Turkish government steps up attack on Kurdish HDP amid COVID-19 pandemic

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President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government dismissed five more mayors from the Kurdish-nationalist People's Democratic Party (HDP) on Friday, arresting them and appointing trustees to replace them.

This is a blatant attack on democratic rights. In the 2019 local elections, the HDP won 65 municipalities. On Friday, the total number of municipalities where the election results have been annulled reached 45. Moreover, six elected mayors did not receive election certificates after the elections, and 21 mayors were also detained. As a result, the HDP governs only 14 of the 65 municipalities it won.

HDP Co-Chair Mithat Sancar condemned the government's action, which it based on charges that the HDP and other opposition parties are complicit in preparations for a coup. Sancar said: "The government, trying to portray itself as a victim by spreading the rumours of a coup, appointed five more trustees to our municipalities and in fact staged a coup. The appointment of trustees is the hardest, clearest example of the hostility towards Kurds."

The HDP has long been a target of police repression by the AKP government and state authorities. Many of its mayors, legislators and leaders have been jailed on terrorism charges.

These attacks have escalated ever since Turkey's "peace process" with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) ended in 2015. As the WSWS explained, "After Washington made the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG)—an offshoot of the PKK—its main proxy army in Syria, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government ended the process, fearing to lose its Kurdish region. It launched a bloody military assault in Kurdish towns." Since then, thousands have been killed and more than 200,000 forced to flee their homes.

In 2016–17, during the state of emergency imposed after the failed 2016 NATO-backed coup against Erdo?an, the government removed more than 90 HDP-backed mayors elected in 2014 and launched attacks into Syria against US-backed Kurdish militias. Even today, former HDP leaders Selahattin Demirta? and Figen Yüksekda? and several HDP legislators are still political prisoners.

The government's latest attack on the HDP comes amid growing anger inside Turkey over the AKP's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as escalating conflict between Turkish forces and US-backed Kurdish nationalist groups.

On May 14, there was an armed attack, allegedly by the PKK, on a vehicle carrying Social Support Group officials in the city of Van, in eastern Turkey. Two officials were killed. After the ceasefire in Syria's Idlib province brokered by Turkey and Russia in early March, the Turkish army has escalated operations against Kurdish nationalist groups in Turkey and Iraq, and against the YPG in Syria.

The conflict with the Kurdish nationalists is bound up with broader conflicts between Turkey and its NATO imperialist allies in the region. After France, Greece, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Cyprus jointly condemned Turkish gas-drilling in the eastern Mediterranean, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavu?o?lu accused Paris of wanting "to help YPG elements carve out a terror state in northern Syria."

At the same time, the AKP's attack on the HDP is the product of explosive political tensions inside Turkey itself. According to recent polls, an alliance between the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), the far-right Good Party, and the HDP would defeat the AKP and its ally, the far-right Nationalist Movement

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Party (MHP) if elections were held today.

In its statements on the pandemic, the Erdo?an government has increasingly attacked the CHP and its allies, referring to the failed 2016 coup and making unsubstantiated accusations that the bourgeois opposition parties are preparing a coup. These attacks aim to divert growing social anger among workers against the AKP government over the pandemic.

CHP leader Kemal K?l?çdaro?lu is working to create a broad bourgeois opposition front against the AKP's Public Alliance with the MHP. The CHP and other capitalist opposition parties are not, however, less bankrupt and reactionary than the AKP, nor do they have any serious objection to the pandemic response of the government, which imposed the diktat of the ruling class. Rather, the CHP aims to exploit rising social anger to install a new government more openly aligned with the NATO imperialist powers.

K?l?çdaro?lu said that if there were a "snap election" the CHP would help two AKP split-offs, the Future Party of former AKP Prime Minister Ahmet Davuto?lu and the Democracy and Progress Party of former AKP Foreign Minister Ali Babacan, form a group in parliament. This would help these parties participate and receive state aid in elections.

This disparate coalition cobbled together by K?l?çdaro?lu is reactionary and shot through with contradictions. Davuto?lu and Babacan both implemented the AKP's anti-democratic and anti-worker policies while in office, but left the AKP amid growing conflicts between the Erdo?an government and the imperialist powers. K?l?çdaro?lu's attempts to introduce these former AKP politicians into the CHP-led Nation Alliance once again demonstrate the CHP's pro-imperialist orientation.

They also expose the HDP, who speaks for sections of the Kurdish bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie and worked closely with the CHP as it founded the Nation Alliance in 2018. Both the CHP and the HDP are, if anything, even more openly oriented to imperialism than the Erdo?an government.

The CHP is forming this alliance against the AKP, but it has always supported the Turkish army's operations in Syria and in Turkey, and it also voted for the AKP's constitutional amendment removing the parliamentary immunity of HDP deputies. Nonetheless, the HDP unhesitatingly backed CHP candidates in last year's local elections.

Moreover, the HDP clearly states that it is open again to an alliance not only with the CHP, but also its fascistic partner, the Good Party. Ahmet Türk, a senior HDP leader elected as mayor of Mardin last year but then dismissed, glorified the CHP-led alliance, declaring: "Turkey's democratization is important. Today, the main opposition party CHP is a party that should lead this. … Therefore, even if we criticize CHP from time to time, it is because it did not fulfil this task."

He added, "Despite all injustice, if I see any hope I will shake the hand of [Good Party leader] Meral Ak?ener or an MHP leader."

Türk's statement comes after Ak?ener appealed to the AKP and MHP, to seek solutions to economic problems and called for "national unity."

After weakly criticizing Ak?ener for not inviting the HDP to these talks, HDP Co-Chairman Mithat Sancar signalled that the HDP would join Ak?ener's call for "national unity" if it were invited, stating: "Without the party which took at least 6 million votes, without the third largest party in the parliament in Turkey, how would you provide unity and solidarity?"

The attempts to form an alliance between the CHP, Good Party and the HDP, and split-offs from the AKP reflect their shared hostility to the working class. This is also an irrefutable indictment of the pseudo-left groups that have enthusiastically rallied behind the CHP and HDP, presenting them as an alternative to Erdo?an.

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