

Youth rebellion across Europe frightens ruling elite in Türkiye

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President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan issued an open threat to the working class and youth of Türkiye in a statement following a cabinet meeting on October 26. He referred directly to the movement of youth and workers that is shaking numerous countries across Europe.

“If there are those who, emboldened by events in some European countries, dream of a similar attempt, let them know this: Türkiye was not picked up off the street, and it is not a country that will be surrendered to the street,” Erdoğan declared.

Erdoğan’s fascist ally, Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli, said on October 13 that the demonstrations in France had the “potential to bring wider masses into the streets” and could spread “wave upon wave” across Europe. He ended his speech with a direct warning to youth: “Do not be tempted by France! Do not be swayed by Western imperialism!”

Europe is being shaken by its largest social movement in decades. In France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Ireland, Albania and Serbia, mass protests initiated largely by high school and university students are merging with a growing movement of the working class. In November, strikes and national days of action involving millions of workers are planned in a number of countries, albeit under the control of the trade union bureaucracy.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) has stressed, what is developing is not merely a protest movement, but a fundamental class conflict that directly raises the question of power: Who will determine the course of society—the billionaire oligarchy, which resorts to every means to increase its profits, finance rearmament and wage war, or the working class, the overwhelming majority of the population?

In the same speech, Erdoğan targeted those protesting his government’s attacks on opposition media outlets and journalists. On Saturday, hundreds of journalists and thousands of citizens took to the streets in numerous provinces across Türkiye to defend press freedom.

“Before those who attack our government on the pretext of press freedom try to cover up crimes with demonstrations, let them come out, if they can, and explain their crooked and dirty relationships,” Erdoğan said. He claimed that anyone can say whatever they wish, so long as it does not contain “insults, lies and disinformation.” Then he delivered his real message: “But like all the democratic countries of the world, Türkiye does not and cannot allow an operation to be mounted against it through shady relationships.”

This statement expresses the fact that the Erdoğan government has no response to social and democratic demands other than police state repression. Erdoğan is announcing that any social opposition that takes to the streets will be branded a “foreign operation” and the product of “dirty relationships,” and will be met with the full force of the state’s repressive apparatus.

Erdoğan is not speaking only for himself. He represents the dominant sections of the capitalist oligarchy. The Turkish ruling class’s fear of a mass explosion of opposition among workers and youth is not unfounded. The objective conditions that produced the movement in Europe—war, militarism, austerity, the soaring cost of living, staggering social inequality and growing police state repression—are present in Türkiye as well.

The possibility that youth protests could act as a trigger, and that the working class could enter the scene as an independent force, terrifies all the parties of the established order in Türkiye. These parties are tied to a ruling class that defends its interests through its strategic alliance with US, European Union and NATO imperialism. This alliance is at odds with the sentiments of the overwhelming majority of the population, who oppose the US and NATO and the war against Iran.

That is why, ahead of the NATO summit held in Ankara in July, the government “preemptively” detained hundreds of anti-war protesters, most of them young people. Dozens remain unlawfully behind bars. As part of this wave of repression, two young members of the Workers’ Party of Türkiye (T?P) were jailed on October 26 for hanging a banner reading: “If there is no future for us, there is no peace for you. [Education Minister] Yusuf Tekin, resign!” The two students were released Wednesday, following protests.

The European imperialist powers are pouring hundreds of billions of euros into rearmament to wage NATO’s war against Russia in Ukraine and the wars in the Middle East. They are making the working class pay for this through cuts to education, healthcare, pensions and social benefits. With the reintroduction of conscription, young people are being prepared for deployment to the front in imperialist wars of aggression that have no popular support.

While energy, rent and food prices erode real wages, the wealth of a handful of oligarchs has reached staggering proportions. Unlike in the 1960s and 1970s, governments controlled by the financial oligarchy have no room to make significant social concessions. Mass resistance is growing against the attempt to make the working class and youth pay the full cost of the financial crisis and war. The ruling class is responding with dictatorial measures and the systematic strengthening of the far right. The developments in Europe show that the class struggle on an international scale has entered a new and explosive stage.

Türkiye is one of the most fragile links in this process. Even according to the doctored figures of the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜ?K), annual inflation stood at 29.7 percent in September. Education prices rose by 14 percent in a single month, and by 26 percent in higher education. According to calculations by D?SK-AR,

the research center of the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions, the purchasing power of the net minimum wage of 28,075 lira eroded by 6,828 lira in nine months, leaving it 9,725 lira below the hunger line. For millions of working class and pensioner families, choosing between rent, food and bills is a daily reality.

As the WWS has pointed out, as of the last quarter of 2025, 6.5 million of the 24.1 million young people aged 15 to 34 in Türkiye were neither in employment nor in education. Sitting atop this social powder keg, the government is increasingly planning its spending in line with the demands of the financial oligarchy. In the 2027 draft budget law, combined spending on defense, internal security and interest payments exceeds spending on education, central government healthcare and social assistance.

While maintaining its rhetoric of a “negotiated solution,” the government is at the same time integrating Türkiye ever more deeply into the aggression of the US and its NATO allies in the Black Sea and the Middle East. The Mecca Joint Defense Agreement, signed with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan on August 7 and expected to be voted on in parliament next week, aims to advance the regional interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie in line with US imperialism’s drive to establish complete hegemony over the Middle East. The reactionary scramble for energy resources and routes also threatens to bring Türkiye into military confrontation with Israel and Greece. Türkiye’s political and media establishment is seeking to promote Turkish nationalism on the basis of rivalry with Israel and Greece. At the same time, however, the Turkish bourgeoisie maintains its alliance with these rivals through the US and NATO alliances.

The Kemalist and Kurdish nationalist bourgeois opposition is turning to the same imperialist powers and seeks to defend the interests of the same ruling class. However much these forces complain about the Erdoğan regime’s mounting repression, they fear the emergence of the working class as an independent political force capable of shaking the foundations of capitalist rule no less than the government does. They are no less opposed to it.

As the government abolishes basic democratic rights, the Peoples’ Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party) is spreading the illusion that negotiations between Ankara and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), led by the imprisoned Abdullah Öcalan, can bring “peace” and “democracy” to Türkiye and even to the Middle East. The Stalinist parties allied with the DEM Party continue to support this illusion—even though they themselves are targets of police state repression. The Workers’ Party of Türkiye (T?P) and the Labour Party (EMEP) voted “yes” on a law introduced to parliament by the Erdoğan regime, a law they themselves acknowledged has nothing to do with democratization or peace. This vote marked a critical threshold in their collaboration.

Özgür Özel’s New Party (YEN? Parti), which split from the Republican People’s Party (CHP), aims to keep the opposition under control and channel it into elections before a social explosion erupts. This is the fundamental lesson it has drawn from the mass protests that broke out in March 2025 after the arrest of Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor and CHP presidential candidate Ekrem ?amamo?lu. That movement, in which broad masses, above all young people, poured into the streets to defend basic democratic rights, was brought to an end by Erdoğan’s police repression together with the pacifying interventions of Özel, then the leader of the CHP.

As the WWS has shown in detail, Özel sent an open message to the imperialist capitals in articles published in June in *Newsweek* and the *Financial Times*. If Erdoğan’s dictatorial measures were not halted, he

warned, a social explosion would erupt in Türkiye that would destabilize NATO and the EU; his party was therefore the most reliable force for preventing such an explosion. Young people in France and other countries, however, moved into action before those in Türkiye.

Ümit Özda?, the leader of the far-right Victory Party (Zafer Partisi), openly voiced the common approach of the entire bourgeois opposition on October 22. Özda? acknowledged that young people from France to Albania are clashing with police over the cost of living and the education system, and that in Türkiye housing costs and rents are higher and the schools are in worse condition. He then issued the following appeal: “We, as the Victory Party, ask the Turkish people to keep their anger inside until the elections, and on election day to call this government to account at the ballot box for everything it has done.”

This claim of an “electoral solution,” which Özel shares, is a clear expression of the political bankruptcy of the bourgeois opposition. Erdoğan’s main rival is in prison. Countless elected mayors have been removed from office in defiance of the will of millions of voters. The elected leadership of the main opposition party, the CHP, has been overthrown by an unlawful court ruling, and trustees have been appointed to critical media outlets. Under these conditions, it is the government that decides when and under what conditions an election will be held. An election held in such an environment will not be a democratic election. To tell young people and workers to “wait for the ballot box” is to invite them to watch the consolidation of a police state.

In Türkiye, as in Europe and the rest of the world, none of the fundamental problems facing the masses of workers and youth can be resolved on a national basis, or by replacing one capitalist government with another. Stopping the imperialist wars and implementing urgent social measures in the interests of the overwhelming majority of the population require a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the oligarchy, in Türkiye and internationally. This means the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe and the Middle East.

We call on all workers and young people who want to fight on the basis of this international revolutionary perspective to join the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International—the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi - Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party - Fourth International)—and its student and youth organization, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).



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