

A sociological analysis of labour unions and labour union elites in Developing countries: Turkish labour union elites **

Ali Arslan*

ABSTRACT

This study will concern itself with Turkish labour unions and social portrait of contemporary Turkish labour union elites: firstly, brief information on theoretical and historical background of labour (trade) unions is given, then major findings about contemporary Turkish labour union elites are presented.

Multiple methodological approaches were used to define the research subject, to outline the research universe. Extensive field researches comprise the major data sources of the study. Very detailed interviews were conducted with members of Turkish labour union elites. An original data set were created from the data which was gathered in the field. In addition to this, several subsidiary techniques were used to achieve the goals of the research, including documentary and historical data techniques. Also, secondary data was obtained from the studies of other researchers which was rather useful.

Key Words: *Power, Elite, Labour Union, Labour Union Elites, Turkish Labour Union Elites,*

** This article reproduced from D. Ali ARSLAN's PhD Thesis (Arslan, 1999).

* Assistant Professor D. Ali ARSLAN, Sosyologist and Political Scientist. Lecturer at Mersin University in TURKEY. aliarslan@mersin.edu.tr

1. Introduction

Trade unions can be identified as the organisations of employees that are struggling to improve the social and economic situation of their members. They are democratic institutions that operate on behalf of their members. Collective bargaining, creating better working conditions and gaining more advanced social rights for their members can be listed among their major activities and the reasons for their existence.

The first emergence of workers' organisations occurred in seventeenth century Britain. The first labour unions were craft unions. The development of trade unions is parallel to the development of capitalist society. Industrialisation stimulated the rise of the first industrial trade unions. Hence, industrial unions of unskilled or semiskilled workers followed the craft unions.

Trade unions are the most important organisations of employees in contemporary capitalist societies. Unionism functions to communicate the collective and effective voice of workers to the employers. As Freeman and Medoff (1984: 5) put it, "unions are an important voice for some of our society's weakest and most vulnerable groups, as well as for their own members". Also, Freeman and Medoff conclude that "unions are associated with greater efficiency in most settings, reduce overall earnings inequality, and contribute to, rather than detract from, economic and political freedom".

The unions engage in for collective bargaining and sign contracts with employer or government. The contract may cover many employers in an industry nation-wide, may be with a specific employer or may cover only one factory or group of plants. As Mark Blau points out (Greenwald, D., 1994: 629), more than one union may have contracts with one employer. Sometimes, if the collective bargaining process does not end successfully, unions may decide to strike. On the other side, some employers may declare a lock out in certain circumstances.

There are three major kinds of union which are the craft union, the industrial union and the general union. The craft union is a union composed of members who share a common set of skills whether they work in the same industries or different industries. It is the oldest type of union organisation. The industrial union is a union composed of all the workers in a plant or industry, whatever their level of skills. The general union is the largest kind of union. It is composed of workers who have neither a common skill nor work in a single industry (Stiegeler, 1976: 31).

There are two contradictory views about trade unions: negative views of trade unions and positive views of trade unions. The negative view (the monopoly face) criticise unionism and argue that trade unions are dispensable, unproductive and unnecessary. From this point of view, unions are socially unresponsive, elitist, non-democratic and crime-riddled institutions. Whereas the positive view (the collective voice/ institutional response face) sees the unions as the unavoidable and beneficial component of capitalist societies. This view rejects the suppositions of the view of "the monopoly face". According to the

positive view, better management and good skills, improved morale and higher productivity are correlated with unionism.

It seems that, there is some truth to both sides of the debate, nevertheless, research findings mostly support the positive side of the coin. Of course some negative aspects of some trade unions in some sectors might be observed, however these negative appearances cannot be generalised to all trade unions. Freeman and Medoff (1984: 78) clearly shows that the idea that unionism increases wage inequality is not reflected in reality. Unionism increases wage inequality between organised and unorganised blue collar workers, but it decreases the inequality between the white collar and blue collar labours. As Clegg argues (McCarthy, 1985: 84), the primary task of a trade union is to protect its members from the actions of employers. However, there is the idea introduced by Robert Michels (1962) that the unions may not represent the interests of their members in all situations because of their oligarchic and hierarchical structures.

Unionism represents the labour side of a special kind of power relations. The power of capital forms the other side of the coin. Trade unions symbolise the united power of labour. They play a very substantial role against the capitalist: they aim to modify the power of the capitalist in an industrial society. There is a positive relation between membership density and union power. High membership density increases the power of the union, nevertheless, this is not the only factor which affects the endowment of the trade union. As mentioned by Booth (1995: 74), union power is also affected by some other factors, such as the elasticity of labour demand, managerial resistance and the structure of collective bargaining.

Trade union elites represent their members interests. Most of the trade unions provide some social benefits to their members, such as benefits of old age, sickness, unemployment. Like the other elite groups, trade union elites can be accepted as a highly powerful elite group which can influence the decision making process to obtain some benefits for their members. However, the type and extent of their influence may vary in terms of time, subject, conditions and societies. Whereas some trade unions have indirect effects on politics, as stated in the Modern Economics Dictionary (McGraw-Hill, 1965: 522) sometimes they directly take part in the governmental decision making process.

Most trade unions have intimate ties with political parties. The political colour of the unions differs from one country to another, such as from communist unions in Italy to socialist oriented unions of the UK and Scandinavia, and the conservative Catholic unions of Belgium. Even, The American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) provides another kind of unionism: they call themselves neutral and support different parties at different times.

As explained by Freeman and Medoff (1984: 192-3), trade unions may effect politics in several ways:

- By propogandising among their members to vote in particular ways
-

- By spending union funds to register votes
- By contributing to the expenses of pro-union candidates
- By allocating union resources, including staff time and volunteers to political campaigns.

Methodology

According to Mills (1956: 363), it is not too difficult to understand the middle classes, but understanding the very top of modern society needs discovery and description. This is a very difficult task, because they are usually inaccessible, busy and secretive. It is always difficult to get information about their backgrounds, their characters and their activities. In spite of all these difficulties, the purpose of this paper is to find the answers to these and similar questions:

How do elites manipulate and exercise power? How does the circulation of elites (either horizontal or vertical mobility) occur? What kind of relationships exist among the elites in their own group and also between elite groups? Who are they, do they come from another planet? What kind of values influence their behaviour? What do they think and how do they behave? How did they become so powerful? How do they see themselves? Do the elites possess group consciousness and coherence and practice conspiracy within their own elite group, and also is there homogeneity between elite groups? What is their life style and world-view? What kind of relationship exists between elites and non-elites?.

Elite studies (Etzioni, 1993) stress obviously elites, their existence, their positions and reputations, their careers, their roles in society. This particular kind of studies have great importance within sociological and political studies, because elites are the main agents of social change. They manage the direction, the speed and the form of social change, because they hold institutional power and influence social decisions on a macro level, and they can affect the political outcomes within society.

This study was designed not only as quantitative research, but also as a qualitative national elite survey. Respondents are holders of elite positions in trade and labour unions. Therefore, the study has a comparative character, like the German National Elite Study 1981 (carried out by Ursula Hoffmann-Lange), studies of national elites in the United States (Barton: 1985) and Australia (Higley et al.: 1979). Moreover, the study has an international comparative nature, because many questions asked in the previously mentioned national elite studies, were also used in this study.

The multi-method approach was used in this study (Moyser & Wagstaffe, 1987). Both the "reputational" and "positional" approaches were used for identifying the elites: the positional approach was used to identify the individuals who have a potential for power

because of their status and social position within society; the reputational approach was used to select those respondents who have a reputation for power and influence.

The positional approach was used to define the elite universe. Firstly, a list of elite sectors was set up. Following this, the most important organisations within each sector were specified. Then, the top positions within each organisation were determined. Finally, the current incumbents of these positions were considered as members of the elite. Furthermore, the reputational approach was also used as a supplementary approach to select the effective members of some elite groups, such as mass-media elites and political elites following the simple random sampling techniques.

No single source of data or data collecting techniques was chosen. The study was operationalised using the multiple methods of observation, documentary analysis and focused interviews. The majority of the data which is used in this study was obtained from field research and documentary sources. Observations helped the researcher to get more detailed and reliable information concerning elites and the existence and operation of elite organisations.

In addition to field research using questionnaires and semi-structured interview schedules, written and printed materials were used for data collecting. The data archives, publications and bulletins of the related private and state institutions

As Hertz and Imber argue (1995: 78), semi-structured interviews have a very special importance for elite studies. Following this tradition, these particular types of interview techniques were chosen. The questionnaire will be used for semi-structured interviews to get more detailed and specific data from the field. In addition to completely structured questions, open-ended (unstructured) questions have also been used. In general, semi-structured questionnaires have been widely used in elite studies and have great popularity amongst elite researchers. This particular kind of interview schedule is more suitable and valuable than the fully structured or unstructured questionnaire for realising the major goals of this research. It will be especially helpful in gaining more detailed information about the respondents' social backgrounds, attitudes, beliefs, values, behaviour and roles.

A total of 84 questions have been used in the interview schedule. All the questions have special purposes to realise. Whilst some of them aim to measure single peculiarities, others have multiple targets. The research has both a qualitative and quantitative character. Nevertheless, it is especially a descriptive kind of quantitative research. The data was analysed using the SPSS program (Fielding, 1994).

More specifically, labour union elites were selected because this elite group was relatively less studied. Labour unions have enormous potential power. If they wished they could mobilise millions of people in a short time. This kind of action has already taken place several times in the recent history of Turkey. Therefore, governing political elites are forced to take into account the views and the desires of the leaders of the most influential union confederations, such as TURK-IS, DISK, HAK-IS.

Table 1
The Sampling Group

SECTORS	ORGANISATIONS	POSITIONS	RESPONDENT NUMBER
<p>Labour Union Elites</p> <p>(The members of the Most powerful Confederations of Turkish Labour and White Collar Workers Unions)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DISK (The Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Union) ▪ HAK-IS (The Confederation of Islamist Labour Unions-Confederation of Rights of Turkish Workers' Trade Unions). ▪ TURK-IS (The Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions) ▪ KESK (The Confederation of Public Sector Workers' Unions) ▪ KAMUSEN (The Confederation of Civil Servants' Unions) ▪ EGITIM-SEN (The Confederation of Teachers' Unions) 	<p>- General Presidents</p> <p>- Chief Executives</p>	35

For the reasons given above, 6 major and most powerful confederations of the Turkish labour and white collar unions (**Table 1**) were included in the sampling group. Their historical-financial-physical powers, membership density, reputation and their previous militant actions were taken into account in the selection procedure.

Three of them were the most powerful labour union confederations of Turkey: TURK-IS (The Confederation of Turkish Trade unions), DISK (The Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Union) and HAK-IS (The Confederation of Islamist Labour Unions-Confederation of Rights of Turkish Workers' Trade Unions). The other three confederations were mostly white collar workers' unions: KESK (The Confederation of Public Sector Workers' Unions), KAMUSEN (The Confederation of Civil Servants' Unions) and EGITIM-SEN (The Confederation of Teachers' Unions). The presidents and chief executives of these organisations were classified as the Turkish labour union elites.

Development of labour unions & unions of trade and industry in contemporary Turkish politics

The Turkish economy was traditionally an agriculture one, so there were a small number of industrial workers in the early years of the Republic. The number of wage earners was too low to establish a labour union. Nevertheless, the young Republic inherited a

tradition from the Ottoman Empire (Lewis, 1961: 469). The first workers' union was founded in 1871, that was the Pro-Workers Union (Amele Perver Cemiyeti) and was formed by workers in the food, textile and paper industries. Two other important labour organisations were established in 1908. They were the Workers' Mutual Association and the union of the workers of Tophane Factories.

The first strike occurred in the early years of the twentieth century to gain higher wages and better working conditions. The year 1908 saw a large number of strikes, but the Balkan Wars and World War I inhibited their development. The extraordinary conditions of two wars necessitated solidarity and co-operation rather than class struggles.

Efforts to establish labour unions in the Republican period began in 1922. The leaders of workers from twenty different industries came together to try to set-up a western-style union in Istanbul. The formation of "meet and establish associations", which was granted in the Constitution of 1924 gave rise to workers' associations and they began to spread throughout the country.

The first labour federation was formed in 1947. But, the first national federation -TURK-IS- was set-up in July 1952. TURK-IS (The Confederation of Turkish Labour Unions) is one of the three largest and most influential labour confederations in Turkey. More than 30 Turkish labour unions are affiliated to TURK-IS. According to statistics in 1992, the total number of their members was about 1,723,998. TURK-IS is a member of the Free World Trade Unions Confederation and also the Union of Free World Asian Trade Unions Advisory Committee. Its administration has a board of directors with 38 members and a Board of Executives with 5 members. They outline their major aims as "fighting poverty and ignorance, protecting democracy, attaining a high level of the national democratic, secular and social state structure based on Atatürk's principles and the Constitution".

The second most important Turkish labour union confederation is DISK which is The Turkish Revolutionary Workers' Unions Confederation. It was formed on February 13, 1967. However, the activities of the confederation were suspended by the military junta on September 12, 1980. They re-acquired their legal rights by a decision of the Military Court of Appeal on July 16, 1991. DISK is a member of the European Unions Confederation and has about 30 affiliated member unions from various fields of industry.

The third important Turkish labour union confederation is HAK-IS (The Confederation of Islamist Labour Unions-Confederation of Rights of Turkish Workers' Trade Unions). It was established on October 22, 1976. The confederation describes its major objectives as "to respect national and moral values, to abide by the rule of social order and rights, to create peace and harmony between workers and employers, to upgrade the living conditions of workers and enable them to fully utilise human rights and freedoms and to create a prosperous and developed Turkey based on national unity".

One can observe the plurality of labour unions with different political colours in contemporary Turkey. The Turkish trade unions have close connections with all the political parties. Whereas the liberal democratic parties have close links with TURK-IS, social dem-

ocratic parties have close ties with DISK. Also, Islamist parties have friendly ties with HAK-IS which is the confederation of Islamic trade unions. The following part of this paper will examine the social anatomy of Turkish labour union elites.

Social portrait of contemporary Turkish labour union elites

A full picture of Turkish labour union elites in terms of important social, political and demographic indicators will be given in this section. As mentioned in the “Methodology” chapter, the leaders of unions of labour unions (in other words the presidents and chief executives), are identified as labour union elites. Firstly, the chapter will concentrate on the demographic peculiarities of Turkish labour union elites. Then, the educational background and family structure will be examined. Also, the social origins and other social characteristics of Turkish labour union elites will be investigated.

Demographic peculiarities of Turkish labour union elites

As in previous chapters, age and gender are accepted as the major demographic indicators. Firstly, the findings on the age characteristics of Turkish labour union elites will be analysed. Then, their gender peculiarities will be discussed (Arslan, 1999: 147-169).

Age

As can be seen in **Table 2**, there is enormous predominance of middle aged people among Turkish labour union elites. Almost 87 percent of them are middle aged or late middle aged. Advanced aged people also have been non-represented among Turkish labour union leaders: there is nobody who are higher than 57 years old among them.

Table 2

Age Characteristics of Turkish Labour Union Elites

Age	Count	%
Lowest thr. 39	4	13
40-44	6	20
45-49	12	40
50-54	6	20
55-59	2	7

Although the proportion of young labour union elites is higher than any other elite groups, young people are still under-represented in this elite group. Although the youth have been the largest age group in the entire Turkish population, their proportion in leadership positions of Turkish labour unions confederations is only 13 percent. Nevertheless,

the mean age of Turkish labour union elites is younger than the mean age of labour union elites of most other countries. The mean age of Turkish labour union elites is almost 46. Whereas the minimum age of Turkish labour union leaders is 30, their maximum age is 57.

Gender

As in other Turkish elite groups, it is possible to observe large male domination among Turkish labour union elites. A large majority of those people who occupy the highest and the most important positions in Turkish labour unions confederations are male. Only one of the most influential positions in white collar unions confederations has been held by a woman.

Table 3

Gender Characteristics of Turkish Labour Union Elites

	Gender	
	Count	%
Female	1	3
Male	29	97

This male domination, among Turkish labour union elites can be observed in **Table 3**. As can be clearly seen, more than 97 percent of Turkish labour union elites are males, whereas the proportion of females is only 3 percent.

Educational characteristics of Turkish labour union elites

The leaders of confederations of Turkish labour unions have a highly elitist character according to their educational levels, in comparison with the general educational level of the entire Turkish population. Nevertheless, the quantity and quality of their education is lower than any other Turkish elite groups. This situation is related to their occupational backgrounds. An important proportion of labour union elites have come from blue collar and semi-blue collar occupations that do not necessitate a high level and quality of education.

Table 4 shows that, approximately 67 percent of Turkish labour union elites have a university degree. The remaining 33.3 percent proportion of them graduated from high schools and middle (junior high) schools. It can be concluded from these findings that, although their occupation does not necessitate a high level of education, university educated members of labour unions have a much greater chance than those people who does not have university education to obtain a high position in the power structure of their organisations. A university degree privileges people in the competition for obtaining elite positions.

Table 4

Education Levels of Turkish Labour Union Elites, Their Spouses and Their Fathers

	Educational Level (%)				
	University	High School	J. Hig. School	Primary School	No Sc. Education
Respondent	66.7	26.7	6.7	-	-
Respondent' Father	13.3	6.7	3.3	63.3	13.3
Respondent's Spouses	46.7	33.3	10	10	-

As can also be seen in **Table 4**, a large majority of the leaders of Turkish labour union confederations come from lower educated families. Only 13 percent of their fathers have a university degree. On the other hand, more than 63 percent of fathers have experienced the maximum primary school education.

Another significant finding in this context relates to the spouses of Turkish labour union leaders. A large proportion of the spouses of Turkish labour union elites possess a university degree: approximately 47 percent of the spouses have a university degree. When the proportion of university educated female members of the Turkish population (nearly 7 percent) is taken into account, this finding becomes more meaningful. Briefly, the proportion of university educated spouses of Turkish labour union elites is 7 times higher than ordinary Turkish women.

Table 5

School Types of Turkish Labour Union Elites and Their Children

	School Types (%)			
	Mostly State Normal	Mostly State Prestigious	Mostly Private College	Not Applicable
Respondents	80	16.7	3.3	-
Respondents' Children	23.3	36.7	30	10

The quality of educational experienced by Turkish labour union elites is lower than other Turkish elites. As demonstrated from **Table 5**, a large majority of them have graduated from normal state schools. The proportion of those labour union leaders who graduated from prestigious private schools is very small. Only one of them was educated in a private college, whereas the large majority of them were educated in normal state schools. Also, the number of those labour union elites who have been educated in presti-

gious state schools is extremely small in comparison with the members of other Turkish elite groups. Nevertheless, a substantial majority of them preferred to send their own children to prestigious schools (both privately owned or state owned). Almost 67 percent of the children of Turkish labour union elites have had been educated in both privately owned or state owned prestigious schools.

It is possible to observe a high level of plurality in terms of subjects studied among contemporary Turkish labour union elites. **Table 6** clearly shows that, the most popular education type are the social sciences. Also, a large proportion of Turkish labour union elites have graduated from the departments of Management, Engineering and Education of major Turkish universities. It seems that there is a slight association between education types of Turkish labour union elites and education types of their fathers. **Table 6** shows that the most popular education types in the times of Turkish labour union elites' fathers were law, medicine, engineering and education. Although this situation has begun to change in the 1990s, these four education types have been traditionally popular in Turkish society.

Table 6

Education Types of Turkish Labour Union Elites and Their Fathers'

Education Types	Respondents (%)	Respondents' Fathers (%)
Social Sciences	16.7	-
Management	10	-
Technical Sciences	10	3.3
Economy	6.7	-
Education	10	3.3
Mathematics	6.7	-
Philology	6.7	-
Medical Sciences	-	3.3
Law	-	3.3
Not Applicable	33.3	86.7

On the other hand, the most influential university in the recruitment process for Turkish labour organisation is Ankara University. As presented in **Table 7**, Ankara University graduates comprise the largest proportion among labour union elites. Gazi University, Selcuk University and Istanbul University graduates follow them. The popularity of Ankara University can be explained by the "halo affect" of SBF-Mulkiye (Faculty of Political Sciences). As mentioned earlier, this faculty of Ankara University (SBF-Mulkiye) is one of the most prestigious traditional elite schools in Turkey. Also, the number of Selcuk University and Gazi University graduates in this particular elite group is worthy of mention.

Table 7

School Names of Turkish Labour Union Elites

School Names	Proportion (%)
Ankara University	20
Istanbul University	6.7
Istanbul Technical University	3.3
Gazi University	13.3
METU-ODTU	3.3
Selcuk University	10
Others	10
Not Applicable	33.3

Table 8

Foreign Language Abilities and Foreign Language Types of Contemporary Turkish Labour Union Leaders

Foreign Language Ability		Foreign Language Types	
Number of For. Lan.	Proportion (%)	Name of Foreign Lang.	Proportion (%)
No	63.3	Not Applicable	63.3
One	20	English	16.7
Two	16.7	German	3.3
Three and More	-	English-French	10
		English-German	3.3
		Arabic-European	3.3
Total	100	Total	100

In accordance with the relatively low level and quality of their education, the proportion of elite respondents who have knowledge of at least one foreign language is very small. **Table 8** shows that, only 37 percent of labour union elites have foreign language ability. Although the large majority of Turkish labour union elites do not know any foreign language, the proportion of those who can understand and speak two foreign languages is quite large. As in other elite groups the most popular foreign language is English, followed by German and French.

Occupational backgrounds of Turkish labour union elites

The largest proportion of Turkish labour union elites began to work as labour unionists in the early years of their occupational careers. As can be seen in Table 9, more than

33 percent of them, after a short work experience in a blue collar job, became active members of labour unions. On the other hand, an important proportion of the leaders of white collar unions came from public administration and education.

A large majority of Turkish labour union elites comes from blue collar families. Most of their fathers had unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. As demonstrated in **Table 9**, almost 80 percent of their fathers are farmers, workers, tradesmen, artisans or merchants. The occupational status of their spouses' fathers is very similar to that of their own fathers'. Also, an important proportion of labour union elites prefer to marry children of soldiers, police and other professionals.

Table 9

Occupational Background of Turkish Labour Union Leaders, Their Fathers' and Their Spouses' Fathers' Occupations and Favourite Occupations in Their Adolescence

Occupations	Proportion (%)			
	Respondent	Respondents' Fathers	Respondents' Spou.' Fathers	Favourite Oc. of Respondents
Tradesman-Artisan-Merchant	-	40	30	-
Public Administration	20	10	-	20
Pilot	-	-	-	3.3
Farmer	-	23.3	16.7	-
Worker	10	16.7	16.7	-
Civil Servant	-	3.3	-	-
Law	-	-	-	13.3
Soldier-Police	-	-	6.7	-
Fine Arts-Caricat.	-	-	-	6.7
Education-Science	10	-	-	20
Trade Unionist	33.3	-	-	-
Engineer-Archit.	-	-	-	20
Other Professions	23.3	6.7	30	-
Manager (Priv.)	-	-	-	10
Journalism	3.3	-	-	6.7
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 9 also shows that, the most popular occupations among the leaders of Turkish labour unions confederations in their adolescence were public administration, engineering and education. Law, managing director in the private sector, journalism and fine arts were also popular.

Table 10

Occupational Backgrounds of Mothers, Spouses and Spouses' Mothers of Turkish Labour Union Elites

Occupations	Proportion (%)		
	Respondents' Mothers	Respondents' Spouses	Respondents' Spouses' Mothers
Housewife	100	56.7	90
Teacher	-	23.3	10
Lawyer	-	3.3	-
Journalist	-	3.3	-
Social Scientist	-	3.3	-
Public Administrator	-	6.7	-
Bank Clerk	-	3.3	-
Total	100	100	100

Parental families of Turkish labour union elites and their spouses follow a traditional pattern in terms of their mothers' occupations. Almost all Turkish labour union leaders' mothers and 90 percent of their spouses' mothers do not work in a paid job but are housewives. On the other hand, the situation is slightly different among the spouses. As can be seen in **Table 10**, although the majority of their spouses are housewives, the sectors of public administration and education are highly popular among the spouses of Turkish labour union elites.

Table 11

Occupational Satisfaction and Occupational Satisfaction Rate Among Turkish Labour Union Leaders

<i>Occupational Satisfaction</i>	Proportion (%)	Occupational Satisfaction Rate	Proportion (%)
Prefer Present Job	93.3	Very Satisfied	50
Do not Prefer Present Job	6.7	Satisfied	50
Total	100	Total	100

The leaders of Turkish labour unions confederations are very satisfied with their actual social and occupational positions. **Table 11** shows that, almost a hundred percent of Turkish labour union elites are satisfied with their actual occupational positions. In addition to that 50 percent of them are very satisfied. Also, 93 percent of them reported that if they had another chance in life they preferred their actual positions.

Table 12

Occupational Tenures and Future Occupational Plans of Turkish Labour Union Leaders

Future Occupational Plans	Proportion (%)	Occupational Tenure	Proportion (%)
Continue to Same Job	73.3	One-Five Years	33.3
University Lectureship	3.3	Six-Ten Years	23.3
Attendant to Politics	16.7	Eleven-Fifteen Years	10
Higher Public Administr.	6.7	Sixteen and Over	33.3
Total	100	Total	100

Turkish labour union elites have very long occupational tenures. As can be seen in **Table 12**, more than 43 percent of them have been working as labour unionists for more than 10 years. In addition 33,3 percent of them have had job tenure for over 15 years. Nevertheless, the proportion of newcomers is very large among Turkish labour union elites in comparison with other Turkish elite groups: over 33 percent of Turkish labour union leaders have occupied their actual positions for less than five years.

As the natural result of a high degree of job satisfaction, a large majority of Turkish labour union elites are planning to continue to do the same job in the future. It is very meaningful that a large proportion of Turkish labour union elites are planning to be active in politics: almost 17 percent of them reported that their ultimate occupational aim was to become active in politics. Higher public administration and university lecturing are also among the future occupational plans of the leaders of Turkish labour union confederations.

Findings on social origins and actual social status of Turkish labour union elites

The overwhelming majority of Turkish labour union elites have risen from the lower stratum of Turkish society to their actual social positions. **Table 13** shows that a large majority of the leaders of Turkish labour unions come from the lower or middle social classes. Only 17 percent of their fathers possessed an upper middle class status. Although the majority of Turkish labour union elites come from petite bourgeoisie and small bourgeois families, none of them come from bourgeois families. On the other hand, the social class origins of their spouses are higher than the labour union elites' social backgrounds. A large majority of the spouses have a middle or lower-middle class background.

Table 13

Social Class Status of Turkish Labour Union Leaders, Their Fathers and Their Spouses' Fathers

Social Class Status	Proportion (%)		
	Respondents	Respondents' Fathers	Respondents' Spouses' Fathers
Lower Class	-	16.7	3.3
Lower Middle Class	-	26.7	10
Middle Class	23.3	40	66.7
Upper Middle Class	60	16.7	20
Upper Class	16.7	-	-
Total	100	100	100

It appears that there is a low association between the social origins and actual social class positions of Turkish labour union elites. In comparison with their fathers' social class position, they have a very high social class position. The large majority of the leaders of Turkish labour unions confederations have upper-middle or upper class status. Only 23 percent of them argue that they are the members of middle social class. When, their social class origins (their parental class positions) are taken in to account, it can be concluded that Turkish elites had engaged in inter-class marriages.

Family backgrounds and family structure of Turkish labour union elites

As discussed earlier, Turkish society ascribes a high value to family and marriage. As a natural result of socio-cultural factors, almost 100 percent of Turkish labour union leaders are married. On the other hand, a large majority of Turkish labour union elites have small families. **Table 14** shows that almost 80 percent of Turkish labour union leaders have a maximum of two children.

Table 14

Family Size of Turkish Labour Union Leaders and Their Fathers

Number Of Children	Proportion (%)	
	Respondents	Respondents' Fathers
One Child	30	3.3
Two Children	50	6.7
Three Children	16.7	16.7
Four Children	3.3	20
Five Children	-	16.7
Six Children	-	10
Seven and More	-	26.6
Total	100	100

The findings, which have been presented in **Table 14**, provide a clear idea of the rapid social development in Turkey. Almost 90 percent of Turkish labour union elites' fathers have more than two children, and some of them have large families. Whereas the fathers of Turkish labour union leaders had an average number of 4.87 children, the average number of children of Turkish labour union elites is only 1.93. Also, whereas the fathers had up to 9 children, the sons have only a maximum of 4.

Table 15

Marriage Ages of Turkish Labour Union Leaders and Their Spouses

Marriage Age	Proportion (%)	
	Respondents	Respondents' Spouses
Lowest through 20	6.7	26.7
21-23	23.3	40
24-26	23.3	13.3
27-29	23.3	10
30 and over	23.3	10
Total	100	100

The most common age for marriage among the leaders of Turkish labour union confederations is 24 and over. As can be seen in **Table 15**, only 30 percent of the leaders married when they were 23 years old or younger. As in wider Turkish society, Turkish labour union elites prefer to marry younger women. Almost 67 percent of their spouses married at the age of 23 or younger.

Table 16

Average Marriage Ages of Turkish Labour Union Leaders and Their Spouses

Variable	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Spouse's Marriage Age	23.07	16	34
Marriage Age	26.53	20	40

The average age of marriage of Turkish labour union elites is higher than that of their spouses. **Table 16** shows that whereas their average age of marriage was 27, their spouses' average age of marriage was 23. Also, whereas the minimum age of marriage of Turkish labour union elites was 20, the minimum marriage age of their spouses was 16. The situation for the maximum age of marriage is more or less the same. These circumstances can be explained by the of social and cultural value system. There is the common unwritten law in Turkish society that women have to be younger than their husbands when they get married.

Conclusion

Trade unions are the most important organisations of employees in contemporary capitalist societies. Unionism functions to communicate the collective and effective voice of workers to the employers. As Freeman and Medoff (1984: 5) put it, "unions are an important voice for some of our society's weakest and most vulnerable groups, as well as for their own members". Also, Freeman and Medoff conclude that "unions are associated with greater efficiency in most settings, reduce overall earnings inequality, and contribute to, rather than detract from, economic and political freedom".

The first emergence of workers' organisations occurred in seventeenth century Britain. The first labour unions were craft unions. The development of trade unions is parallel to the development of capitalist society. Industrialisation stimulated the rise of the first industrial trade unions. Hence, industrial unions of unskilled or semiskilled workers followed the craft unions.

Like the capitalist class, the working class which is an inseparable part of the capitalist system was a relatively new phenomenon in Turkey. In the nineteenth century, the number of workers was not more than a couple of thousand. The first workers organisations began to appear in Turkey in the late 19th century. These included the *Åmeleperver Cemiyeti* (Society in Favour of Workmen-founded in 1871), *Osmanli Amele Cemiyeti* (Ottoman Labour Society-founded in 1895). As Lewis (1961: 469) shows, trade unions were permitted, except in public enterprises. Nevertheless, a genuine labour organisation, in its contemporary meaning -as the representative of the working class- emerged as the result of efforts by Kemalist governments in the twentieth century. The number of labour unions increased from 73 in 1940, to 239 in 1952. As noted by Lewis (1961: 471), an all-Turkish federation of unions was formed in Izmir in 1952 with an estimated membership of 150,000 workers.

Trade union elites represent their members interests. Most of the trade unions provide some social benefits to their members, such as benefits of old age, sickness, unemployment. Like the other elite groups, trade union elites can be accepted as a highly powerful elite group which can influence the decision making process to obtain some benefits for their members. However, the type and extent of their influence may vary in terms of time, subject, conditions and societies. Whereas some trade unions have indirect effects on politics, sometimes they directly take part in the governmental decision making process.

Turkish business associations and the trade unions have become highly influential in the social and political life in Turkey throughout the 1990s. They have in particular begun to play a substantial role in Turkish politics. Important progress has occurred in elite solidarity and elite co-operation among the different Turkish elite groups during the same period. The solidarity and co-operation of Turkish trade unions and Turkish business associations is worth mentioning. When the origins, ideological ties and conflicting objectives of these elite groups are remembered, the meaning and the significance of this solidarity can be understood more clearly.

The five largest confederations (unions of the unions) of the Turkish business associations and trade unions set up a solidarity and co-operation front under the name of the "pentad civil block" (5'LI SIVIL BLOK). Whereas two of these organisations were the confederations of the unions of employees, the other three represented the associations of Turkish employers.

TURK-IS (politically right) and DISK (the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Union-politically left) are the two most powerful confederations of Turkish trade unions. The other three which are on the employer side are TISK, TESK and TOBB: TOBB is the union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey. TISK is the Confederation of Employers' Associations of Turkey. TESK is the Confederation of Traders and Artisans Associations of Turkey.

The civil block issued a declaration against the activities of the Refahyol coalition government at the end of 1996. They warned the government about the worsening social and economic situation in Turkey and demanded that it find urgent solutions to the major social, political and economic problems confronting society. The elites of these confederations worked in co-operation with other Turkish elite groups to stop the provocative actions and decisions of the "Refahyol" (Welfare-way) coalition relating to the future of society. Eventually, heavy pressure from Turkish elites and other social organisations brought about the end of the "Refahyol" coalition.

This block and other elite groups also played a very substantial role in creating a new coalition government. All the major elite groups and other social groups supporting democracy worked in co-operation to establish a new coalition government- the solution government or "problem-solver". This represented a coalition of the three major Turkish political parties. The two partners in the new coalition government were from the political right: the Motherland Party (ANAP-Anavatan Partisi) and the Democratic Turkey Party (DTP-Demokratik Turkiye Partisi). The third partner was the left wing Democratic Leftist Party (DSP-Demokratik Sol Parti).

The solidarity and co-operation between confederations of the Turkish business associations and confederations of the Turkish trade unions has a very significant meaning, because, these organisations are historically and theoretically rivals and opponents. Nevertheless, the increasing social and economic problems and rapidly growing Islamist movement pushed them in to co-operation to preserve Turkish democracy.

Their solidarity and co-operation has continued. They have been monitoring the activities of the new coalition government very closely too, to check whether they are carrying out their promises. As a result of this, they have found the performance of the new government to be insufficient. In February 1998, they announced that if the government did not improve its performance and make some urgent reforms to tackle the major social problems of the country, they would not continue to support the new government. Instead the civil block would support alternative political parties which promised to make the necessary reforms after the next elections.

It seems that a very new but very positive and useful tradition has begun in Turkey. Both trade unions and business unions and associations have become much more sensitive toward the problems of society than ever before. This recent case illustrates how the unions, either business or trade, have become more powerful and more effective in the decision making process in modern Turkey. Also, it demonstrates that the autonomy of elites and elite co-operation have importance for the maintenance of the democratic polity.

REFERENCES

- Arslan, A. (1999), *Who Rules Turkey: The Turkish Power Elite and the Roles, Functions and Social Backgrounds of Turkish Elites*, Guildford: University of Surrey, Department of Sociology (PhD Thesis).
- Booth, A. L. (1995), *The Economics of Trade Unions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Etzioni, H. (1993), *The Elite Connection*, London: Polity Press.
- Fielding, J. (1994), *SPSS for Windows V. 6.0*, Guildford: University of Surrey.
- Freeman, R. B. & Medoff, J. L. (1984) *What Do Unions Do*, New York: Basic Books Inc.
- Greenwold, D. (1994) *The McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Economics*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hertz, Rosanna & Imber, Jonathan B. (1995), *Studying Elites Using Qualitative Methods*, London: Sage.
- Higley, J. & et al. (1979), *Elites in Australia*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Lewis, B. (1961), *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London: Oxford UP.
- Mccarthy, W. E. J. (1985), *Trade Unions*, Middlesex: Penguin.
- McGrow-Hill, (1965), *Modern Economics Dictionary*, London: McGraw-Hill.
- Michels, R. (1962), *Political Parties: A Sociological Studies of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, NewYork: Collier-MacMillan.
- Mills, C.W. (1956), *The Power Elite*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Moyser, G. & Wagstaffe, M. (1987), *Research Methods for Elite Studies*, London: Allen & Unwin.
- Stigeler, S. E., (1976), *Dictionary of Economics and Business*, Aldershot: Gower.