

Turkey to hold elections in May amid deepening political, social crisis

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Turkish President and Justice and Development Party (AKP) leader Recep Tayyip Erdo?an has announced that presidential and parliamentary elections, legally scheduled for June 18, will be held on May 14. This has sparked a political crisis.

On Saturday, Erdo?an sought to legitimise his candidacy, stating: “The constitutional amendment adopted in 2017 is so clear that there is no room for the slightest debate. Turkey switched to a new system of rule with the 2018 [presidential] elections, so in this respect, the timer has reset.” He added, “The president elected in 2018 is the first president of the new system.”

According to the constitution, parliament can decide to renew the elections with a three-fifths majority. The president also has the power to renew elections. However, the constitution stipulates that for Erdo?an, who was elected president in 2014 and 2018, to run again, parliament must decide to hold elections, otherwise it would be unconstitutional. It states: “In the event that the Parliament decides to renew the elections during the second term of the President, the President may run for another term.”

The response of the bourgeois opposition, led by the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP), to this unconstitutional attempt reveals its political bankruptcy. In Turkey, as in the rest of the world, there is no faction of the ruling class that defends democratic rights.

After Erdo?an's announcement, CHP leader Kemal K??l?çdaro?lu argued that it was impossible to oppose Erdo?an on this issue. He said: “Let's say we object to it, where will it go? To the Supreme Election Board [YSK]. Who appointed those members? Erdo?an. Who will object to its decision? There is nowhere to appeal. Even the Constitutional Court.” He added: “Therefore, we do not consider to focus on whether Erdo?an should be a candidate or not.”

The Nation Alliance (“Table of Six”), led by the CHP,

issued a statement after it met on Thursday, admitting that Erdo?an's candidacy would be unconstitutional. They said: “Turkey is ruled by a government that acts with lawlessness. In this context, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the law, which are so clear that they leave no room for doubt, it is not possible for Mr. Erdo?an to run again in the elections to be held on May 14, unless the Parliament decides to renew the elections.”

Nevertheless, the “Table of Six” legitimised the elections by impotently accepting them. They stated: “However, we are confident that in the 100th anniversary of our Republic, our nation will say ‘Enough’ to this unlawful order and we would like to state that we are ready for the elections that Mr. Erdo?an plans to hold on May 14th with the support of our people, our belief in ourselves and our love for our country.”

This right-wing bourgeois alliance, to which various pseudo-left tendencies have declared their support against Erdo?an, is not an alternative to the People's Alliance of AKP and its fascistic ally, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Rather, it is a rival that is at least as pro-imperialist and hostile to the working class and to democratic rights. Its position on the elections is also a sign of what the bourgeois opposition will do if Erdo?an decides to reject the legitimacy of the election results.

The Nation Alliance includes the far-right Good Party, an MHP split-off; the Islamist Felicity Party, from which the AKP emerged; the Future Party of former AKP Prime Minister Ahmet Davuto?lu; and the DEVA party of former AKP Economy and Foreign Minister Ali Babacan.

Turkey is going to the elections amid the escalating US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, as the cost of living and unbearable social conditions drive the working class everywhere increasingly into struggle and the turn of the ruling class to authoritarian forms of rule.

In the face of growing anger and opposition among

working people, Erdoğan has sought to ban strikes, on the one hand, and taken populist measures on the other. These measures include a 50 percent increase in the minimum wage for 2023, and new regulations on contract work and pensions. However, this is unlikely to appease mounting discontent among the broad masses.

In Turkey, where official annual inflation is over 60 percent and nearly 90 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, class tensions are particularly acute. All factions of the ruling class are well aware of them. This is why the bourgeois opposition alliance is as determined as the Erdoğan government to prevent the masses from mobilising in defense of basic social and democratic rights.

Recently, the Erdoğan government pushed for an undemocratic ruling blocking one of its rivals, Ekrem İmamoğlu, the CHP Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB), from running for the presidency. In 2019, İmamoğlu won the Istanbul metropolitan municipality, which Erdoğan's AKP had ruled for 25 years, despite the government's attempts to steal the election by re-running it.

In December, however, an Istanbul court sentenced İmamoğlu to two years, seven months and 15 days in prison and a political ban for allegedly “insulting” public officials. The final ruling has not yet been made. However, it can be finalized quickly if Erdoğan decides this is needed to halt İmamoğlu's candidacy.

Currently, polls suggest that neither Erdoğan's People's Alliance nor the Nation Alliance will secure the necessary majority in the presidential and parliamentary elections. The Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), with over 10 percent, or around 6 million votes, may therefore play a critical role in the outcome.

The government is holding a suit before the Constitutional Court, threatening to close the HDP as a trump card before the elections. Last week, the court rejected the HDP's request to postpone the case until after the elections. On January 5, it also blocked official election funding for the HDP from the treasury. However, as a pro-EU and pro-NATO party, the HDP has no progressive response to this reactionary and undemocratic state repression.

When the “peace process” between Ankara and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) collapsed in 2015 amid the imperialist regime-change war in Syria, the HDP, which was part of the peace talks, came under mounting repression. The emergence of the People's Protection Units (YPG) as the main US proxy in Syria and of a

Kurdish enclave there, terrified the Turkish bourgeoisie. They feared a Kurdish enclave could form in Turkey, a country with over 20 million Kurds.

As violent clashes with the PKK erupted again, the Erdoğan government embarked on a relentless anti-democratic crackdown against the HDP. With CHP support, several HDP MPs were stripped of parliamentary immunity and some were imprisoned, including HDP co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ.

The HDP has more and more openly oriented to the bourgeois CHP-led alliance, but it has not been officially included in this alliance, which has largely ignored its demands. Recognizing its key role in the elections, the HDP leadership announced in early January that it would nominate its own presidential candidate if it was still ignored. It will participate in the parliamentary elections with its own candidates in the Labor and Freedom Alliance it has formed with a coalition of pseudo-left and Stalinist parties.

In the run-up to the elections, there is a very real danger that the Erdoğan government will launch a new military offensive against the US-backed Kurdish forces in Syria, trying to quell the growing social anger by promoting nationalism and militarism.

The way forward lies not in supporting this or that right-wing faction of the bourgeoisie, but in establishing the political independence of the working class from the entire capitalist establishment on the basis of an anti-imperialist, anti-war and socialist programme. This is the perspective for which the Socialist Equality Group, the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, fights.



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