

Petty-bourgeois nationalism vs. Trotskyism: Brazil's Workers Cause Party (PCO) defends Erdo?an's repression in Turkey—Part 1

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This is the first part of a two-part article.

In early April, the Brazilian Workers' Cause Party (PCO) launched a lying attack on the statement by the Turkish Socialist Equality Group (SEG) titled "The crisis in Turkey and the struggle for revolutionary leadership," published on the *World Socialist Web Site* and its Portuguese-language page.

Spanning three parts under the headline "Once again, 'Trotskyism' in favor of imperialism in Turkey: WSWS enthusiastically supports NATO demonstrations/ WSWS again shows its inability to understand the phenomenon of bourgeois nationalism," the statement constitutes an unintended self-exposure of the political and intellectual rot of this Brazilian pseudo-left organization.

Indiscriminately slandering the SEG and the mass movement of the working class and youth in Turkey, the PCO openly advocates the establishment of a dictatorship by President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an.

This article is the latest installment in a campaign by the PCO in response to the growing influence of the revolutionary internationalist politics of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in Brazil and internationally. It is also a continuation of the PCO's rabid response to the WSWS's exposure of the group's servile defense of the reactionary government of Recep Tayyip Erdo?an.

In July 2023, we published an article exposing the PCO's celebration of Erdo?an's re-election, which they presented as a "defeat for imperialism." These reactionary statements were picked up in Turkey, portrayed as the position of the "Brazilian Trotskyists" and reported by official government media outlets.

The Socialist Equality Group (GSI) in Brazil, in collaboration with its comrades in the SEG in Turkey, exposed the political trap set by the PCO for the working class of both countries. The PCO responded to this exposure with a hysterical chauvinist attack on the ICFI and its Brazilian supporters, accusing them of being a "pro-imperialist gringo group."

The GSI refuted these slanders and the gross falsifications of Trotskyism by the petty-bourgeois nationalists of the PCO. They responded to this principled analysis with a cowardly silence.

However, the PCO's latest provocation further exposes the essence of its opposition to the WSWS's politics: defending bankrupt bourgeois nationalism against Trotskyism and the program of Permanent Revolution.

The title of the PCO statement says it all: "Once again, 'Trotskyism' in favor of imperialism." In its content and language, it echoes the slanders of Stalinism against the Trotskyist movement.

The PCO slanders Turkey's mass demonstrations and the SEG's revolutionary perspective

The PCO statement concocts a series of blatant lies, slandering both the mass demonstrations that erupted in March in Turkey and the Trotskyists of the SEG, who are fighting to arm Turkish workers and youth with a revolutionary perspective.

The PCO's characterization of these demonstrations as "NATO mobilizations," supposedly "driven by imperialism to serve as a cover for a coup d'état—the so-called 'color revolutions,'" is a grotesque distortion.

As the WSWS wrote, in early March, Turkey was rocked by a massive wave of protests triggered by the arrest of Ekrem ?mamo?lu, the mayor of Istanbul and presidential candidate of the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP). The demonstrations were brutally repressed by the Erdo?an government, while the CHP did its best to prevent them and, when that proved impossible, to divert them into safe channels controlled by the bourgeois state.

What brought youth and workers to the streets was a broad and legitimate defense of democratic rights and opposition to the erection of a presidential dictatorship. But they were also driven by popular opposition to escalating social inequality and decades of war across the region.

The anti-government demonstrations took place against the backdrop of an explosive development of the class struggle in Turkey with objective revolutionary implications. Over the last few years and months, workers in different industries have joined wildcat strike movements that defied governmental bans and the control of the trade union bureaucracy.

The PCO denounced the WSWS for characterizing the crisis in Turkey as revolutionary in character and representing the "harbinger of the future of other countries." As we will explain, they correctly perceive the shattering implications of such a perspective for their own reactionary political operations in Brazil.

The PCO statement begins by accusing the WSWS of "distorting reality in favor of the mobilizations," claiming that "To say, first of all, that the protests in Turkey involve millions of people is a falsification." They are wrong. Even if the scale of this lie gets eclipsed by what follows, it is upon such minor falsifications that a monstrous slander begins to be constructed.

To substantiate its claim, the article selectively quotes from an *Al Jazeera* report of March 21 mentioning that "small groups of demonstrators clashed with police" at Istanbul City Hall on the previous night. Then, they quote CHP leader Ozgur Ozel, who proclaimed on that occasion: "we are 300,000." "Although this is an exaggeration," they write, "it is far from being a mobilization of 'millions of people'."

Contemptuous of the actual events taking place in Turkey, the PCO omits the fact that the *Al Jazeera* report was only referring to the second day of protests, which escalated over the following days. On March 29, an estimated 2.2 million people attended a rally in Istanbul alone, while mass demonstrations also took place in other cities.

On top of the falsifications about the scale of protests, the PCO fabricates a phony indictment of the WSWS statement based upon its references to the CHP as a “Kemalist party” and to Erdo?an’s “Islamic government.” Isolating these terms from their context in the SEG’s document, they embark upon a rhetorical tirade that takes up two entire parts of their statement.

Concealing from its readers the SEG’s analysis of the historical and class character of ?mamo?lu and the CHP, the PCO falsely proclaims: “The [WSWS] text presents Ekrem ?mamo?lu simply as the ‘mayor of Istanbul’ and as someone with a ‘Kemalist orientation’.”

The argument that follows is revealing in relation to the class orientation of the PCO itself:

Characterizing a politician as a “Kemalist” is the same as considering him to be the heir of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey. It would therefore be the same as considering the politician in question a nationalist, someone who defends a program aimed at Turkish economic development.

The PCO seems bewildered by its own ignorance. It is a basic fact that the CHP is the party founded by Atatürk. The reactionary evolution of Kemalism demonstrates the historical bankruptcy and unviability of all bourgeois nationalist perspectives—such as those advocated by the PCO itself—in the imperialist epoch.

At one point, the PCO baldly admits not even knowing what ?mamo?lu’s case is about: “In the foreign press – that is, outside Turkey—there is little information about ?mamo?lu.” Its ignorance of the Turkish political reality doesn’t stop the PCO from issuing categorical statements.

They write:

The CHP today plays a role similar to that played by Vladimir Zelensky in Ukraine or Edmundo González in Venezuela. It is a lackey of imperialism and its organizations, such as NATO. They say openly: we depend on you—the imperialist forces—to achieve our goals.

This characterization, deliberately omitted by the WSWS, is the most important for analyzing the demonstrations in Turkey. ... It is not a “Kemalist” mobilization, nor is it the abstract defense of the political rights of the mayor of Istanbul. It is a mobilization of imperialism in defense of its own interests in one of the most important countries in the world [emphasis added].

It is the PCO, in fact, that deliberately and dishonestly omits the paragraphs of the SEG statement that clearly characterize the CHP and define the Trotskyists’ attitude towards it. We quote them at length:

The Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu calls for the release of ?mamo?lu and all other CHP members arrested in violation of their right to a fair trial. However, this does not imply any political support for the CHP. By its very nature, the CHP cannot advance the struggle for democratic rights. On the contrary, the CHP is trying to divert the mass movement into the electoral framework and thus suppress it. Like the Erdo?an government, it is opposed to a revolutionary working class movement that would challenge the capitalist system and bourgeois rule from which these fundamental problems stem.

The CHP is a bourgeois nationalist party that is aligned with the same imperialist powers that collaborate with the Erdo?an government and has proved once again that it is incapable of defending democratic rights. In order to calm down the fears of the Turkish bourgeoisie of a revolution, the CHP sought to reassure the imperialist powers and get their support by declaring that it is a “NATO party.” Numerous Stalinist and Pabloite political tendencies have also fulfilled their role of preventing the development of a revolutionary socialist alternative by completely subordinating the mass movement to the leadership and politics of the CHP.

The spinelessness and political capitulation of the CHP as a bourgeois party is part of a global phenomenon. As Leon Trotsky, who co-led the October Revolution of 1917 with Vladimir Lenin and founded the Fourth International in 1938, explained in his theory of permanent revolution, no faction of the bourgeoisie in the world in the present epoch can consistently defend democracy, social equality and an anti-imperialist policy.

The second part of the PCO’s statement makes an even more pathetic attempt to smear the WSWS, presenting its use of the term “Islamic” in reference to Erdo?an as indisputable proof of the ICFI’s “pro-imperialist” orientation.

It begins as follows:

The WSWS has already demonstrated that it was not Marxist by completely ignoring the social content of ?mamo?lu’s candidacy. That is, it ignored the class that the candidacy represents—imperialism. Reinforcing the error, the WSWS presents the Turkish government merely as an “Islamic government.”

It’s hard to say what an “Islamic government” would be—and the WSWS doesn’t make a point of explaining it either.

Censoring our actual analysis of the historical and class character of both the CHP and Erdo?an, the PCO sets out to battle a straw-man, a fictitious political opponent who frames the conflict in Turkey as between progressive “Kemalists” and reactionary “Islamists.”

What we wrote in a previous answer to the PCO’s deceitful attacks applies entirely: “This is nothing more than a play on words, the political method of the dishonest and the demoralized petty-bourgeois.”

The Brazilian pseudo-lefts protest: “The fact is that there is nothing in the real world that serves as a basis for calling the Turkish government ‘Islamic’.” They conclude, “It is an intrigue whose sole purpose is to facilitate imperialism’s domination of Turkey.”

“Nothing in the real world,” says the PCO! To make such a statement requires an extraordinary level of ignorance and contempt for political facts.

Erdo?an comes from the traditional Islamist political movement “Milli Görü?” in Turkey. He and his AKP have acted in accordance with the role of “moderate Islamism” assigned to such movements by US imperialism for more than 20 years.

Let us quote from a speech given by the “secular” Erdo?an in February 2024:

For nearly a thousand years, Turks have preserved Islam, and Islam has preserved Turks; Turks have been the sword of Islam, and Islam has been the sword of Turks. When you glance through history books, the truth that emerges is this: To be Turkish is to be

Muslim. ... A definition and project of Turkishness that does not carry the spirit of jihad in Islam is, in essence, an attempt to turn the Turkish nation into a museum piece, a folkloric element.

The PCO's claim that Islamists are the target of imperialism is a transparent subterfuge. Saudi Arabia and similar obscurantist Muslim Gulf states, chosen by Donald Trump as the destination of his first major overseas trip, serve as anchors of US imperialist policy in the Middle East. As Washington and the European imperialist powers push for a violent redivision of the Middle East, including through the backing of the Zionist genocide in Gaza, they are singing praises for the Al-Qaeda offshoot Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) that recently seized power in Syria.

Erdo?an has been a major backer both of the HTS in Syria and the Al-Qaeda-linked jihadists in Libya, partly due to political and ideological affinities. He also supported the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, in opposition to al-Sisi's military dictatorship. This ended some time ago. In line with the interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie, Erdo?an has embraced al-Sisi, an ally of US imperialism and the Zionist regime, calling the blood-soaked dictator "my dear brother."

It is worth noting that the PCO's entire "polemic" has been built, so far, around a single quotation from the SEG statement's first paragraph!

In the fraudulent narrative concocted by the Brazilian pseudo-lefts, the SEG—which the PCO falsely presents as the "Turkish version" of the "North American" WSWS—has been transfigured into a spineless backer of the CHP.

In fact, the SEG is the only political tendency in Turkey which irreconcilably opposes all sections of the bourgeoisie and fights for the political independence of the working class based on the program of international socialist revolution.

It is this internationalist perspective—which powerfully connects the destinies of the working class in Turkey and Brazil—that the PCO desperately seeks to conceal from the Brazilian public.

Any member of the PCO or reader of its website who believes that knowledge of Turkey's political history and reality are necessary for making a serious evaluation should carefully review the documents written by the SEG and the WSWS.

On the WSWS Portuguese page they will find these critical documents:

Hundreds of thousands protest ?mamo?lu's arrest in Istanbul as CHP and Erdo?an accuse each other of being "pro-imperialist"

No to war! Reject the pro-imperialist alliances of the Turkish ruling class! Build the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi!

No to imperialist war and genocide! Reject the capitalist political establishment! Build the Socialist Equality Party in Turkey!

Turkey celebrates centenary of the republic in shadow of war

After the Turkish elections: How the pseudo-left rallied behind the CHP

What is the path to genuine democracy in Turkey?

A neo-Stalinist lecture on bourgeois nationalism

It is in the final part of their statement that the PCO more openly elaborates its own political perspective. It unequivocally exposes them as defenders of capitalist reaction against the working class.

The statement's headline attacks the WSWS's supposed "inability to understand the phenomenon of bourgeois nationalism." How does the PCO understand it then?

Defining the social and economic character of the political contradictions in Turkey, they write: "What exists is the domination of the great powers—such as Germany, the United Kingdom and the United

States—and the struggle of the Turkish people against this domination. Turkish institutions are, in this sense, a reflection of this struggle."

In a different paragraph, attacking our comparison between the development of dictatorial forms of rule in the US and Turkey, they argue:

The problem with this analysis, however, is that it ignores the fact that the Turkish bourgeoisie is completely different from the US bourgeoisie.

The Turkish bourgeoisie, like the bourgeoisie of any backward country, is a semi-oppressor, semi-oppressed bourgeoisie. It is a bourgeoisie that, while oppressing the working class, is oppressed by imperialism. And for this reason, depending on the political situation, it can act in a very progressive way or in a very reactionary way.

The idea that imperialist oppression lends a progressive role to the national bourgeoisie of backwards countries is false and in total opposition to the basic principles of Trotskyism.

It is worth recalling how Trotsky placed the struggle against national oppression by imperialism—and his particular remarks about South America—in the epoch of international socialist revolution:

The liberation of the colonies will be merely a gigantic episode in the world socialist revolution, just as the belated democratic overturn in Russia, which was also a semi-colonial country, was only the introduction to the socialist revolution...

[It] is not the belated South American bourgeoisie, a thoroughly venal agency of foreign imperialism, who will be called upon to solve this task, but the young South American proletariat, the chosen leader of the oppressed masses. The slogan in the struggle against violence and intrigues of world imperialism and against the bloody work of native comprador cliques is therefore: the Soviet United States of South and Central America.

Even in the case of a progressive war of national liberation, in which it would be the Marxists' obligation to support the oppressed country in its struggle against imperialism, their central task remains to fight for the independent mobilization of the working class in direct opposition to the bourgeoisie.

As Trotsky insisted, any concession to the bourgeoisie's claims to defend the nation's interests against imperialism; any exaggeration of the differences between the comprador and nationalist sections of the bourgeoisie, both ultimately agencies of imperialism; any softening of the opposing interests of the working class and the bourgeoisie is a heinous crime against the socialist revolution.

The PCO's formulations about the national bourgeoisie and its relations to imperialism aren't, in fact, in any way different from those of Stalinism.

The Stalinist perspective, which revived Menshevik's two-stage theory of the revolution, emerged as a nationalist reaction to Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution that guided the Russian Revolution.

The political experimentations with the idea advocated by the PCO that the bourgeoisie in backward countries "can act in a very progressive way" have always led to catastrophe for the working class, beginning with the defeat of the 1927 Chinese Revolution under Stalin's "bloc of four classes." The whole history of Latin America in the 20th century is a tragic testament to that.

In our earlier answer to the PCO, we have dealt in detail with their gross

theoretical falsifications of Trotsky's writings, aimed at transfiguring the proponent of the Theory of Permanent Revolution into a vulgar advocate for bourgeois nationalism.

It is notable that in their more recent attack against the WSWS, the PCO has abandoned the effort to link its own neo-Stalinist positions in any way to Trotskyism.

The PCO's political foundations, based upon the two-stage tradition of Stalinism, are totally bankrupt in themselves. But one must also note that Erdo?an is not Chiang Kai-shek or Atatürk. Identifying him as the leader of an "anti-imperialist" section of the Turkish bourgeoisie is just absurd.

In the concluding paragraphs of their statement, the PCO writes:

The Erdo?an government, as the very analysis of the term "Islamic government" has already indicated, is a government with a series of contradictions with imperialism. It is a government, for example, that is constantly in conflict with the state of "Israel". At the same time, it is a government with close relations with Russia. In this sense, it is an obstacle to imperialism's policy of domination over the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Turkey, besides being a backward country, is one of the most strategically located territories in the world. It is close to Russia, the Balkans, Central Europe, the Middle East and the Caucasus. That's why it's a member of NATO.

For imperialism, a Turkey completely aligned with its interests could be a decisive factor in future military conflicts. On the other hand, a rebellious Turkey could tip the balance in the struggle of oppressed countries.

The Erdo?an government is not an obstacle to imperialism's policy of domination over the Middle East and Eastern Europe; it is a tool for this policy.

The Turkish bourgeoisie and its political establishment have increasingly oriented towards imperialism and collaborated with it since the foundation of the Turkish republic. Contrary to what the PCO claims, Turkey is not a NATO member merely because of its geographical location, but as result of the bourgeoisie's determination to oppose the USSR in the aftermath of World War II.

For the last three decades, as the SEG statement explains, the Turkish bourgeoisie "has been deeply involved in the imperialist wars of aggression in the Middle East, Central Asia and North Africa." Since Erdo?an came to power in 2002, he has "backed the war in Iraq, sent troops to Afghanistan, and assisted the regime-change wars in Libya and Syria. Whatever his rhetorical criticism, he has supported the ongoing genocide of the Zionist Israeli regime in Gaza with US-NATO backing."

As of 2024, Turkey is the fifth largest exporter to Israel. By mediating the shipment of Azerbaijani oil to Israel via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, Turkey is an accomplice in the genocide of Palestinians, feeding Israel's war machine.

Established in 2012 under the Erdo?an government for NATO use, the Kürecik Radar Base in Turkey is operated by the US military. This early warning radar system is reported to protect NATO forces, as well as Israel, and is used against Iran and its allies, who are targeted by US imperialism and the Zionist regime.

As for the "conflict" between the Turkish and Israeli bourgeoisies, there is no progressive side between the two critical allies of US imperialism. They are confronting each other over growing rivalry regarding the revision of resources and influence in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean, including Syria. At the root of this conflict lies more than 30 years of US imperialism's aggression in the Middle East in its drive for total domination of the region.

The tensions arising from Turkey's attempt to preserve ties with Moscow amid the escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia—a critical issue behind the attempted coup against Erdo?an in 2016—have not altered this fundamental relationship.

In fact, Erdo?an launched his authoritarian crackdown against the political opposition counting on the US and European powers' approving silence due to their strengthened partnership.

So rotten is the PCO's political line that in their previous attack against the WSWS they came out in open defense of the Erdo?an regime's collaboration with NATO's war aims, justifying its legitimacy as a "bargaining chip for Turkey's entry into the European Union."

The delusional talk about a "rebellious Turkey" under Erdo?an's rule being the harbinger of the "struggle of oppressed countries" against imperialism only exposes the ultimate consequences of the PCO's bankrupt nationalist perspective.

To be continued.



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