

**Work Accidents as the Most Afflictive Face of Neoliberalism:
The Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin Case
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Work accidents are a vital cost of neoliberal globalization that is paid by workers all around the world. According to a report by the International Labor Organization (ILO) each year approximately 2.5 million workers die as a direct result of work accidents and work-related diseases. Therefore, focusing on work accidents and discussing the causes of work accidents by discussing the political economy behind these causes is very important to understanding the experiences of workers in the neoliberal globalization period.

For this purpose, this paper examines work accidents in the subcontracting companies in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin in the post-1980 period. The main aim of this paper is to ascertain whether the work accidents in the subcontracting companies in the Basin are not a destiny or a result of simple neglect in the work process, or are they the result of the political economy, which is shaped by the tense relation between the capital, the labor, and the state.

Studying Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin is important, above all, as Nurşen Gürboğa states, because it constitutes a microcosm of the relations between capital, labor, and the state.¹ Second, it was one of the most important and biggest worker basins in the country from the 1840s until the 1980s. Therefore, it is attractive to social scientists who study workers' experiences and history in Turkey.

In addition to this, after the Second World War, only the Turkish Hard Coal Enterprise (TTK), which was an important State Economic Enterprise of the import substitution industrialization period, produced coal in the Basin. In the neoliberal period because of the subcontracting practices of different actors different from TTK started to produce coal in the Basin. Therefore, third, the differences, tense relations and contradictions between, these actors and their reflection on the working conditions create an opportunity for social scientists to understand working conditions and workers' experiences.

Studying mining and mine workers as a social scientist resembles going to a country whose language you do not know. On the one hand, the strange terms of the mining literature and, on the other, the Cartesian logic of the mining engineers make it very difficult.

Still, there are important studies that focus on the social history of the miners and their organized or unorganized struggles. Three studies that are the product of historiographic sensibility

¹ Nurşen Gürboğa, *The Zonguldak Coal Basin As the Site of The Contest 1920-47* (Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Archives and Research Center, 2009), p. 79.

of recent years towards the social form the underpinning of this paper. Donald Quataert's *Miners and the State in the Ottoman Empire: The Zonguldak Coalfield, 1822-1920*², Hamdi Genç's dissertation "Ereğli Kömür Madenleri (1840-1920)"³ and Nurşen Gürboğa's dissertation, "The Zonguldak Coal Basin As the Site of the Contest 1920-47"⁴.

These studies evaluate the actual living and working conditions of the Zonguldak Coal Basin by using the perspective of social history from below. They do not use the worker as a timeless and universal phenomena. Their worker category includes part-time, unskilled, and mostly migratory laborers. They also examine the ties of the workers with the village, their everyday resistances, the aspects of labor market and the work disputes between workers and so on.

For this purpose, first, the political economy of work accidents is examined and the impacts of the new working forms on work accidents under the flexible working regime are discussed. Second, an overview of the history of the Zonguldak Hardcoal Basin is given. In addition to this, the changing global political economy of the coal production is analyzed by developing a comparative perspective between the cases of England, the People's Republic of China, and Turkey. Third, the redevance system as a subcontracting practice is studied. Fourth, the main causes of the work accidents in subcontracted companies and informal pits are discussed. As a result, we conclude that the flexible working regime as one of the main pillars of neoliberalism has increased rate of the work accidents in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin.

Work Accidents In Flexible Working Conditions

In the neoliberal globalization period, the work and daily life conditions of the workers have worsened increasingly because the collective struggle for the workers' rights has declined. The high unemployment rates, the sharpening of the global capitalist struggle, and the collapse of the real socialist models that had once increased the hope of people for better working and life conditions have worsened the work and daily life conditions of the workers in parallel with the decline in organized struggle. Because of the worsening of work and daily life conditions of the workers in the neoliberal globalization period, work accidents have become one of the most important common experiences of workers throughout the world.

The Political Economy of Work Accidents

² Donald Quataert, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Madenciler ve Devlet* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Yayınevi, 2009).

³ Hamdi Genç, *Ereğli Kömür Madenleri 1840-1920* (Ph. D. diss., Marmara Üniversitesi, 2007).

⁴ Nurşen Gürboğa, *The Zonguldak Coal Basin As the Site of The Contest 1920-47*.

Work accidents can be defined as "accidents that happen in a working life context."⁵ However, it does not mean that the main consequences are "limited to injuries on the involved workers,"⁶ or are limited to the workplace where the accident happened. Many people are affected to different degrees by work accidents including workers, workers' family, capitalists, state's supervisor of the occupational health and safety and those who are involved in the work context before and after the accident in many different ways.

In addition to these, there are the social, economic and political effects of work accidents. For that reason, work accidents should not be considered as limited to the people who are directly involved or to the exact time when the accident happened.

French Sociologist Annie Thebaud Mony, who conducts field studies on the relations of subcontracting and workers' health in the French nuclear industry, writes that, "work accidents occur in the junction of public policies, the strategies of individual companies and laborers' choices which are limited by social relations."⁷ However, it is not enough to focus only on triangle of the state, capitalist and workers. It is also necessary to examine the unequal and repressive nature of these relations to describe the notion of work accidents. The intersection of these three is the labor process, where the work accident occurs.

The most distinguishing feature of the labor process for work accidents is the commodification of labor. It is no coincidence that the labor process is based on dominance relations, as it is what capitalism entails in the condition of commodified labor.

The Importance of Work Accidents in the Process of Class Formation

According to E.P. Thompson, social classes are historical processes that are shaped by the conflictual relations in the labor process. Contrary to determinist theories,⁸ which view classes as an automatic product of the current mode of production, this kind of historicist approach to class formation focuses on the work and daily life relations of workers and capitalists. Therefore, he emphasizes not only the economic aspects of class relations, but also the political and cultural aspect of it. "The making of the working class is a fact of political and cultural, as much as of economic, history."⁹

Like capitalists, workers are also active actors who create their own history by struggling

⁵ Jan Hovden et al., *A Need for New Theories, Models and Approaches to Occupational Accident Prevention? Safety Science* 48, no 8 (2010), p. 3.

⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷ Annie Thebaud - Mony, *Çalışmak Sağlığa Zararlıdır* (Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2012), p. 24.

⁸ One of the most important example: Gerard Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History* (New York: Oxford Press, 2000)

⁹ Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Making of English Working Class* (New York : Vintage Books, 1966) p. 194.

against or incorporating various conditions.¹⁰ Thompson writes that "the working class made itself as much as it was made."¹¹ The commodification of workers' health, which is one of the important results of the commodification of labor, is also an issue of struggling against or incorporating in the process of class formation.

The working life context can be seen as a microcosm of class struggle, which is shaped by the economic, social and the ideological relations between the workers and the capitalists. Michael Buroway says that "any work context involves an economic dimension (production of things), a political dimension (production of social relations), and an ideological dimension (production of an experience of those relations)."¹²

Therefore, discipline of labor power economically, socially, and ideologically by capitalists is a crucial point for class struggle. Following Thompson, it can be said that the agency of workers must be taken into account in the process of the discipline of labor power economically, socially, and ideologically by capitalists. This kind of approach offers important insights into the process of class formation.

David Harvey writes that "since labor control is essential to capitalist profit, so, too, is the dynamic of class struggle over labor control and market wage fundamental to the trajectory of capitalist development."¹³ Capitalists try to develop some mechanisms for labor control. He continues, saying, "labor control (...) entails, in the first instance, some mix of repression, habituation, co-optation and co-operation, all of which have to be organized not only within the workplace but throughout society at large."¹⁴

Technological change, the intensification of working, de-unionization, less safer and less healthy conditions can be turned into critical weapons in the hands of the capitalist class. In times of high unemployment, workers must choose either to work in unsafe and unhealthy conditions or go hungry. The workers' struggle against harsh physical and psychological pressures in the working place aims at the weakening of such discipline mechanisms.

In contemporary capitalism, the struggle against work accidents as a part of the working class tactics of weakening discipline mechanisms on labor power is one of the constitutive moments of working class formation. As said above, work accidents are common among workers throughout the world. Therefore, the struggle against work accidents can be a junction point between the experiences of the workers and the working class formation.

¹⁰ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 76-107.

¹¹ Thompson, *The Making of English Working Class*, p. 194.

¹² Michael Buroway, *The Politics of Production* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 39.

¹³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), p. 180.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

The Changing Political Economy Of The Coal Production

An Overview of the History of the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin

After the Industrial Revolution, the using of steam as an energy resource which was more economic and more productive instead of firewood and the coal, was turned to an important resource for industry. In addition to this, coal was also used for melting iron, which was used for producing important machines for industry. In 1800, the amount of total coal output of England, which was the center of industrial revolution, was 11 million tons, while that of France, Belgium and Germany's was only 6,000 tons.¹⁵ This rate can help us to understand Industrial Revolution's importance in the coal production.

In these years in the Ottoman Empire there was a need of coal for the new-born industries and navy. In 1830, the Empire made an agreement with the USA and after this agreement Empire's navy turned to began to use steam ship.¹⁶ Therefore, the Empire, which had important coalfields, decided to establish The Ereğli Coal Mines Company in 1841, for extracting mine from the Zonguldak coal basin.

In 1841, the state set up the Ereğli Coal Mines Company for the mining of the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin. Between 1841 and 1846, the hard coal basin was managed by this company.¹⁷ In this period the mining techniques were very primitive. In 1846, basin's administration was transferred to the *Darphane-i Amire*. In 1850, *Darphane-i Amire* was turned into the Privy Purse, so the basin's administration transferred to Privy Purse.¹⁸ Gürboğa writes that, in this period, "two factors called for early state involvement, once was *miri* (state-owned land) status of the basin and other was the establishment of monopson market relations between coal mining operators and the state."¹⁹ The mine operators had the status of *mültezim*. We also know that state gave these *mültezims* the rights of collecting taxes from surrounding villages. The duty of Privy Purse was to collect remittances of *multezims* and to control the mining engineers.

In 1850, the state created a monopson market for the Zonguldak coal basin. This means that the State was the only buyer of whole mine production. This system continued until 1882. Gürboğa writes that in this period the Naval Ministry created a military order in the Basin.²⁰

During the Crimean War, French and English steam war ships needed coal. Between 1854

¹⁵ Christine Rider, *An Introduction to Economic History* (Ohio: South-Western College Publishing, 1995), p. 192

¹⁶ Hamdi Genç, *Ereğli Kömür Madenleri 1840-1920* (Ph. D. diss., Marmara Üniversitesi, 2007) p. 8.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁹ Gürboğa, *The Zonguldak Coal Basin As the Site of the Contest 1920-47* p. 59

²⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

and 1857, the English Company held the right of management of the coal basin.²¹ In these years, the Ottoman State imported technical personnel from England, which was a very advanced country in coal mining techniques. The import of coal from England continued during the Crimean War years.

The bad management of the mines gave harm to the navy of the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, in 1865 the coal mine's management was transferred to the Naval Minister.²² After the entry of the Naval Ministry to the region in 1865, Gürboğa writes that the state was responsible for the supply of the labor force.²³ Therefore, the state charged the Dilaver Pasha Regulation in 1867 to manage conditions of the labor force in the mines. There was a scarcity of labor force in the region as were in other regions of the Ottoman Empire. To solve this problem, the Regulation created a compulsory labor force regime for the coal basin.

According to the regulation, all males who were between 13 and 50 years of age, and lived in the fourteen counties around the coal basin, had to work in the basin on a rotational system according to which miners worked in the mines for 15 days and then they returned to their villages where they continued farming. Quartet said that "this also enabled the continuous flow of agricultural taxes which were the financial base of the Ottoman economy."²⁴

This is an important point because the miners of the nineteenth century in the coal basin were not consistent with the ideal type of proletariat who sold their labor force in the market and had no ties with agriculture. The Ottoman State forced miners by using soldiers to work in the mines, so it can be said that this practice was meant to manage capitalist market conditions by using non-economic powers. Therefore, to understand the conditions of working class in the region we must focus on the Ottoman State's approach to capitalism in this period.

The importance of workers' relations with the soldiers was discussed above. With the application of a rotational system, the nature of the workers' relations with soldiers changed a bit. When the miners went to their village for fifteen days and did not want to return to mines, the soldiers forced them to return. Because of the rotational system, a worker was not able to leave the mine before another worker came to replace him. Therefore, the disputes between workers included the soldiers because the one who had to bring the worker who did not come was the soldier himself. The workers, who had good relations with soldiers, possibly took advantage of this situation, so local relations pattern became more important in the working life in this period.

Another important point is the workers' ties with their villages. As we know from Aytekin's research, there was a problem of unpaid wages in the coal basin.²⁵ Large amounts of the wages of

²¹ Genç, *Ereğli Kömür Madenleri 1840-1920*, p. 29.

²² E. Attila Aytekin, *Tarlalardan Ocaklara Sefaletten Mücadeleye, Zonguldak-Ereğli Kömür Havzası İşçileri 1848-1922* (İstanbul, Yordam Kitap, 2006) p. 30.

²³ Gürboğa, *The Zonguldak Coal Basin As the Site of the Contest 1920-47*, p. 60.

²⁴ Quataert, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Madenciler ve Devlet*, p.97.

²⁵ Aytekin, *Tarlalardan Ocaklara Sefaletten Mücadeleye, Zonguldak-Ereğli Kömür Havzası İşçileri 1848-*

the workers were appropriated by the local authority as taxes. In this situation, the villages offered the workers a means to subsist. Therefore, to understand the nature of exploitation in the coal basin we must take into account of the workers' ties with their villages. In addition to this, the industrial-rural linkage was an obstacle for the creation of qualified labor power because the workers could not see themselves as only workers.

Gürboğa writes that, "there is no doubt that the abolition of the state's monopsony over the coal market in 1882 constituted another breaking point in the history of the basin. The 1882 decision opened the path for the flow of large-scale capital, including capital of foreign origin."²⁶ Although the compulsory labor regime was not officially abolished until 1908, after 1882, the compulsory labor regime was not in operation.

Ereğli Company which was a French Company had 186 million kuruş capital which could not be compared to that of other small-scale companies. This company controlled 92 percent of total production of the basin at the end of the century.²⁷ Although this company tried to improve substructure conditions of the basin, the local mining companies and the people who lived in the region reacted negatively. There were many thefts and attacks against the company in these years.

Serb, Montenegrin, Italian, Greek, French, English and Irish workers worked in the course of time in the Zongulgak Coal Mines. Especially Montenegrins continued to work in the mines after the independence of Montenegro. Some problems occurred between the foreign workers and Ottoman workers from time to time.²⁸

After the 1908 Revolution, the economic policies aimed at the national capitalism.²⁹ In parallel with these economic policies, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) took control of the basin from the Naval Minister and first gave it to the Ministry of Public Works and then the Ministry of Commerce, Agriculture and Mines. "The abolition of the Naval Ministry's administration in terms of labor management and the management of mining activities."³⁰ The CPU wanted a highly centralized organization for the administration of the coal basin.³¹

According to Turkish Republic State Supervisory Council's Report of Health and Safety in Mines of Turkey "although there were more than three hundred small and big scale coal enterprise, the Basin was nationalized in 1911."³² Until 1914 the Ottoman State had full control over the basin.

1922, pp. 51-65.

²⁶ Gürboğa, *The Zonguldak Coal Basin As the Site of the Contest 1920-47*, p. 63.

²⁷ Aytakin, *Tarlalardan Ocaklara Sefaletten Mücadeleye, Zonguldak-Ereğli Kömür Havzası İşçileri 1848-1922*, pp. 32-33.

²⁸ Genç, p. 327.

²⁹ Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908-2005* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2007) p. 22.

³⁰ Gürboğa, *The Zonguldak Coal Basin As the Site of the Contest 1920-47*, p. 65.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

³² Turkish Republic State Supervisory Council, 2011, *Report of Health and Safety in Mines of Turkey*, Accessed on 15 November 2012, Available online at <http://hukuk.usak.edu.tr/dokuman/ddk2011_3.pdf> ddk>

However with the break out of World War I, German capital flowed into the Basin and gradually took shares of the Ereğli Company and control of the War Coal Center.³³

After World War I, French armies invaded the Basin and occupied it until the end of National Struggle. War Coal Center was replaced with Entente Forces Coal Commission.³⁴ In June 1921 the French occupation ended. in June 1921. Between 1914 and 1922, the coal production was interrupted by extraordinary conditions of World War I and the National Struggle³⁵

In September 1921, "*Havza-i Fahmiye Amele Kanunu*" the first labor act in after the National Struggle was issued. This law regulated the working conditions, hours and some social security mechanisms. Gürboğa writes that "with the pro-labor provisions of the laws, the new government desired to show its sympathy towards the more oppressed sections of society, which the mine workers effectively represented."³⁶ In December 1923 the government established the *Amele Birliđi*... Until the foundation in the Basin of the first labor unions in 1946, the Amele Birliđi played its part bringing the state's paternalist policies to the workers and mine operators' representatives and functioning as a workers' representative organization."³⁷

Gürboğa writes that "after 1922 the ruling elite of Republican state concerned with the capital composition of the basin, encouraged the entry of large scale national companies under the control of newly established national bank, Türkiye İş Bankası (Turkish Business Bank)."³⁸ The capital needs of the Basin were supplied by the Turkish Business Bank.

The first Law of Promoting Industry Law (*Teşvik-i Sanayi Kanunu*) in 1927 and the Global Economic Crises in 1929 led to a break in liberal economic policies. Turkish economic and political life were redesigned by the State-led industrial development policies. Boratav writes that "the state dominated the whole economic life by investing capital, operating enterprises and being a control mechanism."³⁹ In the 1930s, parallel to the state-led industrialization attempts, the basin gained further importance in the country's economic policies. These policies also put an end to foreign capital in the Basin.

Although Turkey did not participate in World War II, it experienced a war economy.⁴⁰ "In 1940, the state decided to operate the the mines directly in the Basin by *Ereğli Kömür İşletmeleri* which were connected with Etibank."⁴¹

³³ Yasin Kaya, "Class Underground, Class Aboveground: Zonguldak Mineworkers and Their Unions" (M.A. Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2009) p. 29.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Gürboğa, *The Zonguldak Coal Basin As the Site of the Contest 1920-47*, p. 66

³⁶ Ibid., p. 67.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁸ Gürboğa, *The Zonguldak Coal Basin As the Site of the Contest 1920-47*, p.

³⁹ Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908-2005*, p. 68.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 81.

⁴¹ Turkish Republic State Supervisory Council, 2011, *Report of Health and Safety in Mines of Turkey*, p. 192.

During the World War II the need for coal was increased dramatically. "For the aim of satisfying coal need the government put compulsory labor regime (*iş mükellefiyeti*) into practice in the Basin.⁴² The compulsory labor regime was a part of *Milli Korunma Kanunu* which suspended social purposes of the 1936 Work Law. Like in the Dilaverpaşa Regulation which had also put into practice a compulsory labor regime in the nineteenth century, in Second compulsory labor regime in 1940s, the labor process were restructured on the rotational basis. Workers spent half of the year in their village, the other in the pits. Yasin Kaya summarize the major consequences of the Gürboğa'a comprehensive work on compulsory labor regime

(i) The state who became the sole owner and the manager of the basin with establishment of 33 EKİ, applied practices of coercion and violence on the workers and villagers, and it intensified its existence in the region. (ii) Republican People's Party asked for the consent of the people in the region to ensure the compulsory labor and the propaganda practices helped the paternalistic ideology to deepen. (iii) The agricultural-based economy of the region collapsed due to the labor power fleeing from the villages to work in the mines.

Second Compulsory Labor Regime was abolished in 1947.

The Golden Age of the Zonguldak Coal Basin

After the end of the compulsory labor regime in 1947, the administration of the little mines that had been brought together to be administered by the Ereğli Hard Coal Enterprise (EKİ), passed to the Turkish Coal Enterprise. In 1983, this enterprise was transformed into the Turkish Hard Coal Enterprise (TTK).⁴³

For the history of the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin, the importance of the Çatalağzı Thermal Power Plant, which was built in 1948 within the body of EKİ to meet the need of the electricity of the area, must be emphasized. Today, all of the needs of ÇATES are met by the TTK. Moreover, it also meets most of the coal needs of Karabük Iron and Steel Factory built in 1937 and Ereğli Iron and Steel Factory built in 1965 until the 1980s.⁴⁴

⁴² Murat Metinsoy, "İkinci Dünya Savaşı Yıllarında Zonguldak Kömür Ocaklarında Ücretli İş Mükellefiyeti ve İşçi Direnişi," in *Zonguldak Kent Tarihi '05 Bienali Bildiriler Kitabı*, ed. Kürşat Coşgun and Ahmet Öztürk (İstanbul: Zonguldak Kültür ve Eğitim Vakfı, 2006) p. 93.

⁴³ Turkish Republic State Supervisory Council, 2011, *Report of Health and Safety in Mines of Turkey*, p. 192.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

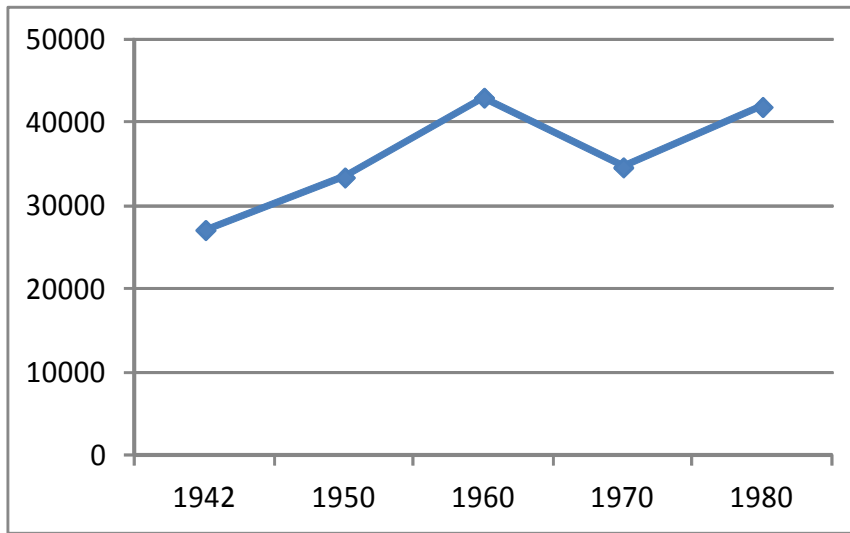


Figure 4: The worker numbers of TTK⁴⁵

The geological characteristics of the coal found in the basin allow only labor-intensive production. For that reason, total production in the basin is directly proportional to number of workers of the basin.

Between 1960 and 1980, called also the Golden Age of the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin, the worker number passed 40,000. In parallel with this, the production increased. Total annual production of run-of-mine approached 8 million tons. The coal exportation that had begun with 16,000 ton in 1973, passed 10 million ton in 1998.⁴⁶

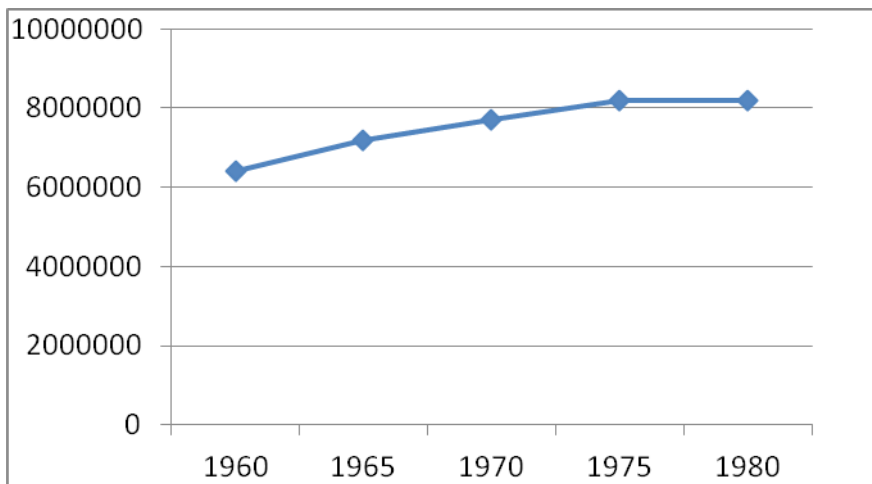


Figure 5: The total

raw coal production (tone)⁴⁷

The years of the compulsory labor regime during the Second World War did not leave pleasant memories in the minds of the laborers. On the other hand, 1960 and 1980, as a result of syndical struggles and policies aiming at the increase of domestic consumption, apparent progress was made in the working conditions of workers and the high wages given to the workers raised their

⁴⁵ I prepared this figure by using data of Turkish Hard Coal Enterprise.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

life standards, as was mentioned in the second chapter.

In 1958, many small and big syndicates, including the Zonguldak Mine Workers' Syndicate founded in 1948 with 15,000 members, founded the Mine Workers Federation of Turkey. This federation becomes a member of TÜRK-İŞ in 1960. In 1983, it was transformed to the General Mine Workers Syndicate which is still active today.⁴⁸

The syndical struggle is important in terms of the worker's history in the basin. Behind this history, is the dynamic agency of the mine workers, who organized the biggest strike after the 12 September 1980, and owned their achieved rights to their struggles, sometimes despite syndicates, before 1980. The worker's resistance of 1965, known also as "the Events of Kozlu," are one of the most important examples of the worker struggles of these years. These events began because of the oppression of the workers like beatings, profanities and because seniority pay rises were left to the discretion of the work chief.

As the result of the soldiers acting to break up the resistance, two workers died, ten workers were injured with bullets, twelve soldiers were hospitalized because of the injuries from stripes.⁴⁹ The agency of the workers in the basin continues until 1980.

Turkey's Experience with Coal Production after 1980s

Before focusing on coal production, to give some information about Turkey's mining sector in general is useful to understanding its experience with coal production.

Today, the mining sector accounts for about 1.4% of the GDP of the country.⁵⁰ 98% of the natural gas, 90% of the oil, 20% of the coal are imported.⁵¹ Although the mining sector has important employment advantages, for instance, the employment capacity of the mining sector is 2.6% more than the manufacturing industry, 16.97% than energy sector, only 2.6% of the total state subsidies are given to the mining sector.⁵²

In the light of this information, it is easier to focus on coal production.

⁴⁸ Ekrem Murat Zaman, *Zonguldak Kömür Havzasının İki Yüzyılı* (Ankara: TMMOB Maden Mühendisleri Odası, 2004) p. 125.

⁴⁹ Ekrem Murat Zaman, *Zonguldak Kömür Havzasının İki Yüzyılı*, p. 126.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.8

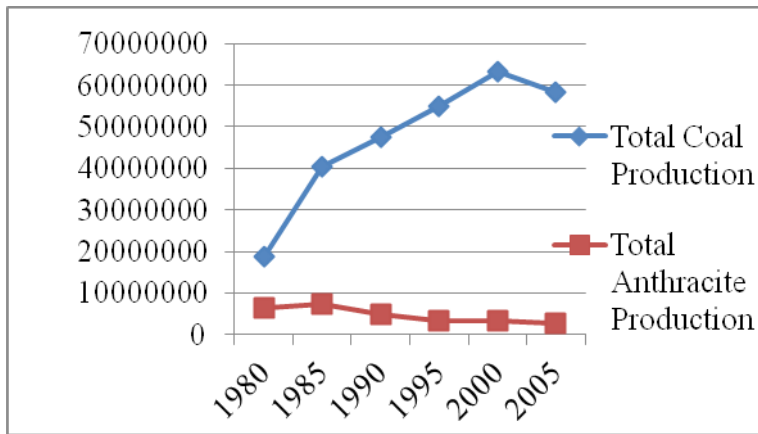


Figure 13: Total coal production and total hard coal production in Turkey (tonnes) ⁵³

As it can be seen in Figure 8, in Turkey while the total production of coal including boron, lignite, and hard coal is increasing, the rates of hard coal production are decreasing.

Coal production is a labor-intensive sector. As Mütevelliöglu and Işık write that if 1990 is used as a base between 1991 and 2006, the unit labor cost decreased about 22%.⁵⁴ This rate shows that in the neoliberal period, the labor costs have been decreasing. Therefore Turkey's labor market is convenient for labor intensive sectors such as coal production. As was showed above, in the post-1980 period the total coal production in the whole world has been increasing. If the increase in the world's coal need and Turkey's cheap labor market are taken together it is easy to understand the increase in the total coal production in Turkey in the post-1980 period.

However, when hard coal production is examined, the situation becomes more complex. Why hard coal production is decreasing while the total coal production is increasing is must be examined on.

Before answering this question first, the hard coal production in Turkey must be discussed. Hard coal is produced only in the Zonguldak Coal Basin by the TTK, which was created in 1983 as a SEE, and subcontracting firms under the name of the *redevance system*, which will be examined in the next chapter. In addition to the TTK and its subcontractors, there are 250 informal pits in the basin.⁵⁵ The TTK's hard coal production satisfies the whole needs of the Çatalağzı Thermal Power Station. The hard coal reserve in the basin is 1.3 billion tons up to -1200 grades.⁵⁶

The increasing rates of hard coal imports are the important aspect of the Turkey's hard coal

⁵³ *World Coal Production, Most Recent Annual Estimates, 1980-2007*

⁵⁴ Nergis Mütevelliöglu and Saim Işık, (2009) "Türkiye Emek Piyasasında Neoliberal Dönüşüm, In Küreselleşme, Kriz ve Türkiye'de Neoliberal Dönüşüm (pp.159-198) İstanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi., p. 191

⁵⁵ Turkish Republic State Supervisory Council, 2011, *Report of Health and Safety in Mines of Turkey*, p. 193

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 194

production. Turkey first imported 16,000 tons of hard coal in 1973. After that, hard coal imports have increased gradually and they reached about 20 million tons in 2009.⁵⁷

After this general information about hard coal in Turkey, the question of why hard coal production is decreasing while the total coal production is increasing can be answered. Two important factors are affective in this situation. First, the broken faulted and fragmental nature of the coal reserve of the Zonguldak Coal Basin make the mechanization of the production impossible. The hard coal reserve in the basin looks like a tree that has grown beneath the earth. Mechanized production systems for coal mining are suitable for the reserves like a cheese hoop. When the mechanized systems are set up at one point, they can produce from that point for many years. However, in the Zonguldak Coal Basin, when the mechanized systems are set up, the systems must be changed to reach another branch of the tree for short periods. This situation leads to important increases in the costs of mechanization. For that reason, production has not been mechanized in the Zonguldak Coal Basin. It is important because in the neoliberal period economic activities occur in international competition conditions. It is easy to estimate that mechanized basins' hard coal has a great competitive advantages in terms of production quantity and prices.

Second, most importantly, the organized power of the Zonguldak coal miners is an important political threat for the state, especially in the neoliberal period in which all organized activities have started to be seen as a political threat. The Zonguldak coal miners showed their organized power in the Big Miners' Strike (*Büyük Madenci Grevi*) between 1989 and 1991. The state wanted to destroy this organized power but the Big Miners Strike showed that would not be easy. In addition to the miners' organized power, the strategic importance of hard coal for the national security in possible war conditions could wholly block liquidation of the sector.⁵⁸

Privatization Through The Back Door: Redevance System In The Zonguldak Coal Basin

The strike in 1990-91 was a turning point for the Zonguldak coal basin. The coal production has been done previously by only the TTK, which is a SEE would be done by TTK and subcontractors together with the application called the redevance system.

The redevance system, which is a subcontracting practice, must be examined for understanding the sociological, economic and political atmosphere in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin in the post-1980 period. Moreover, the redevance system offers important possibilities for understanding the contradictory and tense relation between the labor, the capital, and the state. From the perspective of the state, the elimination of the state as an economic actor by means of the

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 195

⁵⁸ Ibid.

elimination of the TTK, which was one of the important actors of the Basin history, becomes prominent in this process. From the perspective of the capital, this process lasts as a capital accumulation process that begins with small-scale enterprises, than continues with the investment of the bigger capital to the Basin. From the perspective of the labor, the possibilities of the organization decrease for the workers and even they manage to organize, the influence of their organization weakens (as the consequence of the changing political economy of the hard coal production).

Work accidents are one of the vital issues that are positioned in the center of the labor, capital and state triangle, which changes considerably in the post-1990 period. For that reason, this process must be examined more closely in order to understand the formation process, the reasons and the consequences of the work accidents in the Basin. It is only after this examination that the fact that the work accidents are the consequence of the loss of the class struggle by the workers in the Basin can be understood.

Based upon the mortality numbers per ton it can be said that the rate of work accidents in subcontracting enterprises that work with redevance system is higher than the ones in the TTK pits. So it is vitally important to analyze the redevance system in order to understand the work accidents in the Zonguldak hard coal basin. In this chapter I will analyze the redevance system by using the data of the field survey I carried out in the Zonguldak coal basin as well. After that, in the next chapter I will focus on some work accident examples which I derived from field survey I carried out in Zonguldak coal basin.

While reviewing all of this process, to distinguish strictly between the period in which TTK produced alone and the period in which the TTK and the redevance enterprises produced together is not that easy. In the context of our issue, the health of the miners working in the TTK was seen as a cost element in the Keynesian-Fordist era and it continued to be seen like this in the neoliberal era. For that reason, the fact that the most important reason for the work accidents is the commodification of the worker's health must be remembered and the fault line that determines the work accidents is continuous must be emphasized.

The Redevice System in General

Between 1960 and 1980 worker's struggles reached their apex. These years also saw import substitution industrialization policies. The Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin has not been left beside this process. In these years, the worker's deaths per 100,000 ton followed a decreasing course; it decreased in half between 1960 and 1980. This situation is one of the most important consequences of the worker's struggles in the Basin. On the other hand, in the years when the redevice system

was applied, the death rate per 100,000 ton production increased dramatically. Even though the death rate per 100,000 ton production has decreased due to the legal arrangements of the 2000s, it did not reach the lowest rates of the early 1980s. In addition to this, when we compare the sites of the TTK and the redevance sites during the years of the redevance system, it is seen that the death rate per 100,000 ton was higher in the redevance fields.

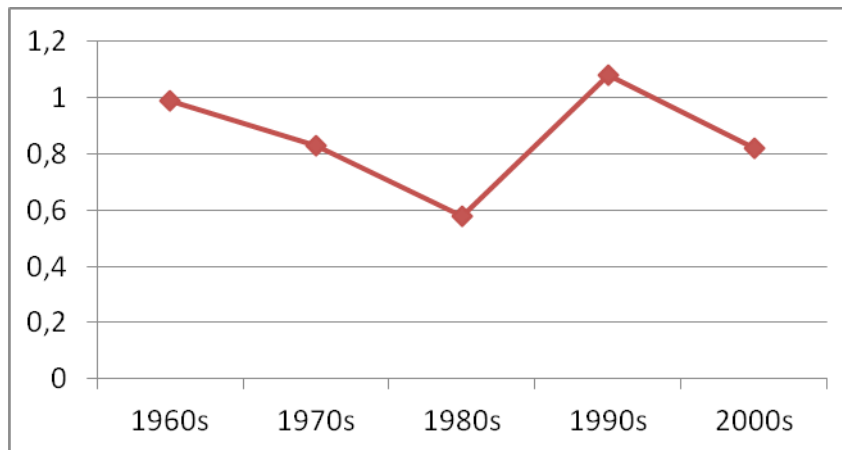


Figure 14: Death ratios for per 100,000-ton production⁵⁹

There are two important features of the neoliberal period about the state, as was discussed in the second chapter. The first one is withdrawal of the state from being an economic actor, which means privatization. The other is that the state turned into an actor that managed the social and political life according to the needs of global capital accumulation process. The Zonguldak coal basin is not except from this global transformation. Therefore in the process of the elimination of the SEEs the privatization of the TTK came to agenda. However, the organized struggle against privatization of the coal miners in 1990-91 strike showed that the privatization process could be overcome in one night. Thus, state put the redevance system on the agenda as a tactic of "privatization through the backdoor."

As was told in the first chapter, the subcontracting practices, in other words the redevance system, spread into the Basin as a consequence of the neoliberal globalization after 1989. In this process, the TTK continued to its activity with fewer workers and with less production during time. As a result, a hybrid labor market was constituted with the workers in the TTK, the workers in the subcontractors of the TTK and the workers in the redevance sites. This hybrid and multipartite labor market is one of the most important characteristics of the Basin history after 1989 must be emphasized strongly.

Alongside this hybrid and multipartite labor market, the unemployment is an important

⁵⁹ I prepared this figure by using the Mining Engineer Levent Usman's data and the Production data of Turkey Hard Coal Enterprise.

problem for the Basin, as well as for all Turkey. An explicative example of the unemployment problem occurred in 2008 during the process of the worker recruitment of the TTK. When the General Directorate of the TTK declared that it would recruit 3,000 underground workers, 37,247 workers applied. 1,033 of the applicants were university graduates.

As was mentioned in the first chapter, the reduction of the state to a facilitator for capital in the neoliberal globalization era is one of the factors that must be considered while analyzing the history of the Basin after 1989. The tense and fragile compromise between the capital, the state, and the workers of the Keynesian-Fordist era gave place to a conflictual ground constituted of capital, which gains strength while taking along the state and the workers, which can organize less and which are weakened for that reason.

As was mentioned in the second chapter, imported coal became cheaper due to the global political economy of the changing coal production. To use the import coal in the iron steel industry, which is the most important coal consumption area for the industry in Turkey, became rational. For that reason, the workers were dispossessed of the possibility to affect the industrial production chain through a strike. As a result, a possible movement of the coal workers became less “dangerous.” This situation, which was the result of the easier movement of the capital at the global level, was an important factor that limits the effects of the workers’ organization.

The Term: Redevance

The word “redevans,” which means tax paid as a result of using something, comes from French. It is understood from Paul Lafargue’s article "The Peasant Proprietary in France" published in 1884 where the word “redevans” is used to indicate the rent paid by serves in return for using a part of land belong to the church or nobles.⁶⁰

Today the word “redevance” is rather used in mining literature. The term “redevance system” in mining literature is used for the model that a mining field is takes over a subcontracting company for a certain time in return for money.

⁶⁰ Paul Lafargue, The Peasant Proprietary in France, Accessed on 15 November 2012, Available online at <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lafargue/1884/06/peasant-proprietary.htm>>

The Workers Numbers and Production Level in the Redevice System

Today over one-third of the coal production is done by subcontracting enterprises in which approximately 7500 miners are employed.⁶¹ It is important to emphasize that there are a lot of informal pits in the mine sites of subcontractors (as it will be examined in the next pages), but their workers are not included in this number. If those workers are taken into consideration the number will arrive at 10000. However, the number of miners will arrive about 15000 in the next months. For instance Soma Inc. and Hema Inc., which signed redevice contracts in 2012, declared that they would employ more 6000 miners in the next months. Total 32 mine sites are run by subcontractors.

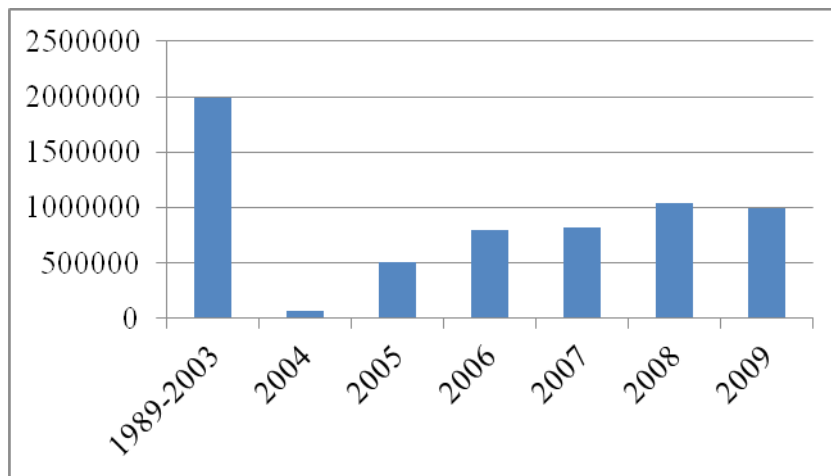


Figure 15: The coal production of subcontractors, 2011 (tonnes)⁶²

The (II)legal Background of the Redevice System in Zonguldak Coal Basin

According to the Article 168 of the Constitution of the Turkish Republic, the mines are commons and they are under the ruling and the control of the state. According to the same article, the state can transfer these rights to other natural and legal people.

The legislation about the exploration of mines, their exploitation, to have the right upon them and their abandonment are regulated by the Mining Law No: 3213 of 1985. This law states that the mines are under the ruling and the control of the state and they are not dependent on the property of the land in which they are found.

The point, which is important here, is that even though you possess the property of a land where there is a mine, the property of the mine belongs to the state. For that reason, to open an informal pit is an illegal act.

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⁶² Turkish Republic State Supervisory Council, 2011, *Report of Health and Safety in Mines of Turkey*, p. 201.

The mining activities in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin are regulated through the Regulation of Rock Pits from 1901 to 2004 and so, the mines of Zonguldak were not dependent on the Law No: 3213. The Law No: 5177 that came into effect in 2004, abrogated some of the articles of the Law No: 3213 and the mining activities of the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin became dependent on the Mining Law No: 3213.

However, this law of 2004 could not meet the legal needs of the redevance system that gradually became widespread in the Basin. In response, the Law No: 5995 came into effect in 2010. This law aimed to remove the legal gaps and the contradictions born from the proliferation of the redevance system. For this aim, new regulations on license, permission to exploration and control are introduced. Moreover, through this law, the regulation of “the assurance of environmental compliance” is introduced. This regulation sets forth a payment equal to the royalty paid by the license owner. At the end of the license, if the license owner makes the field environmentally compliant, this amount will be returned to the license owner.

In addition to these, Article 21 of the Law No: 5995 states that in the case of a threat in terms of the security of life and property coming from the mining activities, these activities must be stopped. However, in the period up until today in the Basin, this article that can be seen as a possibility on behalf of the workers did not have a chance to be applied.

The first redevance contract was made in 1988 in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin. Also the Report of Health and Safety in Mines of Turkey of the State Supervisory Council claims that the de facto application began in 1988. However, I learnt from the people I interviewed in the basin that production in the fields with redevance began in 1992, following the strike of 1990-91 although the first contract was made in 1988. On the other hand, legal arrangements at that period did not allow handing over mining to third persons, subcontractors, with special contracts as it is in redevance system in Zonguldak coal basin.

No matter it that lacks a legal bases redevance has continued since 1988. The 32nd Article of the Regulations related to the Mining Law was changed in 1990. With that change third persons and institutions are allowed to operate in mining field by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources based on redevance contracts between license holders and the governments. Application of redevance achieved a legal base at a level of regulations with this change. The Council of State (*Danıştay*) decided that redevance contracts were not legal and they should be abolished; however, this decision was not implemented. Finally Law No 5177 made a change in Mining Law No 3213 in 2004 and the application of the redevance system achieved legal base only in hard coal.⁶³

The application of the redevance system has been defended by the TTK by claiming that this system prevents the informel pits and the opening of the new pits which are near to surface are

⁶³ Esra Ergüzeloğlu Kilim, 2010, "*Madencilik Sektöründe Taşeronlaştırma ve Özelleştirme Yöntemi: Rödovans*", Available online at <Esrakilim.blogcu.com

not used by the TTK. Therefore it is important to know the reality of the Zonguldak coal basin: informal pits.

A Zonguldak Coal Basin Reality: Informal Pits

Informal pits with no legal registration have existed since the initial years of coal production in the Zonguldak Coal Basin. The coal reserve in the basin is under the city and almost everyone in Zonguldak know something about the coal production techniques. These factors have made harder to struggle against informal pits.

The informal pits can be found in secluded areas, such as on the sides of distant mountains or the garden of the houses for the aim of escaping from any legal control. The mining operators who have informal pits bring miners together for the production in informal pits. The miners have a daily wage. The people with whom I talked in Zonguldak said that the total of the daily wage of the miners who work in informal pits was near the minimum wage if they worked the whole month. It goes without saying that the workers who work in the informal pits have no social security.

As was emphasized in the second chapter, high unemployment rates is an important characteristic of the neoliberal period. It is easy to guess that especially in the high unemployment conditions, the informal pits prevails. Starting to work as a miner for the TTK requires some conditions. For instance, completing the military service and physical strength are important conditions. The informal pits give an opportunity to people who can not meet the conditions. I learnt from the people I interviewed in the basin that many 15 year old boys work in informal pits.

There is no necessary mining equipments against the threat of the firedamp or the sudden flood of the water in the informal pits. For instance, the lighting and airing systems are crucial aspects of the security of the workers. These systems must have an anti-firedamp feature. However, this anti-firedamp equipment is very expensive so in the informal pits, ordinary electric bulbs are used for lighting and an accumulator is used for the ventilation equipment.

The TTK does not monitor the informal pits. However, if there is a denunciation about an informal pit the TTK engineers will destroy it.

The people who live in Zonguldak use informal coal for heating in general. It is about half the price of the coal which is sold by the TTK.

The Zonguldak Chamber of Commerce estimates that there are about 250 informal pits in the Zonguldak Coal Basin. Although it is impossible to know the exact number, this estimation gives an idea about the widespread existence of the informal pits.

Although one of the aims of the redeavance system is the prevent the prevalence of the informal pits, the redeavance system leads to growth of informal pits. To understand this situation, it

is necessary to focus on the redeavance system in practice.

Subcontractors of the Subcontractors in the Redeavance System

The redeavance system is a kind of subcontracting practices in which the TTK has the position of primary employer and small companies that have redeavance contract are in the subcontractor position. Therefore, it is important to emphasize that the redeavance system is the local reflection of the division of the production as a global process to create new profit advantages at all steps of the production process, which is the important characteristics of the neoliberal period, as was said in the second chapter. However it is important to emphasize that in the redeavance system informal pits serve as the subcontractors of the subcontractors of the TTK.

In the redeavance system, the TTK give the right to produce coal at the mine sites, which are defined in the redeavance contract to subcontractor companies. In these mine sites coal seams are close to surface. Because the subcontractor companies mostly have small capital, they cannot afford to built the necessary infrastructure to produce coal from the deep coal seams. Until 2012 there were no redeavance contracts for deeper coal seams than, -180 grade. However, in the last years the companies with bigger capital have started to invest in the Zonguldak coal basin. Therefore, redeavance contracts have started to allow producing coal from deeper coal seams. For instance, in the Soma and Hema A.Ş.'s redeavance contracts signed in 2012 give permission to produce up to -540 grade.

In the redeavance system, the subcontractor companies give a royalty (redeavance) for per ton production to the TTK. There is a necessary production level in the contract. If the subcontractor company produces less than necessary production, it must pay a royalty for the necessary production. Therefore, accelerating the production process to complete the necessary production is a crucial point for the subcontractors. For that reason, the workers of the subcontractors work more than 8 hours. This serve also the purpose of the workers because their wages are calculated by per ton production.

To complete the necessary production, the subcontractors give permission to informal pits in their mine sites. Their production is showed as the production of the subcontractors. The subcontractors both complete their necessary production and take a share from the informal pits' production. If informal pits are determined, the subcontractors' have no responsibility. Therefore, it can be said that the informal pits serve as the subcontractors of the subcontractors in the TTK redeavance system.

An Examination Of The Work Accidents In The Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin

In this chapter, the focus will be on the subcontracting pits working on the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin. The former chapters emphasized that the work accidents, or in a larger sense, the worker's health and the work security areas, are the areas where the class struggle is concretized. The strengthening of the capital's hand via the weakening of the workers' organization because of the standardization of the flexible working regime in the neoliberal era was also emphasized. Therefore, the policy of reshaping the global map of the coal production and the increase of the coal production in the areas where the labor power are unorganized and cheap were also discussed.

For that reason, it was claimed that the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin was not out of this process and that all of these developments at the global level had important reflections on the Basin. One of the most important developments was the decrease of the hard coal production where each worker was organized even though the total coal production (the boron, the lignite, the hard coal) in Turkey had increased. Other important reflections of the mentioned global transformation are the decrease of the Turkish Hard Coal Enterprise's share in the sector, the decrease in the number of employed by this enterprise, and in parallel with the increase of the ratio of the imported coal, the proliferation of the redevance basin where the coal is extracted through subcontracting.

It must be said that all these developments have important costs from the viewpoint of the laborers of the Basin. These costs include not only low wages, the insecuritization of the whole working life, the transformation of the state into a tool to provide the needs of the capital and, as a result, the erosion of even the legal gains of the workers, but also at the intersection of all these points, the increase of the work accidents, which result in disability in the best case and, in death in the worst case. As this paper tries to illustrate, the work accidents, which is a moment when the class struggle is concretized in the body of the laborers that come down to a cost element, are the most important price that the workers pay because of their power loss in opposition to the capital.

In sum, in this chapter, the answer to the question of how and why the flexible working regime applied to the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin paved the way for the work accidents will be sought.

A Comparison between the Fordist Working Regime and the Flexible Working Regime in Terms of Work Accidents in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin

To be able to discuss the relationship between the flexible working regime and the work accidents, enough information about the work accidents during the previous era, the Fordist era, must be given. To be able to claim that the work accidents have increased in the flexible working

regime, historical records on the work accidents in all, or at least, some of the prominent sectors must be known. However, it is quite difficult to reach this kind of data for many reasons. Still, it can be said that the most significant reason is that the state, which was an economic actor itself during the Fordist era, did not record such data or even if keep records, it did not declare them to the public.

The Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin stays out of this generalization about state recording. For a long time, the coal mining was the only means of existence in the area. Another reason why mining became an essential part of the daily life in Zonguldak is that the workers' culture developed due to the basin, which is one of the most important worker's basins in the country from the Ottoman era. It is especially difficult to erase the death, a phenomena that corrupted the daily life, from the city's memory. Thanks to the powerful syndical structure, the local newspapers of the city and opponent mining engineers, there is quite a lot data on fatal work accidents that occurred in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin. Unfortunately, this data has not been the object of inclusive academic research. This is a serious lacking in the social sciences literature of Turkey.

Figure 14 shows the death ratios in 100,000-ton production since the 1960s. In this figure, all the work accidents (whether they occurred in the TTK, in subcontractor pits or in illegal pits) are included. This graph is prepared according to the data of annual production of the TTK and the published documents on fatal work accidents of Levent Usman, a mining engineer of the TTK.

This figure provides the possibility to deduce important aspects of the flexible working regime and the work accidents in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin. As is seen, between the 1960s and the 1980s, during the period when the labor struggles were most intensive, there was a sharp decline in fatal work accidents. However, in the years following the military coup of 12 September, there was a sudden increase of fatal work accidents, even a return to the period before 1960. This fact is due to the weakening of labor organizations and to the transition to the flexible working regime, two central issues that were discussed in earlier chapters. Therefore, in the light of the data at the hand, it can be argued that the flexible working regime in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin increased the work accidents.

A decrease in fatal work accidents occurred at the end of the 1990s. The main reasons for this development were the legal transformations and the change in the capital composition. As was discussed earlier, the steps in the EU harmonization process and the decisions of the Council of State about the illegality of the redevance enterprises were the legal reasons for this decrease of fatal work accidents. On the other hand, the entry of bigger capital groups to the Basin and their little attempts at institutionalization constitute the reason related to the capital composition.

The Fragmented Labor Market and the Work Accidents

It must be emphasized that the flexible working regime is not a monolithic, total or one-sided process, but an uneven and u-turned process developed in patches with an articulation with the old regime. For that reason, the working conditions of the previous period and the flexible working conditions can be discussed through the present interpenetrating working conditions in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin.

It was emphasized above that together with the flexible working regime, there is a fragmented labor market in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin. It can be argued that there were always illegal pits, from the first time when the coal was mined in the basin until today and, for that reason, there was always diversity in the labor market. However, the number of the people working in illegal pits never reached a number comparable to the number that of the workers in the TTK. The illegal pits always remained marginal. On the other hand, together with the flexible working regime, the number of the workers in the subcontractor pits approached the number of TTK workers; moreover, even the workers working in the subcontractor firms of the subcontractor pits reached important numbers.

It will be appropriate to focus on the effects of this diversity of the labor market in work accidents.

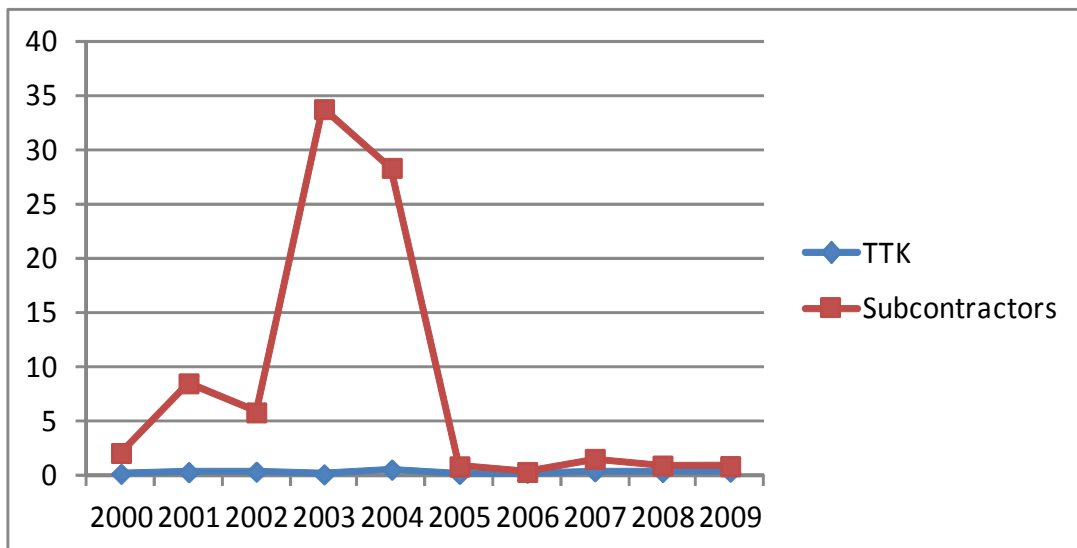


Figure 16: Comparison of Death Ratios⁶⁴

In figure 16, the fatal work accidents ratio in the TTK per 100,000 ton production and the

⁶⁴ I prepared this figure by using the Mining Engineer Levent Usman's data and the Production data of Turkey Hard Coal Enterprise.

same ratio in subcontractor and in illegal pits (with accessible data) are compared. As the production amount of illegal pits is unknown, the production ratio of subcontractor firms is used as a base for the data on subcontractor and illegal pits. If the production of illegal pits is taken into consideration, it can be said that the death ratio in subcontractor and illegal pits would decrease a little bit. However, it is also true to say that the unregistered accidents of illegal pits can balance the unaccessed production data of the illegal pits. For that reason, it can be said that the data of the graph are very close to the real ratios.

It is observed in figure 16 that the death ratio per 100,000 ton production in redevance firms and illegal pits is at least four times the ratio in the TTK. This data proves the argument according to which the flexible working regime increases the number of work accidents in the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin. In figure 17, the death numbers in TTK and the subcontractors and illegal pits.

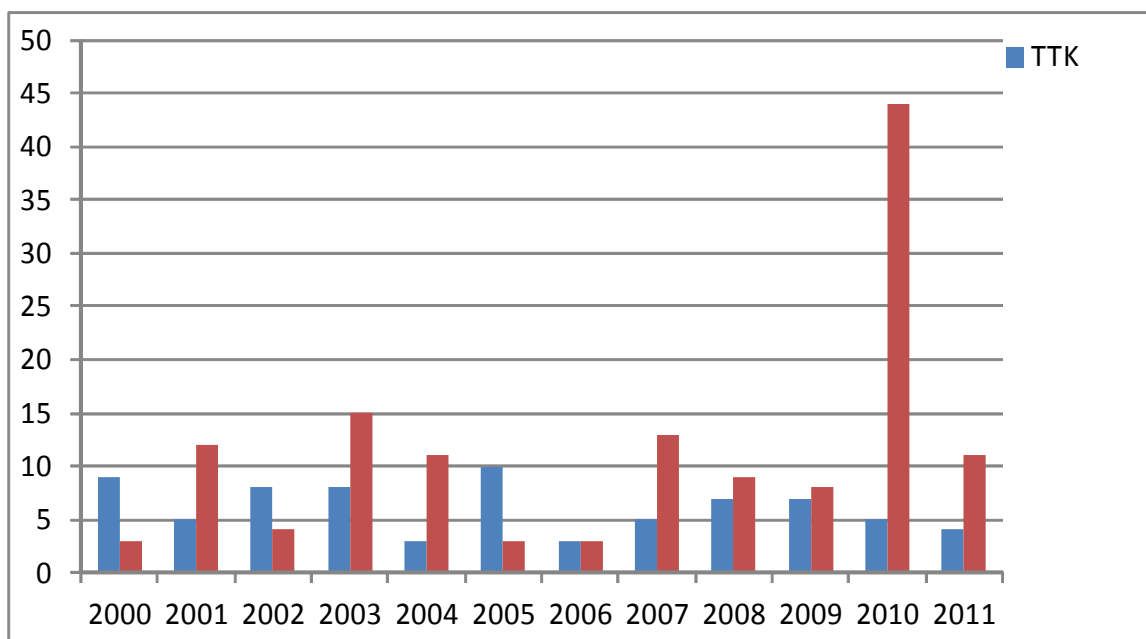


Figure 17: Comparison of death numbers⁶⁵

Now, how the flexible working regime increases the risk for work accidents can be discussed. In the following part, how the flexible working regime changed the working conditions in practice and why this change increased the accident ratio will be discussed.

The Practical Consequences of the Transformation of the Production Process in Terms of the Work Accidents

As was examined in detail throughout the previous chapter, the flexible working regime resulted in important transformations in the basin in terms of the production process. In this part, the relation of the work accidents with the transformations of the production process will be discussed.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

One of the most important transformations is the arrangement of the subcontractor firms' contracts by means of deadline. In the basin where their production approaches that of the TTK (and it is estimated that their total production will pass the production of TTK by the end of 2013), these kind of contracts result in production pressure upon the subcontractor firms. For that reason, capital owners adjust wages according to the production per ton of every worker for producing consent to this rhythm and to this intensity. The wage system of production per ton is a fact that fundamentally transformed all the production process structure from the viewpoint of the miners who work collectively in the underground with groups of at least six people. The competitive atmosphere created through the wage system per ton has had a deconstructive effect on the collective production process. In addition, the workers began to work faster to increase the production amount which they are paid for. This haste becomes an essential threat to the secure and under control working atmosphere.

For example, landslips are the leading reason of fatal work accidents in the subcontractor firms. The main reason for the landslip is the faulty fortification, the process for preventing the collapse of the rocks from the ceiling while tunneling. During the interviews conducted with the workers of subcontractor firms, the workers said that those responsible for the fortification are extra paid when they do more than a definite meter, and that for that reason they do this process in a hurry and that this results in serious deficiencies and faults. As a result, originating from the pressure of the production, the acceleration of the production rhythm, the increase of its density and the wage system per ton, shortly the aim of increasing the relative and the absolute surplus (the *raison d'être* of the capitalism) results in work accidents when it is associated with a sector like mining, where an increase of the physical and the mental exhaustion of workers is fatal.

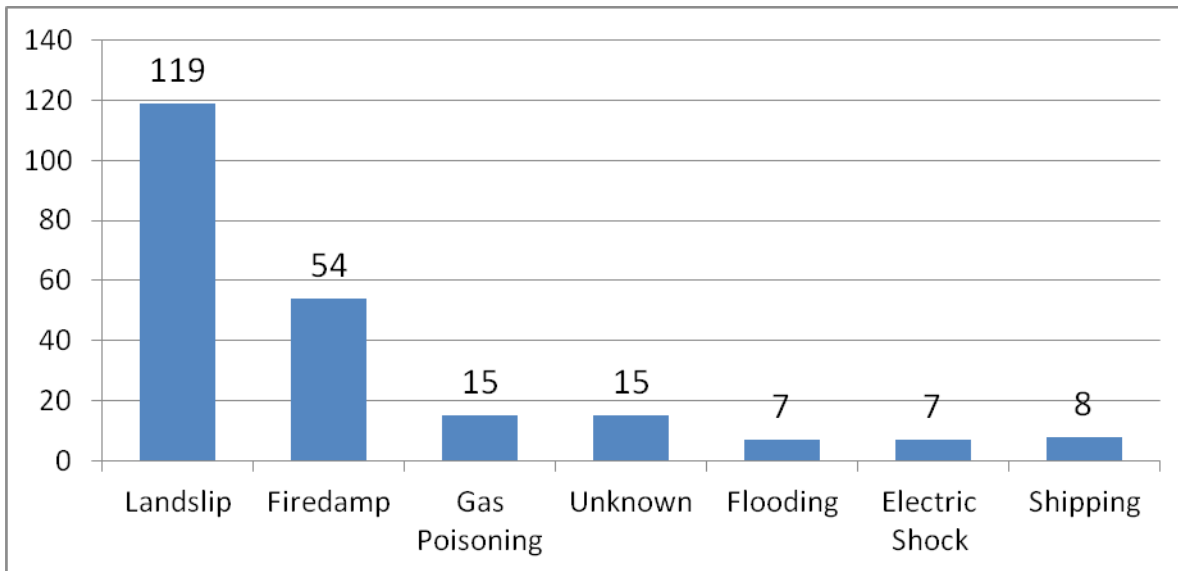


Figure 18: Death numbers according to death reasons in redevance firms since 1989⁶⁶

Another course of the work accidents is that the lack of precautions taken regarding miners' health and security by the redevance firms because these precautions are considered too costly. As was mentioned in the previous chapters, the redevance firms are companies that have small capital, generally found by retired miners. It is impossible for these firms to prepare a vital technical substructure like having instruments to measure the gas flow all the time or building a ventilation system.

From one side, the investment of big capital groups like Hema and Soma A.Ş. in the area in the last 3-4 years and from the other side, the growth of local small-scaled firms point out an important change in the capital structure of the area. This change results in small attempts at institutionalization of the mining firms and bigger investments from their part.

In an interview conducted with the company Doctor X of the mining company D, which has been producing for years in the area and which has a significant influence in the Zonguldak Chamber of Commerce, said that now every worker employed undergo a medical examination immediately. This development, which could be read as a step forward from the perspective of workers, is in fact a result of the competition between capitalists. Because the absence of these examinations carries the risk of paying compensation to workers from the perspective of capitalists.

For example, Doctor X said that the patients that he had sent to Zonguldak Atatürk Education and Research Hospital with the suspicion of pneumoconiosis (an occupational lung disease caused by the inhalation of dust) during the recruitment. However, these same patients had been given clean bills of health when they were working at the TTK. He reported this fact as an example of the negation of the sickness of workers by a public hospital for not condemning to

⁶⁶ I prepared this figure by using the Mining Engineer Levent Usman's data.

indemnity the TTK, another public institution. From the other side, Professor Y from the Zonguldak Atatürk Education and Research Hospital, argued that company doctors like Doctor X made diagnose at the onset of pneumoconiosis to newly employed workers as often as possible to save their company from paying compensation in the case of a possible pneumoconiosis case in the future.

Miners work in groups of six people underground. These six people gain the capacity of acting collectively as they know each other. This capacity of acting collectively is a very important factor when they are working under the sudden threats of a flood, or an explosion or a landslide. The ease of firing and the casualization of labor during the flexible working regime result in the corrosion of the capacity of the collective act and in the disappearance of the cumulative experience. During an interview conducted with one of contract worker A, he said that they did not have stable positions, that they worked in the line of work, in which there was a need for worker, that sometimes they constructed fortifications for a half day and they dig tunnels for the other half. This condition prevents specialization in a specific position.

For example, the TTK retired miner B who works now as a contract worker is the dynamiter. Blasting is necessary for tunneling. He said that this job requires great concentration and experience. However, he remarked that some of the newly employed workers were assigned to the blasting operation. He emphasized that it is very important to know the emission of different gas for a dynamiter and that this requires education and experience.

Another important point is the lack of the occupational education in subcontractor firms. This is very critical in mining because this profession is a quasi-craft. Any unconscious act done in underground can result in the death or injury of many people. For that reason, a long education that continues also after employment is necessary. However, as said above, the prevention of specialization in a line of work and the absence of occupational education results in the lack of the orientation of the miner to the underground, to this different world that has its own rules.

Another point that is as important as occupational education is nutrition. Mining is exhausting job. For that reason, as expressed by the mining engineer C, a miner must take in 4,300 calorie per day. However, (the TTK included) neither firm gives food to miners. This results in the weakening of the miner physically as well as psychologically. Similar to any human eat an insufficient number of calories, the possibility to act impulsively increases among miners. The cost of these impulsive acts can be heavy when they occur underground.

Moreover, the mining engineer C said that according to his research, he had reached the fact according to which the work accidents caused by impulsive acts concentrate towards the end of the shift. The main reason for this is that mining is basically a war against nature and that the miner who finishes his shift believes that he has overcome nature at this day, too, in his subconscious. It is

said that the ratio of acting impulsively increases with this joy of victory. The mining engineer C emphasizes especially the work accidents when miners go up in the lift. He said that workers say things like “we were so cheerful, we did not understand what it happened,” and he argued that this situation was the result of the thought of “overcoming nature,” more precisely the thought, “I did not die this day as well.”

The last important factor about work accidents to be discussed is the absence of registration of the accidents that have occurred in the redevance areas. This helps the main firm “purge” itself and results in an amnesia about work accidents. “Memory” is a very important factor in the struggle of workers against work accidents. A struggle to develop can grow based on this memory and to the updates on it. Beyond any struggle, this memory can be the keystone of a miners’ culture against work accidents.

Yet, the non-record of work accidents and the prevention of their notice by capitalists through their local connections (on-site doctors, media, etc.) are important actions to limit the work accidents to those who have the accident. Besides, the non-record of the work accidents is a “cleaning operation” to support the argument of the firm about “the production in healthy conditions” for the next bidding process.

At this point, it will be appropriate to mention unemployment, which is an important factor in why the workers keep working in this sector in spite of all of the above-mentioned factors. Any research done on the working conditions of the workers in the subcontractor firms of the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin must consider the pressure of “either you work in these conditions or you starve” created by the fact of the unemployment. Looking carefully at the relationship between the working conditions in the subcontractor firms of the Zonguldak Hard Coal Basin and the unemployment, it is possible to say that the “free market” argument of the capitalism is groundless, at least in the context of this research. The issue is not the confrontation in equal conditions of individuals whose rights are protected by laws. On the contrary, the issue is the abdication of the right to healthy and secure work because of the threat of unemployment for those who are obligated to sell their labor power.

As was emphasized in previous parts, there are important consequences of the inclusion of Turkey to the model of the growth without employment in the neoliberal era, especially in terms of the present labor market. Before anything else, unemployment strengthens the hand of the capitalists in creating competition in the labor market. The fact that there are so many unemployed who can substitute workers who will be fired increases the advantages of the capitalists.

Moreover, let us think about the reflections of this fact on the worker’s health and on the work security, not for all the Turkish labor market where it is valid, but for the specific example of Zonguldak, where a single sector shapes almost all the economic life.

The workers with whom the interviews were conducted said that they would not have become miners if they had had the possibility to work in other sectors with more secure conditions. The miner E said: “After I go home, even after I take a bath and I brush my teeth, there is still the scent of coal on my breath. I wonder how uneasy my wife is... Even just for this, I would like to work in another sector.” Meanwhile, most of the workers interviewed say that they did not want their children to become miners.

However, another important point must be emphasized here. Working in the TTK means having a fair wage in the conditions of Zonguldak. The workers in the subcontractor pits consider contract labor as a step towards being a TTK worker. Further, for those working in the firms that are subcontractors of the subcontractor firms, the aim is first to become the worker of the main subcontractor and then, becoming worker of the TTK. Once becoming a TTK worker, the worker can get a bank loan easily for a house or a car and his retirement becomes guaranteed. Therefore, he can have a better position in the labor market of Turkey.

It must be emphasized that the contract workers interviewed in the basin try to take advantage of local and national political figures to become TTK workers. Some of the interviewed workers had just returned from Ankara where they went to see the former TBMM president, Köksal Toptan, who was the deputy of Zonguldak for a long period. Their request was to favor contract workers in the process of the new recruitment of the TTK which happens rarely. The workers introduced their request as “prioritize the experienced.” A group of five people from different political views went to Ankara to become TTK workers. The reason to mention this anecdote is to emphasize how important is to become a TTK worker for contract workers.

During the interviews, the workers answered negatively to the question of “if they made such an attempt for secure working conditions.” For that reason, such a deduction is possible: the pressure of unemployment represses the demand for healthy work conditions.

Work Accidents in Illegal Pits

As was mentioned before, illegal pits have always been present in the history of the basin. However, along with the redevance system, a new phase where the illegal pits have increased has begun. The subcontractor firms themselves opened the illegal pits to meet their deadlines in the contract signed with the TTK on the redevance area. This production done by mostly by under-aged miners who work without insurance, at low wages and with the hope of “becoming the subcontractor’s registered worker later,” has not any official record. For that reason, there is no inspection. The lack of inspection has serious results in this sector of mining where the worker’s health and security are very important. In this context, the target of the TTK is not to locate or to

close down the illegal pits, but to explode the pit when there is a notice of such a pit.

During the interviews conducted with the mining engineers who went to explode the pits, they strongly emphasize that the miners who opened the illegal pits knew mining very well and most of these miners were retired miners.

The mining engineer F said during the interview that the miners who open informal pits develop amateur, cheap, but very dangerous solutions to the central technical issues of the mining like the ventilation, the lighting, fortification, and the use of water. For example, in a pit, only anti-firedamp instruments must be used. All the electrical and battery operated instruments are dangerous. However, in many illegal pits, the lighting is done with lanterns and extension cables. There are also plug sockets and power supplies in illegal pits. Moreover, in a illegal pit that the mining engineers went to with a notice in 2007, they found a heater. A heater in a pit is the same as a bomb. In another example of an illegal pit exploded by engineers, water engines were working with accumulator.

All these indicators show that the production in the illegal pits is made with the conditions of the nineteenth century.