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## Interview: Mustafa Basoglu

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# 'We want peace at home and abroad'

*Mustafa Basoglu is the education secretary of the Turkish Labor Federation (Turk-Is). On Jan. 3, Turk-Is led a nationwide, one-day general strike against the economic and foreign policies of President Turgut Özal. The 2 million-man strike was the largest in Turkish history and the first general strike in 10 years. Turkey is now deep in crisis as a result of the government's capitulation to Anglo-American pressure to participate in a war with Iraq. The interview was conducted by telephone by Joseph Brewda on Jan. 14.*

**EIR:** Mr. Basoglu, regarding the general strike which had economic and political aims: I understand that one strike demand was that Turkey not participate in an Anglo-American-led war with Iraq. Could you give some background on why the strike was called, how successful it was, and what the key issues were?

**Basoglu:** Our collective action was very successful and the participation of our members was about 90% nationwide.

The working class and Turk-Is, which represents a large group of the population who suffer greatly from the results of the economic and social policies of the last 10 years and are heavily exploited, want to regain and set up pluralistic and free democratic regimes.

There is not any concrete result to report regarding our request to the government or to Mr. Özal to make necessary changes in the Constitution and in the labor laws; to ensure the fair distribution of national income; the superiority of law; and to open the doors to seek for our rights. . . .

Our confederation started to take actions beginning in 1985 against the Özal government. We played a great role in the change of the Constitution which gave civil rights back to former politicians.

In 1988, Turk-Is struggled against the governing party in the general local elections and succeeded in lowering the governing party's vote from 36% to 21%.

In these struggles, the main purpose of Turk-Is was to protect our human and union rights and freedoms, and also to have a democracy without prohibition.

To achieve its purposes, Turk-Is held seminars in 53 provinces and discussed the problems with almost 10,000 local union leaders and workers' representatives. Between 1984 and Dec. 20, 1990, Turk-Is protested [against] the government through conducting eight rallies and 19 big-hall meetings which drew over a million workers.

Today, in addition to these reasons, the workers and the great majority of the population are against a war, unless our territories are attacked. We want peace at home and abroad.

These are the main reasons why the executive board and other committees of the confederation took a decision for a general action, and put it into practice with great success.

**EIR:** What is the average Turkish worker and citizen's view toward a likely Gulf war, and the government's agreement to collaborate with the Bush administration's Gulf policy?

**Basoglu:** Turkish workers and the citizens of Turkey in general, and also other organizations, are against a war unless Turkish territories are attacked, and prefer to live as a peaceful nation. The opposition parties also share our point of view.

**EIR:** I understand that the Zonguldak mine workers, who have been on strike for over a month, have organized a march to Ankara. What are their demands?

**Basoglu:** The Zonguldak mine workers did not receive fair wages for many years, and were forced to work under unsafe and unhealthy conditions as a result of the government's economic policies. This is why they went out on a strike, which is fully supported by Turk-Is and its affiliated unions. They marched to Ankara to force the government to accept their rights.

At the moment, the Turk Metal Union [metal workers] with 87,000 members, and the Seluloz Is Union [paper workers] with 11,000 members, are out on strike in the metal and paper industries. This is also fully supported by Turk-Is and its affiliated unions.

**EIR:** The participation by the Turkish government in the embargo against Iraq has severely affected the Turkish economy. How has this policy affected the Turkish workers' standard of living?

**Basoglu:** The Turkish economy was severely affected as a result of the embargo against Iraq. Large numbers of transportation workers lost their jobs. Also, other side industries related to the transportation industry were closed down on that transportation route [to Iraq]. Almost 100,000 other workers lost their jobs. Because of the high price paid for petroleum, which is now bought from the world market [but previously from Iraq], the prices of goods increased, and as a result of these increases, the purchasing power of workers has gone down.

**EIR:** Do you plan further labor actions?

**Basoglu:** New labor actions will be planned and put into practice by the Turk-Is executive board and other boards until its requests are accepted to change the Constitution and labor laws, and to realize the real pluralistic democracy, which were unanimously approved by the Turk-Is 14th and 15th congresses.