

May Day 2026

Turkey, the war on Iran and the resurgence of the class struggle

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This speech was delivered by Ula? Sevinç, Chairman of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International), at the 2026 May Day Online Rally, organized by the WSWS and the ICFI.

On behalf of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi–Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party–Fourth International), we celebrate May Day with workers all over the world and send our revolutionary greetings to all. We are celebrating this May Day amidst the imperialist war against Iran, under conditions where the Turkish working class is breaking free from decades of suppression and emerging onto the scene, to which the ruling class and its state apparatus have responded with a violent offensive.

The resistance of the Doruk Mining workers, who set off from Eski?ehir on April 13 and walked approximately 190 kilometers to Ankara to fight for their unpaid wages and other stolen rights, brought the class struggle to the forefront of the country’s agenda. The people of Ankara, as well as artists, academics and workers from other factories, declared their solidarity with the Doruk miners, led by the Independent Mining Workers’ Union. The government responded with tear gas, police blockades and arrests.

This struggle forms part of a developing independent workers’ movement. The class struggle, which was suppressed for years by state repression, the betrayals of the trade union bureaucracies, and identity politics, is resurfacing. Earlier this year, Polyak miners in ?zmir broke through a gendarmerie barricade, seized control of the mine, and raised the issue of “the necessity for workers to take control of the country’s governance.” Approximately 5,000 Migros warehouse workers continued their wildcat strike, defying police pressure.

This developing movement points to the social power that needs to be mobilized to oppose imperialist war and meet the urgent social and democratic aspirations of the people: the international working class.

The targeting of leaders of the independent labor movement is a way of intimidating the entire working class. Ba?aran Aksu, one of the leaders of the Independent Mining Workers’ Union, was arrested while trying to set off to join the march of

Doruk Mining workers. Mehmet Türkmen, the Chairman of the independent textile union B?RTEK-SEN, has been in prison for six weeks because of a speech in which he told striking workers the truth. Esra I?k, who defended the Akbelen Forest and the villagers’ lands, is still in jail. This crackdown is part of a broader wave of arrests targeting opposition journalists, lawyers and union representatives.

It is no coincidence that this pressure intensified especially after the US and Israel launched their war against Iran. The Turkish ruling class, which is also preparing for war, cannot tolerate the working class, which is expected to bear the full cost of the war, acting independently in its own interests.

The main goal of eliminating democratic rights and building a dictatorship is to suppress the independent political mobilization of the working class before it can even take root. The working class must respond to this assault, which targets fundamental constitutional rights such as freedom of expression, the right to vote and stand for election, the right to demonstrate, and the right to strike, with its own counter-offensive.

This requires organizing independently of the entire trade union apparatus, including the D?SK bureaucracy, which ignores the Doruk Mining resistance and refuses to defend the class war prisoners. Independent rank-and-file committees should be established in every factory, every mine, every neighborhood and every school. These committees should be united across borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), because workers are facing a global capitalist offensive that can only be countered with a global strategy.

Workers must inscribe on their flags the demand for freedom for all class war prisoners. This should be an integral part of the call for freedom for all political prisoners worldwide, especially the Ukrainian socialist and our comrade Bogdan Syrotiuk, imprisoned in April 2024 for his internationalist stance against the war.

No one should be taken in by the “pro-worker” rhetoric of the Republican People’s Party (CHP), itself now under judicial oppression. This is a party that imposes poverty wages on

workers in its own municipalities, breaks strikes, and in its September 2025 report to NATO declared Iran a source of instability and advocated for NATO's expansion into the Middle East. The track record of the CHP's social democratic allies in Germany, Britain and France is riddled with imperialist war, social cuts and the usurpation of democratic rights.

The war that the US and Israel have launched against Iran is a NATO-backed imperialist war of aggression. In this war, at least 3,375 people have been killed in Iran, including at least 376 children. In Iran, more than 3 million people have been internally displaced. As schools, hospitals and other civilian infrastructure were destroyed, poverty and unemployment reached enormous proportions. The war has exacerbated food insecurity across the region and also led to a water crisis. The economies of Arab regimes, which faced Iranian retaliation for aiding the US-Israeli attack, are expecting a serious contraction. Workers are forced to pay the price of war as well as the high cost of living.

The government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has not merely stood silent as Trump threatened to obliterate Iranian civilization and send the country back to the Stone Age. By signing the Riyadh Declaration—which does not even name the United States and condemns Iran for exercising its right to self-defense—it has made its alignment in the war unmistakably clear. Bases in Türkiye continue to serve the infrastructure of the war. Azerbaijani oil still goes to Israel via Türkiye. Following the start of the war against Iran, NATO deployed Patriot air defense systems to the Incirlik and Kürecik bases. Furthermore, this year's NATO summit will be held in Ankara in July.

This collaborationist attitude, a product of the ruling class's military-strategic and financial dependence on imperialism, is diametrically opposed to the attitude of the working class. According to polls, more than 90 percent of the Turkish population opposes the unjust war against Iran and the US bases in Türkiye.

The Erdoğan government is trying to deflect this opposition by placing the blame for the war solely on Israel. But Israeli Zionism functions as US imperialism's attack dog in the region. American policy is not dictated by Israel. Presenting the attack on Iran as merely an Israeli war is nothing more than providing cover for US imperialism and complicity with the Trump administration.

The tension between Türkiye and Israel is not limited to manipulating domestic public opinion. This is a product of the growing rivalry between two allies of US imperialism, which is seeking complete dominance in the Middle East. There is an irreconcilable contradiction between the posture of Ankara—which has joined Trump's so-called Gaza Peace Council and counseled the Iranian regime to surrender without a fight—and the stance of the Turkish population, who stand with the Palestinian and Iranian peoples and hate imperialism and Zionism.

Under these circumstances, it has become clearer than ever that calling on the Erdoğan government to take steps towards "peace and democratization" and to resolve the Kurdish issue is a deception designed to conceal the truth from the workers. The aim of the negotiations between Ankara and the PKK is not to meet the legitimate democratic demands of the Kurdish people. The aim is to ensure that the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisie reach an agreement in line with the US, and that the working class is brought under control domestically.

Furthermore, the claim of a "democratic peace" under imperialism is a great deception. Vladimir Lenin in 1915, during the First World War, wrote the following on this subject: "Pacifism, the preaching of peace in the abstract, is one of the means of duping the working class. Under capitalism, and especially in its imperialist stage, wars are inevitable... the idea that a democratic peace is conceivable without a series of revolutions is profoundly mistaken."

In Türkiye, Iran, Syria and Iraq, the subject of the struggle for the recognition of the democratic rights of the Kurdish people is not this or that imperialist power or bourgeois government, but the working class. Workers cannot advance the struggle for socialism without defending the democratic rights of their brothers and sisters from oppressed nations.

In this struggle, the American, European and international working class is an ally of workers of Kurdish, Turkish, Arab, Persian, Jewish and other nationalities. As Leon Trotsky explained in his Theory of Permanent Revolution, the fulfillment of all unresolved democratic tasks and the struggle against imperialism can only be carried out under the leadership of the working class. This means fighting for a Socialist Federation of the Middle East. The success of this struggle, which is part of the fight for world socialist revolution, depends on the building of the revolutionary leadership of the working class.

The founding of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi (Socialist Equality Party) in June 2025 as the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International represents a critical step forward in this struggle. This marks the first time a party has been established in Türkiye based on the internationalist program and principles of Trotskyism. Almost a year has passed, confirming the ICFI's emphasis on Türkiye's critical position in global geopolitics and the class struggle, and on the potential of its multinational proletariat in the global fight against capitalism and imperialism.

This May Day, we call on workers, intellectuals, and youth across the region to join us in this struggle and to take action to build new sections of the ICFI.



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