The changing structure of the working class in Turkey

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Introduction

The aim of this study is to define the material base, quantitative and qualitative profile and changing structure of the working class in Turkey. This study is intended to give an account of the working class in Turkey, and draw some conclusions related to changes in the structure of it in recent years.

The bourgeois ideology has been in an effort to make the working class invisible by suggesting a "classless society" for decades. Since the 1980s by identifying the working class with blue collar male workers for example it is suggested that working class no longer exists, working class has been transformed into the middle class or the working class has disappeared.

Since then the concepts such as; "citizenship" based on different identities, lifestyle and social status, "poverty and wealth" based on different income levels, "entrepreneurship" based on market power, "elites" and "popular classes" based on having ruling power are frequently used in social analysis. So exploitation has been seen as a product of individual or group behaviour not as the product of structural contradictions of capitalism. So the ownership of the means production has been eliminated from the analyses. But class analysis of people living in a certain society should be done according to their role in production not according to their income levels or consumption patterns.

Making an objective analysis of working class and understanding the conditions that gave rise to "class in itself" in Turkey, are crucial to combine ongoing class struggle with the organizational forms compatible with this objective position of class.

The Scope of the Working Class

What people think about themselves cannot identify the class positions of people, but their material positions do. Class positions are determined by material relations of people in production. Classes

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4 Organizing Expert, United Metal Workers' Union/DISK and Member of coordination committee of DISK-AR.
5 See Tanyılmaz (2007: 115-117) for concrete examples of each approach.
6 For example see Buğra (2003).
are defined according to people’s position in the social production and reproduction (Boratav, 1995; Callinicos and Harman, 2006; Savran, 2008; Tanyilmaz, 2007). One’s place in the social production is determined basically by the ownership of the means of production. The power of the working class in Marxism comes from the objective position in the production process and its potential to act collectively is based on this objective position not on poverty or exclusion.

### Table 1: The Scope of the Working Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Working Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persons engaged in economic activity during the reference period for at least one hour as a regular employee, casual employee, employer, self employed or unpaid family worker.</td>
<td>+ Regular or casual employee... Waged, salaried and casual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Legislators, senior officials and managers...Waged but not in working class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unemployed</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unemployed comprises all persons 15 years of age and over who were not employed (neither worked for profit, payment in kind or family gain at any job even for one hour, who have no job attachment) during the reference period who have used at least one channels for seeking a job during the last three months and were available to start work within two weeks.</td>
<td>+Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persons not in labour force</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Not seeking a job but available to start a job</td>
<td>+Discouraged workers and other not seeking a job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Discouraged workers + others</td>
<td>+Seasonal worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Not seeking a job and not available to start</td>
<td>+Busy doing household work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Seasonal workers</td>
<td>+Retired persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Busy doing household work</td>
<td>+Disabled, old or ill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Retired persons</td>
<td>+Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Migrant Workers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Profile of the Working Class in Turkey**

As of the year 2013 in Turkey, total number of employees was 25.5 million. The share of waged, salaried and casual labor, forming the basis of the working class, in total employment has been constantly increasing in Turkey. It increased to 64.1% in 2013 from 27.6% in 1970. The number of waged workers, so dispossession and proletarianization are accelerated. Nearly 6 out of 10 people waged, salaried or casual employees in Turkey. In the past 20 years while the rate of unpaid family workers (most of them women) decreased by 51.3 percent, the rate of waged salaried and casual workers increased by 40 percent. The share of self-employment is in a declining trend (while it was 24.7% in 2000, it declined to 18.7% in 2013).

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7 Data used here is from TURKSTAT (Turkish Statistical Institution) Labour Force Statistics Database.
8 For woman labour in Turkey see Toksöz (2009), Yaman-Öztürk (2010), Kurtulmuş (2013).
Table 2: Labour force status by non-institutional population (Thousand) (15 + age)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Non-institutional population 15 years old and over</th>
<th>Labour Force</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Under Employment</th>
<th>Time-related under Employment</th>
<th>Inadequate employment</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Population not in labour force</th>
<th>Labour force participation rate (%)</th>
<th>Unemployment rate %</th>
<th>Non-農業 unemployment rate %</th>
<th>Employment rate %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>55.608</td>
<td>28.271</td>
<td>25.524</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>2.747</td>
<td>27.337</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>54.724</td>
<td>27.339</td>
<td>24.821</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>2.518</td>
<td>27.385</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>45.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>53.593</td>
<td>26.725</td>
<td>24.110</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>2.615</td>
<td>26.867</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>52.541</td>
<td>25.641</td>
<td>22.594</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>3.046</td>
<td>26.901</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>48.358</td>
<td>22.454</td>
<td>20.066</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.388</td>
<td>25.904</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>46.211</td>
<td>23.078</td>
<td>21.581</td>
<td>1591</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.497</td>
<td>23.133</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TURKSTAT, Labour Force Statistics Database

According to the broad definition there are 23 million 462 people in working class A

+16.353 million in waged and casual +2.747 million unemployed + 2.129 million "are not considered as unemployed" (those who lost hope of finding a job, others do not seek a job but ready to work and seasonal workers do not seek a job and not ready to work) + 3.217 million unpaid family workers − 1.900 million Legislators, senior officials and managers = 22.546

Extended labour force = Official labor force + are not considered unemployed

30.400 = 28.271 +2.129

So we can say that 74% of the extended labor force is working-class.
Table 4: Working Class A (Thousand) (15 + age)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Waged (A)</th>
<th>Salaried and casual (A)</th>
<th>Unemployment (B)</th>
<th>Discouraged (C)</th>
<th>Other (D)</th>
<th>Seasonal (E)</th>
<th>Legislators, senior officials and managers (G)</th>
<th>Working Class A (A+B+C+D+E+F-G)</th>
<th>Labour Force</th>
<th>Extended labour force</th>
<th>Working Class A/Extended Labour Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>16353</td>
<td>2747</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>1441</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3217</td>
<td>1900*</td>
<td>22546</td>
<td>28271</td>
<td>30400</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>15619</td>
<td>2518</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>1303</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3268</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>21551</td>
<td>27339</td>
<td>29396</td>
<td>73.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>14876</td>
<td>2615</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>1267</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3303</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>20829</td>
<td>26725</td>
<td>28734</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>13762</td>
<td>3046</td>
<td>716</td>
<td>1297</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3083</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>20086</td>
<td>25641</td>
<td>27719</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>11436</td>
<td>2388</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>1077</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>2841</td>
<td>2070</td>
<td>16549</td>
<td>22454</td>
<td>24408</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>10488</td>
<td>1497</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>599</td>
<td>4660</td>
<td>1731</td>
<td>15975</td>
<td>23078</td>
<td>24139</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TURKSTAT, Labour Force Statistics Database and authors’ calculations

According to broad definition there are 40 million people in working class B in Turkey

**Working class B** = Working class A + “housewives”, students, pensioners and the disabled (to the extent of the proportion of working class A in Extended Labour Force)

These calculations show us that, broadly defined working class “B” is 71.8% of the working age population as of 2013. We can easily say that working class, consists the majority of the total population in Turkey.

Table 5: Working Class B (Thousand) (15 + age)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Working class (A)</th>
<th>Unpaid Housework (1)</th>
<th>Student (2)</th>
<th>Retired (3)</th>
<th>Disabled, old or ill (4)</th>
<th>1+2+3+4</th>
<th>(1+2+3+4)*</th>
<th>Working Class A %</th>
<th>Active population</th>
<th>Working class B/Active population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>20086</td>
<td>11.914</td>
<td>4.122</td>
<td>3.577</td>
<td>3.394</td>
<td>23.007</td>
<td>16.672</td>
<td>36.758</td>
<td>52.541</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TURKSTAT, Labour Force Statistics Database and authors’ calculations
Sectoral Distribution of Employment

- The share of agriculture tends to decrease... 23,6% in 2013
- The share of the industry tends to increase slightly... 26,4% in 2013
- Employment tends to rise continuously in the services sector.... 50% in 2013
- 77.5% of those employed in the services sector are waged and casual
- Among the sub-branches of the services sector the highest increase in employment is in “Financial institutions, insurance, real estate, business and institutions, business services” sub-sector...
- Self-employed and unpaid family workers in the agricultural sector and, the wage earners in industry and services sectors constitute the majority of employment.

Informal employment

According to data from Turkstat Labour Force Statistics Database;
- 3 million 400 thousand of 15.6 million paid and casual workers and almost all 2 million 997 thousand unpaid family workers are devoid of any social security and employed unregistered.
- One of every 5 paid and almost entire unpaid family workers is employed unregistered.
- Unregistered work in women’s employment in all areas is at a much higher rate.

According to data from Social Security Institution the year 2012;
- The share of informal employment in establishments employing less than 50 people is 49%...
- The share of informal employment in establishments employing more than 50 people is 4%....
- The share of informal employment in establishments employing less than 10 people is 61%...

Public employment trends (2003-2012)

The number of employees in the public sector has increased in absolute terms but the public sector share in total employment has unchanged.

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10 Sosyal Güvenlik Kurumu (SGK) (Social Security Institution), (http://www.sgk.gov.tr/wps/portal/tr/sigortalilik/kayitdisi_istihdam/)
Types of employment in public sector are civil servants, judges and prosecutors, academicians in public universities, contracted workers, public workers and temporary workers. The number of contracted workers has increased by 4% and temporary workers increased by 31%\(^\text{11}\).

Labour and Social Security Minister Faruk Celik reported that:

> "When you look at the public, compared to 10 years ago, the number of workers decreased to 200 thousand from 500 thousand. You need to understand this correctly. Does this mean that the state is shrinking? Or does it mean public sector started to use contracted workers heavily? When you look underneath you find ‘subcontracting’. It means the need hasn’t decreased but the form of how this need is met has changed." (Hurriyet Newspaper, September 26, 2013)

According to data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 586 thousand in public and 420 thousand in private sector, total 1 million people were working as sub-contracted at the end of 2012\(^\text{12}\). During the period between July 2009 and December 2012 the number of contracted workers in public sector has increased by 335%.

As a result of privatization of public sector enterprises, employment in these enterprises decreased drastically from 653 thousand to 135 thousand. The only form of employment increased during this period has been contracted staff. Due to the widespread use of subcontracted and temporary workers in public sector, working conditions have got worse and occupational health and security measures ignored which puts the life of workers under threat. The result is; at least 301 workers were killed in Soma...

**In conclusion**

1. The number of working class in Turkey, both in level and ratio has increased. The number of people who sell (waged, regular and casual), who try to sell (the unemployed), and who sold in the past (retired workers and civil servants) their labour power has increased. So the **waged labor - capital relation** has come into the center of social relations more than ever before in Turkey.

\(^\text{11}\) Devlet Personel Başkanlığı (http://www.dpb.gov.tr/tr-tr)
2. Women’s participation in labor force is still low but the proportion of regular and casual waged women in employment is increasing.

3. The weight of waged employees in Services, especially in trade (mainly retail chains), is increasing compared to industrial workers. Today, white-collar and service sector workers make up the majority of the working class and are becoming increasingly important.

4. Although there is not a significant increase in the number of industrial workers, labor productivity of workers employed in industry has increased considerably. So industrial workers still play a key role as a social power.

5. Although the majority of workers are employed in small-scale establishments, the manufacturing industry and workers employed in large enterprises remain critical in Turkey’s capitalist economy as a result of the centralization and concentration of capital.

6. Waged and casual workers have been growing in number especially in Western and Southeastern Anatolia in recent years. But the traditional industrial cities especially Istanbul, Izmir are preserving their weights.

7. There is a convergence in working conditions of female-male, migrant-domestic, full-time-part-time, secure-precarious workers; workers and civil servants; blue-collars and white-collars. This convergence carries unifying and integrative tendency but also bears opposite tendency which leads to more divisions and competition within the working class and adversely affects the working-class unity and solidarity.

8. In particular, a significant increase in unemployment and in informal employment cause to intensification of precarious working conditions in Turkey.

9. We can expect, transformations in the structure of the working class of Turkey in the coming period will carry similar trends; especially reserve army of labor in metropolitan areas and the urban poor will increase quantitatively and the tendency of proletarianization in the new industrial cities in the periphery is going to become stronger.

References
ISMMMO (İstanbul Serbest Muhasebeci Mali Müşavirler Odası) (2012) *Yabancı Kaçak İşçiler ve Türkiye’ye Göç Hareketi raporu*