

In Turkey's local elections, pseudo-left T?P exploit anger over earthquake to horse-trade over seats

Hakan Özal**20 February 2024**

In the run-up to the local elections on March 31, as the wildcat strike movement against the cost-of-living spreads across the country and social anger against the parties of the capitalist order grows, the pseudo-left parties, especially the Workers' Party of Turkey (T?P), are trying to keep this anger within the confines of the capitalist system and use it to advance their horse-trading for seats.

This is particularly evident in the city of Hatay, which was devastated by two earthquakes of magnitude 7.7 and 7.6 centered in Kahramanmara? on February 6, 2023. On the anniversary of the February 6 earthquakes, there was a strong backlash against Health Minister Fahrettin Koca of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Hatay Metropolitan Mayor Lütfü Sava? of the Republican People's Party (CHP).

There was also a hostile reaction to CHP leader Özgür Özal because of the party's re-nomination of Sava?, one of the main figures responsible for the devastation caused by the lack of necessary preparations for the earthquake, as its candidate for the local elections.

As explained in the *World Socialist Web Site*'s series of articles on the anniversary of the earthquake, the buildings housing tens of thousands of people were turned into their graves by the policies of the government and local authorities run by opposition parties, which put capitalist profit before science and public health. Hundreds of thousands were injured and millions left homeless.

As a result of the state's failure to mobilize for three days after the earthquake, many people waited under the rubble to be rescued and died from freezing or dehydration. The failure of the government and local authorities to take action, despite warnings from scientists, made the earthquake a historic disaster.

One year later, the most basic needs of tens of thousands of people—food, shelter, and clothing—remain unmet. The promises made by the government and municipalities have not been fulfilled. Many people are still forced to live in tents, containers and damaged buildings. This has led to massive anger against both the government and the CHP mayors.

In Hatay, as in the rest of the country, the pseudo-left plays the role of diverting the people's anger against the establishment parties and keeping it within the boundaries of the capitalist order.

Global problems such as the NATO war in Ukraine, the Israeli genocide in Gaza, the preparations for war against Iran and the developing world war, COVID-19 and other pandemics are not on the election agenda of any party. Nor are they interested in the fact that tens of millions of working people in Turkey, an earthquake-prone country, continue to live in dangerous housing. The discussion about who to nominate as candidates is mainly part of the horse-trading for access to mayoral and municipal council positions.

Amid the anger against the CHP's mayoral candidate, T?P has announced the well-known former national soccer player Gökhan Zan as its candidate for the Hatay Metropolitan Municipality. Zan was a parliamentary candidate for the far-right Good Party in last year's general election but was not elected. He resigned from the Good Party last December.

In an interview with the *Sözcü* newspaper on February 11, a few days before his candidacy was announced, Zan answered the question "Will you run for mayor?" as follows:

I am wherever the Great Turkish Nation, who put me in their hearts, wants to see me. Whether it is politics or not, as a son of this land, I will not hesitate to sacrifice for my country. You know, there is a saying from centuries ago, "Let's all die if it's about the homeland," I am someone who comes from such a culture.

In the press statement announcing his candidacy, Zan said, "I make two calls from here, the first is to the Republican People's Party leaders; it is unacceptable to re-nominate someone who is involved in earthquake crimes. My second call is to Mr. Lütfi Sava?; withdraw and let's unite around the Hatay Alliance."

At the same meeting, T?P spokesperson and deputy Sera Kad?gil answered the question, "Will you withdraw your candidate if the CHP changes Lütfü Sava?" by saying "If our CHP friends do their part, we will do our part."

Lütfü Sava?'s personal political responsibility for the earthquake disaster is undeniable. However, the CHP as a whole is not exempt from these crimes. While the government continues to abandon millions of people to their fate in Istanbul, one of the cities that will be hit hardest by the expected earthquake in the Marmara region, the "urban transformation" that the current CHP municipal administration has been implementing for the past four years and which is presented as a remedy against the earthquake has been a tool, especially in Istanbul, to remove working class residents from the city center and to build luxury residences for the rich.

The aim of the T?P is not to prosecute those responsible for the earthquake disaster. The entire election campaign of the T?P was based on bargaining for seats with the CHP, the Kurdish nationalist People's Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) and various pseudo-left parties.

In Hatay, T?P received more than 75,000 votes in last year's parliamentary elections, reflecting the reaction after the earthquake. Apart from the three deputies elected from Istanbul, it only managed to get enough votes to elect one deputy from Hatay (the imprisoned Can Atalay, elected from Hatay, was undemocratically stripped of his parliamentary seat by an unconstitutional judicial maneuver by the government). The T?P now plans to use this anger to fight for positions in the municipalities.

In the districts of Hatay, the T?P entered into negotiations with other pseudo-left parties and groups for a joint candidate and a share of council seats, many of which were made public and failed. Mehmet Güzelyurt, presented as a mayoral candidate in the Defne district, was a candidate of the Democratic Left Party (DSP) in the previous local elections. The DSP, a bourgeois party that has nothing to do with the left except its name, supported President Erdo?an's People's Alliance in last year's presidential and parliamentary elections.

It was reported in the media that many people who had been officials of or candidates for various parties across the country, such as the CHP, the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA), which split from the AKP, and Erdo?an's de facto ally, the Vatan Party, were running for T?P.

In an interview with *TV100* last December, T?P leader Erkan Ba? said, "If right-wing candidates are presented to us" by the CHP and "they say, 'Elections can only be won with these names,' and this is imposed on us, then we will run our own candidates in elections all over Turkey." Now, the T?P is practicing the unprincipled tactic of presenting its own right-wing candidates as "leftists" instead of the right-wing candidates of the CHP.

The policy of the T?P in the local elections is a product of its steady development to the right. Last year, T?P deputies did not

participate in the vote on Finland's membership in NATO and did not vote "no" against it, and the membership was approved unanimously by the parliament.

In last year's presidential elections, the T?P supported Kemal K?l?çdaro?lu, the candidate of the Nation Alliance, which is much more explicitly pro-imperialist than Erdo?an's People's Alliance.

The Nation Alliance consisted of the CHP, the far-right Good Party, which broke away from the MHP; the Islamist Felicity Party, from which the AKP was born; the Future Party of Ahmet Davuto?lu, who served as prime minister under the AKP government and who determined its war policies across the Middle East; the DEVA Party of Ali Babacan, who served on the AKP's top economic official and is a trusted figure of finance capital, and finally the right-wing Democratic Party. In the second round, K?l?çdaro?lu also formed an anti-refugee and anti-Kurdish alliance with the fascistic Victory Party.

The T?P, which recently reached an agreement with the CHP for the local elections, does not put up candidates in places where it is crucial for this right-wing bourgeois party to win. They put forward candidates where the CHP is sure to win or lose decisively.

The T?P and its allied pseudo-left parties are the political mouthpieces of the upper middle class, not of the working class. They participate in the elections with unprincipled and opportunist alliances, not with a program that seeks solutions to the global problems of the working class, such as the Israeli genocide in Gaza, the US-NATO imperialism dragging humanity into a third world war, the COVID-19 pandemic and the danger of earthquakes. In the name of the "left," they lie that capitalism can be improved and that social problems can be solved if they take over local governments.

The reconstruction of earthquake-ravaged cities like Hatay based on the needs of society, the reconstruction of many cities threatened by natural disasters like Istanbul with scientific planning and the highest level of robustness and livability, and the provision of the right to safe housing, one of the most fundamental rights of all people, must be among the main demands of a real socialist party in the elections.

The assertion of these demands must be combined with the warning of the working masses about the developing world war and the ongoing pandemic and their mass mobilization against these deadly dangers based on an international socialist program.



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