with its own political followers. The first wave of the strike ended with 600 arrests and 50 injuries after the security forces’ brutal assault. Then, 3000 workers were laid off because of their involvement in strike activity. The workers’ resistance drew significant support from left-wing and students’ movements, and it expanded to working-class neighborhoods near the Tariş factory. In February 1980, thousands of workers were detained in a soccer stadium, and some 10,000 gendarmerie commandos assaulted working-class neighborhoods with panzers in order to destroy the barricades and break the workers’ armed resistance (Keskin, 2004).

The escalation of class conflicts in parallel with the expansion of the organizational capacities of Turkey working class reached its peak in 1980. This is clearly reflected in the soaring number of days lost due to strike activity between 1970 and 1980, which points to a total increase of over 1977%, from 260,338 to 5,408,618 days. In this period, the number of unionized workers rose by over 28%, from 819,373 to 1,049,250 workers (Milliogullari, 2007).

Similar to what happened in the 1971 military coup against the growing tide of working-class militancy, the escalation of class conflicts in the 1980s culminated in a military coup on 12 September 1980, which resulted in a total of 650,000 arrests, over 750 casualties for various reasons, 420 death sentences, 14,000 cases of citizenship revocation, 23,700 cases of forced closure of association, and 9962 cases of lawsuits for torture charges (only between 1982 and 1988) (T24, 2015). Regarding the labor movement, the military authority prohibited DISK, but allowed the activities of collaborationist unions such as TÜRK-İŞ and Hak İşi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu’s (Confederation of Turkish Real Trade Unions, or HAK-İŞ) (Tokol, 1994).

In summary, the aftermath of the Second World War attested to a new wave of combined development with Turkey’s fuller integration into global capitalism and adoption of import substitution in the 1960s, which tolerated higher wages, greater benefits and union organizing. In turn, the combined development of Turkey’s organizational CCs was embodied in collaborationist unions’ ties to their US patrons. The military coup of 1960, the enabling environment of the new constitution and workers’ reclamation of their new constitutional rights greatly amplified organizational capacities and led to the emergence of ‘combative unionism’, which was however dramatically suppressed by the military coup of 1980.

**Turkey’s neoliberal restructuring and class capacities: a combined and uneven development perspective**

How has Turkey’s neoliberalization shaped the combined and uneven development of WCCs? This question will be addressed in three sub-sections. The first sub-section will provide a brief historical background of how import-substitution policies led the Turkish economy to a bottleneck so as to pave the way for neoliberal restructuring. The second sub-section will look at the effects of trade liberalization on CCs, whereas the third will address financial liberalization and privatization. The final sub-section looks more deeply into the uneven development of CCs as regards the flexibilization of labor markets and neoliberal social policies underpinned by Islamic and paternalistic values. For the practical purposes of this article, we understand neoliberalism as a set of policy actions that find their expression in the principles of trade and financial liberalization, privatization, deregulated labor markets, and flexible labor (Harvey, 2005). At the global level, neoliberalism is perhaps best represented and actively promoted by US-led dominant international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), and World Trade Organization (WTO). Indeed, the scope and extent to which neoliberal policies are implemented at the meso-level depend on the (sub)national peculiarities of the given institutional settings, sociocultural background, and balance of social forces (Peck & Theodore, 2012; Peck, Theodore, & Brenner, 2012).
The Crisis of the import-substitution model and Turkey's transition to neoliberalism: a historical account

Turkey's import-substitution model relied on outward-looking strategies that allowed for the participation of foreign capital in encouraging the use of imported inputs to produce durable consumer goods. In the meantime, this era considerably expanded the scope of democratic rights (Algül, 2015; Gülalp, 1985). One could argue that both the concentration of the industrial sector and accentuation of liberal democracy helped to expand WCCs, which was clearly reflected in the rise of working-class movements.

In the aftermath of the 1960 military coup, the public sector kept its share in strategic branches with a 40% to 50% control in manufacturing industry and total investments throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Import restrictions as well as price, interest rate, and credit controls were imposed, alongside the goal of expanding national consumption based on the domestic assembly industry. Encouraged through subventions and other kinds of incentives, industrial production was steered towards durable consumer goods such as radios, fridges, washers, vacuum cleaners, televisions, automobiles, and other modern home and office equipment (Boratav, 1986, 2011; Ercan, 2004; Meder & ŞAhin, 2008; Yeldan, 2011).

Meanwhile, the healthy functioning of import-substitution strategies prioritizing domestic consumption necessitated higher growth rates and the adoption of a social pact that would benefit the popular classes. Greater reliance on domestic consumption thus enabled employers to tolerate increasing real wages and unionization levels with expanded democratic rights. Real wages rose by 120% between 1963 and 1976, whereas the number of unionized workers rose from 298,000 in 1961 to 1,049,250 in 1980 (Boratav, 2011; Milliogullari, 2007).

The long-term results of import-substitution strategies generated unexpected outcomes by increasing Turkey's over-reliance on imports and external borrowing. Imports soared from nearly $468 million in 1960 to $948 million in 1970 and $7.9 milliard in 1980 (Ministry of Development, 2015). These outcomes ended up with a foreign currency shortage (Boratav, 1986, 2011; Ercan, 2004; Meder & ŞAhin, 2008; Yeldan, 2011). The predominance of the assembly industry had forced the Turkish economy to rely increasingly on imported assembly parts and intermediate goods. However, higher levels of import dependency proved detrimental to the sustenance of Turkey's economic growth, which was exposed following the 1973 oil crisis, as a manifestation of the combined development of capitalism worldwide. Indeed, oil was also the most important intermediary good for the survival of Turkey's industry. Turkey was hit by another hike in oil prices in 1979. The Turkish state attempted to postpone the detrimental effects of this crisis by resorting to further external borrowing and budgetary deficits (Boratav, 2011; Pamuk, Ş, 2015). The budgetary deficit—which equalled to 40 million Turkish liras in 1960—rose to almost 4 milliard Turkish Liras in 1974. In 1960, Turkey's foreign debts amounted to $992 million, whereas they climbed to over $16 milliard in 1980. Eventually, GDP growth rates declined from 7.4% in 1972 to −2.4% in 1980 (Ministry-of-Development, 2015). In this environment, the Turkish industry was unable to easily manoeuvre into an export-led path for generating the needed amount of foreign currency, because its assembly industry specialized in domestic consumption was technologically inferior to that of Western industrialized countries (Boratav, 2011). Moreover, the crisis of the import-substitution model was also translated into a decade-long political instability. Turkey experienced another military coup in 1971, which happened in response to the rise of left-wing movements and trade unions (Boratav, 2011; Ceyhun, 1988; Ercan, 2004; Kaya, 2009; Kirmizialtin, 2012; Meder & ŞAhin, 2008; Pamuk, Ş, 2015; Yeldan, 2011).

The incapacitating effects of the combined development of capitalism on WCCs were strongly articulated in Turkey's neoliberalization. Turkey's departure from the import-substitution model was initiated with the so-called decrees of 24 January 1980 and the military coup on 12 September 1980 (Sönmez, 2009). The decrees of 24 January were prepared by Turgut Özal, the then under-secretary of the Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel and future deputy prime minister in the military
government between 1980 and 1982. The primary aim of these decrees was trade liberalization, the elimination of subsidies, and promotion of an export-led strategy (Güneş, 2013; Kirmızıaltın, 2012; Önder, 1998; Pamuk, Ş., 2015; Pektas, Ş., 2014; Sönmez, 2009; Yeldan, 2011). However, Özal’s decrees could not be fully implemented due to the fragility of Demirel’s minority government and the growing strength of left-wing movements and labor mobilizations contesting the emerging neoliberal framework with full force (Boratav, 2011; Güneş, 2013). Ultimately, the 1980 military coup dispersed the popular opposition by banning the political parties and suppressing labor movements with the aim of establishing the political stability necessary for the implementation of neoliberal policies (Önder, 1998; Öniş, 1992). As part of the combined development of Turkey’s capitalism, this coup thus dealt a major blow to organizational WCCs.

The military dictatorship and subsequent conservative governments under Özal’s administration left the labor movement incapacitated as a potentially leading actor in social and political change. Taking the 1979 level as the base (=100), real wages fell from 60.7 in 1984 to 55.5 in 1985 and 54.3 in 1986 (Petrol-İş, 1987, p. 91). The share of wages in Turkey’s GNP declined from 24.6% in 1980 to 17.5% in 1986 (Delibas, 2015, p. 124). Meanwhile, unemployment rates grew from 7.2% in 1980 to over 8.1% in 1987 (IMF, 2016).

In this environment, the labor movement broke its post-coup silence throughout the late 1980s, although much of this growing activism has consisted of parallel developments rather than coordinated efforts. Labor mobilization gained momentum with what came to be known as the Spring Actions (March 1989–May 1989). These actions can be considered to have triggered the first wave of labor mobilization in the neoliberal era. The Spring Actions emerged as a nation-wide grassroots initiative of around 600,000 public-sector workers who protested the bureaucratic leadership of TÜRK-İş and other three public enterprise unions for their failure to finalize the then ongoing collective bargaining process. Grassroots movements built their militancy on the legacy of the preceding experiences of workers’ resistance in the 1986–1989 period, which brought to the fore strike solidarity committees and other forms of bottom-up organizing at the shop-floor level. They also inherited the innovative repertoire of protest accumulated throughout this period and before, ‘such as lunch boycotts, collectively calling in sick, slowing down production, refusing to shave, shaving off hair, delaying starts of work shifts, and organizing small gatherings and marches before or after shifts’ (Dogan, 2010, p. 9). Ultimately, the outcomes of the 1989 Spring Actions help to pinpoint the importance of the working-class mobilization in the Turkish context. Not only did these actions succeed to achieve a nearly 140% wage increase, but they also ‘contributed to the first electoral victory of the left since 1977’ (Mahiroğulları, 2005; pp. 372–374; Tokol, 1994; pp. 100–102; Dogan, 2010; p. 11). In other words, the labor movement was the main factor in Turgut Özal’s electoral defeat in 1991, the strongest leader after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (the founder of the Republic) and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (the current President of the Republic) who led Turkey’s first neoliberal government in the post-Özal era.

The Zonguldak Coal Miners’ Resistance—which took place between 30 November 1990 and 8 January 1991—is emblematic of the new wave of labor mobilization initiated by the Spring Actions. Nearly 50,000 miners’ families decided to go on foot for approximately 100 km in January 1991 under Genel Maden İşçileri Sendikası’s (General Mining Workers’ Union, or Genel Maden-İş) initiative, when the Zonguldak Governorate did not allow for the bus travel that was originally planned to protest the government’s austerity measures. Similar to the Spring Actions, the grassroots spontaneity added much energy and dynamism to the events, and came to rally a large number of democratic mass organizations and political parties nation-wide. Since the entire Zonguldak economy used to live on coal mining, the miners’ resistance also appealed to the local people (Koç, 2016).

Having directly targeted Turgut Özal’s austerity policies on wages, the Zonguldak Resistance changed the course of Turkey’s contemporary politics by playing a major role in the alternation of Özal’s party, Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party, or ANAP) from the ruling party to the opposition in the 1991 parliamentary elections, for the first time since 1983. It is therefore possible to argue that
austerity measures and privatizations as part of the combined development of Turkey’s capitalism have had unintended consequences that led the working-class movement to develop innovative forms of grassroots organizing in favor of organizational WCCs. Despite limited material gains obtained from this mobilization, the powerful influence of the Zonguldak Resistance in Turkish public opinion also led to the resignation of Yıldırım Akbulut, the then Prime Minister and ANAP President. Subsequently, the electoral defeat of the neoliberal ANAP in 1991 after intense class mobilization resulted in an 11-year-long period of weak coalition governments that were incapable of fully implementing the neoliberal agenda of privatization. Furthermore, just like the Spring Actions, the Zonguldak Resistance has exerted a tremendous influence on the politicization of the young generation of this time, a significant portion of which joined the leading ranks of left-wing political parties in our days (Aydınlık, 2016; Bulut, 2010; Dogan, 2010; Engin, 2012). Worthy of note here is that the early 1990s were also marked by the unionization attempts of public servants. The period between 1990 and 1995 that culminated into the creation of Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Public Workers’ Unions, or KESK) witnessed fierce struggles for public servants’ right to organize, including mass protests, rallies, hunger strikes, and work stoppage (Koç, 2016).

The 2010 TEKEL (Turkish Tobacco Enterprise) resistance is emblematic of the ways in which the combined development of Turkey’s neoliberalism has shaped the WCCs under privatizations. Just like the Spring Actions, the TEKEL Resistance emerged as a grassroots movement. TEKEL workers coming from 11 cities with 106 buses occupied the Kızılay Place for as long as 78 days with resistance tents built despite Ankara’s freezing cold temperatures. TEKEL workers’ Kızılay encampment gained significant support from the various sectors of civil and political society, especially the left-wing youth (Çelik, 2012; Topal & Yalman, 2015). At the time of the TEKEL protests, Turkey was being increasingly polarized into two ethnic groups between the Turks and Kurds, while tensions between secularists and Islamists had certainly not lost steam. Eventually, the TEKEL encampment failed to achieve workers’ demands against privatization in the name of greater job and employment security. Yet, TEKEL workers’ resistance has played a strategic role in energizing and consolidating the anti-AKP (Justice and Development Party, or Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) civil society and provided a historical reference point for the possibility to transcend the fragmented and atomistic nature of identity-based movements. As Turkey’s largest party, AKP is the representative of Turkey’s conservative tradition that reclaims the Ottoman legacy and the Islamist identity. The TEKEL resistance has demonstrated the potential of the working class to mobilize the civil society beyond religious and ethnic strife (Bulut, 2010; Çelik, 2012; Topal & Yalman, 2015; Yikilmaz & Kumlu, 2011).

In a similar vein, the resistance of 35,000 metal workers in 21 different workplaces in May–June 2015 left its imprint on the history of Turkey’s labor movements. The importance of this resistance for organizational WCCs lies in the fact that this experience was led by workers of a predominantly conservative and Turkish-nationalist background who demanded higher wages and challenged collaborationist unionism as exemplified in Türk-Metal Union’s (Türk Metal İşçleri Sendikası) reluctance in demanding higher wages. Metal workers’ resistance has not only induced significant damage to the long-lasting alliance between the state, employers, and collaborationist unions, but it also broke the wall of fear surrounding the ‘indiscussibility’ of the AKP power with the hands of its own constituency (Çelik, 2015a; Savaş, 2016).

**Trade liberalization and class capacities in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup**

In this sub-section and the next, we will address Turkey’s neoliberal restructuring in the sphere of trade and financial liberalization, because these were the ‘very first measures’ (Öniş, 1992, p. 11) of Turkish neoliberalism. The sub-section on financial liberalization will also contain an extended discussion of privatization. The final sub-section will deal with the labor and social policy implications of neoliberalization for WCCs.
The combined development of neoliberalism made its earliest advances in the area of trade liberalization. This issue was already a priority area in the decrees of 24 January, which instituted the Export Promotion and Implementation Department (EPID). The EPID was entitled to offer certificates for export promotion and controlled the export promotion funds. Exporters benefited from large amounts of subventions, low-interest credits, and tax rebates and breaks (Ercan, 2004; Kirmizialtı, 2012; Önder, 1998).

Indirect forms of public support for the export sector involved the suppression of the labor movement and wages as well as the promotion of marginalized forms of labor, especially subcontracting. The expansion of precarious labor largely owed to ‘the heavy concentration of manufactured exports in several traditional, low-technology or natural-resource-based sectors such as textiles, apparel, iron, steel, and food processing’ (Önder, 1998, p. 54). For example, the textile and apparel sector—which is underpinned by low-wage, sub-contracted, and non-unionized labor fragmented in small workshops or home-based production workplaces – contributed to as high as 36% of the total exports in the period 1992–1995 (Önder, 1998). Put differently, WCCs were severely constrained by a growing export industry. In the meantime, the policy of suppressing wages and promoting traditional export industries was also compatible with the state’s intention to constrain domestic demand with the aim of steering companies into the export business (Ercan, 2004; Gülalp, 1985; Pektaş, Ş, 2014).

In consequence of the implementation of export-led policies, the share of the industrial sector in total exports soared from 36% in 1980, to 76.7% in 1988 (Kirmizialtı, 2012). The contribution of exports to Turkey’s GDP—which was nearly 5.2% in 1980—reached its peak in 1988 and rose to 18.6% (World-Bank, 2016). Similar to export liberalization, imports also took their share from the neoliberalization of the Turkish economy. In 1984, the number of liberalized import items increased by 150%, from 1000 to 2500 items, whereas restricted items decreased from 1800 to 459, with stamp duties reduced from 25% to 1% (Kirmizialtı, 2012).

In the post-ANAP era (1991 onwards), the idea of trade liberalization gained momentum with Turkey’s accession into the European Customs Union in 1995, which accelerated the combined development of neoliberalism and the growth of pro-AKP exporters starting from 2003. Regarding the labor implications of Turkey’s Customs Union engagement, the Turkish industry embarked on a development plan that heavily relied on low-added-value and export-driven sectors such as textiles and food in Anatolia, with the participation of low-cost, unqualified, unorganized, and precarious labor (Pektaş, Ş, 2014). Certainly, the Anatolian expansion of capitalism is an expression of the adverse effects of this uneven process on structural WCCs were particularly observed in the atomization, fragmentation and precarization of large segments of the working class.

The combined development of trade liberalization thus generated crucial uneven outcomes that shaped both capitalist class formation and WCCs. The AKP era (2003 onwards) opened up a new phase of trade liberalization, which found its fullest expression in the rise of export-oriented companies, or the so-called Anatolian Tigers. These companies are located in peripheral Anatolian cities such as Kayseri, Konya, Denizli, and Gaziantep, which are traditionally associated with conservatism and pro-AKP politics. Many of these small-to-medium-sized companies are members of the Islamic Mустaکіl Sanayici ve İсаdmalrı Derneği (MUSIAD, or Independent Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association), Anadolu Aslanları İсаdamları Derneği (ASKON, or Anatolian Lions’ Association of Businessmen), or Türkiye İсаdamları ve Sanayiciler Konfederasyonu (TUSKON, or Turkish Confederation of Industrialists) (Aydın, 2013; Kosebalaban, 2007; Öniş, 2012; Tok, 2008; 2015; Tür, 2011). In this environment, the contribution of exports to Turkey’s GDP increased from nearly 13.4% in 1990 to 25.2% in 2002 and 28% in 2015 (WorldBank, 2016).

We can thus argue that the implications of trade liberalization through export-led strategies go beyond the sphere of economics. In conservative businesses, workers’ consent is consolidated via conservative businessmen’s leading role in Islamic civil society organizations such as the Uluslararası Teknolojik, Ekonomik ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Vakfı (Technological, Economic, and Social...
Financial liberalization, privatization, and decreasing class capacities in the neoliberal era

The combined development of neoliberalism in Turkey expressed itself strongly in the liberalization of exchange and interest rates. In fact, the liberalization of foreign exchange rates was intended to complement trade liberalization, because it was aimed to suppress domestic demand and support export-driven production by affecting relative prices. Foreign currency trade was liberalized in 1984. The liberalization of exchange rates, interest rates, and currency trade was then followed by the institution of the İstanbul Stock Exchange in 1986. This process was complemented with a transition to the full convertibility of the Turkish lira and liberalization of capital mobility in 1989 (Kirmızıaltın, 2012; Pektaş, Ş., 2014; Yeldan, 2011).

In the pre-1980 era, Turkey's economic strategies were mostly geared towards protecting the interests of industrial capitalism, whereas the 1980s marked the rise of financial capitalism. The share of financial profits and costs in Turkey's GDP increased from 1.9% to 3.3% in the period 1977–1988, whereas the share of interests in national income rose from 2% to almost 10% between 1980 and 1988 (Boratav, 2011). Eventually, the liberalization of capital movements in 1989 led to the increasing involvement of foreign capital in national financial markets, which generated significant arbitrage returns. In the period 1989–2002, the average foreign-currency arbitrage returns were measured as high as 23.1%, which rose to a rate of almost 33% by 2002 (Boratav, 2011).

Financial developments imposed through neoliberal policies exposed the Turkish economy to enormous risks. Not surprisingly, each of the four major economic crises in the post-Cold War Turkish economy originated from financial failures. First, the 1990–1991 crisis was triggered by the First US Occupation of Iraq. The panic created by the war led to the flight of hot money out of Turkey, which in turn resulted in the depreciation of the Turkish lira, hike of the interest rates, and eventually economic stagnation. Another major economic crisis of financial origin occurred in 1994, when an over-appreciation of the US dollar vis-à-vis the Turkish lira, accompanied by a sudden hike of interest rates, caused a mass panic with a capital outflow of over $4.2 milliard (TCMB, 2016). Eventually, the crisis spread to the real economy. In a similar fashion, the Turkish economy was exposed to another financial crisis after the 1997 East Asian crisis hit Russia in 1998. The panic led to the outflow of hot money, nearly over $6 milliard from Turkey (Boratav, 2011; Pamuk, Ş., 2015). Finally, the 2001 crisis can be seen as the culmination of structural problems generated by Turkey's financial deregulation under the IMF guidance. During the crisis, the capital outflow following the investor panic was recorded to be high as over $14.5 milliard (TCMB, 2016). The root cause of this crisis lays in the high fragility of Turkey's banking and financial system due to excessive deregulation. As a matter of fact, the IMF-led inflation reduction policies had tied the liquidity-creation mechanisms of national financial markets entirely to short-term and speculative capital inflows (Akyüz & Boratav, 2003; Cizre & Yeldan, 2005; Yeldan, 2001, 2002).

In the final analysis, financial liberalization contributed at first hand to over a decade-long period of political instability between 1989 and 2002, which was marked by weak coalition governments. Indeed, the upsurge of the labor movement since the late 1980s was also crucial in the fragmentation of Turkish politics throughout the 1990s. Nevertheless, one could argue that...
the social contradictions of neoliberalization found their sharpest expression in financial crises, accompanied by the fragmentation of Turkey’s political party system (Önder, 1998; Taymaza & Voyvoda, 2012).

A well-known reason for the detrimental effects of financialization on structural CCs is that the expanding financial sector does not provide as much employment as other sectors in the real economy, especially as compared to the industrial sector (Luce, 2014). Regarding economic crises, moreover, another downside of financialization is that increasing economic adversities tend to intensify competition in the job market and squeeze unionization, as a result of which structural CCs are undermined unless organizational CCs exhibit exceptional resistance. In this respect, it is relevant to note that the 1994 crisis led to a 40% decrease in real wages (Turan, 2011). Similarly, in the aftermath of the 2001 crisis, real wages in 2002 regressed almost to the 1998 levels and kept their downward trend until 2007 (Bağımsız Sosyal Bilimciler, 2015). In turn, unemployment rates climbed by over 25% between 2001 and 2002 (TurkStat, 2016). It is worthwhile to mention that unemployment levels could never reach the pre-2001 crisis levels. In 2000, unemployment was only 6.5%, whereas it reached 9.2% in 2014 (World-Bank, 2016).

Privatization has been no less influential in the transformation of WCCs in Turkey as well. In view of the uneven development of neoliberalism, one could discern two distinct phases of privatization in Turkey’s neoliberal restructuring (Öniş, 2011). The 1980–2001 phase was marked by a slow pace of privatization with a limited scope, whereas the recent phase that started after the 2001 economic crisis accelerated this privatization process. In fact, the legal environment for the privatization programme was built in 1984, but Turkey did not experience any major privatization initiative until 1988 (Öniş, 1991).

Both national and foreign capital seems to have greatly benefited from privatizations in the AKP era. In 2006, 55% of Türk Telekom’s shares were sold to Saudi Oger Telecoms for $6.55 milliard. Similarly, 51% of the shares of TÜPRAŞ (Turkey’s only oil refiner) were acquired by Turkish Koç-Shell in 2005. 46.12% of the shares of ERDEMİR (Turkey’s largest steel producer) were sold to Turkish OYAK for $2.77 milliard in 2006, whereas 51% of the shares of PETKİM (Turkey’s leading petrochemical company) were acquired by the Socar-Turcas-Injaz alliance (Azerbaijan-Turkey-Saudi Arabia) for $2.4 milliard in 2008 (Angun & Bedirhanoğlu, 2013). Koç Holding’s case as the largest representative of Turkey’s monopoly capitalism clearly illustrates how capitalists benefited from these privatizations. Following TÜPRAŞ’s sale, Koç Holding’s operating profits increased from almost $954 million in 2005 to $1.451 milliard in 2006. In the same period, Koç Holding’s net sales revenue rose from over $18 milliard to $34 milliard (Koç Holding, 2007). Similarly, pro-AKP capitalists also derived significant benefits from privatizations. In the 2000s, Cengiz Holding and Çalış Group were the beneficiaries of the privatization of ETİ Aluminyum (aluminum producer) and Yeşilirmak Elektrik Dağıtım AŞ (electricity distributor), two of the largest-scale privatizations of the AKP era (Angun & Bedirhanoğlu, 2013). Overall, the annual revenue generated through privatization in the AKP years hit a record amount of almost $12.5 milliard in 2013 (TCMB, 2016). The revenue generated from privatization amounted to only $4.6 milliard between 1986 and 1999. The total privatization revenue between 2005 and 2013 amounted to $46.8 milliard (Savaş, Suzüük, Koç, & Koç, 2014, p. 382).

It is imperative not to understate the negative effects of privatization on structural WCCs. Significant wage reductions in consequence of the privatization of public firms were widely reported. Wage reductions reached as high as 61% in Ankara, Balıkesir, Izmir, Denizli, Niğde and Söke cement factories in 1996. The reduction of employment in privatized firms is another major consequence of privatization. For example, according to the 2010 figures, employment in Orus, Asil Çelik, Havas, Izkenderun Demir Çelik, Kardemir, Söke, Ordu Soya, Patlas, and POAŞ (Petrol Ofisi A., Oil Office Inc.) decreased from 2341 to 261, 796 to 491, 2256 to 1697, 8222 to 7767, 5417 to 3919, 1359 to 514, 181 to 108, 1102 to 471, and 3822 to 1029, respectively (Pektaş, Ş, 2014, pp. 260–261). Wage reductions undermined structural WCCs insofar as they intensified intra-class competition in the job market. In turn, employment cuts helped to liquidate militant
unionists and other workers who had experience in union organizing. As far as the effects of privatization on organizational WCCs are concerned, it is worthwhile to refer to the contraction of employment and eradication of unions in 10 privatized enterprises where Türkiye Petrol, Kimya, Lastik İşçileri Sendikası (Petroleum, Chemical & Rubber Workers Union of Turkey, or Petrol-İş) was previously organized. The first year following the privatization of these ten enterprises saw the reduction of employment from 11,513 workers to 7,039 workers, which points to a reduction of almost 39%. Consequently, Petrol-İş was completely eradicated from six of these enterprises (Petrol-İş, 2016).

Therefore, privatized firms underwent massive de-unionization. Eventually, the combined effect of trade liberalization, financialization, and privatization seems to be strongly reflected in massive de-unionization in the first decade of the 2000s, which is calculated based on the number of workers covered by collective labor agreements. Under the impact of the 2001 crisis, the number of unionized workers declined from 775,478 in 2001 to 255,059 in 2002. In 2009, this number was recorded as 504,796 (Koç, 2010b, p. 446). A similar picture is found in the number of days lost to strikes. In the 1980s and 1990s, this number was measured as 8,503,438 and 14,053,751, respectively. It is striking to observe that the period 2000–2015—which recorded a total of 3,877,208 days lost to strikes—did not even draw near the 1980s’ levels, when the working-class movement was severely paralyzed in the military coup environment (Çalışma-Genel-Müdürlüğü, 2015).

In sum, the precarization of labor in the context of successive financial crises and mass privatizations has incapacitated the working class. Regarding the weakening of WCCs under neoliberalism as a prevailing trend, it is finally relevant to point to the strong correlation between decreasing real wages and the expansion of precarious labor under trade liberalization, financialization, and privatization. The 1980s saw considerable real wage declines in the private and public sector (Koç, 2010b). Conversely, substantial real wage increases following the 1989 Spring Actions and other instances of labor mobilization (Koç, 2010b) reveal the importance of increasing organizational CCs. As a side note, finally, the upward trend of real wages was interrupted following the 1994 economic crisis. This is particularly important in terms of the harmful effects of neoliberalization and financial crises on structural WCCs. The declining number of unionized workers in the 1994 crisis is particularly striking, which fell from 1,098,549 in 1993 to 227,990 in 1994 (Koç, 2010b, p. 346, numbers derived from the number of workers covered by collective labor agreements).

Flexibilization of labor markets, neoliberal social policies, and class capacities

One should acknowledge the fact that flexibilization and neoliberal social policies date back from as early as the 1980s (Çelik, 2015b). First of all, the 1980 military coup constrained the organizational capacities of the working class by banning all trade unions except for TÜRK-İş and HAK-İş, and repressing the most militant sections of labor leaders (Akkaya, 2004; Meder & ŞAhin, 2008). These measures cleared the way for the neoliberalization of the social security system and the adoption of the 1982 Constitution without significant social resistance. Neoliberal reforms in the social security system were initiated in March 1981, with considerable increases in the financial burden of beneficiaries, higher premiums, and constrained benefits (Meder & ŞAhin, 2008).

Indeed, the AKP’s majoritarian rule—which replaced the fragmented political structure of the 1990s—provided the necessary political legitimacy and social stability for the acceleration of neoliberalization. When it comes to the neoliberalization of labor, the Labor Act Number 4857 was inaugurated in 2003, and it reversed the pro-labor regulation of employment relations of the import-substitution era by providing a legal framework for the expansion of flexible, atypical, and precarious employment relationships such as sub-contracting and on-call working. This was followed by the adoption of the ‘Private Employment Agencies Regulations’ in 2004, which broke the state monopoly on employment agencies (Çelik, 2015b). In turn, the so-called Omnibus Act of 2011 (Torba Yasa, or the Bag Bill in direct translation from Turkish) extended the definition of flexible labor to homeworking and teleworking with inadequate job security,
imposed internship obligations for enterprises, provided enterprises with state funded opportunities for hiring precarious labor in certain conditions, and extended the probationary period from two to four months, among other things (Evrensel, 2011). Aside from anti-labor acts, the AKP government’s strategy to flexibilize the labor market is clearly reflected in the National Employment Strategy for 2014–2023, which was adopted in 2012. This document presents the flexibilization of the labor market as the ultimate solution for ensuring Turkey’s adaptation to the so-called contemporary capitalism, overcoming the problem of chronic unemployment and preserving the Turkish economy’s competitiveness (Çelik, 2015b). Another labor-related development in 2016 was the inauguration of the so-called ‘Slavery Act’, which allowed employers to rent workers for a maximum of eight months and no more than two contract renewals, with no right to severance allowance, annual leave, unionization, social security, and retirement (Birgün, 2016).

In such an anti-labor legal environment, flexibilization has become a prevalent norm in economic sectors where sub-contracting practices are heavily promoted. These sectors comprise construction, public health, cleaning, food and agriculture, mining, municipal workers, and shipbuilding (Çelik, 2015b; Savaş, Süzük, Koç, & Koç, 2013). Relatedly, the number of subcontracted workers soared from nearly 400,000 workers in 2002 to over 1.6 million workers in 2011 (Savaş et al., 2013). In a similar vein, the number of those who work without social security was measured as high as 31.8% in January 2016 (Turk Stat, 2016b). In terms of structural CCs, it is thus becoming more difficult to reach potential union members in such a flexibilized market. According to the latest data, the number workers who benefit from collective agreements decreased from 1,098,549 in 1993 to 825,000 in 2013 (Çelik, 2015c; Koç, 2010b; p. 346).

Concerning organizational CCs, the prevailing forms of union organizing may also serve as a hampering mechanism that prevents the adaptation of labor movements to the new conditions of capitalism such as sub-contracting (Yücesan-Özdemir, 2014). The legal framework that regulates Turkey’s labor organizing imposes a two-fold threshold system at the sectorial and workplace level, which articulates the uneven development of neoliberalism and its peculiar implications for CCs. In Turkey’s case, conformance with the threshold is arbitrarily assessed by the Ministry of Labor, because it tends to support pro-government unions and thus trigger years-long lawsuits for competency disputes. In this environment, ‘the employer uses the lawsuit process as an opportunity for de-unionization and either dismisses the employees being unionized or forces them to resign from the unions’ (Çelik, 2015b, p. 627).

Parallel to these labor regulations with pro-government implications is the strengthening of conservative unionism, not only through the current threshold system, but also the workplace pressure to join conservative unions, especially in the public sector. There are three leading union confederations in Turkey, namely TÜRK-İŞ, DISK, and HAK-İŞ. The two main public servants’ unions are the KESK and the pro-AKP Memur Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Public Servants’ Unions, or MEMUR-SEN). Therefore, not only did the conservative HAK-İŞ and MEMUR-SEN witness record increases in their membership base under the AKP governments, but also center-right unions such as TÜRK-İŞ started to oscillate between co-optation by pro-government forces and working-class advocacy. MEMUR-SEN and HAK-İŞ witnessed a record increase in their membership base, with 2183.2% and 44.2% in the period 2002–2015, respectively. However, TÜRK-İŞ, DISK and KESK contracted by 54.2%, 61%, and 16% despite the increasing number of public workers and unionized public workers in the period 2002–2015, from 1,357,326 to 2,354,314, and 650,770 to 1,679,028, respectively (Çalışma-Genel-Müdürlüğü, 2016; Çelik, 2016b; Devlet-Personel-Başkanlığı, 2017; Milliyet Daily News, 2008).

It is possible to argue that the AKP government takes a carrot and stick approach to colonizing unionism. On one hand, all available resources are mobilized to acquire the control of trade unions by promoting clientelistic practices and co-opting union organizers. On the other hand, incompliant unions are subjected to political repression. A case in point is the AKP’s strike bans, which occurred 13 times in the period 2002–2017 (Evrensel, 2017).
The uneven development of neoliberalism and its peculiar implications for CCs are also reflected in the area of social policies. In this area, working-class grievances caused by this anti-labor environment are smoothened thanks to the AKP’s Islamic and charity-led social assistance network to the detriment of the organizational capacities of the working class. Certainly, workers’ involvement in charity networks contribute to the consolidation of clientelistic relationships with the state and habits of Islamic allegiance. All of this eventually ends up discouraging class-based mobilization. For this reason, the AKP government heavily relies on the mobilization of its civil society base, grassroots party organizations and local government agencies for expanding its neoliberal social assistance network. This network is adorned with an Islamic claim to conservative family values, community spirit, and religious solidarity. Indeed, one could also argue that global economic stability that lasted from 2002 to 2009 provided additional stimulus for the acceleration of social assistance networks in a supportive economic environment (Çelik, 2015b; Pamuk, Ş, 2015; Yücesan-Özdemir, 2014).

The AKP’s social assistance system goes back to the foundation of the General Directorate of Social Cooperation and Solidarity in 2004, which was promoted to the ministry status with the creation of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies (MFSP) in 2011. The available data suggest that social assistance transfers climbed from 1.3 milliard Turkish liras in 2004 to 4.85 milliard in 2015. In 2015, over 3 million households benefited from social assistance, whereas regular and temporary assistance was distributed to 2,318,042 and 1,924,649 families, respectively. Regular assistance includes conditional assistance in education, health, maternity, domestic care, widowhood, and orphaned children of military families. Temporary assistance involves social aid for food, fuel, housing, health, education, employment, maternity, disability, and clothing. Parallel with the expanding scope of social assistance, it is important to note that the MFSP’s employment—including bureaucrats, employees, doctors, teachers, and other social workers—went up from 11,628 cadres in 2011 to 16,069 in 2015 (Köse & Bahçe, 2010; p. 506; MFSP, 2016).

In line with strongly clientelistic principles, this Ministry started to distribute social assistance through not only the channels of district governorates, municipalities and neighborhood representatives, but also pro-government and conservative foundations (e.g. Deniz Feneri, İlyilikder, Kimse Yok Mu?, Cansuyu, and Ensar) whose number exceeded 1000 in 2015 (Kutlu, 2015, pp. 150–151). Of particular note is that one single foundation’s beneficiaries can even go up to as high as 2.5 million people (Kutlu, 2015, p. 250). Material assistance through conservative foundations involves the distribution of food, coal for heating, clothing, and household goods, alongside professional training courses and other social projects (Kutlu, 2015). Social assistance is also provided through direct cash transfers that are managed through the Conditional Education and Health Assistance Scheme. Changes in the amount of coal distribution are exemplary of the scope of charity-driven social assistance networks. Coal distribution increased from nearly 650,000 tons in 2003 to over 2.2 million tons in 2014 (Kutlu, 2015, pp. 158, 166).

In the final analysis, it is widely acknowledged that the AKP’s charity-driven Islamic social assistance network fosters a deeper sense of gratitude to party leaders and religious devotion on the part of beneficiaries. The constant fear of losing access to social assistance instigates a stronger popular support to the AKP regime (Kutlu, 2015). A serious implication of the AKP’s social assistance system for CCs is that the conditionality of social assistance tied to unemployment and low income encourages some people to keep working in the informal sector or consent with the employer’s desire to rely on informal employment in order to conceal their household income (Kutlu, 2015). Moreover, it is also noted that social assistance is often distributed based on ethnic and sectarian bias so as to mostly exclude Kurdish and Alawite populations (Kutlu, 2015), which potentially reproduces the division of the working class along ethnic and religious lines.

In brief, the crisis of import substitutionalism and the adoption of a neoliberal model of development triggered a new wave in the combined development of structural WCCs. These developments precarized labor and paralyzed union organizing, mainly through trade liberalization, financialization, privatization, and labor flexibilization. As for the uneven development of structural WCCs, these capacities were also hampered by the rise of export-oriented small-to-
medium scale businesses in peripheral cities associated with conservatism. Yet, the era of coalition-
governments (1991–2002) facilitated by financial crises led to political instability, which provided a
relatively favorable environment for increasing working-class militancy until the AKP’s ascendancy.
Regarding the uneven development of organizational WCCs, finally, the neoliberal state’s efforts to
suppress unionism and replace it with Islamic charity-driven social policy networks culminated in
the dislocation of the large segments of the labor movement and the rise of conservative unionism
in the 2000s. The state’s close regulation of union membership had a tremendous effect on
constraining organizational capacities. Indeed, the neoliberal character of social policies and
labor regulations that contributed to the precarization of labor can be seen as part of the
combined development of organizational CCs.

**Conclusion**

We maintain that the combined character of structural CCs makes itself felt in the crippling effects
of Turkey’s alignment with US imperialism at the expense of progressive or leftward unionism
during the Cold War. Particularly, the combined character of Turkey’s organizational WCCs was
reflected in TÜRK-IŞ’s political alignment with US imperialism in the Cold War, which significantly
regressed organizational capacities. Regarding the impact of unevenness on organizational CCs, it
is important to specify that the 1960 military coup supported a pro-labor environment thanks to
which trade unionism could flourish in the 1960s until the right-wing military coup in 1971.

Turkey’s transition to neoliberalism can be briefly explained based on the crisis of import-sub-
stitutionalist development strategies in the 1970s. In turn, the development of CCs under neoliberal-
ism can be assessed with respect to the effects of trade liberalization, financialization, and privatization
since the 1980s. Trade liberalization is important in terms of the adverse effects of export-led and
foreign-currency-generating sectors on CCs. While privatization was crucial in widespread de-union-
ization and precarization of labor, excessive financial liberalization led to successive economic crises
and political instability at the expense of WCCs. Moreover, the AKP’s anti-labor regulations consoli-
dated flexible forms of labor, conservatization of trade unions, and Islamo-conservative aid networks.
These developments helped to pacify large segments of the Turkish working class.

The combined development of structural WCCs thus finds its expression in Turkey’s adoption of
neoliberalism and its implications for labor including trade liberalization, financialization, and
privatization alongside de-unionization and precarization of labor. Unevenness makes itself felt
most strongly as to the Anatolian expansion of capitalism and slower pace of neoliberalism until
2002. The combined development of organizational CCs pertains to the AKP’s neoliberal labor
regulations and social policies, whereas their uneven counterpart is embodied in the AKP’s Islamic
and charity-led social assistance networks alongside the rise of conservative unionism and con-
servative businessmen’s involvement in civil society.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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References


