

Turkey's Erdoğan depicted as “anti-imperialist leader” by Brazilian pseudo-left PCO

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17 July 2023

While broad sectors of the pseudo-left have embraced the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, anti-Trotskyist groups like the Workers Cause Party (PCO) in Brazil are seeking to divert the growing opposition to imperialist war and oppression among workers and youth internationally into a bankrupt support for bourgeois nationalism.

Despite focusing their activity entirely upon the national political sphere, it is in their choice of international allies that organizations like the PCO most openly expose their reactionary character. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's recent victory in the Turkish presidential elections was enthusiastically celebrated by the PCO, which sought to present him as an anti-imperialist leader and cover up his authoritarian policies directed against the working class and the Kurdish people.

In an editorial in the party's publication *Causa Operaria*, they argued that Erdoğan's victory against Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, “a representative of the policy of imperialism in the country,” made it “an even more important fact for the struggle of the oppressed, not only Turks, but for the whole world.” Attributing to the Turkish president the “willingness to confront the world dictatorship of imperialism,” the PCO declared that “despite being a representative of the Turkish right-wing, Erdoğan shows an increasingly intense alignment with the oppressed countries and, above all, with Russia, moving away from the policy of US imperialism.”

In a tweet published on May 28, the day the Turkish presidential election results were announced, the PCO declared: “Imperialism defeated again. Amid a gigantic campaign of a coup character against Erdoğan the current president was reelected in Turkey. Imperialism loses control of the Middle East.”

The PCO's tweet, which has been viewed hundreds of thousands of times, and received several laudatory responses from Erdoğan supporters, is part of its efforts to divert a real struggle against imperialism into the reactionary channels of nationalism.

Despite being seen in Washington and European capitals, which have not hidden their preference for Kılıçdaroğlu, as insufficiently aggressive in promoting their interests in the

region, Erdoğan is far from being an opponent of imperialism, let alone a defender of the populations victimized by its wars and interference.

In his nearly two decades in power, Erdoğan has closely collaborated with the criminal operations of NATO, of which Turkey is a member, directly participating in the US proxy war against Syria, receiving and refueling US fighter jets and bombers at its airbases, and holding refugees in Turkey coming from imperialist wars in the Middle East under the anti-immigrant policy of “Fortress Europe”.

The truth is that Erdoğan's reactionary policies did not lead to his defeat in the elections only because, in a contest that presented no real alternative, his official opponent, Kılıçdaroğlu, showed himself a servile instrument of imperialism and an open supporter of the forces of the Turkish extreme right. Kılıçdaroğlu declared several times in his campaign that if elected he would unabashedly pursue NATO's interests in the war against Russia, while signaling his subservience to international finance capital and promising brutal austerity against the working class.

However, this does not change the fact that Erdoğan, whatever his rhetoric, is also a right-wing politician in the service of imperialism and the Turkish bourgeoisie against the working class.

He has shown that he is fully capable of furthering imperialist interests, clearing the last obstacle for Finland's membership in NATO in March amid the military alliance's increasingly open offensive against Russia.

On May 29, Joe Biden, the top representative of world imperialism, congratulated his supposed opponent on his election victory and declared: “I spoke to Erdoğan. I congratulated Erdoğan. He still wants to work on something on the F-16s. I told him we wanted a deal with Sweden, so let's get that done.” Amid preparations by the US and European powers to send the fighters to the Ukrainian military, Erdoğan was using his veto over Sweden's NATO bid as a bargaining chip for US concessions.

Erdoğan's pragmatic maneuvering in relation to the conflict in Ukraine—which, according to the PCO, makes him a fighter

against imperialism—is an expression of the impasse of the Turkish bourgeoisie, caught between its longstanding military-strategic ties with the US and European powers on the one hand, and its economic links with Russia on the other.

To the extent that the Turkish ruling elite sees much to lose and few advantages in the current war, Erdoğan has sought to pursue a policy of balancing between Washington and Moscow. Under the growing pressures exerted by a sharp escalation of the US-led NATO war against Russia, his approval of NATO membership for Finland and Sweden as well as Ukraine shows that this policy has become increasingly untenable.

Erdoğan's bankrupt political maneuvers and the logic of the bourgeois interests he defends led him to declare at the beginning of this month that "Without a doubt, Ukraine deserves to be in NATO," while also coming out in favor of Sweden's NATO membership. This thoroughly exposes the PCO's claims about this decades-old representative of the Turkish elite is an opponent of imperialist aggression.

However, Erdoğan's main fear is that the war and its destructive consequences will spur working class revolt against the rule of the Turkish bourgeoisie. He has resorted to increasingly authoritarian methods in response to a huge increase in strikes by Turkish workers since last year, spurred by inflation and a social crisis that will only intensify. Presiding over a historic wealth transfer from working people to finance capital, particularly since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, his government just announced a brutal social austerity program.

Nationalist groups like the PCO are willing to provide cover for Erdoğan's capitalist attacks and authoritarian measures because they are politically oriented not to the Turkish working class, but to its national bourgeoisie. The premise of their statements is that countries like Turkey, which have a global position analogous to that of Brazil, are capable of establishing an alternative to imperialist domination by asserting their national capitalist interests.

According to this view, the ongoing process behind the current war, which began in Ukraine against Russia and is headed toward China, is not a redivision of the world between imperialist powers. Groups like the PCO assume that this conflict opens the path for the so-called "rising economies" to finally break free from the bonds of imperialism and overcome their status as oppressed nations.

Whatever their rhetorical claims of defending "oppressed peoples," by identifying the interests of the exploited and oppressed masses in these countries with those of the ruling classes, the policies of the PCO legitimize the suppression of any independent working class mobilization for clashing with bourgeois "national interests." This is what is fundamentally behind the PCO's support for Erdoğan and all the groups it calls "anti-imperialis."

Besides Erdoğan himself and Lula da Silva's government of the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil, the PCO has thrown its

political support to the reactionary Taliban regime in Afghanistan that took over after the US military withdrawal, the Iranian clerical regime that responded to this year's months-long mass protests with arrests, lethal force and executions, and the oligarchic Putin regime in Russia that carried out the reactionary invasion of Ukraine.

The PCO's statements attributing anti-imperialist credentials to such regimes are entirely in sync with its policy in Brazil itself. After six months in which the Lula government worked to implement austerity measures, ruled out any serious response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and supported attacks against basic democratic rights, the PCO is taking the lead in its defense, hysterically denouncing all opposition to its policies as the work of "coup plotters" and collaborators of Bolsonaro and far-right forces. Although the PCO's attacks are directed at disputes with other pseudo-left groupings, it signals the resolute support the party will give to Lula as his government's policies confront working class opposition.

The Brazilian and Turkish supporters (Socialist Equality Groups) of the International Committee of the Fourth International reject the reactionary illusions spread by organizations like the PCO in relation to pro-imperialist bourgeois politicians like Lula or Erdoğan, and advance an independent political perspective for the working class based on an international socialist program.

All those who seek a real struggle against imperialist war and the capitalist state will find nothing to advance that struggle in the reactionary politics of the PCO. Only the International Committee of the Fourth International and its affiliated national sections have consistently opposed the US and NATO imperialist war against Russia in Ukraine since the beginning, and fought to unify workers in Ukraine, Russia and all countries independently of imperialism and Russian nationalism. Only they seek to base the struggle against war upon the independent and international mobilization of the working class in the struggle for socialism. That is the organization toward which workers and youth should turn at this critical juncture.



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