

Göker Giresunlu

**STEEL FOR THE NATION, MISERY FOR THE PEOPLE:
LIVING CONDITIONS AND COPING STRATEGIES
AT KARABÜK IRON AND STEEL WORKS
DURING WORLD WAR II**

Thesis submitted to the Department of Historical Studies,
Central European University Private University, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the Master of Arts degree in Historical Studies

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, **Göker Giresunlu**, candidate for the MA degree in Historical Studies declare herewith that the present thesis titled “Steel for the Nation, Misery for the People: Living Conditions and Coping Strategies at Karabük Iron and Steel Works during World War II” is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the living and working conditions and coping strategies in and around the state-owned iron and steel works at Karabük during World War II. Recent literature on state-owned industrial enterprises in Turkey suggests that conditions were unsatisfactory for workers during the 1940s, which led to high labor turnover and absenteeism rates. These high rates were interpreted as resistance or a defense mechanism, as opposed to the previous literature's contention that workers lacked political agency, and high rates were rooted in their peasant characteristics. This study demonstrates that a combination of limited state capacity and urgency to produce iron and steel created a highly exploitative, unsatisfactory, and unequal setting around Karabük Iron and Steel Works (KISW). Many employees were unable to cover their living expenses and suffered from inadequate housing, malaria, pneumonia, and other diseases. However, it also challenges the homogenization of employees' conditions by arguing that unequal distribution of wages and welfare services created opportunities for upward social mobility. To that end, it identifies a variety of coping strategies among the employees and other residents of Karabük, ranging from collaboration to anti-proletarianization. Whereas collaboratives improved their living conditions through climbing the ladder without disrupting the system, peasant-workers, entrepreneur-workers, and people who used KISW as a stepping stone undermined the factory's efficiency through rejecting becoming stable employees. KISW was gradually compelled to recognize these coping strategies to consolidate the necessary workforce. The management both improved available welfare services and wages and changed their content in accordance with the people's coping strategies, albeit insufficiently and unequally. Hence, this study argues that an uneasy compromise between KISW and people was reached, in which both improved conditions towards their goals gradually but insufficiently.

Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the people of Karabük, particularly to the Yavuz family and members of Kırmızımavi Karabük Sports Culture Association. When my family moved to Karabük in 1999, after the earthquake profoundly shook Sakarya, my mother was pregnant with me. The Yavuz family, who happened to be their new next-door neighbors, graciously welcomed my family. We moved back to Sakarya in 2002. Therefore, I do not remember my time at Karabük. However, the memories of Karabük are always remembered beautifully in our family, mostly thanks to the Yavuz family. These memories and the interesting history of Karabük created an emotional bond between me and the city. When I started to support Karabük's local football team at a young age, I happened to meet people from Kırmızımavi, who also strengthened this bond. This emotional bond turned into an intellectual curiosity gradually, which led me to write this thesis. Therefore, I am deeply grateful to them for keeping my childhood love and curiosity for Karabük alive.

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Introduction

In April 1937, Turkey's Prime Minister İsmet İnönü traveled to the small village of Karabük, which had only been connected to the nearby coal-mining town of Zonguldak and the capital, Ankara, by railroad since 1934. He was there to lead the groundbreaking ceremony for a new state-owned iron and steel works. He gave a long speech, stressing that this factory, which would be a product of Turkish and British partnership, would create a modern industrial town, with modern workers and citizens.¹ What he said to the village headman a few minutes before the ceremony was emblematic of the discourse surrounding republican industrialization: "Son, we are laying the foundation of your factory. We have placed a pot of gold here; anyone who is hungry can take some from it. The gold here will never run out."²

Departing from a problematization of this quote, and others like it, this thesis fundamentally questions whether this metaphoric pot existed, and if so, whether people's experience with this pot was positive, as the Prime Minister promised. Historical evidence indicates that people whose lives had been affected by Karabük Iron and Steel Works (hereafter, KISW) had a rather multifaceted relationship with this giant state-capitalist undertaking. This study aims to unravel this multifaceted historical relationship between people and state-led industrialization in Karabük during the Second World War. To that end, it explores not only material living and working conditions in and around KISW, but also the everyday experience and coping strategies of people. In other words, it attempts to understand people's agency in relation to state-led industrialization, in addition to their experience of everyday material conditions. I argue that people around KISW experienced a highly exploitative and unequal setting, which only

¹ "İsmet İnönü Dün Karabük Demir Fabrikalarının Temelini Attı" and "Başvekilimizin Nutku", *Cumhuriyet*, April 4, 1937.

² Hür Kalyoncu, *Zaman Mekan ve Anılarla Karabük* (Karabük: Kardemir, 2016), 12.

provided relatively good conditions for a privileged group of civil servants and highly skilled employees. However, a variety of subtle and creative coping strategies manipulated this process in favor of the people, while undermining state-capitalist goals to a considerable extent. Therefore, this thesis tries to understand lower-class politics in practice while also revealing the political-economic priorities of the state-led industrialization in Turkey during the 1930s and 1940s.

Historical Background

Why the Turkish state was undertaking such a large industrial investment in a location like Karabük before the Second World War, with a British partnership, is a multi-layered question that should be answered before moving into detailed discussions concerning this thesis. Industrialization had long been perceived as the method to overcome economic underdevelopment and dependency since the early 19th century. However, neither the Ottoman Empire nor the young Turkish Republic in the 1920s reached the desired level of industrialization. In the 1920s, Turkey preferred a liberal model of development where the state incentivized industrialization through legal regulations and financial rewards to private entrepreneurs.³ However, when the Great Depression of 1929 shook the world, Turkey was still an overwhelmingly agrarian country with limited industrial production. The country's economy was in a state of unequal exchange with the industrialized world, in which it exported raw materials, especially agricultural products, and imported mass-consumed products like textiles.⁴

The period between 1929 and 1932 constituted a turning point in the perception of how Turkey should industrialize. The global crisis was reflected in a decrease in its export revenues

³ Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye'de Devletçilik* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, 2006), 29–30; Yahya Sezai Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)* (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2015), 272. “Liberal” in this context does not refer to a non-interventionist state. The Turkish state was quite interventionist in economic matters during the 1920s. Rather, it refers to the absence of state-owned enterprises in systematic manner.

⁴ Gülten Kazgan, *Tanzimat'tan 21. Yüzyıla Türkiye Ekonomisi* (İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2002), 63–64; Kazgan, 70; Boratav, *Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, 231–32; Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)*, 283–85.

due to falling prices of agricultural products, just when Turkey had to start repaying the foreign debts of the defunct Ottoman Empire. Therefore, the balance of payments, which Turkish political officials deeply cared to preserve, was in jeopardy. Besides, the Kemalist political elite realized the deep discontent among the people with the economy when a short-lived opposition party garnered popular support in the country, and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself toured the country shortly after the party's closure.⁵ The skepticism for private entrepreneurs who, in the eyes of this political elite, highly benefited from the speculation and incentives for individual gains but did not initiate industrialization needed for the nation, also grew in this short period.⁶ The terms of the Lausanne Treaty's commercial agreement that prevented Turkey from establishing protective tariffs came to an end in 1929 as well. The combination of these factors made the conception of an alternative industrialization path unavoidable.⁷

Turkish political officials started to voice the concept of etatism in these years, but its content remained vague. Economic historians like Korkut Boratav and Yahya Sezai Tezel argue that etatism in this context was never theorized, except for some marginal attempts to further transform it into an alternative political-economic model. Therefore, Turkish republican etatism was a capitalist, pragmatic developmental strategy rather than a systematic economic plan.⁸ In other words, it was a state-capitalist method to ease the effects of the global capitalist crisis and enhance Turkey's position in the global capitalist economy. The content of etatism was made clear only in the First Five-Year Industrial Plan, which was only a list of industrial projects.⁹ The plan

⁵ Boratav, *Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, 140–43; Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)*, 283–86.

⁶ Ayşe Buğra, *State and Business in Modern Turkey: A Comparative Study*, SUNY Series in the Social and Economic History of the Middle East (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1994), 100–101; Boratav, *Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, 142.

⁷ Boratav, *Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, 140–43; Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)*, 283–86.

⁸ Boratav, *Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, 159; Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)*, 361.

⁹ Boratav, *Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, 159; Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)*, 361; Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development* (London: Verso, 1987), 105–6.

anticipated the establishment of a group of factories, mostly in textiles, which would use national raw materials to produce normally imported market products to substitute imports and balance Turkey's trade deficit. It was essentially an import substitution project.¹⁰ Besides this, it envisioned the establishment of certain strategic industries in metallurgy and mining, despite not having the raw materials or the technology for them, because the importation of these would put Turkey in danger in a potential war. These enterprises were to be built and operated by Sümerbank and Etibank, two institutions established to oversee Turkey's industrialization.¹¹

Karabük Iron and Steel Works were part of the latter section of the plan. Although textiles were at the center of the plan for substituting imports, an iron and steel complex was thought to be the heart of industrialization.¹² Turkey lacked any industrial complex to process iron and steel, except a small military workshop that could complete some basic tasks in Kırıkkale.¹³ This was considered to be a potential danger to the national defense if importation had to stop. Moreover, the bureaucratic elite considered iron and steel works as the cornerstone of a large-scale national industrialization. Therefore, the construction of iron and steel works was not controversial.¹⁴ Rather, its location created the biggest controversy. Site selection in the industrial plan was a contentious process, although existing railroad lines provided the basic framework.¹⁵ Karabük was the most controversial site for several reasons. The iron and steel industry needed a large amount

¹⁰ Boratav, *Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, 236–37; Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)*, 342.

¹¹ Boratav, *Türkiye'de Devletçilik*, 254; Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)*, 397.

¹² Tezel, *Cumhuriyet Döneminin İktisadi Tarihi (1923-1950)*, 364–65.

¹³ Erol Tümerterkin, "Ağır Demir Sanayi ve Türkiye'deki Durumu" (PhD Dissertation, Istanbul, İstanbul University, 1952), 228.

¹⁴ Tümerterkin, 231–32. Tümerterkin narrates a meeting within the Turkish military staff in 1928 in these pages. According to him, it was decided to build an iron industry even if it would operate at a financial loss for more than ten years. It is difficult to trace the source of this anecdote. Nevertheless, it perfectly summarized the importance of the iron and steel industries for the national defense at the time.

¹⁵ Görkem Akgöz, "Smokestacks of 'Atatürk's Minarets': Industrialisation and the Politics of National Space," in *In the Shadow of War and Empire: Industrialisation, Nation-Building, and Working-Class Politics in Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 106–51.

of coal, large water resources, and a large number of skilled workers. Lastly, the factory was not supposed to be easily targeted by any potential military operation, particularly from the sea. Karabük was not the only potential site that is close to the Zonguldak coalfield and large water resources, but it was chosen with the advice of the military since it was located between mountains, considerably far away from the sea, and in fact from any other transportation except the railroad.¹⁶



*Figure 1: A military officer's photograph from early 1940s with KISW at the background.
Source: Author's personal collection.*

Turkey also had neither the required financial capital nor the skill to construct such complex integrated facilities at the time. Foreign cooperation was needed for almost any large industrial undertaking. While it was Soviet credits and expertise in textiles, it was to be either British or German in metallurgy.¹⁷ Despite the offer from the German Krupp company being financially more satisfying, Turkish officials preferred to work with the British Brassert company

¹⁶ Safa Ş. Erkün, "Karabük'ün Sosyal Monografisi" (PhD Dissertation, İstanbul, İstanbul University, 1950), 23; Erkün, 27–28; Tümertekin, "Ağır Demir Sanayi ve Türkiye'deki Durumu," 234, 236–237.

¹⁷ Please see Samuel J. Hirst, *Against the Liberal Order: The Soviet Union, Turkey, and Statist Internationalism, 1919–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024) and Dilek Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey: Economic and Foreign Policy Strategies in an Uncertain World, 1929–1939*, (Leiden: Brill, 1998) on the diplomacy of etatism.

to reduce the country's dependency on Germany and develop diplomatic relations with the UK.¹⁸ The factory's construction started in April 1937, but it went into operation gradually. Between June 1939 and November 1939, the power plant, coke factory, blast furnaces, and pipe factory went into operation. Three main rolling mills of 28, 16, and 12 sizes went into operation between April 1940 and June 1940. A sheet rolling mill was added to them in November 1941. In 1944, an acid sulphuric plant and a superphosphate plant were also opened.¹⁹ This gradual opening, combined with the factory's inefficiency for many reasons, created conflicts between Sümerbank/Turkish government and Brassert/British government. Indeed, KISFW never reached the desired level of output in those years, for which the British blamed the Turkish for not being able to supply enough raw materials and skilled labor, and the Turkish blamed the British for not being able to construct factories in harmony and supply enough skilled labor.²⁰

¹⁸ Erkün, "Karabük'ün Sosyal Monografisi," 32; Tümertekin, "Ağır Demir Sanayi ve Türkiye'deki Durumu," 234; Barlas, *Etatism and Diplomacy in Turkey*, 171-73, 178-80. Barlas argues that Turkish focus in industrialization shifted towards national defense industry in the mid-1930s because of concerns about Italian aggression in the Mediterranean and coming of a war. This shift was also accompanied by a shift towards UK for several reasons. Whereas Soviet Union was not able to provide necessary loans, UK was perceived to be only suitable great power to supply Turkey's armament.

¹⁹ Tümertekin, "Ağır Demir Sanayi ve Türkiye'deki Durumu," 273.

²⁰ Referred as "Brassert-Sümerbank Conflict", this turned into a long-lasting negotiation between both companies and governments during the war. This conflict led a considerable archival trace in both British and Turkish archives. I believe it could be fruitful study of legal history, if examined.



Figure 2: A general picture of KISW in the early 1940s.
Source: Author's personal collection.

World War II broke out just when certain parts of the KISW started to operate, and continued until the factory's construction was completed. The war significantly undermined both the UK and Turkey's capacity to satisfy KISW's needs, which contributed to the above-mentioned conflict. Whereas Turkey was not actively involved, the country was in full-scale mobilization throughout the war. It is estimated that 750,000 of 1,000,000 men who were drafted to the military were part of the workforce before the war.²¹ This reflected itself in the falling national production.²² Combined with the high wartime inflation, this provoked a group of protective measures. Extraordinary taxes, the state's takeover of the distribution of grain, and compulsory labor were introduced. Although compulsory labor was not implemented in Karabük²³, the same National

²¹ Murat Metinsoy, *İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nda Türkiye: Savaş ve Gündelik Yaşam* (İstanbul: Homer Kitabevi, 2007), 51–53.

²² İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, *İktisadî Politikaları ve Uygulamalarıyla İkinci Dünya Savaşı Türkiye'si* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014), 83–84.

²³ Caroline E. Arnold, "In the Service of Industrialization: Etatism, Social Services and the Construction of Industrial Labour Forces in Turkey (1930–50)," *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 3 (May 2012): 473, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2012.661720>. Why compulsory labor was not implemented in Karabük could be an interesting question to explore. General Inspection Board Minutes shows that it was debated and rejected. According

Protection Law legalized the extension of working hours and limited labor mobility by prohibiting workers from leaving their jobs without valid excuses.²⁴ This conformed with Turkey's classless industrialization idea, in which workers supposedly did not constitute a separate class, but just a section of the nation that serves the national development in production.²⁵ This national labor regime prevented the development of working-class politics in its narrower²⁶ sense and expected workers to shoulder the burdens of wartime problems.

Literature Review

This was, in fact one of the reasons that studies on labor remained considerably limited for a long time in Turkey. The dominance of the Kemalist paradigm of a classless nation was also accepted by other political groups regarding the absence of modern classes in Turkish society. The exclusion of the working class from politics in its narrow sense left early studies with the idea that the Turkish working class did not have a political agency in the country's history.²⁷ The field emerged as a history of movement, which furthered this limitation because there was not a

to Arnold wartime experience proved to the political elite that they cannot provide desired workforce through force because resistance against compulsory labor was widespread in Zonguldak and other examples. This might have played a role in the rejection of this practice in Karabük.

For resistance against compulsory labor in Zonguldak coalfield please see: Nurşen Gürboğa, "Compulsory Mine Work: The Single-Party Regime and the Zonguldak Coalfield as a Site of Contention, 1940–1947," *International Review of Social History* 54 (2009): 115–42, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26405433>.

However, I should also note that prisoner-workers were part of KISW's workforce during the war, which is another form of compulsory labor. For prisoner-workers in early republican Turkey please see: Ali Sipahi, "Convict Labor in Turkey, 1936–1953: A Capitalist Corporation in the State?," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 90 (2016): 244–65, doi:10.1017/S0147547916000144.

²⁴ Ahmet Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1946* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları, 1999), 413.

²⁵ Gökem Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire: Industrialisation, Nation-Building, and Working-Class Politics in Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 92–93; Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, 104.

²⁶ Metinsoy, *Savaş ve Gündelik Yaşam*, 16; 22–25. Metinsoy argues that one major problem in the social history of Turkey is that politics are mostly defined in the narrower sense, referring only to the high politics. I also use politics in the narrow sense when referring to approaches that only consider institutionalized or traditional methods of politics as part of people's political subjecthood and agency.

²⁷ Y. Doğan Çetinkaya, "'Sefaletten İhyaya': Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Tarihi ve E.P. Thompson," *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 17 (Spring 2014): 2; Y. Doğan Çetinkaya, "Türkiye Kurulurken İşçi Sınıfı, İmparatorluk ve Cumhuriyet: Devamlılık ve Kopuş," in *Cumhuriyet'in İlk Asrında İşçiler*, ed. M. Gökem Doğan, Cumhuriyet'in 100 Yılı (İstanbul, Turkey: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2024), 8.

substantial labor movement in this period.²⁸ As some scholars rightly pointed out, the field was in complete “poverty”.²⁹ The existing studies could not challenge the narrative, and they reproduced the idea that Turkish workers were passive and silent as opposed to a strong state.³⁰

The tables have only started to turn in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The labor history of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey defined itself as a field in this period, thanks to a new generation of scholars. Y. Doğan Çetinkaya, a member of this generation, describes this period as the “revival” and “spring” of labor history. He argues that this revival took place because an “archival turn” occurred in historiography when a new generation of scholars started to closely examine archival materials regarding the lower classes in the late Ottoman and republican periods.³¹ Despite agreeing with Çetinkaya’s observation about the archival turn, I argue that this was also followed by a methodological turn in the field. Scholars like Can Nacar, Gökem Akgöz, Murat Metinsoy, Nurşen Gürboğa, and Yiğit Akın started to employ new approaches and methodologies to historical evidence.³² The disagreement between the two strands is best summarized by the debate between Ahmet Makal and Yiğit Akın.³³

²⁸ Çetinkaya, “Türkiye Kurulurken İşçi Sınıfı,” 13; Yiğit Akın, “Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihçiliğine Katkı: Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Kaynaklar,” *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 77.

²⁹ Çetinkaya, “‘Sefaletten İhyaya’: Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Tarihi ve E.P. Thompson,” 1.

³⁰ Çetinkaya, 4.

³¹ Çetinkaya, “Türkiye Kurulurken İşçi Sınıfı,” 15–16.

³² Can Nacar, ““Our Lives Were Not as Valuable as an Animal”: Workers in State-Run Industries in World-War-II Turkey,” *International Review of Social History* 54, no. Supplement 17: Ottoman and Republican Turkish Labour History (2009): 143–66, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859009990277>; Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire*; Yiğit Akın, “The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics in Early Republican Turkey: Language, Identity, and Experience,” *International Review of Social History* 54, no. Supplement 17: Ottoman and Republican Turkish Labour History (2009): 167–88, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859009990289>; Metinsoy, *Savaş ve Gündelik Yaşam*; Gürboğa, “Compulsory Mine Work.”

³³ Ahmet Makal, “Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi ve Tarihçiliği Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme,” in *Ameleden İşçiye: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi Çalışmaları* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2007); Akın, “Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Kaynaklar.” These two pieces are directly in dialogue with each other, and they perfectly demonstrate the nuances of the debates in the labor studies of early republican Turkey. The following discussion takes these pieces as a point of departure, but it is not limited to them. Rather, it also takes other studies of Makal and the new generation of scholars into consideration.

These two different strands agree on the fact that there was an oppressive national labor regime in early republican Turkey, constituted through the Labor Law, National Protection Law, and other practices. These narrowed down the possibilities for workers to have an organized and active role in politics.³⁴ However, these scholars differ in the details of this issue. While Makal argues that conditions at state-owned factories were relatively good, others suggest that the state-centered approach blinds Makal to the actual conditions on the ground. For Makal, workers in state-owned industries did not constitute a labor aristocracy but enjoyed certain privileges through social welfare services.³⁵ In contrast, for others, these services were insufficient and unequally distributed, which resulted in a negative attitude of workers against the factories. Moreover, health problems, lack of accommodation, and harsh discipline within the factories worsened the situation.³⁶

For the new generation, the high labor turnover in the state-owned industries was a clear sign of labor dissent. During the 1930s and 1940s, these enterprises suffered from a very high percentage of labor turnover, sometimes going even above 100% yearly. Akın, Nacar, Akgöz, Metinsoy, and others, with their novel approaches, conceive this as either a defensive strategy or a resistance against the conditions. They claim that this was an unorganized but collective practice that compelled factories and the state to increase welfare services and formulate new social welfare policies.³⁷ Therefore, workers actively shaped not only their lives but also macro politics with their

³⁴ Makal, *Türkiye’de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri: 1920-1946*, 449–50, 453; Nacar, ““Our Lives Were Not as Valuable as an Animal”: Workers in State-Run Industries in World-War-II Turkey,” 162; Metinsoy, *İkinci Dünya Savaşı’nda Türkiye: Savaş ve Gündelik Yaşam*, 224–25.

³⁵ Makal, *Türkiye’de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri, 1920-1946*, 280–81, 440–41.

³⁶ Nacar, “Workers in State-Run Industries,” 162–66; Akın, “Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Kaynaklar,” 83–85; Metinsoy, *Savaş ve Gündelik Yaşam*, 231; Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire*, 157.

³⁷ Metinsoy, *Savaş ve Gündelik Yaşam*, 292–94; Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire*, 206; Akın, “Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Kaynaklar,” 100–102; Nacar, “Workers in State-Run Industries,” 164–66. Although these scholars share a common point, they also differ in the nuances of understanding labor turnover. For instance, Akgöz relates turnover more closely with the labor market conditions, rather than the factory and living conditions in her case, as opposed to Nacar.

everyday resistance. Makal strongly disagrees with this approach and argument, as he explicitly discusses in dialogue with some of these studies.

For Makal, these micro approaches miss the macro political, economic, and social developments and structures, which in turn lead them to overstate workers' agency and political role.³⁸ He argues that there is no reason for historians to think of high labor turnover as a conscious response to the conditions. Instead, he associates high labor turnover with the peasant characteristics of the workforce. Accordingly, these workers lacked the necessary socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds to adapt to industrial work. In other words, their rural ties prevented them from constituting a stable workforce or a class-for-itself. Furthermore, even if it was a conscious response to bad conditions, this response could not influence social welfare policy since the authoritarian labor regime closed legitimate political channels. Welfare services and social welfare policies were rather the state's solution to the inefficiency in state-owned enterprises. Therefore, workers remained passive and silent throughout this period.³⁹

For the last decades, the scholarship within the Western academia followed the lines of the new generation. The idea that workers' subtle resistance shaped social welfare policy remained dominant, albeit there is surely a stagnation in labor studies on this period. Except for Gökem Akgöz's recent publications and monograph on the Bakırköy Cloth Factory, there are no recent publications on labor in the 1930s and 1940s, as if former studies consumed all the available sources and covered every aspect of the discussion. For the scholarship that remained within Turkey, the state-centered Makal-type narrative is still common. These narratives still present workers as overexploited passive figures as opposed to a strong oppressive state.

³⁸ Makal, "Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi ve Tarihçiliği Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme," 30–31, 41–42.

³⁹ Makal, "Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi ve Tarihçiliği," 49–56.

One could say that studies on Karabük, which are very rare, also follow this line. A group of studies written about housing and other welfare services of the factory emphasized that these were part of a civilizing mission of Kemalism, which is a highly debatable point, and Karabük was the symbol of this.⁴⁰ For Mehmet Kütükçüoğlu, who was the author of the first academic book on Karabük in the 2000s, too, that was the case, and his study did not go further than being descriptive of the process, relying on available archival documents.⁴¹ Mustafa Berkay Aydın's PhD thesis, with its focus on working-class formation, differed from these studies because it was theoretically informed and written through field-research interviews. However, the lack of archival resources, combined with the ideal types derived from theories and problems of interviews with people who mostly remember the postwar period, limited its contribution too.⁴²

Ali Karatay's *Demir Çelik Karabük: Bir İşçi Kentinin Öyküsü (Iron Steel Karabük: Story of a Working-class City)* could be considered as the most important among them in terms of using different sources together and focusing on the social aspects of Karabük.⁴³ However, this book also reproduces the idea of a strong, oppressive state against weak and passive workers. In Karatay's narrative, workers are mostly there as objects of oppression and exploitation.⁴⁴ Karatay primarily, and rightly, states that KISW workers faced difficult working and living conditions, and they were extremely exploited by the state, but he does not document this adequately.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Sezen Öktem, "Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Modernleşme Hareketi: Karabük Demir Çelik Fabrikaları Yerleşimi Örneği" (MA Thesis, İstanbul, İstanbul Teknik Üniversitesi, 2004); Meltem Özkan Altınöz, "Sümerbank'ın Karabük'ün Konut Politikasındaki Rolü," *Çağdaş Yerel Yönetimler* 24, no. 2 (2015): 49–62; Meltem Özkan Altınöz, "Endüstri Kenti Karabük'ün Sosyal Yaşantısının Şekillenişinde Yenişehir Sineması'nın Rolü," *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi* 4, no. 1 (2015): 83–99; Sinem Kaya, "İdeoloji, Gündelik Yaşam Pratikleri ve Mekan Etkileşiminde Karabük Demir Çelik Fabrikaları Yerleşiminden Öğrendiklerimiz" (MA Thesis, Ankara, Gazi Üniversitesi, 2011).

⁴¹ Mehmet Kütükçüoğlu, *Türkiye'nin İlk Ağır Sanayi Kenti Karabük: Milli Şef Döneminde* (Karabük: Karabük Valiliği Yayınları, 2012).

⁴² Mustafa Berkay Aydın, "Formation of Working Class in a Steel Town in Turkey: A Narration of Workers from Public to Private Sector" (PhD Dissertation, Ankara, Middle East Technical University, 2016).

⁴³ Ali Karatay, *Demir Çelik Karabük: Bir İşçi Kentinin Hikâyesi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018).

⁴⁴ Karatay, 83.

⁴⁵ Karatay, 60.

Furthermore, in some instances, despite rejecting the labor aristocracy argument, he comes closer to this point by arguing that Karabük's workers never acquired class consciousness or actively resisted the state because they enjoyed certain privileges.⁴⁶ This problematic approach and argument are rooted in Karatay's research questions. The goal of his study is to understand why Karabük's workers never showed glimpses of Marxist class consciousness and working-class actions despite living in a heavy industrial factory town.⁴⁷ This Eurocentric Marxist benchmark directs him to an elitist approach and blinds him towards the agency of Karabük's workers as long as their actions remained outside of the traditional methods of working-class politics.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The first methodological point of departure of this thesis arises from the state of the art on labor studies and social histories of early republican Turkey. Monographic micro-studies with macro inferences that recognize the political and social agency and subjecthood of the lower classes are severely lacking in this field. Our knowledge about living and working conditions around the republic's first heavy industry complex is also relatively limited. Furthermore, we do not know how people interacted with this giant political, social, and economic undertaking. This study aims to achieve these through revisiting existing sources and methodologies, besides introducing new ones.

Inspired by late E. P. Thompson and many others who followed him, this study treats the working class not as a stable entity with a certain set of qualities but as a dynamic constellation that is in formation through actual historical experience.⁴⁸ This is particularly significant in our understanding of workers in early republican Turkey because it was a late-industrializing country,

⁴⁶ Karatay, 82–84.

⁴⁷ Karatay, 13–16.

⁴⁸ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1980), 1–3; Thompson, 937–39.

still with an overwhelmingly agrarian demography and economy. Only a minority of workers in Karabük had prior industrial job experience. Moreover, most of them owned land, either in close villages or their place of origin. Therefore, they were in the early steps of their formative experience, and they certainly did not follow their European counterparts' path. This, in fact, has a defining effect on my methodology. As Sinan Yıldırım and Nacar point out, it is not possible to understand the workers of Turkey in this period without understanding their peasantry.⁴⁹ In other words, they were peasant-workers who kept their rural ties or just gave up on them, which certainly shaped their experience.

This has significant methodological implications for this study. Peasantry is habitually essentialized into unchanging qualities. These unchanging qualities very often refer to peasants' "inabilities". Some scholars conceive it also as an obstacle to working-class formation.⁵⁰ This may be a sound statement if we are to follow a Western European working-class formation model, especially the British one, where the dispossession of the peasantry from the land constituted the turning point in the creation of the proletariat. However, one could hardly think of any reasons to follow a Western European ideal class formation model to analyze Turkish workers. Rather, we should acknowledge that peasantry constituted an important component of the working class at that moment of class formation and discuss peasantry's material context and influence on the workers' experience and actions. This necessity also should lead us to turn our gaze to the surroundings of the industries as much as the workplace itself, and sometimes even more.

⁴⁹ Nacar, "Workers in State-Run Industries," 150; Sinan Yıldırım, "Köylüler, İşçiler ve Köylü-İşçiler," in *Tanzimat'tan Günümüze Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Tarihi 1839-2014: Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Alanlar, Yeni Sorunlar*, ed. Y. Doğan Çetinkaya and Mehmet Ö. Alkan (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2015), 274–76.

⁵⁰ M. Hakan Koçak, *Camın İşçileri: Paşabahçe İşçilerinin Sınıf Olma Öyküsü* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014), 172–73; Makal, *Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, 295–302.

Most of the labor studies on Turkey so far have focused on workers' experience within and outside of the workplace, but an overwhelming part of their focus has remained on the outside experience, partially due to the availability of sources. The focus on welfare services was a significant factor in this. On the contrary, Akgöz argues that the formative experience of the class takes place in the workplace. Thus, labor studies should focus more on workplace experience, which would also help them to bridge micro and macro perspectives.⁵¹ She demonstrates a very good example of this approach in her study of the Bakırköy Cloth Factory.⁵² However, I argue that this does not translate into a general methodological rule in Turkish labor studies. It is hardly conceivable that workplace experience was the principal formative factor for thousands of people who moved between KISW, agricultural work, and other jobs for years. I contend that we should keep our focus balanced between outside and inside the workplace but pay extra attention to material conditions that surround the workers, whether they are unskilled semi-proletarians or skilled proletarians, to understand their meaning-making processes, which are the basis for their actions.

This methodological choice also translates itself into periodization. Akın and Akgöz extend their studies from the 1930s to the early 1950s.⁵³ Akın even argues against Makal's periodization, which only covers the single-party period from 1923 to 1946, because this border is determined by political history, which limits our understanding of labor at the time. Therefore, he suggests,

⁵¹ Görkem Akgöz, "İşçi Sınıfı Tarihyazımında İşyeri ve Çalışma Deneyiminin Yeri: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Fabrikalarının Kapısından Girmek," in *Tanzimat'tan Günümüze Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Tarihi 1839-2014: Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Alanlar, Yeni Sorunlar*, ed. Y. Doğan Çetinkaya and Mehmet Ö. Alkan (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2015), 235–36.

⁵² Görkem Akgöz, "Voices from the Shop Floor: Politics, Law, and Workplace Industrial Relations," in *In the Shadow of War and Empire: Industrialisation, Nation-Building, and Working-Class Politics in Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 226–63. Her focus on the workplace experience is at the foreground of this chapter.

⁵³ Akın, "The Dynamics of Working-Class Politics"; Görkem Akgöz, "Textures of Struggle: Worker Politicisation from the Shop Floor to the Trade Union," in *In the Shadow of War and Empire: Industrialisation, Nation-Building, and Working-Class Politics in Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 264–317. This periodization is especially clear in these pieces.

labor historians should use “early republican” to cover the period from the 1920s to the mid-1950s.⁵⁴ Nacar and Metinsoy do not delve into the periodization discussion, but they solve this problem by solely focusing on the World War II period. This thesis also remains within the time frame of the war, but not because of macro-political reasons. At the end of the war, the legal and political framework went through a considerable change with the introduction of political parties, class-based organizations, and others.⁵⁵ But more importantly, labor turnover has gradually declined. Therefore, at the turn of the decade, both macro and micro political, social, and economic contexts of workers were strikingly different than wartime. In the early 1950s, Karabük’s workers had a union, albeit a moderate one, and several newspapers to make their voices heard, apart from having an actual impact through their votes.⁵⁶ Hence, extending periodization towards the mid-1950s and instrumentalizing primary sources from that period while discussing the 1940s is quite problematic in some instances.

This socioeconomic and political context, combined with the peasant characteristics of the workers, also requires different theoretical frameworks to employ. As James C. Scott theorized in his studies, “weapons of the weak” are mostly invisible to our eyes, which look for the Eurocentric modeled revolutions, revolutionary actions, organizations, and strikes.⁵⁷ However, this does not mean these “weapons” are ineffective. Rather, the accumulation of everyday acts of insubordination induces meaningful differences in both their lives and governmental policies.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Akın, “Yeni Yaklaşımlar, Yeni Kaynaklar,” 73.

⁵⁵ Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire*, 237–39. “Preoccupied with industrial progress but distrustful of the disruptive power of organized labour, Turkish industrial policymakers turned to an expansion of social intervention and labour regulation in order to increase industrial productivity and secure working-class cooperation.”

⁵⁶ Karatay, *Demir Çelik Karabük*, 131–33, 136–137; Göker Giresunlu and Can Nacar, “‘Her Zaman Siz Dayak Yersiniz, Bu Sefer de Siz Vurun’: 1950’lerde Karabük-Zonguldak Rekabetini Futbol Üzerinden Okumak,” *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 22 (Fall 2023): 156–57.

⁵⁷ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁵⁸ Scott, 290–96.

These acts usually do not require formal organizations.⁵⁹ They do not explicitly challenge the authority and thus do not provoke a strong reaction. Moreover, the state or other oppressive institutions and people find it difficult to put the blame on certain individuals or groups.⁶⁰ In this light, they provide significant short-term gains to subordinates without risking too much.⁶¹ Although one should not overstate the consciousness and collectivity behind these everyday acts, Scott states that folk culture and network underwrite them, which results in their cumulative effects.⁶²

It is in this theoretical framework that I look, understand, and explain the everyday experiences and actions of the people of Karabük. I find this approach also in parallel with the German school of *Alltagsgeschichte*, which the most prominent figure, Alf Ludtke, describes as a method that is centered around the everyday life of the people, who are mostly excluded from historical narratives.⁶³ According to him, this is not only an inclusive effort but also an exploration of everyday reflections of macrostructural processes like industrialization.⁶⁴ Historical actors were more than helpless victims in these processes, and their subjective experiences and actions are yet to be explored.⁶⁵ Ludtke also argues that this closer look at social experience and its rhythm is the only way to recognize discontinuity between and within classes.⁶⁶ This claim is at least as important as Scott's approach to this thesis because it is where one of the methodological novelties lies.

⁵⁹ Scott, 300.

⁶⁰ Scott, 33–34.

⁶¹ Scott, 30.

⁶² Scott, 298–300.

⁶³ Alf Ludtke, "Introduction: What Is the History of Everyday Life and Who Are Its Practitioners?," in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Ludtke, trans. Templer (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3–4.

⁶⁴ Ludtke, 6–8.

⁶⁵ Ludtke, 5.

⁶⁶ Ludtke, 20–21.

Labor studies on Turkey mostly treated workers as a homogenous group and attributed certain actions to them as a whole. However, it is inconceivable that a migrant skilled worker, a local unskilled worker, and a foreman would have the same experiences and strategies in Karabük. Therefore, this thesis takes the fragmented nature of workers and others' socioeconomic conditions into account to understand their everyday experiences and actions. Instead of condensing a diverse set of actions into dichotomous categories like passivity or resistance, a spectrum of coping strategies is recognized and analyzed. I argue that this approach is better for exploring the agency and subjecthood of workers, who collaborated, adapted, and resisted the state-capitalist industrialization. It also saves this study from the existing dichotomy of describing workers' everyday experiences as either ignorant passivity or fully resistant subjects. Consequently, a peasant-worker who moved seasonally between harvesting and factory work would be considered as part of an anti-proletarianization strategy in which he increased his flexibility in wartime conditions, while a skilled stable worker would be considered as part of a collaborative strategy in which he increased his status in the unequal hierarchy through earning skill and experience within the workplace.

Sources

Indeed, recollecting these everyday experiences and glimpses of coping strategies from existing historical sources is a difficult task. Nevertheless, the significance of Karabük in Turkey's industrialization, combined with the UK's involvement in the process, created a considerable archival trace. Although the overwhelming majority of my sources are produced by Turkish and British governments, they provide me with a good room to reconstruct people's experiences and strategies at least on the group or class level, if not the individual. I make use of two governmental

archival corpora in addition to a group of digital and traditional ethnographic material, including interviews with residents of Karabük, to enable myself to recognize the diversity of everyday life.

Firstly, and most importantly, *Sümerbank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporları* [Sümerbank General Inspection Board Reports] are available in the collections of the State Archives in Turkey. These reports are the chief sources of this thesis. During my research, I worked on all the available reports, in addition to *Sümerbank Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Tutanakları* [Sümerbank General Inspection Board Minutes] files, from 1939 to 1960. These reports are compiled as books and published by Sümerbank itself at the time. Their principal goal was to report the workings of state-owned enterprises to a group of MPs who were responsible for inspecting these enterprises' performance. Although inspectors tend to reflect mostly on economic workings like the profitability of KISW, the reports do not completely neglect workforce-related issues and welfare services. This was partially because these were also related to the factory's efficiency. Nevertheless, these reports enable us to discover the number of workers, wage structures, available accommodation, health services, and many other aspects, albeit partially and inconsistently, due to flawed record-keeping at KISW. They often lack qualitative insights into workers' experience, which is rarely but valuably available at the Republican People's Party's provincial reports that are located in the same archive. These offer significant glimpses into workers' demands and complaints in several instances.

However, the principal qualitative evidence regarding Karabük is located at the National Archives of the United Kingdom, which constitutes the other backbone of this research. This archive holds more than 30 files directly and almost exclusively related to KISW and Karabük, which, to my knowledge, have not been explored before in Turkish labor history. KISW's significance as the only iron and steel works in the Middle East and UK's efforts to establish

rapport with Turkey and to prevent any rapprochement between Turkey and Nazi Germany compelled Foreign Office to meticulously observe Karabük. Furthermore, since the factory was built with British credit, by a British company and operated by a group of British operatives, the government had to be responsive to the conditions of its subjects, in addition to complaints of Sümerbank and the Turkish government. Therefore, aside from providing statistics to cross-check Sümerbank's data, these files include reports and correspondence with much qualitative evidence and narrative, which are not available in any other corpus. Particularly, monthly reports written by Charles Mannoock, British Superintendent of KISW between 1941 and 1945, reflect on life at Karabük in detail. As a result, these reports are frequently referenced throughout this thesis.

In addition to these large corpora, this thesis draws from a variety of alternative sources to enrich its exploration. Local historian Hür Kalyoncu and Aydın, whose PhD thesis is mentioned in the other sections, conducted a series of important interviews in the preceding decades.⁶⁷ These interviews are available in their studies either as full transcripts or as quotes. Some other scholarship on Karabük or labor in Turkey also includes interview transcripts and quotes.⁶⁸ I also benefit from the biography of Şinasi Altın, written by his daughter recently.⁶⁹ In the absence of ego documents and personal narratives about Karabük, the sections regarding the Altın family in the 1930s and 1940s in this book are very valuable. I also make use of digital ethnographic material to compensate for the lack of alternative personal narratives. Besides enriching my narrative, this material supports or tests my close reading of the archival sources. The last group of sources is not primary sources but academic studies on Karabük that are based on contemporaneous field research. A group of articles and theses was written in the late 1940s and

⁶⁷ Hür Kalyoncu, *Cumhuriyet Kenti Karabük* (İstanbul: Karabük Belediyesi Kültür Yayınları, 2007); Aydın, "Formation of Working Class in a Steel Town."

⁶⁸ Yıldırım Koç, *Sendikacıların Anlatımıyla Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Hareketi* (İstanbul: Sosyal Tarih Yayınları, 2021).

⁶⁹ Ayşe Beril Altın, *Hayal Varsa... Bir Yaşam Hikayesi* (İstanbul: Siyah Kitap, 2023).

1950s to examine Karabük because it was perceived to be a social laboratory, developing from scratch as an industrial city.⁷⁰ The authors' arguments and findings of their studies are treated the same as any other academic study. However, accessibility of certain sources to them, including being able to do contemporaneous fieldwork in Karabük, made certain sections, like quotes from interviews with workers, available in their studies. In those cases, I treat them as primary sources because it is impossible to obtain those observations and information from any other available historical source.

Structure

The structure of this thesis is based on argumentation and analysis, rather than chronology. Although chapters include chronological analysis as well, the shortness of the timespan allows me to cover it as a whole with two different analytical lenses in each chapter and delve into chronological analysis when it is necessary. In this light, the first chapter focuses on working and living conditions around KISW during World War II. It explores wages and living expenses, housing, and health to demonstrate unfavorable and unequal conditions. Therefore, it not only asserts an absolute evaluation of conditions, but also a relativity by including comparisons with other industrial enterprises, cities, and comparisons within different segments of the employees. In conclusion, it argues that Karabük was a site of misery and inequality for many, including even

⁷⁰ Please see the non-exhaustive list of these studies: Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu, *Kuruluşunun XXV. Yılında Karabük (1937-1962)* (İstanbul: Fakülteler Matbaası, 1962); Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu, "Karabük'te Sanayileşmenin İktisadi ve İçtimai Tesirleri," *Sosyoloji Konferansları Dergisi*, 1961, 1–37; Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu, "Karabük'ün Teşekkülü ve Bazı Demografik ve İktisadi Meseleler," *Sosyoloji Konferansları Dergisi*, 1962, 1–10; Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu, "Beledi Hizmetler ve Amme İdaresi Bakımından Karabük," *Sosyoloji Konferansları Dergisi*, 1961, 100–132; Naim Yarar, "Arıcak Köyünün Beşeri ve İktisadi Coğrafyası" (Graduation Thesis, İstanbul, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 1957); Erkün, "Karabük'ün Sosyal Monografisi"; Tümertekin, "Ağır Demir Sanayi ve Türkiye'deki Durumu"; Amiran Kurtkan, "Karabük'ün Çalışma Müessesesi ve Sosyal Şartları," *Sosyoloji Konferansları Dergisi*, 1961, 73–87; Erol Tümertekin, "Karabük'ün Kuruluşu," *Sosyoloji Konferansları Dergisi*, 1964, 104–9.

the relatively privileged group of employees, due to a lack of state capacity and a list of informed decisions.

The second chapter moves beyond the discussions about living and working conditions and explores people's everyday coping strategies and their effects on social welfare policies. It explores why there was not an organized workers' movement or any other open political conflict in Karabük at the time. Then, it argues that an organized or politicized act was not feasible for people due to both their characteristics and authoritarian government, which led them to pursue a wide array of subtle everyday coping strategies. These strategies are categorized under three main groups, while keeping potential overlap between them in mind, and are analyzed with the help of official records and historical ethnographic evidence. Lastly, it discusses changes in KISW's social welfare services in relation to people's everyday coping strategies to demonstrate that these strategies were not limited to their individual lives. In consequence, it contends that various coping strategies ameliorated people's living conditions to a meaningful extent, while compelling considerable social welfare policy change at the end of the war.

1 Conditions at Karabük during World War II

“Now Karabük, for those who have not seen it, is thought to be an uninspiring place with nothing more than a factory and a few houses. However, this is a very large and modern town with plains and hills that shine brightly at night, and its surroundings are too large to walk around in a day. Karabük must be seen to understand what Turkish determination to work is capable of.”

Kazım Nami Duru, MP of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, 1946.⁷¹

“Now I want you to see, all we can hope to look forward to is the end of the day. If you have never seen Karabük, never ask to, except to read of it as in a thriller novel, on some bleak night by the fireside.”

Mr. J. Nield of Karabük Iron and Steel Works to Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labor and National Service of the United Kingdom, 19 April 1942.⁷²

These two quotes depict utterly disparate portraits of Karabük. However, the disparity between them is not merely because the authors were out of touch with reality. Rather, it was a matter of how to experience and perceive Karabük. For the likes of Kazım Nami Duru, who visited Karabük for political purposes to observe Turkish modernization and state-led industrialization, Karabük was a fascinating experience. It symbolized a new and modern Turkey in which the government was able to produce iron and steel in a complex facility of factories while also providing welfare services like housing, health services, and food to the employees, thus preventing a potential class conflict. It was a shiny experiment that proved the ability and determination of Turkish modernization. For the likes of J. Nield, who lived in Karabük and worked in the factory, it was a site of misery, especially during World War II. Considering Nield was already familiar with large industrial undertakings from his previous work experience in the UK, he was not fascinated by the factories. Instead, he was dissatisfied with the working and living

⁷¹ Kazım Nami Duru, “Safranbolu-Karabük”, *Karabük Mecmuası*, (January 1946): 9.

⁷² The National Archives of the UK (TNA): FO 371/33317, 26 June 1942, Conditions at Karabük.

conditions. Notably, Nield was one of the fortunate employees since he was a skilled British worker. He presumably had a house, a domestic servant, and a good salary. For hundreds of people working at Karabük, being allocated a house by the factory was a dream, in addition to other dreams like avoiding malaria or work accidents, being able to get a proper health service, covering their living expenses with their wages, and eating an adequate number of hot meals.

In this chapter, I aim to discuss both faces of Karabük by exploring the socioeconomic conditions and the structure that state-led industrialization created around KISW for thousands of employees. While acknowledging that jumpstarting iron and steel production in wartime and providing relatively better lives for some could be a success story for the young Turkish Republic, I argue that a list of informed decisions and a lack of state capacity made Karabük a site of misery for many. Throughout the chapter, I probe into wages and living expenses, housing, and health conditions to demonstrate that both workers and other employees suffered, albeit to different degrees, from the government's decision to plant this huge industrial complex in a space without prior social and economic infrastructure.

1.1 Wages and Living Expenses

Wages in state-owned industrial enterprises are one of the most controversial issues in the literature. Primary sources rarely present standardized and reliable wage structures. Moreover, potential units of comparison, like wages in the private sector for the same industry in the same city, or living expenses, are hardly accessible. Therefore, the discussions in this regard rely on many assumptions and over-stretch comparisons with weakly related data. On the other hand, specific factors on living expenses are rarely included in wage calculations. Karabük was an isolated space with non-fertile land. Rice agriculture, which held a significant place in farming in the area, was partially prohibited due to malaria risk, and a large area of rice fields was occupied

by KISW itself.⁷³ The area also lacked any prior social and economic infrastructure that was sufficient for sudden growth.⁷⁴ Furthermore, World War II brought rampant inflation in food prices. Since available discussions do not take this into account, they do not reveal much about the purchasing power of KISW workers. Thus, our knowledge about wages remains dysfunctional. Therefore, I propose discussing wages in comparison with grocery expenses in two different years, 1943 and 1945, in addition to analyzing wage discrepancies within KISW as proof of stark inequality, but also an opportunity for upward mobility.

Makal argues that state-owned enterprises paid better wages to workers to attract them as a result of his comparison between average wages in private and state-owned textile industries in Istanbul. He further contends that this could be considered as a representative, thus generalizing his argument to all state-owned enterprises.⁷⁵ However, as Akgöz clarifies, Sümerbank factories did not have a universal and standardized wage structure.⁷⁶ Wages in KISW and other factories differed greatly.⁷⁷ Karatay also criticizes Makal's approach because there was a huge wage discrepancy within each Sümerbank factory. Moreover, due to high labor turnover, an overwhelming majority of KISW workers were earning the lowest possible wages in the structure. In this light, he argues that if one compares Makal's data with KISW's statistics, it could only be argued that senior and skilled workers of KISW earned more than average wages in Istanbul's

⁷³ Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi (BCA) 490-1-0-0/ 728-495-5 Bazı Bölgelerdeki Fabrika, İşyerleri ve İşçilerin Genel Durumu Hakkında Büyük Millet Meclisi Çalışma Komisyonundan bir Gurubun Hazırladığı Rapor. [Çalışma Komisyonunun Mütenekkiren İşyerlerini Tetkik ve Seyahat Anında Tarafından Görülenleri Arzeden Rapor Denemesi, Dr. M. Şerif Korkut, Burdur Milletvekili, Çalışma Komisyonu Üyesi. 25 Eylül 1947].

⁷⁴ Erkün, "Karabük'ün Sosyal Monografisi," 48. Erkün also observes that the city was not able to develop a working division of labor and commerce due to this sudden growth, and this created destitution for the workers.

⁷⁵ Ahmet Makal, *Ameleden İşçiye: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi Çalışmaları* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2007), 131–36.

⁷⁶ Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire*, 180–81.

⁷⁷ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 15-0-0 Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümer Bank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İçtimai Teşkilatı Hakkında 1941 Yılı Raporu, 20. A table in this report shows that average worker wage in KISW, Bursa Merinos Factory, Defterdar Factory and Beykoz Leather and Shoes Factory were different from each other.

private textile factories. Accordingly, throughout the 1940s, a junior worker in KISW earned lower than average wages in the private textile sector of Istanbul.⁷⁸ Even in 1949, there were workers who earned under 100 Turkish Liras (hereafter, TL), eligible for the factory's free hot meals, in KISW, while the national average was 105 TL.⁷⁹ Karatay's closer analysis demonstrates that most of KISW's workers were earning low wages in absolute terms. Nevertheless, this argument does not reveal either their purchasing power or the comparative earnings in other jobs in Karabük at the time.

Qualitative evidence suggests that wages in KISW were not completely satisfactory in the face of the private sector and inflation, neither for civil servants nor British employees nor for workers. Higher wages in the private sector were considered among the major reasons for high labor turnover among Turkish employees. Civil servants could not accumulate money to invest or sustain the lifestyle they had been accustomed to. Regarding workers, Mannock found it impossible for them to sustain a proper diet with their earnings.⁸⁰ More importantly, neither Turkish nor British employees' wages kept up with the rampant inflation. According to Mannock, most of the significant goods' prices were above several hundred cents of their global prices in 1943. Between 1939 and 1943, the prices of bread, tomatoes, rice, olive oil, eggs, onions, cheese, olives, watermelon, melons, and grapes increased by three- to sevenfold. For instance, the cost of bread was 30 kuruş (hereafter, kr) if it was rationed and 45 kr if it was not in 1943, while it was 8 kr in 1939.⁸¹ In the same period, junior workers' daily earnings increased from 80 kr to 160 kr, while senior skilled workers' daily earnings increased from 240 kr to 380 kr.⁸² Therefore, workers'

⁷⁸ Karatay, *Demir Çelik Karabük*, 64–67.

⁷⁹ Karatay, 67–68.

⁸⁰ TNA: FO 371/37452, 23 September 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on the position of Karabük, Notes on Turkish Personnel at Karabük.

⁸¹ TNA: FO 371/37452, 7 August 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on the Position of Karabük, July 1943.

⁸² BCA 37-10-0-0/ 69-0-0 Başbakanlık Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1951 Yılı Raporu, 26.

wages increased at most twofold, falling behind the inflation in Karabük. The reports also admitted that the improvement in wages was insufficient, and prices in the town depended on these wages, which worsened the situation.⁸³

*Table 1: Wage categories and planned number of workers in each category at KISW in 1943.
Source: Sümerbank General Inspection Board Report of 1943.*

Wage Categories (Daily, in TL)	A 4-4.5-5	B 3.2-3.5-3.8	C 2.4-2.7-3	D 1.6-2	F 1.6
Planned Number of Workers in 1943	379	934	1486	1098	829

The data for 1943 demonstrates that many of KISW's employees were barely able to cover their grocery needs with their earnings.⁸⁴ Workers were categorized under five groups according to their seniority and skill. The medium, mildly skilled worker earned 2.7 TL per day, around 70 TL monthly. However, since Group C included all workers who earned 2.4, 2.7, and 3 TL respectively, it is not clear how many workers earned up to 2.7 TL per day. With an optimistic assumption that there was an equal distribution, we might calculate that 990 of 1,486 workers in Group C earned at most 2.7 TL. While 1098 workers in Group D earned 1.6 or 2 TL, 829 in Group F earned 1.6 TL.⁸⁵ 47 of the total 340 civil servants earned at most up to 75 TL, mostly, meaning that their daily earning was around 3 TL as well.⁸⁶ In sum, 2,964 of the total 5,066 Turkish employees earned less than 3 TL per day. In other words, more than half of the employees in

⁸³ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 15-0-0 Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümer Bank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İçtimai Teşkilatı Hakkında 1941 Yılı Raporu, 21.

⁸⁴ This data reflects not the actual number of workers in each wage group. Instead, it shows KISW's planned cadres. Nevertheless, it demonstrates wages in KISW if the factory was able to recruit in accordance with its plans. Therefore, it is safe to instrumentalize this data.

⁸⁵ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 25-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1943 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 21.

⁸⁶ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 25-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1943 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 19.

Karabük were in quite low earning categories. But what were the implications of earning at most 3 TL per day in Karabük in 1943?

Mannock's list of grocery prices in 1943 enables us to understand the purchasing power of KISW employees. According to Mannock's list, an unrationed loaf of bread cost 0.45 TL, a kilo of tomatoes cost 0.5 to 0.7 TL, a kilo of rice cost 1.15 to 1.4 TL, and a kilo of cheese cost 2 to 2.4 TL at the time.⁸⁷ We should consider 2.7 TL as the daily earnings of a mildly skilled worker who is on his way to becoming a senior and a low-qualified civil servant.⁸⁸ Evidently, these employees were hardly able to buy a kilo of cheese and a loaf of bread with their wages. More strikingly, around 1,927 workers who earned up to only 2 TL per day could not even afford a kilo of cheese. In other words, they were hardly able to buy two loaves of bread and a kilo of rice. For 829 workers who earned 1.6 TL, it was even worse, since their wage was only equal to the price of four loaves of bread. If we assume that some of these employees were taking care of a standard family of four or five, their wages were probably not even barely sufficient. Therefore, in sum, I argue that there was a huge living expense crisis for more than half of KISW's employees, as both qualitative and quantitative evidence demonstrates.

The residents of Karabük had to face a profound crisis of shortages during World War II, in addition to a living expense crisis. According to Mr. Mannock, the military unit that was located in the district to protect factories even worsened the situation. He states that these soldiers spent at least 80,000 TL in Safranbolu just for food and meals. This made the farmers and tradesmen of Safranbolu rich.⁸⁹ However, the situation in Karabük was bad. The shortages were acute to the point that salaries almost became meaningless. Until the harvest of 1943, it was impossible to shop

⁸⁷ TNA: FO 371/37452, 7 August 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on the Position of Karabük, July 1943.

⁸⁸ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 69-0-0 Başbakanlık Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1951 Yılı Raporu, 28.

⁸⁹ TNA: FO 371/44113, 16 June 1944, Mr. Mannock's May Report on Karabük.

comfortably.⁹⁰ In October 1941, General Witham's report on Karabük, which signifies some complaints of the British employees at Karabük, also touches upon this issue. For him, one of the most important problems was increasing living expenses and a lack of choices. Shopkeepers in Karabük were charging British workers unreasonable prices for stuff like tea. Moreover, due to scarcity, these workers were living without having many fundamental supplies they used to have in their houses back in their countries.⁹¹ Mannock's letter to General Witham from July 1942 was surprisingly optimistic compared to the other reports and letters from Karabük. However, even in this letter, Mannock says that there were sometimes scarcities of some fundamental foodstuffs like bread and potatoes. Unlike them, eggs, butter, milk, and seasonal fruits and vegetables were available.⁹²

In response to this crisis, the factory, as in other state-owned factories, opened a general supplies shop in Yenişehir in 1942 and started to serve a hot meal to the workers in June 1941.⁹³ The operation of the general supplies shop shifted between Sümerbank itself and private contractors. The aim was to supply Yenişehir residents with goods that were not easily accessible in Karabük's other shops. However, British documents show that this shop was mismanaged for years, and it lacked important supplies almost constantly. Mannock finds private contractors relatively more successful, but even in their period, the goods were quickly sold out.⁹⁴ His report from June 1943, a year after the shop's establishment, shows that even goods like tea, coffee, butter, and cheese were insufficient.⁹⁵ It was only improved in 1944 with the tenure of a different

⁹⁰ TNA: FO 371/44112. 1 January 1944, Mr. Mannock's December Report on Karabük situation.

⁹¹ TNA: FO 371/30075, 20 October 1941, Report by General Witham on Karabük British Personnel.

⁹² TNA: FO 371/33317, 8 July 1942, Mr. Mannock to Mr. Sterndale Bennet, Memorandum on Karabük.

⁹³ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 7-0-0. Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu, 48; TNA FO 371/33317, 8 July 1942, Mr. Mannock to Mr. Sterndale Bennet, Memorandum on Karabük.

⁹⁴ TNA: FO 371/37450, 3 June 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on the Position at Karabük.

⁹⁵ TNA: FO 371/37450, 1 July 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on the Position at Karabük.

private contractor. However, it had problems regarding payments to Sümerbank, and some employees were complaining that it was expensive.⁹⁶

The hot meal was served once a day and consisted of 1,500 calories, based on the military calculations for the required calories in a meal. It was free for workers who earned up to 160 kr per day.⁹⁷ In 1945, the inspectors reported that neither the meals nor the cafeteria were good and clean.⁹⁸ This was only improved after the war, when this scheme was also expanded to some civil servants who earned up to 60 TL monthly. The Report of 1946 expresses satisfaction with the increasing number of cafeterias and their cleanliness.⁹⁹ In 1945, the cost of one hot meal with 450 grams of bread was 63 kr for the factory. One can assume that due to the advantageous position of the factory in the market, and the political importance of it, this was probably considerably cheaper than what it would cost if the ingredients were bought by workers individually in the markets of Karabük.

Therefore, a calculation of how many meals a worker's daily earnings could buy at the factory in 1945 would give us a clear understanding of the purchasing power, which KISW management was surely aware of since they also had to calculate the cost of a meal. In 1945, the report states that the minimum workers' wage was increased to 160 kr due to increasing living expenses and the labor market. Accordingly, 522 workers out of a total of 3,693 earned this minimum wage, while the majority earned between 200 and 300 kr, with a total of 2,378 workers. Hourly wages varied from 25 kr to 65,50 kr, and their average was 40,73 kr. Therefore, an average

⁹⁶ TNA: FO 371/44112, 10 April 1944, Mr. Mannock's March report on Karabük.

⁹⁷ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 15-0-0 Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümer Bank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İçtimai Teşkilatı Hakkında 1941 Yılı Raporu, 39.

⁹⁸ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 36-0-0. Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 101.

Interview with Ziya Büyükbektaş. Kalyoncu, *Cumhuriyet Kenti Karabük*, 199. Ziya Büyükbektaş remembers that free meals at afternoons consisted of a rice porridge with some meat pieces inside.

⁹⁹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 41-0-0. Başbakanlık Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümerbank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1946 Yılı Raporu, 48.

worker earned around 320 kr per day if he worked the regular 8-hour shift.¹⁰⁰ In that case, he was not able to receive a free meal from the factory, and his daily earnings were equivalent to the cost of five meals at the factory, but if we consider that market prices were considerably higher, he could only buy ingredients for two or three meals per day. I suggest that if we include other expenses, for instance, rent, this leaves many workers with a daily earning that would possibly only be sufficient for a meal. Therefore, I argue that meal service was only available to the workers who would not be able to eat a proper meal through their earnings, and this was a necessity to keep them working in the factory.

Another striking issue concerning wages was the significant discrepancy between workers' earnings. For instance, Group B workers earned twice as much as those in Group F, while Group A workers earned double the wages of those in Group D, and in some cases, even more than those in Group C.¹⁰¹ In other words, more than a third of workers had very good wages in comparison with their counterparts. 3.8 TL per day was considered to be a standard wage for skilled or senior workers.¹⁰² In the grocery's calculation, a medium-skilled worker was able to buy a kilo of rice and cheese in addition to a loaf of bread. Although they were hardly labor aristocrats, they did considerably better than many. In clearer numbers, if we take an unskilled worker's wage as 1 unit, a medium-skilled worker earned 1.7 units, while a skilled worker earned 2.4 units.¹⁰³ This discrepancy was also valid for civil servants. If we exclude the outliers, three people, presumably managers, who earned 500 and 600 TL monthly, and nine people who earned up to 65 TL monthly,

¹⁰⁰ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 36-0-0. Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 97-100.

¹⁰¹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 25-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1943 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 21.

¹⁰² BCA 37-10-0-0/ 69-0-0 Başbakanlık Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1951 Yılı Raporu, 26.

¹⁰³ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 69-0-0 Başbakanlık Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1951 Yılı Raporu, 27.

their wages ranged between 75 liras to 400 TL. However, those who earned between 210 to 400 TL were only 55 civil servants, while 350 of them earned between 75 to 210 TL.¹⁰⁴ If we compare civil servants within themselves, a minor but considerable portion of them earned more than twice the majority. While some of the best-earning workers' wages were around the low-earning civil servants, most of the civil servants still earned better than they did. 112 civil servants earned more than 5 TL per day, some reaching 15 TL, even if we exclude three outliers, meaning that even the best workers, who were probably not more than 100 people, earned less than what a third of civil servants did. This also means that, except for the negative outliers, an overwhelming majority of civil servants probably did not have issues with their grocery shopping when products were available. Civil servants also unequally benefited from production bonuses when it was introduced. In 1945, 167,488.59 TL were distributed to a total of 430 civil servants, and 197,457.31 TL were distributed to 4,386 workers.¹⁰⁵

British employees were also on the positive end of the scale. A list from 1943 shows that the annual wages of 21 British employees ranged between 625 and 1,500 pounds. In other words, the lowest earning British employee earned around 260 TL monthly. However, only six of them earned below 1,000 pounds annually. Therefore, an overwhelming majority of them earned more than 400 TL monthly, meaning that they did much better than almost all of their Turkish counterparts, except for the managers.¹⁰⁶ This does not mean that they were comfortable with their wages. Since many could not bring their families to Karabük, they had to sustain a second home in the UK for their wives and children.¹⁰⁷ This also meant that they had to pay an income tax to

¹⁰⁴ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 25-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1943 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Karatay, *Demir Çelik Karabük*, 67–68.

¹⁰⁶ TNA: FO 371/37450, 28 June 1943, Karabük Subsidy.

¹⁰⁷ TNA: FO 195/2463/126; FO 371/30070, 30073-30074. Both sustaining a second home in the UK and the exchange rate are recurrent themes of complaints in British documents. It should also be noted that the part of their salaries

the UK, which was even highly disturbing for someone in the position of Mr. Mannock, who did everything he could to avoid this during his negotiations before taking up the job because he thought this would bankrupt him at the end of three years.¹⁰⁸ Secondly, a part of their earnings was paid in Turkish liras, but due to inflation, it was insufficient. They had to convert Pounds to TL at an unfavorable exchange rate. For instance, while their wages were paid according to an exchange rate of 5.20, the rate that was actively used when they wanted to convert was 7.50 in 1941.¹⁰⁹ Although it is difficult to state the extent of their loss quantitatively, one can argue that it was substantial because the British government had to take action and pay an extra 25% of their wages from its public budget to keep these workers in their jobs.¹¹⁰ This group, despite all the criticism directed at them, was needed to establish the factory and train Turkish personnel. However, their limited contribution and high wages partially turned them into an extravagance.¹¹¹ Their existence added another layer to the unequal setting at Karabük.

This analysis reveals two significant points regarding the wages in KISW. Firstly, the fact that more than half of KISW's workers earned less than what we may assume as a living wage proves that the wages were not organized according to the living expenses. This was also reported in both British and Turkish documents about the workers' welfare.¹¹² Secondly, hierarchical categorization according to skill and seniority is designed in a way to reward disciplined and

which are supposed to reach their families every month was delayed very often, which should have disturbed many homes.

¹⁰⁸ TNA: FO 371/30074, 3 October 1941, Karabük- General Superintendent.

¹⁰⁹ TNA: FO 371/30075, 20 October 1941, Report by General Witham on Karabük British Personnel.

¹¹⁰ TNA: FO 371/30074, 27 September 1941, British Operatives at Karabük.

¹¹¹ TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi [Minutes of Turkish Grand National Assembly], Dönem 6, Cilt 2, 15. Birleşim, 23 May 1939, 178-179. As early as 1939 MP Emin Sazak criticized expenditure on foreign experts in Karabük.

TNA: FO 371/37450, 29 July 1943, Discontent at Karabük: Dr. Chubb and Mr. Jeffries. An intercepted letter from H.F. Jeffries of KISW demonstrate the situation very well. Jeffries wrote: "We are not here to run the laboratory, but as consultants & it seems they would sooner learn by their own mistakes, for we are very seldom consulted. ... the attitude seems to be that so long as we sit quietly in our office and do not interfere they are content to pay our high salaries."

¹¹² TNA: FO 371/37452, 7 August 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on the Position of Karabük, July 1943.

capable workers in the long term and transform them into reliable full-time industrial workers. A small minority of workers earning around a low-category civil servants' wage signals a potential for mobility for some. However, this also shows a preferential order in favor of civil servants, who mainly earned more than even the best worker, despite some not being directly related to production. Thirdly, it proves the deep inequality in Karabük, even within the ranks of workers and civil servants, let alone between these groups. To sum up, I argue that Sümerbank directed its scarce resources in favor of civil servants and potential full-time industrial workers, which worsened the conditions of the overwhelming majority and created a highly unequal setting. This also proves an order of priority. Maintaining a workforce with a certain number of skilled workers and civil servants was clearly much more significant than providing at least a basic standard of living for each worker, including junior and low-skilled ones. Consequently, while KISW's welfare provisions might have prevented literal scarcities, wages remained deeply insufficient and unequal throughout the war. This hierarchy of priorities and inequality was also multiplied by unequal allocation of other welfare services like housing and health.

1.2 Housing

It is almost impossible to encounter any historical account of Karabük before the 1930s because it was probably indistinguishable from the multitude of villages in Anatolia. It may be even more difficult since the village was isolated between mountains. Some people may have crossed Karabük during their travels to Safranbolu, but most likely, they never cared to describe it. Fortunately, some recounted their coincidental visits to Karabük's surroundings or researched its past when it had evolved into the heart of Turkish industry. Nihat Özgören, a journalist, was one of them. He recalls that once he had to spend some time around Karabük during the mid-1930s because his train broke down during his trip to Ankara from Zonguldak. According to him,

Karabük was a small village, consisting of 15 houses, in the middle of nowhere.¹¹³ Although there are various numbers suggested by different people, Karabük certainly hosted no more than 15 houses before the arrival of the railway.¹¹⁴ Even after that, there were only a few extra buildings, including a coffeehouse for people who needed to wait there a long time, a restaurant, and two buildings of the Directorate of State Railways.¹¹⁵



Figure 3: Arrival of the first locomotive to Karabük Station in November 1932.

Source: Karabük İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, <https://karabuk.ktb.gov.tr/Resim/227843.gar-acilisjpg.png?0>.

Site selection for industrial investments was a highly contentious process. It was even more contentious for iron and steel factories since these were considered part of the national defense

¹¹³ Nihat Özgören, “Demir ve Çelik Fabrikalarını ve Çevresini Tanıyalım”, *Safranbolu-Karabük*, March 11, 1947.

¹¹⁴ Ömer Faruk Macun, “Sıtmadan Başımızı Kurtaramazdık,” *Karabük Halk Eğitimi Merkezi Bülteni* (Special Issue), (1973): 24. Quoted in Hür Kalyoncu, *Cumhuriyet Kenti Karabük*, (Karabük: Karabük Valiliği Yayınları, 2007), 204. Village headmen of Öğlebeli, a larger administrative unit of Karabük at the time, also confirms this in an interview.

¹¹⁵ Erkün, “Karabük’ün Sosyal Monografisi,” 44.

industry.¹¹⁶ Therefore, the Turkish General Staff was involved in selecting the site for this enterprise, and it is widely believed that they made the decisive intervention in favor of Karabük, which was sufficiently far away from the sea and protected by mountains surrounding it.¹¹⁷ They were most likely aware that this would bring many other challenges, like accommodating or commuting thousands of workers and supplying for the factory and the people as well. However, as a later conversation in the General Inspection Board Minutes proves, erecting and operating the factories as soon as possible took precedence over these concerns.¹¹⁸

Sümerbank hoped to obtain a certain number of non-skilled workers from the surrounding villages, but it was impossible to obtain skilled workers and engineers without providing them with accommodation. Therefore, the construction of a neighborhood of at least several hundred houses was programmed.¹¹⁹ This led to the first major social stratification in Karabük's history.¹²⁰ Sümerbank made a conscious decision to build different types of accommodations for two

¹¹⁶ Görkem Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire: Industrialisation, Nation-Building, and Working-Class Politics in Turkey* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2024), 115–119. Akgöz names Karabük as the most contentious and problematic site-selection both in terms of process and the result.

¹¹⁷ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 7-0-0 Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu, 6.

Erol Tümertekin, “Ağır Demir Sanayi ve Türkiye’deki Durumu” (Ph.D. Dissertation, İstanbul, İstanbul University, 1952), 234-236. Tümertekin may be the earliest proponent of this argument. He benefits from a variety of reports in his dissertation and Sümerbank General Inspection Board Reports also confirms his point. Karabük’s proximity to the coal mining province Zonguldak is another major reason in this site-selection decision.

¹¹⁸ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 20-0-0 3640 Sayılı Kanuna Bağlı İktisadi Teşekküllerin 1942 Yılı Muameleleriyle Bilanço ve Kar ve Zarar Hesaplarını Tetkik Eden Umumi Heyet Zaptı, Cilt 5, 250. Fuat Sirmen, Minister of Economics, responds to the criticism about housing by saying that if the government were to build sufficient housing before the factory started to operate, they would have lost considerable pace.

¹¹⁹ Karatay, *Demir Çelik Karabük*, 59; Kütükçüoğlu, *Türkiye’nin İlk Ağır Sanayi Kenti Karabük*, 92–93. Karatay and Kütükçüoğlu describe this as a comprehensive *a priori* project to create a modern city and a modern Turkish citizen. Although this idea is common in political discourse, it neglects the historical formation of social welfare policies in Karabük. The next chapter will counter this argument by demonstrating that a practice of comprehensive housing had developed only gradually as a response to workers’ everyday resistance. As mentioned above, only *a priori* project was for engineers and managers of the factory.

¹²⁰ Erkün, “Karabük’ün Sosyal Monografisi,” 59–61; Fındıkoğlu, “Karabük”te Sanayileşmenin İktisadi ve İçtimai Tesirleri,” 33. Erkün, as a researcher who had three field trips to Karabük in the late 1940s, argues that in Karabük, the class distinction is specifically visible in terms of space, and differentiation of accommodation and leisure constitutes the main lines of this distinction. Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu, who also did several field trips to Karabük, also argues that there are social and cultural differences between Yenışehir and other neighborhoods.

segments of working people. While the area on the opposite side of the factory, called “Yenişehir,” was designed to host civil servants, engineers, and highly skilled workers in apartments and family houses, a dormitory was constructed on the factory site to host 400 construction workers.¹²¹ I argue that this divergence between residential sites constituted the foundations of unequal modernization in Karabük. Yenişehir was a concerted effort to build a modern neighborhood to satisfy the needs of engineers, civil servants, and highly skilled workers. On the contrary, workers’ dormitories were only there to meet basic accommodation needs.¹²²



*Figure 4: KISW (foreground) and Yenişehir (background, pointed as “I” in the photograph), 05.08.1940.
Source: Author’s personal collection.*

¹²¹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 7-0-0 Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu, 44-46, 48.

¹²² Tümertekin, “Ağır Demir Sanayi ve Türkiye’deki Durumu”, 270. Tümertekin’s dissertation was admitted in 1952, but even in that period he could not restrain himself from asking whether it was impossible to build houses that are more suitable to the characteristics and pleasures of workers when the construction started in Karabük.



Figure 5: Karabük town center at the end of the 1940s. Railway tracks (left), workers' houses (left corner) and workers' dormitories (right).

Source: Karabük İl Kültür ve Turizm Müdürlüğü, <https://karabuk.ktb.gov.tr/Resim/227852,oz-8jpg.png?0>.

Accommodation statistics from 1940, when factories started to operate, show another stark inequality between these two groups. At the end of the year, the factory had 180 houses in addition to the workers' dormitories. General Inspection Board Reports categorizes KISW's houses according to their distribution. This categorization demonstrates that workers' accommodation did not remain limited to dormitories, and the factory started to build houses for them too. However, the number of houses built for each group was highly disproportionate. While only 56 workers' houses were built for 2,610 workers, 124 civil servants' houses were built for 215 civil servants. It should be noted that these workers' houses were also built closer to the factory, next to the river running between the Yenişehir hills and the factory site.¹²³ 800-900 workers were also accommodated in dormitories, but these were highly defective. They were adobe buildings that

¹²³ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 7-0-0 Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu, 44-46. Considering that Karabük lacked proper sewage and sanitation system and were filled with diseases rooted in those, living next to a running river, to which probably town's, especially Yenişehir's waste flowed meant being more vulnerable to certain diseases.

were built to house workers temporarily during the construction. They had only 500 beds. Most probably, workers who were currently on different shifts shared a bed. The inspector was dissatisfied with the hygienic conditions in the dormitories, too.¹²⁴ These conditions suggest that the factory management privileged the welfare of civil servants against the basic needs of workers, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This unmistakable hierarchy of needs and welfare was maintained for a decade. However, this does not mean that civil servants were not suffering from the lack of and low quality of housing as well.

One could take the example of British personnel of KISW to demonstrate the acute conditions of housing in Karabük at the time. British employees at Karabük were constituted of highly skilled workers who were attracted to the factory with high salaries and other promises like free and suitable housing.¹²⁵ However, reports from British officials and letters from British workers show that Sümerbank constantly fell short of its promises. The lack of housing constitutes a constant complaint in these documents. In 1940, R. Sharp stated to the factory manager Akkoç that many British operatives still did not have any proper accommodation. Moreover, although they were promised “suitable accommodation” in their contracts, those who had houses were not given some amenities like cupboards, and the factory even made them pay for the wardrobes given to them.¹²⁶ The factory was unable to provide proper housing and fulfill its contracted promises to a group of workers, which it was most anxious to keep working efficiently.

Housing remained inadequate until the end of the decade despite the continual building of new houses almost every year. Two moments of crisis made the acute conditions even clearer. British workers were also promised in their contracts that their wives and children, whose ages

¹²⁴ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 7-0-0 Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu, 48.

¹²⁵ TNA: FO 195/2463/126, 27 September 1940, L. F. Korb to Sir Knatchbull-Hugessen, Karabük Service Contract.

¹²⁶ TNA: FO 195/2463/126, 4 September 1940, R. Sharp from British Club, Karabük to the Management of KISW.

were below 18, would join them in Karabük. Nonetheless, the war conditions prevented both the British and Turkish governments from taking concrete actions in this matter, and many families remained apart from each other. In late 1943, British workers gained some hope in this matter since the war in the Mediterranean became more controlled in favor of the British, and routes to Turkey were relatively safer. However, Mannoock's report states that in case families were to arrive at Karabük, there would be no proper housing for many. Many British workers were sharing houses in Karabük since they did not have their families with them. Upon hearing that their families might join them, they demanded separate houses. However, as Mannoock states, this was impossible because there were not enough houses. This demand could only be met by making Turkish families leave their houses, which would enhance the overcrowding problem.¹²⁷ In January 1944, another report by Mannoock shows that this was actually what happened. Both British and Turkish single personnel were packed closer in some houses to create space for families. To prevent any crises, the management rented some houses in the city and subleased them to employees.¹²⁸

In February 1944, an earthquake shook the Western and Central Black Sea, which damaged a lot of houses in Karabük. According to the rumors that Mannoock heard, more than 500 people in the city were left homeless, and at least 13 houses in Yenışehir were unlivable. In response, personnel were packed even more tightly. The basements of some of the factory houses were transformed into temporary rooms for those who were left homeless.¹²⁹ Some British workers were also among the hosts. The factory also decided to build wooden houses on the factory site to temporarily host these people, but only 50 of them were going to be available in the following

¹²⁷ TNA: FO 371/44112, 21 December 1943, Mr. Mannoock's November Report on Karabük Situation.

¹²⁸ TNA: FO 371/44112, 7 February 1944, Mr. Mannoock's January Report on Karabük.

¹²⁹ Kalyoncu, *Cumhuriyet Kenti Karabük*, 188. Turhan Kökkaya, a witness of the period, tells a detailed story of the earthquake to Hür Kalyoncu during an interview.

month.¹³⁰ Rebii Barkın, who was also a member of the Board, visited Karabük and these wooden houses in 1945. According to him, these supposedly temporary houses still housed families of seven people in just one room. Moreover, they did not have any proper facilities like bathrooms and kitchens, except for a toilet. He states that there were 70 wooden houses and 100 more were being constructed by the factory.¹³¹ This temporary response to the earthquake was turned into a permanent response to the acute housing problem in the city, without consideration of other needs. Hulki Alisbah, the general manager of Sümerbank, also admitted that these wooden houses were not built to satisfaction, but they were just born out of a requirement in response to the earthquake. Moreover, in 1944, more than 200 proper houses were also built.¹³² It should be noted that the number of employees was constantly increasing in these years. When the earthquake shook Karabük, more than 4,000 workers and 400 civil servants were employed in the factories.¹³³

At the end of the war, the factory still did not have sufficient housing for its employees. Compared to the 340 houses and two dormitories that were in use in 1942, there were 833 houses, including the temporary wooden houses at the end of 1945.¹³⁴ However, when one investigates the distribution of houses, it shows that only a minority of workers obtained accommodation, in contrast to civil servants and highly skilled workers. Although official statistics sometimes categorized workers and foremen (*usta*) in the same group, which shows the accommodation percentage for workers higher than it should be, the statistics of 1945 had a differentiation. Only

¹³⁰ TNA: FO 371/44112, 20 March 1944, Mr. Mannock's February Report on Karabük.

¹³¹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 35-0-0 3640 Sayılı Kanuna Bağlı İktisadi Teşekküllerin 1944 Yılı İşlemleriyle Bilanço ve Kar ve Zarar Hesaplarını İnceleyen Genel Kurul Tutanağı, Cilt 7, 215-216.

¹³² BCA 37-10-0-0/ 35-0-0 3640 Sayılı Kanuna Bağlı İktisadi Teşekküllerin 1944 Yılı İşlemleriyle Bilanço ve Kar ve Zarar Hesaplarını İnceleyen Genel Kurul Tutanağı, Cilt 7, 220-221.

¹³³ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 31-0-0 Sümerbank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 16.

¹³⁴ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 20-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 56; BCA 37-10-0-0/ 36-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 102.

15.8% of workers were accommodated in factory houses with their families, while 25.8% of them were accommodated in dormitories. Although 509 of 1,008 workers who were accommodated in dormitories were also married, they were unable to live with their families. On the other hand, 70% of civil servants and managers were accommodated in houses with 3, 5, or 7 rooms. Considering that workers' houses had only 2-3 rooms, temporary wooden houses had just one room, and many shared wards in dormitories, this shows how, despite the increasing percentage of accommodated workers, they were still discriminated against in construction and distribution processes. Many had to live in shanty houses in Karabük or commute from their villages, mostly on foot.



*Figure 6: "Several houses from Yenişehir, Karabük."
Source: Author's personal collection.*

1.3 Keeping People Healthy

The iron and steel industry requires a good level of technical knowledge, experience, and skilled workers, according to contemporaneous sources. Turkey, except for the British workers, lacked all of these. This provided the first major risk in terms of keeping workers and civil servants in the factory healthy. However, this was not the only one. Karabük was a hotbed of malaria, due

to the rivers running through the middle of the town, and the long-lasting habit of rice cultivation.¹³⁵ This, accompanied by hard working conditions, unhygienic living conditions, and nutritional deficiencies, risked the health of thousands of people in the town. Sümerbank and the Turkish government were well aware of these risks, but they were to be taken for the sake of Turkish industrialization. Factory hospital and other health services were established to prevent these, but as in housing and other welfare services, they failed. This failure also revealed stark inequalities in experiencing Karabük.

Karabük was not a unique case regarding malaria. There was a constant malaria epidemic threat in many parts of Turkey in the early 20th century.¹³⁶ However, whereas the government was fighting against malaria in those districts, it constructed KISW in a valley that is known as a malaria region without taking any measures.¹³⁷ General Inspection Board Reports demonstrate that Turkish management was aware of the malaria epidemic in the district, even in the early steps. Between 1938 and 1941, the factory hospital treated 4,512 cases of malaria on average each year.¹³⁸ The Report of 1940 claims that the condition was getting better because malaria was fought actively by the factory's health protection staff. It was true because compared to 1939, the hospital treated 1,653 fewer malaria cases. However, this was only a partial and temporary victory. In 1941, the number of cases was even higher than in 1939. Nevertheless, this could be considered a good year if they knew what was coming.

¹³⁵ Interview with Hüsni Bodur, Kalyoncu, *Cumhuriyet Kenti Karabük*, 168. Kalyoncu's interviewee Hüsni Bodur is one of the earliest settlers in Karabük. He moved into the village in 1931 as a butcher to sell meat to railroad workers. He says that he used to organize his working hours by predicting when he is going to have a malaria attack because it was unavoidable.

¹³⁶ İlhan Tekeli and Selim İlkin, "Türkiye'de Sıtma Mücadelesinin Tarihi," in *Cumhuriyetin Harcı II: Köktenci Modernitenin Ekonomik Politikasının Gelişimi* (İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2003), 147.

¹³⁷ Tekeli and İlkin, 129. According to Tekeli and İlkin, Araç Valley, in which Filyos River flowed, and KISW was located, was among the malaria regions detected in a map of malaria regions from 1924.

¹³⁸ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 7-0-0 Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu, 47; BCA 37-10-0-0/ 24-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 58.

*Table 2: Number of malaria treatments in KISW hospital between 1938 and 1945.
Source: Sümerbank General Inspection Board Reports of 1940, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945.*

Year	Number of Malaria Treatments
1938	4,995
1939	4,885
1940	3,232
1941	4,936
1942	14,202
1943	13,053
1944	13,372
1945	7,569

Between 1942 and 1945, a malaria epidemic raged in Karabük. According to the official statistics, the hospital treated 14,202 cases in 1942, 13,053 cases in 1943, 13,372 cases in 1944, and 7,569 cases in 1945.¹³⁹ Karabük's population was 15,019 in 1940 and 20,064 in 1945.¹⁴⁰ Safranbolu's population, including Karabük, was 73,733 and 59,839 in these respective years.¹⁴¹ If we assume that population changes were distributed equally to other years, we can calculate the percentage of malaria treatment in KISW hospital in proportion to both Karabük's and Safranbolu's populations. Accordingly, between 1940 and 1945, malaria treatment cases in KISW hospital were 14,3% of the Safranbolu population and 53% of Karabük's population on average.

¹³⁹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 31-0-0 Sümerbank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 50; BCA 37-10-0-0/ 36-0-0. Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 104.

¹⁴⁰ Genel Nüfus Sayımı, 20 Ekim 1940: Vilayetler, Kazalar, Nahiyeler ve Köyler İtibarile Nüfus ve Yüzey Ölçü, Devlet İstatistik Enstitütüsü, Ankara, 1940, 679; Genel Nüfus Sayımı, 21 Ekim 1945: İl, İlçe, Bucak ve Muhtarlıklar İtibariyle Nüfus Miktarı ve Yüzey Ölçü, Devlet İstatistik Enstitütüsü, Ankara, 1945, 618.

¹⁴¹ Genel Nüfus Sayımı, 20 Ekim 1940, 680; Genel Nüfus Sayımı, 21 Ekim 1945, 618.

For comparison, malaria treatment cases in Turkey averaged only 5,2% of the national population in the same period.¹⁴² If we only consider the number of people who were examined for malaria, instead of the whole population, malaria treatment numbers constituted 44,5% on average.¹⁴³ People who were examined for malaria were from malaria regions, meaning that the percentage of cases should be expected to be high. Nevertheless, calculations prove that malaria treatment numbers in proportion to Karabük's population were even above that. Therefore, the malaria epidemic in Karabük, even if one includes the Safranbolu district, was considerably above both the national average and the other malaria regions.

Table 3: Percentage of Malaria Treatments in Turkey Relative to Total Population and to Number of People Examined for Malaria; Percentage of Malaria Treatments in KISW Hospital Relative to the Population of Safranbolu and Karabük (1940–1945)

Source: Tekeli and İlkin, "Türkiye'de Sıtma Mücadelesinin Tarihi," 158.

Genel Nüfus Sayımı, 20 Ekim 1940, 680.

Genel Nüfus Sayımı, 21 Ekim 1945, 618.

Sümerbank General Inspection Board Reports of 1940, 1942, 1944, 1945.

Year	% of Malaria Treatment in Turkey Relative to Total Population	% of Malaria Treatment in Turkey Relative to Number of People Examined for Malaria	% of Malaria Treatment at KISW Hospital Relative to Safranbolu Population	% of Malaria Treatment at KISW Hospital Relative to Karabük Population
1940	6	45	4	22
1941	6	41	7	31
1942	4	44	20	84
1943	6	47	20	73
1944	5	44	22	70
1945	14	46	13	38

¹⁴² Tekeli and İlkin, "Türkiye'de Sıtma Mücadelesinin Tarihi," 158. Tekeli and İlkin's table demonstrates absolute numbers, but calculations about percentages and averages belong to me.

¹⁴³ Tekeli and İlkin, 158.

It is also known that some workers were less likely to report their illness to avoid losing some workdays, and thus earnings. Considering that the number of workers in these years was between 3,500 and 4,500, it is safe to suggest that many employees caught malaria during this epidemic. This led to the loss of thousands of working hours for the factory. In 1942, the factory lost working hours, which is equivalent to six months of work by 140 workers, because of malaria. Although it is impossible to calculate, the report states, since many workers came to work while they were sick not to lose their earnings, this also caused a major loss of efficiency.¹⁴⁴ The report also claims that the factory was successful in eliminating malaria within the borders of the factory site. However, since most of the workers came from surrounding villages, they brought malaria with them.¹⁴⁵ According to what Mr. Mannock has heard from experienced workers in Karabük, the former general manager was strictly fighting against malaria by implementing the ban on cultivating rice, preventing mosquitoes from reproducing by cleaning water resources, and other methods. But since he left, between 1941 and 1944, nothing was done against malaria, and rice cultivation was allowed again.¹⁴⁶ It turns out that his sources were correct, and the Turkish government was unable and unwilling to enforce the ban on cultivating rice.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore,

¹⁴⁴ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 24-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 58.

¹⁴⁵ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 24-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 284.

¹⁴⁶ TNA: FO 371/44112, 1 January 1944, Mr. Mannock's December Report on Karabük Situation.

¹⁴⁷ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 25-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1943 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 76.

BCA 490-1-0-0/ 728-495-5 Bazı Bölgelerdeki Fabrika, İşyerleri ve İşçilerin Genel Durumu Hakkında Büyük Millet Meclisi Çalışma Komisyonundan bir Gurubun Hazırladığı Rapor. [Çalışma Komisyonunun Mütenekkiren İşyerlerini Tetkik ve Seyahat Anında Tarafımdan Görülenleri Arzeden Rapor Denemesi, Dr. M. Şerif Korkut, Burdur Milletvekili, Çalışma Komisyonu Üyesi. 25 Eylül 1947]. MP Dr. M. Şerif Korkut states that during the construction period local administration was asked to prevent rice cultivation, but it was rejected because rice cultivation brought 40.000 TL income to the district yearly. According to him, several workers were dying each day due to malaria at the time.

despite the epidemic being well-known and inspectors explicitly warning about malaria, Karabük was not listed as an official malaria district until 1944.¹⁴⁸

Mannock's monthly reports show that this was a constant threat in Karabük, which ravaged everyone. For instance, despite living in relatively better conditions, working less, eating more, and having a proper house, compared to thousands of Turkish workers, 35% of the British people in Karabük caught malaria in July of 1943.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the factory hospital did not have a specific malaria doctor and staff until March 1944. In March 1944, a group of extra nurses and a malaria doctor were appointed to the hospital.¹⁵⁰ However, Mannock states that the process of filling water pools to prevent mosquito reproduction was slower than the doctor planned, which led to another summer of malaria epidemic in 1944.¹⁵¹ We observe the drastic decrease in the number of malaria cases in 1945, which was likely due to this work, and also improving conditions in terms of nutrition since the war was coming to an end. However, a short quote from Mannock's report on the hospital vividly demonstrates the seriousness of malaria crises in these years: "During the Malaria plague now raging there are crowds of patients besieging the place. The hall, passages, and the steps outside are full of sick people, yellow with fever, some lying prone some huddled up for warmth, many shivering violently."¹⁵²

But it also shows another significant aspect of malaria treatment in Karabük. According to Mannock, quinine, which was crucial in the treatment of malaria, was limited, and sometimes absent. Therefore, the British employees were demanding the British Embassy to provide them

¹⁴⁸ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 20-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 58; BCA 37-10-0-0/ 31-0-0 Sümerbank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 51.

¹⁴⁹ TNA: FO 371/37452, 7 August 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on the position of Karabük.

¹⁵⁰ TNA: FO 371/44112, 10 April 1944, Mr. Mannock's March report on Karabük; BCA 37-10-0-0/ 31-0-0 Sümerbank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 51.

¹⁵¹ TNA: FO 371/44112, 23 May 1944, Mr. Mannock's April report on Karabük.

¹⁵² TNA: FO 371/37452, 18 October 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on Karabük Situation, Karabük Hospital.

with some.¹⁵³ However, even when quinine was available, it was only for a privileged group. Those who were not fortunate enough to be privileged would get a shot from an “unsterilized hypodermic syringe, which most of the time *did* not help at all”.¹⁵⁴

Karabük was also full of other health problems during these years. To our knowledge, typhus, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and intestinal parasites were other common diseases in the area. Tuberculosis and pneumonia had resulted from the fact that many workers had to walk for long hours after their shift within the very hot environment of KISW, but they were not considered occupational diseases.¹⁵⁵ Human mobility, combined with the unsanitary urban conditions, fostered other diseases. For instance, two types of intestinal parasites, which were common among people of the Eastern Black Sea region who constituted a considerable portion of migrant workers at Karabük, were turning into a major issue in 1945, as MP Niyazi İsmet Gözcü, who was also a military doctor, warned.¹⁵⁶ Between 1940 and 1945, the hospital in Karabük treated an average of more than 59,000 patients every year. Considering that the population was around 15,000 in these years, this means that an overwhelming majority visited the hospital at least more than twice. It is safe to say that this is the case even if we exclude the malaria epidemic, since at most 14,000-15,000 patients were treated for malaria in these years on average. Dental problems and work accidents were listed among the reasons for common visits to the hospital.

This brings us to another problem in Karabük: work accidents. The fact that the factory started to operate in 1940 with a group of workers who were not experienced or skilled was a huge risk. Due to a high labor turnover rate, KISW was unable to consolidate a skilled and experienced

¹⁵³ TNA: FO 371/37452, 28 September 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on Conditions at Karabük.

¹⁵⁴ TNA: FO 371/37452, 18 October 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on Karabük Situation, Karabük Hospital.

¹⁵⁵ TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, Dönem 8, Cilt 10, 39. Birleşim, 6 February 1948, 53.

TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, Dönem 8, Cilt 12, 68. Birleşim, 7 June 1948, 114.

¹⁵⁶ TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, Dönem 7, Cilt 20, 19. Birleşim, 26 December 1945, 458-459.

workforce until the end of the 1940s. Moreover, new parts of the factory started to operate in the middle of the war, which worsened the situation. A witness of the period, Kemal Özdemir, recalls that there were at least several mortal work accidents in the factory each day.¹⁵⁷ Official statistics do not confirm this statement.¹⁵⁸ One needs to approach both with suspicion. Whereas Özdemir's recollection of this memory was in 2017, more than 70 years after this period, the factory's accident record-keeping practice was even criticized by the inspectors for the lack of standard and unreliability.¹⁵⁹ However, we can safely say that the factory had a high rate of work accidents during these years, varying from year to year. In 1941, there were 594 major and 119 minor accidents according to the report, and this might be the year Kemal Özdemir reported about.¹⁶⁰ However, in other years between 1940 and 1945, it averaged 104 major and 1,489 minor accidents per year. Unfortunately, I am unable to determine the criteria for major and minor accidents, but I can argue that from 1942 on, record-keeping for minor accidents must have improved since 1942 had 2,086 minor accidents compared to last year's 119.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Kemal Özdemir, "3 Nisan 1937'den Bugüne Karabük Paneli'ne Sunum" in *3 Nisan 1937'den Bugüne Karabük*, Karabük: Karabük Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2017, 36, cited in Karatay, *Demir Çelik Karabük*, 75.

¹⁵⁸ Karatay, *Demir Çelik Karabük*, 75. Karatay argues that official reports do not have any word about work accidents. Although I agree that they often neglect detailed reporting of work accidents, I believe there is no reason to neglect available data and rely on one interview.

¹⁵⁹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 56-0-0 Başbakanlık Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Karabük Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesinin 1949 Yılı Raporu, 17.

¹⁶⁰ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 20-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 58.

¹⁶¹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 20-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 58.

*Table 4: Number of work accidents at KISW between 1938 and 1945.
Source: Sümerbank General Inspection Board Reports of 1940, 1942, 1944, 1945.*

Year	Major Accidents	Minor Accidents
1938	72	30
1939	291	82
1940	122	140
1941	594	119
1942	103	2,086
1943	72	2,014
1944	133	1,725
1945	92	1,484

The factory management's awareness of the risk of work accidents was made clear in their policy regarding the hospital beds. In 1940, Karabük's hospital had only 39 beds, and 10 of them were kept empty in case of any accidents.¹⁶² Therefore, the factory predicted that there is always a significant possibility that while minor accidents in the factory could injure at least several people every day, a major accident could injure more than that. To make it even more clear that the situation in Karabük was considerably worse than anywhere else, the number of work accidents in 1941 in Karabük was seven times more than the second-worst state-owned factory.¹⁶³ According to a British report, the frequency rate of accidents per 100.000 working hours was considerably

¹⁶² BCA 37-10-0-0/ 7-0-0 Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu, 47.

¹⁶³ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 15-0-0 Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümer Bank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İhtimai Teşkilatı Hakkında 1941 Yılı Raporu, 35.

higher than similar factories in other countries, but their severity rates were lower, which proves most of the accidents were minor ones that were caused by inexperience.¹⁶⁴

This reveals a lot about how workers of Karabük were perceived and treated. I must note that, except for British employees and some of the Turkish engineers, none of the workers had neither instruction manuals nor required training to work in this highly specialized production facility. Most of the workers were employed according to the daily demands of the factory, and an overwhelming majority of them only worked for short terms.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, despite the existence of a training and trial process on paper, they were not implemented.¹⁶⁶ Since both British and Turkish governments were convinced that Turkey should produce at least a certain part of its iron and steel needs urgently, the risk of high rates of work accidents was knowingly taken. One of the major inequalities and problems of Karabük was situated in this issue because it is safe to argue that the overwhelming majority of the thousands of work accidents that occurred in KISW in this period affected inexperienced workers disproportionately for sure.

The factory had a hospital that served its employees and the other residents of the district, but it remained insufficient throughout the 1940s.¹⁶⁷ In 1939, it only had six beds and one

¹⁶⁴ TNA: FO 371/33315, 31 December 1941, H.A. Brassert & Co., Limited's Complete Operation Report for the Period of 9 September 1939- 9 March 1941.

¹⁶⁵ Erkün, "Karabük'ün Sosyal Monografisi," 96. Erkün writes that many days workers were employed among people who just wait in front of the factory doors before the shift starts, according to the needs of the factory.

¹⁶⁶ The lack of instruction manuals, standardized procedures for employment and training is a constant theme in both British and Turkish documents. Although efforts like apprentice schools and internship periods helped to improve this situation, they mostly affected a minority of workers.

¹⁶⁷ Unfortunately, a mistake by Ahmet Makal is repeated both by him and others in this regard. Makal claims that Karabük had two hospitals, with 150 and 20 beds, seven dispensaries and 115 personnel, including 28 doctors, in April 1944. However, he cites the inspection report of Ereğli Coal Enterprises while giving this information. Ereğli Coal Enterprises employed at least five times more workers than Karabük, and its coal pits were spread into a large area. Therefore, these statistics most probably belong to there, but definitely not to Karabük.

Makal, *Türkiye'de Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri, 1920-1946*, 271; Makal, "Türkiye'nin Sanayileşme Sürecinde İşgücü Sorunu, Sosyal Politika ve İktisadi Devlet Teşekkülleri: 1930'lu ve 1940'lı Yıllar," in *Ameleden İşçiye: Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi Çalışmaları* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2007), 141; Tekeli and İlkin, *İktisadi Politikaları ve Uygulamalarıyla İkinci Dünya Savaşı Türkiye'si*, 199–200.

bathroom, but nothing else. Only one doctor was working in the hospital.¹⁶⁸ Due to the awareness that this could create a disaster in case of an epidemic, Sümerbank promised to build a hospital with 120 beds.¹⁶⁹ However, this had to wait for a long time. In 1940, the hospital was in a temporary building, and it had only 39 beds. Although the population was relatively smaller in 1940, it was still insufficient. The inspector reported that sometimes the hospital staff discharged ill people to open space for people who were in a more severe condition. In 1943, it was expanded to 46 beds by including the space of the British and Turkish Clubs that were in the same building as the hospital.¹⁷⁰ Surprisingly enough, the clubs had new buildings in three months, whereas the hospital needed to wait another two years.¹⁷¹ It was only expanded to have around 100 beds in 1945 with the new building. This hospital needed to take care of around 20,000 people, and if one includes a military garrison in the district, it was closer to 30,000.

Mannock's report on the hospital clearly demonstrates that it was unable to meet this need due to a lack of medical staff, medical provisions, proper building, and some important devices like an X-ray machine. In 1943, the staff consisted of a surgeon who was also the chief, a physician, a woman doctor who usually took care of children, one dentist, three dressers, one matron, and some nurses. Mannock claims that they were overworked all the time, specifically because of the malaria epidemic. However, this was probably not the worst side of the hospital. Although Mannock appreciates this overworking staff, he also says that the physician was an interesting person who "only allow three kinds of disability: Malaria, Karabük Stomach, and child-birth". More interestingly, many thought the treatment for all three was the same: it was a choice among

¹⁶⁸ TNA: FO 371/23292/136, 18 January 1939, Percy Lorraine's Report on His Meeting with Celal Bayar, Sukru Saracoglu and Tevfik Rustu Aras.

¹⁶⁹ TNA: FO 371/23292/136, 22 April 1939, Memorandum by Commercial Secretary on the Construction and Operation of Karabük Iron and Steel Works.

¹⁷⁰ TNA: FO 371/44112, 1 January 1944, Mr. Mannock's December Report on Karabük Situation; BCA 37-10-0-0/25-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1943 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu.

¹⁷¹ TNA: FO 371/44112, 23 May 1944, Mr. Mannock's April report on Karabük.

quinine, two tonics, and an effective purgative. In most basic cases, dressers directly used their hypodermic syringes without even changing or sterilizing them, and nobody was concerned about it, because they thought a shot was a treatment for anything.

Maybe more importantly for our purposes here, the hospital was a place where class distinction and inequality made themselves more visible than anywhere else. Mannock not only tells that quinine was available only for a privileged group but also narrates imaginary dramatic scenes from the hospital. For instance, he states that the rules were only implemented if you were an important person. If you were just a worker or a woman, an important person could have entered the room during your treatment, and you would have had to wait there half-naked while the doctor greeted him. The important person waits until your treatment is done. When you leave the room, the doctor locks the door and follows the rules while treating him. If the visitor was an even more important person, he/she could have gone directly upstairs to the chief surgeon's comfortable waiting room. Another class distinction comes into play in treatment, because you could only get a bed if you were important or you had money. However, even if you got a bed, the conditions were not good. Mannock tells how the hospital was filled with bugs by declaring that the late British Schoolmaster held the record of catching the most bugs in a night with 37, and it was said that he got rid of his melancholia thanks to the excitement of this hunt. More seriously, he argues, you would either get malaria or kidney trouble due to the "limey water" of the hospital if you stayed long.

Mannock finishes his narration by stating that "no people of a soft kind" could live through the experience of this hospital. Moreover, "neither malaria nor kidney trouble can be cured here", and "no Turkish woman of good standing would dream of having a baby in Karabük". Therefore, "the hospital is in the main given up to the peasants, the middle-class Turks and British. The

Turkish elite will dine, drink and play with the Head Doctor, but, when possible, they go to İstanbul for treatment.”¹⁷² He reveals something completely inaccessible in Turkish documents through his narration. The factory management, which delayed the construction of a hospital building, could not appoint a sufficient number of staff and could not provide sufficient supplies, mostly due to financial reasons for years, were clearly aware of the misery in the hospital, to a level that they would never think of having real treatment there.

1.4 Conclusion

Etatism was conceived as an alternative path of industrialization that would modernize Turkey’s economy without prompting drastic changes in socioeconomic structure and creating class division within the nation. To that end, state-owned enterprises needed to hold a delicate balance between exploiting labor and satisfying its needs. However, this chapter proves that KISW was constantly short of its promises to the employees, whether they were skilled or unskilled, British or Turkish. Turkey lacked the capacity to provide welfare to employees of state-owned enterprises while also producing a surplus. However, an absolute lack of capacity was not the only issue. The cases of wages, housing, and health services demonstrate that scarce resources were also unequally distributed within the workforce. An overwhelming majority of workers disproportionately suffered from the living expenses crisis, lack of accommodation, diseases like malaria and pneumonia, and work accidents. Turkey’s urgency to jumpstart heavy industry undermined concerns over workers’ welfare. Consequently, Turkish state-led industrialization offered unequal development in Karabük, accompanied by a lot of tragedies and misery.

Sümerbank and KISW were also distant from being able to implement their projection primarily because of the concurrent scarcity of skilled and unskilled labor. KISW suffered from a

¹⁷² TNA: FO 371/37452, 18 October 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on Karabük Situation, Karabük Hospital.

high labor turnover rate throughout the period. Particularly, civil servants did not want to stay in this isolated town for all the reasons mentioned in this chapter. This played a significant role in the unequal distribution of resources because KISW felt compelled to prioritize the perceived needs of much-needed skilled employees. On the other hand, workers were perceived as an easily exploitable and docile mass, whose resources could be diverted to a minority. The reality was strikingly different. KISW never managed to create a disciplined and stable workforce. Only a section of people preferred long-term KISW employment, whereas the majority created coping strategies that undermined the factory's feasibility but ameliorated their lives. The next chapter explores how workers' and civil servants' coping strategies undermined the state-capitalist project and shaped social welfare policies in Karabük.

2 How to Cope with the Misery: People's Coping Strategies during the War

The state capitalist motives, urgency to increase iron and steel production levels, and a lack of necessary state capacity transformed Karabük into a site of socioeconomic inequality, overexploitation, and misery. This was the consequence of a list of intentional decisions, mistakes in planning, and an inability to implement. However, the state and its branches were not the sole actors in this process. I have associated the workers and other residents of Karabük only with the act of suffering throughout the first chapter. For the early republican political elite and many scholars who wrote about state-led industrialization, they were passive and docile subjects who could only suffer. In other words, they were victims of this grand historical narrative of state-capitalist industrialization. However, they were neither docile subjects nor mere victims. In contrast, they pursued a wide array of coping strategies that shaped not only their lives but also the direction of state-led industrialization in Karabük.

This chapter moves beyond discussions of their working and living conditions around KISW and explores the various coping strategies they adopted to either prompt a change in the policy level or ameliorate their position within the existing circumstances. The semi-proletarian characteristics of labor in Karabük and the oppressive labor regime made organized and collective action infeasible for workers and others. Therefore, many adopted invisible, mostly individual, and long-term strategies, which would improve their lives without provoking repression. Some even resorted to collaboration and improved their circumstances through climbing the ladder at any given opportunity. Each strategy had various effects on their lives and KISW, but their accumulation offered only a partial success to the state-led industrialization project because while collaboration sustained production to a level, widespread and high labor mobility significantly

undermined efficiency. Mobility and flexibility of the people proved to be key features in this process. People's creative and selective appropriation of different coping strategies, ranging from collaboration to explicit resistance, compelled the state and management to improve their conditions accordingly. This chapter first presents two moments of organized action that were immediately suppressed. I argue that these incidents prove the unfeasibility of it. Then, it moves on to an analysis of long-term coping strategies and their effects, with a specific attention and effort to recognize the diversity of these actions.

2.1 The Impossibility of Organized Resistance

In comparison with other industrial towns, Karabük's history seemed to be a history without open political or social conflicts. Political atmosphere in the city remained relatively calm throughout the 20th century, even during Turkey's tumultuous years under military juntas. KISW workers also remained on the side of the status quo in many instances. Their unions were of a more conservative and right-wing nature, in accordance with the ruling coalitions.¹⁷³ They also avoided explicit industrial action like strikes, unlike their counterparts in the Zonguldak coalfield.¹⁷⁴ Likewise, in the 1940s, primary sources and secondary literature do not point to considerable political and social conflicts. This is partially rooted in the fact that the factory documents are still inaccessible to historians, and inspection reports usually focus on aggregate production-related issues. Moreover, Karabük files in the National Archives of the UK had not been explored until this thesis. Only the suppression of a communist cell and a fight between interns and foremen, which turned into a conflict with police and the management, are mentioned in several sources.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Karatay, *Demir Çelik Karabük*, 151–57.

¹⁷⁴ Only exception was when the government announced plans to close KISW in 1994, which forced workers and other residents into a wave of strike and urban protests, which resulted in revocation of the decision. Instead, KISW was privatized through a symbolic sale of its shares to people of Karabük, workers and Karabük's tradesmen.

¹⁷⁵ Ali Karatay, *Demir Çelik Karabük: Bir İşçi Kentinin Hikâyesi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018), 90; Mustafa Berkay Aydın, "Formation of Working Class in a Steel Town in Turkey: A Narration of Workers from Public to

This section explores an unexplored case of organized action, besides the suppression of the communist cell, to demonstrate how limited the potential for organized action was.

The one and only organized workplace action we come across in the archives took place in the fall of 1940, not by Turkish but by British employees. As stated in the first chapter, British employees also suffered from a list of problems, including remaining apart from their families, despite enjoying a relatively advantageous position compared to their Turkish counterparts. They were under the protection of the British government. Most of the time, they directed their demands and complaints either to the British government or the embassy in Ankara and invited them to pressure the Turkish government. Maybe even more importantly, they were skilled and experienced employees that Turkey and KISW were in dire need of, and the UK had a difficult time supplying to their partner. Most of them were engineers, chemists, and foremen with experience in the iron and steel works of the UK. If one left Karabük, it took months to find someone to replace him and facilitate his transport to Turkey.¹⁷⁶

Unlike Turkish engineers, most of whom were recently graduated from universities, and workers, who were mostly peasants without prior experience, British employees of Karabük were familiar with labor organizations and industrial disputes. In 1940, the British Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) had around 100.000 members. Furthermore, they were formally involved in negotiations regarding the war effort in the steel industry. Ernest Bevin, a former trade union

Private Sector” (Ph.D. Thesis, Ankara, Middle East Technical University, 2016), 108–10; Interview with İlhami Açıksöz, Yıldırım Koç, *Sendikacıların Anlatımıyla Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Hareketi* (İstanbul: Sosyal Tarih Yayınları, 2021), 208.

¹⁷⁶ TNA: FO 371/30070, 3 January 1941, Operatives for Karabük Steel Works. Both representatives of British government and Brassert company explicitly state that it is hardly possible to find suitable voluntary candidates for jobs in KISF in a group of correspondence.

TNA: FO 371/30071, 6 May 1941, Extra Operatives for Karabük. A recorded conversation with Mr. Chegwiddden of Ministry of Labour shows that British government were also concerned about safety during potential travels of any employee that would be recruited for KISW.

leader, was appointed as the Minister of Labor in the same year as well.¹⁷⁷ Hence, as Arthur Pugh, the man who played a key role in the formation of the confederation, states, organized labor had a good standing in the UK.¹⁷⁸ Documents show that British trade unions were monitoring the situation in Karabük as well.¹⁷⁹ In addition to their familiarity with industrial politics, British employees of KISW also constituted a tighter community compared to their Turkish counterparts. While many workers were dispersed around tens of villages, and worked only temporarily in the factory, which was even a bigger problem in 1940, British workers had to share the same spaces for living every day. Almost the only social space they had was the British Club, which was a recreational space but became the epicenter of the first organized action in Karabük's history.

Rudolf Sharp, the chairman of the British Club, sent a letter to the factory management on behalf of all the British employees of KISW on September 4, 1940.¹⁸⁰ The letter reveals the structure of the British Club in addition to the complaints and demands of British employees. Although the club was mostly mentioned as an informal organization or space to facilitate amusement to the British community in other documents, this letter demonstrates that it had an internal constitution that brought obligations to act in certain situations. According to the letter, 20 members of the club demanded an extraordinary general meeting on September 2 to discuss some problems that have been interpreted as a breach of their contract. Following the constitution of the club, the meeting took place that night. These issues had been previously mentioned to the management in a letter written by the superintendents of each department in November 1939, but

¹⁷⁷ Arthur Pugh, *Men of Steel: A Chronicle of Eighty-Eight Years of Trade Unionism in the British Iron and Steel Industry* (London: The Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, 1951), 545–46.

¹⁷⁸ Pugh, 546, 573-574. ISTC was officially represented in the Iron and Steel Board that was formulated at the end of the war to manage the recovery of the industry. This proves how British trade unionism in the iron and steel industry consolidated its position throughout the first half of the 20th century.

¹⁷⁹ TNA: FO 371/33315, 8 January 1942, Experts and Materials for Karabük; 19 January 1942, Karabük Personnel.

¹⁸⁰ TNA: FO 195/2463/126, 4 September 1940, R. Sharp from British Club, Karabük to the Management of KISW.

employees did not observe a considerable improvement in their respective problems. In other words, after trying to address their complaints through a safer method by using the hierarchical ladder from superintendents to the management, British employees decided to instrumentalize the British Club as if it were a trade union. The letter was neither a collective petition nor an individual superior's attempt to convey his subordinate's problems. Sharp spoke as the chairman of the club on behalf of every British employee. In sum, the process was collectivized and institutionalized on the British side.

The complaints in the letter consist of seven titles: water, medical examination, light, suitable residence, heat, sanitation, and salaries. Most of these problems have been touched upon in the first chapter. In cases of water, light, residence, and salaries, the letter claims that there were definite breaches of contract by KISW. The problem was different in each case. The water was bad and scarce. Light was only partially supplied. Moreover, the costs of alternative sources were not covered. Residences were not suitable. This also made it impossible for the British to bring their families to Karabük. Salaries were delayed multiple times, creating hardships for families at home. In fact, the contract between KISW and British employees obliged the factory to provide water, light, suitable residences, and salary payment in the first week of each month.¹⁸¹ In the case of medical examination, employees acknowledged that it was not a breach of contract to cancel free examination and supplies that had been ongoing for the last year, since it was not promised in the contract, but they argued that it was “inequitable treatment”.¹⁸² Therefore, they demanded the continuation of the existing practice. The case of heat was mentioned as not developed despite the assurances, and sanitation was addressed in relation to the issues of water and medical

¹⁸¹ TNA: FO 195/2463/126, 27 September 1940, L. F. Korb to Sir Knatchbull-Hugessen, Karabük Service Contract.

¹⁸² TNA: FO 195/2463/126, 4 September 1940, R. Sharp from British Club, Karabük to the Management of KISW.

examination. In sum, British employees demanded a general improvement in their living conditions in accordance with their contracts. They relied on both legal and diplomatic bases, due to their service contracts and KISW management's informal assurances. Sharp, on behalf of all British employees of the KISW, finished the letter with a confident and even threatening tone, relying on this legal basis. The letter says: "We have been very patient about our grievances and have done our best to accept bad conditions with a good grace, in view of repeated promises of amelioration. Our patience is now exhausted, and we hereby warn you that unless something is done immediately to give us our lawful rights under the contract, we shall cease work on Monday, 16th September 1940, and proceed to sue you for breach of contract."

Considering that their contract obliged three months' notice before termination by either party, this should be interpreted as a threat of either an illegal resignation or an illegal strike. This action also could be considered as "insubordination" according to Article 13 of their contract, which would make them lose any financial compensation in case of termination.¹⁸³ Moreover, as mentioned before, strikes and resignations without valid excuses were outlawed by Turkish legislation as well. Unlike British employees, KISW's general manager S. Akkoç was aware of Turkish legislation, which he instrumentalized in his letter to Sharp. The letter was rather a notice, or a threat, to the British employees about the fact that this action "might give birth to undesirable results."¹⁸⁴ As Akgöz and Makal argue, the three laws, the Labor Law, the Associations Law, and the National Protection Law, were complementary to each other to create an oppressive labor regime in terms of collective organization, bargaining, and action.¹⁸⁵ While the Labor Law only recognized individual disputes with compulsory arbitration, it banned strikes and lockouts.

¹⁸³ TNA: FO 195/2463/126, 27 September 1940, L. F. Korb to Sir Knatchbull-Hugessen, Karabük Service Contract.

¹⁸⁴ TNA: FO 195/2463/126, 6 September 1940, S. Akkoç, Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi to Mr. Sharp, British Club.

¹⁸⁵ Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire*, 100–101; Makal, *Tek Partili Dönemde Çalışma İlişkileri*, 411–13.

Associations Law banned any kind of organization that is based on class or occupation. Lastly, the National Protection Law both suspended some protective measures of the Labor Law and limited labor mobility by criminalizing resignation without a valid excuse. In total, institutional and organized methods of industrial action were illegal, except for the individual disputes.

Akkoç's letter does not explicitly mention the names of these laws, but it refers to Turkish legislation and military interests in general.¹⁸⁶ The letter consists of two sections. The first section starts with the reminder that all British employees in Karabük were subject to Turkish laws, and this was also stated in their contracts. In this light, Akkoç writes, unless Sharp possessed a power of attorney certified by the notary that authorized him to act on behalf of all British employees, each individual should have addressed their own complaints with their own signatures. Therefore, in parallel with the Labor Law and Associations Law's individualistic content¹⁸⁷, Akkoç clearly states that this organized action would not be recognized by KISW. The second section emphasizes that any collective action aimed at KISW would harm the mutual interests of both Turkey and the UK, since it was an institution working for the national defense. This part reminded British employees of both the extraordinary measures, including the National Protection Law, and their political significance. Consequently, Akkoç's letter, clearly backed by Turkish legislation, employee contracts, and political context, criminalized and marginalized the occasion. In this light, the letter implied that if the proposed action of illegal resignation or illegal strike were to occur, British employees would be punishable for committing an illegal industrial action and hampering Turkey's national defense. However, the letter was not only threatening, but also advisory, since

¹⁸⁶ TNA: FO 195/2463/126, 6 September 1940, S. Akkoç, Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi to Mr. Sharp, British Club.

¹⁸⁷ Akgöz, *In the Shadow of War and Empire*, 100–101. According to Akgöz, Labour Code only recognized individual contracts, and brought protective measures only in individual basis, to prevent collectivization of discontent.

Akkoç finished the latter with his personal hope that all British employees would cooperate with KISW to overcome these problems.

Rudolf Sharp's response to this letter came quickly on September 7, with only his signature as the chairman of the British Club, without a claim to be on behalf of all British employees.¹⁸⁸ The letter says that the committee of the club gave deep consideration to Akkoç's response and agreed without objection that the last paragraph that foresaw the strike and lawsuit was not a matter of the club, and they have withdrawn it. Moreover, Sharp argues that he did not intend to act on behalf of employees. He only wanted to convey the demands of those who were present at the meeting. In other words, British employees retreated from institutionalized language to the previous safer individual language because they were probably made aware of Turkish legislation by the letter and maybe other informal means. Consequently, they withdrew all elements of the organized action and offered a meeting between management, representatives from Brassert, and four members of the committee. That meeting, which lasted for almost four hours, took place on September 12.¹⁸⁹ According to Sharp, they discussed all the issues with "utmost freedom" during the meeting. However, Akkoç stated that he has done everything he could, and only the central government could meet their demands. When Sharp and others asked for further guidance, he advised them to write to their embassy to put pressure on the central government. In short, British employees turned their faces to the diplomatic ways once again since the organized action proved to be risky and impossible.

Turkish authorities were not only apprehensive about KISW's production levels. They were also alarmed about potential communist people, organizations, and publications, specifically in

¹⁸⁸ TNA: FO 195/2463/126, 7 September 1940, R. Sharp from British Club, Karabük to the Management of KISW.

¹⁸⁹ TNA: FO/195/2463/126, 14 September 1940, R. Sharp from British Club, Karabük to British Ambassador, the British Embassy, Ankara.

industrial regions. Postwar documents demonstrate that Zonguldak province, including the district of Karabük, was carefully observed in this regard, with the help of party reports and denunciation letters.¹⁹⁰ Official ideology was firmly rejecting classes and class politics, and state-led industrialization was perceived to be a route of development without facing class-related problems that had emerged in capitalist countries. Therefore, when signs of communism among people emerged, the government tried to respond concurrently through penalizing certain people and ameliorating workers' conditions to keep them distant from this "harmful ideology". Although communist parties and organizations remained marginal in Karabük until today, the specter of them emerged at least once in 1944.

What we know about this occasion is quite limited. One of the members of the reactivated illegal Turkish Communist Party, Zihni Anadol, started to work at the KISW as a recruiter in 1943.¹⁹¹ It is possible that he was sent there to organize workers by the party itself.¹⁹² He was also disturbed by the clear inequality between civil servants and workers and thus advised workers to unionize.¹⁹³ In the same year, Anadol and a group of people were arrested. They were accused of being members of a communist cell in Karabük. Aydın, citing from Günçikan, says that 16 workers were arrested together with Anadol.¹⁹⁴ British archives also mention a wave of arrests against communists in March 1944, where 50 to 70 people were arrested.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, in April 1944, Mannock writes that an engineer was preparing a report proving that the recent breakdowns in the steel mills were the result of this communist group's actions.¹⁹⁶ Unfortunately, this was not

¹⁹⁰ BCA 490-1-0-0/723-474-1, Zonguldak İlinin Teftiş ve Çalışma Raporlarının Genel Sekreterliğe Sunulduğu. [Zonguldak Milletvekili Ahmet Güreli'nin İl Parti Teşkilatına Dair Raporu, 20 Nisan 1947].

¹⁹¹ Berat Günçikan "Stavay Bir Gün Mutlaka," *Cumhuriyet Dergi*, March 1999, 3, cited in Aydın, "Formation of Working Class in a Steel Town," 109.

¹⁹² Aydın, 109.

¹⁹³ Zihni Turgay Anadol, *Truva Atında İlk Akşam* (Evrensel, 2006), cited in Aydın, 109.

¹⁹⁴ Günçikan, "Stavay Bir Gün Mutlaka", 4, cited in Aydın, 109.

¹⁹⁵ TNA: FO 371/44112, 12 April 1944, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock, March 1944.

¹⁹⁶ TNA: FO 371/44112, 23 May 1944, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock, April 1944.

explored further in the archives. Furthermore, we are not sure about the number of people and their other activities either. Evidently, this communist cell was suppressed even before they managed to organize a considerable number of people or significant action, except for breakdowns, which we are not sure if they were related. However, the fact that an MP of Zonguldak, Hazım Atıf Kuyucak, emphasized that the factory should improve its welfare services to prevent “harmful ideologies” in Karabük when he was evaluating the inspection report of 1944 demonstrates that this was taken as a serious threat.¹⁹⁷

In conclusion, these two cases show how constrained the possibilities of organized and politicized action were in Karabük during World War II. While in the first case, British employees benefited from the fact that they were much-needed workers from the UK and were given an option to choose collaboration, which they quickly took, members of the communist cell did not even have that chance. Clearly, the risk was even higher for Turkish workers. Their semi-proletarian and peasant status and inexperience may seem to be the most significant obstacles to organized action, but I argue that the risks of it were considerably higher than the potential realistic benefits, especially in the short term, which concerned them most. It was difficult for an organized action to be formed and provide gains, thus, Turkish workers overwhelmingly adopted less visible methods to cope with the surrounding conditions.

2.2 Long-term Coping Strategies

Workers and other locals adopted long-term strategies less to deliberately resist political authority or force the state to change policies, but more to ameliorate their living conditions under given circumstances. They took their fate into their own hands as much as they could. The key

¹⁹⁷ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 35-0-0 3640 Sayılı Kanuna Bağlı İktisadi Teşekküllerin 1944 Yılı İşlemleriyle Bilanço ve Kar ve Zarar Hesaplarını İnceleyen Genel Kurul Tutanağı, Cilt 7, 221.

tools for them were flexibility and mobility. Under the difficult wartime conditions, an inflationary economy, and an authoritarian government, they worked hard to be flexible and mobile to avoid undesired circumstances and ameliorate their working and living conditions. Since this was also shaped by their individual skills and conditions, they developed a rich variety of coping strategies. This section categorizes three groups of people by the strategies they adopted and analyzes them to get closer to the experience of Karabük during the Second World War from below.¹⁹⁸ While it also evaluates how these strategies shaped social welfare policies targeting them, the section's focus remains on the people, rather than the state. I argue that, in contrast to existing narratives, keeping the focus on people also requires us to recognize people who were in conformity with ongoing problems and difficulties. Therefore, this section also tells the stories of people who worked their way up within the system without disrupting it, in addition to the dissident strategies.

2.2.1 Upward Mobility within KISW

Neither wages nor promotions, nor housing allocations were standardized at the KISW at the time. There was also a significant labor shortage, specifically in terms of skilled labor. Personal networks, including one's relationship with department superintendents and foremen, played a key role in promotions and housing allocations.¹⁹⁹ Also, becoming senior and earning a little bit of skill improved one's earnings and chances of benefiting from social welfare services more. Therefore, the unstandardized regime of allocation and promotion and a significant labor shortage made

¹⁹⁸ These groups and strategies overlap with each other in certain aspects. For instance, a worker who adopted for upward mobility within KISW could then leave and invest in his own venture, meaning that he used KISW as a stepping stone. Therefore, they are not completely distinct groups or strategies. However, I believe, this categorization is needed to prove that these were not solely individual anecdotes. Rather, they have accumulated into a collective phenomenon. Nevertheless, this section should be read by keeping their potential to overlap in mind.

¹⁹⁹ BCA 490-1-0-0/ 728-495-5 Bazı Bölgelerdeki Fabrika, İşyerleri ve İşçilerin Genel Durumu Hakkında Büyük Millet Meclisi Çalışma Komisyonundan bir Gurubun Hazırladığı Rapor. [Çalışma Komisyonu Üyelerinin 16 Temmuz 1947 ve 12 Eylül 1947 Arasındaki Tetkikatlarına Dair Raporu]. According to the report workers' promotion were left to their superordinate's arbitrary decisions. This, and insufficiency of earnings were creating bitterness between workers and superordinate in KISW.

upward social mobility in the short term quite possible for many, through luck, a good network, or hard work. Many employees adopted this strategy to climb the ladder to ameliorate their lives.

Whether migrants or local workers, many have heard about KISW from their friends, relatives, or newspapers and decided to try their luck in Karabük. They had various reasons to do that, most of which were unknown to us. But at least two of them are clearly stated in different sources. Mehmet Ali Çamurali was attracted to working in KISW by the possibility of becoming a trainee in England for six months.²⁰⁰ He was originally from Trabzon, a province with a high level of out-migration due to the scarcity of land and low agricultural productivity. When some friends of his, who were KISW workers on their yearly leave, mentioned that KISW sends a group of workers to England as trainees, he decided to join them. Although he was not selected as a trainee, he was employed by the factory. Moreover, his skill in operating the factory's cinema helped him to get allocated a house in Yenışehir. In consequence, he was able to start a relatively comfortable life in Karabük because he was relieved of housing expenses. Housing was crucial in the formation of coping strategies, as the anonymous worker A, whom sociologist Ziyaeddin Fahri Fındıkoğlu interviewed, also proved with his story.²⁰¹

Worker A was a timber factory worker in his hometown of İnebolu, in the neighboring province of Kastamonu, when one of his friends invited him to Karabük for a foreman position in KISW. He must have gotten excited by the offer since being a foreman in a state-owned enterprise meant at least a moderate wage, higher status, and better chances to benefit from any welfare service, including housing. Therefore, he moved to Karabük in 1939. However, most probably due to the unstandardized recruitment process, he was recruited as a worker. This meant earning at least three times less than he expected. He decided to stay, but he was only able to rent a room

²⁰⁰ Interview with Mehmet Ali Çamurali, Koç, *Sendikacıların Anlatımıyla Türkiye İşçi Sınıfı Hareketi*, 298–300.

²⁰¹ Fındıkoğlu, “Karabük”te Sanayileşmenin İktisadi ve İçtimai Tesirleri,” 19.

without electricity or water for his family, which made life “unbearable”. As a result, he sent his family back to İnebolu. In other words, he preferred living without his family, as the overwhelming majority of workers in Karabük did, because this seemed to be the only feasible option. However, when his family returned to Karabük for reasons unknown to us, he realized that this was not sustainable. He demanded that one of the newly built factory houses be allocated to him and his family. When this demand was rejected, he decided to resign. However, due to the labor shortage, the factory did not accept his resignation and allocated him a house in 1942.²⁰² Therefore, after four years, being patient paid off for him and his family. We are not sure if he intended to resign or instrumentalized resignation for acquiring accommodation, but this also proves that the labor shortage opened up channels for the improvement in living conditions of the workers.²⁰³

A more institutionalized channel of mobility was established in 1942 when KISW opened the Apprentice School to train the required skilled labor.²⁰⁴ This provided a great opportunity for social mobility for many. The school only accepted high school-aged male children to train them for three years. The training was both practical and theoretical. Engineers and foremen of the factory served as their teachers as well. Throughout their education, KISW provided the students’ meals, accommodation, a certain number of clothes, and hygiene materials. They were also paid wages, increasing gradually as they finished each grade. The students’ employment in KISW was guaranteed after graduation.²⁰⁵ This also meant that they completed their compulsory military service in civilian employment at KISW, which was another pull factor.²⁰⁶ Moreover, having

²⁰² Fındıkoğlu, 19.

²⁰³ It is highly possible that threat of resignation was a common strategy especially among skilled workers, foremen and civil servants since there was a huge labor shortage. However, we lack more evidence of this at least for the case of KISW. Therefore, I will not further explore this method as part of collaborative strategies.

²⁰⁴ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 20-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 16.

²⁰⁵ TNA: FO 371/44112, 12 April 1944, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock, March 1944.

²⁰⁶ Erkün, “Karabük’ün Sosyal Monografisi,” 98–99.

trained in KISW for three years before starting to work also meant having some acquaintances who could later work in their favor, since we have already demonstrated that social networks held a significant effect on one's chances of acquiring promotion, housing, or any other kind of benefit.

The school became an attraction point for the children of KISW workers, civil servants, other locals, and peasants from other provinces in a short time. In 1946, 15% of the students were children of civil servants and engineers, 45% were of foremen and workers, and 40% were of outsiders.²⁰⁷ Especially the lower-class people perceived the Apprentice School as a tool of social mobility and extra income. It is known that some of the students, especially peasant children, were sending some of their wages back to their families.²⁰⁸ Therefore, having a child at the Apprentice School meant both relieving the financial cost of a child and even acquiring an extra income, while also not having to be concerned about that child's future in three or four years. This was also the case for some KISW workers as well. Ziya Büyükbektaş's father, who came to Karabük in 1938 to work and brought his family with him, later changed the official date of birth of Ziya because he was not old enough to enter the Apprentice School at the time.²⁰⁹ In this case, the proportion of different groups of children in the school, including the children of servants and engineers, proves that the school was desired by many families for their children's future and family comfort. In other words, I argue that the Apprentice School became part of both short and long-term strategies of especially the lower-class families, peasants, and workers, while serving and satisfying the dire need for skilled and trained labor of the KISW.

²⁰⁷ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 41-0-0 Başbakanlık Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümerbank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1946 Yılı Raporu, 51.

²⁰⁸ TNA: FO 371/44112, 12 April 1944, Memorandum by Mr. Mannoock, March 1944.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Ziya Büyükbektaş, Kalyoncu, *Cumhuriyet Kenti Karabük*, 194.

2.2.2 Collaborative Outsiders

The second category of people who instrumentalized KISW as part of their coping strategy in a more upwardly mobile sense were people who did not work in the factory but made it, and the development generated by it center of their livelihood. People of this category are quite heterogeneous, ranging from forest villages to wealthy landowners of the neighboring town of Safranbolu. Their strategies must be explored because KISW's effect was not limited to its employees. On the contrary, it was a socioeconomic center for the surrounding area. Therefore, despite our limited knowledge about outsiders, their relationship with KISW is significant for understanding the social and economic history of state-led industrialization in Karabük.

The first and one of the earliest examples of this category was Hüsni Bodur. Bodur was born in 1911 in Safranbolu. He was a butcher in his hometown when he learnt that German engineers came to the village of Karabük to build the railroad in 1931. As a 20-year-old butcher, despite all the criticism he had from his townsmen, he moved to Karabük to sell meat to the railroad workers. The railroad was the earliest form of industrialization in Karabük, and Bodur did not miss his chance to profit from it, although it was only for seven or eight months. He was not alone. Bodur also tells that a hostel owner from Zonguldak came to Karabük before the factory's groundbreaking and established a hostel over there too.²¹⁰ In fact, after the railway station's establishment, several hostels and coffeehouses were established in the emerging neighborhood. KISW's construction accelerated this trend more than one could imagine. Many wealthy people of Safranbolu bought land from and around Karabük before the government even attempted to undertake a large-scale confiscation outside the factory and Yenişehir sites. They profited from this

²¹⁰ Interview with Hüsni Bodur, Kalyoncu, 168.

process through speculation and other means.²¹¹ For instance, some built houses and shops and rented them out when the town grew due to the factory.

Another interesting case was İsmail Güven's story.²¹² He was a grocery store owner in Safranbolu before the Second World War. When the war ended, he must have realized that there would be a construction boom.²¹³ Therefore, he moved to Karabük and started to sell construction materials like bricks and iron.²¹⁴ This business helped him to build connections with KISW, which eventually led him to become involved in transportation brokerage and the iron trade. At the end of the 1940s, Güven stood out as one of the first home-grown bourgeoisie of the developing town. He continued to invest in the iron and steel industry, working through contracts with the KISW.

Peasants of and around Karabük who normally had only limited integration to a large market also benefited from the factory. Early in the 1940s, British documents mention that surrounding villages were supplying the factory settlement with fresh cheese, milk, butter, eggs, and other products.²¹⁵ Moreover, since wood for fuel was always something scarce in the town, forest villagers profited from its trade. They were cutting down trees in their villages and selling them in the town.²¹⁶ KISW also bought products from both peasants and local shop owners. There were most probably other ways of interaction between KISW and the surrounding villages that traditional sources do not mention at all. For instance, Alp Kunkar, who came to Karabük as a child in 1939 when his father, an engineer, started to work in KISW, remembers that a peasant woman brought her daughter, Güzel, to her mother and begged her to take and raise her daughter. Güzel was "adopted" and became responsible for taking care of Alp and his little brother. When

²¹¹ Erkün, "Karabük'ün Sosyal Monografisi," 66.

²¹² Kurtkan, "Karabük'ün Çalışma Müessesesi ve Sosyal Şartları," 75.

²¹³ Barış Alp Özden, "Health, Morality and Housing: The Politics of Working Class Housing in Turkey, 1945-1960," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 49 (2013): 95–96, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0896634600002053>.

²¹⁴ Kurtkan, "Karabük'ün Çalışma Müessesesi ve Sosyal Şartları," 75.

²¹⁵ TNA: FO 371/33317, 6 July 1942, Mr. Mannoek's Letter on Conditions at Karabük, July 1942.

²¹⁶ Yazar, "Arıcak Köyünün Beşeri ve İktisadi Coğrafyası," 16.

she turned 16, her father came and brought her back to the village because she was going to get married.²¹⁷ It is highly possible that many young women and men worked as domestic servants in different forms, like Güzel did. In short, first the railway, then the KISW opened up new channels of trade and other interactions for the people who were not working in the factories as well. For many, the factory became a significant part of their lives.

2.2.3 KISW as a Stepping Stone, Entrepreneurial Insiders and Dual Lives

KISW being the center of socioeconomic life and strategies of these groups of people meant that the Turkish government was able to facilitate a new town revolving around the industrial development on this micro scale. It also meant that jumpstarting and sustaining iron and steel production was possible without either changing the socioeconomic structure of society or introducing a comprehensive compulsory labor regime. KISW's number of employees increased every year. At the end of the war, it was higher than 4000. However, this was only a partial success. The productivity in the factories was quite low. Neither the total production output nor the productivity levels increased in parallel with the expansion in the number of employees in many departments.²¹⁸ This was partially due to the disharmonious organization of the factory's departments, and partially due to KISW's inability to recruit a sufficient number of employees.²¹⁹ The gap between the planned number of employees and the actual number of employees remained wide throughout the period. This was the reason why KISW was operating a labor prison in

²¹⁷ Alp Kunkar (@alp.kunkar), "39 Eylül'de Karabük'e geldiğimizde...," Facebook, March 28, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/alp.kunkar/posts/pfbid0VBZNTnmp5auufXtQTwchxuBEQoGUY5Y3B5U5WN7RdrhqBGCffUww57Y2BqqjEVqkl>. I contacted Mr. Kunkar during my research to conduct an interview. He did not want to participate in an interview due to his old age but stated that he shared all of his memories about Karabük in his Facebook profile, and I can benefit from them. Unfortunately, he passed away on May 9, 2025, while I am writing this thesis. His efforts to provide a platform for people of Karabük to build a community and share their memories online are greatly appreciated.

²¹⁸ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 20-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 12.

²¹⁹ TNA: FO 371/48721, 25 November 1945, Visit of Messrs Lomax and Kearton to Iron and Steel Works at Karabük.

addition to the Apprentice School. At the end of the war, KISW had 551 labor prisoners.²²⁰ Therefore, the compulsory labor was in the picture, albeit partially.

Compulsory labor provided disciplined bodies, which KISW lacked most. KISW was not only unable to recruit a sufficient number of employees, but also to prevent them from leaving. Labor turnover rate and high absenteeism were the main concerns of Sümerbank and KISW managers throughout the period. A large number of people, ranging from engineers to unskilled workers, rejected becoming stable and full-time KISW employees. Instead, they transformed KISW into only a phase or an option to ameliorate their conditions, which disrupted the factory's productivity and visions of creating an urbanized, disciplined, and "national" group of workers greatly. This section tells these stories not by focusing on how Turkish state-led industrialization "failed" but by focusing on how people creatively adapted to the conditions, which in turn shaped the macro and micro policies of the government and the management. I argue that this is the only way to relieve these workers from being portrayed only as the victims or objects of exploitation by an industrial complex and oppression by an authoritarian state. I claim that workers were most probably aware of the incapability of the state, besides the labor shortage, which they exploited greatly, and manipulated in their favor to a meaningful extent.

KISW employed 215 civil servants, including engineers, chemists, and other qualified personnel, in 1940, which gradually increased each year and reached 452 at the end of the war.²²¹ However, the cadres must have changed almost completely at least once and maybe more times in these five years. Between 1942 and 1945 122, 118, 126 and 117 servants left the factory in

²²⁰ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 36-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 93.

²²¹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 7-0-0 Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu, 12; BCA 37-10-0-0/ 36-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 16.

respective years.²²² In other words, KISW lost at least one-third of its white-collar employees every year.²²³ An overwhelming majority of these employees had no prior experience in the iron and steel industry, and most probably not in any other large industrial undertakings as well. This made the situation even more frustrating for the KISW management. Civil servants were acquiring skills and experience at KISW for a short time and then leaving at the first opportunity.²²⁴

²²² BCA 37-10-0-0/ 20-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 13; BCA 37-10-0-0/ 25-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1943 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 18; BCA 37-10-0-0/ 31-0-0 Sümerbank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 13; BCA 37-10-0-0/ 36-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 18.

²²³ The sources do not specify whether some of those civil servants left KISW only temporarily, to return work after a short interval. However, this is not mentioned as a trend by neither the inspectors, nor Mr. Mannock. Therefore, it is highly possible that an overwhelming majority of them did not retain their jobs in KISW again.

²²⁴ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 25-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1943 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 19-20.

Table 5: Civil servant turnover at KISW between 1940 and 1950.

Source: Sümerbank General Inspection Board Reports of 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950.

Year	Planned Number of Civil Servants	Actual Number of Civil Servants	New Employment	Loss
1940	306	215	N/A	N/A
1941	363	276	N/A	N/A
1942	474	312	201	122
1943	476	340	164	118
1944	573	367	127	126
1945	628	452	170	117
1946	646	446	118	121
1947	567	428	93	73
1948	551	411	46	63
1949	523	412	43	42
1950	511	410	48	50

Both General Inspection Board Reports and Mannock's observations agree upon the fact that KISW turned into a stepping stone for many qualified white-collar employees. According to Mannock, employment outside KISW offered higher salaries. Therefore, whenever these people acquired sufficient skill and experience to move one of those works, they did. Sometimes the management prevented them from leaving by instrumentalizing legal measures.²²⁵ In addition to the National Protection Law's legal backing, some trained employees were previously bursaries of

²²⁵ TNA: FO 371/37452, 7 August 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on the position of Karabük; 23 September 1943, Notes on Turkish Personnel.

Sümerbank and KISW. Their scholarship contracts compelled them to either work at KISW for some time or pay a compensation fee after they complete their education or internship.²²⁶ However, according to Mannock, this did not help either. Whenever they were forced to stay, civil servants lost their will and energy to learn and work. Therefore, KISW lost trained personnel in both circumstances. They either left or turned into inefficient and unhappy employees. Financial fines or threats of firing did not work either, since these employees were aware of the fact that KISW needed them.²²⁷

For workers and foremen, too, it was the case. KISW was not able to create a stable and disciplined workforce in those years. Between 1940 and 1945, the factory had 2,610, 2,899, 3,131, 3,476, 4,031, and 3,693 workers in the respective years. In 1940, monthly labor turnover was around 300 workers, meaning that the factory changed its cadres almost twice in a year.²²⁸ In the following years, the average yearly turnover was 1,682. In other words, KISW lost more than half of its workers every year. Only 32.7% of the workers in 1945 had more than three years of experience at KISW.²²⁹ More than half of the workers who left during 1945 were Group C workers, meaning that they were not masters, but still experienced and skilled workers. Moreover, absenteeism was also a significant problem as well. In 1945, KISW lost an average of 15% of monthly working hours due to absenteeism.²³⁰ Aside from the fact that diseases and injuries caused too many excused absences, many workers also did not turn up to work at certain times without

²²⁶ Kütükçüoğlu, *Türkiye'nin İlk Ağır Sanayi Kenti Karabük*, 120.

²²⁷ TNA: FO 371/37452, 7 August 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on the position of Karabük; 23 September 1943, Notes on Turkish Personnel.

²²⁸ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 7-0-0 Başvekalet Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1940 Yılı Raporu, 13.

²²⁹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 36-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 96.

²³⁰ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 36-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 94.

an excuse.²³¹ Therefore, KISW was not able to maintain short-term workforce stability and was even further from achieving long-term stability.

Table 6: Worker turnover at KISW between 1940 and 1950.

Source: Sümerbank General Inspection Board Reports of 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, 1948, 1949, 1950.

Year	Planned Number of Workers	Actual Number of Workers	New Employment	Loss
1940	N/A	2,610	4,104 (est.)	3,600 (est.)
1941	3,684	2,899	2,228	1,818
1942	4,223	3,131	1,689	1,457
1943	4,726	3,476	2,497	2,187
1944	5,086	4,031	1,948	1,424
1945	4,874	3,693	1,186 (est.)	1,524
1946	4,409	3,482	676	951
1947	4,320	3,593	723	658
1948	4,688	3,392	620	499
1949	4,282	3,285	209	316
1950	4,500	3,449	409	245

This phenomenon could be considered and labeled as “instability” and “ill-discipline” from the state-centered perspective. Many, including contemporaries of these workers, believed that this was the result of their peasant characteristics. Asım Karaömerlioğlu, in his seminal study on peasantist discourse in early republican Turkey, argues that there was a political consensus within

²³¹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 15-0-0 Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümer Bank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İhtimai Teşkilatı Hakkında 1941 Yılı Raporu, 12-14.

the Kemalist ruling elite about avoiding the dissolution of peasantry through their integration into urban space and industrial workforce.²³² However, this was not the case for Karabük. Sümerbank's policy aimed to proletarianize peasant-workers. This was perceived to be the only way to create a stable and disciplined workforce. For Mannock, they could not be stable industrial workers because they were attracted to their rural background: "They are out of harmony with the discipline and the concentrated demands of factory life. Instead of breadth and tranquility of the countryside they meet the confined atmosphere of the factory shed, with its shearing heat, oppressive noise, unnatural grime, and unusually hard and continuous work. Instead of the call of the sun and of the seasons they must answer the mill siren or obey the factory clock. From free individuals they become numbers on cards. They are the first generation of factory workers and their shoes don't fit."²³³

Despite his essentializing approach to peasantry, Mannock was right about how difficult KISW could be for a peasant. The differences between non-industrial, agricultural work and KISW were stark. Some first-generation workers describe KISW as an unbearable place, particularly due to the noise, heat, and harsh discipline. Besides physical difficulties, strict hierarchy and discipline were perceived as humiliating in certain instances.²³⁴ Many workers must have preferred their unstable but calmer and freer agricultural work to this stable but oppressive industrial work. KISW was not extremely satisfying in other aspects as well, as told in Chapter I. Therefore, many workers likely had both cultural and material reasons to leave simultaneously, and they did leave. Migrant

²³² Asım Karaömerlioğlu, *Orada Bir Köy Var Uzakta: Erken Cumhuriyet Döneminde Köycü Söylem* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2006), 66–67, 84.

²³³ TNA: FO 371/37452, 7 August 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannock on the position of Karabük; 23 September 1943, Notes on Turkish Personnel.

²³⁴ Excerpt from the Interview with İsmail Usta, Aydın, "Formation of Working Class in a Steel Town," 95.

skilled workers who worked on the construction of KISW did so after they realized they could not accumulate enough money to send to their hometowns to support their families.²³⁵

However, leaving was not the most common option. Mannoock writes this about the peasant-workers in the same paragraph, : “The fact that the great majority of the men are peasants who by birth and upbringing are one with the land, whose sympathy, understanding and creative skills, such as it is, are in, and of it, must never be overlooked.”²³⁶ I contend that we historians also must never overlook their creative skills and understanding not only in land, but in general, in creating strategies to maintain and improve their lives. Most of the peasant-workers of KISW adopted a dual life as a strategy, turning into semi-proletarians. They also wanted to inject cash into their peasant economy and make an effort to achieve upward social mobility. They became temporary workers, as they wished to be, and as KISW management feared most. Again, this provided the factories with a certain amount of labor to sustain production, but not at the desired efficiency and level.

Surrounding villages provided most of these peasant-workers. Safa Erkün states that cereal farmers of the Eflani district and vegetable farmers of the Araç and Soğanlıçay river basins adopted a specific type of seasonal employment in KISW. These people only worked several months a year in factories unless there was a drought that year.²³⁷ Other peasants must have followed similar patterns as well. Sometimes, these patterns were planned by the large family, too. For instance, when Nuri Altınır left his village to work in KISW, his brother stayed there and took care of his family, in addition to cereal farming, which was a profitable business. Therefore, the large Altınır

²³⁵ BCA 490-1-0-0/721-464-2 Zonguldak İlinin Teftiş ve Çalışma Raporlarının Genel Sekreterliğe Sunulduğu. [Zonguldak Sayıtlarının 8 Kasım 1937 Tarihli Tetkikat Raporu].

²³⁶ TNA: FO 371/37452, 7 August 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannoock on the position of Karabük; 23 September 1943, Notes on Turkish Personnel.

²³⁷ Erkün, “Karabük’ün Sosyal Monografisi,” 81–82.

family benefited from both types of incomes and protected themselves from fluctuations in cereal agriculture.²³⁸ Moreover, by leaving his family behind, Nuri Altiner reduced his costs in Karabük. He also spent his weekly leaves in his village, to which he went by walking for hours from the railway track. When his son Şinasi came of middle school age, he captured the possibility of upward mobility and signed him to first the middle school and then to the high school in Karabük.²³⁹ I must also note that people did not simply choose between the farmland and KISW. Many either left KISW with fake excuses at the beginning of summer or did not turn up at work several days a week to work in construction, which usually paid better daily wages.²⁴⁰ This strategy of fake excuses was instrumentalized in doing agricultural tasks as well. Unfortunately, not many detailed accounts of these dual lives took place in the archives, but both qualitative and quantitative evidence indicate that this was a common strategy.

Another type of dual life strategy in Karabük was an entrepreneurial one. Some migrants or local workers preferred to open shops in town while maintaining their jobs at KISW. Most of these shops, at least those that are visible in historical sources, were related to the iron and steel sector. These entrepreneur-workers worked simultaneously in both jobs for a long time. However, whenever they felt like the potential for their venture was growing, they left the factory. I.S. nicknamed person from Fındıkoğlu's study, was one of them. Between 1939 and 1944, he traded scrap steel besides his work at KISW. In 1944, he left his job and invested in iron and steel

²³⁸ Since KISW had not more than several dozen female employees in these years, this thesis does not delve into gender related issues. Sources regarding women in and around KISW are also quite scant. However, I must note that women's invisible labor on the farms was most likely crucial in sustaining this dual life strategy. Therefore, I acknowledge that there should be a further discussion of women's role in coping strategies in and around state-owned enterprises.

²³⁹ Altiner, *Hayal Varsa*. Şinasi would later go to college in Istanbul with a KISW scholarship, return to KISW as an engineer, and become a private entrepreneur and politician in the following decades.

²⁴⁰ Erkün, 82; BCA 37-10-0-0/ 20-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1942 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu.

brokerage full-time.²⁴¹ This had two implications for KISW. Firstly, this entrepreneur-worker life meant that some of the qualified workers of the factory were doing double shifts every day and spending their leaves on their venture as well. In terms of labor efficiency, this was a significant problem because KISW was already a greatly tiring industrial undertaking for workers. As in the case of peasant-workers, KISW expected them to reproduce their labor in their free time. Secondly, most of these entrepreneur-workers left their jobs at some point and became private sector contractors, as in the case of I.S. This transformation occurred mostly in the postwar period, due to a liberalizing economy and the expected boom in construction. Since Karabük became the center of Turkey's iron and steel trade, KISW workers had an advantage in entering the market in the post-war boom. Osman Yücel, who worked 13 years in KISW as a foreman, also benefited from this and started to broker iron and trade in 1946.²⁴² Thus, KISW was losing experienced and skilled employees.

2.3 Effects of Coping Strategies on Social Welfare Policies

Workers' coping strategies not only ameliorated their living conditions through earning more, working less, acquiring a factory house, and similar individual ways, but also affected the social welfare policies of Sümerbank. Inspection Reports never perceived labor turnover and absenteeism as individual issues. The extent and persistence of this phenomenon were visible even in the first year of KISW's operation, and Sümerbank was already aware of this problem from other enterprises. Therefore, it was quickly recognized as a collective and significant issue that needed to be solved. The General Inspection Board Report of 1941 explicitly states that Sümerbank's social welfare policies aimed to create a stable and permanent workforce with the

²⁴¹ Fındıkoğlu, "Karabük"te Sanayileşmenin İktisadi ve İçtimai Tesirleri," 21.

²⁴² Kurtkan, "Karabük'ün Çalışma Müessesesi ve Sosyal Şartları," 75.

required skills and qualities.²⁴³ The Report of 1944 admits that KISW's sustainability and efficiency could only be guaranteed through the means of personnel.²⁴⁴ In other words, Sümerbank perceived social welfare policies on employees as a method to create a permanent workforce to make KISW sustainable and efficient. In consequence, these policies had to be formulated in accordance with employees' complaints, demands, and silent coping strategies.



Figure 7: KISW High School Students in 1948
Source: Author's personal collection.

According to Sümerbank reports, the reasons behind high labor turnover and absenteeism were low earnings, the absence of training, and a lack of proper accommodation in which workers could settle down with their families. As early as 1941, the report states that this could only be solved with a comprehensive program.²⁴⁵ Evidently, workers' flexible and mobile strategies

²⁴³ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 15-0-0 Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümer Bank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İhtimai Teşkilatı Hakkında 1941 Yılı Raporu, 9-10.

²⁴⁴ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 31-0-0 Sümerbank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 12.

²⁴⁵ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 15-0-0 Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümer Bank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İhtimai Teşkilatı Hakkında 1941 Yılı Raporu, 12.

compelled KISW and Sümerbank to envision a comprehensive strategy to satisfy their perceived needs to be permanent at Karabük and KISW. Inspection Reports mention some improving services in the following years as reasons for the falling turnover rates. For instance, when KISW opened a middle school, the report praised it as a factor that would bind civil servants to Karabük. Moreover, the inspectors also advised KISW to open a high school soon.²⁴⁶ Production bonuses, which were unequally allocated in favor of civil servants, were also perceived as one of the reasons for falling turnover rates among civil servants.²⁴⁷

However, Sümerbank and KISW always considered the issue of housing more central to the labor turnover. The fact that KISW had to start operating before constructing sufficient housing for its employees was criticized even among Sümerbank and government circles. It was considered impossible to create a stable workforce while housing was scarce in Karabük.²⁴⁸ Moreover, reports suggested that accommodation in dormitories was not a positive factor in creating a permanent workforce since workers could not settle down with their families in them.²⁴⁹ Towards the end of the war, the reports associated the falling rates of labor turnover with the improving housing conditions, besides improving earnings.²⁵⁰ Also, some started to voice the idea that KISW should move into the cooperative housing model and transfer the property of houses to workers to bind them to Karabük more strongly.²⁵¹ However, the labor turnover rate was still significant in 1945.

²⁴⁶ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 25-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1943 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 18.

²⁴⁷ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 36-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 22.

²⁴⁸ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 20-0-0 3640 Sayılı Kanuna Bağlı İktisadi Teşekküllerin 1942 Yılı Muameleleriyle Bilanço ve Kar ve Zarar Hesaplarını Tetkik Eden Umumi Heyet Zaptı, Cilt 5, 241, 23, 251.

²⁴⁹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 15-0-0 Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümer Bank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İhtimai Teşkilatı Hakkında 1941 Yılı Raporu, 29-30.

²⁵⁰ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 31-0-0 Sümerbank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1944 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 17.

²⁵¹ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 35-0-0 3640 Sayılı Kanuna Bağlı İktisadi Teşekküllerin 1944 Yılı İşlemleriyle Bilanço ve Kar ve Zarar Hesaplarını İnceleyen Genel Kurul Tutanağı, Cilt 7, 215-217.

Sümerbank had already admitted that the labor turnover rate was not falling enough despite the measures taken because it was not completely in the enterprise's hands in 1941.²⁵² Sümerbank did not recognize at the time, but its visions that were implied in social welfare policies were conflicting with certain coping strategies, which was the reason behind the fact that the measures were not sufficient to lower the labor turnover rate satisfactorily.

KISW's policy in these years was exclusively focused on creating a stable workforce. The ideal worker was a man who was settled down in Karabük with his family. He was to direct his attention fully to his work at the factory during the working hours, and to reproduce his labor with his family during his free time.²⁵³ As the first section proved, this imagination fit well with some employees' strategies. Therefore, until some point, improving housing conditions, alongside better earnings, helped to lower the labor turnover rate. However, workers did not have one common and static livelihood strategy and vision. Some wanted to keep their lives in the surrounding villages. It was no coincidence that a group of workers conveyed two clear demands to MPs who were on an inspection tour in September 1940: more housing and transportation from certain points of the district to the factory by either buses or commuter trains.²⁵⁴ For the peasant-workers, even a commuter train from the town's center to the factory could have been extremely helpful, specifically in winter. This was realized at the end of the war. The 1945 Report suggested KISW to conduct research to understand the characteristics and livelihood strategies of people before programming housing construction. Inspectors explicitly recognized the fact that some may not prefer moving to Karabük.²⁵⁵

²⁵² BCA 37-10-0-0/ 15-0-0 Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümer Bank Fabrikalarının İşçi Meseleleri ve İçtimai Teşkilatı Hakkında 1941 Yılı Raporu, Sümerbank'ın Cevapları, 19.

²⁵³ "Türk Endüstri İşçisinin Günlük Hayatı," *Cephe*, October 1945.

²⁵⁴ BCA 490-1-0-0/721-467-1 Zonguldak İlinin Teftiş ve Çalışma Raporlarının Genel Sekreterliğe Sunulduğu. [Zonguldak Mebuslarının 1940 Eylül Ayı İçerisinde Gerçekleştirdikleri Tetkikatın Neticelerini Gösterir Raporu].

²⁵⁵ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 36-0-0 Sümer Bank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1945 Yılı Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Raporu, 103.

Housing was central to KISW's policy, but transportation of workers from surrounding villages and towns was not. Although the factory buses were transporting a group of civil servants from Safranbolu since the beginning, there was no comprehensive scheme. Nevertheless, the persistence of anti-proletarianization strategy compelled KISW to introduce more transportation gradually. In 1942, Sümerbank demanded extra budget from the government to buy buses for civil servants who lived in Yenişehir and Safranbolu. However, at that point, KISW planned to buy only four buses. Moreover, the scheme did not include workers, at least officially. In 1944, KISW's buses were still officially listed as transportation means for civil servants, but the numbers were increasing considerably.²⁵⁶ Postwar sources indicate that the factory's transportation expenses increased significantly.²⁵⁷ In those years, KISW both expanded the bus service and introduced a workers' train between the town center and the factory.²⁵⁸ Nuri Altınır, who used to walk parallel to railway tracks, now had a chance to catch the train for a considerable part of the journey. Furthermore, more stops were added to transportation trains that are coming to Karabük in response to the demands of people from the province's villages who either work in KISW or bring their produce to Karabük.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi, Dönem 7, Cilt 17, 58. Birleşim, 21 May 1945, Taşıt Kadroları, Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi. (Vehicle Rosters of KISW)

²⁵⁷ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 56-0-0 Başbakanlık Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Karabük Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesinin 1949 Yılı Raporu, 22.

BCA 37-10-0-0/ 57-0-0 Sümerbank'ın Başbakanlık Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Karabük Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesinin 1949 Yılı Raporuna Cevapları, 9.

²⁵⁸ Erkün, "Karabük'ün Sosyal Monografisi," 54; Tümertekin, "Ağır Demir Sanayi ve Türkiye'deki Durumu," 260; İsmail Ömer Girgin, *Karabük* (İstanbul: Osmanbey Matbaası, 1948), 44.

²⁵⁹ BCA 490-1-0-0/ 723-475-1 Zonguldak İlinin Teftiş ve Çalışma Raporlarının Genel Sekreterliğe Sunulduğu. [Zonguldak Milletvekili Ali Rıza İncealemdaroğlu'nun Karabük Bucağı Raporu, 15 Mayıs 1948]. In response to the demands of the people of nine villages around Karabük, trains started to stop between Karabük and Bolkuş to ease peasants' trips to the town, which was normally 15 kilometers in a difficult terrain on foot.

2.4 Conclusion

Therefore, I argue that people's coping strategies not only compelled KISW to increase the number and quality of existing services but also to reconsider their content in accordance with people's various needs and demands. An inclusive and expanded transportation scheme was only introduced when Sümerbank and KISW managements firmly realized peasant-workers' persistence. On the other hand, collaborative employees continued demanding more housing. Consequently, the persistence of these different strategies, with their strength rooted in the government's urgency and labor shortage, made Sümerbank and KISW expand transportation and build accommodation simultaneously, albeit insufficiently and gradually.

This situation problematizes two significant arguments regarding state-led industrialization and KISW. Firstly, it proves that housing provision in state-owned enterprises was not simply a reflection of a *civilizing mission*. On the contrary, it was a consequence of workers' everyday coping strategies. Secondly, in contrast to Karatay's argument that KISW created and preferred peasant-workers to reduce the cost of reproduction of labor and prevent working class formation, it demonstrates that this dual life was preferred by workers themselves, while strongly disliked by the factory.²⁶⁰ Karatay himself quotes a famous anecdote that tells of the postwar manager of KISW who was traveling from village to village, begging women not to make their husbands work in the field.²⁶¹ Indeed, this was the official approach because peasant-worker characteristics did not reduce the cost of reproduction either. Many workers travelled long hours on foot, and worked on farms as well, which made them vulnerable to diseases, thus, inefficient in factory work. Therefore, in both cases, state-centered approaches conflict with existing historical evidence. Furthermore, they also neglect the historical formation of social welfare services. They do not perceive any

²⁶⁰ Karatay, *Demir Çelik Karabük*, 96–97; Karatay, 392–394.

²⁶¹ Karatay, *Demir Çelik Karabük*, 75.

connection between gradual improvement and change in these services with workers' coping strategies, except for arguing that services were improved to reduce labor turnover rates. However, workers' coping strategies brought limited but meaningful changes in their lives and social welfare policies.

The end of military mobilization alleviated the labor shortage at the end of the war. This, combined with the improving conditions, reduced the labor turnover rates. KISW also took significant decisions besides expanding its transportation network to more villages. In 1946, the factory did not employ a group of workers who were known for their seasonality.²⁶² In 1948, it banned the act of reemploying those who left without a valid excuse.²⁶³ Therefore, the labor turnover rate continued to decline. In other words, workers lost some of their flexibility. However, they had already established most of their needs to sustain their diverse strategies in wartime. Moreover, wartime accumulation, combined with postwar liberalization, opened up new opportunities in the private sector as well. One might say that people and KISW reached a compromise at the end of the decade, after a long conflict between some coping strategies and KISW's productivity-related goals.

²⁶² BCA 37-10-0-0/ 41-0-0 Başbakanlık Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümerbank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1946 Yılı Raporu, 14.

²⁶³ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 51-0-0 Başbakanlık Umumi Murakabe Heyeti Sümerbank Türkiye Demir ve Çelik Fabrikaları Müessesesi 1948 Yılı Raporu, 17.

Conclusion

Etatism was vague and controversial in its conception. However, it did not create a rupture within the ruling classes- bureaucracy and capitalist bourgeoisie. Rather, as Çağlar Keyder argues, it created a “homogenous coalition” behind increasing industrial production under a protective trade regime and oppressive labor regime. State capitalism bolstered domestic production through substituting imports and exploiting the peasantry and workers to a greater extent.²⁶⁴ However, unlike what Keyder and Makal suggest, negotiation around state-led industrialization was not confined to the bureaucratic and economic elite.²⁶⁵ Workers and others exploited the scarcity of labor, lack of state capacity, and Kemalist populism’s concerns to industrialize without creating class division within the nation. Thus, their coping strategies held a significant place within the negotiation, although they were invisible in the sense of high politics and formal political processes. They did not transform the country’s political sphere and economic model but actively shaped the practical reflection of high politics to their lives, through their individual but cumulatively collective and rich efforts to ameliorate their conditions.

Coping strategies took shape around KISW in response to both local and national political and economic conditions. Turkey’s urgency to jumpstart iron and steel production, combined with wartime conditions, created both absolutely and relatively bad and unequal setting around KISW. The factory lacked housing, hospitals and doctors, a standardized wage structure and promotion system, and many other features when it started to operate. Transforming Karabük into an attractive industrial center for people was a difficult task to undertake, particularly during wartime. Nevertheless, concerns regarding the welfare were secondary to national industrialization. Therefore, making workers live on earnings under a living wage, without proper accommodation,

²⁶⁴ Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, 105–6.

²⁶⁵ Keyder, 109; Makal, “Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Emek Tarihi ve Tarihçiliği,” 54–55.

sanitation, and health services, with the risk of malaria, pneumonia, intestinal hookworm, and work accidents, was implicitly acknowledged. At the age of high optimism and determination of Turkish modernization, inspectors, MPs, and others repeatedly stated their concerns and plans regarding these conditions. However, not only were their plans sometimes highly flawed but also, but they also lacked the necessary means to realize what they imagined.

The people of Karabük had to live with those conditions every day, and they did not have time to trust these flawed plans that would only partially, gradually realize and unequally serve to them. They also did not have a legitimate channel of political mobilization. Class-based associations were outlawed, in addition to the prohibition of strikes. Moreover, the government had extraordinary authority over labor due to wartime measures. Glimpses of organized action emerged sporadically, but they were immediately suppressed. It is in this context that KISW's employees developed a variety of coping strategies to improve their lives. While some collaborated with state-led industrialization and climbed the ladder within the system, many maintained dual lives between KISW and their farms and shops. They worked hard to be flexible and mobile to avoid any undesired circumstance or accommodate unwanted but promising situations. In the end, KISW's workforce was quite different than a disciplined, stable one. For civil servants, it was a stepping stone from which they could earn skill and experience, then move to better state-owned enterprises or the private sector. Entrepreneur-workers also joined them in moving to the private sector, mostly through opening iron and steel sector-related shops in the town or brokering iron and steel. Peasant workers rejected proletarianization and became semi-proletarians to enrich their means of living. KISW changed their lives to a great extent but could not transform them into disciplined bodies of labor in the desired way.

KISW searched for a solution to these problems throughout the period. The need for a comprehensive social welfare policy and improvement of wages and promotions to create a stable workforce was recognized. However, while improvement in wages fell behind the inflation and improvement in the private sector, welfare services remained insufficient and problematic. Civil servants were awarded production bonuses and other income sources in addition to more housing and recreational spaces, including schools for their children. Nevertheless, Karabük was still a small town with limited opportunities. Almost none of KISW's civil servants projected a long-term life in Karabük. Workers were also provided with more accommodation, production bonuses, recreational spaces, schools, and hot meals, albeit unequally allocated in favor of civil servants and highly skilled workers. The problem of malaria remained constant during the war. There is also no proof that conditions at workers' dormitories were improved. Moreover, some were living in shanty houses in unsanitary conditions. Wages remained unequal and insufficient. Nevertheless, the picture at the end of the war was considerably better. More workers settled down in factory houses with their families. Wages and other extra incomes were increased. The hospital was expanded. Apprentice School provided a channel of mobility, while other factory schools also admitted a certain number of children from workers' families as well. More importantly, KISW was compelled to recognize the peasant-worker strategy at the end of the war, as the introduction of transportation services and changes in housing policy demonstrate. In sum, workers' coping strategies caused a transformation in the content of welfare services, in addition to an improvement in available ones.

In consequence, an uneasy compromise between KISW and the people was maintained. This compromise did not fulfill the state-led industrialization's goals. Whereas people had to live in difficult circumstances, the factory never reached its production goals, partially due to the

characteristics of the workforce. On the other hand, this uneasy compromise also made it possible to produce iron and steel in a short time and provide channels of positive mobility to people. Karabük continued to grow, both in industrial and urban terms, after the war.

There is a need for further study of postwar Karabük to complement the findings of this study. Not only did KISW continue to expand some of its welfare services after the war, but Karabük also gradually transformed into a city. The political and economic framework also changed dramatically. The introduction of multiparty politics and liberalization of the economy opened up new channels for political participation and economic mobility. Karabük's tradesmen started to pressure KISW to retreat from some welfare services to provide space for private entrepreneurs.²⁶⁶ Moreover, like Osman Yücel and İsmail Güven, they became partners of KISW as brokers of transportation and iron and steel trade. In the 1950s, private entrepreneurs started to establish iron and steel processing workshops, in which KISW's iron was formed in different measures that KISW did not produce despite the demand from the market. A symbiotic but controversial relationship between the private sector and KISW, and Karabük and Yenişehir emerged.²⁶⁷ This period should be explored in-depth to understand the long-term history of state-led industrialization, which is not the goal of this thesis.

I must acknowledge that workers' coping strategies were not limited to these long-term livelihood strategies. Lack of factory documents, for instance, disciplinary proceedings about workers, confined my research in terms of accessing the details of life at the workplace. Akgöz's

²⁶⁶ BCA 37-10-0-0/ 50-0-0 3460 Sayılı Kanuna Bağlı Devlet Ekonomi Kurumlarının 1947 Yılı İşlemleriyle Bilanço ve Kar ve Zarar Hesaplarını İnceleyen Genel Kurul Tutanağı, Cilt 10, 161-162.

²⁶⁷ I previously touched upon emergence of this complicated web of relations in Karabük in a co-authored article with Can Nacar. However, this article was focused on local politics and football clubs, thus, it is not a comprehensive analysis. Göker Giresunlu and Can Nacar, "Her Zaman Siz Dayak Yersiniz, Bu Sefer de Siz Vurun': 1950'lerde Karabük-Zonguldak Rekabetini Futbol Üzerinden Okumak," *Tarih ve Toplum: Yeni Yaklaşımlar*, no. 22 (Fall 2023): 152–75.

Readers can also check Ali Karatay, "Demokrat Parti Döneminde Karabük," in *Demir Çelik Karabük: Bir İşçi Kentinin Hikâyesi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018) for an account of Karabük during the 1950s).

study proves that the workplace was also a constant place of negotiation in state-owned enterprises through an analysis of the personal files of workers in the Bakırköy Cloth Factory.²⁶⁸ It is not difficult to conceive such events taking place at KISW during the war as well. Therefore, there is still a significant gap in our understanding of people's everyday strategies around KISW. There is only a glimpse of these in several documents, signaling that some workers may have been slowing the work down on purpose.²⁶⁹ Moreover, we might predict that some of the frequent breakdowns in KISW could have taken place as industrial action by some discontented workers. Or one can easily imagine a group of workers protesting the low quality of food at the factory cafeteria. Therefore, I do not claim that I provided a definitive analysis of people's everyday experiences of KISW. Instead, I have only presented a lens, to which a variety of lenses could be added through new methodologies and primary sources. Nevertheless, these different lenses would not undermine the significance of people's coping strategies in the face of state-led industrialization. On the contrary, they will enrich our understanding, which is one of the central goals of this study.

²⁶⁸ Akgöz, "Voices from the Shop Floor: Politics, Law, and Workplace Industrial Relations."

²⁶⁹ TNA: FO 371/37452, 7 August 1943, Memorandum by Mr. Mannoock on the Position of Karabük, July 1943.

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