

May Day 2021 and the struggle for international socialism in Turkey

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The following speech was delivered by Ula? Ate?ci, a leader of the Sosyalist E?itlik (Socialist Equality Group) in Turkey, to the 2021 International May Day Online Rally held by the World Socialist Web Site and the International Committee of the Fourth International on May 1.

Revolutionary greetings from the Socialist Equality Group in Turkey.

As the pandemic intensifies the contradictions of global capitalism, we greet May Day 2021 amid growing geopolitical tensions and war dangers in the region surrounding Turkey.

Thirty years of imperialist war since the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991 have not only shattered the region, but also sowed the seeds of new conflicts and wars.

The NATO powers led by the United States have backed the Ukrainian regime's military threats against Russia since President Joe Biden took office. These threats also target the growing economic influence of China, which the US has declared its main "great power" rival. With Turkey's Bosphorus Straits and the entire Black Sea now a major flashpoint, imperialist recklessness could trigger a nuclear conflict threatening millions.

The bloody war that broke out between Turkish-backed Azerbaijan and Russian-backed Armenia last summer was a warning: great power rivalries are mounting in the Caucasus.

The Biden administration, which has made clear that it will continue Donald Trump's "take the oil" policy, is continuing the US military occupation in northeast Syria, threatening not only Damascus but also Moscow and Tehran. Syria, where a decade-long NATO war has led to over 500,000 deaths and 10 million people becoming refugees, is a dangerous flashpoint. Turkey retains a military presence in the north against the US-backed Kurdish militias, and the US and Israel continue their air strikes against Syrian troops and Iranian-backed militias.

Washington, Israel and the Gulf oil sheikdoms are continuing war preparations against Iran, where the pandemic has been exacerbated by brutal US sanctions, killing tens of thousands.

Another flashpoint of geopolitical tensions is the Eastern Mediterranean. Maritime boundary disputes between Turkey and French-backed Greece over energy resources constitute a direct threat of military conflict between so-called "NATO allies." These have been intertwined with the bloody wars

NATO launched in Libya and Syria in 2011, in response to the revolutionary uprisings of the working class in Egypt and Tunisia.

Ankara's recent summons to the French and Greek ambassadors after another naval incident in the Mediterranean shows that these so-called NATO allies are teetering on the verge of war.

The most serious warnings are necessary. As the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) wrote in its statement titled "Socialism and the Fight against Imperialist War" in 2014: "Another imperialist bloodbath is not only possible; it is inevitable unless the international working class intervenes on the basis of a revolutionary Marxist program."

This emphasizes the urgency of building the ICFI, the leadership of the world Trotskyist movement, which places the struggle against imperialist war at the center of its strategy of world socialist revolution.

Turkey is emerging as an epicenter of the pandemic due to the murderous "herd immunity" policies implemented by President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government.

With between 40 and 60 thousand cases per day, Turkey has the most new infections in Asia after India, which is reporting 350,000 cases per day. The number of COVID-19 deaths is approaching 40,000, according to official figures that have repeatedly been shown to be manipulated to underestimate the death toll.

Even according to these unreliable numbers, while nearly 30,000 people died of coronavirus in the 13 months after March 2020, this number climbed to 8,000 in April alone.

The main culprit of this massacre is the Erdo?an government, which from the beginning determined the policy in line with the profit interests of the ruling class. However, the bourgeois opposition parties led by the Republican People's Party (CHP) have been complicit in this policy and raised no serious objection in the parliament. They pursued the very same policy in the cities under their control.

These infections and deaths were an inevitable result of the "opening" policy announced at the beginning of March.

While even limited restrictions were lifted, most schools were opened to in-person education. Erdo?an's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) held mass party congresses in

several provinces.

As public anger against this policy of “social murder” grew, President Erdoğan declared a so-called “full lockdown” for 18 days starting on April 29, 2021. Erdoğan said that his main concern was to prevent damage to “trade and tourism.”

Almost all workers are exempted from social-distancing measures so they can go to non-essential workplaces to generate profits for Turkish and international investors. Moreover, no social support is given to small business owners, workers and others affected by the measures.

In Turkey, where real unemployment and food inflation are both over 30 percent, one of the most striking expressions of working class misery is the fate of millions of refugees fleeing war. Literally abandoned, they are not even included in the vaccination schedule.

Moreover, in 2020, while the Istanbul stock market broke records, approximately 90 percent of state economic support to combat the pandemic went to businesses, companies and banks. While banks and large conglomerates made huge profits amid mass deaths, millions of workers were forced onto short-time work allowances or unpaid leave. Hundreds of thousands of workers were also fired from their jobs.

The class struggle is rising as the pandemic intensifies social tensions that are already heading for an explosion. This is still in its early stages, in Turkey and internationally. Workers in many industries are fighting back against forced unpaid leave, layoffs or post-pandemic austerity measures and do not back down despite severe police state repression.

Rising class tensions are also eliminating what is left of Turkish democracy. The ruling class led by Erdoğan is scrapping democratic rights and building a presidential dictatorship, aimed above all at the working class. The government is threatening to ban the Kurdish-nationalist Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), in order to divide the working class with nationalism and divert social anger.

The Socialist Equality Group is irreconcilably opposed to these attacks on democratic rights. Our opposition to police-state measures against the Kurdish people does not, however, signify any lessening of our opposition to the bankrupt politics of Kurdish nationalism. The HDP is a pro-NATO and pro-EU party that supports the US intervention in Syria. Moreover, it orients to Turkish bourgeois parties like the CHP, the far-right Good Party, the Islamist Felicity Party and two AKP split-offs, which it calls “forces of democracy.”

Whatever their tactical differences, their support for “herd immunity” policies and imperialist war vindicates Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution. These parties, subordinated to imperialism, are incapable of defending democratic or social rights. That task falls to the international working class, fighting to overthrow capitalism as part of the world socialist revolution.

As workers enter into struggle, they face not only the AKP government, backed by the fascist Nationalist Movement

Party, but also the bourgeois opposition parties and their trade union allies. This became clear in the strikes of thousands of workers in two separate municipalities in Istanbul recently. The CHP, which manages these municipalities, was no less hostile to the working class than the AKP. Moreover, it was the so-called “leftist” DİSK trade union confederation that sold out the strikes.

As the pandemic began, DİSK bureaucrats pledged to stop production at factories wherever positive cases were detected but never did such a thing.

Once again, they demonstrated their readiness to serve the ruling class and its state by “working together” with the government, holding a joint press conference with the widely hated Turkish interior minister. While DİSK leaders met with the interior minister, police under the same ministry’s command attacked activists who made a press release on May Day.

The complicity of all the trade unions in back-to-work and back-to-school policies and their efforts to contain the growing working class opposition shows that the way forward for workers is to build rank-and-file committees independent of the pro-capitalist unions in every workplace, country and internationally.

On this basis, we have initiated a Rank-and-File Committee for Safe Education in Turkey to unite and mobilize wide social opposition against the school reopenings last February, as part of rank-and-file committees globally spearheaded by the ICFI. As the Socialist Equality Group, we fully support the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. This is the only internationalist and socialist response to the global policy of death by the ruling class, preparing the great class battles that lie ahead.

We urge all those listening to us today to contact us to build rank-and-file committees in their workplaces, schools and neighborhoods and organize an international counteroffensive of the working class. This is an integral part of the struggle to build sections of the ICFI in Turkey and internationally.



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