Rethinking the informal labour market in Turkey: A possible politics for the trade unions

The struggle for trade union organization is thus a struggle for the hearts and minds of people; in other words, a battle of ideas. (Hyman, 1999:5)

Introduction

Given that the large share of Turkey’s workforce remains at present outside the world of full-time, stable and protected employment, there is renewed interest in informal labour markets. In other words, discussing about, writing on and/or researching informal labour markets is rather fashionable in Turkey. The literature on the informal sector exists in two main lines. The first line of studies deals with the growing problem of the informal sector, using the term ‘poverty’; these consider poverty as sui generis and consider the informal sector as the cause and consequence of poverty. The second line is grounded on labour-friendly researches conducted by trade unionists or people standing by the world of labour. Both of these two lines exist in the form of ‘journalistic’ enquiries providing a rather descriptive and empirical analysis of the informal sector. They do tell us about what is happening but they certainly miss why it is happening; facts never speak of themselves and, hence, the real question is the why. This article therefore aims to examine why there is a growing informal labour market in Turkey, what its main characteristics are and what can be done – or to put it differently, what are the possible politics for the labour front.

Turkey entered the millennium with erratic rates of real growth and investment, a worsened income distribution and social equity, a paralysed fiscal apparatus and an ever-growing informal labour market. Informal activities in cities provide the livelihood of a large part of the population. In order to answer the question of why there is a growing informal labour market, we will define in the first part the capitalist labour market and examine Turkey’s informal labour market in the context of the ongoing class struggle in both the central and peripheral countries. In the second part, we will examine the main characteristics of the informal labour market with an emphasis on the role of female and child labour. In the final part, we focus on what can be done and try to outline a potential agenda for the trade unions.

Why is there an informal labour market?

The debate on the size and significance of the informal economy and its linkages with both poverty and growth, in the peripheral countries in general and in Turkey in particular, argues that informal labour markets would disappear once these countries achieved sufficient levels of economic growth or modern industrial development by
implementing the right mix of economic policies and resources.\(^1\) On the contrary, the growing informal labour market in Turkey can only be explained by understanding that ‘the informal economy is a permanent, albeit subordinate and dependent, feature of capitalist accumulation in the global age of capitalism’. Hence, in order to answer the question of why there is an informal labour market in Turkey, we need to examine the constraints and challenges offered by global capitalism.

There is a certain correlation between the dynamics of accumulation on a world scale and the policies ‘discovered’ by those responsible for implementing policy in peripheral countries. A set of peripheral countries are ‘advised’ to take similar steps by the Bretton Woods institutions that had gradually acquired new functions after the great shift realised by the worldwide implementation of monetarist policies at the beginning of the 1980s (Lipietz, 1987).\(^2\) The neo-liberalisation of the regulations of peripheral countries included changes in the given peripheral country’s conventions on welfare provisions, decent pay, working conditions and trade unions to eradicate obstacles to competitiveness, profitability and growth in the market place. In other words, not only the tendency towards falling profits but also the demise of the Soviet system compelled capitalist states to leave the search for class compromises behind and to attack the entitlements of the working class which had been acquired with the existence of the welfare state (Scharpf, 1996; Streeck, 1999).

Globalisation of the economy has contributed to the informalisation of the workforce in many industries and countries (Standing, 1999). This is because global competition tends to erode employment relationships by encouraging formal firms to hire workers on low wages with few benefits or to sub-contract (or outsource) the production of goods and services, while global integration reduces the competitiveness of many informal firms or self-employed producers vis-à-vis imported goods (in domestic markets) and vis-à-vis larger, more formal firms (in export markets) (Rodrik, 1997).

Hence, labour markets have been restructured towards the wisdoms of ‘flexibility and deregulation’ by informalising the market through growing sub-contracting activities, part-time work and by minimising the privileges of the formal sector through restricting wages and rights. The positions of trade unions have become weakened. Due to the intensive growth in the productivity of labour, the number of workers employed in the circulation of total capital, i.e. the service sector, has impressively increased.

By the 1980s, production in central countries was being increasingly reorganised into small-scale, decentralised and more flexible economic units. Mass production

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1. Not only international organisations such as the International Labour Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, but also policy-makers, activists and researchers concerned with labour issues in the government, trade unions and/or employee associations share the same view. See the reports and discussion papers on the informal sector and/or informal labour markets prepared by the ILO and the World Bank; see also the publications of the Turkish Confederation of Employer Associations (TİSK) and the reports of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

2. This not to say that peripheral countries have become the victims of an omnipotent capitalism represented by the central economies.
was giving way to ‘flexible specialization’ or, in some contexts, reverting to sweat-shop production (Piore and Sabel, 1984). These new patterns of capitalist development are associated with the informalisation of employment relations – standard jobs being turned into non-standard or atypical jobs with hourly wages but few benefits, or into piece-rate jobs with no benefits – and with sub-contracting the production of goods and services to small-scale informal units and industrial outworkers.

In addition to these coercive requirements of labour markets in central countries, peripheral countries such as Turkey are under even more coercive requirements (Lipietz, 1987). Firstly, the factors of production, most importantly the labour power, of peripheral countries have increasingly become subject to global competition. As a result of this process, external market pressures are implying the Turkish nation state to favour the needs of multinational capital over the interests of Turkey’s labour force.

Secondly, the relations of production were re-regulated, not in a single country but in certain industrial regions formed in reciprocal relations between the capital of the centre and the labour force of the periphery. Immigrant workers supply their labour to the centre and export substitution requires labour-intensive production in periphery countries. These countries are satisfactorily rich in the number of coercive tools with which to rule labour under the command of the growing structural and behavioural power of an internationally mobile capital. Subsequent to the implementation of export-oriented industrialisation strategies in the early 1980s, small-scale firms have become increasingly important to Turkey’s economy. In an era of flexible production and sub-contracting, small-scale firms have been able to enter the global market place by cheaply producing and exporting labour-intensive commodities such as textiles, food, garments and leather goods. These small-scale firms depend on unpaid and under-paid labour, encouraged by large-scale manufacturing factories seeking cheap sub-contracting linkages to take over the intensive-intensive parts of industrial production (Dedeoğlu, 2004).

Thirdly, these conditions are worsened under the disability of the Turkish state to realise the structural transformation to take the necessary steps for the implementation of export substitution policies (Yalman, 2002). Within this context, and from 1998 onwards, IMF-oriented economic policies have played a significant role over the labour market ‘discoveries’ of policy-makers in search of credits. Given that financial or capital account liberalisation had already been achieved, the pro-market rhetoric became inadequate for the initiation of the necessary regulations.

The main axis of IMF policies, especially after February 2001, aimed to reach stabilisation by way of rebuilding market confidence. According to this strategy, Turkey is to undertake the necessary reforms designed by the IMF and will be subjected to the direct control of the same institution on a regular basis. In practice, this strategy is legitimised under the banner of the strategy of competitive disinflation aimed to create price advantages over the main transnational competitors. This policy assumes

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3 The Standby Agreement enacted in January 2002 clearly states ‘In support of these objectives, we will … (c)ontinue … to strengthen our debt position and rebuild market confidence.’
the de-indexation of wages, a decrease in employer costs and strict control of budgetary expenditures. It was hoped that competitive gains would cause a correction of market shares and, thereby, have a favourable effect on unemployment. Yet, given that the import substitution-oriented industrial structure of Turkey remains untouched, such an attempt has a destiny of failure.

So far, we have tried to provide a short summary of the forces, structures and mechanisms behind the scene of Turkish capitalism in relation with world capitalism in order to give some clues for the explanation of de-regulation, de-unionisation, the growth of the service sector, the lack of social security and the minimisation of the rights and privileges of the formal sector in Turkey’s labour market in the post-1980s.

**What are the main features of the informal labour market?**

In spite of the heterogeneity of the informal labour market and its multiple dimensions, conceptual and statistical definitions of it are not as clear-cut as one might expect. The informal labour market is highly heterogeneous, covering production units with different features and in a wide range of economic activities, as well as people working or producing under many different types of employment relations and production arrangements. Some important features of the informal labour market are: flexibility in labour supply and demand; low levels of skill, productivity, wages and social security; and a high level of exploitation by the formal sector (Portes et al., 1989).

Given that many studies underline the deep and close relation between migration and the informal sector (Sethuraman, 1984), the case of Turkey provides rich evidence. Turkey is one of the countries with the most rapid urbanisation process in the world: there is a great migration into the cities from rural areas and the urban population is increasing rapidly. The population is concentrated especially in the large provinces and industrial regions. Provinces such as Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Adana, Kocaeli, Bursa, Antalya and Gaziantep, as industrial or trade centres, have dense populations. By 2000, approximately two-thirds of Turkey’s population lived in urban areas, which continue to grow rapidly (see Table 1). The rapid urbanisation created by the population moving from rural areas causes serious problems from the viewpoint of employment. The slow pace of employment creation in the modern sector, most notably in manufacturing, means rapid growth in generally low productivity jobs in the informal sector. There are more non-industrial than industrial jobs in the cities and a majority of families depend on non-industrial, unskilled work for their livelihood, including automotive repair; bus and taxi driving; domestic painting and repairs; maintenance of grounds and buildings; personal services in private homes; operation of small retail shops; street cleaning and maintenance; street vending of products and services; textile piecework in the home; and various transport and haulage jobs. Hence, large numbers of immigrants work in the very extensive informal labour sector in Turkey, which ties them into a structure of problems with illegal residence and unofficial work.
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Table 1 – Population of Turkey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Urban population</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Rural population</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>13 648 270</td>
<td>3 305 879</td>
<td>24.22</td>
<td>10 342 391</td>
<td>75.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>16 158 018</td>
<td>3 802 642</td>
<td>23.53</td>
<td>12 355 376</td>
<td>76.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>17 820 950</td>
<td>4 346 249</td>
<td>24.39</td>
<td>13 474 701</td>
<td>75.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>18 790 174</td>
<td>4 687 102</td>
<td>24.94</td>
<td>14 103 072</td>
<td>75.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>20 947 188</td>
<td>5 244 337</td>
<td>25.04</td>
<td>15 702 851</td>
<td>74.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>24 064 763</td>
<td>6 927 343</td>
<td>28.79</td>
<td>17 137 420</td>
<td>71.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>27 754 820</td>
<td>8 859 731</td>
<td>33.69</td>
<td>18 895 089</td>
<td>68.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>31 391 421</td>
<td>10 805 817</td>
<td>34.42</td>
<td>20 585 604</td>
<td>65.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>35 605 176</td>
<td>13 691 101</td>
<td>38.45</td>
<td>21 914 075</td>
<td>61.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>40 347 719</td>
<td>16 869 068</td>
<td>41.81</td>
<td>23 478 651</td>
<td>58.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>44 736 957</td>
<td>19 645 007</td>
<td>43.91</td>
<td>25 091 950</td>
<td>56.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>50 664 458</td>
<td>26 865 757</td>
<td>53.03</td>
<td>23 798 701</td>
<td>46.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>56 473 035</td>
<td>33 326 351</td>
<td>59.01</td>
<td>23 146 684</td>
<td>40.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>62 865 574</td>
<td>40 882 357</td>
<td>65.00</td>
<td>21 983 217</td>
<td>35.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>67 803 927</td>
<td>44 006 274</td>
<td>64.90</td>
<td>23 797 653</td>
<td>35.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Institute of Statistics, National Census Results.

Another important indicator of the informal sector is the employment size of the enterprise.4 The most striking feature of enterprise structure in Turkey is the strong predominance of small and medium-sized enterprises. Enterprises with five or fewer employers and employees represent almost 65 per cent of the volume of employment (Table 2).

Table 2 – Distribution of employment by enterprise size (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>10+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


4 At an operational level, for example, ILO informal sector surveys in Latin America between 1990 and 1995 define informal sector employment as consisting of all own-account workers (but excluding administrative workers, professionals and technicians) and unpaid family workers, as well as employers and employees working in establishments with less than five or ten people engaged.
Thirdly, low wages in the formal sector, together with the high rate of inflation, forces many workers to look for additional income in the informal sector.\(^5\) The neo-liberal re-structuring of the Turkish state has resulted in an ongoing decline (except for the period between 1989 to 1993\(^6\)) in real wages and agricultural incomes throughout the 1980s, the 1990s (Boratav et al., 2000) and in the first years of the 2000s (Boratav, 2003). Overall real wages declined by 1.3% in 2002; during the same year, incomes in the manufacturing sector turned down by 4.6% while real wages in manufacturing in the public sector declined 2.6% (Yeldan, 2002:178-200). Within the years following 1980, conditions of the reproduction of labour power consistently worsened for the individual worker. The process that started officially with the open economy rhetoric has exhausted most of the capacity of wage earners, including state officials, to be a member of the middle classes. In other words, many employees in the formal sector seek to complement their income through additional, informal activities. Moreover, in order to gain a better income, some workers in the formal sector leave their job and build their own businesses in the informal sector (Selçuk, 2002).

Fourthly, widespread privatisation-led dismissals in the public formal sector lead to a search for jobs in the informal sector. In other words, when public enterprises are downsized, redundant workers who do not find alternative formal jobs have to turn to the informal economy for work because they cannot afford to be openly unemployed. Most post-dismissal jobs lack formal arrangements and social benefits, and imply that, for most workers, the dismissals were a movement from the formal into the informal sector of the economy (Tansel, 1998).

Fifthly, according to Hart (1973), a British economist who coined the phrase the ‘informal sector’, the main component of a formal sector is wage and salary earners whereas the main component of an informal sector is self-employed people (Hart, quoted in Selçuk, 2002:5). Self-employed workers, most of whom are own-account and unpaid family workers, represent nearly half the total labour force and are considered to constitute the major part of the rural and urban informal sector in Turkey. In 2000, for instance, wage and salary earners accounted for around 40 per cent of total employment, while unpaid family workers and the self-employed represented almost 50 per cent (Table 3).

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5 Those responsible for the domestic implementation of the 2001 IMF programme state that they are ‘Putting in place a fiscal framework to increase the public sector primary surplus from the targeted 5.5 per cent of GNP in 2001 to 6.5 per cent of GNP in 2002’ (Standby Agreement of 2002). The 7% growth performance in the first quarter of 2003 is considered by these people to be a success within this framework. Yet, Yeldan (2002) states that, when we analyse the sources of recent growth, the main incentive behind it appears to be the decrease in labour costs. The effect of devaluation on imports appears to be another reason for growth. Thus, growth has nothing to do with the monetarist measures introduced by IMF.

6 Throughout the 1990s, in addition to DISK being permitted to operate again, more than 15% of white-collar workers were organised into trade unions, despite government opposition (Boratav, 2003).
Sixthly, the growing informal sector is deeply related to the growing incidence of unemployment\(^7\) and under-employment\(^8\) in Turkey (Table 4). Yeldan (2003:174) states that, in a national economy in which the cost of debt interest is more than 15% of gross national income, an intended public sector primary surplus target of 6.5 per cent of GNP\(^9\) can only be carried out by significant cutbacks in health, education and public investment. Yet, such policies result in a decline in the productivity of labour power and create a vicious cycle over productivity. Growth under such conditions is known as impoverishing growth in the international literature on commerce (Yeldan, 2003). Thus, the principal aim of the recent IMF programme, which is not only providing political objectives to policy-makers but is also implicitly implying new regulations, is to manage the debt problem of Turkey. Consequently, it is safe to say that, in 2003, the Turkish economy became totally dependent on external financing and lost its ability to grow with its own resources and regulatory institutions without commencing structural change. The reduction of public spending will soon become an obsessive objective with destructive effects.

\(^7\) ‘Unemployed’ comprises individuals who were without employment in the reference period but were available for work, or who were looking for work, and had used at least one of the search channels to seek employment in the past six months. People who have already found a job or established their own business but for some reason have not yet started working and those who could start working within fifteen days are also considered to be unemployed. The ‘unemployment rate’ is the ratio (expressed as a percentage) of unemployed people to the labour force in the relevant age group.

\(^8\) Under-employment relates a) to employed people who work less than 40 hours for economic reasons during the reference period and are able to work more at their present job or are capable of doing a second job (economic factors include work slowdowns for technical or economic reasons; a lack of work; inability to find a full-time job; initiation of the termination, or termination, of employment during the last week); and b) to people who are not in the above group and who want to change their present job or are seeking a second job because of an insufficient salary or because they are not working in their usual occupation.

\(^9\) ‘For 2002, our priority will be to restore financial and macroeconomic stability and to further progress in structural reforms. To this end, we will ensure that our ambitious public sector primary surplus target of 6\(\frac{1}{2}\) percent of GNP will be met. This, together with our active and flexible debt management strategy, should ease government debt rollover. We are also determined to deepen our structural reforms to build on the important results achieved so far.’ (Article 7 of Standby Agreement, 2002)
The process of informalisation has had a negative impact on wages and has covered all areas of productive activity. Import substitution as a hegemonic project disappeared but, as a social reality, remained to be decisive in the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. The new institutionality in work, together with a rejection of the aim of deepening import substitution, lowered the proportion of skilled workers amongst the total workforce. Given that trade unions were weakened significantly, the informal sector was expanding and the pressure of the reserve army on working power intensifying, the limited rigidity paradigm of the 1970s came to lose its meaning. Being an economy in which production is orientated predominantly towards the internal market, the decline of wages had a decisive impact on overall growth. Furthermore, mainly after 1989 as a consequence of trade liberalisation, the limited domestic market became subject to competition. Throughout these years, fragmentation within the ruling class lost its meaning in the face of the rising power of the financial sector and of the politics necessary for the finance of industry. This situation states that the main dynamic of growth after 1994 became the ongoing deterioration of wages and, thus, of the conditions of the reproduction of collective labour power rather than the successful management of the economy by those responsible for the domestic implementation of IMF-designed programmes.

Lastly but not leastly, most workers in the informal economy share one thing in common – the lack of formal recognition and protection. The lack of social security provision for a considerable number of workers is highly evident in Turkey. In 2002, 51.2 per cent of civilian employment were working without any social security (SIS, 2002).

**The unbearable shame of the informal labour market: child labour**

Thousands of children in Turkey are employed mostly in the informal labour market under unhealthy working conditions, without any social security and earning less than minimum wages (SIS, 1999; ILO, 2004). The employment of children negatively affects their physical and mental development and deprives them of opportunities to expand their capacities. Given the recession, the growing social inequalities and the spectacular disasters of globalisation in Turkey, concerning the reasons why children work, 38.4% – the largest number cited – do so to help economically support the family household (SIS, 1999). Even though children are paid less than adults, whatever income they earn is of benefit to poor families.
According to the Household Labour Force Survey, conducted by the State Institute of Statistics jointly with the ILO in October 1999, children in the 6-17 age group constitute 25.4% (16.088m) of the 63.42m non-institutional civil population of Turkey (Table 5). Across Turkey, out of these 16.088m, the rate of those engaged in economic activity is 10.2% (1.635m). Of these children, 61.8% are boys and 38.2% girls. The rate of boys and girls engaged in household work is 26.9% and 73.1% respectively (Table 6).

Table 5 – Non-institutional civil population according to gender and place of residence (Oct 1999) (thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>TURKEY</th>
<th>URBAN</th>
<th>RURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>6-17 years old</td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63 416</td>
<td>16 088</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31 860</td>
<td>8 202</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>31 556</td>
<td>7 885</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIS, 1999 Household Labour Survey Results.

The trend of migration to urban areas, together with the disintegration or non-availability of a familiar social support network, means that the phenomenon of working children is becoming more apparent, particularly as the number of children working in marginal sectors and on the streets in order to help support family income levels is increasing (ILO, 2004).

In Turkey, the majority of both ‘rural’ and ‘rural-originated urban’ families experience child-to-parent form and they regard children as an economic value (Peker, 2004). In rural regions, families utilise children as labour. Most of the families in these rural regions are in want of social security and social insurance, while the problems of old-age parents are also solved within the family structure.
Moreover, child labour is mostly utilised in export-oriented industries. In order to gain a higher share of the world market, Turkey is seeking to compete by minimising the cost of labour. And child labour and poor labour conditions are increasingly related to this phenomenon. For example, even though there are no official figures on the number of children working in the garment and textile sector, the DISK/Textile Workers Union estimates that 180 000 to 200 000 children are employed (FWF, 2003).

Another important condition that facilitates child labour is that, in unregistered and unregulated workplaces, labour practices go unmonitored. Hence, standards often do not meet international labour standards or else they are usually below the standards set by law for registered workplaces. According to the Fair Wear Foundation, in the garment and textile industry:

Existing legislation considers unregistered operations and the employment of unregistered workers as illegal. However, enforcement and inspections are almost totally non-existent; and constant understaffing means inspections and enforcement remain wholly inadequate (FWF, 2003).

**Women working in the informal labour market**

The employment of women in the informal sector in Turkey is also likely to rise. According to the Household Labour Force Survey conducted by the State Institute of Statistics in 2004, women constitute 25% (9.972m) of total employment in Turkey (19.902m). Across Turkey, in non-agricultural activities, the rate of those who work

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**Table 6 – Type of work of children by gender and region (6-17 years old) (thousands) (Oct 1999)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of residence and gender</th>
<th>Total no. of children</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Not working</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Engaged in economic activity</td>
<td>Engaged in domestic chores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey Total</td>
<td>16 088</td>
<td>6 420</td>
<td>4 785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8 202</td>
<td>2 300</td>
<td>1 290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7 885</td>
<td>4 121</td>
<td>3 496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Total</td>
<td>9 577</td>
<td>3 626</td>
<td>3 074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4 926</td>
<td>1 352</td>
<td>937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4 650</td>
<td>2 274</td>
<td>2 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Total</td>
<td>6 512</td>
<td>2 795</td>
<td>1 712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 276</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3 236</td>
<td>1 847</td>
<td>1 359</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SIS, 1999 Child Labour Survey Results
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without registering with any of the social security institutions was around 25 per cent in the 1990s and around 30 per cent in the 2000s (Özșüca, 2003) – a rate which is showing a rising tendency. In non-agricultural sectors, the rate of men working without registering with any of the social security institutions is 29.9 per cent while for women it is 28.9 per cent (Özșüca, 2003).

The increasing employment of women in the informal sector can be put down to various reasons. First of all, with the increase in unemployment, women are tending to lose ground in the formal sectors of the economy. Secondly, given the rapid process of urbanisation, women, because of their low level of skills, cultural conditioning and traditional family responsibilities, stay out of the formal labour market in favour of the informal one. Thirdly, stagnating and falling household incomes due to the poor performance of the economy also leads to the increased entry of women into the informal labour market. Fourthly, export-oriented industries, in the search for cheap labour, favour women’s employment. These factors are leading to the increasing informalisation of the female labour force. This informalisation takes place broadly in one way: work is being pushed out of factories and formal work situations into small workshops (sweatshops), homes and informal situations (Onni, 1999).

Given that work is being pushed into small workshops, small-scale ateliers in the garment and textile industry, for example, are highly dependent upon female labour (Dedeoglu, 2004). Concerns raised in relation to working conditions in the Turkish garment industry include: the possible existence of sex-based discrimination in wage scales; wages below the living wage (especially for unregistered employees); improperly compensated overtime; and sexual harassment and intimidation of women workers (also particularly in unregistered workplaces) (FWF, 2003).

Homeworking or home-based working is on the rise among the female labour force. When women who have been laid-off as a result of economic crises recommence work, many begin to do so from home. Also among those working from home are women who are too old to go out to work, women unable to work outside their homes because they have small children and those whose conservative families do not allow them to work outside the home. Homeworking women are invisible to the state (they are not included in statistics), to society and even to themselves in the sense that they often do not consider themselves to be workers. Most problematic for homeworkers are the lack of any social security protection and the unsuitability of homes for working purposes, leading to health problems (respiratory and ergonomic) and to a number of hazards for young children (Hattatoglu, 2000).

What can be done? A possible politics for trade unions

As E.P. Thompson notes, under capitalism, both moments of the circuit of capital are characterised by the struggle of capital to divide workers and to equalise their conditions downwards versus the struggle of workers to unite and to equalise their conditions upwards. Hence, despite the recent neo-liberal discourse on individualism, labour

11 For the first two quarters, this rate is 33.3 per cent on average (SIS, 2004).
politics today should be based on an agenda which can unite. Hence, trade unions, the collective organisations for labour, should be brought back into the debate. Labour and the unions have little alternative but to leave behind the one-dimensional strategy of unionism (collective bargaining), geared towards the one level (that of the collective agreement) and the one issue (wages). Unions have to rebuild their organisation, change the legislative and political climate and influence labour market policies.

Firstly, unions should develop strategies to re-organise the supply side in the informal labour market. The diversity of work and labour market situations in Turkey means that a traditional, standardised trade union agenda can be neither practically effective nor ideologically acceptable. The task is to move to:

A kind of unionism that replaces organisational conformity with co-ordinated diversity (Hyman, 1999:12)

or, to put it differently, an ‘informal unionisation’.

Secondly, unions should define themselves as a social movement. This approach rejects economism and the ‘political bargaining’ approach. Social movement unionism is an active, community-oriented strategy which works with a broad conception of who are working people. It breaks down the binary oppositions between workplace and community, economic and political struggle and between formal sector workers and the working poor (Munck, 1998). When unions adopt this orientation, they often find allies amongst the ‘new’ social movements and, in particular, with NGOs (non-governmental organisations).

In accordance with this, thirdly, the collective labour law, which has a narrow definition of unions designed only for the purpose of wage bargaining, has to be changed. The Collective Labour Act and the Collective Bargaining and Strike Act are now under discussion in parliament. An urgent politics is needed to influence this process.

Fourthly, unions can draw strength from developments on the European Union side because European social policy, as included in the Social Charter, is supportive of union involvement in the labour market.

As a final note, to attract members and win the support of the broader public, unions should redefine their organisations, their members and their politics. To do so, unions need more than ever a collaboration with academia, because the struggle of unions is a struggle for the hearts and minds of people; in other words, it is a battle of ideas.

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