

For the United Socialist States of the Middle East and Central Asia

By Ula? Ate?ci
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The following speech was delivered by Ula? Ate?ci, a leader of the Sosyalist E?itlik (Socialist Equality Group) in Turkey, to the 2020 International May Day Online Rally held by the World Socialist Web Site and the International Committee of the Fourth International on May 2.

I bring fraternal greetings from the Socialist Equality Group in Turkey, a gateway between Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The coronavirus pandemic has laid bare the devastation caused by decades of imperialist war and austerity in this region.

Turkey is now the country in Asia with the most cases. Workers in many workplaces have launched wildcat strikes to demand that production be stopped in non-essential industries. However, President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government has kept many workers on the job to churn out profits for the capitalist class. As a result of this policy, imposed together with Turkey's bankrupt parliamentary opposition parties and trade unions, the rate of confirmed COVID-19 cases among workers is almost three times above the average in Turkey.

The pandemic exposes not only the bankruptcy of the Middle Eastern bourgeoisies, but the true face of imperialism. Initially, Iran emerged as the regional epicenter of the pandemic. Already, before the pandemic, Washington had imposed sanctions slashing Iran's oil exports, crippling its trade and freezing it out of the US-dominated global financial system.

This year began with the US drone murder of General Qassem Suleimani, the Iranian government's second-highest official, in Baghdad—where the Iranian regime helped Washington set up a puppet regime during the US occupation of Iraq. This state killing, directly ordered by the US president, aimed to terrorize the entire region.

As the pandemic began, the Trump administration took the barbaric decision to use the coronavirus as a weapon of war. Imposing new sanctions, it blocked trade in medical goods critical to treating tens of thousands of innocent Iranian men, women and children ravaged by the disease. Since then, thousands of Iranians have died.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and its sympathizers in Turkey, the Socialist Equality Group, unequivocally condemn the US and European sanctions imposed on Iran. These sanctions must be immediately lifted.

Across the region, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Palestine and other war-torn areas are the most vulnerable to the virus. Their health care infrastructure has been virtually destroyed by decades of war and bombings by the US, its European and Middle Eastern allies and their proxy forces. What remains of a medical system cannot properly diagnose and monitor the sick, let alone treat them.

This is the result of decades of war in the Middle East since the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991, eliminating the main military counterweight to imperialism. Since then, millions have died in imperialist wars and occupations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and beyond. Waged by Washington to counterbalance the erosion of its economic power by establishing its domination of this oil-rich, geo-politically vital region, they have left the region desperately exposed to the pandemic.

Launched amid revolutionary working class uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, the imperialist proxy wars in Libya and Syria and then the onslaught on the Yemeni people continue alongside the ongoing persecution of the Palestinians by the Israeli state. This can only proceed because of the complicity of the

Middle Eastern bourgeoisies: the Turkish government; Kurdish nationalist groups in Turkey, Iraq and Syria; the Arab states, and the Zionist regime in Israel. Bourgeois nationalism has proved totally bankrupt.

The struggle against COVID-19 in the Near and Middle East can only be waged by the working class against imperialism and its regional allies.

The Turkish government has played an especially reactionary role in the Syrian war, which has led to over 500,000 deaths and 10 million people becoming refugees. Serving as a tool of Washington, it attacked the Syrian regime's forces inside Syria just two months ago—risking a direct clash between Turkey's ally, America, and the Syrian regime's main backer, Russia.

As for the Kurdish nationalist militias, they emerged as key proxy forces of the imperialist powers in the Syrian war, imprisoning thousands of people without trial in prison camps. While uncompromisingly defending Kurdish and other oppressed people in the Middle East, the ICFI gives no support to the Kurdish or any other bourgeois nationalists.

More than 110,000 Yemenis have died and hundreds of thousands have been wounded since the Saudi monarchy invaded Yemen, the Middle East's poorest country, in 2015. Saudi-led coalition forces bombed hospitals, schools, homes and weddings. In the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe, about 14 million Yemenis are on the brink of famine.

Refugees trapped in Turkey and Greece amount to a significant fraction of the over 70 million refugees fleeing imperialist war and poverty around the globe. A vast network of prison camps stretches from the Near East across the Mediterranean. In these camps, often funded by the European Union, innocent refugees face beatings, torture and even rape, slavery and murder. Lacking basic sanitation, they are in grave danger of succumbing to COVID-19.

It is a critical task of the international working class, in particular in Turkey and Greece, to defend refugees against persecution. They must be released from detention, receive medical care and obtain full democratic rights, including citizenship rights.

The same capitalist crisis that produces the insanity of imperialist war also provides the impulse for socialist revolution. The eruption of revolutionary struggles in Tunisia and Egypt confirmed this analysis. However, without a revolutionary leadership in the

working class, both the old military regime in Egypt and the old bourgeois-nationalist regime in Tunisia managed to hold on to power.

The crisis today directly poses the question of building the international revolutionary leadership giving a socialist perspective to the working class. The bitter experiences of the past century and first two decades of the 21st century have vindicated Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution.

In countries of a belated capitalist development, the bourgeoisie cannot lead the struggle for social and democratic rights and establish its independence from imperialism. That task falls to the international working class, fighting for the overthrow of capitalism as part of the world socialist revolution. Against imperialism, the battle cry of workers across this region must be: for the United Socialist States of the Middle East and Central Asia.

The only revolutionary alternative for workers, youth and oppressed people across this region is the International Committee of the Fourth International. The ICFI alone has waged an uncompromising, decades-long fight against imperialist war and for the continuity of Marxism and socialism. We urge our listeners to join us and build the sections of the ICFI, the World Party of Socialist Revolution founded by Leon Trotsky.

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