

Turkey: Fascists and Social Democrats form new government

Justus Leicht
3 June 1999

It took over a month, but it has now been decided: for the first time since the 1970s and the second time in the history of modern Turkey, the fascist party—MHP (Nationalist Movement Party)—will sit in government in this unhappy land. At the head of the government stands Bülent Ecevit from the DLP (Democratic Left Party), a long-serving social democrat and confirmed Kemalist.

This development is of enormous international and historical significance. It should serve as a warning to workers all over the world. When the profit system is mired in a profound crisis, there are no limits beyond which the social democrats are not prepared to go to defend it. All of Ecevit's protestations cannot disguise the fact that the character of the right extremist MHP, widely known as the Grey Wolves, has not changed. The MHP itself emphasises this fact.

The fascist party has nothing to fear from the state; quite the contrary. On May 14, Vural Savas, the leading prosecutor of the country's constitutional court, declared there was no basis for press reports of investigations being conducted into the MHP. Afterwards a deputy of the MHP declared that it was a legitimate party carrying out a legitimate struggle which continues today. The party leader Bahçeli made a similar point.

What is meant by this “legitimate struggle”? The blood of thousands of people clings to the paws of the Grey Wolves. Over the last 30 years they have been responsible for numerous attacks on striking workers and protesting students, for the murder of journalists and human rights activists, for pogroms against left-wingers and Alevites (a religious minority) and for the brutal massacre of Kurds.

They have close connections with the Mafia, army, police and secret services. In the course of the 15 year-long bloody civil war in the Kurd provinces they have dominated the “special units” of the security forces, as well as the dreaded death squads of the so called “counter-guerrillas”. It is not so much the MHP that has changed, as the state itself. Its various organs can be hardly distinguished from the fascist bands.

It is no wonder that, following parliamentary elections on April 18, it was unclear for some time whether a coalition government between the DLP, MHP and conservative ANAP (Motherlands Party) of Mesut Yılmaz would really come into being. Ecevit, along with many leading newspaper commentators, had from the very beginning orientated towards such a coalition.

Others were worried about the bad reputation of the MHP both at home and abroad and their unpredictability. For the past four years the party had no representation inside parliament. Two years ago its founder and undisputed absolute leader, Alparslan Türkeş, died. The MHP was thought to be an unknown quantity.

For a time, therefore, a coalition of the DLP and the ANAP with the other conservative party, the TPP (The True Path Party) of Tansu Ciller was regarded as a possibility. Both centre-right parties have been enormously discredited because of their notorious corruption and nepotism and were the biggest losers in the election. In addition, a bitter rivalry exists between the party leaders. Some newspapers have therefore demanded that the chairpersons of both parties, particularly Ciller, step down and open the way for a merger of the parties.

As it became clear that the TPP had been relegated to a role in opposition, hefty internal political struggles begun. A similar development is to be seen in the Islamic Virtue Party (FP) and the Social Democratic-Left Kemalist CHP (Republican Peoples Party), once the state party of the founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Atatürk, but now a party without representation in parliament.

Ecevit has taken considerable care to bind the MHP into the government while “softening it up”. His requirements for a coalition agreement were first leaked to the press. Rahsan Ecevit, the wife of the prime minister and chairwoman of the DLP, publicly declared her “concern” over the “past” of the MHP and her “doubts” about whether the party had really changed.

For their part the MHP leaders melodramatically declared their allegiance to the “legitimate struggle” of their party

and vainly demanded a public apology. The coalition of right and “left” parties appeared to be on the brink of collapse. The press, state president Demirel, the ANAP and a section of the employers did everything they could to rescue the coalition—and were successful.

The need on the part of the Turkish bourgeoisie for such a “strong” government is easily explained. The ordinary people of Turkey, who at present suffer under unbearable levels of unemployment and poverty, are expected to swallow more bitter medicine from the “poison cabinet” of the International Monetary Fund over the next few years. In addition, employers' federations are demanding that the Turkish economy be made “fit and streamlined” for a broad integration into the European economy.

With regard to the social and economic questions, there are barely any differences between the future coalition partners. Massive privatisation, “reform” of social insurance, the lowering of taxes for the employers and the raising of consumer taxes—there is general agreement on these points. Differences emerge, however, on how these measures should be imposed while at the same time holding society together.

In the absence of a visible socialist alternative, the social tensions have principally expressed themselves in the form of support for Islamist tendencies. Although the FP, the successor of the banned RP (Welfare Party), was forced to accept electoral defeat, it is still the third strongest force in parliament and will lead the opposition.

Already in 1991 the MHP entered parliament as part of a joint list with the RP and took over central Islamic demands in the course of the election campaign. Because of this they were able to take many votes from the FP. For their part, the TPP and the ANAP adopted as vague a position as possible on these issues.

As Marx put it: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of an unspiritual situation.” For many workers, poor and lower-middle-class people the political turn to Islam has less to do with the desire for the introduction of the Sharia (head scarf) or a religious state, as with a vague desire for “justice” and “morality”. This mood is aimed against the enormous destruction of living standards, which has been carried out by Kemal Atatürk's “holy knights” in the name of “modernisation” and “orientation to the West”, a process bound up with huge state corruption.

The reaction of Ecevit to the appearance in parliament of FP deputy Merve Kavakci garbed in a head scarf speaks volumes. “This is no place to challenge the state!” he cried out excitedly.

The Islamists have made the head scarf their political symbol. Later President Demirel made compromising comments on this issue. The DLP is practically the only

party in parliament taking as uncompromising a line as the military on this question. One of the DLP's main differences with the MHP is the former's support for a ban on head scarves in schools and universities.

The Grey Wolves made the abolition of this ban one of the main planks of their election campaign. For this reason the head of the MHP, Bahçeli, surprisingly praised the chairman of the constitutional court and Turkey's senior judge, Ahmet Sezer, as the latter called for more freedom of opinion and sharply criticised the existing practice of bans and persecutions.

The position is different with regard to the Kurdish question. All of the coalition partners agree that a “Kurdish problem” does not exist—it is rather a problem of “terrorism”. But the problem of how to resolve this issue is contentious.

In common with many businessmen Ecevit is fearful of a further escalation and has therefore advocated a “Law of Repentance,” permitting lighter sentences for self-confessed and defecting PKK cadre. The carrying out of the probable death penalty for PKK chief Abdullah Ocalan is also controversial. On both questions the MHP has adopted an uncompromising position: “No mercy for terrorists”.

The experienced old fox Ecevit is seeking to use his DLP to establish a balance and hold in check the Islamist and fascist tendencies represented by the MHP. The ANAP is seen as a force for arbitration. The problem is, however, that these tendencies arise from the bankruptcy of the Kemalist state model and the break-up of existing society.

The growing political weight of the military and the fascists stems from the failure of democratic mechanisms under conditions of increasing class polarisation. This is also the reason for the hysterical forms of Turkish chauvinism and the accompanying flexing of muscles abroad, alongside intensive domestic repression. These policies enflame Kurdish nationalism, which in turn feeds Turkish nationalism even more.

It may be that the new government coalition is able to hold power for some time. But one thing is clear, flying in the face of their election promises, this government will bring neither prosperity, nor social justice and democracy, nor an end to the loss of life arising from the Kurdish conflict.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)