

Turkish ruling parties break planned election alliance

Bar?? Demir

2 November 2018

Amid growing social anger in Turkey and a new shock to Turkey's international relations with the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul, the People's Alliance between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) has broken down.

Last Tuesday, MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli announced that his party would no longer seek an alliance with the AKP in local elections slated for late March 2019.

Speaking at a weekly leadership meeting of his party, Bahçeli said: "In this current situation, we have no expectations, pursuit or intention to form an alliance in the local elections of March 31, 2019. It will not be possible to reach an agreement through forced meetings. Nor is there a need to linger or play with hopes. ... We will stand in the elections with our own candidates and emblem."

The Islamist AKP and the far-right MHP formed the People Alliance in early 2018 for presidential and parliamentary elections, after the MHP supported President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's AKP government after the abortive coup of July 15, 2016, launched from NATO's Incirlik air base with US and German backing. They have cooperated on building a police state targeting the working class in Turkey, invading Syria and attacking Kurdish nationalist forces in Syria. The MHP called for a "yes" vote on granting the Turkish presidency dictatorial powers in the 2017 referendum.

Erdogan won the presidential election with MHP support in the first round. But the June 24, 2018, parliamentary elections were a definite setback for the AKP, which failed to secure a majority. The AKP won 295 of 600 seats in parliament and became dependent on the MHP for its parliamentary majority. The MHP

won 49 seats on 12 percent of the vote. This was a surprisingly good result for the MHP, as the IYI Parti (Good Party) had split from MHP prior to the election, on a pro-NATO line.

In response to Bahçeli's announcement that there would be no alliance in the local election, Erdogan said: "Everyone will go their separate ways." He also accused the MHP—a far-right party formed with CIA support in 1969 by former Colonel Alparslan Türke?, who carried out brutal "counterinsurgency" campaigns in the 1970s against the workers and students movements in Turkey—of racism.

He also accused the MHP of supporting the drug trade by supporting the release of drug dealers: "We cannot grant amnesty in a period where there are 50,000 drug dealers. ... Will we be known as a government that has forgiven the drug dealers?"

After Bahçeli broke the election alliance, Turkey's lira fell nearly 3 percent on the currency markets. Then both Erdogan and Bahçeli had to stress that the decision was only about the upcoming local election and will not, however, affect the continuation of the People's Alliance government itself.

The breakdown of the election alliance nonetheless points to the crisis provoked in Turkish ruling circles by escalating strikes and workers struggles at home, and growing wars and conflict across the region.

Rising inflation, especially on prices for basic goods, growing unemployment and poverty, business closures, bankruptcies and downsizing are threatening workers and are increasingly provoking workers struggles. In September, thousands of construction workers at the site of a new airport in Istanbul carried out protests against workplace accidents, precarious and oppressive working conditions and the violation of basic rights. The government reacted to this mass protest with a

brutal police attack, jailing more than 30 workers.

Erdogan and both parties in his government are desperate to prevent this opposition from picking up momentum, for fear that it will rapidly escalate into mass class struggles. Its brutal attack on the protesting construction workers is aimed at intimidating all workers who seek to defend their rights. Although the airport construction workers' strike was suppressed, mass opposition in the working class heightens.

The class struggle is developing parallel with the deepening crisis of the Turkish economy. The Turkish lira suffered significant depreciation against the US dollar and the euro this year. Turkey's official inflation rate rose to 24.52 percent in September. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), it increased 6.3 percent from the previous month—a far bigger increase than the 3.6 percent that had been predicted in an earlier Reuters poll of 15 economists.

Under these conditions, tensions between the MHP and AKP grew, as the MHP does not want to take responsibility for the consequences of the economic crisis and the policies of the AKP-led government. Instead, it offered some populist promises of social concessions in an attempt to consolidate its gains in the last elections. It made calls for an amnesty law for prisoners, an early retirement law, and for a return of the racist vow in the schools. Erdogan opposed these MHP proposals, however.

Amid the upsurge of the class struggle and wars across the Middle East from Syria to Yemen, Erdogan saw the Saudi regime's brutal murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi as a chance to strengthen his hand.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* stated: "Ankara clearly sees the Khashoggi assassination as a means of promoting the Turkish regime's interests in relation to Riyadh and Washington. It has shared tense relations with both the Saudi regime and US imperialism, including over Saudi Arabia's blockade of Qatar, a key ally of Turkey, and Washington's utilization of the YPG Syrian Kurdish militia as a proxy ground force. Ankara views the YPG as a branch of the PKK, the Turkish Kurdish separatist movement against which it has waged a bloody counterinsurgency campaign for more than 30 years."

Erdogan may also try to use Khashoggi's assassination as a way to ask for concessions from

Washington, such as an exemption from US sanctions against Iran.

As he sought to repair relations with the NATO powers badly damaged after the 2016 NATO-backed coup, Erdogan turned to Germany and the EU and also sought to normalize relations with the United States. He gave some compromises such as release of US pastor Andrew Brunson, who had been accused of helping prepare the 2016 coup. This cut across the nationalist line of the MHP, which made tactical criticisms of the AKP on this issue.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact