

Right-wing nationalists win Northern Cyprus elections

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22 April 2009

In the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC), the right-wing nationalist opposition party, the UBP (National Unity Party), led by Dervis Eroglu, won a landslide victory in Sunday's early national elections.

The UBP garnered 43.96 percent of the vote, giving it a slim majority in the 50-seat parliament. The election result was a blow to the ruling, nominally "left" CTP (Republican Turkish Party), which took 29.33 percent of the vote.

The turnout was exceptionally high at 81.3 percent, an indication of growing internal tensions.

In less than four years, electoral support for the CTP has plummeted from 45 to 29 percent. At the time of the earlier elections, CTP leader Mehmet Ali Talat became president, winning 55 percent of the votes cast for that office.

Prior to the 2005 national and presidential elections, the CTP, an ex-Stalinist and now pro-European Union and pro-market bourgeois party, made a number of hollow promises to the population, which was weary of living in political isolation under the increasingly difficult economic conditions in the north. The CTP pledged to open the way to EU membership and economic prosperity.

Turkey's ruling party, the Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party), provided guidance and support to the CTP by pushing some DP (Democratic Party) and UBP deputies to resign from their parties and establish the pro-AKP organisation, the ORP (Freedom and Reform Party). This manoeuvre was aimed at breaking the CTP from its links with Serdar Denktas' DP, which has proved to be an unreliable coalition partner.

In the past, Talat and his CTP had repeatedly and bitterly complained about unacceptable interventions from Ankara. Now, however, under conditions of a

worsening economic crisis, the CTP leadership has welcomed the political initiatives from Ankara.

The Turkish and Greek communities failed to agree to the United Nations unity plan by the stipulated March 2003 deadline and the AKP government in Turkey decided to force out the right-wing nationalist president of northern Cyprus, Rauf Denktas, as soon as possible.

A revised UN reunification plan was put to both communities in twin referendums in April 2004. The various UN plans were essentially dictated by the main imperialist powers, but the "left-wing" Talat and his CTP championed them in the name of progressiveness and prosperity.

The revised version of the plan was endorsed by Turkish Cypriots and overwhelmingly rejected by Greek Cypriots. The Greek Cypriot leader Tassos Papadopoulos played a decisive role in killing the plan by openly asking the people to vote "no"—aware of the fact that time was on his side, i.e., the side of the Greek and Greek Cypriot bourgeoisie.

It is now known that at the time the top brass of the Turkish military was very uneasy about these developments, and that the "sellout" of Northern Cyprus by the AKP was one of the major motives behind its coup d'état plans of 2003-2004.

Another piece of this newly emerged evidence, the Ergenekon indictment, claims that the UBP received some \$20 million from the Ergenekon political-military network in the 1998 elections to further its election campaigns. According to the indictment, these funds were used to bribe or force voters to vote for the UBP.

It is also a well known fact that Northern Cyprus had been an important hub for "deep-state" activities, as well as a convenient holiday resort for their gunmen.

In the wake of the current economic crisis, the people

of Northern Cyprus realise they have been badly deceived. The unsustainable speculative-led economic growth of 2003-2007 was based on the casino industry and a construction boom, which declined sharply in 2008 as the global financial crisis hit the economy. This decline has turned into a full-fledged economic disaster in the first four months of 2009.

The future looks even bleaker, which is why the CTP decided to hold early elections.

Cyprus has been divided since 1974, when Turkish forces invaded the island in response to an attempt by Greek Cypriots to make it part of Greece. Initially, Turkey justified its military intervention on the grounds of restoring constitutional order. Instead, Ankara instigated the emergence of a new state on the island.

In 1983, following the September 1980 military coup in Turkey, the occupied part of the island was transformed into a new state under the name of the KKTC. Since then, only Turkey has extended diplomatic recognition to this state. Over the last quarter century the KKTC has functioned as a military protectorate.

The Turkish military presently retains some 30,000 troops within the borders of the KKTC. The Turkish people have been taught for decades that Cyprus is the “infant land” (with Turkey as the “motherland”). Since the middle of the 1950s, this has been an integral part of official Turkish chauvinist ideology.

As is typical in a military protectorate, the KKTC’s public sector is the largest employer, accounting for nearly 20 percent of employment. Part of the cost, together with infrastructure investment, is financed by the Turkish government, which allocates some \$500 million annually.

Following the defeat of the UN plan, a new round of confidence-building measures and contacts were launched, and the election of Demetris Christophas of the Stalinist and pro-EU AKEL as president of Greek Cyprus in February 2008 fostered new hopes among some layers of the population. There was talk that the “comradely” ties between Talat and Christophas would help overcome outstanding problems.

Now these hopes lie in tatters and many believe that the outcome of Sunday’s vote will likely jeopardise efforts at reunification.

Eroglu has repeatedly said he will press for international recognition of the breakaway state. The

UBP wants the island to remain divided and has its sights set on a two-state model, including the possibility of a loose federation.

In an interview with the *Sunday Zaman* he said, “We have our own state, and our main duty is to maintain and strengthen our state. Everything will be easier if it is universally accepted that we are a nation and that we have a state.”

On the eve of Sunday’s vote, Greek Cypriot President Christofias warned that a UBP win could put the talks in jeopardy.

Although the election results do not directly affect Talat, his ability to negotiate a pro-imperialist settlement with the support of the AKP could be limited.

The current deadlock in Cyprus illuminates the reactionary role of those nationalist and chauvinist forces which declare they are an alternative to the EU and the imperialist powers. A party like the UBP, which played a major role in transforming northern Cyprus into a military protectorate and spread chauvinist poison, has nothing to offer the working people of Cyprus irrespective of their ethnic background. In the course of its term in office, the UBP will implement harsh austerity measures in the name of stabilizing the economy.

The UBP’s ties with clandestine paramilitary organisations must also be seen as a threat to the working people of Cyprus.

Only an independent and genuinely internationalist movement of the Cypriot working class, uniting all the nationalities on the island on the basis of a socialist programme and allying them with the world working class, can provide a democratic and peaceful solution to the Cyprus question.



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