

Turkey celebrates centenary of the republic in shadow of war

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Tomorrow marks the centenary of the Turkish Republic, founded on 29 October 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. A number of official commemorations are of course planned. The Presidency’s Directorate of Communication has organized special video screenings to mark the centenary by installing giant screens in various squares in Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir.

According to the state-owned Anadolu Agency, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will visit Atatürk’s mausoleum in Ankara on Sunday and then participate in a Republic Day reception. He will attend the “100th Anniversary Official Parade Ceremony” at the Turkish Grand National Assembly and watch the Navy and Turkish Air Force parade in the Bosphorus in Istanbul. He will then deliver his “100th Anniversary Address” to the citizens.

The centenary is being celebrated, however, in the shadow of the Israeli genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza, which threatens to escalate into a war across the entire Middle East. Turkey is also deeply involved in NATO’s war with Russia in Ukraine, which lies just across the Black Sea from Turkey. As Washington and the European powers fully back the Israeli army and deploy their own forces across the Middle East, concerns are mounting in Ankara about a devastating regional or global conflict.

Broad masses of working people and youth in Turkey are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Republic as a great step forward in the struggle against imperialism and its accomplices in the Ottoman palace in Istanbul a century ago.

However, the fundamental world problems from which the proclamation of the Republic emerged in 1923 are resurgent today, across the Middle East and internationally: imperialist wars to re-divide the world, dictatorship and inequality.

The Ottoman Empire, defeated alongside Germany in the First World War, was invaded after the war by the armies of Britain, France, Italy and Greece. The resistance movement, which started in Anatolia with the support of the masses of workers and peasants, was eventually united under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal in the Grand National

Assembly established in Ankara. The war of national independence was fought mainly against Greek forces, who served as the proxy of Britain.

The October 1917 Revolution in Russia, led by Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, and the young Soviet Republic created by the October Revolution, gave a tremendous impulse to the struggle against colonialism in Turkey and around the world. Soviet Russia’s support for Ankara was crucial to the Turkish victory in the War of Independence in 1922.

The Sultanate, which had collaborated with the imperialist occupation and opposed the national liberation movement, was abolished in 1922. This was followed by the proclamation of the Republic in 1923 and the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924.

While the strong roots of the anti-imperialist sentiment and republican tradition that exist among the broad masses today lie here, the fundamental tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution remain unresolved.

The goals of achieving national unity and building a secular regime remained incomplete. What emerged under the bourgeois republic was not a coherent secularism, but the control and exploitation of Islam by the newly established state. On the day of the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, a state-affiliated Directorate of Religious Affairs was established.

Over the past century, all bourgeois parties and the state machine have always used Islam as a means to undermine the development of class consciousness and struggle of the workers. This is true for Erdoğan’s Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP), which has been in power since 2002, as well as for the Kemalist CHP and other parties.

Land reform was out of the question due to the new regime’s collaboration with the feudal lords, and the basic democratic rights of the Kurdish people and other minorities were disregarded from the outset, setting the stage for a bloody conflict that continues to this day.

The rights of the working class, including the right to strike and the right of organization were banned, while the

emerging communist movement was severely repressed. What was in name a democratic republic in reality had the character of an authoritarian, one-party regime.

Atatürk claimed the modern Turkish Republic was a “classless and united mass.” In reality, the class struggle as it existed at the time was the main driving force of events in Turkey, as throughout the world, over the past century.

Turkey is not only one of the most developed industrial countries and largest working classes in the region, but also one of the most unequal societies. This social inequality extracted a bloody price in the Turkish-Syrian earthquake of February 6, 2023: tens of thousands died preventable deaths in homes that were not earthquake-proof, and millions were left homeless.

The total indifference of all factions of the bourgeoisie to the danger of earthquakes that still threatens millions in the wake of this historic catastrophe is an unanswerable indictment of the capitalist system and bourgeois rule.

The bourgeois political establishment, which is celebrating the centenary of the Republic with nationalist and militarist demagogy, has no solution to the fundamental social and democratic problems of the masses. Its main concerns are to preserve the outdated capitalist nation-state system, continue the extraction of surplus value from the working class, and suppress the threat of revolution from below. The ruling class finds its main allies for this in the imperialist powers.

The Turkish ruling elite has consistently sought integration into the Western world, i.e., with the imperialist-capitalist world system. After the Second World War, it turned Turkey into an outpost of the US-led NATO alliance in the Middle East against the Soviet Union. The strong military-strategic ties established with US imperialism led Turkey to be the first Muslim country to recognise Israel.

As part of NATO, the Turkish ruling elite has been complicit in the imperialist interventions and wars for regime change that have devastated the Middle East in the period since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This filthy collaboration has not prevented Turkey from being drawn into the maelstrom of imperialist war.

Today Ankara faces an impossible dilemma: either supporting the genocidal war in Gaza and US-led preparations for war against Iran, or confronting its allies, the NATO alliance and Israel. This dilemma found sharp expression in Erdoğan’s recent endorsement of Sweden’s membership into NATO, even as he condemned Israel’s NATO-backed genocide in Gaza. The Turkish parliament will vote on Sweden’s bid soon.

The Turkish bourgeoisie, unable to solve the Kurdish question, fears that such a Middle East war could create a US-backed Kurdish state on Turkey’s borders, encourage Kurdish separatism inside Turkey, and damage its interests

in the region. At the same time, it faces growing anger among the working masses, who overwhelmingly support Palestine and oppose Washington, the NATO alliance and Israel.

One hundred years after the founding of the Turkish republic, history has delivered a striking vindication of Leon Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution: In the epoch of imperialism, in countries of belated capitalist development, the bourgeoisie is incapable of carrying out basic tasks such as independence from imperialism and the establishment of a democratic regime. As Trotsky wrote:

With regard to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries, the theory of the permanent revolution signifies that the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all of its peasant masses.

On the centenary of the Turkish Republic, the Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu (Socialist Equality Group) in Turkey insists: the workers, the overwhelming majority of the Turkish people, have common interests not with “their” ruling class, but with their billions of class brothers and sisters around the world. For the Turkish working class, there is only one way forward: fighting for a world socialist revolution and a union of socialist republics against imperialist war, social inequality and authoritarianism—adopting the program of *international*, not national, liberation advanced by the October Revolution in 1917, which paved the way for a victorious struggle against imperialism and the founding of the republic a century ago.



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