What does the newly-established “Socialist Union of Forces” in Turkey stand for?

Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu
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On August 20, the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), the Left Party, the Communist Movement of Turkey (TKH) and the Revolutionary Movement announced the establishment of the Socialist Union of Forces (SGB) with a statement titled “Together we claim the future of our country!”

Turkey is heading towards presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023 amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, NATO’s war on Russia in Ukraine, and as growing US provocations against China threaten humanity with a nuclear Third World War. As the cost of living rises and poverty deepens, the growing opposition within the working class is manifesting itself in the form of wildcat strikes, and the class struggle is intensifying.

There is a growing sense among the masses that both the ruling “People's Alliance” of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an and the “Nation Alliance” of bourgeois opposition parties, which claims to be an alternative to it, are political representatives of the ruling class, hostile to the working class and incapable of solving any fundamental social question.

In this context, the founding statement of the SGB, composed of Stalinist and pseudo-left organizations, puts forward a program of nationalism and so-called anti-imperialism based on the interests of the affluent sections of the middle class in Turkey, not the international working class. The main function of the misnamed SGB is to try to drive rising social opposition into safe political channels and block the development of a genuine revolutionary socialist alternative for the working class.

This is also the main function of another middle class alliance, formed under the leadership of the Kurdish bourgeois-nationalist Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) and including other pseudo-left parties such as the Workers’ Party of Turkey (T?P) and EMEP.

The main distinction between these two alliances is tactical, not strategic. Both so-called “left” alliances are essentially oriented towards the bourgeoisie, advancing a nationalist, parliamentary reform program and rejecting a program for international socialism based on the working class. However, it is the predominance of Turkish nationalism that has pushed the components of the SGB not to join the HDP-led alliance.

The founding statement of the SGB makes clear the unbridgeable class gap separating nationalist middle-class pseudo-left politics and the international Marxist-Trotskyist perspective defended by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its followers in Turkey, the Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu (SEG).

In the statement, there is not a single word about the pandemic, which has caused billions of preventable infections and millions of preventable deaths due to the murderous policy of mass infection pursued by the ruling classes internationally since the beginning of 2020.

According to official figures, approximately 6.5 million people worldwide and 100,000 people in Turkey have died from COVID-19. While the real number of deaths in the world is estimated to exceed 20 million, according to calculations by Güçlü Yaman, a member of the Pandemic Working Group of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), the number of excess deaths in Turkey reached 298,000 as of August 18.

The response of the ruling class to the pandemic has been to transfer enormous wealth from the working class to finance capital, while forcing workers to risk their health and lives at work to generate profits. With rapidly rising inflation in Turkey and around the world, an unprecedented attack on the living conditions of working people is underway.

The SGB’s silence on this ongoing catastrophe is not a simple matter of omission. In fact, it is an expression of the complicity of the pseudo-left forces in the ruling class’ anti-worker response to the pandemic. This response was implemented with the approval of the bourgeois opposition parties and the trade unions. In this context, it is no coincidence that pro-opposition D?SK trade union confederation’s general secretary, Adnan Serdaro?lu, and many figures linked to the CHP signed the SGB statement.

However, the ICFI and SEG have fought from the beginning to mobilize the international working class for a scientific public health policy to stop the pandemic and save lives. This means the global implementation of the Zero COVID policy that was successfully implemented in China. As political representatives of the affluent middle class, profiting from the continued exploitation of workers and the stability of the financial markets, the SGB and other pseudo-left groups are not concerned about the raging pandemic, let alone in advancing a program to stop it.

The statement does not directly mention NATO’s imperialist war against Russia in Ukraine, but it declares: “At a time when imperialism is dragging our geography to destruction by opening new war fronts, and the war organization NATO is accelerating its expansionist policies with the most dangerous war scenarios, the goal we have been expressing for years is even more urgent: Turkey must leave NATO. The foreign bases in our country must be closed.”

The SGB has no perspective, however, for ending the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine or eliminating the threat of a third world war posed to the international working class. Moreover, there is no mention of the complicity of the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisie in NATO’s imperialist wars for decades across the Middle East and the Balkans.

The SGB’s orientation towards the bourgeoisie is clearly revealed in the sentence, “We are determined in the struggle against imperialism for an independent and sovereign Turkey.” What is meant here is not workers’ power established in Turkey as part of the international socialist revolution, but the reform of the existing bourgeois regime. The class-collaborationist so-called “anti-imperialism” of the SGB is diametrically opposed to the Trotskyist opposition to imperialism, based on the mobilization of the working class on the program of world socialist revolution.

The Turkish nationalist character of the SGB is evident in the fact that the Kurdish question, the main democratic problem in Turkey, is not even mentioned in the statement. “We all yearn for a free republic in which

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everyone will live equally and fraternally and in which discrimination and antagonisms based on ethnic, religious, sectarian and gender-based differences are eliminated by establishing citizenship," the SGB says. Neither Erdo?an's Nation Alliance nor the CHP-led People's Alliance will object to these words.

The Kurdish question, an international problem with over a century of history, has claimed tens of thousands of lives in the last four decades. It is deeply intertwined with imperialist interventions in the Middle East, especially since the US launched the Gulf War amid the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union. Today, thousands of Kurdish politicians, including former HDP leaders, are still imprisoned in an undemocratic manner.

The decades-long oppression of the Kurdish people constitutes one of the most concrete proofs of the bourgeoisie's inability to solve basic democratic problems in the age of imperialism, as Leon Trotsky explained in his Theory of Permanent Revolution. These problems, such as the Kurdish question, can only be solved if the working class, backed by the oppressed masses, overthrows the imperialist-backed bourgeois regimes in the Middle East as part of the international socialist revolution, seizes power and establishes a truly democratic and socialist federation.

However, the Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu fights for the immediate fulfillment of the basic democratic demands of the Kurdish people: Kurdish must be made an official language, education in the mother tongue must be introduced in public schools, all obstacles to Kurdish language and culture must be removed, and all political prisoners must be released.

The SGB's statement criticizes the "Islamist reaction" of Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, but treats it only as a problem of the AKP—ignoring the drive to authoritarianism and dictatorship by the ruling classes across the world. The statement begins by declaring: "During its two decades in power, AKP has established a full-scale pro-market and collaborationist political Islamist regime by eliminating the gains of the Republic one by one."

The struggle against reaction is treated as a struggle only against the AKP and Islamic sects or societies. However, Islamist reaction and the erosion of secularism did not start with the AKP. Despite important democratic achievements such as the abolition of the Sultanate and the Caliphate, the Turkish bourgeoisie has proven itself incapable of establishing true secularism due to the class relations on which it based its rule.

The entire history of the Turkish Republic vindicates Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, which states that the struggle for genuine secularism as a fundamental democratic issue can only be realized through the struggle of the working class against bourgeois rule and for socialism.

The SGB's statement is an example of "popular frontism," orienting to supposedly "progressive" wings of the bourgeoisie, in this case towards the Nation Alliance, against the working class. It is dominated by conceptions from the anti-Marxist arsenal of Stalinism, such as "people" (9 times), "country" (12) and "patriot" (2). Words from the lexicon of Marxism such as working class, class struggle, socialism, socialist (except for the name of the alliance), workers' government or workers' power are absent.

"This monstrous regime, in which all decisions about the future of the country and the people are concentrated in a single person who represents the interests of domestic and foreign capital, reaction and imperialism, must be abolished," the SGB states, adding: "A holistic mechanism, including the electoral system, must be established to ensure the strong participation of the working people in politics."

The Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu advocates the abolition of the presidential regime established after a controversial referendum in 2017, the repeal of all anti-democratic laws, including the "anti-terror law," and the departure of Erdo?an. But apart from a workers' government established by the independent revolutionary mobilization of the working class, the claim that Erdo?an's departure and the abolition of the presidential system will lead to a "flowering of democracy" is a lie.

The SEG emphasizes that burning problems facing the masses cannot be solved on a national basis, under bourgeois rule and the capitalist profit system. When this international, class-based Marxist approach is ignored, every political attempt will only result in the support of different factions of the capitalist class.

What is meant by "a holistic mechanism" is nothing but a new packaging of the bourgeoisie's domination over the economy and the working class. Indeed, the statement only once mentions the pro-NATO and pro-European Union Nation Alliance, which is opposing the People's Alliance led by the AKP and the fascistic Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The Nation Alliance consists of the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP), the far-right Good Party, the Islamist Felicity Party, and other right-wing parties like the Democratic Party and AKP split-offs DEVA and Future.

"It is clear that the right-wing and pro-business character and policies of the Nation Alliance cannot be a solution to the real problems of our country and our people," the statement declares. However, the previous statements and practices of the components of the SGB reveal that their so-called opposition to the Nation Alliance is not a principled one, and that they are fully open to supporting its presidential candidate as a "lesser evil" against Erdo?an.

As a matter of fact, TKP General Secretary Kemal Okuyan said in an interview in January: "I will say it very clearly so that it can be understood. Let's say Erdo?an and [CHP leader Kemal] K?l?çdaro?lu come side by side in the second round. We are already saying what we have to say about Erdo?an. We will also say our word about K?l?çdaro?lu and the opposition in general in a very clear way. But we would say 'Erdo?an should get out of the way of Turkey so that the people see that the alternative is not the solution' and we would ask for votes for K?l?çdaro?lu."

Moreover, answering questions about the SGB on the CHP-aligned Halk TV on August 22, Okuyan said, "We will not surrender to the existing alternatives, but also we will not help Erdo?an to be re-elected." With this, he was repeating that if the presidential election goes to a second round, they would support the bourgeois candidate opposing Erdo?an.

The TKP only stipulates that a "right-wing" candidate must not be fielded, as if CHP leader K?l?çdaro?lu or whatever candidate the right-wing Nation Alliance will run could truly be left-wing. The fact that this is also the only "condition" of the T?P, which emerged from a split with the TKP and allied with the HDP, makes clear that these parties agree in principle to confuse workers and young people turning to the left and to support the bourgeoisie.

The TKP is the sister party of the Stalinist Greek Communist Party (KKE). As the WSWS explained, its "history is steeped in the counter-revolutionary crimes of the Soviet bureaucracy. It supported the extermination of revolutionists by the Stalinist regime, and organized the killings of Trotskyists within Greece… The KKE endorsed and participated in bourgeois governments, with both New Democracy and Pasok."

Like the KKE, the TKP is an anti-Trotskyist and anti-working class party that still defends the crimes and lies of Stalinism, including the Great Terror of the 1930s. Its publishing house has published books by the pseudo-historian Grover Furr, reproducing the Stalinist lies of the 1930s.

Another key component of the SGB, the Left Party, had already formed an electoral alliance in the 2019 local elections with the CHP and the far-right Good Party, which broke away from the fascistic MHP. Alper Ta?, a leader of the Left Party's predecessor, the Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP), and currently a member of the Left Party's leadership, ran as the Nation Alliance's candidate for mayor of Beyo?lu district of Istanbul in the March 31, 2019 local elections and campaigned together with the

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Good Party.

The Left Party/ÖDP was and is still the sister party of the Greek pseudo-left Radical Left Coalition (Syriza), which carried out one of the greatest social attacks on the Greek working class. Elected in January 2015 based on promises to end the EU austerity policies imposed on Greece, Syriza blatantly betrayed its promises.

Like Syriza, the Left Party is also a part of the Party of the European Left (PEL) in the service of European imperialism. Their Spanish ally, the Podemos party, is in government with the big-business Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and has implemented a “let it rip” policy over the pandemic, leading to preventable deaths of hundreds of thousands. The PSOE-Podemos government in Spain has carried out massive attacks on the social conditions of the working class and on democratic rights, including the right to asylum.

The fact that the Communist Movement of Turkey (TKH), a party also emerging from the TKP, has declared a different approach to the Nation Alliance, emphasizes the unprincipled and pragmatic basis of the SGB. In a statement on March 22, TKH declared that it “will not support the forces of establishment, especially the CHP, and any of the bourgeois parties, and will not ask for votes on their behalf.”

This alliance of Stalinist parties, which puts forward a class collaborationist, national-opportunist program, has nothing progressive to offer the working class. On the contrary, the record of Stalinism and the pseudo-left, including their international allies, prove their hostility to the working class and their role as servants of the bourgeoisie.

Regardless of the maneuvering of pseudo-left alliances such as the SGB or the outcome of the 2023 elections, the fundamental problems arising from the global crisis of capitalism and bourgeois rule will persist: the pandemic, the threat of a nuclear third world war, the rising cost of living and social inequality, and authoritarianism and dictatorship.

The only social force capable of solving these problems is the international working class, which is beginning to come into action globally. The Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu, which irreconcilably opposes all bourgeois and petty-bourgeois alliances against the working class, is working to build the Turkish section of the ICFI, the only political tendency that provides this emerging movement an independent revolutionary perspective based on the strategy of the world socialist revolution. We call on all those who agree with this perspective to participate in the building of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi as the revolutionary leadership of the working class.

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