

Turkey: Kurdish nationalists and left groups move towards electoral bloc

Sinan Ikinici
21 March 2007

With national elections set to be held in Turkey on November 4, political parties on both the right and “left” are increasingly engaged in unprincipled horse-trading. Plans and proposals to form electoral blocs are floated frequently and get considerable coverage in the media. An indispensable part of this process is the mutual political recriminations between competing bourgeois factions.

For the last few weeks, the Kurdish nationalist Democratic Society Party (DTP)—successor to the consecutively banned People’s Labour Party (HEP), Democracy Party (DP), People’s Democracy Party (HADEP), Democratic People’s Party (DEHAP) and Democratic Society Movement (DTH)—was giving the impression that it would not enter this year’s elections as a party, but would rather run “independent” candidates. The aim of this tactic would be to bypass the extremely antidemocratic 10 percent national election threshold, which is designed primarily to block the Kurdish nationalists from having deputies in the parliament.

Under this restrictive Turkish election law, only parties gaining more than 10 percent of the national vote are allowed to gain parliamentary seats. The threshold, however, does not apply to independent candidates.

Until now, none of the Kurdish nationalist parties have managed to overcome the 10 percent election threshold, but they have played a major role in municipal government in the southeast since 1999.

According to the DTP’s alleged plan, as soon as they entered the parliament these “independent” deputies would join the DTP and form a parliamentary group, which requires a minimum of 20 deputies. Estimates show that with its core electoral support in the southeast of the country, the DTP can manage to get around 25 seats in parliament.

However, according to a news report published by the *Turkish Daily News* (TDN) on March 12, DTP deputy leader Aysel Tugluk declared that the party wants to form an electoral bloc with some left-wing parties for the coming elections, instead of resorting to the tactic of entering parliament with “independent” candidates.

While a section of the Turkish “left” supports the army and Turkish nationalism in the name of struggling against imperialism, globalisation and Islamic revivalism, another

section—including some fake Trotskyists—support Kurdish nationalism. They are always eager and willing to provide a left cover for the Kurdish nationalists whenever they ask for it.

Tugluk told *TDN* that the electoral bloc’s candidates would not be exclusively Kurdish. She also signalled that the DTP would be more generous than before in allowing its left props to appoint their own candidates. In the past, predecessors of the DTP formed such electoral blocs with left-wing parties and groups, but selected their own candidates without giving much room to the others.

A number of left-wing groups support the DTP in the name of “revolutionary politics,” despite the party’s open adaptation to US imperialism and the Kemalist establishment in Turkey. Leading members of the DTP and its predecessor parties have openly expressed their support for the US-led occupation of neighbouring Iraq, hoping for the establishment of a Kurdish state in the north of that country, a state that could only emerge as a puppet of the major imperialist forces.

They are also in favour of entry into the European Union and of accepting the financial criteria involved. Such financial measures have already had disastrous consequences for the poor and backward farming areas of largely Kurdish southeast Turkey. During their election campaign in 2002, DEHAP representatives declared the IMF “an indispensable reality of our epoch.”

In her interview with the *TDN*, DTP leader Tugluk employs very mild rhetoric, repeating her offer of support for the Kemalist establishment: “It is very wrong to conduct politics by provoking tensions. Everyone needs to be careful. We will campaign for togetherness in parliament and are aware that we need to be very careful.”

She added, “We want a bright and peaceful Turkey and for this, there needs to be a solution to the Kurdish problem. We see the solution lying inside Parliament.”

According to various election polls, the DTP’s expected vote total is between 3 and 5 percent. During the 2002 election campaign, in addition to the support of its usual left-wing props, the DEHAP formed an alliance with the Social Democratic Peoples Party (SHP) of Murat Karayalcin. But this bloc only managed to receive 6.3 percent of the vote. It is not difficult to envisage that a similar electoral bloc this year—with

or without additional parties and groups—would not allow the DTP to surpass the 10 percent threshold, as the SHP receives 2 percent in the polls.

Just one day after Tugluk's comments, SHP leader Karayalcin proposed to the Republican People's Party (CHP) joining to establish a "left-wing" pre-election alliance. The CHP is the only opposition party in parliament. It represents the Kemalist tradition and is close to the military.

Before that, Karayalcin had acted like a "wise man." Looking for a solution to the crisis over the presidential election, he proposed to all the other political parties to elect the next president by popular vote. The Kemalist establishment fears that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) might use its parliamentary majority to elect its leader, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a moderate Islamist, as president.

Karayalcin presented himself as a democrat, trying to find a civilian solution to the deepening regime crisis. But in fact, his proposal was in line with the campaign launched by the army against the AKP government. Nonetheless, the proposal didn't gain significant support.

It is difficult to know whether Karayalcin's attempt was just a manoeuvre to justify a bloc with the DTP by saying, "Well, I did my best, but Baykal's [leader of CHP, who is acting like the mouthpiece of the army] response was negative."

For the last few months, government pressure against the DTP has escalated. This adds fuel to the flames of nationalism and chauvinism that have been terrorising the country over the last few years. This campaign is spearheaded by the Turkish military and supported by its "civilian partners."

The wave of nationalism and chauvinism in Turkey is a response by establishment political circles in particular to the implications of the Iraq war. As a result of the disastrous US-led war and occupation of Iraq, that country is on the verge of breaking apart, and the Turkish elite is extremely worried about the possible consequences of such a development. Increasing independence for the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, combined with the prospect of oil revenues flowing into Kurdish hands, has intensified fears in Turkish nationalist quarters of a resurgence of Kurdish nationalism inside Turkey itself.

There is a growing threat that the Turkish army will invade northern Iraq in the coming spring, when the snow melts, to clamp down on PKK (Kurdish Workers Party—the Kurdish nationalist guerrilla organisation) forces in their Iraqi safe haven. As a result, tensions between Ankara, Washington and the Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq (namely Barzani and Talabani) have been growing for the last few months. Last month witnessed a harsh clash of words between Ankara and Kurdish leaders, particularly Barzani.

On February 18, police in Van in eastern Turkey raided the local DTP's office. Two members of the party were arrested on February 23. On the same day, the Diyarbakir prosecutor's office ordered the arrest of Ibrahim Aydogdu, the Diyarbakir branch leader of the DTP, for saying any attack on Kirkuk in

Iraq would be tantamount to an attack on Diyarbakir in Turkey. Both cities have a Kurdish majority.

On February 26, Ahmet Turk, the leader of the DTP, and Tugluk were sentenced to a year and a half in prison for "praising crime or criminality" as well as for using a language other than Turkish in official papers. The two were accused of distributing Kurdish-language material praising imprisoned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan. The court found Turk and Tugluk guilty of violating not only the Penal Code, but also the Political Parties Law. This aspect of the verdict is critical as it paves the way for banning the DTP.

On March 2, three DTP members were arrested on charges of spreading propaganda for the PKK. The arrests followed a police raid on the DTP's office in Batman on 1 March.

On March 6, Turk was again found guilty of praising jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, because he referred to him as "sir."

This is far from a complete list. Numerous party officials, including regional and district leaders, are continuously facing trials on the basis of different articles of the Penal Code and the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

While the antidemocratic and anti-Kurdish 10 percent threshold serves as a prop for the crisis-ridden Turkish political system, it is not without its harmful side effects. As a result of the threshold, the AKP and the CHP were the only parties to enter parliament in the November 2002 national election. More than 45 percent of the votes cast in the election found no representation in parliament. As a result of inter-party transfers (which have been another typical feature of Turkey's limited and corrupt bourgeois democracy for decades), today the ANAP (Motherland Party with 20 deputies), the DYP (True Path Party with 4 deputies), the SHP (Social Democratic People's Party with 1 deputy), the HYP (Party of People's Rise with 1 deputy) and the GP (Young Party with 1 deputy) are also represented in parliament.

More importantly, thanks to the 10 percent threshold, the moderate Islamist AKP enjoys a huge parliamentary majority—354 out of 550 seats—and, over the last four and a half years, has been capturing the strategic heights of the state machinery, eliminating the Kemalist elite. The next president will be elected in May 2007 by an absolute majority of the parliament (in other words, by the AKP) to a seven-year term. He has the mandate to shape the top echelons of the judiciary and the administrative system. This is what lies behind the campaign against the AKP launched last year by the Turkish army and its civilian supporters.



To contact the WWSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact