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Dictatorship, war and the fight to build the SEP in Turkey

This speech was given by Ulaş Ateşçi, a leading member of the Sosyalist Eşitlik (Socialist Equality Group) in Turkey, at the International May Day 2025 Online Rally, held Saturday, May 3.

May Day 2025 speech given by Ulaş Ateşçi

On behalf of the Sosyalist Eşitlik Grubu in Turkey, I commemorate May Day, the international day of unity, solidarity and struggle of workers and youth all over the world and send our revolutionary greetings.

We are celebrating this May Day under conditions in which the building of a presidential dictatorship by the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has entered a new phase. More than 90 people were detained in house raids in Istanbul ahead of May Day. Last month, Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Republican People's Party (CHP) mayor of Istanbul, was arrested and sent to prison, joining countless political prisoners, including leaders of the Kurdish movement.

The unlawful arrest of İmamoğlu, who is increasingly ahead of Erdoğan in the polls for the presidential elections to be held at the latest in 2028, has led to spontaneous protests of broad masses of youth and working people across the country.



Mass protest against the arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu in front of the building of Istanbul Municipality in Saraçhane, İstanbul, March 23, 2025 [Photo: herkesicinCHP/X]

The potential for these mass protests to trigger an independent and revolutionary working class movement frightened both the Erdoğan government and the other capitalist establishment parties, including the CHP. That is why the government resorted to police-state repression to suppress the protests, while the CHP did its best to end the movement by directing it towards the next elections.

Both the contempt for basic democratic rights and the growing social opposition and radicalization among the working class and youth are international phenomena that stem from the deepening crisis of the capitalist system and the ruling class.

The Turkish government took this undemocratic step after Donald Trump became president for a second term in the United States. The Trump administration itself is building a presidential dictatorship in the US and faces growing opposition among workers and youth.

In Turkey, as in the US, this authoritarian regime is essentially targeting the working class, the only social force that can put an end to the rule of the capitalist class, take power and establish a genuinely democratic regime.



In this Nov. 13, 2019, file photo, President Donald Trump shakes hands with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan after a news conference in the East Room of the White House, in Washington. [AP Photo/Evan Vucci]

The Sosyalist Eşitlik Grubu calls for the immediate release of all political prisoners, including İmamoglu. This is part of a global campaign by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement of which we are a part, for the freedom of all political prisoners, first and foremost the Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotyuk.

Without defending democratic rights in principle, workers cannot advance their interests and the struggle for socialism.

This also applies to the necessity to oppose imperialist war on principle. The genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza by the Zionist Israeli state has been going on for more than one and a half years. This genocide could not have been maintained without the full support of NATO, of which Turkey is a member, for Israel. Now, the same imperialist and Zionist powers are increasingly targeting Iran and its allies and preparing for a war that will turn the entire region into a bloodbath. Their aim is the full imperialist domination over the entire Middle East, including Iran.

The Sosyalist Eşitlik Grubu demands that Turkey leave NATO and break all relations with Israel. The military bases used for the benefit of the United States and Israel must be closed and the mediation of the flow of oil from Azerbaijan to Israel must be stopped. Hands off Palestine, Iran, Yemen and the Middle East as a whole!

This means the struggle not only against Erdoğan's government, which heads NATO's second largest army, but against all pro-NATO and pro-imperialist parties, including the CHP. It is part of the struggle to unite the working class against imperialism and Zionism on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program in the Middle East and internationally.

The catastrophe of war that has been escalating in the Middle East for decades is a product of the imperialist nation-state system and can only end with it. The allies of the Middle Eastern workers of Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Persian, Jewish and other nationalities in this struggle are not the bourgeois nationalist regimes and movements, which are part of the capitalist system and whose programs are bankrupt, but the American, European and international working class. Our battle cry and goal is the Socialist Federation of the Middle East.

The subject of this fight is the working class, which is beginning to mobilize in defiance of the union bureaucracies controlled by the capitalist parties. The emerging wildcat strike movement of workers in Turkey for better wages and decent working conditions must be linked to the struggles of the workers in other countries who are facing the same problems and the same class enemy. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) provides the means for this.

The struggle to improve the social conditions of the working class and youth must be developed as an integral part of the struggle for democracy and against imperialist war internationally. All these struggles are essentially a fight for socialism against capitalism, the final battle between a handful of profiteering oligarchs and the working class, the majority of the world's population.

In the mass protests that erupted in Turkey in March, growing social inequality, discontent and concern for the future played a significant role. What was missing was a revolutionary perspective and leadership knowing how to overcome these global social problems, which are fundamentally rooted in the capitalist system, and how to build a society based on social needs, not private profit.

Together with the ICFI, the Sosyalist Eşitlik Grubu is advancing this perspective and building this leadership based on the objective revolutionary role of the international working class. No fundamental social and political problems can be solved without seizing the ill-gotten wealth and power of the capitalist class. And in a globally integrated economy, these solutions must be international.

The recent earthquakes in Istanbul and the Marmara region, which revealed the danger facing millions of people, have shown the urgency of this program. The wealth acquired by the capitalist class through exploitation and financial profiteering must be expropriated. Both this social wealth and the vast resources squandered on war must be used to rapidly solve urgent social problems, especially safe housing.



People camp outdoors following an earthquake shook Istanbul and other areas of Turkey on Wednesday, in Istanbul, Turkey, April 24, 2025 [AP Photo/ Khalil Hamra]

This massive social transformation requires that the working class, which creates all wealth and ensures the functioning of the world economy, take power through socialist revolution. This is what the Sosyalist Eşitlik Grubu and its ICFI sister parties are fighting for around the world.

On this May Day, I call upon all those who are watching us to join in building the ICFI and Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi in Turkey and internationally.

Break with all the bourgeois establishment parties and the so-called left parties that claim there is no other way but to support them!

Forward to the founding of the Sosyalist Eşitlik Partisi in Turkey!

May Day 2025