

What does the “Labour and Freedom Alliance” in Turkey stand for?

Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu
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The Labour and Freedom Alliance (EÖ?) was founded under the leadership of the Kurdish nationalist Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) on September 24. It regroups pseudo-left parties like the Workers’ Party of Turkey (T?P), the Labour Party (EMEP), the Workers’ Movement Party (EHP), the Social Freedom Party (TÖP) and the Federation of Socialist Assemblies (SMF). The record of the EÖ?’s constituent parties and its official statement show it is only a so-called “left” political extension of the Nation Alliance of bourgeois opposition parties led by the Kemalist Republican People’s Party (CHP).

Turkey is heading towards presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023, as the US-NATO war with Russia in Ukraine brings humanity to the brink of a nuclear “Armageddon,” and the cost of living and unbearable living conditions everywhere push the working class into struggle. In Turkey, where official annual inflation exceeds 80 percent and nearly 90 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, class tensions are particularly acute. The entire political establishment, including the unions and the pseudo-left, are trying to contain the developing social explosion.

The EÖ? has the same function as the Socialist Union of Forces (SGB) formed in August by the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP), the Left Party, the Communist Movement of Turkey (TKH) and the Revolution Movement: to drive the growing anger and opposition of workers and youth to both President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the “Nation Alliance” into the channels of the capitalist establishment and thus suppress it. This means preventing the development of an independent revolutionary movement of the working class, the key to genuine change.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, “The main distinction between these two alliances is tactical, not strategic. Both so-called ‘left’ alliances are essentially oriented to the bourgeoisie, advancing a nationalist, parliamentary reform program and rejecting a program for international socialism based on the working class.” Although it was the predominance of their Turkish nationalism that led the SGB parties not to join the EÖ?, efforts at collaboration between the two alliances continue.

The Nation Alliance includes five other right-wing bourgeois parties besides the CHP. It is not an alternative to the People’s Alliance of Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the fascist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), but its equally pro-imperialist and anti-worker rival. Indeed, the Nation Alliance contains the far-right Good Party, which broke away from the MHP; the Islamist Felicity Party, from which the AKP emerged; former AKP prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu’s Future Party; and former AKP economy and foreign minister Ali Babacan’s DEVA party.

As a major faction of the ruling class, the Nation Alliance is organically incapable of and hostile to addressing any fundamental social problem facing working people. It has the support of not only sections of the Turkish bourgeoisie, but also significant sections of the US and European imperialist bourgeoisies. In December 2019, during the US presidential race, Joe Biden called for “a very different approach to [Erdoğan] now, making it clear that we support opposition leadership” in Turkey.

Their orientation to the Nation Alliance and thus to the Turkish bourgeoisie, NATO and imperialism reveals the essentially right-wing and anti-working-class character of both pseudo-left alliances. The leaders of HDP and T?P, two of the parties of the EÖ? Alliance currently represented in parliament, have repeatedly emphasized that they are seeking a joint candidacy with the Nation Alliance against Erdoğan.

T?P Chairman Erkan Ba? clearly expressed the real function of the alliance by asking, “Why not vote for a candidate [of the Nation Alliance] in the first round [of presidential elections] that we can vote for in the second round?” In the 2019 local elections, the HDP and various pseudo-left parties supported the right-wing candidates of the Nation Alliance in major cities such as Istanbul and Ankara.

However, the EÖ? aims to work in the elections through the HDP, which has an electoral support of around 6 million. With the pseudo-left parties it includes and the program it proclaims, the EÖ? aims to get under control masses of workers and youth who are starting to look for a revolutionary way out of the capitalist crisis, by trapping them behind the Nation Alliance and the parliament.

In essence, EÖ? supports the Nation Alliance without taking part in it, working to guard its left flank. It is not at all unlikely that the global capitalist crisis and the intensification of the class struggle will carry parties of the EÖ? into a CHP-led new government. The ties of EÖ? parties, especially the HDP, with pro-imperialist pseudo-left parties such as Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and the Left Party in Germany, reveal the trap being set for the working class.

The founding declaration of the new alliance claims that the urgent task of the coming period is “to stop the destruction created by the People’s Alliance [of Erdoğan] in many areas from economy to politics, to end One Man Rule, to improve the working and living conditions of the people, to ensure a change and transformation on the basis of democratic rights and freedoms.”

This “urgent task,” in fact, consists of supporting the candidate of the Nation Alliance against Erdoğan in the upcoming elections and forming a group in parliament. The promises “to improve the working and living conditions of the people and to ensure a change and transformation on the basis of democratic rights and freedoms” are a fraud. Indeed, the alliance is in no way opposed to the ruling class and the capitalist system of exploitation as a whole.

Improving the working and living conditions of the people, or more precisely the workers, who constitute the overwhelming majority of the population, requires a frontal attack on the privileges and wealth of the bourgeoisie, which is inextricably tied to imperialism. The solution of democratic problems, especially the Kurdish question, cannot be separated from this. It entails a struggle for socialist revolution and workers’ power in Turkey as part of the international struggle for socialism.

Another feature of the declaration is its somewhat greater emphasis on socioeconomic problems, and lesser emphasis on a false promotion of “democratization” centered on identity politics, compared to programs of

similar HDP-led alliances in the past period. This is not an expression of the HDP's and parties' shift to the left. They are responding to the leftward shift of the broad masses of workers and youth, amid intensifying class tensions, with a shift in their rhetoric.

Fundamentally, however, while workers and youth are starting to look for a genuinely left-wing alternative to the surging cost of living, the threat of nuclear war and authoritarianism, the EÖİ uses this rhetoric to keep them in the channels of capitalist order.

Its section titled "An economic order in which to work and live humanely" states: "The programs and actions of this government are based on a political understanding and practices that prioritize the interests of imperialism, the capital class and its own crony companies and holdings."

It continues: "Taking concrete steps to solve the problems of cost of living, low wages, unemployment, poverty, subsistence, housing, etc., and improving the working and living conditions of workers, labourers, oppressed masses of people is the first issue for everyone today. Based on this fact, it is imperative to pursue policies that will make domestic and foreign capital pay the heavy bill of the economic crisis and the multifaceted social destruction, and put an end to the precariousness and the lack of a future experienced by laborers."

But in reality, the EÖİ is not against "imperialism and the capital class." On the contrary, as a political alliance of sections of the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisie and affluent middle classes, the EÖİ does not question the rule of imperialism and the capitalist class in any way. This is not a political mistake, but a consequence of the class character of this alliance. Moreover, the EÖİ's essentially social democratic program of national reform has been completely invalidated by the globalization of capitalist production over the past 40 years.

Making "domestic and foreign capital pay the heavy bill for the economic crisis and the multifaceted social destruction" requires the nationalization of all big banks and companies under the democratic control of the workers. This step can only be taken through the mass mobilization of the working class based on an international socialist program, confronting the capitalist state apparatus that the EÖİ is willing to run.

The EÖİ is a potential candidate to play a role in a capitalist government that would work to suppress working class opposition. The HDP is a consultative member of the Socialist International led by pro-imperialist social democrats. It takes its Greek sister party, Syriza, as a model. This fraternal relationship has not changed since Syriza came to power in 2015 and imposed on the Greek people the severe austerity program of the European Union (EU) and the big banks.

Syriza set up brutal internment camps for refugees in Greece as part of the EU's dirty deal with the Erdoğan government. Syriza leader and former prime minister Alexis Tsipras developed military and political ties with the Zionist regime in Israel and the bloody Al-Sisi dictatorship in Egypt. Today Syriza, similar to the chauvinist nationalist bourgeois parties in Turkey, promotes bellicose and militarist politics in the reactionary conflict between the Turkish and Greek bourgeoisies.

CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu—of whom HDP Co-Chair Mithat Sancar said, "We value Mr. Kemal, we find his efforts important"—has previously declared that he would take steps that could lead to a war with Greece if he came to power. "I will come and take all those islands," he declared in 2017, referring to Greece's islands in the Aegean Sea.

The EÖİ's statement does not directly address or oppose the US-NATO war on Russia, which threatens humanity with a nuclear world war, and is silent on the growing danger of war between Turkey and Greece.

Stating that there is an urgent need for "policies in favor of peace at home, in the region and in the world, and for long-term cooperation between peoples," the declaration says: "For this, the needs of the peoples, not the interests of the imperialist powers and their collaborators,

must be taken as the basis." It continues: "Abandoning expansionist, military show-of-force policies based on war and confrontation with other countries, especially our neighbors, and pursuing a principled and peaceful foreign policy based on equal rights is imperative for a genuine popular sovereignty."

According to the pseudo-left components of the EÖİ alliance, "world peace" is possible while imperialism and the capitalist nation-state system continue to exist. This lie is an expression of the orientation of all alliance members, especially the HDP, to a compromise with imperialism and their own ruling class. As for the so-called "popular sovereignty," a term taken from the lexicon of Stalinism, it means continued exploitation and oppression of the working class, which constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population, by the ruling class, which privately owns the means of production. It is, in fact, a bourgeois sovereignty.

Indeed, the EÖİ has no perspective to fight imperialism and the danger of nuclear world war. The HDP, the backbone of the alliance, sits in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Moreover, the Kurdish bourgeois nationalist movement as a whole, despite all its false peace rhetoric, supported the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the war of regime change in Syria in 2011 launched by NATO powers, including Turkey. The EÖİ hails the People's Protection Units (YPG), which has become US imperialism's main proxy force in Syria, as the vanguard of the so-called "Rojava Revolution."

The declaration claims: "In order to solve the Kurdish question, which is directly linked and intertwined with democratisation, it is necessary to take steps for a democratic and peaceful solution instead of the politics of denial and suppression." In essence, this means reviving the so-called "peace process" between the Erdoğan government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which lasted until 2015, and has since collapsed.

As WSWS has explained, this process, which began in 2009, was in reality a process of "peace" between the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisies under the auspices of the imperialist powers. It developed as part of the imperialist war of plunder in the Middle East and was the product of forces hostile to the social aspirations of working people in the region and around the world.

The fact that this process ended in a bloody conflict in 2015 was a product of the objective dynamics of the imperialist war, not the subjective intentions of Erdoğan or any other political leader. The rise of the YPG in Syria with US support and the possibility of an independent Kurdish state on Turkey's southern border terrified the Turkish bourgeoisie. Dreaming of expanding its territory and influence, it ended the so-called "peace process" for fear of losing its own Kurdish region.

The HDP, its predecessor Kurdish bourgeois parties and its pseudo-left allies all collaborated with the Erdoğan government throughout this process, feeding the same illusions in the AKP then as they do in the Nation Alliance today. During the 2013 Gezi Park protests, as millions took to the streets against the AKP, the then-Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) tried to dissuade Kurdish workers and youth from joining the protests, echoing the CHP and the union bureaucracies. In the imperialist war for regime change in Syria, the HDP called for the Turkish army to act together with the YPG.

The Socialist Equality Group fights for the fulfillment of the basic democratic demands of the Kurdish people. These demands include making Kurdish an official language, introducing education in Kurdish in public schools, removing all obstacles to Kurdish language and culture, and releasing all political prisoners. However, the struggle for these democratic demands and against the war cannot be separated from the struggle against imperialism and all its bourgeois proxies in the region.

The solution to the Kurdish question is possible only when the working class, backed by the oppressed masses, overthrows the imperialist-backed bourgeois regimes in the Middle East as part of the international socialist revolution, seizes power and establishes a truly democratic, socialist

federation.

The EÖİ's pro-capitalist character is also highlighted by its silence on the COVID-19 pandemic. It even ignores the existence of the pandemic, let alone putting forward a program to stop the spread of the virus, which continues to rage with a new surge.

This reflects the pseudo-left's support for the policy of "learning to live with COVID" implemented by the ruling class around the world, with the exception of China. The pandemic, which has to date caused more than 20 million preventable deaths and billions of infections, could rapidly be brought under control with the necessary public health measures. But this would require an international mobilization of the working class to oppose the death policy of the ruling class, which refuses to take these measures because it would harm its profit interests and wealth.

The only political tendency in the world fighting for this scientific program is the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). It alone puts forward a global revolutionary socialist program based on the working class against imperialist war, the pandemic, the cost of living, authoritarianism and, it must be added, climate change, all of which are major global problems concerning working people all over the world.

An unbridgeable class and political gap separates the ICFI's supporters in Turkey, the Socialist Equality Group and the Labour and Freedom Alliance and other pseudo-left parties. The so-called "alternatives," all deeply tied to the capitalist nation-state system and imperialism, have nothing to offer the working class and youth but new catastrophes.

The way forward is not by replacing one reactionary capitalist government with another in Turkey or elsewhere, but by turning to the great historical traditions of the working class: the struggle for workers' power and world socialism against imperialism and capitalism. This means building, in Turkey and around the world, new sections of the ICFI—which for decades has steadfastly defended the program of world socialist revolution that led to the October Revolution of 1917 against Stalinism, social democracy and petty-bourgeois nationalism.



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