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Turkey after the elections

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The November 1 parliamentary elections in Turkey were held under conditions of extreme social tension and escalating violence.

In the run-up to the poll, Turkish planes bombed targets in Syria and Iraq. The war in Syria and Iraq spilled across the border into Turkey in the form of bloody terrorist attacks in Suruç and Ankara. The Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party) government resumed the war against the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) and imposed a state of emergency in Kurdish cities. The government, headed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, attacked its political opponents and critical media outlets by means of the courts as well as gangs of thugs and police.

Fuelling the political crisis and the growth of popular opposition was a mounting economic and financial crisis, compounded by the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria and Iraq. Less than five months before, Erdoğan and the AKP had lost their parliamentary majority in national elections.

The unexpected outcome of last Sunday's election, with the AKP regaining its majority in parliament, resolves none of these crises and contradictions. Rather, it heralds a period of violent class struggle and political conflict. The AKP will seek to use its control of the state and security apparatus to establish an authoritarian regime and directly attack the working class.

Only an independent intervention by the working class can prevent Turkey and the entire region from sinking further into a vortex of civil war and dictatorship.

Erdoğan's AKP government is a regime of crisis. The wars carried out by the US and its imperialist allies against Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria have shattered the social and political structures of the entire region.

The Middle East, like the Balkans before the First World War, has become a battleground in which the major powers fight each other for oil, spheres of influence and geopolitical advantage. The emergence of a proxy war between the US and Russia in Syria threatens to trigger a military conflict between nuclear-armed powers.

These international factors dominate Turkish politics. The stalemate in the Syrian war, which the AKP government was instrumental in escalating, has shattered its dreams of expanding its political and economic influence along the lines of the old Ottoman Empire—into the Arab world, the Black Sea region, the Caucasus and the Balkans—and becoming the “tiger” of the Middle East. AKP leader Ahmet Davutoglu's policy of “zero problems with neighbours” has become a reality of “problems with all neighbours.”

None of Turkey's bourgeois parties has an answer to the problems that arise out of this crisis. This is true not only for the Islamist AKP, but also for the Kemalist CHP (Republican People's Party), the ultranationalist MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), and the pro-Kurdish HDP (People's Democratic Party).

Despite the election result, anti-war sentiment and working-class opposition are rising. As the election results became known, reports emerged of a factory occupation by glass workers in the city of Mersin. Masses of Turkish workers are turning to the left, not to the right.

The AKP was able to win only because of the bankruptcy of its political rivals. Amid the escalating violence of the election campaign, it presented itself as a factor for stability and national unity, attracting nationalist voters, led by Tugrul Türkes, the son of the MHP founder Alparslan Türkes, and conservative Kurds. Its electoral gains occurred mainly at the expense of the MHP and HDP.

The election highlights the reactionary character of the Turkish bourgeoisie, which throughout its history has never been able to establish truly democratic conditions. It spent the post-World War II period in the shadow of US imperialism and NATO, repeatedly turning to military dictatorships and fascist violence to suppress the working class. The Kemalist CHP and the arch-nationalists of the MHP became identified with these policies.

The AKP was an opponent of the military and an advocate of democratic reform only as long as its own rise was threatened by enemies within the state apparatus. Having consolidated its power, it developed the same dictatorial tendencies as its Kemalist and nationalist predecessors.

As for the HDP, it does not speak for the Kurdish masses, but for the Kurdish bourgeoisie and privileged layers of the middle class. The fact that the democratic rights of the Kurds are

suppressed and the HDP is persecuted by the state does not make this party of the Kurdish bourgeoisie progressive. On the contrary, like the various wings of the Turkish bourgeoisie, the HDP vies for the support of the United States and other imperialist powers, offering them its services.

It is significant that while the HDP calls for peace in Syria, it does not call for the withdrawal of all imperialist forces from the region, the closure of US military and CIA bases, and the withdrawal of Turkey from NATO. The regional autonomy or independent state it seeks does not equate to better social conditions and more democratic rights for the Kurdish masses, but greater privileges for the Kurdish elites.

What is true for the HDP also applies to the PKK, which differs from the HDP only in its tactic of armed struggle. This tactic is reactionary. The guerrilla war drives a wedge between Kurdish and Turkish workers and is grist for the mill of right-wing Turkish nationalists. Its aim is to exert pressure on the Turkish state, with which PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan is ready to make a deal at any time if the Kurdish elites can receive greater political power and a share in the spoils from the exploitation of the Kurdish working class.

The Syrian branch of the PKK, the People's Protection Units (YPG), is now working closely with the US military, which arms and trains it and provides it with logistical support.

Only an independent political movement of the working class can prevent a further slide toward civil war. To this end, workers must free themselves from the paralysing influence of the bourgeois parties and the various pseudo-left groups and intervene with their own program. The struggle against war and the struggle against capitalism are inseparable.

The imperialist powers and the regional elites fight for a re-division of the Middle East and its economic resources. They want to replace the disintegrating borders and state structures that were forced on large parts of the collapsing Ottoman Empire by British and French imperialism 100 years ago with new borders and neo-colonial oppression.

Before this agenda can be carried out, however, the working class will have an opportunity to intervene in struggle and present its alternative to Turkey's bourgeois parties. Its answer must be the struggle against imperialism and the unification of the working class across all state, ethnic and religious divisions under the banner of a Socialist Federal Republic of the Middle East.

The most urgent task is the establishment of independent, revolutionary workers' parties, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, in Turkey and the other countries in the region.