

Fighting erupts in Turkish parliament as Erdogan pushes for presidential dictatorship

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Fist-fights erupted in the Turkish parliament yesterday as the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) moved to impose a series of constitutional amendments aimed at turning the country into a presidential dictatorship under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Two deputies, one of the AKP and another of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), were hospitalized with injuries after the fighting, which erupted after another deputy, independent Aylin Nazliaka, handcuffed herself to the speakers' microphone. Nazliaka said her action was a protest at the handcuffing of the parliament by the broad powers the proposed constitutional reforms would grant to the president.

The parliament nonetheless continued voting on the measures, approving yesterday Article 12 of the 18-point constitutional amendment package. This article, approved with only 12 votes over the necessary 330-vote threshold, grants the president the authority to impose a state of emergency.

More broadly, the amendments in the bill extend the president's power over the legislative and judiciary branches. They enable the president to issue decrees, appoint ministers and top state officials—including the majority of the higher judicial bodies—and to dissolve parliament, while making it considerably harder to try or dismiss the president.

To impose the bill, Erdogan and the AKP are working closely with the fascistic Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). During the debates, AKP lawmakers consistently attacked the members of the two opposition parties, the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) and the HDP.

The MHP's legalistic denials of charges that it is working with the AKP to impose the constitutional

amendment package only served to underscore the close collaboration between the two parties. The AKP and the MHP, MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli told reporters in parliament on Thursday, "are two separate legal entities. We will have discourses within which we will say 'yes' in our own way."

Bahçeli denied reports that the MHP is supporting Erdogan's amendment because it is certain that it will have seats in a future AKP-led government, however. "We are not in a state to answer such a question regarding the future," he said. "We have not stated an opinion about the future in this process."

In the meantime, however, AKP sources confirmed that they were coordinating their actions with the MHP. "We will evaluate what the MHP will do during the campaign," an AKP source told *Hurriyet*. "The MHP will carry out its own rallies, but we will coordinate with them."

The desperate manoeuvres by Turkish opposition politicians reflect a broad awareness in the ruling class that Erdogan's amendments would undermine basic democratic rights and mark a major step towards dictatorship. On Monday, 62 former Turkish diplomats issued a statement against the amendments. "We are deeply concerned that such a development will further divide Turkey and will put it into a serious internal and external crisis at a time when the Republic of Turkey is facing terrorism, economic difficulties and the threat of war," they said.

The drive of Erdogan and the AKP towards dictatorship is bound up with the intense and explosive crisis facing the Turkish bourgeoisie. Facing escalating social opposition in the working class and sharp conflicts with its imperialist allies in the NATO alliance over the war in Syria, Erdogan is strengthening a dictatorial regime to be used against the working

class, as well as against further attempts by Washington and Berlin to topple his regime.

With strike activity increasing in Britain and in Spain, there are growing signs that the working class is going on the offensive in Turkey and across Europe. Some 2,650 metal workers in 14 factories in Turkey decided to go on strike, as collective bargaining between companies (General Elektrik Grid Solution, Schneider Enerji, Schneider Elektrik and ABB) and the trade union failed to reach a conclusion.

With the help of the United Metalworkers Union, which from the beginning worked closely with the government and did its best to block opposition among the workers, strike action was postponed by a cabinet resolution for 60 days. This was on the grounds that the strike was deemed to be of a “nature that will impair national security.” The decision points to the fact that the government aims to ban strike activity, fearing that the increasing economic and political crisis will drive ever broader sections of the working class into struggle.

The Turkish lira is plunging towards an unprecedented level of four lira to the US dollar, as tourist revenues collapse due to escalating terror attacks in Turkey, and Turkey continues to suffer from economic stagnation of its main export markets in Europe, hit by European Union (EU) austerity measures.

Above all, the Erdogan regime has been staggered by the failed coup attempt of July 15, carried out by sections of the Turkish army backed by Washington and Berlin. Arrests and dismissals of academics, police and army officers have become routine. Since July 15, some 43,000 people have been remanded in custody and 95,000 public employees from all state institutions and universities have been dismissed.

Ankara’s relations with its NATO partners are on the verge of collapse, as it develops ties with Moscow. Most significant was the agreement reached between Ankara and Moscow on the war in Syria, which excludes Turkey’s NATO partners, first of all the United States, in the process. Russia and Turkey have initiated a new round of Syrian peace talks in Kazakhstan, scheduled for January 23, and are moving to set aside disputes over the fate of President Bashar al-Assad.

The escalating dispute between Ankara and its NATO allies reflects the highly advanced state of the

breakdown of the post-World War II order. A section of the Turkish ruling class, represented by Erdogan’s AKP, is seeking a better position for itself through an open conflict with its traditional allies in the EU and the Obama administration, by deepening its relations with Russia and China.

As it moves further from NATO and the EU, the AKP appears to cherish the hope that it will be able to work out more stable relations with the incoming Trump administration—a hope that may well prove to be illusory. Nonetheless, the AKP and the Turkish army are for now still pressing on with ties to Russia.

On Wednesday, Turkish and Russian air forces carried out a common operation against the Islamic State militia around al Bab, an unprecedented event for a NATO member, since its foundation in 1949.

Following months of bluster and threats against the Obama government and the European Union, mainly over Syria, their support to the failed coup attempt and the PKK, Erdogan continued his anti-Western tirades, this time over Turkey’s economic problems.

On Thursday, he blamed Ankara’s Western allies for the collapse of the Turkish currency, which recently plunged to record lows against the US dollar. “They try everything to slow the economy by troubling suppliers and consumers. They take every chance to scare investors and block investments. A lot of international institutions, notably the European Union, make unfair accusations,” he said.

After the pro-government newspaper *Yeni Safak* accused Germany’s Deutsche Bank of “economic terror” by recalling loans to Turkish companies before their due dates, the bank’s Turkish unit issued a statement stating that it was “unacceptable” for the paper to associate the bank, Germany’s largest, with terrorism.



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