

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

Part II: The dead end of the petty-bourgeoisie's orientation to the CHP

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This is the second of a three part series. Find part one here.

The wave of statements by leading figures of Turkish petty-bourgeois politics that they seek a lasting alliance with the CHP testifies to their hostility to the working class. They are indicating their support for imperialist war and their indifference to the rights of Kurdish and other minorities within the boundaries of the Turkish state, as well as the danger of violent, imperialist-backed regime-change operations in Turkey itself.

The CHP and HDP are, if anything, even closer than the AKP to the imperialist powers that have waged decades of war in Iraq and Syria and across the Middle East. The CHP has long campaigned for so-called “European values,” seeking closer ties to the European Union (EU). While the Erdoğan government has sought to profit from the never-ending wars of aggression waged by Washington and the EU in the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the CHP backed Erdoğan's invasions in Syria during the NATO-led war to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. In this conflict, HDP-backed, Kurdish-nationalist militias emerged as NATO's main proxy forces inside Syria.

This record is a devastating confirmation, in the negative, of the Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution, which states that in countries of belated capitalist development, the bourgeoisie is incapable of establishing a democratic regime. Deeply tied to imperialism and fearing the working class, it cannot discharge the tasks carried out by the democratic revolutions of the 18th century in America and France. These tasks fall to the working class, leading all the oppressed classes in a struggle to take state power. The democratic revolution thus goes over into the socialist revolution which, pursued on an international scale, can furnish the necessary resources from the global economy to develop a prosperous, democratic and socialist society in ex-colonial countries.

The politics of the Turkish bourgeois parties today bear the indelible stamp of the Turkish bourgeoisie's reactionary dealings with NATO imperialism and its suppression of the working class and oppressed nationalities. In 2015, the CHP supported the AKP government's crackdown on Kurdish towns in which 4,000 people were killed, more than 10,000 jailed and 200,000 people forced to flee their homes. In 2016, it voted for an AKP-backed constitutional amendment stripping HDP deputies of parliamentary immunity. As a result, today, the HDP's previous leaders, Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, and its several ex-deputies are still in prison.

As disputed elections emerged in both Ankara and İstanbul this spring, CHP candidates Mansur Yavaş (a former militant in the far-right Nationalist Movement Party [MHP] in the 1970s) and Ekrem İmamoğlu

issued tweets hailing MHP founder Alparslan Türkeş. A fascist officer trained in the United States, Türkeş played a key role in organising NATO-backed coups in Turkey in the 20th century, particularly those of 1960 and 1980. He founded the MHP in 1969, which led a campaign of assassination and repression targeting left-wing workers, youth and intellectuals in the 1970s.

After the bloody NATO-backed coup attempt of July 2016 targeting Erdoğan, it is clear that the sympathy of Yavaş and İmamoğlu for Türkeş is not a purely historical issue. It is a not-so-subtle threat that the CHP seeks the support of powerful forces in the imperialist ruling classes and the Turkish army. Its target is first and foremost left-wing opposition, rooted in the working class.

On July 15, 2016, amid growing frustration in Washington and Berlin at Erdoğan's shift to closer relations with Russia, Turkish military units, including some operating out of NATO's Çiğirlik air base, launched a coup. They bombed the Turkish parliament, tried to seize key areas of major Turkish cities and sent a kill team by helicopter to murder Erdoğan. At midnight, Erdoğan issued an appeal to the Turkish population to rise up against the attempted coup. After a timely warning from Moscow, Erdoğan managed to escape the army unit sent to murder him.

What halted the coup was the ensuing mass mobilisation against it. Erdoğan's authoritarian record notwithstanding, broad social layers in Turkey, above all in the working class, remembered the bloody record of NATO-backed coups of 1960, 1971, and 1980. In 2016, more than 200 people died fighting to prevent the victory of another such coup.

The forces in the CHP-led alliance, on the other hand, adopted an indifferent position during the coup attempt. They did not seek to mobilise their supporters, criticising the coup in words only after it had failed, when Washington and Berlin themselves were forced to issue pro forma condemnations of the coup attempt they had supported behind the scenes. But then the CHP backed Erdoğan's reactionary attacks on democratic rights—including its jailing of deputies of the Kurdish-nationalist HDP, which nonetheless supported the CHP in this year's elections.

These events expose the mechanisms the Turkish bourgeoisie has used to suppress working class opposition to austerity and three decades of NATO wars in the Middle East. The slaughter of millions of people and the devastation of entire countries that began with NATO's 1991 Gulf War with Iraq, and that followed with wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, has provoked widespread opposition and revulsion. Yet the parties that for decades have been promoted as the “radical left” have a nationalist orientation to the CHP and, through it, to imperialism. Today, amid the US imperialist war preparations against Iran, they are totally silent on this immense danger that could easily develop into a regional and

even global war.

The class basis of the pseudo-left's support for war and austerity

The orientation of the ÖDP, EMEP, DS?P, D?P and other petty-bourgeois parties of this type to the CHP is not an error or the product of a misunderstanding they can be persuaded to abandon. Rather, it reflects material interests of anti-working class and anti-Marxist layers in the affluent middle class among which these parties have their base. While they descend politically from the Stalinist, Pabloite or petty-bourgeois nationalist activists of the radical labour movement and left academia in the 1960s and 1970s, whom NATO coups of that era often targeted for bloody repression, the union bureaucrats and “left” academics have shifted drastically to the right over the last 40 years.

These layers in the middle class were transformed by the globalisation of production, the restoration of capitalism by Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and China in 1989-1991, and the ensuing decades of imperialist war in the Middle East. In this period, Turkey emerged as a cheap industrial platform for European capital and as a base for NATO wars in the Middle East. This objectively transformed the relationship between the trade unions or guerrilla movements, on the one hand, and the working class.

This milieu's decisive feature had been its nationalist rejection of the internationalist perspective of Permanent Revolution, which underlay the working-class seizure of power in the October 1917 revolution in Russia and the struggle against Stalinism led by Leon Trotsky and continued by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

After capitalist restoration in 1989-1991, these forces could no longer pose as friends of the October Revolution by pointing to their alliances with the Soviet or Maoist regimes. At the same time, they emerged as labour overseers enforcing world market conditions in Turkish factories ever more oriented to EU and world markets, or as military proxies of the imperialist powers in US-occupied Iraq or in the NATO war in Syria.

The objective class contradiction between these layers and the working class, whose discontent is rooted in opposition to capitalist exploitation and imperialist war, has acquired enormous intensity. While these organisations retained “solidarity,” “labour,” or even “revolution” in their party names, they consciously oppose international revolutionary struggles of the working class. This underlay the ICFI's analysis that these forces are not left-wing parties, but the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left.

The initial upsurge of revolutionary class struggles in the 21st century, in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, vindicated this assessment. All Turkey's major establishment parties—including the AKP, CHP, MHP and HDP—lined up behind the imperialist-led proxy wars in Libya or Syria through which the NATO powers responded to the revolutionary upsurge in North Africa. And the pseudo-left organisations lined up behind them, despite growing social anger in the working class in Turkey and internationally.

Turkey's pseudo-left parties are directly affiliated to political parties that opposed social revolution in North Africa, supported the Libyan and Syrian wars as “revolutions” and worked to suppress working class struggles in America or Europe.

The EMEP, a pro-Albanian Stalinist party, is affiliated to the Tunisian Workers Party of Hamma Hammami. During the Tunisian revolution, this party played a reactionary role. In the name of “struggle for democracy,” it did its best to divert the revolutionary mass movement of workers and youth behind the pro-regime General Union of Tunisian Labour (UGTT) and the ruling elite. Today, Hammami leads the petty-bourgeois “Popular Front” coalition, which is thoroughly integrated into the ruling

establishment led by Nidaa Tounes—the party that the old regime of Zine El Abedine Ben Ali founded as its new public face.

As for the DS?P, its Egyptian affiliates, the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), played the critical role in diffusing repeated revolutionary upsurges of the Egyptian working class between 2011 and 2013. They were bitterly hostile to the perspective of an independent struggle of the working class for state power. At each new stage in the revolution, they hailed whatever organisation the bourgeoisie was putting forward—the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces junta, the Muslim Brotherhood of President Mohamed Mursi, or the Tamarod (“Rebel”) alliance that prepared General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's 2013 coup. By blocking the formation of a revolutionary leadership and subordinating the working class to bourgeois politicians, they paved the way for the establishment of the bloody Sisi dictatorship.

The ensuing decade of war and class struggle has exposed the hostility of the pseudo-left to the working class and the democratic rights of the Kurdish people and other national minorities. Early on, they backed the AKP's “peace process” with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Ankara's strategy to use the PKK to strengthen its hand in Iraq and Syria. After decades of imperialist war, however, the bankruptcy of this policy of appealing to various warring ethnic factions to secure the democratic rights of national minorities in the Middle East is apparent.

Initially, Erdoğan eagerly supported the US war to overthrow Bashar-al Assad's Baathist regime and arm the Islamist militias Washington used as its shock troops against Assad. But he recoiled when, after the defeat and collapse of its Islamist allies, Washington made the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG)—an offshoot of the PKK, against which Ankara has fought a bloody, 35-year counter-insurgency war in southeast Turkey—its main proxy army in Syria.

The AKP ended its “peace process” with the PKK, which continued in fits and starts from 2009 to 2015. The HDP had been a key supporter of the AKP in its anti-worker, pro-imperialist policies during the “peace process” with the PKK. During the Gezi Park protests of June-July 2013, as more than 2.5 million people took the streets against the AKP, the HDP (then the Peace and Democracy Party, BDP) discouraged Kurdish workers and youth from protesting, echoing the line of the CHP and the unions. It clashed with Erdoğan only after he fell out with Ankara's NATO partners and cracked down on the Kurdish nationalists.

The Turkish pseudo-left, praising to the skies the emergence of Kurdish nationalist militias in Syria as Washington's main ground force in the name of the “fight against ISIS,” became a political extension of imperialist or Turkish bourgeois reaction. Virtually all of them hailed this process as a “Rojava Revolution,” taking the name given by the Kurdish nationalist militias themselves to the portion of Syrian territory they occupied under the Pentagon's protection. Several members and supporters of Turkish pseudo-left parties were killed as they went to fight in the imperialist war in Syria. In the recent election, these parties promoted CHP officials that are now endorsing AKP plans for mass deportations of Syrian refugees and invasions of Syria targeting the US-backed Kurdish militias there.

The anti-worker orientation underlying this reactionary policy in Syria took overt form in their support for the Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza) in Greece. After the election defeat of the Syriza in July, they have all maintained a deafening silence on their relations with this right-wing, anti-worker party.

Elected in January 2015 based on promises to end the EU austerity policies imposed on Greece, Syriza blatantly betrayed its promises. Refusing to appeal to broader opposition to austerity in the European working class against the EU, it instead immediately signed a new EU austerity memorandum.

In July 2015, as the EU threatened to expel Greece from the euro zone if it did not step up its social cuts, Syriza staged a referendum on EU austerity, hoping to obtain a “yes” vote and a mandate to resign and hand

power to the conservatives. Stunned by the workers' landslide "no" vote in the referendum, Syriza trampled it underfoot and pursued an anti-worker policy. Imposing tens of billions of euros in social cuts, it sold weapons to the Saudi war in Yemen and imprisoned tens of thousands of Middle East refugees in squalid conditions in detention camps (see also: "The Political Lessons of Syriza's Betrayal in Greece").

While the ICFI alone warned the workers before Syriza's election that it would betray its promises, the pseudo-left groups in Turkey and internationally enthusiastically promoted it. The ÖDP, Syriza's sister party in Turkey, declared in a statement on January 26, 2015, immediately after the election victory of Syriza, "We congratulate Syriza. ... Syriza's victory means the beginning of the people's quest for a new world order. ..." The Kurdish nationalist HDP, which is also a sister party of Syriza, similarly hailed its victory and emphasised its "solidarity" and "strategic collaboration" with Syriza.

In a January 27, 2015, statement, the EMEP hailed Syriza: "The success of Syriza as a people's front in the Greek elections...have given hope and encouraged all the oppressed classes and peoples who fight for bread and liberty."

The D?P—in line with its Greek affiliates, the EEK—also initially supported Syriza and promoted illusions about it. Before the Greek elections of January 2015, D?P leader Sungur Savran wrote an article titled "Syriza trap," declaring: "We will be so happy at how strong the camp of the working class and the toilers led by Syriza will emerge out of the election."

None of these organisations have seen fit to offer a political accounting for their support for this reactionary party. Syriza's anti-working class record and its collaboration with the AKP government on the EU's "Fortress Europe" policy against refugees fleeing imperialist wars across the Middle East constitute an unanswerable indictment of their own record. By hailing their Greek co-thinkers, the Turkish pseudo-left showed that it is prepared to commit similar political crimes against the working class in Turkey.

To be continued



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