

The issues in the Turkish health care workers national strike

By the Socialist Equality Group (Turkey)
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The one-day warning strike across the country organized by the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), the main organization of physicians in Turkey, and various health care workers unions yesterday raises critical issues for Turkish and the international working class.

The Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu (Socialist Equality Group, SEG) supports this strike movement, and calls on all workers and youth to draw the necessary lessons for the development of an independent political and social movement of the international working class.

The strike, triggered by the refusal of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government to improve the economic and social conditions of all health care workers through a regulation in the parliament, drew wide participation. Medical students also supported the strike by boycotting classes.

Providing care only for emergency patients, dialysis patients, pregnant women, pediatric emergencies, cancer patients and intensive care patients, and at COVID-19 clinics, the health care workers marched and issued press statements in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Bursa, Diyarbakir and many other cities, declaring, "We have run out of patience for health policies that favor business, not science, life and labor."

Health care workers, who are at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19, are demanding increased salaries, the elimination of staff shortages and improvements in their social rights in the face of the unprecedented rise in the cost of living and worsening working conditions. They are protesting the privatization of the health care system in the interests of profit. They also state that their actions and protests will continue if these demands are not met.

This national strike, which followed last week's limited work stoppages in hospitals, is part of an upsurge in the class struggle internationally amid a deepening global capitalist crisis and the raging COVID-19 pandemic.

The working class all over the world is beginning to resist the social onslaught by the ruling class, which has continued for decades with the support of the unions and is now exacerbated with the pandemic. A workers' counteroffensive is building up. The struggle of health care workers in Turkey reflects growing opposition among all sections of the working class and inspires tens of millions of workers around the world, who are in very similar conditions.

This strike movement is developing under conditions where the

pandemic rages and the Omicron variant spreads, while the government has taken no public health measures. The human cost of keeping non-essential businesses open and pursuing a "herd immunity" policy in the profit interests of the ruling class has been 80,000 deaths in Turkey, including at least 500 health care workers. While the actual death toll is estimated at over 200,000, officially nearly 10 million people have been infected of COVID-19.

Moreover, mass infections and deaths, which the government is trying to normalize, continue. Approximately 20,000 cases are detected and 180 people die of COVID-19 every day. This murderous policy is being implemented without any objections from the bourgeois opposition and the trade unions.

The failure to take necessary scientific public health measures to end the COVID-19 pandemic and the intensifying exploitation of the working class stem from the same root cause: the unhindered drive of the capitalist ruling class to accumulate private wealth. The fact that billionaires worldwide increased their wealth by US\$3.6 trillion as millions died from the pandemic epitomizes the criminal character of the capitalist system.

The anger created by this colossal social crime, combined with the unprecedented cost of living, is radicalizing millions of workers and young people and pushing them onto the path of struggle.

While annual official inflation in Turkey reached 21.31 percent in November, the independent Inflation Research Group (ENAGroup) announced that real annual inflation reached 58.65 percent. The Turkish lira (TL) continues to fall against foreign currencies. The US dollar has risen from 7TL to nearly 15TL today. The monthly minimum wage, at 2,825 TL (less than US\$200), is currently the lowest in Europe on a US dollar or euro basis.

This is fueling demands for a substantial increase in minimum wage negotiations directly affecting millions of workers and their families. In addition, the contract negotiations involving nearly 150,000 metal and auto workers ended in disagreement. The 12 percent raise offered by MESS, the organization of metal and automotive companies, represents the bourgeoisie's declaration of war on the working class. The demand for a strike is rising among the metal workers, who want an upward revision in their proposed contracts from the pro-company trade unions.

Workers forced to go to factories and workplaces to create profits for the corporate and financial elite during a deadly

pandemic and educators forced to go to unsafe schools are protesting the government and the decline in their living standards on social media, demanding a dramatic increase in wages. Hundreds of thousands of young people are calling for remote learning as the Omicron variant is spreading across the country.

The conditions for a massive social explosion are ripening. The ruling class and all its political representatives fear and are preparing for the eruption of this social anger, which is brewing among millions of workers and youth, in the form of a mass working-class movement independent of the unions.

President Erdoğan's government, whose popular support has been declining steadily in the latest polls, has no other solution but to combine totally inadequate measures and police-state violence against this developing movement.

Reflecting the growing social opposition among the population, several street interviewers were placed under house arrest in the recent days, while police attacked a forum on the "economic crisis" at Ankara University on Tuesday, detaining at least 30 students.

A pro-government law professor's statement, "Due to the severe economic depression that seems inevitable, we need to be prepared as a society for a declaration of the state of emergency," makes clear the government's determination to suppress the developing social movement by force. It also creates a danger that if Erdoğan is certain to lose a possible national election, he may take a step similar to former President Donald Trump's January 6 coup attempt in the United States.

In response, the bourgeois opposition led by the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) is trying to channel the rising social opposition behind itself and into the channels of the capitalist order by calling for early elections.

The Socialist E?itlik Grubu warns millions of workers and youth who hope to change their unbearable living conditions that a new government led by the bourgeois opposition is not a solution.

The common problems facing the working class in Turkey and internationally (a preventable pandemic, high cost of living and growing social inequality, abolition of democratic rights, the drive toward dictatorship and the danger of world war) stem from the capitalist system and bourgeois rule. The only way forward is through the establishment of workers' power as part of the struggle for international socialism.

The CHP-led opposition ("Nation Alliance"), which is at least as pro-imperialist and hostile to the working class as Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), will form a pro-European Union (EU) and pro-NATO government, if it comes to power, and will seek to violently suppress the mobilizing working class.

The opposition parties follow the same criminal policy against the pandemic in the municipalities they govern, respond to strikes in the same way as the government, and maintain close relations with the EU, NATO and the main organizations of Turkish bourgeoisie. These facts confirm the warning of the SEG.

A possible government formed by the bourgeois opposition will not be an alternative but a continuation of the Erdoğan regime. It would include the far-right Good Party, which broke away from Erdoğan's fascist ally Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), and DEVA and the Future Party, which broke away from the AKP.

The trade unions and pseudo-left organizations such as the Workers' Party of Turkey (T?P), the Labour Party (EMEP) and the Left Party play an extremely reactionary role with their support of the bourgeois opposition, which is as afraid of a social explosion as the government.

While the pro-opposition D?SK union confederation seeks to control the growing opposition among the workers by organizing rallies in several cities, the pseudo-left organizations are directing the workers to support the unions and the bourgeois opposition.

Far from fighting to end the pandemic, pseudo-left organizations no longer speak about COVID-19, while making plans to come to power with the CHP and the Kurdish bourgeois-nationalist HDP (People's Democratic Party), with whom they work in close cooperation in various unions and municipalities.

The pseudo-left organizations are attempting to establish a so-called "third front" under the leadership of the HDP and, through this alliance, to direct the masses of workers and youth, who have begun to mobilize and turn toward the left, behind the bourgeois opposition led by the CHP.

Their open orientation to the Nation Alliance is revealed in a recent statement by T?P leader Erkan Ba?, who announced, "We can finish this job [i.e., defeat Erdoğan] by voting for a candidate in the first round for whom we can vote in the second round [of the presidential election]."

This right-wing "lesser evil" policy will only bring disappointment and destruction for the working class. One of the most recent examples of this fraud was the pseudo-left forces' support for Democrat Joe Biden against Republican Donald Trump in the 2020 US elections. Continuing with Trump's murderous response to the pandemic at home, Biden escalates aggression against China and Russia, raising the danger of a nuclear world war.

The only social force that can stop the pandemic and put an end to the high cost of living, social inequality, dictatorship and the danger of war is the international working class. There are no shortcuts to saving lives and improving living standards. These steps require a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the bourgeoisie.

On May 1, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) called for the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). It recently launched the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic to develop such a movement globally, calling upon scientists, health care workers, working people and youth to support and join the IWA-RFC and the Inquest.

The inevitable social explosion of the working class needs to be equipped with a revolutionary political perspective and organization independent of all pro-capitalist parties and unions. This means building the Socialist Equality Party as the Turkish section of the ICFI within the working class.



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