

**THE CHILDREN'S PROTECTION SOCIETY:  
NATIONALIZING CHILD WELFARE IN  
EARLY REPUBLICAN TURKEY**

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**"Song of the Children's Protection Society"** (*Himaye-i Etfal  
Türküsü*)

Oh, Homeland! Homeland! Homeland!  
It is these Turkish children  
Who protect you, who make you shine,  
Who increase your renown.

Oh, Nation! Nation! Nation!  
It is these Turkish children  
For whom you wished happiness  
And created this great state.

It is these Turkish children  
Who walk, crawl,  
Who adorn your homes  
Who await nurturance and assistance.

It is these Turkish children  
For whom assistance should be endless.  
Do not distinguish rich from poor,  
They are all your eyes, your heart, and your equals.

It is these Turkish children  
Who will be the guardians of the country tomorrow,  
Armed with science and ammunition,  
The grandchildren of the Grey Wolf.

-Aka Gündüz, 1929

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Aka Gündüz—best known as a Turkish writer, publicist, parliamentarian, and social activist—wrote this song for the Turkish Children's Protection Society (*Himaye-i Etfal Cemiyeti / Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu*) in the late 1920s. His words highlighted a deepening understanding of the connections among ideas of nation, child, welfare, and Turkey's future. In the second-to-last stanza, the song reminded listeners that children, whether rich or poor, deserved the limitless care and assistance of Turkish society. The closing stanza emphasized that, after all, it was these children who would be called upon to protect the country as adults. Armed with knowledge and weapons, these descendants of the mythic ancestral Grey Wolf would carry out their duties to family and nation—but only if they were healthy, robust, and strong.

While representative of other nationalist narratives of the early Turkish republic, this song barely hinted at the social, economic, and political realities of children's lives "on the ground." Yet, members of the association for which the song was written—the Turkish Children's Protection Society (CPS)—were fully aware of the great obstacles that faced the new republic regarding child health and welfare.<sup>1</sup> In the early republic, evidence of widespread child poverty could be found in newspapers, where journalists debated the relevance and impact on Turkey of postwar reconstruction and the global depression of the 1930s. Newspaper reporting on efforts to feed and clothe poor children of towns and cities across Turkey highlighted the pressing nature of the "child question."<sup>2</sup> The issue was addressed in the halls of the Grand Assembly, in boardrooms of philanthropic associations and hospitals, and by governmental branches charged with the care of children (particularly the Ministries of Education, Health and Social Welfare,

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1 See, for example, the opening comments of the 1936-37 Work Report of the CPS, *Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu* 1938, pp. 10-11.

2 I have chosen to translate *çocuk meselesi* as the "child question." The phrase encompassed a range of issues that were constructed as social problems important in the early republic. Like the "woman question" (see Deniz Kandiyoti 1991), the "child question" in Turkey was frequently raised in the popular press and was a focus of medical and pedagogical journals, professional meetings, pamphlets, exhibitions, and educational curricular materials throughout the 1920s and 1930s. For this paper, I drew largely upon the published reports and documents of the Children's Protection Society (1926-39) and articles published in leading newspapers and journals, such as *Cumhuriyet* (1928-1937); the official publication of the CPS, *Gürbüz Türk Çocuğu* (1926-27, 1934-35); the CPS publication *Çocuk Haftası* (1929-30); *Yeni Adam* (1934-39); and the official national People's House publication, *Ülkü* (1933-39).

and Justice). Working poor and children themselves also expressed their needs in public, though recovering their voices is much more difficult than reaching an understanding about elite discourses on poverty and social problems associated with it.<sup>3</sup>

The "child question" was multifaceted and addressed a broad range of issues common to other countries during the early twentieth century. In Turkey, key concerns included: high infant and child mortality rates; a large number of orphaned, abandoned, or poor children; malnourishment and disease; child labor; homelessness; begging; child abuse and abandonment; child prostitution; and delinquency.<sup>4</sup> While many of these issues had been recognized as social problems and had entered public discourse during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the Ottoman Empire, not until the emergence of the republic did the "child question" become a more dominant concern in public discourse and an issue of sustained policy debate.<sup>5</sup>

During and following World War I and the War of Independence, high rates of infant and child mortality, the plight of large numbers of orphaned children, and malnourishment and disease were immediate and widespread concerns. Under the strain of such far-reaching upheaval, social networks among extended family members and within neighborhoods and villages could not be counted upon to provide for the poor or dispossessed. At the same time, the reorganization of religious institutions such as the pious foundations (*vakıf*) under state administration, and the official discouragement of giving practices in the name of religion, further undermined traditional avenues for poor relief. According to those working in the government and many professional elites, such social problems as child poverty and infant mortality were to be met partly by state-funded projects in health and social welfare and partly by civic associations and party branches. Yet the task of reconstruction was enormous, and throughout the 1920s state

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3 Suad Derviş often reported the conversations and opinions of Istanbul children and mothers in numerous articles she published during the mid-1930s for newspapers such as *Cumhuriyet* and *Tan*. Taken as a whole, her articles are a major contribution to a better understanding of what the daily living conditions, thoughts, and opinions of working-class mothers and children might have been during the 1930s.

4 I have addressed the construction of the "child question" as a social problem in more detail in Libal 2000.

5 For a discussion of the gradual shift toward notions of an idealized childhood as separate from adulthood, see Duben and Behar 1991, pp. 230-38.

agencies as well as private associations struggled to meet the needs of the beleaguered populace. By the 1930s, despite a period of normalization of daily life throughout the republic, there remained the persistent question of how to cope best with combating disease, hunger, and malnutrition. With the onset of global depression, state and local efforts to recover from considerable wartime losses suffered a further setback. Thus, in the 1930s the conditions faced by many children still could be described as dire.

It was in this context that the Children's Protection Society mobilized and expanded from its earlier Ottoman roots. The intent of this paper is to provide an analysis of the CPS in the 1930s—its mission, its strategies for meeting its goals, and its position in a network of loosely allied private and state organizations that worked to redress child poverty and to improve child health standards. The CPS, one of the most visible institutions working on behalf of children during the 1930s, became one of the avenues through which the country sought to cope with difficult social and economic circumstances on a more general level in the early republic. My discussion draws attention to the considerable accomplishments of the Society on the one hand, and the multiple ways in which it failed to reach said objectives on the other.

On the surface, the Society appeared to be a voluntary association much like other civic associations that were formed in many countries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A closer look at the membership and activities of the Society reveals a more ambiguous position vis-à-vis the state. The Society was formally linked to other international child-welfare leagues and unions, and by the early 1930s Turkish delegates regularly attended League of Nations conferences on child health and welfare.<sup>6</sup> European and American visitors to Turkey usually treated the Children's Protection Society as a private foundation and likened it to similar associations in their respective countries. An analysis of who shaped the CPS goals, led its initiatives, and monitored its progress as it expanded in the 1930s, however, complicates the picture of the Society's position and meaning in the early republic. Despite its visibility and official state recognition, the Children's Protection Society was handicapped in the quest to achieve its stated goals of pro-

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6 Prior to the outbreak of World War II, the League of Nations cosponsored at least two joint congresses on child welfare in the Balkans. Representatives from Turkey's CPS attended these congresses, along with other delegates from throughout the Balkan region. See, for example, *Cumhuriyet* 1936, p. 2.

tecting children's rights and lives.<sup>7</sup> The Society's long-term ability to transform the health and welfare of great numbers of needy Turkish children was limited by its quasi-corporatist structure, its inability to secure adequate funding through privatized ventures, and the relatively limited financial support of the state. Despite the substantial growth of the CPS as an organization, the social conditions, economy, and infrastructural development were such that the "child question" was too much for the Society to tackle effectively in the early republic.

The Children's Protection Society represented a hybrid kind of institution that mediated both state and societal interests. In a sense, the Society acted as a "surrogate" state agency. With a central committee comprising parliamentarians and, at times, heads of ministries, and with its headquarters located in the newly founded capital of Ankara, the CPS, like other voluntary organizations of the era, worked within the parameters created by an emerging professional elite and the limits imposed by the state. The fact that many of those professional elites served dual roles as members of the CPS and as politicians illustrates further the interwoven nature of the organization's civic and official functions. The Turkish state claimed credit for the successes of the Society and highlighted its support of CPS efforts. Yet even without the full financial or political support of the government, the CPS and the Turkish state were also targeted by local critics for failing to live up to their promises for Turkey's children.

### **Population, Child Welfare, and Nation-Building**

*A nation's strength is measured by its children's health.*  
-Dr. Fuad Umay<sup>8</sup>

Concerns with child poverty and child health and welfare intensified in public discourse in the 1920s, particularly as supporters of the new, secular state began to embark upon significant social and political reforms. As might be expected, this refrain further sharpened in the 1930s with the onset of global depression. Public discourses on population and child-centered policies were fused with the notion of nation-state building. Debates regarding population and children during this

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<sup>7</sup> For a general mission statement, see Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu 1935.

<sup>8</sup> This saying is attributed to Dr. Fuad Umay in *Çocuk Haftası* 1929, p. 106.

period were framed as national issues to be addressed by the larger society and the Turkish state. Alongside the widespread discourse on population and nation-state building emerged a professional sector seeking to ameliorate the conditions of poverty, homelessness, and high rates of illness among children living in urban areas, in particular.<sup>9</sup> By and large, this professional elite did so for humanistic reasons linked to nationalist and modernist projects of the early republic. When doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, and other volunteers were able to ensure the survival of children under their care, such professionals and their institutions portrayed themselves as contributing to the new nation-state.

Shortly after the establishment of the Turkish republic, key parliamentarians and President Mustafa Kemal himself promised to assist organizations willing to promote a pro-natalist campaign and measures to ensure infant and child survival. The child, viewed as a citizen-in-the-making, symbolized a nation-state embarked on a progressive march toward future prosperity and greatness. Thus, the state promised public assistance to children and families, especially in instances in which one or both parents were unable to work or had died, or for families with many children. The state also set aside an annual reserve of funds to provide pensions for widows and orphans. The extent to which these allowances were distributed to qualified recipients or actually ameliorated poverty within this group was often challenged in the popular media and in localized social surveys.<sup>10</sup>

Creating a national primary education system was one of the areas in which the official stance on the importance of the child for future nationhood was most visible (see, for example, Allen 1935; Tiregöl

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9 While health professionals and educators, for example, were concerned about health, hygiene, and education in rural areas, initial efforts focused upon urban areas such as Istanbul. During the early republic, small-scale attempts were made to address the "village child's" health and educational concerns, although financial and personnel constraints (on both private and state-supported initiatives and institutions) were barriers to effecting large-scale change in rural areas. Issues of the People's House journal, *Ülkü*, from the 1930s contain more on efforts to bring elementary-school education and regular medical care to children in rural Turkey. See, e.g., Zeki Nasır 1933 and Tonguç 1938a, 1938b.

10 For a pre-republican account of the insignificance of the allowances for many widows and orphanage, see Phillips 1922. Annual national budgets, such as for 1933, set aside 16,651,360 TL for retirees', widows', and orphans' pensions (*tekaüt, dul ve yetim maaşları*), as cited in Kemal Turan 1933, p. 349.

1998). Under a newly restructured Ministry of Education, the republican reformers worked hard to train new teachers, build schools, and create a comprehensive elementary school curriculum. Reformers were confident that educating children was key to transforming society and building a strong republic. Throughout the 1930s, the effects of child poverty in Istanbul troubled elementary school officials, bureaucrats, and social activists and prompted them to try a number of measures to provide children with hot lunches, clothing, shoes, and school supplies. Şükrü Kaya, Minister of the Interior, visited Istanbul in 1934 to address concerns that 7,000 schoolchildren were chronically hungry (Neşet Halil [Atay] 1934b). The CPS and the Turkish Red Crescent Society then stepped in to provide the children with regular hot lunches. Yet, by 1937, according to *Cumhuriyet*, the problem had not been solved—in fact, the headcount of malnourished youngsters within Istanbul Province had grown to some 15,000 elementary school children (*Cumhuriyet* 1937, p. 2). The paper reported that of those 15,000, only 7,000 children received regular assistance.

While these numbers alarmed local officials and activists, the "child question" extended beyond the elementary school classrooms to neighborhoods, city streets, and villages where the majority of Turkish children had yet to set foot in primary school. More often, school-age children worked in order to contribute to household income or remained home or on the streets while their parents or other caregivers worked.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, efforts to address the "child question" in terms of alleviating hunger, homelessness, and exploitation through heavy labor were largely decentralized and not well coordinated across state and private domains. Thus, efforts often were undertaken simultaneously on local and national levels by private philanthropic associations, local municipal administrations, and the state. The state vested power in the Ministry of Health and Social Assistance and the Ministry of Education to establish infrastructural reforms and concrete services that would benefit the republic's children. The Ministries of Justice and Interior were responsible for overseeing state orphanages and providing separate sections of prisons that would house minors. In Istanbul, the children's wing of *Darülaceze* and *Darüşşafaka*, the primary boarding school opened in 1873, provided services for poor or orphaned children (Sakaoğlu 1994). Their budgets were met largely by municipal funding; a portion of proceeds from theater, cinema, and

various transportation ticket sales; and private donations.<sup>11</sup> Other boarding schools (*yatı mektepleri*) for children of elementary school age administered by the Ministry of Education served orphans and poor children, although these were so expensive to operate that the Ministry of Education reduced rather than expanded its support in the 1930s (Başgöz 1973, pp. 211-13). Popular media and CPS reports highlighted the fact that demand for space in government-run institutions far exceeded institutional capacity throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

The Children's Protection Society was one of a number of private or semiprivate organizations to address directly the needs of orphans and the children of the poor. Most notably among the others, the Turkish Red Crescent Society provided significant amounts of assistance to poor families in the Young Turk and early republican eras. The Mothers' Federation, the Turkish Women's Federation, various societies for the care of the poor, local branches of the People's Houses, and branches of the Turkish Republican People's Party also took up the cause of child poverty. The work of these organizations often overlapped with that of the CPS. Moreover, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the CPS frequently cosponsored projects and events and cooperated with such organizations. While the CPS was not the only organization providing for poor children and their mothers in the early republic, it gained a reputation for being the most important organization to provide services, education, and advocacy on children's issues nationwide.

### Foundation of the Children's Protection Society

Historical accounts vary regarding when and by whom the CPS was founded. Turkish republican historiography generally cites the birth of the CPS in 1921, when it was first established in Ankara (see, e.g., Sönmez 1997). The establishment of the Children's Protection Society predates the republican period and goes back to the Young Turk era, as Mustafa Şahin (1997) and Cüneyd Okay (1998) have recently pointed out.<sup>12</sup> Historians agree that with the onset of the Balkan Wars and

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11 For a contextual understanding of the changing landscape of social welfare in the late Ottoman Empire, see Özbek 1999. For a brief discussion of the children's facilities and the primary education wing of *Darülaceze*, see Yıldırım 1996, pp. 162-68; on funding for *Darülaceze*, see Yıldırım 1996, pp. 111-40.

12 Okay 1998 importantly traces the various arguments of recent historiographic treatments as well as official Turkish CPS historiography, which has underrepresented the importance of the pre-republican work of the Istanbul CPS and its precursors.



World War I, various groups of doctors established local initiatives to deal with growing numbers of orphaned or homeless children. According to Okay, by March 1917 a group of prominent doctors, businessmen, lawyers, and local dignitaries gathered in Istanbul to craft a mission statement and by-laws (1998, pp. 21-22). Shortly thereafter, the newly organized Children's Protection Society gained permission from the Young Turk government to become an officially recognized association.

In 1917, the Istanbul CPS opened the Children's Guesthouse (*Çocuk Misafirhanesi*) in Firuz Ağa. Children were sent to the guesthouse from *Harbiye Mektebi* or by various relief organizations or individuals who came into contact with *şehit çocukları* (orphaned children of martyred fathers) (Okay 1998, p. 23). Early CPS activities centered on caring for children of all ages. This meant finding placement for older children in houses as "adoptees" or in local workshops where they could learn a trade, providing for health care for sick or malnourished children, and feeding and educating children within the guesthouse itself.<sup>13</sup> During World War I and the War of Independence, CPS relief efforts were marked by the immediate needs of caring for children displaced by the effects of a loss of parent or relatives, direct conflict, famine, disease, or voluntary or forced migration. Children who had no immediate family or relatives, or could not be supported within the family, neighborhood, or rural community, were often sent to the CPS by local police, military, other individuals willing to intervene, and occasionally by children themselves.

After the defeat of the Greeks in the War of Independence and the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923, the plight of orphaned, displaced, and other poor children (often ones with families) became even more evident. Sabiha Zekeriya Sertel (1987 [1969]) noted in her memoir, *Roman Gibi*, that tens of thousands of children were orphaned during the war years just prior to the founding of the republic. While living in New York in the early 1920s, she received a letter from a friend who wrote: "There are 90,000 Turkish orphans. *Darüleytamlar* (state-run orphanages) are only able to accommodate 12,000 children." Children whose mothers and fathers died on the Eastern Front, in particular, wandered the streets of Anatolia (Sertel 1987 [1969], pp. 43-

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13 Between 1917 and 1922, the Guesthouse took in 2,027 children, most of whom were then placed out in families or in other institutions; see Okay 1998, p. 24.

44). Other contemporary writers commented that Istanbul's streets were filled with barefoot, ill-clad children begging for food and/or work. During this period, the CPS reconfigured and reestablished its headquarters in Ankara, although branches in Istanbul and the surrounding region continued to serve the greatest numbers of children. In the face of apparently overwhelming need in the new republic, the CPS continued to expand its mission and scope, opening scores of new branches throughout the country. By 1929, the CPS boasted more than 300 branches, stretching from Izmir to Diyarbakir. Such increasingly visible activities thrust the CPS into the limelight as one of the most significant institutions providing for the needs of the nation's children,

*Himaye-i Etfal:*

**Leading the Battle for Child Welfare in the 1930s**

*"The Children's Protection Society is a source of power that will secure and protect the future of the country."*<sup>14</sup>

In 1921, the CPS established general headquarters in the new capital in Ankara. After 1923, the Ankara headquarters worked to unify branches under a single bureaucratic apparatus and to increase the number of branches throughout the republic. The 1930s marked a time of further growth in membership and branches, consolidation of the central bureaucratic structure, and, most significantly, expansion and formalization of the Society's practices and goals. As the CPS became more widely recognized for its work, however, the Society's ambiguous position as a voluntary, civic association mediating important state and societal interests became more marked and a source of internal and external commentary. Despite its national visibility, the CPS as an association had no formal, legal ties to the Turkish state. Yet the overwhelming presence of high-level parliamentarians and influential political figures on the Society's governing committees meant that, *de facto*, the Society had to operate under the indirect, and often direct, purview of those creating state policies and budgets.<sup>15</sup> CPS publica-

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<sup>14</sup> As cited in *Çocuk Haftası* 1929, p. 107.

<sup>15</sup> For example, at the 1936-37 CPS convention, İsmet İnönü represented Malatya. Şükrü Kaya, Minister of Interior, and other prominent parliamentarians dominated the roster of official delegates. Only a few lawyers, doctors, and educators who were not in the Grand National Assembly attended the semiannual congress. *Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu* 1938, pp. 5-6.

tions, such as *Gülbüz Türk Çocuğu* (Robust Turkish Child) and *Çocuk Haftası* (Children's Week) often contained the pictures, writings, and commentaries of political leaders, ministers, and bureaucratic elites. Public functions—such as congresses, exhibitions, and especially the activities surrounding Children's Week<sup>16</sup>—provided opportunities for Turkish political leaders to highlight the link between national goals for development and the rearing and protection of Turkish children. While appropriations set aside by the state constituted only a small fraction of the annual budget of the Children's Protection Society, some measure of financial support could be counted on each year. In addition, the Society cooperated with other initiatives sponsored by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. It also combined resources, expertise, and personnel with such organizations as the Turkish Red Crescent Society, the Mothers' Federation, the Turkish Women's Federation, and local branches of the Republican People's Party on campaigns for food relief, other forms of material assistance, and public-health education.

It is crucial to note that after the founding of the Turkish republic, the work of the Children's Protection Society gradually shifted away from the refugee and emergency relief services that had dominated its early years while centered in Istanbul. While the Society continued to provide some on-site housing for orphans in various branches in the late 1920s and 1930s, this was neither the primary focus of the Society's work nor the reason for its renown. Rather, the CPS became engaged in a nationwide campaign to promote child health and welfare, which involved the multilayered goals of providing direct assistance to mothers, infants, and older children (many of whom were orphans), education, research, and publicity. In 1930, Dr. Fuad (Umay), one of the founders of the Istanbul branch of the CPS and longtime head of the CPS general headquarters in Ankara, was interviewed by a reporter for *Cumhuriyet* (*Cumhuriyet* 1930a, p. 2). The reporter opened with the comment, "The Turkish Children's Protection Society, which has undertaken the responsibility of protecting the homeland's children (*vatan yavruları*), owing to the assistance and protection of our leaders and our government, and also the treasured compassion of our people, has been progressing toward its sacred goal."

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16 Children's Week was first celebrated in 1929, commencing on 23 April, a date that had been celebrated as a holiday commemorating Turkish national sovereignty since 1923. I discuss the holiday in more detail below.

The journalist's introduction underscored the extent to which the CPS was understood as *the* organization working on behalf of children during this period, even as he or she emphasized state and societal involvement in the support of CPS work.

*Providing Direct Welfare Services*

The CPS was widely known as an organization that provided direct services to children and mothers. When CPS leaders publicized activities, they often highlighted the exact numbers of children and poor mothers who had been helped in a given year. For example, Dr. Fuad (Umay) summarized the work of the Children's Protection Society in 1930 by giving a list of the activities of the some 438 centers and branches within Turkey:

Our Society in Ankara has children's clinics, milk depots (*süt damlaları*), playgrounds, one polyclinic, and a 90-bed orphanage (*ana kucağı*). Istanbul has a 90-bed poorhouse and a milk depot. In Eskişehir and Tokat there are milk depots and children's playgrounds. In Bursa there are two day-care centers, one with 30 and another with 50 beds. Adana has a food bank that feeds 82 children daily. Mersin has a playground. In Tokat, Izmir, Diyarbakir, Zile, Kasaba, and Fethiye there are polyclinics. 76,195 children have been helped in all . . . In addition, 16,295 [meals] and 136,292 kilos of milk have been distributed to children in different locations.<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Fuad further accounted for CPS activities in the previous year, citing the distribution of 3,050 packages of baby food and Nestle milk powder. The CPS had given caregivers financial support for 1,221 children; clothing outfits went to 17,314 children; and the Society had distributed 1,531 pairs of shoes, 952 hats, 322 pairs of socks, and 1,071 pairs of underwear. When relating the "work" of the Society, CPS leaders emphasized such enumerations of direct services provided rather than dwelling on other aspects of CPS work, such as education programs for mothers and day-care workers, or publishing Society journals, leaflets, and educational materials. In an effort to demonstrate where the donations of money and goods had gone, the CPS communi-

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17 Dr. Fuad (Umay), as quoted in *Cumhuriyet* 1930a, p. 2.

cated to the populace-down to the number of diapers given away-the extent of direct relief carried out on behalf of the nation's poor children.

The CPS constitution of 1935 stated that the general goals of the Society were to protect "children's rights and lives." Children under the age of 12 were eligible to receive material protection (*maddî himaye*), and those between 12 and 18 years old were eligible for spiritual or emotional protection (*manevî himaye*).<sup>18</sup> In order to achieve its goals, the Society worked at one level on publications and research about child health and welfare. It also endeavored to monitor care being given to children and mothers by CPS institutions, foster or adoptive families, and workshops and institutes in which CPS had placed children. Only a small percentage of CPS resources was appropriated for such oversight, however, and only five people worked in this division of the general headquarters.<sup>19</sup>

A second tier of activities included a variety of interventions intended to provide direct aid to needy orphans and poor children and their mothers. Thus, the Society sought to construct children's clinics (dispensaries), guesthouses and orphanages, and milk depots (*süt damlaları* or *süt tevzi mahalleri*) where pasteurized milk or formula was distributed; to assist in the care of poor and sick children, which included providing food and supplies for schoolchildren; to provide financial support for families who agreed to take in foster children; to find jobs for children able to work; to establish children's libraries and create model workshops (*darülmesailer*) for children; to help needy pregnant women and provide them with information about legal, he-

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18 Emotional protection for the most part meant that officials attempted to monitor older children's progress in schools or institutes, at workplaces, or in family placements. In larger centers, branches helped older children find jobs. From research I have done to date, the CPS devoted the bulk of its resources and attention to projects for infants and younger children, who were considered the most vulnerable of populations. Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu 1935, p. 3.

19 Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu 1938, pp. 22, 27. The annual budget provided for 2,400 TL to be spent on salaries for the division doing "control and inspection" (*murakabe ve teftiş*), but only 575 TL and 600 TL were spent in 1936 and 1937, respectively. In the same report, the CPS budgeted 6,900 TL for salaries of workers in charge of inspection in 1938 and 1939, a significant increase over the previous two years. This money was to be divided among the head of the Inspection Department (1,800 TL a year), a secretary (900 TL a year), two inspectors (1,800 TL a year each), and a controller (600 TL a year). This division of the Society was supposed to serve the entire network of CPS organizations. Whether or not this money was actually spent on inspection and control has yet to be determined by further research.

alth-related, and child-rearing issues concerning them and their children; to create playgrounds and gardens for entertaining children in a healthy manner; and to publish information on marriage, including information on appropriate age for marriage, physical appearance of the future spouse, personality, and social position (Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu 1935, pp. 3-5).

Such ambitious goals spanned a range of modernist concerns that were in vogue throughout Europe and the United States during the 1930s—from health, hygiene, and eugenics to socially and politically approved forms of child labor and recreation. Thus, throughout the republic, the CPS stepped up campaigns to provide clean milk for infants, prenatal and postnatal medical checkups for mothers, well-baby checkups, vaccinations, and bathing facilities to promote “hygienic” mothering practices with young infants and children (Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu 1940a, pp. 1-3; Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu 1940b). The Society recognized an overwhelming need for children's protection on all fronts and hoped to focus, in particular, on the high rates of infant mortality that persisted throughout Turkey. Society doctors felt that only by curbing the numbers of babies lost in the first few years of life could the Turkish state's goals for significant population growth be met.<sup>20</sup>

*Propaganda and Education:  
Training Modern Turkish Mothers and Infant Caregivers*

In order to promote the reduction of infant mortality rates, one of the Society's primary projects was writing and disseminating educational materials on child health, child care, and nutrition. At the same time, the CPS endeavored to publicize its own efforts and to solicit members and support for CPS projects. Such work was regarded as a

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<sup>20</sup> By the late 1920s, doctors identified maternal health as a key component in securing infant health and lowering mortality rates. The CPS began encouraging mothers to get medical checkups, deliver babies under the care of licensed midwives, and follow up with well-baby and well-mother care. Small strides were made by the CPS, but the number of midwives, doctors, clinics, and hospitals available for such care were few even in Istanbul and Ankara. A major factor was overcoming the barriers to get women to seek out such care voluntarily. . For a working-class mother's perspective on why she would not seek professional medical help in childbirth, see Suad Derviş's interview, *Gürbüz Türk Çocuğu* 1935, pp. 29-32. See also Dr. Fatma Arif 1929, pp. 205-6. For insight into Ministry of Health and Social Assistance initiatives on infant and child mortality, see Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Sıhhat ve İçtimai Muavenet Vekâleti 1933, pp. 75-80.

critical part of the Society's mission. Until 1937, "Propaganda and Publications" received a relatively small amount of the annual budget, and its yearly expenditures were relatively low. Before 1937, the division primarily focused on publishing a monthly journal called *Gülbüz Türk Çocuğu* (Robust Turkish Child) and pamphlets that were distributed to mothers and families at exhibitions, in public centers, and in the Society's own clinics and milk depots.

The Society established a national reputation for high production values in its publication, *Gülbüz Türk Çocuğu*, which ran in several formats between 1926 and 1936 and was recognized by the International Society for the Protection of Children (Neşet Halil [Atay] 1934a). The intended audience for *Gülbüz Türk Çocuğu* was medical and child-care professionals, teachers who worked with young children, and mothers who might be interested in the latest "scientific" thinking on topics ranging from breast-feeding to learning disabilities. The journal was also a vehicle for publicizing child-welfare issues among CPS branches, other associations, and government officials. As Neşet Halil (Atay) put it, the writers for *Gülbüz Türk Çocuğu* were "in the midst of a struggle to introduce the child question . . . as a national question" (1934a, p. 7). For Neşet Halil Bey, the journal could play an instrumental role in placing the "child question" uppermost on the national social policy agenda.

After 1936, the Society succumbed to pressures of financing and publishing trends. Citing the desire to provide for "a portion of the reading needs of the country's children," the CPS shifted its primary publication energies toward children themselves and launched the weekly *Çocuk*. Some within the Society hoped to fill a perceived gap in "quality" reading and educational material, even as others worried that devoting so much time and money to the new project would distract the CPS from greater tasks of promoting child health and welfare.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, publication expenses skyrocketed—from 2,174 TL in 1936 to 22,070 TL in 1937. Just over half of the 1937 expenses were recovered in subscription fees, and funds had to be diverted from other projects to cover the increased publication costs (*Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu* 1938, pp. 21-22).

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21 I have yet to find direct evidence that the state pressured the CPS to shift its focus, although the ensuing debate among key figures about the direction of the journal points to such an impetus. This issue bears detailed scrutiny, as it reveals struggles within the organization to define its purpose and direction in later years.

Aside from these publications, the CPS attempted to reach broader audiences with pamphlets, posters, radio broadcasts, and exhibitions, although literacy and access to technology were often prerequisites for being able to absorb the Society's message firsthand. Doctors and other experts strove to disseminate the latest modern, scientific knowledge on child health issues and child-care techniques. Throughout the 1930s, the CPS distributed a pamphlet on modern motherhood and held classes for mothers at larger CPS centers, such as Ankara. CPS-sponsored radio broadcasts during Children's Week featured doctors speaking on the principles of child health and child rearing. In turn, such speeches were reprinted partially or entirely in other CPS publications and were excerpted in other magazines and publications.

*Promoting Child Welfare through Children's Week*

Another method of "reaching the people" was through public commemoration and celebration. Informal recognition of 23 April as Children's Day began in the early 1920s.<sup>22</sup> By 1929, the Children's Protection Society extended its activities over a full week. Throughout the 1930s, Children's Week (*Çocuk Haftası*) offered one of the most influential vehicles for promoting awareness of the "child question." The week was intended to heighten awareness of the importance of children to the nation-state and society. Initially, the CPS focused on fundraising and collecting contributions to carry out its various projects. As on other important Islamic and secular holidays, during Children's Week various philanthropic societies, neighborhood and town party branches, and wealthy individuals provided clothing, shoes, and sweets to poor and orphaned children. As the holiday expanded in scope, the meaning of the event gradually shifted from one in which the CPS drew attention to the plight of poor and orphaned children to a more general celebration of Turkish children and the state. By Children's Week in 1929, the CPS (and often Republican People's Party branches, or later the People's Houses) hosted a broad spectrum of activities, including children's parades, playing in parks and play-

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<sup>22</sup> İffet Aslan cites the first recognition of 23 April as Children's Day as early as 1922 (1983, p. 568). By 1924, the newspaper *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* called 23 April a "children's rosette holiday." In another interpretation, Necdet Sakaoglu (1998) writes that a Children's Holiday was first celebrated in 1929 as a part of Children's Week.



grounds, and, in some years and places, free attendance at cinemas. Children competed in robust child contests, recited poetry, and received gifts of sweets. A select few could be chosen as governor for the day and invited to serve as administrators in local and national governmental offices. The CPS and other organizations sometimes sponsored children's balls to benefit the Society.

The holiday took on somewhat contradictory meanings—at once becoming a time to celebrate modern childhood and nationalistic notions of sovereignty and might, even while the CPS sponsored activities to heighten awareness of the persistent face of child poverty, infant and child mortality, and exploitative labor practices. Numerous political cartoons and opinion columns in national newspapers picked up on these apparent contradictions and openly questioned the implications of celebrating the joys and freedoms of modern childhood while so many children remained street-bound, homeless, ill-clad, and malnourished. At the close of Children's Week in 1930, for example, *Cumhuriyet* ran a front-page cartoon depicting barefoot children in tattered clothing lined up for a parade. The caption below the cartoon read, "The parade of those who were forgotten during Children's Week" (*Cumhuriyet* 1930b, p. 1). Necdet Sakaoğlu also highlights the paradox in his discussion of the history of the National Sovereignty and Children's Holiday, citing the work of writer/activist Sabiha Zekeriya (Sertel). According to her, 23 April and Children's Week had mistakenly come to be understood as a time for entertaining children. Rather, she emphasized, "April 23 is the day for children who are hungry, sick, or who work. It is a day for discussing their plight."<sup>23</sup>

### **Funding Strategies and the Limits of Private Philanthropy**

*"Assistance to the Children's Protection Society increases the Turkish population."*<sup>24</sup>

Founding members of the CPS opened the Society's general headquarters in Ankara in 1921 by paying monthly dues of two TL each, accepting two bolts of cloth from a generous donor named Akşehirli Bey, and securing a small building on Hacıbayram Caddesi to set up the new headquarters (Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu 1940b; *La Turquie*

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<sup>23</sup> This author's translation. As cited in Sakaoğlu 1998, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> As quoted in *Çocuk Haftası* 1929, p. 107.

*Kemaliste* 1941, p. 22). From these modest beginnings, the matter of securing adequate funding intensified even as the goals of the Society expanded. Funding in the 1920s and 1930s came from a variety of sources and, while the amount of money taken in by the Society increased steadily, the level of income was never sufficient to meet the demand for direct aid and other goals of the CPS. The Society developed a number of strategies to ensure regular income, including a relatively successful practice of acquiring land and building offices or other structures that the CPS then leased to other organizations and individuals. Despite such creative efforts, however, the problem of securing adequate funds to carry out the CPS mission continually beset the organization during the 1930s.

The CPS relied on multiple sources for maintaining its infrastructure, providing services for children and mothers, and maintaining projects such as publications and research.<sup>25</sup> Donations from private citizens and local fundraising activities in various branches and at the general headquarters constituted about 30 percent of CPS annual revenues. Its most significant sources of income came from renting out rooms, buildings, land, and equipment, as well as from a general pool of donations split among various organizations (*ortak iane*). Revenue shared by the government from the sale of welfare receipts (*şefkat fişleri*), luxury taxes, and an annual contribution by the government accounted for approximately 20 percent of CPS funds. Other income sources included serial subscriptions, the sale of tissue flowers (*rosette*), interest earned on monetary holdings, and revenue from rentals of "automatic toy machines" (play equipment and carnival rides) found in parks and gardens of cities and towns.<sup>26</sup>

In the early 1920s, the CPS had received large donations from Turkish expatriates, and contributions continued to come in through the 1930s,<sup>27</sup> charitable gifts constituted a relatively small fraction of

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25 According to Article 50 of the 1935 Constitution, the CPS acquired revenue from: annual membership dues; appropriations from the republican government, *evkaf* (pious foundations), and municipalities; income from possessions, assets, and workshops; revenue from various fundraisers such as exhibitions, performances, "welfare bazaars," and raffles; donations or charity. *Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu* 1935, p. 19.

26 See, for example, legislation giving the CPS the right to collect revenues from play equipment and carnival rides in parks, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Sicilli Kavanini Kanunlar* 1932a, pp. 74-75.

27 Akın (1996) outlines Dr. Fuad Umay's fundraising and public relations efforts in the United States in 1923. Umay's visit helped establish long-lasting

the annual CPS funding. The CPS sponsored many civic fundraising events, including balls, welfare bazaars, raffles, exhibitions, talks, and other entertainment programs. Smaller branches outside of centers such as Ankara and Istanbul might put on only one or two events a year. The events offered an opportunity for local elites to gather, promoting a sense of "civic consciousness" in addition to raising funds.

The CPS invested considerable financial resources in acquiring properties and constructing buildings to be used solely as revenue-generating rentals or to partially house CPS institutions and partially serve as rentals. Most of this development took place in Ankara, where the general headquarters was located. By the mid-1930s, the Ankara center collected rental revenues from a swimming pool, a casino, and a cinema. Rentals were seen as a sustainable strategy for earning money. Building expenditures, while high, were regarded as good investments for the future.

During the late Ottoman Empire, the state promoted the sale of special stamps to support the Children's Protection Society. Such practices continued under the republican leadership. In the early 1930s, the Istanbul municipality supported a regulation that would allow passengers on ferries, trains, and other forms of private transport to buy and use tickets to benefit the CPS instead of the ordinary tickets purchased for travel. In 1932, the Turkish Parliament mandated the Postal, Telegraph and Telephone Administration to set aside for the CPS a portion of fees earned from letters, telegrams, and other forms of special-delivery mail sent over a ten-day period during the month of the Children's Holiday.<sup>28</sup> While the state made provisions to sell special stamps and tickets, and to impose other taxlike charges, overall contributions made by the Turkish state (at the municipal and national level) still accounted for a relatively small proportion of the annual CPS budget. In 1936, for example, the government gave 21,498 TL to the Children's Protection Society; in 1937, the figure dropped to 20,447 TL. These figures were significantly less than the annual expected

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links with Turkish expatriate populations in the United States that would continue to provide a significant amount of monetary support throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The trip also deeply influenced Umay's vision for the CPS's work in the next decade. Umay visited Columbia University's School of Social Work and other child-welfare institutions in New York, Chicago, and Washington, DC; he also gave an official talk at an international social work congress in Washington, DC, where he spoke on the Ottoman *vakıf* system.

<sup>28</sup> *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Sicilli Kavanini Kanunlar* 1932b, p. 271.

state contribution of 27,000 TL that the CPS had budgeted for. 1936 and 1937.<sup>29</sup> This level of funding from the state reflected approximately one-tenth of the operating expenditures in 1936 and one-twelfth in 1937. At the same time, the CPS paid the government property taxes of 4,600 and 5,797 TL in 1936 and 1937, respectively. To indicate just how limited such funding actually was, the state's appropriations would not even have covered the total set aside for CPS publications and propaganda for the 1937 year (22,070 TL). The salaries of those working at the general headquarters, day-care center, and kindergarten in Ankara would have been covered (at 10,166 TL), but the expenses for water, electricity, and heating would have exceeded the government contribution (*Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu* 1938, p. 22).

As the CPS continued to grow and attempt to expand its projects and services across the country, the need to secure large amounts of funding also increased. A dominant concern of the CPS administration, then, not only involved the direct support of children and mothers; leaders also had to devote considerable energies to supporting a growing infrastructure and increasingly complex bureaucratic processes.

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The Children's Protection Society had grown considerably since its reorganization in 1921; by the mid-1930s, it boasted hundreds of new branches throughout the republic. The CPS arguably had become one of Turkey's most visible "national" organizations. The Society's leadership aspired to wide-ranging goals for lowering infant mortality, caring for needy primary-school children, and providing medical checkups for pregnant women and educational materials for mothers in the new republic. A careful reading of the print media and journals concerned with social issues in the 1930s reveals the tenuous nature of such officially sanctioned efforts to promote child health and welfare. Critics and a growing number of reformist elites were alarmed by the persistence of the "child question" in the 1930s. No longer could child poverty be explained away as a result of their parents being "martyred" during the pre-republican war years, or as the outcome of dislocation and want that pervaded during that time of upheaval. Child poverty was persisting, perhaps becoming even more entrenched after more than a decade of relative peace and reconstruction.

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29 This line item was recorded as assistance from the government. *Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu* 1938, p. 21.

Annual reports in the 1930s reveal a more mixed picture of the "reach" of the CPS throughout the republic. While in 1937 the Society boasted of having 585 centers and branches and 19,405 registered members, many of these branches participated in limited numbers of activities. For smaller branches, local committees often took on a single project such as distributing clothing or school supplies to school-children, or feeding hot meals to children. Many focused on the celebrations and events of Children's Week, raising money to provide candy, chocolate, or special meals or to give clothing to poor children. Other branches focused on subsidizing circumcisions for orphaned boys or boys from poor families. While the numbers of CPS branch organizations had increased, by no means had the CPS established a uniform structure of services that would be provided throughout the country. Such a comprehensive design would have required far greater infusions of financial and human capital.

The numbers of needy children receiving sustained and substantial material assistance were relatively small, even at the general headquarters in Ankara. A listing of Turkish CPS properties and landholdings that existed between 1935 and 1937 is instructive of the relatively small number of institutions the Society was able to build and support (see Table 1).

By the early 1930s, when the new republic had passed through its first decade in relative peace, basic living conditions for the most vulnerable of groups appear not to have improved very much. As a writer for *Cumhuriyet* put it in 1935:

. . . [W]e are poor, very poor. We have hundreds and thousands of children who are hungry and neglected vagrants living on the streets. The majority of these children die and many of [those who live] are not being brought up properly. We must know that these neglected and dying children are the clean blood that flows in our veins. If we cannot save them from poverty and death, we will never be able to feel the real joy of living and we will not be able to say that we did our duty for the future. In our country the child question is not so simple that one or a few organizations will be able to tackle it. The state should take this as one of its most important tasks. The state is the expression of the society's will and our society is one that will depend on being led by the hand. (*Cumhuriyet* 1935, p. 5)

**Table 1.**  
**Land and Building Assets of the Children's Protection**  
**Society's General Headquarters and Branches<sup>30</sup>**

Numbers		
Institutions	1935	1937
Ana Kucağı (orphanage for infants)	3	3
Day care	8	10
Milk Depots	10	10
Clinics	25	26
Childbirth Centers	1	1
Child-care Center	1	1
Soup Kitchens	28	36
Şefkat Yurdu (a type of orphanage)	13	15
Orphanages (older children)	3	3
Playgrounds	28	33
Bathhouses	6	6
Movie Theaters	7	8
Child-care Museum	—	1
Reading Rooms	1	4
School for Child-care Workers	1	1
Schools for Mothers	2	2
Buildings	18	19
Pasture, meadows, orchards	1	7
Vacant lots	—	2
Total	155	159

The author wrote those lines in a column drawing attention to a series of Suad Derviş's articles on the status of children in Turkey. In that series, Derviş sometimes subtly and at other times explicitly critiqued the work of the CPS as being inadequate to meet the overwhelming needs of Turkish children. In the seventh installment, Derviş described what she learned on a visit to the Alemdar branch of the Children's Protection Society in Istanbul (Derviş 1935, p. 7). The branch secretary explained that neighborhood branches' budgets were

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<sup>30</sup> Taken from a table presented in Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu 1938, p. 14.

allocated at the annual meetings. The Alemdar branch collected contributions from performances, entertainment, the sale of buttons, and balls. Upon learning that the branch had a kitchen able to feed 30 to 33 children, Derviş asked if that meant the Alemdar neighborhood had only a small number of hungry children. The secretary replied: "Not true, madam. Our neighborhood is the most crowded. We have many schools. Of course, in these schools the number of needy children is more than 30, but our ability to help is limited by our means." After listening to an account of the number of children and families that various philanthropic societies in the Alemdar neighborhood had helped in the past year, Derviş remarked, "This is not insignificant. But in the face of necessity this was like a needle in the haystack. Whichever family's door one knocks on, one hears, 'They are not helping us.'" Suad Derviş concluded with the thought that the number of people who benefited from the work of philanthropic associations was certainly much smaller than the number of needy, and that child welfare had to be better addressed by social laws and the state.

Even though the accomplishments of the CPS during the early republic were significant, CPS leaders were acutely aware that the Society could not meet the needs of most Turkish children. Founding member and longtime CPS head Dr. Fuad Umay expressed a desire to ground welfare efforts more deeply within the state apparatus. Regarding the inability of Ankara's orphanage (*Ana Kucağı*) to take in new infants, Umay stated: "Because our expenses have been increasing, the number of children we are able to help decreases and this saddens us. Our goal of fighting children's mortality seems farther away. We request from the government that they find a solution. The continuation of this situation will not be beneficial for our country . . ."<sup>31</sup> In a general statement for the 1936-37 Biennial Report, the CPS asserted its case more directly: "Undoubtedly it is recognized that in order to respond to the needs of our children and mothers all around our country, what we need is the concern of the State (*devlet*)—not of a given society (*cemiyet*)<sup>32</sup> or administration (*hükümet*)" (*Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu* 1938, p. 11).

Whether recognized externally (as through the eyes of activists such as socialist feminist Suad Derviş) or acknowledged internally (as

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31 Reprinted as a quote in *Çocuk Esirgeme Kurumu* 1938, p. 11.

32 Here "society" is meant as "organization" or "association."

by longtime founder and leader Dr. Fuad Umay), it was clear by the mid-1930s that the work of a single semivoluntary association like the Children's Protection Society could solve neither the multifaceted and entrenched issue of child poverty nor other social and health problems that corresponded with it. Outside critics as well as CPS leaders felt that without greater investment by the state, the Society's ambitious goals could not be met. Despite being closely aligned with the state, and publicly proclaiming the need for further state support of its goals, the Society was largely unsuccessful in securing either more financial support or a transformation and consolidation of state and private initiatives to support child welfare under the auspices of a national children's bureau or agency. Even though the CPS was widely regarded as the most important "national" organization working on behalf of children, the Society was at best an uneasy surrogate institution for state-organized welfare. Whether researching, educating, publicizing, or delivering services to children and mothers, the CPS had exceeded the bounds of what realistically could have been accomplished.

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