

May Day 2022: Turkey's role in the US-NATO war drive against Russia amidst growing class struggle

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This is the report delivered by Ula? Ate?çi to the 2022 International May Day Online Rally held on May 1. Ate?çi is a leader of the Sosyalist Isitlik Grubu, the Socialist Equality Group in Turkey. To view all speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

Revolutionary greetings from the Socialist Equality Group (SEG), the Turkish organization in political solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

The international working class welcomes May Day 2022 amid an ongoing war on Ukrainian soil between the US-led NATO powers and Russia that threatens all of humanity with a nuclear world war. This imminent danger is accompanied by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed nearly 20 million people worldwide as a result of an official policy of mass infection and death.

In Turkey, where nearly all measures have been lifted to stop the spread of COVID-19, President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government has almost completely lifted the obligation to wear masks indoors.

The official number of COVID-19 deaths in Turkey is approaching 100,000 as a result of a criminal policy driven by the profit interests of the ruling class everywhere. This policy is implemented with the direct or indirect support of the bourgeois opposition parties, the trade unions and the pseudo-left. In fact, the SEG is the only political tendency in Turkey that calls on the working class to fight for a global Zero-COVID policy to end the pandemic and stop deaths.

Despite unscientific claims that the pandemic is over, 60,000 of these deaths have occurred in the past year. About 17,000 people have died from this preventable disease in 2022 alone. Moreover, according to the calculations of Güçlü Yaman, a member of the Pandemic Working Group of the Turkish Medical Association, the total number of excess deaths in Turkey during the pandemic exceeds 281,000.

On the other hand, Turkey, located in the Black Sea region next to Ukraine and Russia, is at the center of the war in terms of its military-strategic ties as well as its geographical location. As a NATO state, Turkey backs Ukraine politically and militarily, but it also has important economic and military ties with Russia. Although Ankara's position prompts it to seek mediation between Kiev and Moscow despite the US-led escalation against Russia, Turkey ultimately continues to function as an outpost of NATO imperialism in the region.

Despite its various disagreements, the Turkish bourgeoisie has been complicit in the interventions and wars for regime change of US imperialism and its allies in the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa ever since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The war in Ukraine is a product of this 30-year imperialist war drive and NATO's relentless eastward expansion. According to one poll, almost 80 percent of the population opposes war in Ukraine and says Turkey should remain neutral in the war.

These imperialist wars of plunder, which killed millions of people and turned tens of millions into refugees, are marked by numerous war crimes documented in detail by the *World Socialist Web Site*. Stretching from Yugoslavia to Iraq, from Afghanistan to Libya, Syria and Yemen, they received the direct or indirect support of the Turkish state.

To these crimes must be added Israel's ongoing persecution of the Palestinian people. Ankara hypocritically condemns this from time to time according to the course of its relations with Israel, but Turkey itself continues the anti-democratic pressure against the Kurdish people and elected politicians within the country.

Condemning Russia's reactionary invasion, which plays into the hands of US-NATO imperialism and serves to divide the Russian and Ukrainian working class, the Erdo?an government is prosecuting an illegal military invasion in Syria and Iraq and maintains permanent military presences in these countries. This policy is implemented with the

support of the pro-NATO Turkish bourgeois opposition parties.

The last military operation launched by Turkey in mid-April against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) forces in the territory of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government has had basically two objectives. First, it seeks to pave the way for the transport of Iraqi gas to Europe via Turkey, as part of US-backed plans to end Europe's energy dependence on Russia. Second, the ruling class wants to use the war to suppress and divert externally class tensions that have become uncontrollable at home.

The SEG advocates the withdrawal of all NATO forces, including Turkey, from Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. The basic democratic rights of the Kurdish people must be recognized, and political prisoners released.

Inflation in food and fuel prices, a global phenomenon, had reached record levels in Turkey even before the start of the war in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia. This situation, caused by economic policies pursued for the benefit of finance capital for decades, together with the disruption caused by the pandemic in supply chains, has made living conditions intolerable for millions of workers' families. During the same period, the Turkish government has overseen an unprecedented transfer of wealth from the working class to the capitalist ruling class.

While official annual inflation reached 61 percent in March, the real inflation rate rose to 142 percent, according to a more reliable report of the independent Inflation Research Group. With Turkey importing about 80 percent of its wheat from Ukraine and Russia, war and sanctions have made Turkey an epicenter of the global food crisis.

While North Africa and the Middle East region are the hardest hit by the food and fuel crisis, mass protests and strikes are spreading from Sudan to Kenya, and Iran to Greece. The wildcat strike wave that swept through Turkey in January and February 2022 was a harbinger of the emerging movement of the international working class.

According to data compiled by the Labor Studies Group, at least 106 wildcat strikes occurred in just the first two months of 2022. The average annual number of wildcat strikes in the previous five years was only 97 a year. This points to an intensifying and increasingly militant movement of the working class. Doctors and health care workers have organized consecutive nationwide strikes in the last months, and they are preparing to go on a broader strike in May.

Most importantly, this working-class movement, as it does around the world, is developing largely independently of and in defiance of the unions. The unions are working in close cooperation with the ruling class to strangle the developing movement of the working class. Some of the unions such as DİSK are under direct control of pseudo-leftist forces.

Against them, the SEG calls for the formation of rank-and-file committees, independent of the unions, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

One of the reactionary tools used by the bourgeoisie to suppress the rising class struggle and divide the working class is the anti-refugee campaign. Vulnerable refugees, who had to flee their countries due to imperialist wars in the region, especially Syria, have increasingly become the target of the entire political establishment.

The SEG vehemently rejects calls to "return the refugees into their countries" launched by the bourgeois opposition parties supported by the pseudo-left. Workers cannot unite and fight the bourgeoisie without defending refugees and rejecting national chauvinism. All refugees and immigrants should have the opportunity to live and work in the country they want, including Turkey, with full citizenship rights.

State prosecution of defendants in the Gezi Park case also ultimately aims to intimidate growing social opposition in the working class. The Gezi Park protests against social inequality and authoritarian policies, attended by millions in 2013, deeply shook the Erdoğan government. Erdoğan prosecuted over a dozen prominent personalities involved in the protests and, after their acquittal in 2020, re-launched their prosecution, ultimately handing down heavy sentences against the defendants last Monday.

Today, the entire political establishment, including the pseudo-left, is united in seeking to prevent growing anger and opposition within the working class from erupting in a mass revolutionary movement. While the largely discredited Erdoğan government seeks to survive based on policies of war and repression, the bourgeois opposition tries to channel the growing social opposition to the upcoming elections.

The SEG insists that the establishment parties of the Turkish bourgeoisie, which is deeply tied to imperialism, are organically incapable of solving the fundamental problems of millions of workers and the oppressed masses.

The struggle to put an end to the deadly pandemic policy, imperialist war, dictatorship and social inequality means fighting for workers' power and international socialism, and against capitalism and bourgeois rule. We urge all our listeners to join the building of the ICFI and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties, the only political tendency that advances this program in the world.



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