Turkish parliament passes law on Kurdish PKK disarmament

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The Law on Strengthening National Solidarity and Social Integration was passed by the General Assembly of the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) on Monday. The product of the negotiations conducted by President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) led by Abdullah Öcalan, imprisoned on ?mral? Island since 1999, it is based essentially on the surrender of the PKK.

A total of 561 deputies took part in the open vote on the 12-article measure, known as the "framework law." It was adopted with 467 votes in favor, 87 against and seven abstentions. According to the speaker of the parliament, the bill passed with one of the highest levels of support any law has received in the history of the assembly.

The breakdown of the vote by party lays bare the consensus within the political establishment. Voting "yes" were 268 deputies from Erdo?an's Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP); 44 from the fascist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP); 55 from the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party) and two from the Democratic Regions Party (DBP); four from the Islamist HÜDA PAR and one from the Felicity Party; 16 from the New Path ("Yeni Yol"), another right-wing coalition; seven independents; and one from the social democratic Democratic Left Party (DSP).

The Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP), long the target of politically directed judicial operations and whose elected leadership was removed by an unlawful court ruling that installed former Chairman Kemal K?l?çdaro?lu at its head, cast 29 votes in favor and two against, while 14 of its deputies did not take part. All three deputies of the Workers' Party of Turkey (T?P) and both deputies of the Labour Party (EMEP) voted "yes."

Of the 87 votes against, 54 came from the New Party ("Yeni Parti"), led by Özgür Özel, a recent split from the CHP; another 35 New Party deputies voted "yes." The far-right Good (?Y?) Party cast 29 votes against, and one independent and one deputy from the Democrat Party also voted no. Four deputies of the New Welfare Party and three from New Path abstained.

What does the consensus express?

This is not the expression of a consensus for democratization, nor a desire for "peace." The agreement of the overwhelming majority of the Turkish and Kurdish political establishment is the product of the ruling class's attempt to close ranks and reconcile its interests, amid a war intensifying across the region under the leadership of US imperialism and in line with Washington's drive for total domination of the Middle East.

The joint report, adopted by the parliamentary commission in February, stated this openly: "Changing global and regional conditions have made strengthening the internal front not a choice but a necessity." Negotiations began some two years ago, when Israel launched its war on Gaza and Lebanon, then encompassed Iran and now approaching Türkiye's borders. Under these conditions the Erdo?an's government is seeking to strengthen the rear.

The reactionary character of this initiative is evident in the fact that it is backed by imperialism and proceeds in harmony with imperialist aggression. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained, the Ankara-PKK negotiations have developed not *against* US aggression in the Middle East but *as a part of it*. Ankara, locked in growing rivalry with Israel in Syria and across the region, is seeking with Öcalan's help to transform the PKK-led Kurdish movement, organized in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, from an enemy of more than 40 years into an ally. Washington supports these negotiations as a further consolidation of the anti-Iran axis.

The measure contains no political amnesty. Even for PKK members, or those accused of membership, who surrender or are already in prison, it establishes a conditional and menacing regime of deferral. Its implementation has been made dependent on a determination by the security agencies that the organization has ended its existence, as confirmed by the National Security Council (MGK) and has been handed over to an eight-member board chaired by the vice president and composed of the ministers of justice, foreign affairs, interior and national defense, together with the secretary general of the presidency, the head of the National Intelligence Organization (M?T) and the secretary general of the MGK.

Excluded from its scope are "intentional homicide committed in the framework of the organization's activities" and life or aggravated life sentences for offenses committed before June 1, 2005. It is apparent that the intention was to keep many of the PKK's leading cadres, above all, Öcalan, outside the law. Those who do come within the law will live for years under a ban on political activity and under the threat of imprisonment.

The DEM Party and the Kurdish bourgeois leadership

The leading role in sustaining the negotiations, and in presenting the law as a step toward "peace" and "democratization," was played, alongside Öcalan, by the DEM Party.

Co-chair Tuncer Bak?rhan told the General Assembly, "[A] century-old Kurdish question is being carried out of the shadow of conflict onto the ground of law … this process is one that will make Turkey greater and bring it prosperity." His speech was applauded by MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli, one of the principal backers of decades of repression of the Kurdish people.

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Yet the law that the DEM Party is supporting does not even mention the Kurdish people. The Anti-Terror Law remains in place; nothing whatever is done about the trustees imposed on elected municipalities; education in the mother tongue and constitutional status for the Kurdish language are not even at issue. Despite all this, the DEM Party has proclaimed the measure a "historic beginning."

This is not a tactical error but the expression of a class orientation. The Kurdish nationalist movement represents the interests of the Kurdish bourgeoisie and of the middle class layers seeking a share in the state apparatus, in the municipalities and in regional capital accumulation. The perspective of a "democratic republic" aims at the reconciliation of the Kurdish elite with the Turkish bourgeois state and at securing a place within that state. The price of this reconciliation is the political subordination of millions of Kurdish workers and youth to the Erdo?an regime.

The same orientation is clearer internationally. For decades the Kurdish nationalist leaderships have turned the democratic aspirations of the people into bargaining chips with the imperialist powers. In Iraq, the target of imperialist attack by the United States, Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) became one of Washington's props in the region. During the war for regime change in Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) served as the principal proxy force of the US, only to be subordinated afterward to the new Ankara-backed regime in Damascus. Öcalan's orientation to an agreement with Ankara is the continuation of this line. Nationalist leaderships that lean on imperialism have not brought oppressed people democratic rights but only catastrophes.

The DEM Party, together with the other establishment parties, functions to bind workers and youth to a regime that has seized opposition municipalities; that has jailed elected CHP and New Party politicians, opponents of war, journalists and trade unionists; that is being drawn ever more deeply into the US-NATO wars in the Black Sea and the Middle East; and that is crushing working people with inflation and impoverishment.

Workers and young people must demand the unconditional release of all political prisoners, the dropping of political prosecutions, the withdrawal of the trustees imposed on elected municipalities, the abolition of the Anti-Terror Law, constitutional guarantees for the Kurdish language and education in the mother tongue in state schools. Without opposing the oppression of the Kurdish people and defending their democratic rights, the unity of Turkish and Kurdish workers in the struggle for socialist revolution cannot be achieved.

The pragmatism of the New Party and the chauvinist opposition

One of the most widely debated aspects of the vote was the position of the New Party, which Özel founded with more than 90 deputies after the government seized the CHP by means of a judicial coup. According to an account by *Nefes* columnist Deniz Zeyrek, Özel asked the party's group officers and Central Executive Board members to vote "yes," left the remainder free to decide and said, "It would be good if there were at least 35 'yes' votes."

In the General Assembly, Özel asserted that the CHP's leadership had been seized and that presidential candidate Ekrem ?mamo?lu had been jailed, and that no one had more right to vote "no" to this law than they did. But he sought to justify his position by declaring that they would not place their anger ahead of "the nation's right to peace." The imprisoned ?mamo?lu also issued a statement backing Özel.

The New Party leadership, by voting "yes," is signaling to the ruling class that it is the defender of its interests. The broad "no" vote of its deputies is a component of the New Party's effort to get in front of the growing social opposition and to control it.

The political content of the "no" votes must be made clear. The "no" vote of the Good Party, and the opposition of far-right, anti-refugee parties outside parliament such as the Victory Party ("Zafer Partisi"), rest on the claim that the state has "made concessions" to the PKK and express a chauvinist nationalist reaction that must be opposed. It has nothing in common with socialist opposition, which exposes the fact that the law has no connection whatever to its claims of "peace" and "democratization" and serves the reactionary interests of the pro-imperialist ruling class.

Capitulation by the pseudo-left parties

T?P and EMEP, which supported the negotiations and took part in the parliamentary commission but voted "no" to the commission report in February, voted "yes" to a law that falls short even of that report. Moreover, both parties did so after acknowledging that the law contains not the slightest element of democratization. This support, given in essence to the Erdo?an regime, is a declaration of political bankruptcy.

Like the DEM Party, T?P and EMEP propagate the illusion that "peace and democracy" can be attained by pressuring a bourgeois government to change its policy. From the beginning of the 20th century, however, Marxists have explained that war is inevitable in the epoch of imperialism and that the foundations of a lasting peace can be laid only through world socialist revolution. Under conditions in which a third world war is developing, the spread of this illusion serves to disarm workers and youth politically.

In its Party Council declaration of August 8-9, T?P listed the facts that the law had been drawn up behind closed doors, that it contained violations of the principle of equality, that it transferred judicial powers to boards subordinated to the executive and that it imposed bans on political activity. It then announced it would cast a "yes vote by way of reservation." Its justification was that its "counterparts," that is, the DEM Party, had given their approval.

This pseudo-left stance, which in essence serves as the political spokesman of the affluent middle class, has nothing to do with the Marxist perspective that defends the historical interests of the international working class. Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, who led the October Revolution of 1917, defended the democratic rights of oppressed nations as a matter of principle while insisting with the utmost clarity that no support whatsoever was to be given to the reactionary policies of bourgeois nationalism.

The same unprincipled attitude applies to EMEP. At a press conference on August 6, EMEP deputy ?skender Bayhan said the law produced "not a lasting peace but the politics of hostage-taking," that it legitimized the non-implementation of the rulings of the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), and that it hung like the Sword of Damocles over thousands of citizens.

In his speech in parliament on Monday, Bayhan explained his party's support in these terms: "What is not in the bill? There is no democratization. There is no democratic solution to the Kurdish question. ... The most basic democratic rights, the steps to be taken toward lasting peace, are not there. So, what is in the bill? There is a protocol on the laying down of arms. … Despite all these absences it occupies an important place for the period ahead, and we consider taking concrete steps here to be valuable. But we give this support while also making our warnings, our criticisms and our objections."

These parties, which owe their positions in parliament to their electoral alliance with the DEM Party, nullify their criticisms of the law with their

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votes. Far from developing the independent politics of the working class, they consciously obstruct it. At a time when the construction of dictatorship is accelerating, they play an extremely damaging role by lending “left” support to the illusion that pro-imperialist, right-wing bourgeois parties can deliver “peace and democratization.”

A socialist perspective

The position of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi (Socialist Equality Party), the Turkish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, to this law and to the negotiations conducted through secret diplomacy is irreconcilably hostile both to this pseudo-left stance and to the right-wing “no” campaign. Our aim is to unite and mobilise the working class in the fight for democratic rights and against imperialist war.

The SEP carries forward the tradition of the October Revolution, of the Left Opposition founded under Trotsky’s leadership against Stalinism, and of the Fourth International. That tradition has defended, as a matter of principle, the international unity of the working class and the program of world socialist revolution against bourgeois nationalism of every variety.

As the party program states:

> Fighting for education in the mother tongue, for the constitutional guarantee of the Kurdish language and for the recognition of all other democratic and cultural rights as well as freedom for political prisoners, the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi insists that the only way to the lasting peace and democratic rights that the working people long for is the unification of workers of all nationalities in the Middle East and in the imperialist countries in the fight for global socialism and against war and neo-colonial oppression. It means fighting for the Socialist Federation of the Middle East, which will be part of a world socialist federation.

This perspective is grounded in Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution. In the epoch of imperialism, in countries of belated capitalist development, the bourgeoisie is umbilically tied to the imperialist powers, fears above all else the social revolution of the working class and is by its very nature incapable of resolving the fundamental democratic questions. The solution of these questions, including the Kurdish question, lies in the conquest of power by the working class of all nationalities under the leadership of its own revolutionary party and in the advance of the struggle for international socialist revolution. We call on all those who agree with this perspective to support the Socialist Equality Party and to join it.

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