

Kurdish nationalists seek supporting role in Turkish state

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In mid-February the press reported the results of the extraordinary seventh congress of the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party), where the organisation officially gave up the aim of establishing an autonomous Kurdish region. The PKK had abandoned its original demand for a separate Kurdish state in 1993.

The way is now being cleared for a regroupment in Turkey of various Kurdish nationalists and other past critics of the regime to create new political formations supporting the Turkish state.

The PKK delegates decided to delete the word "Kurdistan" from the names of various party organisations. Its front organisation, the National Liberation Front of Kurdistan, has been dissolved and replaced by the Democratic Peoples Union. Its armed organisation, the People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan, has been renamed the People's Defence Force. In the future, the PKK may also undergo a similar change of name.

Osman Öcalan, a member of the PKK executive committee, explained that if there were a general amnesty, former guerrillas could make "a contribution to the democratisation of Turkey". He continued, "Some people are saying, 'Let's transform the state by attacking it'. No, this can be achieved only by soothing and encouraging it."

The report of party Chairman Abdullah Öcalan, who was unanimously re-elected, was relayed to the delegates from the prison island Imrali, where he is presently being held, having been sentenced to death. Öcalan called for reconciliation with the Turkish state and its Kemalist ideology.

He explained that the founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Atatürk, was an opponent of the rising oligarchy and wanted to create a democracy, but he was prevented from doing so because of the Kurdish rebellions that began in 1925. Today, he said, the Kurds should complete his work and co-operate in the "construction of a democratic republic".

Ironically, the PKK's striving for integration into the Turkish state underlines a basic political fact that it had always strenuously denied: in the final analysis, political developments are determined not by national contradictions but by class interests. Since its establishment, the PKK had maintained (in the classic manner of all bourgeois-national movements) that the "national self-determination of the Kurdish people", i.e., the creation of its own state, was the indispensable prerequisite for democracy, economic development and socialism. In light of this, the common interests of Turkish and Kurdish workers would have to take second place.

The brutal persecution and discrimination of the Kurdish minority in Turkey, which was supported by the Stalinist and social democratic parties, lent the PKK a certain credibility. But now the deeper-going political relations are coming to the surface.

The PKK is less concerned with democratic rights—whether of the Kurds or Turks—than with its participation in the exploitation of the raw materials lying in Kurdish areas and the profits to be made therefrom. If in the past it sought to carry out this aim by means of its own state, it now sees the only way forward to be an alliance with the Turkish ruling class. Accordingly, the former "fascist state" is suddenly transformed into a stronghold of democracy!

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the renewed fight for control of the resources of the Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia has greatly increased the geo-strategic significance of Turkey as a geographical bridgehead and bulwark of the United States and the European Union. The PKK concludes from this that it should offer itself as junior partner and auxiliary police force for the Turkish bourgeoisie.

This orientation was expressed very clearly in the PKK newspaper *Özgür Politika*: "The problem with all uprisings is the fact that the oppressor is usually backed internationally, and it is very difficult to convince the friends of the oppressor to end their support.

"The links between Turkey and the Western powers have now taken on a rather important dimension, which is the economic one. In the eyes of its partners, Turkey needs to be stable if they are to benefit from the cheap labour and geographically useful position that Turkey can no doubt offer. These partners, who themselves have all at one time militarily and economically dominated the world, now wish Turkey to base itself on broader forces than its previous military strength.

"The fact that Turkey's wider interests lie with economic advancement brings it into conflict with its own traditions, which are based on domination and national pride. Business circles now see this old tradition as a handicap, as they are now faced with international criticism from all sides when they seek to trade. At the present time there is a conflict of interests between the militaristic rulers and the commercially oriented industrialists. One must take into consideration the possibility that the industrialists would prefer to take control of the Kurdish region by means of investment and exploitation, once the region ceased to be a war zone.... The fact that Turkey may have proved to be stronger

militarily does not diminish the rights of the Kurds. The important thing is to express those rights on the political and legal level" (*Kurdish Observer*, February 18).

The motives and social content of the turn being made by the PKK could hardly be expressed more openly. This has little to do with a conversion to the cause of democracy. In reality, the new policy will be accomplished by means of force against any sign of opposition on the part of the Kurds. It has already been reported that a party leader and two of his bodyguards were killed in a shoot-out that occurred during a congress held in northern Iraq in mid-January. In addition, a group of 20 dissident party members were arrested and subjected to "cross-examination".

At the beginning of the year the central committee of the PKK had already published a statement indicating how it planned to deal with internal party critics: "At this critical time, provocateurs inside our party are supporting the aims of the international conspirators. Despite positive efforts on the part of our party, these pathetic specimens, who persistently tend towards betrayal, have made themselves the extended arm of the war profiteers and the international conspirators."

The same statement went on to declare: "The representatives of this tendency constitute the extended link to clique formations within our party. By opposing any form of change and renewal, they persist in supporting banditry and thereby keep our party disorganised, unprepared and weak in face of the international conspiracy."

The German-language *Kurdistan Rundbrief*, which published this statement, could not avoid expressing its concern in a subsequent article: "The violent and exaggerated choice of words used in the PKK Central Committee statement is disturbing. It strengthens the increasing impression, shared by close friends of the Kurdish cause, that the PKK and their institutions are weakened and helpless and increasingly react to criticism not with arguments, but with defamation and abuse. If this continues, further attacks like that on Selahattin Celik, or direct threats as those against Necdat Buldan, are to be feared."

In order to suffocate all criticism, the cult of leadership around Öcalan is being strengthened. On February 15, the *Kurdish Observer* reported a unanimous PKK congress resolution which declared "our sun" Öcalan to be the "universal national leader" and praised the senseless acts of self-immolation of children and old people that were carried out in protest against his arrest.

In the magazine *Serbesti*, which is published by Öcalan's former attorney and defence counsel, and which has been censored several times by the Turkish authorities, the Kurdish author Cemil Gündogan writes: "The institutions created by the PKK to conduct diplomacy on behalf of the Kurds are now striving to have Turkey admitted into the European Union. Now, when somebody tries to 'unmask' the Turkish state, he is met with criticism from the PKK. The Kurdish television and print media, which operate with money given by Kurds who have fled to Europe because they were victimised by the practices of the Turkish state, are now starting to criticise not the Turkish state, but those who criticise the state. In other words, the main body of the Kurdish movement under PKK leadership is evolving further and further from a democratic political force into a force for restoration" (quoted in the *Turkish*

Daily News, January 24, 2000).

A corresponding reorientation is taking place in the ranks of the legal organisations that co-operate with the PKK or are close to it.

Last autumn, the so-called "Initiative for a Movement for Democracy" was formed. It is strongly supported by the (still) legal Kurdish nationalist party HADEP, from whose ranks come most of the mayors in south-east Turkey, as well as functionaries of various banned Kurdish parties. There is another, similar initiative by Kurdish intellectuals and politicians who are to the political right of the "Initiative for a Movement for Democracy", but who likewise maintain close contacts with the HADEP leadership. It is assumed that one or two new parties could develop out of these initiatives, which would face less danger of prohibition by the state than HADEP or earlier Kurdish parties.

The *Turkish Daily News* has closely followed three earlier congresses of this initiative, and have provided detailed and favourable reports.

The newspaper quoted speeches like that of Sedat Yurttas, a lawyer and former parliamentary delegate of the pro-Kurdish DEP (since banned), to the second congress at the end of January, which made the perspective of the Kurdish nationalists quite clear: "One thing is certain: eastern and southeastern Anatolia, which have been neglected until recently by policies implemented in Turkey, are now opening up to the global economy, global politics and global diplomacy.

"A meeting organised by the United Nations is scheduled to take place in Diyarbakir within the next two days, during which the embargo imposed on Iraq will be debated. If you look at this development from a constructive angle, it represents an oil pipeline and perhaps a natural gas pipeline. The recent developments in the region and the collapse of the Hizbullah terror organisation will obviously promote a flow of the global economy into the region. The issue of the EU should also be evaluated in relation to the same concept. The EU has provided Turkey only with the framework of rights, thus refraining from allowing Turkey to benefit from all the advantages. In order to attain all the rights guaranteed under the EU framework, we must complete our organisational structure and develop some plausible projects."

It is, however, doubtful that the new strategy will prove viable. The ongoing arming of Turkey as a military outpost of imperialism, and the increasing impoverishment of broad social layers as a result of the economic and socio-political dictates of the EU and IMF, inevitably strengthen the political weight of the military and the extreme right, i.e., those forces that do not want a compromise on the Kurdish question.

One thing is certain, however: the perspective of the PKK and its supporters cannot lead to the liberation of the Kurdish and Turkish masses from oppression and exploitation.



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