

After the Turkish elections: How the pseudo-left rallied behind the CHP

Part I: A political liquidation into the capitalist establishment

Ulas Atesci, Alex Lantier
2 October 2019

PART ONE | PART TWO | PART THREE

The March 31 Turkish municipal elections and the June 23 re-run of the vote in İstanbul were a milestone in the integration of a large swathe of middle-class pseudo-left parties into the capitalist establishment. Amid rising anger among workers at growing inequality, poverty, unemployment and social attacks under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, these groups threw in their lot with the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP). They rallied behind the "Nation Alliance" led by the CHP, Turkey's historic party of capitalist rule, and backed by the Kurdish-nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP).

This turn was led by some of the largest organisations in the petty-bourgeois camp, including the ex-Castroite Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP) and the Albanian-Stalinist Labour Party (EMEP). While ÖDP leader Alper Taş ran as a CHP candidate for the Beyoğlu district of İstanbul, the EMEP endorsed CHP candidates in Turkey's three largest cities—İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir. After the AKP's anti-democratic decision to force a re-run of the İstanbul election, they lined up behind the CHP and its mayoral candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu, the favored representatives of influential sections of the Turkish bourgeoisie linked to imperialism, notably the TÜSİAD business association.

Several months after the re-run of the İstanbul election, their bankrupt claims that the CHP and İmamoğlu are an alternative to the AKP and Erdoğan stand exposed. Predictably, the CHP has supported the AKP on key issues of foreign and domestic policy. CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu backed the AKP's preparations for a new Turkish invasion of Syria,

saying he was open to building "a peace corridor or a special zone" in that country. İmamoğlu himself, finally installed as CHP mayor of İstanbul, hailed the AKP's reactionary plans for mass deportations of Syrian refugees from İstanbul, calling it "a necessary process to send unregistered Syrians away from İstanbul."

A class gulf separates the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and *Sosyalist Eşitlik* (the Socialist Equality Group), its sympathising group in Turkey, from these parties. An international resurgence of the class struggle is under way, including mass protests for the fall of dictatorships in Algeria and Sudan, and strike waves across North America and Europe amid mounting anger at social inequality, imperialist war and police-state repression. The discrediting of decades-long imperialist occupations or interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq or Syria objectively poses the question of building a mass anti-war, anti-imperialist movement in the working class.

The response of the ÖDP, the EMEP, and the entire petty-bourgeois layer these parties represent runs in a diametrically opposite direction. As conditions emerge for a revolutionary mobilisation uniting the working class against imperialist war and capitalism across the Middle East and beyond, they try to block opposition to war, social austerity and police-state repression. Their support to the CHP reflects their alignment with the Turkish bourgeoisie, and through it to imperialism.

A political liquidation into the camp of the CHP

After the June 23 elections, the ÖDP hailed the victory in İstanbul of İmamolu, a multimillionaire tied to the TÜSİAD business federation and the Koç corporate empire, Turkey's largest industrial conglomerate. In its statement titled "The people won," the ÖDP wrote: "March 31 and June 23 also show that the end for the political Islamist regime is coming." Pledging to fight "this fascist power which plagues working people," it concluded: "We did it together! We won together! We will re-establish Turkey together!"

The EMEP's newspaper, *Evrensel*, hailed the result as a "public humiliation" for Erdoğan, writing: "The unanimity achieved in the election must be transformed into permanent unity." While EMEP chairwoman Selma Gürkan took to Twitter to personally congratulate İmamolu, the party's İstanbul provincial chairwoman Sema Barbaros declared: "The İstanbul election has more meaning than a local election. The people have not only elected the mayor of İstanbul. They also gave an important lesson to bossism. What is needed is to turn this partnership into a lasting unity."

Throughout the election campaign, this petty-bourgeois milieu insisted that anyone with left-wing sympathies was duty-bound to back the "Nation Alliance" against the AKP, as part of a fight "for democracy" and "against fascism." This was absurd on its face. The "Nation Alliance" included the Good Party, a breakaway faction of the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) that rejected the MHP's support for Erdoğan after the 2016 NATO-backed coup and split from the MHP on this basis. Indeed, a narrow majority of voters rejected their appeals on March 31, voting for AKP-MHP "People's Alliance" candidates.

This did not discourage the petty-bourgeois parties backing the CHP, however. After his defeat in Beyoğlu on March 31, Taş said: "We will continue to work in the streets of Beyoğlu as if we had won. ... We have won this election politically. All Turkey followed, envied, affirmed, applauded and felt proud of our campaign. We did this all together. We all worked on this. We will continue this work, you will be sure that we will not lose this work."

The smaller Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party (DSİP), the Turkish section of the state-capitalist International Socialist Tendency and sister party of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain, endorsed İmamolu.

"The main point in this race is to ensure that voters who did not vote for the AKP on March 31 do not vote for the AKP again! And even, if it can be achieved, to ensure that voters vote for İmamolu," it declared in a statement on the June 23 re-run of the election in İstanbul, adding: "Without participating in the İmamolu front, we will make an independent campaign declaring, 'They were not fair with [İmamolu], so we should give him his due and vote for him.'"

The response of the Pabloite Revolutionary Workers Party (DİP)—the Turkish section of the Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International (CRFI) of Workers Party (PO) in Argentina, and the sister party of the Workers Revolutionary Party (EEK) of Savas Michael-Matsas in Greece—was only superficially different. It declined to directly endorse the CHP. But it made clear its support for bourgeois parties, above all the CHP, calling on Turkish parliamentarians to unite in a Constituent Assembly to rework the legal foundations of the capitalist state.

In its May 6 statement on the second İstanbul elections, titled "Boycott! Return to the bosom of the nation! For an unchained Constituent Assembly," the DİP wrote: "All opposition members of parliament should resign their seats and return to the bosom of the nation. ... Do not let the AKP and the MHP oppress the people! Boycott the re-run of the İstanbul elections, evacuate the powerless parliament!"

By appealing to the bourgeois opposition to act, while indicating its hostility to the AKP-MHP alliance, the DİP made its position clear. In line with the broader petty-bourgeois milieu, it was lining up behind the CHP-led alliance—though the CHP is complicit in all the traditional Kemalist bourgeois elite's crimes, including repeated military coups and the violent suppression of the Kurdish people and of the working class.

To be continued.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)