# Changing Hegemonic Strategies of Business in Turkey before and after the Neoliberal Turn: from Defense to Counter-Attack

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The financial collapse of 2008 and the following great recession with its cataclysmic repercussions have made a deep impact on, and consequently shattered the dominant paradigms in, the field of economic thinking. Mainstream convictions regarding the virtues of free markets, finance, and business in general that until recently seemed all-pervasive, hegemonic, and invincible have been significantly undermined giving way to widespread skepticism towards the existing economic and social order. Inevitably, this has shifted the scholarly trends, making themes, issues, and currents that were marginalized in the last three decades attractive once again. To what degree this ideological shift translates into actual policy-making is another issue. Yet, arguably and in broad brush strokes, what we are witnessing is the gradual ending of an epoch marked by a "pro-business" intellectual climate. It is an appropriate time, then, to trace the origins of this epoch and deepen our understanding of how business succeeded in establishing a favorable intellectual climate for itself in different national contexts.

The epoch that, I argue, was marked by a "pro-business" intellectual climate dates back to the global rise of neoliberalism in the early 1980s. The concept of neoliberalism has generally become a short-hand term to describe major political economic transformations



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of the last three decades such as globalization, deregulation, and financialization.[1] Although there are tremendous disagreements among scholars concerning the causes, consequences, and working mechanisms of neoliberalism,[2] David Harvey's conceptualization as "the restoration of the class power of capital"[3] has perhaps been the most appropriate way thus far to capture the essence of the aforementioned transformations. The structural factors behind this restoration are well documented. We therefore have a great deal of knowledge about the process through which certain transformations in the world economy (the crisis of Keynesianism, the end of Bretton Woods, the IT revolution, globalization, financialization) combined together to strengthen the hand of capital to the detriment of labor.[4] Emphasizing the structural factors, however, runs the risk of neglecting the subjective element in this process of restoration, that is, capital's strategic and collective actions as a class.

Limited attention has been paid to this aspect of the neoliberal transformation.[5] Moreover, the literature at hand becomes even less satisfactory when the issue is collective action in the field of ideology.[6] For instance, what exactly did the restoration of the class power of capital mean in the ideological realm? To concretize the issue, the changes in the public perception of business as an indicator within the ideological realm, before and after the rise of neoliberalism, are as astonishing and drastic as the changes in global political economy. Broadly speaking, in most countries of the west, the late 1970s was marked by economic crisis, political chaos, popular discontent and labor militancy accompanied by a deep skepticism/hostility towards business.[7] This could be observed even in the US, where labor militancy and the radical left have historically been significantly weaker.[8]

1. For an overall evaluation on various aspects of neoliberalism see Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston, *Neoliberalism: a critical reader*.

2. For a recent evaluation concerning the polyvalance of the concept, see Brenner & Peck & Theodore, "Variegated neoliberalization" and Peck & Theodore & Brenner, "Postneoliberalism and its malcontents."

3. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 19.

4. Leading analyses on this issue include Stephen Gill, "New constitutionalism, democratisation and global political economy"; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Dumenil and Levy, *Capital Resurgent*; Ronaldo Munck, *Globalization and Labor*, David McNally, *Global Slump*.

5. Notable exceptions to this absence include Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb, "The Rebirth of the Liberal Creed," Eduardo Silva, *The State and Capital in Chile*. For journalistic accounts along these lines, see Thomas Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality* and Jamie Court, *Corporateering*.

6. Among the limited number of studies that focus on this aspect of neoliberalism are Mark Blyth, *Great Trasformations* and Stuart Hall, *Toad in the Gardens*.

7. Harvey, Ibid. 15.

8. Dreier, "Capitalists vs. the media," 121.

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After a decade or so, however, business skepticism was almost totally eradicated, radical aspirations were coopted or marginalized, and free market society seemed to declare its eventual victory over rival societal visions. Indeed, there seemed to be no alternative. How was this ideological transformation achieved? What kinds of strategies did the business front employ to enhance and consolidate its ideological influence? These important historical questions need to be answered through close empirical research on the efforts of business in the realm of ideology.

In this paper, I aim to answer these questions for the context of Turkey by focusing on two employers' associations, namely MESS (*Türkiye Metal Sanayicileri Sendikası*—Turkish Employers' Association of Metal Industries) and TİSK (*Türkiye İşveren Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*—The Confederation of Turkish Employers' Associations) as representatives of the Turkish capitalist class in the concerned period. Based on an analysis of the periodical publications and public statements of these associations, I identify the changing ideological strategies of business in Turkey before and after the neoliberal turn. Apart from the sections that are devoted to introducing the associations and discussing the history of neoliberalization in Turkey, I refer to secondary sources only to provide a historical context to the issues at hand. Concerning the period, I cover the whole history of the associations from 1962 to 2013, with an explicit focus of comparison before and after the neoliberal turn in 1980. The organization of the article is as follows: First, I introduce MESS and TİSK by providing some historical information and explaining the reasons behind my choice of studying these organizations. After, I lay out a conceptual framework in order to approach the issue. Then, I present a historical background for understanding the Turkish experience of neoliberalization, followed by the analysis of the ideological strategies of business. In this section, I introduce four strategic areas in which business carried out a systematic ideological struggle. Respectively, these areas are relations with the academy, relations with media, image-restoration strategies, and strategies vis-à-vis the left. Finally, I summarize my findings in the conclusion.

## MESS and TİSK: Pioneers of Business Organizations in Turkey

Voluntary business organizations do not have a long history in Turkey. It is not possible to talk about a significant level of voluntary organizational activity among businessmen up until the 1960s.[9] In fact,

9. Ayşe Buğra & Osman Savaşkan, *New Capitalism in Turkey*, 114; Ayşe Tokyol, "İşveren Sendikaları," 299.

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we can talk about class-based organizations in a modern sense only after the 1961 Constitution that granted workers and employers the right to establish unions with the authority to carry out collective agreements, strikes, and lockouts.[10] The early 1960's witnessed a meteoric rise in organized labor activity.[11] The mushrooming and strengthening labor unions induced a feeling of alarm and a need for collective action among businessmen, which, in turn, led to a rapid wave of the foundation of employers' associations in early 1960s.[12] Before this, organized interest representation on the side of business mainly occurred through TOBB (*Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği*—The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey), which had a semi-public status and was based on obligatory membership. The organizational structure of TOBB that allowed for the dominance of small enterprises to the detriment of large entrepreneurs and its semi-public status open to political patronage was increasingly rendering it inefficient for the newly rising industrialists in terms of interest representation.[13] TİSK and MESS are the products of this search for a more efficient organized body and of the first significant wave of voluntary business organizations.

TİSK was founded in 1962 as a cross-sectoral confederation of several employers' associations. It is an umbrella organization that represents predominantly large scale employers in manufacturing sectors. TİSK also includes a wide array of economic sectors consisting of employers' associations in wood, public sector, maritime transport, glass, cement, leather, food, pharmaceuticals, construction, chemicals, local administration, metal, petroleum products, paper, sugar, textile, clay, tourism and education. As I will elaborate below, however, none of these associations had significance in terms of power compared to MESS, a TİSK-member association organized in the metal industries. These two pioneering organizations have been important examples of business collective action in the form of voluntary employers' associations. Although they have predominantly acted in the field of industrial relations, they have dealt with a wide range of economic, political and ideological issues as a collective class actor. During the 1970's which were marked by ascending labor militancy, they were at the heart of industrial conflicts with their acrimonious struggle against radical unions, acting as the "headquarters

10. The path for class-based organizations opened by the 1961 constitution was further advanced by the laws 274 and 275 in 1963, Tokyol, 299.

11. *Saraçhane* meeting in 1961 and the resistance in the *Kavel* factory were two pioneering events that attracted the public opinion and heralded the rise of labor miltancy, İsmet Sipahi, *Gelenek ve Gelecek,* V:1, 41.

12. Ayşe Buğra, *State and Business in Modern Turkey*, 246; Tokyol, 299.

13. Buğra and Savaşkan, 114.

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of the business front." In the 1980's which were marked by neoliberal transformations, MESS and TİSK tremendously increased their political power and significance. More importantly, they not only established closer ties with politicians during this period, but also were able to participate directly in the executive process as some figures who had been top administrators of the associations assumed ministry posts in the post-1980 governments, including the prime minister from 1982 to 1989.[14] With the gradual weakening of labor unions in the neoliberal era, MESS and TİSK's relative importance among other business organizations has gradually faded away as industrial relations ceased to be the primary concern for business. Still though, MESS deals with the strongest and most unionized segments of the working class and carries out collective agreement negotiations with unions representing more than one hundred thousand of workers. In contemporary Turkey, MESS and TİSK lag behind top business associations such as TÜSİAD (*Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği*—Turkish Industry & Business Association) and MÜSİAD (*Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği*—Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association) in terms of publicity and power.[15]

Historically, these two associations are important representatives of the Turkish capitalist class. In many respects, I argue that they provide an optimal case for our purposes. First, with a history going back to the early 1960's, they are the first significant business organizations based on voluntary membership, as mentioned above. Second, on a more practical level, since their foundations, they

14. Şahap Kocatopçu, a former president of TİSK, became the Minister of Industry and Trade, and Tahsin Önalp, a high-profile member of MESS, became the Minister of Construction in the military government from 1980 to 1983. Turgut Özal, the former secretary general of MESS, was the minister of economy in the military government until he resigned in 1982. He later became the prime minister for 1983–1989 and the president from 1989 till he died in 1993.

15. TÜSİAD was founded in 1971 as an organization of top-level businessmen, especially industrialists that were aiming to have a stronger and independent voice in the policy-making process by formulating and promoting macro-level economic and social programs in line with the interests of private sector in general. With its huge economic power, increasing influence among politicians and with strong ties to foreign capital, it soon acquired a level of a peak business association that had to be taken into consideration. Although some figures in MESS and TİSK were influential in TÜSİAD and vice versa, TÜSİAD adopted a sort of Western European capitalism outlook with a relatively more tolerant perspective towards labor unions. In contemporary Turkey, TÜSİAD is by far the most powerful organization of the Turkish capitalist class, whose members in aggregate account for some 40% of the GDP. On the other hand, MÜSİAD that was founded in 1990 mostly by relatively smaller scale businessmen who were located in conservative Anatolian cities and who had an affinity to circles of Political Islam. In terms of political influence and economic power, it made a huge leap forward during the AKP rule and rose to being an important actor of the business front. For a detailed analysis on these organizations, see Buğra and Savaşkan, *New Capitalism in Turkey*, 109–144.

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have published a wide range of publications including periodicals, on a regular basis, which provide abundant material revealing their attitudes, perspectives and stances on various issues. This well-documented and relatively longer history renders these associations suitable cases for observing the transformation in the ideological strategies of business before and after the neoliberal turn. Here, however, arises the question: why not TÜSİAD, as well? After all, it has always been a source of scholarly attraction and has a well-documented history going back to the early 1970's. The problem, however, is that TÜSİAD before 1980, operated rather like a "behind-the-scenes" elite power, mostly occupied with establishing consensus among leaders of big business, exchanging views with their European counterparts, and negotiating with top ranking politicians.[16] After 1980, as a top-level class organization, TÜSİAD obviously made significant contributions to the establishment of a pro-business ideological environment. As opposed to TÜSİAD, MESS and TİSK, however, were at the center of industrial conflicts, dealing with radical unions, frequent strikes and workplace occupations on a regular basis. Hence, they represented the segment of the capitalists that were most closely in contact with laboring classes. In this sense, they were immediately face to face with widespread business-hostile sentiments and consequently, were much more sensitive to and preoccupied with the public perception of businessmen. I argue that they represented what can be called the "spontaneous ideology" of the capitalist class at the time. These render the two associations more revealing concerning the ideological strategies of the capitalist class and more apt sources to capture changes of strategy in the course of time.

One last question that needs to be addressed concerning the choice of organizations is why *both* MESS and TİSK? After all, MESS is a just a member of TİSK, among many other sector-based employers' associations. Therefore, they neither operate on the same level, nor do they necessarily share identical perspectives on every topic. I included both associations for the following reason: although TİSK is the umbrella organization that acts as an upper committee of sector-based associations, historically, MESS has been the leading, most powerful and most influential member of TİSK by far.[17] The reason behind this asymmetrical development of MESS compared to other member associations has to do with the other pole of the conflict. Historically, workers in the metal industries have been the most radical and best-organized segments of the working class in Turkey and they

16. Gökhan Atılgan, "Türkiye'de Toplumsal Sınıflar (1923–2010)," 18–19.

17. Özgür Öztürk, "Türkiye'de Sendikal Mücadele, Sermaye Birikimi, MESS ve Koç Holding," 338. Tokyol also highlights the special position of MESS among employers' associations, Tokyol, 301.

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still are.[18] Consequently, class cohesion and capacity for collective action have been historically higher among the employers in this sector. Therefore, MESS has assumed a leading role, or a "vanguard" role, so to speak, within TİSK, to such a degree that the publicity of the former sometimes exceeds the latter. While other member associations have predominantly dealt with sector-level problems, MESS, as I will show, has characteristically gone beyond the confines of the metal sector and become involved with broader issues. Moreover, concerning ideological strategies, MESS and TİSK have always acted in harmony, in unison and in cooperation. Together, they provide a rich, relatively untouched and valuable source of information concerning the historical questions posed above. These are the main justifications behind my choice of MESS and TİSK as representatives of Turkish business.

## Conceptual Framework

In this section, I lay out my conceptual framework in conversation with the existing literature in order to be able approach the aforeposed historical questions about the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism and the role of business. I mainly adopt what is called in the literature, a neo-Gramscian approach to business studies. As I will elaborate below, I find the Gramscian notion of hegemony a crucial starting point to make sense of the strategies of business associations in the neoliberal era. Simply put, the notion of hegemony derives from the observation that the endurance of capitalist relations in the modern era, despite inequalities, do not merely stem from coercion and repression. In modern societies, ruling classes need a certain level of consent from the masses in order to be able to rule effectively.[19] In this sense, hegemony is "the process by which groups in society attempt to establish their power through exercising political, intellectual, and moral leadership."[20]

The existing literature on the rise of neoliberalism has mostly dealt with the structural changes in the global political economy, paying relatively less attention to the notion of hegemony and its corollary aspects, such as the realm of ideology and the struggles taking place in this realm. This is also true for research agendas that examine the relationship between business and power. Historically, there have

18. The strike activity and unionization rates in the metal sector is still by far the highest, Meryem Kurtulmuş, Kurtar Tanyılmaz, İrfan Kaygısız, "Türkiye İşçi Sınıfının Maddi Varlığı ve Değişen Yapısı," 275.

19. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 12.

20. Bruce Jesson, *Revival of the Right: New Zealand Politics in the 1980s*, 5.

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been two main competing theoretical currents on this issue, the pluralist school on one hand, and the power elite and structural Marxists on the other. Pluralists tend to see business merely as an interest group competing with other social groups that have more or less comparable resources and equal rights, therefore denying the notion of a ruling class.[21] The latter group, however, has rightfully emphasized the institutionalized patterns of unequal resource distribution, privileged access to policy circles, as well as other mechanisms reproducing existing class differences. C. Wright Mills' and William Domhoff's pioneering studies on the power elite, for instance, have drawn attention to the tightly-knit and exclusive networks among business elites and politicians.[22] Structural Marxists, alternately, have emphasized the structural mechanisms, especially the role of the capitalist state, in reproducing and consolidating class rule, through which the capitalist class can effectively reproduce itself without conscious collective action on the side of capitalists.[23] These important debates, most of which took place around the 1970's and 1980's, provided us with novel and crucial insights concerning the relations between business and power. Yet, they predominantly worked with a rather narrow definition of power that was mainly understood as economic and political power, focusing on the business-state nexus and leaving the realm of ideology relatively understudied.I argue that a neo-Gramscian approach with a specific emphasis on the notion of hegemony is especially appropriate to make sense of the process of neoliberalization, the changes in the intellectual field and the role of organized business in this process.[24] According to Gramscian thought, domination or coercion is executed by the state, whereas hegemony takes place in civil society. Hence, for a social class to be hegemonic, it is not enough to capture state power. It also needs to establish its leadership in civil society which consists of institutions such as the academia and the media, as well as everyday social relations in which ideological struggles take place.[25] These multi-faceted struggles operate in different but intertwined fields, underscoring the importance of what can be broadly defined as the cultural sphere: traditions, social

21. For leading analyses on this line, see Robert Alan Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* and Bauer-Pool-Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy*.

22. See C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* and G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America?*

23. For typical contributions on this line, see Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*; Fred Block, "The Ruling Class does not Rule" and Göran Therborn, *What does the Ruling Class do when it rules?*.

24. For an exceptional compliation in this line, see Plehwe-Walpen-Neunhöffer, *Neoliberal Hegemony*.

25. Gramsci, 181–2.

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codes, everyday practices, "common-sensical" perceptions. A recurrent emphasis of Gramscian thought is the role of intellectuals in the ideological struggles, because intellectuals have a special function in formulating, articulating and managing the aspirations of social classes in the realm of ideology.[26] Therefore, any social class that aspires to be hegemonic needs to develop its own "organic intellectuals." Levy and Egan similarly highlight this aspect of the neo-Gramscian approach in business studies. Writing on the issue of corporate political strategy, they differentiate three aspects of business power: the economic system of production, the organizational capacity of associations and the "discursive structure of culture, ideology, and symbolism that guides behavior and lends legitimacy to particular organizations, practices, and distribution of resources," highlighting the importance of the realm of culture and ideology.[27] Contrary to the theoretical currents discussed above which focus on the business-state nexus, a neo-Gramsican approach, with its emphasis on hegemony, ideological struggles and intellectuals, draws attention to a much neglected area of business-society relations.

Another insight of Gramscian thought that is crucial for our discussion is Gramsci's differentiation between an economic-corporate phase and a hegemonic phase. The economic-corporate phase of a social class is one in which members come together primarily to promote their economic interests and to defend their existence as a social class; whereas a hegemonic phase refers to a strategy that goes beyond defense and connotes an aspiration to obtain political and intellectual leadership, social legitimacy and a high level of consent from the governed.[28] I argue that this differentiation is crucial to make sense of the transformation of business strategies before and after the neoliberal turn.

A crucial characteristic of the notion of hegemony is its inherent incompleteness. A given hegemony is always subject to challenges and has to be constantly reproduced. Consent is not gained once-and-for-all, but is always contingent and has to be reiterated every moment, rendering the construction and consolidation of hegemony a never-ending process.[29] This aspect has two important corollaries for our case. First, a social class that aspires to be hegemonic needs to legitimize its own deeds and position even in the absence of a direct and immediate challenge to itself. Second, and more importantly, this notion of incompleteness calls for what can be described as a "strategic conception of power," which highlights the role of

26. Ibid. 5.

27. David L. Levy & Daniel Egan, "A Neo-Gramscian Approach to Corporate Political Strategy," 810.

28. Gramsci, xiv.

29. Walter Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution*, 174.

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competing strategies of agents, collective actors, and organizations in explaining social change, rather than agentless structures or institutions.[30] Thus, these aspects of the neo-Gramsian approach that emphasize the agency and strategies of business actors are key to making sense of the ideological shifts and struggles throughout the process of neoliberalization.

## Setting the Context: Neoliberalism with Turkish Characteristics

Turkey adopted an import substitute industrialization (ISI) strategy in the early 1960s. This involved an inward-oriented accumulation strategy guided by the planning agency of the state that aimed to achieve national development by domestically producing previously imported manufactured goods.[31] Similar to many developing countries at the time, this strategy left its stamp on the socio-economic life in Turkey for the following two decades. The adoption of ISI brought forward a wave of industrialization accompanied by an express urbanization.[32] In terms of class formation, the main pattern was the dramatic rise of industrial capital and urban proletariat. As discussed in the previous section, this period initiated a strong wave of unionization and labor militancy which was met with ascending organizational activity among industrial capitalists. A defining specificity of the 1960-1980 era was that, for the first time, capital-labor conflict acquired an explicit, decisive, and growingly pivotal role in the political history of Turkey.

Roughly until the mid-1970s, Turkey performed notably well in terms of economic growth and industrialization under the guidance of ISI strategy. Enjoying the benefits of protected domestic markets and heavy state subsidies, industrial capitalists achieved a great leap forward by starting large scale factories, and achieving high degrees of capital accumulation and concentration, especially in big cities.[33]

The rapid wave of industrialization, however, was by no means free of problems. For Turkey, the 1960's represent a sort of high-speed modernization that zipped the centuries-lasting transformations of advanced capitalist societies into a decade in which massive rural migration, rapid urbanization, rise of consumerism and student rebellions occurred simultaneously. Yet, overall economic growth

30. Levy and Egan, 813.

31. Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908–2009*, 118–126.

32. The ratio of urban population increased from 32% in 1960 to 39% in 1970, Bülent Duru, "Türkiye Nüfusunda Yeni Eğilimler: Görünüm, Sorunlar, Politikalar".

33. Leading big capital groups such as Koç, Sabancı, Eczacıbaşı, Profilo and Tekfen have assumed the form of holding companies in this era, Özgür Öztürk, *Türkiye'de Büyük Sermaye Grupları: Finans Kapitalin Oluşumu ve Gelişimi,* 92.

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could compensate for the cultural shocks of rapid modernization, and the expansion of the domestic market for light consumer goods and consumer durables were keeping the prospects high.[34] This optimistic picture would gradually wither away as Turkey walked into its most vicious crisis by the mid-1970s. This was a total crisis in which economic, political, and social aspects blended with and fed into each other. I will briefly summarize these aspects respectively.

At the heart of the total crisis, lay the crisis of the ISI accumulation regime which manifested itself through growing import dependence in manufacturing sectors, foreign exchange scarcities, balance of payment problems, and fiscal deficits.[35] The oil shock of 1973 caused an initial alarm to the already fragile economy, making it clear that the existing ISI regime had reached its limits. Due to certain factors, however, an actual economic crisis was postponed almost five more years. One of these factors was the worker remittances coming from European countries bringing relief to the foreign exchange problem.[36] Second, electoral populism was a defining aspect of the Turkish political scene at the time, a phenomenon that is conducive to short-term measures rather than long-term concerns and ambitious reforms that might be costly.[37] Third and relatedly, the international credit markets were extremely generous in the aftermath of the oil shock. Hence, governments opted for short term external borrowing as a temporary solution. These artificial measures, however, could work only for a few more years. Starting from 1978, Turkey entered a sharp and deep economic crisis that manifested itself with stagflation, rising fiscal deficits, foreign exchange bottlenecks and scarcity in basic products.

The severe economic crisis was accompanied by an unprecedentedly serious crisis of political representation. The 1970s were by far

34. Boratav, 119–120.

35. Theoretically, ISI project is said to consist of two stages. In the first phase, which is usually called the easy phase, the country begins to build an industrial base predominantly on consumer goods. The foreign exchange saved from the substitution of consumer goods is directed to the import of machinery and capital goods. In the second phase, the country is more or less self-sufficient in basic consumer goods and develops its industrial base towards more value-added sectors so as to produce consumer durables and then capital goods. This process is called capital deepening. The second stage is known as the difficult stage since it requires larger amounts of capital and imported capital goods. In this process, ISI strategy often faces a stalemate that impedes the further development of industrialization. The import of more sophisticated capital goods requires more foreign exchange that usually cannot be compensated by traditional exports. The economic situation in Turkey during the first half of 1970s looked very much like this.

36. Due to the scarcity of labor force in the postwar era, some European countries started "importing" labor force from abroad. From 1961 to 1973, half a million workers from Turkey migrated to European countries, most of them to Germany.

37. Boratav, 123–124.

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the most instable period of Turkish history with thirteen governments in ten years accompanied by a military intervention at the beginning and another one at the end of the decade. The governments were mostly weak coalitions or minority governments that could provide neither the stability nor the autonomy nor the power required to implement a reform policy. Moreover, the bureaucracy was deeply divided in terms of partisanship. The result was a paralyzed state structure and a politics of indecision where short-term coalitional concerns prevailed over everything else and no party had the capacity or the vision to pursue long-term structural reforms.

The political crisis was not solely about parliamentary politics, but was deeply rooted in the social fabric. The Turkish society at the time was deeply polarized on ideological grounds. The main axis of conflict was, in commonsensical terms, "the left-right conflict." Since the 1960's, socialism had been a growing source of attraction among workers, intellectuals, and students. The rise of socialism manifested by increasing labor militancy, radicalization of intellectuals, and student rebellions was regarded both by the political establishment and the capitalist class as an urgent threat that needed to be stopped. The 1970's witnessed the rise of armed ultra-nationalist groups, supported by right wing elements of the state, as a response to the "communist threat," which in turn initiated an escalating cycle of political violence.[38] In the last quarter of the 1970s, assassinations, massacres, provocations had become part of the daily life. Political violence claimed 319 lives in 1977, 1095 lives in 1978 and 1362 lives in 1979.[39]

In summary, Turkey, in the late 1970s, was passing through a situation of deep and systemic crisis that manifested itself in every aspect of social life.[40] Similar to many other places, neoliberalization came to the agenda as a response to this situation of crisis.[41] The very introduction to neoliberalization in Turkey dates back to the release of the reform package on January 24th, 1980. This package, prepared by a delegation headed by Turgut Özal,[42] included a draconian and extensive transformation of the economy, first and foremost, but also paved the way toward an overall reconfiguration of Turkey's sociopolitical structure. It was an ambitious project that was brought to

38. Kemal Can, "Ülkücü Hareketin İdeolojisi", 663–685.

39. *Sosyalizm ve Toplumsal Mücadeleler Ansiklopedisi*, Cilt 7, (İstanbul: İletişim, 1988), 2378.

40. For a detailed discussion on the political crisis of the 1970's and the perceptions of business in this period, see Ebru Deniz Ozan, *Gülme Sırası Bizde*.

41. Harvey, 22–29.

42. Turgut Özal had been a former secretary general of MESS and was the prime ministerial consultant at the time. He became the prime minister after the end of military rule in 1982 and is regarded as the architect of neoliberal transformation in Turkey.

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the agenda as a response to the deep crisis of the 1970s. "January 24th Decisions" aimed to replace the accumulation strategy of the two preceding decades, namely the "import-substitute industrialization," with "export-oriented growth" in line with the neoliberal tendencies in ascendance around the globe. Prepared under international guidance,[43] it proposed the liberalization of trade, the promotion of exports, the abolition of price controls, the elimination of state subsidies, the promotion of foreign investments, and a tax reform in favor of business. In essence, it was a typical third world type neoliberalization package.[44] Its implementation, however, was not possible in the political atmosphere of the time, characterized by chaos and turmoil, and had to await the military takeover in 1980, which unambiguously marked a milestone in Turkish history.

On September 12, 1980, the military intervened. The coup d'état justified itself on the grounds that it gave an end to "anarchy" and the "fratricide" by restoring "law and order" and that it put an end to the "paralysis of the political process due to the incapability and inter-conflicts of politicians," and created "the political will to carry on the necessary reforms that had to be realized urgently for the sake of the nation." Not surprisingly, one of the first deeds of the military administration was to implement the decisions of January 24th.[45]

Another deed of the military administration was to crush the working class movement and its organizations, which were deemed "the greatest obstacle" to the neoliberal economic transformation.[46] For the sake of achieving "law and order," all union activities were halted, the socialist leaning labor confederation, DİSK (*Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu*—The Confederation of Revolutionary Labor Unions), was shut down, thousands of union activists were arrested, the right to strike was removed, and wages were frozen.[47] Additionally, the collective contract system was abolished and a state institution took over its functions. The labor laws enacted during the military regime deprived workers of the most fundamental rights gained through decades of fierce struggles in the 1960s and 1970s.

43. The International Money Fund and World Bank were backing this . Gülten Kazgan, *Yeni Ekonomik Düzende Türkiye'nin Yeri*, 164. Şenses also stresses the external support of the program, Fikret Şenses, "Turkey's Experience with Neoliberal Policies since 1980 in Retrospect and Prospect", 15.

44. The content of January 24th decisions bears strong similarities with the Mexican transformation under De La Madrid and the Argentian case under Menem, Harvey, 98-106. Boratav also stresses the similarities between this policy package and the ones in Latin American countries, Boratav, 149.

45. Tülin Öngen, "Political Crisis and Strategies for Crisis Management" 65.

46. Boratav, 148–149.

47. Öngen, 65.

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The great repression of organized labor movements, beginning with the military regime but continuing with the labor law enacted by civilian rule in 1983, suppressed wages severely. By 1988, real wages had fallen to their 1963 level, the year the right to strike and collective bargaining were first officially recognized in Turkey.[48]

## TİSK, MESS and the Neoliberal Turn

It was highly significant that all segments, factions, and organizations of the Turkish bourgeoisie, including MESS and TİSK, enthusiastically supported the military regime.[49] The historical record on this issue is unambiguous. In the first issue of *İşveren* after the coup, the president of MESS stated: "*We consider the military intervention as a sacred duty initiated for the well-being of our country and greet with gratitude*".[50] The same issue included the following statement from the administration: *"The day was September 12th 1980 and on that day the Turkish nation has been born again. . . . The Turkish nation has seen that the force of salvation that it has been waiting for months is the Turkish Armed Forces."*[51] Moreover, three figures who had been influential leaders of MESS and TİSK became ministers in the military government.[52] The most ardent expression of the gratitude of the capitalists to the path initiated by the coup, however, came from Halit Narin, the then-president of TİSK: "Up until today, they (the workers) rejoiced, now it is our turn," stated Narin after the enactment of the new labor law in 1983, clearly revealing the revanchist attitude among capitalists toward labor militancy.[53]

It is necessary to also highlight that MESS and TİSK were not simply passive followers of the path initiated by the military, but were urging for fundamental socioeconomic changes along similar lines well before the coup d'etat. As early as 1975, TİSK called for an initiative called "Free Enterprise Council" which would act as a united front for various business associations (including TOBB and TUSİAD) so they would have a stronger voice in the fate of Turkey. This call was explicitly an alarmist attitude towards what was deemed the biggest threat: "the extremist currents" and "the danger of regime change." In the opening plenary of the council meeting, then-president of TİSK,

48. Sungur Savran, "The Legacy of the Twentieth Century," 16.
49. Buğra, 206; Savran, 15; Galip Yalman, "The Turkish State and Bourgeoisie in Historical Perspective," 39.
50. *MESS İşveren*, Nisan 1983.
51. *MESS İşveren* 1983.
52. See footnote 13.
53. Atılgan, 27.

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Halit Narin, emphasized that "the political and economic instability has weakened the state authority and has undermined workplace peace," and defined the most important problem of the time as, "the emergence of a mindset that supports the systematic acts of depreciation against free enterprise and its advocates, " adding, "it is time for business organizations to voice their demands as a monolithic body."[54] This alarmist attitude was even more evident in the following years. Through 1978 and 1979, MESS repeatedly contended that "the private sector was in danger of demise because of the threat of communism and socialism," warning state authorities "to take measures against extremist currents as well as militant and political unionism" and urging for, "the expansion of the authority of security forces."[55] Similarly, the general secretary of TİSK in 1980 considered "political and ideological unionism" the main reason behind escalating terrorist activities and urging for a decisive and immediate prevention against this type of unionism.[56] Clearly, MESS and TİSK were in a defensive position vis-à-vis the radical aspirations among the working class, not only in terms of economic interest, but also in terms of their existence as a social class. In Gramscian terms, they were in the economic-corporate phase of a social class.

Labor militancy and the threat of communism were not the only areas in which TİSK and MESS called for an immediate change. They were also formulating a radical change of the existing regime of accumulation in the face of the economic crisis. In 1978, MESS would contend that the economic crisis, due to foreign exchange bottlenecks, has shown that "the import substitution industrialization model has come to an end together with populist politics and should be replaced by another model based on exports and open to international competition."[57] Familiar neoliberal themes such as "excessive state intervention," "inefficient public enterprises," "populist policies favoring labor," "excessive tax burdens on employers," and "problems with rigid statism" were the highlights of MESS's criticism as early as 1978.[58] Both MESS and TİSK expressed their desire for a new model based on "inflation suppression, export incentives, achieving competitivity and attraction of foreign investment." Expectedly, concerning the January 24th decisions that were formulated by Özal, MESS and TİSK expressed their celebratory remarks by dubbing the decisions as "a necessary and courageous step."[59]

54. *İşveren* no: 9 (June 1975) 6.
55. See issues of *MESS İşveren* in 1978 and 1979.
56. *İşveren* no: 11 (August 1980), 21.
57. MESS, *Gelenekten Geleceğe,* 454.
58. See issues of *MESS İşveren* on the year 1978.
59. İşveren, no:5 (February 1980), 3; MESS, *Gelenekten Geleceğe*, 258.

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It was clear that MESS and TİSK were advocating a turn to neoliberalization well before the military intervened in to implement neoliberal reforms.

At this point, it could be helpful to situate the 1980 coup d'etat in Turkey in a world-historical setting and compare it with similar interventions across the world. Due to similar positions in the world economy, shared histories of dependent development and discontinuities in formal democratic rule, Latin American countries have been the usual site of comparison for Turkey in the modern era. The literature on the political economy of military interventions in Latin America center around the debates on what came to be known as bureaucratic authoritarian (BA) regimes, the typical examples of which are the Argentinian coup in 1966 and the Brazilian coup in 1964.[60] Although the Turkish case shares a certain common ground with these regimes in terms of stemming from a context of ISI exhaustion and in terms of implementing labor suppression and economic stabilization, it significantly departs from them in many respects. Unlike the Turkish case, BA regimes did not adhere to the neoliberal paradigm at all and tended to maintain, and even deepen, the ISI model and the central role of the state in economy.[61] With its explicit adoption of neoliberalism and its commitment to the interests of business elites, the Turkish case most resembles the military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina that took power in 1973 and 1976, respectively. The Chilean coup seems to be a source of inspiration for the Turkish generals, in terms of rapid embracement of radical neoliberalization, the shock-doctrine style, and the technocratic rule. The similarities are quite striking with respect to our specific focus in this paper, the position of organized business concerning the coup. Several studies show that before the coup, Chilean business elites were in a similar alarmist attitude towards the socialist government of Unidad Popular, in the sense that what was at stake was not only their profits and immediate economic interests but also their existence as a social class.[62] The existence of a government at the time that had initiated extensive reforms including ambitious redistribution mechanisms, land and bank nationalizations, coupled with factory seizures and occupations by militant labor unions at the grassroots level rendered the socialist threat a much more immediate and greater concern for the Chilean capitalists relative to their Turkish counterparts. Consequently, their

60. For leading analyses on bureaucratic authoritarianism, see Guillermo O'Donnel, *Modernization and Bureaucratic Authoritarianism* and David Collier, *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America*.

61. Eduardo Silva, *Capitalist Coalitions*, 529.

62. Richard E. Ratcliff, "Capitalists in Crisis," 84–88; Zeitlin-Ewen-Ratcliff, "New Princes for Old?" 117–120.

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response, which involved obstructing the economy via sabotages and shortages, as well as mobilizing movements against the government, was more vicious and their involvement in the military intervention was more direct.[63] Similar to the Turkish case, the Chilean "junta's actions aimed not just at beating down the left but also at (re)imposing the dominance of the owners of capital."[64] Another noteworthy commonality was the direct presence of top business leaders in the executive branch of junta governments.[65] The fact that Pinochet dictatorship remained in power for seventeen years compared to the mere two years of military rule in Turkey, however, makes a significant point of divergence. In Gramscian terms, the Chilean neoliberalization obviously rested on a long-lasting coercion strategy rather than hegemony. Hence, the Chilean business elites seemingly did not bother to boost their public profile or extend their ideological influence beyond the already consolidated upper and middle class groups for a long time. A study that focuses on the business perceptions towards the end of the dictatorship (precisely in 1987-1988), however, shows that business elites were marked "by insecurity and defensiveness regarding their social legitimacy" and were concerned about the negative perception of the businessmen in Chilean society.[66]

The Argentinian coup of 1976 and the following military rule until 1983 also shows certain resemblances with the Turkish case in terms of a revanchist attitude towards the left, strengthening and consolidating the power of big business, and initiating an array of neoliberal reforms that included financial liberalization, abolition of tariffs, wage freezes, and welfare cuts.[67] Yet, unlike Chile and Turkey, there was not a decisive consensus on radical neoliberalism within the Argentinean junta and the decision making circles around it which still included *desarrolista* (developmentalist) elements.[68] This, in turn, led to an incoherent and contradictory pattern of neoliberalization. The decisive consolidation of neoliberalism in Argentina occurred

63. "Prominent business leaders called for the military to intervene to save the nation from 'chaos,' and many reportedly were directly involved in the planning and organization not only of the massive lockouts of October 1972 and the fall of 1973, but of seditious activites, including the successful military putsch of September 11, 1973." Zeitlin-Ewen-Ratcliff, "New Princes for Old," 119.

64. Ratcliff, "Capitalists in Crisis," 74.

65. Fernando Leniz who "had for many years been an important executive associated with both the domestic and foreign interests of the powerful Edwards family," "was appointed by the junta to be the top economic minister of the new government." Ibid. 79.

66. Ernest Bartell, *Business Perceptions and the Transition to Democracy in Chile*, 12.

67. Shannon O'Neil Trowbridge, "The Role of Ideas in Neoliberal Economic Reform: The Case of Argentina," 7.

68. Ibid. 8.

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only after the transition to civilian rule in 1983. In this period, business elites, through media power and newly emerging think tanks, showed a remarkable activism in channeling the policy circles and general public opinion towards an embracement of pro-business ideas and neoliberal values, in other words, establishing ideological hegemony.[69]

Here, I would like to summarize the situation of the Turkish capitalist class before and after the military intervention. Before the coup, the capitalist class was in urgent need of finding a new political will that would end labor and leftist militancy, guarantee stability, and implement neoliberal reforms at all costs. That is what the military regime did. The most significant consequence of the military takeover for the bourgeoisie, however, was that it guaranteed that Turkey's political and economic regime would be based on free entreprise and strict private property rights.[70] The political sphere had become immune to radical, socialist leaning currents that threatened the existence of the capitalist class. The legitimacy that was gained thanks to the coup d'état, which decisively confirmed Turkey's commitment to a capitalist order led by the private sector, provided the Turkish capitalist class a solid self-confidence which could be witnessed in the above-mentioned declarations of the associations made in the aftermath of the coup. Nonetheless, the public profile of business still remained low. Aware of this inadequacy, the business front initiated a systematic strategy to boost its public profile and enhance its ideological influence. In the following sections, I scrutinize certain aspects of this strategy in detail, focusing on the four major strategic areas formulated in the introduction. At this point, I would like to make some notes in order to explain the reasons behind the choice of these four areas. The focus of this paper is the ideological strategies of the business organizations. The concepts of ideology and ideological strategies span a rather wide area, the borders of which is hard to define. Approaching this issue with the notion of class hegemony in mind, I broadly talk about issues, themes, and positions that are beyond the routine workings of the organizations and reveal their world views, their targets, their mentality, especially their self-perception of capitalists, the image of the businessmen they want to present, the way they legitimize their social position and their efforts in influencing the intellectual field. When I look at the publications broadly over a forty year period in order to determine the areas where the organizations' efforts are concentrated, these four stand out as the deliberate, strategic and systematic highlights of the organizations' ideological

69. Ibid. 10.
70. Buğra, "İşadamları ve Toplum," 14.

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struggles that are directly related to a quest for hegemony. As I already discussed, Gramscians emphasized the academy and the media as crucial institutions of civil society where ideological struggles take place. Obviously, the other two areas (image-restoration strategies and strategies vis-à-vis the left) are not at the same analytical level. Yet, rather than an analytical approach, I am adopting a thematic approach that aims to determine the points of concentration and to capture the changes concerning ideological strategies before and after the neoliberal turn.

## Relations with the Academy: Knowledge is Power

The post-1980 period introduced a significant change regarding the relations between the academy and business. Before 1980, pro-labor, radical and leftist ideologies had been quite influential on university campuses. Socialist movements and organizations of various inclinations had managed to establish a strong organizational basis in universities. University students had especially been very active in both legal and illegal leftist organizations, and from the 1960s onwards, they had gained a reputation for being among the vanguards of leftist mobilizations.[71] The influence of leftist ideas could be felt in various zones of the intellectual field. The overwhelming majority of the cultural centers of the time, journals, books and movies, were the domain of leftist or left-leaning intellectuals of various inclinations, a fact that clearly manifests the strength of the left in the ideological realm.[72] This strength could be felt in academia as well, and the dominant ideological atmosphere in the universities impeded closer relations between the business world and academia. For instance, the associations were concerned about the perspective of the universities towards businessmen. In an article in *İşveren* in 1977, the author complained that universities were "scapegoating" the private sector and the Turkish entrepreneur for the problems in Turkey and was calling them to act "responsibly" for the preservation of the free enterprise system.[73]

In the period prior to 1980, academics very rarely appeared in the pages of the publications of TİSK and MESS.[74] Rare also was the presence of academics in any research undertaken by the associations,

71. Kerem Ünüvar, "Öğrenci Hareketleri ve Sol," 819; Bağış Erten, "Türkiye'de 68," 839–842.

72. Özgüden, "Türkiye'de Sol Yayıncılığın Gelişmesi," 2002–3.

73. *İşveren*, no: 7 (April 1984), 6–7.

74. Prof. Adnan Gülerman, for instance, was one of the few periodic contributors.

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which, in any case, was also marginal at that time. In summation, the associations had weak relations with academia.

After 1980, a significant change occurred in the relations of TİSK and MESS with the academia through which the ties between the two gradually grew. A crucial site of these growing relations was public meetings such as symposiums, panels, and conferences that had an altogether significant impact on MESS's and TİSK's public image. Academics were an essential part of these meetings and they overwhelmingly supported the organizations' stand on the issue of concern. For instance, in 1984, TİSK organized a conference together with Dokuz Eylül University on "collective work contracts" which academics and businessmen attended. A revealing speech from the conference was reported in *İşveren* concerning the changing dimensions of business-academy relations:

> *It was a long time desire of our nation to see the university and business circles in cooperation. We are happy to see that this cooperation is finally taking place thanks to the peace and security environment brought by the September 12th 1980 military operation.* [75]

Another indicator of growing ties is the significant increase in the contributions of academics on the pages of the associations' publications. Figure 1 shows the steeply rising trend in the percentage of contributions by academics in *TİSK İşveren* right after 1980.[76] Some were just giving interviews about various topics; others were writing articles, while some almost became regular contributors. Of course, contribution to the publication did not automatically imply commitment to MESS's and TİSK's position. However, the overwhelming majority of the academics' opinions overlapped with the demands of the associations in the period of concern. For instance, Doç. Dr. Coşkun Can Aktan's article in *MESS İşveren* in 1996 advised for the creation of a "constitution of economics" that will determine the core principles of economic life in Turkey.[77] A "constitution of economics" was a core demand of MESS and TİSK in the mid-1990s.[78] Similarly,

75. *İşveren* no:7 (April 1984), 22.

76. See Figure 1. For this calculation I started with the first full year of İşveren that is 1963 and covered all years till 2005, through which the size and style of the publication remained more or less the same. Starting with 2005, the structure of the publication changed significantly hereafter rendering the percentage calculation meaningless. The fact that TİSK initiated a peer-reviewed journal in 2006 that is exclusive to academics shows that the relations got even further stronger after this period. The unexpected peak in 1973 is due to a special issue including a very lenghty report by an academic and is an exception to the overal trends.

77. *MESS İşveren*, Aralık 1996.

78. Sipahi, *Gelenek ve Gelecek V:3*, 155.

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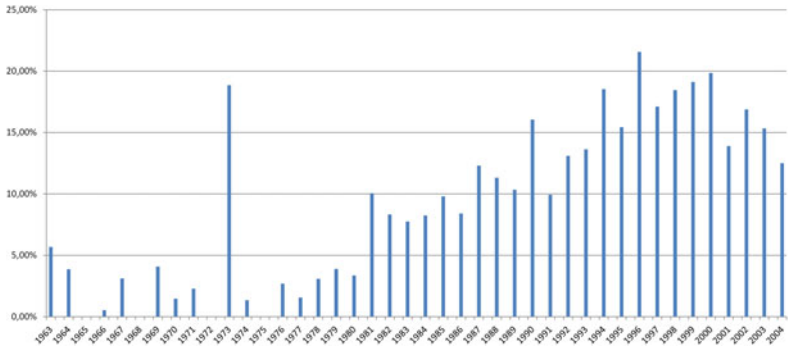


Figure 1 Annual Average Percentages of Pages in *İşveren* filled by academics from 1963 to 2004.

Prof. Dr. Tankut Centel's article in *MESS İşveren* in 1997 which emphasized the importance of flexibility as a "necessity in industrial relations" and criticized "the reluctance of labor unions against flexibility" was exactly in line with MESS's position about this issue.[79]

The initiation of the publication *Mercek* (Focus) by MESS in 1996 is also significant in terms of these developing relations. This journal, strongly populated by academics as well as prominent members of the association, was in the form of a theoretical publication that included lengthy and in-depth articles going beyond the limits of *MESS İşveren* (MESS Employer). To give an idea about the academics' role in this journal, the percentage of articles written by academics to the number of total articles is 30% for 2011 and 36% for 2012. Recently, the associations' influence in the academy has grown deeper, and in 2006, TİSK began to publish even a refereed academic journal called "*TİSK Akademi*," (TİSK Academy), focusing on industrial relations and the economy. This journal is a good indicator of the progress the associations have made concerning the relations with their academy from the 1960s until now. A final area of cooperation, very significant although infrequent, involved a number of awards given to prominent businessmen and business organizations by the universities. Two leading figures of the associations, Jak V. Kamhi and Halit Narin, received honorary doctorates, respectively, from İstanbul University in 1992 and from Uludağ University in 2008. In 1987, MESS was awarded a success plaque by the Faculty of Management at Istanbul University.[80] The award mechanism was the most concrete manifestation of the growing ties between academy and business.

79. *MESS İşveren*, Şubat 1997.
80. *İşveren*, no: 10 (July 1987), 3.

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The strengthening relations between business and the academy can be construed in a number of ways. First, the academic support given to MESS and TİSK presented a "scientific" basis to the associations' position and demands, highly contributing to their legitimacy. Given the technocratic and "scientific" obsession of the neoliberal era regarding social issues, this institutional support was quite influential. Second, close ties with the academy brought, one way or another, co-optation of academics into the ranks of the capitalist class, rendering them intellectual defenders of business interests, or in Gramscian terms, "the organic intellectuals" of business. This was, in a way, an effort to capture the academic field in order to create a business-friendly intellectual environment. Third, being close to academics and receiving awards from academic institutions was a matter of prestige. The growing ties between the world of business and the world of science was aiming to provide the businessmen a significant amount of prestige and power, contribute to their social profile and enhance their ideological influence.

## Relations with Media: Increasing Visibility

Before 1980, businessmen did not show themselves off in the public often. The highly conflictual character of the labor relations of the time, and the existence of militant labor unions and armed leftist organizations were probably the main reasons behind this limited publicity for businessmen.[81] Frequent strikes and occupations gave the businessmen a feeling of danger, even in big factories, where the high administrators and the owners did not generally come into face-to-face relations with workers.[82] Moreover, the associations were explicitly dissatisfied with the perspective of the media concerning businessmen. An article in İşveren in 1977 by Şükrü Er, a prominent member who later would be the president of MESS, addressed the widespread anti-business sentiments in press by saying: "owners of press, though they are entrepreneurs themselves, . . . have led the society with a tale of exploitation and with their false, deceitful, and one-sided views."[83] The associations were not happy with the state media, either. A recurrent complaint was that the state television channel, which was the only one at the time, "was instrumentalized for spreading views that are against the free enterprise by showing it as the main source of the huge problems in the country."[84]

81. Rıfat Bali, *Tarz-ı Hayattan Life-Style'a,* 35.
82. *İşveren*, no: 4/5/6 (January/February/March 2005), 44.
83. *İşveren* no: 5 (February 1977), 6.
84. *İşveren* no: 11 (August 1979), 30.

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After the coup, however, the picture changed significantly. Thanks to the eradication of radical leftist organizations and labor militancy, which provided an end to the tense situation for the businessmen, they broke free from their former timidity and began to become more visible. An indicator of increasing publicity is the relationship between the press and TV channels. The associations began to build stronger ties with all forms of media and gained abundant opportunities to make themselves heard. During the 1980s, for example, the president of TİSK, Halit Narin, became a well-known public figure that was accepted as one of the few top representatives of the Turkish business world. During the 1990s, the associations began to organize regular dinners for members of the press. These meetings were utilized both to transmit the opinions of the associations to the public and to consolidate the close relations between the press and the associations. Thanks to these efforts, several newspapers published interviews with TİSK and MESS leaders and gave place to their public announcements. MESS's quite frequent press bulletins, especially those that responded to the agenda of the country and the world, were given considerable attention by the press. Furthermore, some MESS administrators even took columns, again in certain local newspapers, as guest writers. This fact, which alone testifies to the magnitude of their influence, lent the associations a direct way of addressing the public.[85]

Visible faces of business were also frequently invited to TV channels for panel discussions or to comment on behalf of the employers on specific issues. While the issues at stake were usually related to industrial conflicts or problems in the periods of collective agreements, they were also invited to opine on general issues ranging from EU integration to the economic crisis. In line with this remarkable change, TİSK defined itself as "an obscure, unknown organization in the 60s, one whose voice was heard in the 70s, and one whose words were endorsed in the 80s."[86]

Throughout this period, TİSK and MESS achieved a considerable degree of publicity. For instance, a seminar organized by MESS on January 28, 1999, titled "Crisis: Effects, Precautions and Management," was broadcast by nine different TV channels in leading news programs on the same day.[87] Another example that provides a sense of their publicity is the number of news items solely about MESS, which reached around 1,500 in 1999.[88]

85. For instance, *Şener Muter,* executive board member of MESS, in the daily *Yeni Asır*.

86. *İşveren*, no: 2 (November 1982), 4.

87. MESS, *Medya'da MESS 6,* 345–353.

88. Ibid, 347.

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The strengthening of ties with media and increasing publicity can also be associated with the quest for strengthening ideological hegemony. The 1980 coup eliminated the political threat to the existence of the capitalist class yet the social legitimacy of the bourgeoisie and its public prestige still needed enhancement. The post-1980 experience of the associations with the media has shown the former to be quite aware of the contributions that a strong media presence can make toward accentuating their public profile, confirming and manifesting their self-confidence, and spreading their opinions to the public.

## Image-restoration Strategies: "From Merciless Exploiters to Intellectual Visionaries with a Love of Art"

The public image of businessmen was not so popular in the 1970s. The fierce class struggles of the time, the existence of radical/socialist movements, and worker militancy had led to a notable degree of capital-hostile sentiment among the masses, which diffused into common sense perceptions.[89] The popular movies of the time are one area where we can track the marks of such sentiments. In these movies, the figure of the businessman or the employer was portrayed as a merciless, greedy person who worshipped power and money and bore no sign of a conscience or ethics.[90]

After the coup, the businessmen initiated a considerable effort in the area of public relations which played a significant role in the enhancement of the business class's public prestige. Now, I will seek to trace the reflections of the businessmen's endevaour in the publications of the associations.

Before 1980, the associations' publications (*İşveren* and *MESS İşveren* ) were generally "colorless." They included the associations' announcements, news from the sector or the business world,

89. "The image of the businessman in the consciousness of the masses was an exploiter type" Adaklı, 247.

90. For an elaborate discussion along these lines on the businessman figure in Turkish cinema, see Ümit Tümay Arslan, *Bu Kabuslar Neden Cemil?* 9–24. For further discussion on this theme, see Fuat Ercan, *Sermayeyi Haritalandırmaya Yönelik Kavramsal Düzenekler,* pp. 9–11. In addition to these, Sakıp Sabancı, one of the two top businessmen of Turkey, himself describes this negative image as the following: "In our movies and novels, and cartoons, there is a type of "catastrophe" businessman. Especially industrialists have to have a big belly! An ugly face,a bald head, horrible looks, a big Havana cigar in the mouth, big golden chain in the vest, golden rings on fat fingers. This is the type." Bali, 38.

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summaries of the political and economic developments of the day, some statistics, a section on law, articles on management, and some technical industrial issues. After 1980, a slow, gradual, but highly significant change occurred in the publications.

In 1986, a column opened in *İşveren*, written by the secretary general of the association, called *Görüş* (Opinion). The initiation of a column indicates the acquisition of a personal voice, and a manifestation of an increase in intellectual claims. A frequent theme discussed in this novel editorial arrangement was "human relations." The writers systematically emphasized "the role of human relations, mutual respect and understanding and dialogue in a world directed at peace." MESS, for example, published a whole series of books solely on the issue of "healthy" human relations. They frequently maintained that "money is not everything," and that other values were as important as material gains in the search for a happier life. They began to share their insights and life experiences with the readers. The administrators, who once had only been interested in economic and industrial matters, began to display an interest in literature, arts, and the sciences. They began to share the latest books they had read, or the concerts they had attended with their readers. Starting from 1986, *MESS İşveren* devoted a full section to this topic that was called "the art world of the businessman."

Moreover, MESS publications proliferated. In 1996, MESS began publishing a new journal called *Mercek* (Focus). In 2000, it initiated *Bizbize* (Altogether), a journal that targeted and was massively delivered to workers in MESS-member workplaces.

In 2005, TİSK's main publication *İşveren* underwent a thorough renovation and acquired a "cooler" and more "stylish" appearance. The content of the journal also changed dramatically and new sections like arts, travel, humanity, and archeology were added. These sections usually included interviews with prominent artists and intellectuals and informed the reader about contemporary arts and the opinions of the artists. This expansion of *İşveren* realized two separate objectives. It was both publicly declaring that businessmen were closely interested in cultural and artistic activities, and at the same time, it was edifying the world of employers, making them acquainted with the world of art, thus equipping them with an opportunity to increase their cultural capital.

Another theme that we frequently witness in the publications is what they call "the colors of life." The associations, formerly stuck in a highly profit-centered, materialistic vision, were now discovering the small details that gave meaning to the "art of living," and acquiring an almost "poetic" voice. A symposium organized by MESS on a highly economic and quite technical issue such as

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employee security, for instance, was titled "Recruit the Flowers of Life."[91]

All these transformations in the form and content of the publications as well as of other activities, as argued above, should be considered as part of an image-restoration project. Through the period of concern, the associations, which had struggled with a negative public image before 1980, gradually sought to leave behind the notorious "merciless exploiter" image and to assume an intellectual one. This fabricated typology established the businessman as characteristically an intellectual visionary, both fond of literature and arts and with a refined life style.

This process can be read as the business world's transformation of its economic capital into cultural capital, in a favorable era for doing so. Increasing cultural capital meant a distinguished capitalist class with a sounder manifestation of cultural superiority. This manifestation, I would argue, aimed to contribute to business' image as the "leaders and visionaries of the society" and to strengthen their ideological influence. However, the associations were very careful not to highlight their distinctively "high" culture. For instance, they always stated their dislike of conspicuous consumption or a kind of conspicuous elitism, which some individual members of the capitalist class were keen to manifest.[92] This was probably because, as an organization, they constituted the segment of the class most sensitive to the perceptions of labor.

## Strategies vis-à-vis the Left: Ideological Accumulation by Dispossession

In this section, I will analyze a very specific but notably significant transformation in the association's ideological strategies, the one vis-à-vis leftist and socialist ideology that I call "ideological accumulation by dispossession,"[93] akin to David Harvey's conceptualization.[94] This transformation is highly important since it provides us a profound manifestation of capital's self-confidence and the degree of their increasing hegemony.

Before 1980, TİSK and MESS were notorious among workers for their passionately labor-hostile attitudes and their fiery anti-communism.

91. MESS, *Medya'da MESS 7*, 413.

92. For instance, Cem Boyner was a typical representative of this tendency.

93. This concept was coined by Cenk Saraçoğlu, "Haziran 2013 Sonrası Türkiye'de İdeolojiler Alanının Dönüşümü: Gezi Direnişi'ni Anlamanın Yöntemleri Üzerine Bir Tartışma." *Praksis* 37(2015), 299–321.

94. See Harvey, "The new imperialism."

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"We have smashed DGM,[95] now it is MESS' turn" was a well-known slogan of DİSK-member workers of the metal sector, which manifested their response to this hostile attitude. Both associations frequently alarmed the state authorities against the rise of radical left and worker militancy, which were considered "the greatest threats the nation faced."[96] The worker uprising on June 15-16 of 1970, the violently suppressed May Day gathering in 1977, and other massive rallies of that era were all said to be rehearsals of an externally supported communist uprising.[97] In line with the official ideology, communism was claimed to be an external, modern epidemic that had no foundations in the cultural world of Turkish workers. The associations' voice on this issue sounded remarkably conservative. Against the turmoil of the modern world, they appealed to the preservation of national cultural values and demanded "law and order." The following quotation from an article in *İşveren* penned by the president of TİSK provides an idea about this perspective:

> *Today we are struggling to protect the Turkish State and its indivisibility with its country and its nation, and the free, parliamentary regime, and to destroy ideological and anarchist movements for good. . . . Those traitors who dare to sing the communist international instead of our national anthem should know that this noble state and nation that have managed to defeat all of its inside and outside enemies for centuries, will finally crush and destroy today's anarchists.*[98]

In summary, before 1980 the business front overtly manifested its antipathy, and sometimes hatred, against discourses, slogans, symbols, rituals and personalities affiliated with socialism, which used to be a center of attraction and influence among intellectuals, as well as workers.

In the post-1980 period, this attitude underwent a remarkable transformation. What was changing was not, of course, the antipathy for socialism, but the relation of the businessmen with notions that used to be a part of the inventory of socialist ideology.

The celebratory comments made by the association's leaders following the collapse of Soviet socialism, for instance, sounded quite novel. "After collapsed walls, dissociated empires, and razed taboos, the

95. DGM (*Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemeleri*) is the Turkish acronym for State Security Courts. These courts were designed to specifically suppress labor and left militancy and the bill concerning their authorities was contested by a series of nation-wide strikes led by DİSK in 1976.

96. See for instance the issues of *İşveren* in the late '70s.

97. *İşveren* no:8 (May1977) , *İşverenı* no: 9 (June 1978).

98. *İşveren*, no:5 (April 1980), 3.

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world is surrounded by currents of peace and dialogue,"[99] penned the chief writer of *İşveren* in a rather "progressive" tone. In another article, a different writer stated, "we got rid of the fanaticisms of yesterday, thank god, by rigid doctrines becoming history."[100] What is most noteworthy in these quotes, I would argue, is the tone and direction of criticism against socialist ideas. Although they had once been opposed for being revolutionary, subversive, and radical, they were now opposed for being dogmatic, backward-looking, and antiquated. They had been proven, the associations claimed, to be irrelevant and were supported by no one except a few dinosaurs.

The way the past was remembered by the associations is also remarkable. The writers of the publications frequently recalled the "hard days" of the pre-1980 period as a past that was thankfully and "conclusively" over. They recurrently claimed that the world was in a process of inevitable change that left no space for the "weary ideological aspirations" of the old times. The phrase "in our globalizing world" was generously uttered, followed by the conviction that efforts to resist this process were handicapped by a hopeless "dogmatism." Any attempt to question the legitimacy of, say, the neoliberal period, EU integration or privatizations, was sniped at for being a plot by those who wanted to damage industrial peace and to revert to "those days," which were pejoratively labeled as "ideological." They also made a special effort to display interviews with formerly socialist union leaders in the publications. The common theme in these interviews was again "the viciousness of those 'evil' days during which the worker saw the employer as hostile," this time acknowledged by the former leaders of labor themselves.[101]

Another novelty worth noticing is that on some occasions, leaving behind the fiery oppositional tone, the associations frequently expressed their "tolerance" and desire to "dialogue" with various sectors that "may hold different opinions from the association." The various gatherings with labor unions organized and hosted by TİSK in various forms, such as symposiums or discussion sessions, were often promoted as signs of TİSK's tolerance, open-mindedness, and magnanimity.[102] Regarding such gatherings, Baydur wrote: "it is nice that people who had abstained from us in the past, join our symposiums and express their opinions today."[103] The associations

99. *İşveren*, no:9 (June 1992).
100. *İşveren*, no:2 (June 1992).
101. See several issues of *MESS İşveren* in the years 2001 and 2002.
102. For instance, The conferences *Çalışma Hayatında 21. Yüzyılın Yeni Ufukları* (New Horizons in Professional Life) and *Değişim '97* (Change '97) organized by MESS.
103. *İşveren*, no: 4 (January 2005).

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were proud of "creating a medium through which everyone would be able to state his opinions."

A further significant change in attitude was about certain personalities and items affiliated with socialist ideology. A press bulletin MESS published in 1999, for instance, was titled a "Manifesto," obviously refering to the communist manifesto written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.[104] There were many other references to Marx, to the point it seems that the associations made a special effort to show their interest in him.[105] Furthermore, MESS, at two separate events, one a symposium and the other a press conference, used poems from Nazım Hikmet and Can Yücel, two poets well known for their commitment to the socialist movement in Turkey.[106] In the 1990s, MESS held a series of conferences about "flexibility" titled, "From Modern Times to the Colors of Life" in which Chaplin's famous movie was also featured.[107] The most defiant example of this tendency, however, occurred on May Day in 1993. The celebrations, which held a historical significance as "the day of struggle" for the working class of Turkey and indeed the world, had previously been strictly opposed by the associations on the grounds that it provoked hostility towards capital and damaged industrial peace. This time, however, TİSK itself organized a May Day celebration called the "May Day Ball."[108]

A theme where a kind of "poetic" voice was most evident, often seen in the publications, was that of the project of "creating a tradition" for the associations. After the 1980s, they did exert a special effort to writing a history of their own. They constructed the association's history as a glorified one with a bunch of idealists undertaking great difficulties, working day and night.[109] They proudly boasted that they had initiated the association in a small, one-room bureau. Similarly, after the coup, when labor unions were subject to great suppression, and where DİSK, for instance, was kept shut down for eight years, the three-day closing of MESS was highlighted as "a black era of suffering."[110]

When Mehmet Mermerci, a prominent businessman, had passed away, Refik Baydur mourned by calling him "the thinker of the business world, a fighter of ideas and feelings."[111] In the former

104. *MESS Kısa Bilgi Bülteni*, (18 May 1999).

105. For further examples of the "Marxophilia" of the bourgeoisie, see Bali, *Tarz-ı Hayattan*, 70, 77.

106. MESS, *Medya'da MESS 7,* p. 632.

107. Ibid., 435.

108. *İşveren*, no: 8 (May 1993).

109. Sipahi, V:1, 25–32.

110. Sipahi, V:2, 150.

111. *İşveren*, no: 12 (September 1992).

period, it was uncommon for businessmen to use such adjectives to describe themselves. They settled for descriptions such as hard-working, honest, or patriotic. The mourning of Mermerci, however, was at the same time a demonstration that the business world could also raise idealist thinkers and fighters. In 1999, MESS published a three-volume book titled, "From the Tradition to the Future." This lengthy book in a way marked the embodiment of this tradition-creating tendency.

The sum total of this newfound idealism and apparent adoption of some left-leaning values should by no means be considered as a chaotic and confused attitude toward leftist/socialist ideology. On the contrary, they should be considered as part of a systematic, deliberate, and strategic effort that revealed the aggression and sophistication in the ideological strategies of the capitalist class. What is witnessed here, I argue, is a trifurcated strategy of this class against an ideological stance that had given it trouble before the 1980s. First, there was an effort to "marginalize" and sometimes even criminalize some fundamental premises and principles of socialist ideology, scornfully labeling them as parts of an unfashionable, timeworn system of thought that belonged to the trash heap of history. Second, we can observe an endeavor to "contain" left-leaning sentiments, by inviting them to "dialogue," and "mutual understanding." Notably, this occurred in an era marked by the absence of a significant, let alone powerful or influential, left alternative, or a leftist "threat" that could question the social position and privileges enjoyed by the capitalist class. Lastly, the capitalists were also keen to "appropriate" themes and symbols that formerly had been considered the property of the left. As noted above, the reiterated references to Marx or verses from Nazim Hikmet were not random selections, but part of a struggle over symbols and meanings. The formerly conservative capitalist class was now claiming to be progressive, idealist, democratic, open-minded, taboo-breaking, radical, and even "revolutionary." The employers who had held a "defensive" position in the 60s and 70s were now making "ideological blitzkrieg attacks"[112] deep into "enemy lines."

## Conclusion: Collective Class Action Matters

In this article, my main argument is that the neoliberal era marks a sharp turning point through which business ceased to remain on the defensive vis-à-vis the working class and launched an overall counter-

112. Kirsten Kozalanka, "Political Communication and the Construction of Neo-liberal Hegemonic Project", 9.

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attack that aimed to construct and consolidate its ideological hegemony. The associations had a low public profile in the 1960s and 1970s, an epoch marked by the ascendant power of working class organizations as well as various factions of left-wing movements that were the hotbeds of business-hostile sentiments. MESS and TİSK were especially notorious among militant workers for their rigid stance against labor unions. This situation induced timidity and caution among businessmen that further atrophied their public image. Against the "threat" of communism, they appealed to remarkably conservative and nationalist motives, in a rather defensive mood. In Gramscian terms, they were on the level of an economic-corporate level of a social class.

The military coup in 1980 crushed labor unions and left movements, eradicating the greatest "threat" for the capitalist class. Hereafter, the business front began to display a more confident public image. They made use of increasing visibility along with growing ties with the academy and the media to enhance their social profile. Furthermore, the associations launched an ambitious image restoration strategy which aimed to replace the former sterotype of "money-worshipping, capitalist exploiter" with an image of intellect, distinct tastes and a refined lifestyle. Additionally, they initiated a renewed and much more sophisticated strategy against the left that differed from the dull anti-communism of the pre-1980 era. This strategy, which I call ideological accumulation by dispossession, included selectively marginalizing, containing and approriating certain themes from within the ideological inventory of the left. My analysis suggests that the efforts of MESS and TİSK in these areas show that they, as business actors, left behind the defensive position of the pre 1980 era, that is the economic-corporate phase, and adopted a counter attack strategy that aspired to establish and consolidate ideological hegemony. I should emphasize, however, that I am not making a claim concerning how these strategies were received by large masses. The issue of reception obviously requires different research methods that are well beyond the limits of this paper. Yet, the changes in the four areas that I discussed throughout the paper shows that they expanded the channels of ideological influence and employed more sophisticated strategies to enhance their social profile throughout the process of neoliberalization. In this sense, this study shows the merits of a neo-Gramscian approach in making sense of business strategies in the neoliberal era. The conventional literature that stresses the increasing power of business through neoliberalization mostly deals with the structural factors that strengthened the hand of business vis-a-vis the working class and policymakers, does not offer a sufficient explanation for the strategies of business in the realm of ideology. With its focus on the

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ideological struggles around the notion of hegemony, with its strategic conception of power that emphasizes the strategic role of business, as well its emphasis on business-society relations, the neo-Gramscian approach provides us with a better framework to make sense of the changes in the ideological strategies of business in the process of neoliberalization. The comparisons with Chile and Argentina in terms of the relation of business, coups, and neoliberalization also show that the "brutal transitions to neoliberalism" based on coercion are effective in undermining the immediate threat against business, yet do not solve their social legitimacy problems in general. After transition to civilian rule, business actors needed to wage their own ideological struggles.

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