

Turkish CHP holds “Social Peace and Democracy Conference”

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The Republican People’s Party (CHP) held a “Social Peace and Democracy Conference” in Istanbul Saturday, January 31. Taking place amid US threats of military attacks on Iran, the conference addressed issues such as conflicts in the Middle East, the Kurdish question, and “democratization.”

The first session, “Peace at Home, Peace in the World: National and Regional Experiences,” featured compelling presentations by Hüseyin Oruç, Deputy Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the ?HH Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), and Galip Dalay from the UK military thinktank, Chatham House.

IHH is an Islamist aid organization that works in line with the foreign policy of the Erdoğan government. IHH was a major supporter of jihadists in Syria throughout the regime change war.

The work of Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs) is in clear alignment with “democratic” imperialist policies. Former US Secretaries of State John Kerry and Hillary Clinton, as well as former Turkish President Abdullah Gül (Justice and Development Party /AKP), are among the recipients of the Chatham House Prize. In 2023, during the US-NATO war against Russia, the prize was given to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The guests of the second session, “Building a Democratic Future: Citizen Will, Equality, and Inclusion,” were members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly’s National Solidarity, Brotherhood, and Democracy Commission, established in the context of ongoing negotiations between Ankara and Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

While the ruling AKP declined the invitation, the Islamist New Welfare Party, one of the former AKP leaders Ali Babacan’s DEVA Party, the Future Party led by former Prime Minister Ahmet Davuto?lu, the Islamist Felicity Party, as well as the Kurdish nationalist Peoples’ Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party) and the Stalinist Labor Party (EMEP) spoke. It was announced at the last minute

that representatives of the fascist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the Turkish Workers’ Party (T?P), who had been invited to the session, would be unable to attend. Apart from the AKP, these parties constitute the political spectrum with which the CHP is seeking an alliance.

Like the Commission itself, this session propagated the illusion that right-wing bourgeois parties could bring about democratization and peace. By lending their political support to these negotiations, whose fundamental aim was to align the interests of the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisie with US imperialist objectives in the Middle East, Stalinist and pseudo-left parties played a particularly destructive role.

EMEP MP ?skender Bayhan described the three fundamental problems facing workers in the region as “cheap labor exploitation,” “ongoing redistribution and power struggles on a regional scale,” and “the systematic elimination of democratic rights and freedoms.”

However, Bayhan did not establish a connection between these problems and US-NATO imperialism or the reactionary ambitions of the ruling class. Had he done so, the parties at the conference would have had to be exposed as right-wing parties hostile to the working class and democratic rights, just like the AKP, rather than as partners with whom cooperation was possible.

This would mean withdrawing from the parliamentary commission, explaining that the negotiations had nothing to do with the pursuit of “peace and democracy” but were subject to imperialist plunder and a war of division, and turning not to the government and bourgeois parties but to the working class. The negotiations are based on bargaining between Washington, Ankara, Tel Aviv, the HT? regime, and the Kurdish movement. The Trump administration is attempting to bring its allies together on an anti-Iran axis in the context of seeking complete dominance of the Middle East.

The CHP also supports the negotiations and commission work in line with the interests of the Turkish ruling class. Özel announced in his opening speech that his party would continue this support to the end: “We have seen and

continue to see this as a matter of survival for the future of this nation's children... We are on the Commission in Parliament. Despite all the pressure and all the provocations, we have remained there and will continue to remain there. And we will bring the work to a successful conclusion together.”

While the AKP and MHP describe the goal of the negotiations as a “terror-free Türkiye” the CHP adds the guise of “democracy” to this. Özel said, “We are fully committed to ending terrorism, silencing weapons, and resolving this issue on a democratic basis... That is why we call this process the ‘terror-free and democratic Türkiye process’ and continue to strive for it.”

Since the start of the latest negotiation process in October 2024, numerous CHP members, including Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, whom Erdoğan sees as his main rival in the next presidential election, have been arrested, and democratic rights have been further eroded.

The elimination of the de facto Kurdish autonomous administration in Syria and the liquidation of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), an ally of the PKK, is a common red line for the Turkish ruling class. Özel said, “The news of reconciliation coming from Syria has delighted us all,” in response to the US-backed integration agreement, under which most of the territory controlled by the SDF and all its energy resources were transferred to the Damascus regime.

However, Özel is careful in his language, believing that he cannot win the presidential election without the support of the DEM Party, which is in the process of repairing its relations with the government: “We clearly reject the old, destructive, exclusionary rhetoric that targets Kurds, undermines their honor, and seeks to reproduce the perception that ‘Kurd equals terrorist.’ We have not yielded to any policy that hurts Kurds in Türkiye or their relatives in Syria, and we will not yield. The Justice and Development Party government must also be a guarantor of peace and reconciliation in Syria, not a party to the conflict.”

A section of Özel’s speech drew attention to the social and political disasters that the crisis of the capitalist system has dragged humanity into, while revealing that the CHP, by its very nature, cannot offer a progressive response to this. “We are facing the threat of a renewed destabilization of the current system, which has witnessed two world wars, proxy wars, regional conflicts, and cold wars. Democracies are weakening. Insecurity is increasing. Inequalities are deepening,” Özel said, adding, “The system of capital accumulation is changing. Corporations manage both capital and wars. Peace, unfortunately, is being turned into a fairy tale, negotiated by superpowers hand in hand with global capital. This is what is happening in Gaza, for example. Those who committed genocide, who killed 71,000 people,

are now starting a de facto occupation under the guise of peace, like champions of democracy.”

The conclusion that the working class must draw from this situation is that it must fight for workers’ power and international socialism against the capitalist system, which is the source of social inequality, imperialist war, genocide, and dictatorship. Because without a frontal attack on the ruling class’s power and wealth, no fundamental problem can be overcome.

However, Özel, who views the issue from the perspective of the interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie, which is deeply tied to imperialism and is part of the problem, does not question either imperialism or capital in his proposed solution. Instead, he calls on the working class to surrender to the bourgeoisie’s power in the face of these problems: “In such an atmosphere, Türkiye’s survival depends on a political line that fosters unity and solidarity at home and prioritizes reason and calmness abroad.”

The session titled “The Socioeconomic Foundation of Social Peace: Inclusive Development” did not hide the fact that “unity and solidarity at home” meant the working class being subject to the interests of the bourgeoisie. Its guests were the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD), the main organization of the bourgeoisie, the Turkish Business Confederation (TÜRKONFED), and the Diyarbakır Chamber of Commerce. In a speech he gave in Yalova in January, Özel also emphasized that “the Republican People’s Party is never, ever the enemy of capital, businesspeople, or factory owners.”

The speeches and the profile of the participants revealed the fundamental message of this conference: Amid the instability and crisis created by imperialist aggression in the Middle East, the Turkish ruling class and its imperialist allies could better defend their interests through a government established under the leadership of the CHP.



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