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# The Failure of Turkish Trade-Unionism: 2015 Metal Strike

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## Résumé

In the first half of 2015, there occurred important labor demonstrations in Turkey at many workplaces including Renault, TOFAŞ, Ford Otosan, Türk Traktör etc. Workers initially reacted against double-standards which occurred just after collective bargaining process and demanded standardization of contract terms for all workplaces. Afterwards, such complaints turned into more serious reactions against the union and workers started to resign from the membership for the union neglected workers' demands. The union replied it with a physical attack to workers who resigned from Turk Metal by claiming that there had been provocateurs among the workers. Henceforth, protests evolved into a wave of strikes against neither employer nor Turkish Employers' Association of Metal Industries (MESS), but Türk Metal by criticizing its way of unionism. During the demonstrations, workers applied their own lateral organizational forms and adopted slogans which advises even abandonment of all unions from the workplaces rather than maintenance of existing unions. At the end of the strike, some workers returned back to the union while some others joined to other unions. After the resistance Türk Metal also mutated in order to maintain its position as the largest labor union in Turkey.

During the strike, Metal Workers Association (Metal İşçileri Birliği - MİB), which is a grass-root institution publishing news about the workers and having an organization among the workers, played a triggering role. As a group defending a unionism perception based on grassroots organizations, worker committees and forums, independency from decayed labor-unions of the sector and lateral decision-making mechanisms, it seems that MİB achieved to address workers even though it lost the control over the process in the advanced stages of the movement due to the explosive character of the events.

This study points out that 2015 experience reveals that the established order experienced a crisis and could not maintain a peaceful industrial relations system. By considering MİB as a "contentious labor organization" which attempts to fill the representation gap of workers without legal representative authorities, this study deals with the failure of oligarchic Turkish trade-unionism established just after 1980 coup d'état to control and contain labor movement. In this respect, crisis and representative structure of the sector will be discussed on the basis of 2015 experience and interviews with Türk Metal & MİB officials.

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**Mots-Clés:** representation, lateral organizations, oligarchic trade, unionism, contentious labor organization, Türk Metal