

## SHADES OF RED: RETHINKING THE CONTROVERSIAL PLACE OF İŞTİRAKÇİ HİLMİ IN TURKISH SOCIALISM THROUGH HIS PRESS ACTIVITIES AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

### KIZILIN TONLARI: İŞTİRAKÇİ HİLMİ'NİN TÜRKİYE SOSYALİZMİNDEKİ TARTIŞMALI YERİNİ BASIN FAALİYETLERİ VE TARİHYAZIMI ÜZERİNDEN YENİDEN DÜŞÜNMEK

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#### ABSTRACT

The temporary spring of freedom that followed the 1908 Revolution provided socialist organizations which had long struggled against censorship, exile and punishment, with an opportunity to bring socialism to the public. Although socialist organizations led by various non-Muslim groups had existed in the empire for some time, they were mostly distant from the Ottomanism. The socialist struggle of Hüseyin Hilmi Bey and his circle who organized workers and introduced them to ideas such as syndicate, strikes and revolution was influenced by the strikes that spread throughout the empire after the 1908 Revolution and emphasized Turkish/Muslim elements and followed an Ottomanist line. They began by conveying the socialist struggle to the public through the newspaper *İştirak* and carried it into the political arena with the Ottoman Socialist Party. However, they have often been subjected to insults and denigration in studies on Turkish socialism. Studies criticizing this attitude attempt to explain the issue primarily through ideological partisanship. Based on document analysis, this study argues that the problem stems from liberal historiography and methodological nationalism. Therefore, it seeks to pave the way for alternative studies by criticizing existing historiographical traditions.

**Keywords:** Historiography, Press history, Ottoman socialism, *İştirakçi Hilmi*, *İştirak Newspaper*.

#### ÖZ

1908 Devrimi ile yaşanan geçici hürriyet baharı uzun zamandır sansür, sürgün ve cezalandırmalar ile mücadele eden sosyalist örgütlerin sosyalizmi kamuoyuna aktarabilmeleri için olanak sağladı. İmparatorlukta halihazırda farklı gayrimüslim toplulukların sosyalist örgütlenmeleri olsa da bunlar çoğunlukla Osmanlı çizgiden uzaktı. 1908 Devrimi sonrası imparatorluğa yayılan grevlerin de etkisiyle işçileri örgütleyerek Osmanlı kamuoyunu sendika, grev ve devrim gibi fikirlerle tanıştıran Hüseyin Hilmi Bey ve çevresinin sosyalist mücadelesi ise Türk/Müslüman unsurlara ağırlık veren, Osmanlı bir çizgideydi ki *İştirak* adlı gazete ile başladıkları sosyalist mücadeleyi Osmanlı Sosyalist Fırkası ile siyasi alana taşıdılar. Ancak Hüseyin Hilmi Bey ilginç bir şekilde Türkiye sosyalizmi üzerine gerçekleştirilen çalışmalarda sıklıkla hakaret ve aşağılanmalarla ele alınmıştır. Bunu eleştiren çalışmalar ise meseleyi ağırlıklıla ideolojik tarafgirlik üzerinden açıklamaktadır. Doküman analizi yöntemine dayalı bu çalışma ise sorunun, medya ve basın tarihyazımında yerleşik liberal tarihyazımı anlatısı ve metodolojik milliyetçilikten kaynaklandığını savunmaktadır. Dolayısıyla çalışma, mevcut tarihyazımı geleneklerini eleştirerek alternatif çalışmaların önünü açmak istemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tarihyazımı, Basın tarihi, Osmanlı sosyalizmi, *İştirakçi Hilmi*, *İştirak gazetesi*.

*The grandchildren of İştirakçi Hilmi sell roses facing the sun  
In Taksim Square, they send messages from their phones using Morse code  
That blindness is another name for losing oneself within oneself*

Cihan Oğuz

## INTRODUCTION

The 1908 Revolution triggered a brief *spring of freedom* after Abdulhamid II reinstated the Kânûn-ı Esâsî -Constitution of the Ottoman Empire-, raising high expectations among Ottoman citizens for freedom of expression, criticism and sparking a surge in publications. It also enabled the rapid spread of strikes, long banned and usually suppressed across the empire. Workers and artisans whose demands for fair wages, organization, personal rights, compensation and better working conditions had been ignored, now sought to achieve them through strikes and demonstrations. Simultaneously, previously silenced political and intellectual movements seized this opening. Socialist groups, emerged actively around the revolution, using the press to introduce concepts like socialism, the labour-capital contradiction, Karl Marx, Marxism, revolution, nationalization and to build an alternative platform alongside dominant ideologies such as Islamism, Ottomanism and Turkism.

The Social Democrat Hunchakian Party (1887) and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun, 1890) were the empire's earliest socialist movements, rooted in the Armenian working class and linked to European socialist networks, particularly the Second International. Another significant development was the 1903 split of the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party into *Narrow* and *Broad* factions. Dimitar Blagoev's *Narrow Socialists* rejected any cooperation with capitalists, while the *Broad Socialists*, including Avram Benaroya—who later joined the Sephardic Socialist Review Group—pursued a more flexible strategy. Benaroya eventually allied with the left wing of the National Federative Party, led by Deputy Dimitri Vlahov Efendi, to found the Socialist Labour Federation of Thessaloniki. Based in one of the empire's most populous cities, the Federation played a leading role in the 1 May 1909 demonstrations in Skopje and was soon recognized by both Dashnaksutyun and the Second International as the Ottoman Section's sub-representative. Following

the 1908 Revolution, compulsory military service imposed by the Unionists prompted significant Jewish emigration to the USA (Quataert, 1998b), reducing Thessaloniki's pool of educated workers, driving up wages, and strengthening the city's working class in the post-revolutionary strike wave. Unlike Armenian or Bulgarian socialist groups, Benaroya's organization espoused an Ottomanist socialism. Polat (2004) suggests this stance was influenced by the Russian Jewish Bund's pro-state orientation, which similarly prioritized minority security in a fragile empire—even as Vlahov Efendi delivered pro-Zionist speeches in the Chamber of Deputies. Like the Bund in Russia, Benaroya sought to protect Jews from the perils of imperial fragmentation. Indeed, as Dumont (1977) notes, this position led Vasil Glavinov of the *Narrow Socialists* to dismiss Benaroya's movement as *the party of the Young Turks*.

Concurrently with Avram Benaroya's efforts, Hüseyin Hilmi—who had long promoted liberalism and later socialism through publications like *Serbest İzmir*—founded the Ottoman Socialist Party in September 1909, marking a distinctive moment in imperial politics. Unlike separatist Armenian socialist groups or even Benaroya's Ottomanist but ethnically rooted Thessaloniki movement, Hilmi uniquely called for a unified socialist future for all Ottomans, a stance he maintained until his assassination. He was also the first to directly engage the Turkish/Muslim majority and achieved tangible results through successful strikes. As Haupt (1977) notes, although Benaroya's party and the Hunchakian and Dashnaksutyun movements-maintained contact with the Second International before 1910, none were accepted as the empire's socialist representatives because they lacked a truly inclusive, empire-wide socialist vision. While numerous local socialist groups—especially in Bulgaria—and figures like Parvus Efendi (Alexander Israel Helphand) disseminated socialist terminology and critiques of Western capital in *Türk Yurdu* and lectures at the Turkish Hearth<sup>1</sup>, their efforts remained limited. Beyaz (2013) observes that Parvus shared economic

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<sup>1</sup> Founded in Istanbul in 1912, this association aimed to establish Turkish nationalism as a central political perspective, both culturally and politically. The association quickly gained a wide sphere of influence and became even more effective after the proclamation of the Republic, but it was closed in 1931 due to various political factors.

views with Unionist Finance Minister Cavit Bey on fostering a national bourgeoisie, and despite his important analyses of economic colonization, he was largely silent on organizing socialism in the empire, especially as Cavit Bey openly declared in April 1912 that concrete measures would be taken against it. Toprak (2014) emphasises that, in addition to Parvus Efendi, figures such as Yusuf Akçura and Ahmed Muhiddin who espoused divergent ideological perspectives, concurrently adopted a congruent position in opposition to the liberal economic paradigm, advocating instead for a statist and protectionist economic framework.

These limitations and the socialist movement's failure to project an inclusive vision, gave way to deep pessimism following a series of critical setbacks: The assassination of opposition journalist Hasan Fehmi Bey on 6 April 1909, intensified Unionist repression of the press after the 31 March Incident, the murder of another prominent critic Ahmet Samim Bey and ultimately the loss of the Balkan territories where socialism had been most deeply rooted during the Balkan Wars. Press freedom came under severe strain, especially after Samim's killing. Undeterred, Hüseyin Hilmi and his colleagues at *İştirak* boldly accused the government of involvement in the assassination.<sup>2</sup> In the following issue, they published Samim Bey's prewritten will, in which he explicitly stated his belief that the authorities would orchestrate his murder.<sup>3</sup> The resulting outcry, amplified by extensive coverage in the European press, cornered the Unionists. In response to the escalating crackdown on the national press, *İştirak* issued an urgent appeal to all newspapers to unite in defending freedom of expression:

The murder of Ahmet Samim caused great excitement in the political circles of Beyoğlu and Europe, and foreign correspondents gave details to their newspapers and made many remarks and statements. The German, English, French, Greek and Armenian language newspapers published in our city spoke at length about this murder and this threat against personal freedoms and the freedom of the press, called on the government to fulfil its duty, and showed their sorrow by putting black lines in their columns. However, the Turkish newspapers refrained from expressing the slightest

opinion and even went so far as to make some false statements, even though they were aware of the strange way the body was buried, and they lowered the dignity of the press to miserable levels. (*İştirak* 16, 29 May 1326)

Despite these bold appeals, the 1913 assassination of Grand Vizier Mahmut Şevket Pasha triggered a crackdown that dismantled socialist organizations, exiled their leaders and silenced their press through censorship, a process completed by the wartime suppression of dissent during World War I. From the 1908 Revolution until the founding of the Republic of Türkiye, the most consequential force in organizing workers and spearheading strike and trade union activity was Hüseyin Hilmi's Ottoman Socialist Party, which later reemerged as the Turkish Socialist Party during the Armistice period. Beginning with the first issue of *İştirak* on 13 February 1325/26 February 1910, Hilmi and his circle disseminated an Ottomanist, inflected socialism through a series of journals including *İnsaniyet*, *Beşeriyet*, *Medeniyet* and *İdrak* becoming one of the few groups to first establish a public presence through the press before forming a political party. Yet despite these efforts, Hilmi and his movement have been consistently marginalized, ridiculed or ignored in both the historiography of the Turkish left and the broader Ottoman-Turkish historiography on press. Accusations range from passivity and ignorance to insufficient *redness*, failure to connect with workers and collusion with *enemy* forces. His socialist engagement has even been reduced to chauvinism, personal ambition or mere manipulation by his associate Baha Tevfik Bey. For instance, Açıkkaya (2009) citing Bezmi Nusret Kaygusuz, portrays Hilmi as both Baha Tevfik's puppet and the founder of a socialism *with no roots in Türkiye*. Such critiques, however, rely heavily on secondary judgments rather than engagement with Hilmi's extensive and accessible body of work. Far from isolated, this tendency reflects deeper currents in liberal historiography and methodological nationalism which normalize subjective denigration as legitimate scholarly discourse. Ironically, these dismissals are echoed not only by anti-communist voices but also by researchers adhering to the Soviet-influenced narrative that traces the Turkish left solely to Mustafa Suphi and the Communist Party of Türkiye, thereby erasing earlier, indigenous socialist experiments.

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<sup>2</sup> *İştirak* (16), 29 May 1326.

<sup>3</sup> *İştirak* (17), 31 Mayıs 1326.

## 1. PROBLEMS CREATED BY ESTABLISHED METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Studies on the emergence of socialism in Türkiye face persistent challenges, particularly in identifying the formation of a working class within the Ottoman Empire and distinguishing it from artisans, some of whom successfully integrated into capitalist structures. The empire's uneven regional development combined with a Eurocentric and teleological framing of history, complicates comparative analysis. Central to this difficulty are fundamental questions: Who qualifies as a *worker*? To what extent did artisans' working practices and demands overlap with those of industrial laborers and did this suggest a shared class consciousness? Vatter (1998) observes that mainstream literature often excludes Ottoman artisans by defining workers strictly as employees in modern industrial settings. Yet Vatter also emphasizes (1998) that the Ottoman labor movement was deeply shaped by the historical experiences of these very artisans. Consequently, it is misleading to treat Ottoman socialism or figures like Hüseyin Hilmi as mere imitations of Western models or to fault them for articulating a socialism *incompatible* with the empire's realities. Indeed, whether early labor actions such as strikes or machine-breaking protests, constituted a radical opposition akin to Luddism or industrial-era strike waves remains debatable. E. J. Zürcher (1998) identifies three methodological obstacles in locating the Ottoman working class: First, state and guild records prescribe norms rather than describe reality; second, workers appear in sources only when causing unrest; and third, rural labor is largely absent from documentation. Compounding this, Erol (2009) notes that even within socialist literature, the definition of *worker* and the boundaries of the working class remain contested. Thus, attempts during this period to delineate the working class with fixed criteria within Ottoman socialism were inherently fraught and controversial.

A further obstacle in analyzing debates about the Ottoman working class and the trajectory toward socialism is the persistent tendency in historiography to treat workers as objects, rather than active subjects of history. As Quataert (1998a) observes, both imperial and Republican-era historians often fail to *see* the working class because they frame it exclusively through the

state's optic. Cengiz (2020) adds that this state-centric view, divorced from a materialist understanding of power, remains confined to a narrow intellectual circle and misrepresents the left's conception of agency in the Turkish context. Compounding this, Baydar (2011) highlights how the 1920 Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East, shaped by Bolshevik anti-imperialism profoundly influenced leftist historiography in Türkiye by conflating socialism with anti-colonial nationalism. Çarkçı (2022) reinforces this, noting that figures like Sultan Galiev with his *Socialist Turan* message directed at Muslim populations, were early vectors of this fusion. Closely linked is the overemphasis on the October Revolution as the origin point of Turkish socialism. Şişmanov (1990) for instance, treats Mustafa Suphi as the true founder of socialism in Türkiye, dismissing earlier movements as irrelevant because they aligned with the Second International rather than the Bolshevik-led Third. In his view (1990), pre-Suphi socialists *failed to integrate with the people* and vanished without trace. Consequently, socialist historiography in Türkiye has often collapsed the left into the nationalist or anti-imperialist struggle during the Turkish War of Independence, marginalizing working-class experiences. Zürcher (1998) attributes this bias not only to archival gaps but also to the post-liberation *phoenix narrative*, a euphoric national myth that elevated the military-bureaucratic elite as the sole agents of modernization. This ideological framing cemented a state-centered historiography, sidelining the lived realities of the broader populace and rendering the working class largely invisible.

The marginalization of socialism and the working class in Turkish historiography cannot be attributed merely to liberal or triumphalist narratives that relegate labor to the historical background. At its core lies a deeper methodological problem: The dominance of teleological historicism, reinforced by entrenched traditions of liberal historiography and methodological nationalism. These approaches, long institutionalized in Ottoman and Turkish historical writing frame history as a linear progression toward predetermined endpoints, often retroactively legitimizing dominant political outcomes. When combined with the *decline paradigm* pervasive in Ottoman studies, this produces a multidimensional blind spot. Such perspectives visible across political, press, and media historiography, glorify *victorious* narratives and treat history as a retrospective

justification of the status quo. This tendency has spilled beyond political history into multiple disciplines. Rooted in 19th-century British Whig historiography, this teleology viewed history as purpose-driven, its telos being liberalism and capitalism. Influential Whig historians and politicians cast the Enlightenment, parliamentary governance and the separation of powers as milestones on humanity's march toward freedom with the historian's task reduced to accelerating this *natural* trajectory. As Butterfield (1931) famously critiqued, this tradition flattened historical complexity into a simplistic binary between *progressive* Whigs and *reactionary* Tories, a dichotomy that imposed subjective moral judgments onto the past. Later liberal thinkers like Lord Acton reinforced this framework by condemning revolutions as deviations from history's proper course. Meanwhile, Hegel's philosophy of history which he shaped as the emergence of the Absolute Spirit in connection with the Enlightenment concept and progressive historical motif created by the French Revolution, formed the metaphysical basis for this type of teleological reasoning. These European-centered, capitalism-focused paradigms profoundly shaped the writing of history in the Ottoman-Turkish context, obscuring alternative trajectories like indigenous socialist movements and the agency of the working class.

This progressive motif assigns history a predetermined purpose, detached from individuals, contingent events or empirical realities and judges' global developments by their conformity to this Eurocentric ideal. Collingwood (2019) identifies this tendency in liberal historiography, noting how late nineteenth-century advances in the natural sciences, particularly in England merged with positivist philosophy to solidify a belief in historical progress as an inevitable law. A similar teleology entered socialist thought through Marx (2003) who famously *stood Hegel on his head* by reinterpreting history as the story of class struggle. For Marx, history's purpose was the emancipation of the working class from object to subject of history, a vision that became foundational to socialist historiography. Yet as Marshall G. S. Hodgson (2019) cautions, the dominance of Eurocentric frameworks stemming largely from Europe's early industrialization has obscured the broader, non-European dynamics that shaped the modern world. Consequently, the very notion of *progress* has been confined within a narrow,

deterministic horizon, reducing historical complexity to a single, Western-scripted trajectory.

A defining feature of historicism is its universalizing claim: If history moves toward a predetermined end, then societies that have achieved modern statehood and institutions are deemed the vanguard of human progress. Guha (2020) argues that Hegel's Prussian-centered vision of history as the unfolding of the Absolute Spirit elevated written, state-based histories while rendering non-European societies *ahistorical*, thereby providing a philosophical justification for colonial domination. Carr (2011) critiques such historiography for conflating historians' own ideological preferences with historical truth, presenting subjective narratives as objective destiny. Goody (2019) similarly condemns this Western-centric framework as an epistemic imposition that legitimizes intervention in so-called *backward* regions. Popper (1998) one of historicism's most forceful critics, denounced its historiographical offshoots not only for their flawed methodology and deterministic logic but also for their complicity with authoritarian and imperial agendas. Consequently, this retrospective, teleological mode of history rooted in 19th-century liberal historiography and later reinforced by 20th-century methodological nationalism has deeply infiltrated scholarship across disciplines. In studies of the Ottoman imperial period, this confluence has produced persistent and intractable distortions, obscuring alternative trajectories and non-Western forms of agency, including early socialist and working-class movements.

Methodological nationalism, a framework originating in political science and history before spreading across the social sciences has become deeply entrenched in historiographical practice. It treats the nation-state as the natural and primary unit of analysis, often defining societies through reified notions of *national character*. This perspective dominates fields such as sociology, international relations and economic policy where national histories are interpreted in isolation from global processes and reconstructed retrospectively to fit present-day boundaries and identities. As Wimmer and Schiller (2003) observe, scholars' identification with their own nation-state can introduce significant analytical bias. Giddens (1981) further notes that while European nation-states emerged from specific historical conjunctures, they are frequently portrayed in

historiography as the inevitable outcome of historical development as if guided by an immanent teleology. When this teleological view merges with Eurocentrism, non-European societies are judged *modern* or *civilized* only insofar as they approximate European models. Empires are cast as obsolete relics destined to vanish while nation-states legitimize their existence by interpreting the past through a presentist lens. Consequently, researchers often evaluate imperial-era events not on their own terms but in alignment with the current political narratives and interests of the nation-states they inhabit.

These entrenched historiographical traditions prevalent across multiple disciplines also permeate scholarship on socialism and Hüseyin Hilmi in Türkiye. The problem is exacerbated by methodological nationalism which routinely treats the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire as if it were a nation-state. This anachronistic framing distorts historical analysis, projecting modern national categories onto a pre-national imperial reality. Within this paradigm, the marginalization of Hüseyin Hilmi and his movement or when they are acknowledged, the dismissive and often contemptuous tone used to describe them cannot be attributed solely to ideological bias. Rather, it reflects the deep imprint of established historiographical conventions that prioritize teleological, state-centered and Eurocentric narratives. To move beyond this impasse, it is essential to first situate Hüseyin Hilmi's socialist activism within the broader context of Ottoman historiography. Only then can we critically assess whether scholarly evaluations engage substantively with his extensive body of publications, central to his mission of disseminating socialism to a broad Ottoman public or merely reproduce inherited prejudices.

## **2. THE İŞTİRAKÇİ HİLMİ NARRATE SHAPED BY METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Much of the existing literature on socialism in Türkiye, particularly studies of the movement around Hüseyin Hilmi reproduces the methodological flaws deeply embedded in Ottoman and Turkish historiography. A telling example is the work of M. S. Çapanoğlu (1964), a frequently cited authority in the field who echoing the *decline paradigm*, asserts it was implausible for

socialism to emerge in a society allegedly shaped by five centuries of despotism and lacking translations of Marx, Engels, Kautsky, Bebel, or even Capital. Yet this claim ignores the historical fact that Hüseyin Hilmi founded the Ottoman Socialist Party in 1909. Rather than engaging with this initiative through the lens of domestic socio-economic conditions or the realities of the Ottoman working class, Çapanoğlu dismisses it as opportunistic maneuvering. He attributes Hilmi's activism to the *reckless political atmosphere* following the 1908 Revolution and labels him (1964) an *ignorant* figure unfamiliar with even the basics of socialism. This characterization stands in stark contrast to Hilmi's own writings. In *İştirak* and other publications, he and his associates consistently addressed the dire living conditions of Ottoman workers, analyzed class contradictions and drew explicit comparisons with European labor movements. Indeed, the inaugural issue of *İştirak* declared its central mission to investigate the plight of the working class in Türkiye and the structural causes behind it:

This is an introduction. From now on, every week we will talk about workers in Türkiye, poverty and its causes, union and strike laws and unionism. The working class which constitutes most of our country is synonymous with the life of the nation. We live off their labor. It is our duty to improve their material and intellectual conditions and free them from the chains of oppression. (*İştirak* 1, p. 7, February 13, 1325)

Hüseyin Hilmi and his associates consistently documented the harsh realities faced by workers in Türkiye, often publishing firsthand correspondence from laborers and detailed accounts of conditions in specific workplaces. Notably, they highlighted gendered dimensions of exploitation, including a letter from adolescent female workers in Bursa's silk looms. According to *İştirak* (1910), approximately 5,000 young girls and women were employed in Bursa's silk workshops where they worked as cheap labor and endured systemic exploitation, harassment, insecurity, discrimination and abuse. *İştirak* underscores that these issues could only be addressed through public pressure generated by the press.<sup>4</sup> The newspaper's reporting expanded beyond this initial news item, encompassing a range of issues. The points included condemnation

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<sup>4</sup> "Hükümetin Nazar-ı Dikkatine: Ermeniceden Mütercem Bir Şikayetname", *İştirak* (2), p. 26, February 20, 1325.

of discrimination against female workers<sup>5</sup>, child labour<sup>6</sup>, Finance Minister Cavid Bey's insistence on standard taxes which were detrimental to workers and peasants instead of income-based taxes<sup>7</sup>, and the imposition of working conditions on Turkish workers by foreign companies that did not apply them in their own countries.<sup>8</sup> The newspaper will also criticize the Ottoman press, stating that the government and other newspapers outlets defend the aristocracy while *İştirak* defend workers and laborers<sup>9</sup>, and will call on the press to defend the rights of workers and laborers instead of supporting the government.<sup>10</sup>

Mete Tunçay (2019) exemplifies a recurring critique in Turkish historiography: that early socialist efforts in the Ottoman Empire were premature and imitative, given the supposed divergence between local conditions and those of industrial Europe. Aligning with the *decline paradigm*, he argues that reforms like the Edict of Gülhane (1839) and the Imperial Reform Edict (1856) were adopted solely under foreign pressure, suggesting a broader incapacity for indigenous political innovation. Extending this logic to socialism, Tunçay (2019) contends that Turkish intellectuals lacked the *psychological framework* to grasp leftist ideas and that their attempts merely mimicked Western lifestyles, thereby betraying authentic socialist principles. Yet this view overlooks significant evidence to the contrary. Karagöz Kızılca (2016) emphasizes that the press showed increasing interest in the socialist movement in the Ottoman Empire, particularly after the 1848 Revolutions, and when reporting on these events, journalists preferred to adopt the workers' perspective without entering into any ideological framework. This strategic decision was made with the dual purpose of avoiding government displeasure and sidestepping accusations of ideological bias. As İ. A. Odabaşı (2022) notes, interest in socialism

persisted even under Abdulhamid II's strict censorship, surfacing in literary magazines through poetry and short stories. This engagement intensified after the 1905 Russian Revolution, which catalyzed a surge in socialist discourse and publications across the Ottoman press. Moreover, Tunçay's dismissal of the Ottoman Socialist Party's 1909 manifesto as *liberal* because it emphasized political freedoms (2019) misrepresents its content. In fact, the manifesto's demands closely mirrored those consistently advanced by the Second International: Paid leave, the implementation of an eight-hour workday, the assurance of compensation, retirement provisions, the prohibition of child labor, the recognition of the right to strike, the facilitation of trade union organization, the promotion of freedom of expression and the press, the abolition of the death penalty and the nationalization of the means of production and mines.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, *İştirak* frequently contains clear statements about the future of socialism through revolution.<sup>12</sup> It seems that even if the red demands in Europe and Ottoman Empire are the same, the shades of red vary in the historical narrative. Whereas contentions analogous to Tunçay's were also directed at the *İştirak* circle during that period and they responded with considerable hostility to these criticisms that Türkiye<sup>13</sup> did not possess economic conditions analogous to those in Europe:

The fact that there are no factories in our country and that there is no such thing as a working class is being used as an excuse to justify the lack of regulation of working hours for workers, and for this reason the regulations that were supposed to be established for workers are being postponed. Why is this? Will our country remain without workers and factories forever? Or are the silk, flour, brick and lumber factories that have

<sup>5</sup> "Kadınlarımız Arasında Fikir-i İştirak", *İştirak* (14), p. 209-210, May 15, 1326.

<sup>6</sup> "Gadr Muamelelerinden", *İştirak* (16), p. 204-205, May 29, 1326.

<sup>7</sup> "Maliye Nazırı Cavid Bey ve Sosyalizm", *İştirak* (10), p. 147, April 18, 1326.

<sup>8</sup> "Tramvay Amelesinin Tatil-i Esgali", *İştirak* (13), p. 206, May 8, 1326.

<sup>9</sup> "Mizah Kısmı: Tanin ile İştirak Arasında", *İştirak* (15), p. 239, May 22, 1326.

<sup>10</sup> Türk Matbuatının Serfirazları: Wilhelm'in Cesareti", *İştirak* (19), p. 274, August 26, 1326.

<sup>11</sup> "Osmanlı Sosyalist Fırkası Programı", *İştirak* (20), p. 283-284, September 2, 1326.

<sup>12</sup> See. "Musahabe-i İctimaiyye: Sosyalistliğin Atısı", *İştirak* (3), p. 36-41; "Sosyalistliğin Atısı", *İştirak* (5), p.73-77; Bedik, "Cereyan-ı Cedit", *İştirak* (7), p. 101, March 27, 1326; Alyans Mektebi Müdürü İsrail, "Nasıl Çalışmalıyız?", *İştirak* (20), p. 285, September 2, 1326.

<sup>13</sup> In publications produced by Hüseyin Hilmi's circle, the country is frequently referred to as Türkiye. Despite the fact that the name of the state is frequently referred to as the "Ottoman State" or the "Ottoman Empire" in historiography, the official name of the state was actually Devlet-i Aliyye. However, in contrast to popular belief, the appellation Türkiye was not first used with the Republic (1923); it was also especially used in official correspondence and international agreements, as well as in various academic and cultural writings of the late Ottoman period. Consequently, if the term used in the works cited in this article is Türkiye, it will also be used in the article.

been established in various parts of the countryside today not factories? There are silk factories in Bursa, Adapazarı, Bağcecik and İzmit. Also, every newspaper has been filled with complaints from five thousand girls employed in the Bursa factories about the factory owners who are depriving them of their labor and human rights. Working sixteen hours straight from 9.00 in the morning until 01.00 in the night and earning only two or three pennies! Is this fair? (*İştirak* 7, p. 110, March 27, 1326)

Even though Hüseyin Hilmi and his associates addressed the contention that the economic circumstances in Türkiye and the condition of the working class were not analogous to those in Europe, a contention that purportedly rendered their efforts futile, unwarranted and misguided, the criticism persisted during that period. In another article *İştirak* provided a harsher response to the *gentleman* who asserted that the working class in Türkiye was not comparable to that in Europe:

If the gentlemen were to visit the flour mills in our city, they would soon abandon their suspicions and come face to face with the truth. For in these factories, workers toil from dawn to dusk and every other night for ten or twelve cents a day, sleeplessness, striving to secure the highest possible profit for the factory owner, enduring misery, degradation, and appalling conditions. Our stylish gentlemen should visit the tailor's workshops at least once; where, on a summer day everything is closed and there is only a tiny window at the bottom like a birdcage and the ceiling is low and lit by a large lamp hanging from it, making the place resemble both a bathhouse and a chicken coop, and where fifty or sixty young men stand side by side, sweating, suffering, and shedding tears! (*İştirak* 1, July 14, 1328)

Beyond the issues stemming from European-centric liberal historiography which criticizes Hüseyin Hilmi and his contemporaries for being *untimely and incompatible*, the discourse also suffers from methodological nationalism. For example, Çapanoğlu (1964) assessing early socialist movements in Türkiye, claimed they were started by Armenians and Bulgarians in the Ottoman Empire whose goal was separatism from the start. He further argued that non-Muslim deputies avoided the Ottoman Socialist Party, viewing their goal not as socialism but as the division of the empire. This nationalistic analysis views the empire's nations as threats and fails to consider infrastructural developments across the empire or the impact of the Balkan Wars' losses on socialist-rich regions. Within this view, socialism is reduced to mere non-Muslim disapproval rooted in enmity. Y. D. Çetinkaya (2022) notes that the nationalist

conservative discourse against leftist ideas relies on the belief that non-Muslims dominated education and economics in the Ottoman Empire while Muslims were limited to agriculture and the military. This approach depicts non-Muslims as a homogeneous, upper-class group and Muslims as a lower class. Consequently, European ideas and consumption patterns are seen as non-Muslim introductions which paved the way for socialism. Once this equation is set, all that remains is to criticize Hüseyin Hilmi's actions as futile and inappropriate. Çapanoğlu uses this framework to portray him as an incompetent puppet who lacks understanding: "For Baha Tevfik, the Ottoman Socialist Party was merely an experiment or a pastime. He was well aware that our society was still far from ready for a social awakening. For Hüseyin Hilmi, it was simply a means of livelihood" (1964, p. 51).

Çapanoğlu never mentions the gains achieved by workers in the strikes organized by Hüseyin Hilmi, his efforts to celebrate May Day in Turkey, or the most important aspect of all: the socialist legacy he left behind in the Republic, despite having been exiled for years and eventually murdered in front of the Aqueduct of Valens. Çapanoğlu (1964) just describes all socialist movements as "a memory with no significant impact on our history, perhaps just an intellectual enthusiasm of youthfulness that lasted a little too long..." These accusations even go so far as to justify the murder of Hüseyin Hilmi:

Socialist Hilmi was nothing more than a caricature of socialism. He made it his livelihood and profession. Where could this career path which began as a joke, possibly lead? To the same place every empty-headed adventurer who chooses an ideology as his livelihood will end up: To the filthy pit of an Aqueduct of Valens! The life of Socialist Hilmi is the most characteristic, tragicomic novel of the Constitutional Era which ended with the collapse of an empire. Let's wait for the author! (p. 60)

Aclan Sayılğan (2009) who constructs his narrative through methodological nationalism like Çapanoğlu, both considers socialism as an endeavour of the non-Muslims of the empire and ignores Hüseyin Hilmi and his activities, thus initiating socialism in Türkiye with the October Revolution of 1917:

Let us state immediately that the socialist movements within the Ottoman Empire were not a movement of the Turkish elements, but rather a movement of the

Jews, Greeks and Bulgarians. Turks showed interest in socialist ideas only as a small minority in Istanbul. Socialism gained interest among Turkish elements after the Russian Revolution of 1917. The presence of socialists and communists in Anatolia during the Turkish War of Independence, albeit on a small scale was due to Turkish-Soviet relations and the long-term policies of the Soviets in Türkiye. (p. 9)

Sayılgan's work does not address how the imperial administration during World War I encountered socialist ideas and movements for the first time, nor does it discuss how socialists such as Hüseyin Hilmi who were already in exile, emerged prior to 1917. This attitude labels Hüseyin Hilmi's movement as baseless while failing to consider that the organizational practices of the working class differed greatly from those in Europe. Furthermore, it does not open a discussion on the possibility that this situation could be the result of fundamentally different economic and political developments. Y. Doğan Çetinkaya (2022) posits that the emergence of the working class is frequently attributed to industrialization, rather than to the advent of capitalism. Consequently, the socialist gains of this period are often disregarded, as it is posited that there was no industry in the Ottoman Empire comparable to that of Europe. However, an article published in *İştirak* conveyed to the public that the situation could be evaluated considering Türkiye's circumstances:

Some people dismiss our movement with disdain, claiming that since there are no industrial sectors, factories, or manufacturing plants in our country yet, talking about workers' lives at this stage is like looking at something that is still in its infancy and encouraging revolution and the defence of rights. They say it is pointless, like writing on ice. Should we, like those empty-headed people, respond with smiles that belittle their ignorant words? No! If we do, we will have strayed from our path, so for now we will simply express our sorrow. At the same time, we admit that we do not yet have a working class. Despotism has turned this vast country into a skeleton; we have been unable to make any use whatsoever of our vast and fertile fields, our rich soil or our waterfalls suitable for industrial development. The reason for the absence of industry in our country is despotism and once again despotism! (*İştirak* 7, p. 98-99, March 27, 1326)

The prolonged strike bans, repression of dissent, labor precarity and the Ottoman Empire's semi-colonial status under extensive economic capitulations fostered a distinct working-class infrastructure. Yet critiques

of the *İştirak* circle often overlook these conditions, arguing instead that the Ottoman working class did not mirror its European counterpart. Erol (2009) notes that socialism in the Ottoman Empire followed a unique trajectory, one not devoid of foundations as socialist movements in non-European contexts developed according to their own dynamics. This distinctiveness is evident in the *İştirak* circle's respectful stance toward Islam and religion more broadly. Socialist debates sparked by the 1871 Paris Commune also resonated in the Ottoman press; as Aydar (2015) observes, figures like Namık Kemal, Ahmet Mithat Efendi, Münif Pasha, and Ahmet Cevdet Pasha engaged with socialism in varied ways, though its perceived distance from religion often lent it negative connotations. In contrast, Hüseyin Hilmi and his associates maintained that socialism inherently respected religion, even claiming that prophets and sacred texts endorsed it, a view that may have served as a pragmatic strategy for popularizing socialism but also reflected a sincere conviction that Islam was compatible with socialist ideals.

*İştirak* circle placed considerable importance on maintaining harmony with Islam and tolerance towards other religions. Consequently, they were accused of attempting to disseminate irreligion and corruption within society by the *Şura-yı Ümmet*. In response, a critical article signed by *Hüseyin Hilmi* was published in *İştirak*, asserting that socialism was first established by Jesus Christ and Muhammad's sharia, and the principle of religion which considers all people equal is the foundation of socialism.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, a verse on zakat will be quoted<sup>15</sup> in the issue in which the Ottoman Socialist Party's founding declaration is published and various articles on the fact that zakat is the basis of the principle of social equality will reflect a vision of socialism compatible with Islam, often with quotations from the hadiths. In fact, almost all the publications present socialism as a way of life advocated by Plato and almost all prophets. So much so that in the issue of *İştirak* in which the leader of French Socialist Party Jean Jaurès's letter of support published, Freemasons were condemned on the grounds of their opposition to both religion

<sup>14</sup> Hüseyin Hilmi, "Şura-yı Ümmete Cevap", *İştirak* (4), p. 49-51, 6 Mart 1326.

<sup>15</sup> Osmanlı Sosyalist Fırkası Beyannamesidir", *İştirak* (20), p. 281, 2 Eylül 1326.

and humanity. Furthermore, Freemasonry itself was depicted as one of the monsters that had declared war on humanity, akin to Napoleon.<sup>16</sup> However, Tunçay (2009, p. 50) attributes the discourse of socialism compatible with Islam to Hüseyin Hilmi's lack of understanding of socialism and his pragmatism in seeking to benefit from Islam. Temür (2017) on the other hand, sees this statement as an attempt to prove that socialism is not actually far from Islam and Ottomanism. Indeed, an analysis of the publications of Hüseyin Hilmi and his circle reveals a consistent pattern which lends credence to this hypothesis. For instance, an article published in *İştirak*, drawing upon the works of Baha Tevfik Bey who exerted a significant influence on Hüseyin Hilmi, asserts that the Ottoman Empire's inability to produce a substantial body of philosophical literature and the absence of indigenous philosophical movements rendered them dependent on Western philosophical thought. The author posits that the West and the East are distinct entities, so the mere perception of the West as more advanced should not be accepted uncritically.<sup>17</sup> Instead, there is a necessity to cultivate philosophical discourses and methodologies that are distinctive to the Ottomans and Ottomanism. This approach aligns with the ideological tenets of the *İştirak* circle which employs a distinct approach to the implementation of socialist principles. So much so that they agree with a reader who criticizes the articles published in *İştirak* for not sufficiently examining Marxist movements and struggles, but they respond by stating that they have adopted this line of publication because they believe that it is necessary to first establish a socialist understanding of labor and work in the Ottoman homeland, along with the basic concepts.<sup>18</sup>

Some academic accounts shaped by anti-communist bias and methodological nationalism dismiss Hüseyin Hilmi and his circle's engagement with socialism without acknowledging the Ottoman-specific context. These narratives often reduce Ottoman socialism to a *plot by foreign powers*, framing it either as a separatist scheme orchestrated by non-Mus-

lim minorities or as a movement born solely under Soviet influence. Traces of this Cold War-era anti-communist anxiety persists in influential works such as Fethi Tevetoğlu's (1967), frequently cited in studies on Hüseyin Hilmi. Tevetoğlu explicitly states at the outset that his book aims *to identify the enemy* in the struggle against communism (1967), revealing its propagandistic intent; throughout, portrays Hüseyin Hilmi's activities in a derogatory and mocking tone. For instance, Tevetoğlu (1967) claims that socialism which emerged in the post-1908 revolutionary climate of relative freedom arose merely from *whims and fancies* and *imitation*; then further cites Çapanoğlu extensively to assert that the Ottoman Socialist Party served only as entertainment for Baha Tevfik and a means of livelihood for Hüseyin Hilmi:

The first Turkish socialist party was founded by a self-serving, ignorant, puppet figure who was hungry for fame and fortune; unable to participate in elections, it was abandoned without achieving much success. From an evaluation of the available information, Dr. Refik Nevzat and Baha Tevfik were behind Socialist Hilmi. Although no political ambition or zeal could be identified in Baha Tevfik who died at a young age, Dr. Refik Nevzat's activities have survived to the present day. The Ottoman Socialist Party founded by an ignorant person like Hilmi, had no basis in doctrine or cadre and no organization beyond a printing room. All the party's activities consisted of ineffective, simplistic publications with circulation of no more than a few hundred copies. (p. 20)

Throughout his text, Tevetoğlu disparages Hüseyin Hilmi on multiple grounds, his physical appearance, speech, socialist ideas and efforts to implement them, portraying them as both untimely and detrimental to the nation. Yet as Benlisoy and Çetinkaya (2007) show, this caricature is not original, it reproduces earlier depictions of Hilmi as a *tramp* and *opportunist* propagated by figures like S. Çapanoğlu, B. N. Kaygusuz and R. H. Karay. Tevetoğlu's account further merges methodological nationalism with anti-communism, recasting socialist movements within the empire as separatist plots by non-Muslims. Conceptualizing the Ottoman Empire as a nation-state and viewing it exclusively through a state-centric lens, he claims socialism was essentially the domain of *separatist Armenians and Bulgarians* (Tevetoğlu, 1967) and asserts that the term was *unacceptable* and *allergic* to Turkish-Muslim elites.

<sup>16</sup> "Eslafta Sosyalizm", *İştirak* (6), p. 90-91, 20 Mart 1326.

<sup>17</sup> A. R., "Hangi Felsefe?", *İştirak* (1), Sene: 2, p. 9-11, 7 Haziran 1328.

<sup>18</sup> Hulusi, "İttihad-ı Sinaiyee", *İştirak* (12), p. 190, 1 Mayıs 1326.

Tevetoğlu dismisses Hüseyin Hilmi's attempts to organize workers and disseminate socialist ideas through the press as mere *enthusiasm, fashion and imitation*, allegedly leaving no mark on Turkish intellectuals or the working masses (1967). Yet this raises unanswered questions: If Hilmi's efforts were so inconsequential why were his two parties suppressed, their publications censored or banned, and party affiliates exiled? Moreover, Tevetoğlu insists (1967) that the Ottoman Socialist Party was not truly led by the *ignorant and title obsessed* Hilmi, but by foreign, revolutionary communists who had infiltrated it. By framing socialism solely as a foreign conspiracy while ignoring the material conditions of the Ottoman working class, Tevetoğlu's narrative exemplifies an anti-communist historiography that would reappear in later studies.

Sıtkı Şeremetli opens his work by framing communist activity as a long-standing threat to Türkiye and attributes the emergence of socialism in the country solely to separatist non-Muslim groups. Şeremetli (2017) characterizes the socialist movement of the era as a *sterile intellectual debate*, limited to secondhand translations of Marx, Kautsky, and Jaurès. Reinforcing methodological nationalism, he claims that socialist activism served exclusively Bulgarian, Armenian and Jewish agendas, asserting that none of these groups engaged with Hüseyin Hilmi or his circle. Şeremetli further contends that Jewish socialists aimed to establish a separate state in Palestine, interpreting their lack of contact with Hilmi as proof of separatist intent. This portrayal, however, overlooks historical realities. A significant portion of the empire's Jewish population under the leadership of Avram Benaroya, embraced an Ottomanist socialist vision. Moreover, the absence of organizational links between Hilmi and non-Muslim socialist groups largely stemmed from the fact that many of these communities resided in territories already lost, following the Balkan Wars. Şeremetli goes further, claiming without evidence that the *Turkish nation* was inherently incompatible with socialism due to its social structure and that socialism was imported exclusively by non-Muslims (2017). He also labels Hüseyin Hilmi *a shady character* who allegedly organized strikes with British support and received funds from enemy Powers, a claim

frequently repeated in the literature but refuted by Erdem. Erdem (2012) demonstrates that during the Armistice period, despite explicit bans by British General Harrington and French General Charpy on May Day gatherings in Istanbul, Hüseyin Hilmi and the Turkish Socialist Party successfully held a major May Day demonstration, advocating for an eight-hour workday, weekly rest and trade union rights.

Repeated and caricatured analyses of Hüseyin Hilmi thus criticize the *İştirak* circle as sometimes an apparatus of enemy forces, sometimes a passive movement deceived or ignored by insincere non-Muslims, sometimes a movement pursuing policies contrary to national interests, and sometimes a movement unrelated to socialism. Whereas Hüseyin Hilmi's circle has always taken both an Ottomanist and Marxist stance on nationalism and national interests. For example, an issue<sup>19</sup> of *İştirak* discussing the establishment of a party to join the Second International and the goal of nationalization to achieve common ownership is followed by another issue<sup>20</sup> based on Marx's argument that socialists around the world should unite without distinction of nationality or religion. An article signed by *Ruşen Zeki* emphasized that nationalism was the greatest and only obstacle to socialism at a time when class conflict was intensifying. Hüseyin Hilmi and his circle's unique understanding of socialism within the Ottoman framework was so clear and rigid that none of their publications mentioned the abolition of the monarchy or spoke against the Sultan. When the Balkan War began, a harsh article was published condemning the four Balkan countries fighting against the Ottoman Empire, accusing them of betraying socialism and even labeling them as brutal, cowardly and cruel throughout history. This article defended the necessity of fighting against the four nationalist and separatist countries in the name of socialism.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, this support for the war must have disturbed the Second International, as evidenced by Dr. Refik Nevzat defending peace and calling for restraint and he stated that wars

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<sup>19</sup> *İştirak* (1), Year: 2, 7 Haziran 1328.

<sup>20</sup> *İştirak* (2), Year: 2, 21 Haziran 1328.

<sup>21</sup> "Harp ve Hücum", *İştirak* (20), 26 Eylül 1328.

were a method of capitalism against socialism.<sup>22</sup> In another issue, the prevailing notion that civilization is progressing will be challenged by the precise observation that the prevailing capitalist system of exploitation will soon lead the world into a major war.<sup>23</sup>

Some scholars dismiss the Ottoman-rooted socialism advanced by Hüseyin Hilmi and his circle as mere imitation driven by Westernization. T. Z. Tunaya (1988) for example, interprets socialist movements not through the lens of the Ottoman Empire's internal class dynamics or its integration into global capitalism, but as a superficial reflection of Western discourses on human rights. He further claims that the Ottoman Socialist Party had no parliamentary presence and contributed nothing to debates on labor or socialism (1998), a judgment that ignores the systematic repression the movement faced, including bans, censorship, exile and imprisonment. As Erdem (2012) observes, Hilmi's activism and his party's manifesto are rarely assessed in their historical context; instead, they are anachronistically judged by present-day standards. Consequently, the enduring relevance of the issues they raised, many of which remain unresolved in contemporary Türkiye and globally is often overlooked. This tendency is further evident in Kurtoğlu's (2022) methodologically nationalist reading which labels *İştirak*'s poetic appeals to peace, justice and freedom as inauthentic and incompatible with *Turkish social structure*. This critique not only erroneously projects the empire as a homogeneous Turkish nation-state but also fails to specify why these universal themes are deemed incongruent or which literary forms by contrast, would suit which societies rendering the argument both essentialist and unsubstantiated.

Many of these interpretations rooted in the assumptions that the Turkish working class differed fundamentally from its European counterpart and that socialism was a tool used by non-Muslims to fragment the empire are also shaped by a denial of class conflict. As Georgeon (2021) notes, before the rise of the *New Riches* in Türkiye during World War I individuals

who amassed wealth through wartime, profiteering and black-market activities socioeconomic tensions were rarely framed in class terms, unlike in the West. Consequently, Hüseyin Hilmi's socialist activism is often portrayed not as an organic response to local conditions but as an alien import with the struggle reduced to the actions of Hilmi and a small circle rather than a broader working-class movement. Gürsoy (2013) rightly critiques this tendency, pointing out that Western socialism is frequently treated as uniquely legitimate due to its philosophical depth while similar efforts in Ottoman Empire are dismissed on the grounds that *capitalist conditions like those in the West* had not yet matured. Yet as Gürsoy emphasizes, socialism emerges fundamentally as a human response to the dehumanizing realities of capitalism. Despite these challenges, socialist activism reemerged during the Armistice period as the Turkish Socialist Party, now adopting a clearer Marxist orientation. Gürsoy (2013) also notes that Hüseyin Hilmi succeeded in expanding his movement and making it more popular, particularly during the Armistice Period, when the Unionists were forced to flee abroad or to the interior of Anatolia, by increasing his influence in Istanbul. Indeed, even Hüseyin Hilmi's harshest critic Çapanoğlu (1964) acknowledges, despite efforts by the Allied Powers to thwart him, Hüseyin Hilmi's strikes and workers actions placed enemy forces in a challenging position. Indeed, Erdem (2012) also points out that Hüseyin Hilmi, together with the Turkish Socialist Party, embarked on fieldwork that would prepare the ground for revolution, focusing more on Marxist practice than socialist theory. Despite the ban on International Workers Day celebrations by the commanders of the enemy forces, British General Harrington and French General Charpy, Hüseyin Hilmi organized a large workforce consisting of shipyard, shipyard, company, railway, and tobacco workers.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned points, this dismissal ignores his tangible impact. Cerrahoğlu (1975) observes that it was precisely through Hilmi's efforts that Turkish laborers organized collectively for the first time and secured concrete gains. Nevertheless, Hilmi is routinely labeled ignorant in much of the literature. Özhazinedar (2023) further underscores Hilmi's contribution, noting that *İştirak* enabled the first sustained, organized socialist publication in

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<sup>22</sup> "Makale-i Mahsusa: Sosyalistler Kardeşdir", *İştirak* (23), 28 Eylül 1328.

<sup>23</sup> Branko Melcanopulos, "Bir Nakise-i İçtimaiye", *İştirak* (3), Year: 2, p. 42-43, 5 Temmuz 1328.

Türkiye, reaching a broad audience and giving workers a public voice, marking a foundational moment in the country's labor and socialist history.

## CONCLUSION

Socialism in the Ottoman Empire developed within the context of the empire's specific historical conditions and internal dynamics while remaining connected to broader European currents. The brief period of political liberalization following the 1908 Revolution allowed socialist movements, particularly those rooted in Rumelia to emerge publicly, creating space for figures like Hüseyin Hilmi and his circle. Through publications such as *İştirak*, they sought to articulate a distinctly Ottoman form of socialism, initially presenting its core ideas in accessible, even romantic terms before gradually building a theoretical foundation. However, as Karakışla (1998) notes, the movement suffered a severe blow with the loss of its Rumelian territories during the Balkan Wars which disrupted organizational networks and leadership. In this vacuum, Hilmi and his associates worked to reconstitute socialist activity, culminating in the formation of the Ottoman Socialist Party. Yet persistent internal and external pressures, ranging from state repression to wartime instability led to censorship, exile and repeated suppression, stalling the movement's development. Despite during the Armistice period as the Turkish Socialist Party, now adopting a clearer Marxist orientation. It distinguished itself through large-scale, effective actions: Organizing workers, securing trade union rights and achieving tangible gains through strikes, demonstrating both resilience and relevance in a turbulent era.

Despite these efforts and historical developments, socialist scholarship in Türkiye has often produced a caricatured and dismissive portrayal of Hüseyin Hilmi and his circle, largely based on secondary sources and rooted in the assumption that their movement was rootless and imitative. Some narratives claim that socialism in Türkiye only began after 1917 under Soviet influence and through Mustafa Suphi, while others, shaped by anti-communist sentiment, frame Ottoman socialism as a separatist ploy orchestrated by non-Muslim communities. Both approaches reflect a reductive, polarizing framework that has been repeatedly criticized. A central reason for this distortion lies in the consistent neglect of

Hilmi's original publications as primary sources. Compounding this is a broader methodological deficiency in Turkish historiography, one that has received insufficient attention. This study argues that the recurring problems frequently in the literature stem largely from deep-seated methodological flaws originating in history and political science which have since permeated press history and other social sciences through entrenched historiographical traditions. European-centric liberal historiography not only depicts Hilmi and his movement as embodiments of intellectual weakness and utopian naivete but also channels all analyses of socialism and the working class in the late Ottoman Empire into simplistic, Eurocentric comparisons. Meanwhile, methodological nationalism imposes anachronistic nation-state frameworks onto a multi-ethnic imperial context. Consequently, even as contemporary debates continue over definitions of scientific versus utopian socialism or the very category of worker, Hilmi's circle is routinely labeled as idealistic and unrealistically visionary. Generally shaped by these methodological biases, the literature often trivializes the demands articulated in the party's program, even though many remain unmet in present-day Türkiye. This study therefore seeks to move beyond entrenched interpretive patterns by foregrounding and critically examining the methodological assumptions that have long shaped scholarship on socialism and Hüseyin Hilmi in Türkiye.

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