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On the eve of Turkish elections: Erdogan prepares new intrigues and a major crackdown

On the eve of the June 24 presidential and parliamentary snap elections, the Turkish government of president Recep Tayyip Erdogan is preparing further intrigues against his opponents, while intensifying the government crackdown on the Kurdish nationalists both at home and abroad.

One of the latest examples of his insidious intrigues came to light through a leaked video on social media that shows Erdogan instructing his ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) local organizations to use what he called "tight marking" on voters' lists in order to bring the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) below the 10 percent national threshold.

If the HDP drops under the 10 percent necessary to gain parliamentary representation this would grant the AKP at least 50 to 60 extra seats in the Turkish parliament, as it is the second party in the predominantly Kurdish populated regions of Turkey.

The videos were recorded by Ahmet Ozturk, AKP's neighbourhood head in Topselvi, Istanbul, during a June 9 closed meeting at the party headquarters and posted on his Facebook account. They have been shared on social media by a Facebook account "Biz'ler Tek'ten Güçlüyüz" (We are stronger than the one [man]—a reference to Erdogan), even though Ozturk deleted the original post afterwards.

In one video, Erdogan is heard telling his party's neighbourhood heads, "Friends, our party organization must conduct very different work on the HDP," adding, "I can't speak these words outside [publicly]. I am speaking them with you here. Why? Because if the

HDP falls below the electoral threshold it would mean that we would be in a much better place.”

Erdogan also instructed his party cadres to put “tight marking” on the voters in each district, saying, “You know who is who ... If our neighbourhood representatives do not know who is who, then they should resign. You will take the voter lists for each ballot box and conduct special work.”

In another short video from the same meeting, Erdogan asks his cadres to secure AKP majorities on ballot box monitoring committees in order to “finish the job in Istanbul before it has even started,” adding, “We shouldn’t repeat the experience of June 7.” This was a reference to the June 7, 2015 election, where the AKP lost its parliamentary majority necessary to form a one-party government.

Through its official Twitter account on June 14, the HDP slammed Erdogan, saying, “AKP chairman Erdogan openly incites people to commit crimes. He plans to steal our votes by cheating and pressure to bring us below the election threshold.”

The main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), on the other hand, is preoccupied with the issue of how it can make sure that the HDP overcomes the 10 percent threshold to prevent an AKP majority in the Turkish parliament. At the same time, the CHP is struggling to win over Kurdish voters in the expected second round of the presidential election. The HDP’s imprisoned candidate Selahattin Demirtas has almost no chance to be qualified.

There are growing signs that the CHP has reached an agreement with the Kurdish nationalists to support its presidential candidate Muharrem Ince in return for giving support to the HDP in the parliamentary elections.

This, however, is by no means easy. Although the CHP is masquerading as a defender of the democratic rights of the Kurds, and its presidential candidate is harping about demands for mother tongue education, peace and economic development projects in the predominantly Kurdish populated regions of Turkey, large sections of Kurdish workers and youth do not trust it. And this for justifiable reasons.

Besides its long historical record of brutal oppression, including massacres of Kurds, the CHP is one of the main supporters of the AKP’s crackdown on the Kurdish people both at home and abroad.

In the Turkish parliament, the CHP has enthusiastically supported all government resolutions for the use of military force abroad, providing a legal basis for the ongoing

Turkish invasions and military operations in Iraq and Syria under the cover of fighting “separatist terrorism”—i.e., Kurdish nationalism.

In May 2016, the CHP voted for an AKP-backed constitutional amendment lifting parliamentary immunity that stripped one CHP and 11 HDP lawmakers of their deputy status, resulting in their imprisonment. It is due to this support that the HDP’s former co-chairperson and current presidential candidate, Demirtas, has stayed behind bars since November 2016.

Following the June 7, 2015 elections, the CHP turned a blind eye to the months-long brutal military crackdown on Kurdish towns that left 4,000 dead and more than 10,000 jailed, while forcing some 200,000 people to flee their homes. Instead, it held talks with the AKP to form a coalition government.

The CHP, however, was not alone in its complicity with Erdogan and the AKP. Since Erdogan decided to end the so-called “peace process” with the PKK and launched a crackdown on the Kurdish nationalists in 2015, the HDP was a key supporter of the AKP’s anti-working-class, pro-imperialist policies. In August 2015, during the bloody army operations in Kurdish towns, the HDP participated in an AKP-led “electoral government.” Both the CHP and the HDP, together with all other pro-NATO, pro-European Union (EU) opponents of Erdogan, stood by during the July 15 coup, making empty statements of condemnation only when the coup’s failure became evident. After the April 16, 2017 constitutional referendum, where they led a “no” campaign, the CHP and the HDP worked to calm popular anger over widespread allegations of voting fraud. Whenever the AKP government was on the hook before the working class and mass protests erupted, the CHP, the HDP and their trade unionist followers left their nationalist disagreements aside and joined forces to discourage workers and youth from participating.

Behind this cooperation between the CHP and HDP are their pro-imperialist (pro-NATO/pro-EU) positions and their implacable hostility to the working class, which finds expression in their affiliation with the so-called “Socialist International” of the social democratic and labour parties.

While the bourgeois opponents of Erdogan join forces to defend the interests of Turkey’s ruling class in close cooperation with Ankara’s traditional imperialist allies in NATO and the EU, in order to secure a share of the spoils in the imperialist carve-up of the Middle East, all pseudo-left parties and organizations are increasing their efforts to present them as champions of democracy and peace. In return for their efforts, these political

representatives of the affluent middle class have secured places on the slate of the HDP for the Turkish parliament.

Amid hypocritical promises, collusions and insidious intrigues over how to win the elections at home, the AKP government has further escalated its military operations against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), preparing a major invasion in the PKK's stronghold in the Qandil Mountains (an area close to the Iraqi and Iranian borders) in close cooperation with Baghdad and Tehran.

Parallel to the Turkish army's growing military operations, both at home and in northern Iraq, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has also intensified its own war against the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK) in the western and north-western border regions of the country. The PJAK is a Kurdish nationalist party, associated with Turkey's PKK, waging an armed struggle since the early 2000s.

Meanwhile, Ankara has reportedly reached an agreement with the Trump administration over a "road map" for the withdrawal of the People's Protection Units militia, the main US-proxy in Syria, from the northern Syrian town of Manbij located on the western side of the Euphrates River. According to media reports, Ankara and Washington have agreed on a process that would begin on July 4, and finish within 90 days, and would include the establishment of a local government in Manbij.

On August 24, 2016, the Turkish army launched its first invasion of Syria, "Operation Euphrates Shield," which was followed by "Operation Olive Branch" in January 2018, with the aim of preventing the pro-US Kurdish nationalist forces from creating a Kurdish state or self-government in Syria. At the same time, Erdogan was trying to convince Washington that Turkey, under his authoritarian rule, is still vital to US policy in Syria.