Özgür Özel’s New Party: A defense of Türkiye’s old order

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The New Party (Yeni Parti), founded by deputies and party officials led by Özgür Özel who broke from the Kemalist Republican People’s Party (CHP), emerged from the de facto split within that party since May 21, when a court, exceeding the limits of its jurisdiction, overturned the CHP’s elected leadership under Özel with a ruling of “absolute nullity” and reinstated the former leadership of Kemal K?l?çdaro?lu. This judicial coup was part of a wave of political repression in which dozens of CHP mayors, including Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor and presidential candidate Ekrem ?mamo?lu, have been arrested and removed from office.

The Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi–Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party–Fourth International) opposes this police state repression, defends basic democratic rights and demands the release of all political prisoners. This principled stand does not, however, diminish our irreconcilable political opposition to the CHP and to the New Party.

The New Party’s program, published on July 24 under the title *For a Common Future* and punctuated in nearly every paragraph by the declaration “We will change this dark order,” is not an answer to the social and democratic aspirations of working people. Its program is designed to confine these aspirations within the framework of the capitalist profit system and the imperialist NATO alliance.

The program is compelled to acknowledge the deep social polarization in Türkiye. Its introduction states that the real struggle is “between a handful of people who hold the country’s wealth and the power of the state, and the tens of millions who keep this country standing with their labor.” This admits a reality that even the spokesmen of the ruling class can no longer deny: the sharpening of the class struggle.

But the New Party registers this reality not in order to draw revolutionary conclusions but in order to contain it. The task it has assumed is to channel the growing anger of the working class into parliamentary avenues, in a manner that threatens neither the bourgeois state nor the rule of capital.

Foreign policy: An oath of allegiance to NATO

The New Party’s class character emerges most nakedly regarding foreign policy and security. Drafted in the midst of the war NATO is escalating against Russia in Ukraine and the murderous war waged by the United States and Israel against Iran, the program announces that Türkiye’s “effectiveness within the Western Alliance” will be strengthened, that its influence within NATO will be increased and that the European Union (EU) accession process will be accelerated. This is not the orientation of the overwhelming majority of the population but of a bourgeoisie tied to the imperialist powers that are dragging the Middle East and the entire world into a catastrophe.

The word “imperialism” does not appear in the program. There is not a single sentence on the genocide Israel is carrying out in Gaza, which has enraged hundreds of millions of workers and young people in Türkiye and around the world. NATO’s war against Russia, the US assault on Iran and Türkiye’s descent into the vortex of these wars are concealed behind vague formulations such as “uncertainties and threats.” This silence is not an oversight but a deliberate choice: To name an imperialist war would require taking a stand against it. Whatever Özel’s criticisms of US President Donald Trump and of the war against Iran, the New Party openly defends the military-strategic alliance with the US and NATO.

In the same vein, the program pledges that the deterrent capacity of the Turkish Armed Forces will be strengthened and the defense industry developed. These are pledges to continue the program Erdo?an is already carrying out. Every kuru? poured into arming a ruling class that is complicit with imperialist aggressors will continue to be taken out of education, healthcare and wages.

Immigration policy completes this right-wing line. The declaration of “zero tolerance for irregular migration and illegal crossings,” pledging stronger border security and policies of “return,” repeat the propaganda of the far right in Europe. It continues K?l?çdaro?lu’s anti-immigrant campaign in the 2023 presidential elections. Scapegoating refugees displaced by imperialist wars, poverty and repression serves to divide the working class along national lines.

Historical foundations and the “Türkiye Alliance”

In the section of the program headed “Our Intellectual Foundations and Political Identity,” the party’s fundamental basis is presented as the founding philosophy of the Turkish Republic and the principles of its founding leader Kemal Atatürk. The party declares that it adopts the Six Arrows, among them “nationalism” and “statism.” For all the claim to novelty in its name, the New Party therefore declares itself the heir of Kemalism, which for a century has been the founding ideology of the apparatus of rule of the Turkish bourgeoisie.

The New Party ignores the fact that this movement—which led the national liberation war against imperialist occupation, abolished the sultanate and the caliphate and founded the republic—was an instrument of the developing Turkish capitalist ruling class, that it could not resolve the social and democratic questions it inherited to this day, nor secure independence from imperialism. This flowed from the class basis on which Atatürk and Kemalism rest.

The heritage the New Party claims must determine the attitude of the working class and the oppressed masses to it. Under the one-party regime, the CHP banned independent workers’ organizations and the socialist movement, criminalized strikes, persecuted communists and institutionalized the denial of the existence and basic rights of the Kurdish

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people. Kemalist “populism” was a corporatist doctrine that denied the existence of classes and of the class struggle and defined the nation as a unified mass without privileges. What the New Party calls the “Türkiye Alliance” is the direct continuation of this tradition.

Indeed, the program does not conceal the composition of this alliance: It contains “workers and farmers, tradesmen and industrialists,” as well as leftists, right wingers, nationalists and conservatives. This is the programmatic expression of the call for unification “from social democrats to conservative and nationalist democrats” that Özel voiced in his founding speech on July 21. The claim that workers and industrialists—that is, labor and capital—share common interests is the fundamental lie of all defenders of the capitalist order. Within such an alliance there is no place for the independent interests of the working class; the alliance rests on the subordination of workers to the interests of capital.

The Kurdish question: “The mother tongue is a right” but not education in the mother tongue

The lines the program devotes to the Kurdish question are the most striking proof of the bourgeois opposition’s impotence in the face of democratic questions.

The program states, “The mother tongue is a right,” and adds: “With this approach, the right of all citizens to learn, use and develop their mother tongue will be secured.” But the fundamental demand raised for decades by Kurdish workers and youth is not the right to “learn” one’s mother tongue; it is the right to education in one’s mother tongue—that is, the provision of education in Kurdish by the state, as part of the public education system. In the education section, dozens of pledges are listed without the Kurdish language or education in the mother tongue being mentioned even once. The Kurdish language is reduced to a cultural element that may be “learned” at the level of an elective course or private classes.

The New Party’s failure to write down this demand is of a piece with the attitude of the state: Last year, the Chief Prosecutor’s Office of the Court of Cassation intervened against the demands for education in the mother tongue and for Kurdish to become an official language contained in the program of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi, and the party answered this attempt with a comprehensive reply. At the time, the CHP under Özel’s leadership, the DEM Party and nearly every party claiming to be “democratic” or “socialist” remained silent; the one notable exception was the statement of condemnation issued by the Socialist Laborers Party.

Moreover, the pledge of equality for the Kurds is made conditional: “With the end of terrorism and the establishment of an egalitarian, participatory, democratic political and social order, a permanent solution to the Kurdish question will be secured.” Democratic rights are thus tied to the disappearance of the state’s definition of “terror”; that is, the recognition of rights is referred to the approval of the state’s security apparatus. This conditional approach is part of the official outlook that has used the pretext of “terror” to justify the appointment of state trustees to elected municipalities and the imprisonment of deputies and mayors.

The Anti-Terror Law is not abolished but “amended”

The New Party pledges that the “crime” of insulting the president will be abolished and that provisions punishing political criticism will be ended. But when it comes to the backbone of the police state regime in Türkiye, the language changes: “The Anti-Terror Law will be amended so as not to punish expressions of opinion that have no direct connection with violence.”

That is, it will not be abolished but “amended.” The legal foundation for the imprisonment of countless leftists, Kurdish politicians, journalists, academics and trade unionists, and for branding socialist organizations as “terrorist” will remain in place. Who is to be deemed to have a “direct connection with violence” will again be decided by the same courts, the same prosecutors, the same police apparatus. In the “Citizen Security” section of the program, the promise of “a determined struggle against terrorism, organized crime, gangs” guarantees the existence and powers of this apparatus in advance.

What is represented is not an inconsistency but a class choice. The New Party does not propose to dismantle the repressive apparatus deployed against the working class and the Kurds but to take it under its own administration in a form “open to democratic oversight.” Any bourgeois government will require this apparatus in a period in which social explosions are inevitable. Some 25 years ago, Recep Tayyip Erdo?an also set out with similar promises of “democratization” and proceeded to construct a presidential dictatorship in line with the needs of the ruling class.

“The subcontracting system will be abolished”: The CHP’s record

Under the heading “Secure Labor and Quality Employment,” the program states: “Labor is not a commodity to be left to the mercy of the market but the foundation of human dignity and social welfare.” It pledges that the minimum wage will be set “at a level that ensures a humane life,” that “the obstacles to union organization, collective bargaining and the right to strike will be removed,” that a strategy of “zero workplace deaths” will be adopted, and that “the subcontracting system will be completely abolished.”

These pledges are ambitious on paper. But the program immediately makes wage increases conditional: “In order to raise labor incomes, union organization will be strengthened and policies that increase labor productivity will be implemented.” That is, wages will rise only to the extent that increased productivity permits. This is the formula that capital imposes everywhere with the assistance of the trade union bureaucracies, and it means more intensive exploitation. The economic section of the program states the goal openly: Türkiye must “produce more,” “develop higher technology” and “compete with the world.” The conditions of labor are subordinate to the requirements of this competition.

The real value of these pledges is demonstrated by the CHP’s own practice in the municipalities it runs. The cadre that founded the New Party was the leadership of a party administering a number of Türkiye’s largest cities. These municipalities confront workers not individually but through their own employers’ organization: CHP-run local administrations are represented at the bargaining table by the Social Democratic Public Employers’ Union (SODEMSEN). The rhetoric of “protecting labor” is embodied, at the institutional level, in an employers’ union.

What this relationship means was demonstrated in Izmir in 2025. When no agreement was reached in the collective contract covering some 23,000 workers at the Metropolitan Municipality’s ?ZENERJ? and ?ZELMAN companies, Genel-??, affiliated to the D?SK union confederation, struck on May 29. The CHP Metropolitan Mayor Cemil Tugay, together with municipal bureaucrats and several district mayors, set about breaking the strike by collecting garbage in Alsancak. The same method was repeated

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in the districts; Buca Mayor Görkem Duman likewise went out into the streets with bureaucrats to collect garbage on the sixth day of a work stoppage by workers protesting unpaid wages. When the 1,588 workers of Maltepe Municipality struck in 2021, the ?BB under ?mamo?lu's administration also engaged in strikebreaking, sending ?STAÇ workers to collect the garbage.

The government's assault on municipal revenues has aggravated this picture. But the essential question is how the CHP administrations conducted themselves in the face of that assault. Every administration that refuses to touch capitalist property, bank debts and the limits of the state budget makes the working class pay the bill for the crisis and positions itself as an employer in the face of a strike. Workers' wage demands are rejected in the name of "public-minded fiscal discipline," while workers are pitted against the population of the city.

A New Party government would confront the same logic on a national scale. To fulfill the pledge that "the subcontracting system will be completely abolished" would mean putting tens of thousands of precariously employed workers onto permanent contracts—that is, a direct intervention into the cost calculations of capital and the state budget. The resources for this lie precisely where the program has promised not to tread: corporate profits, foreign debt payments and the investments in the defense industry the program commits itself to expanding. The claim that the interests of capital can be reconciled with the demands of the workers renders these pledges baseless from the outset.

Health and education: "Free for all" but subordinate to the market

The contradiction between the program's social pledges and its commitment to capitalist property and the market is documented in the health and education sections.

The program states, "Health services will be made accessible and free of charge for everyone." Yet the contracts of the City Hospitals operating under the Public-Private Partnership model are not to be cancelled, merely "reconsidered"; the dissolution of the private hospital system, of co-payments and of the pharmaceutical and medical equipment monopolies are not raised at all. Under conditions in which working people are forced to turn to private hospitals at exorbitant prices to obtain rapid treatment—or even to stay alive—the defense of the private health system means treating public health with contempt.

The same pro-market approach prevails in education. While pledging "secular, public, free" education, the program not only refrains from questioning the existence of private schools but elevates them to the level of a principle: "Private schools will be strictly supervised; private schooling will be a choice, not a necessity."

The program admits that it takes this order as given: "minimum wage floors and guarantees of rights" are to be introduced for private school teachers—that is, teachers will continue to work under profit-driven companies, and only the terms of their exploitation will be regulated. The nationalization of the private schools, and the employment of all education workers in private schools and of unappointed teachers in the public sector with full pay, full rights and job security, are not raised.

The assurance offered to international finance capital lies in monetary policy: "The instrument independence of the Central Bank will be secured"—that is, monetary policy will be insulated from the demands of the working class and handed over to the control of the financial markets.

The other social pledges listed in the program are likewise condemned to remain on paper within this framework. Financing them would require the nationalization of the banks and the major corporations and the recovery of social wealth from the capitalist oligarchy. The New Party, like the Erdo?an regime, is fiercely opposed to such measures. Should the working class seek to win them through mass struggle, it will resort to the police state apparatus it has pledged to keep "open to democratic oversight."

Vindication of the Permanent Revolution

Whatever its claims, the program of the New Party confirms once again this fundamental fact: The Turkish bourgeoisie is not capable, and never has been capable, of carrying out the tasks of the democratic revolution.

As Leon Trotsky explained in the theory of Permanent Revolution, under conditions of belated capitalist development, the bourgeoisie—bound to imperialism by a thousand threads and mortally afraid of the working class in its own country—cannot resolve the democratic tasks: the solution of the national question, land reform, genuine political freedom, national independence. These tasks can be carried out only through the conquest of power by the working class and its uninterrupted transition to socialist tasks. This is inseparable from the international development of the socialist revolution.

The program of the New Party vindicates the theory of Permanent Revolution. It promises equality to the Kurdish people but cannot write down education in the mother tongue, because it cannot break from the nationalist foundations of the Turkish bourgeois nation-state. It promises democratic rights but cannot abolish the Anti-Terror Law, because in its fear of a social explosion it depends upon the repressive apparatus. It promises the abolition of subcontracting and free healthcare and education, but it cannot touch the capitalist market and private profit, because it seeks not to encroach upon the interests of the oligarchy but to defend them. It cannot advocate withdrawal from NATO or an anti-imperialist foreign policy, because the interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie require allegiance to this imperialist alliance.

Özel recently gave assurances to international finance capital and the NATO capitals in articles written for *Newsweek* and the *Financial Times*, warning them in friendly fashion: If he is not supported, a social explosion in Türkiye will shake the ruling classes of those countries as well. His program demonstrates, line by line, that the rhetoric addressed to the working class is election propaganda, while the assurances given to the ruling class are the real commitments.

Revive revolutionary traditions, build the working class's own party

The fact that the New Party led the polls even before it was founded is an expression of the search by broad masses for a way out of the Erdo?an regime, of the soaring cost of living and of repression. But the program of the New Party and the record of the CHP on which it rests demonstrate clearly that the social and democratic aspirations of the masses of workers and youth cannot be met by this party.

Nevertheless, many Stalinist, Pabloite and pseudo-left parties are already preparing once again to channel social opposition behind a right-wing bourgeois party. Having supported K?l?çdaro?lu's pro-NATO and anti-immigrant right-wing campaign in the 2023 elections on the grounds of "getting rid of Erdo?an at any cost," these tendencies will now attempt, with formulas such as a "democracy front" and "unity against fascism," to harness workers and youth to the New Party. Their function is to provide bourgeois parties with a cover from the left and to prevent the development of an independent political movement of the working class.

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Workers and youth must reject this trap. The question is not the replacement of Erdo?an by another pro-imperialist politician. There is no difference of principle between Erdo?an, K?l?çdaro?lu and Özel. All are representatives of a ruling class that is deeply bound to imperialism and the US-NATO alliance and that enriches itself through the exploitation of the working class.

What the working class needs is not a “new” bourgeois government under the leadership of a “new” bourgeois party but the revival of its own revolutionary traditions—of the 1917 October Revolution, which also inspired and materially supported the national liberation war in Türkiye; of the Bolshevik Party led by Lenin and Trotsky; and of the Left Opposition and the Fourth International, which defended the program of world socialist revolution against the Stalinist betrayal. The fundamental problems confronting the working class are global in character, and they can only be resolved through a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the ruling class—through the transfer of power to the working class on an international scale.

The program of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi, Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), advances this revolutionary perspective. Every worker and young person who reads the program of New Party should draw this conclusion: the “dark order”—that is, the capitalist order—cannot be changed by the parties of the class that created it and lives off it. The force that will change it, and replace it with a social order based on human need, with socialism, is the working class organized in its own revolutionary party.

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