

The Workers' Party of Turkey and the impasse of pseudo-left politics

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The Workers' Party of Turkey (T?P) was founded in 2017 after a name change made by the People's Communist Party of Turkey (HTKP), which split from the Stalinist Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) in 2014.

It has recently suffered a series of splits and mass resignations. The common feature of them all, which took place with various secondary political or organizational criticisms of the party leadership, is the absence of a historically based Marxist analysis of the class collaborationist political line of the T?P as a pseudo-left party descended from Stalinism. Therefore, none of the groups that emerged from the splits could go beyond establishing new tendencies very similar to the T?P.

This also applies to the roots of the opportunism of the T?P itself. From a historical and theoretical standpoint, the T?P failed to base its split with the Stalinist TKP on a study and assimilation of the great strategic and world-historical issues raised by Leon Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism. This is a common feature of all the tendencies that emerged with the disintegration of the Stalinist parties after the dissolution of the USSR.

In recent years, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the *Sosyalist E?itlik Grubu* have exposed the increasingly open orientation of the T?P towards the national bourgeoisie and imperialism, and its anti-Marxist character, in a series of polemics and analyses.

We explained that its name change in 2017 was intended to exploit the popularity of the former Workers' Party of Turkey, a reformist parliamentary party in the 1960s and 70s that had considerable influence among the advanced sections of the working class.

However, it became clear, especially during the presidential elections in 2023 and local elections in 2024, that what was at stake was more than a simple name change. It reflected the party's open orientation towards imperialism and the bourgeoisie and aimed to direct the growing opposition among the working class and youth into the safe channels of the capitalist order.

A parliamentary party oriented towards the bourgeois political establishment

In 2018, the T?P ran for the parliamentary elections from the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) lists and won two seats in the parliamentary elections, which it entered in an unprincipled political cooperation with the HDP. The T?P's number of seats increased to four with one deputy each from the HDP and the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP).

The past years have been a period of real inflation reaching triple digits, impoverishing the working class, and social anger reaching a boiling point. The conditions of escalating militarism and imperialist aggression across the world and the collapse of democracy have pushed the Turkish

ruling class towards militarism abroad and authoritarianism at home.

Especially after the government ended the "peace process" with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in 2015, repression against elected Kurdish politicians increased. The "peace process", which had begun in previous years with the support of Washington and European capitals, collapsed after the US made Kurdish militias in Syria its main proxy force. After 2018, the opposition of the T?P deputies in parliament became visible in the bourgeois media and social media.

The T?P's entry into the parliamentary elections in May 2023 in alliance with the HDP but with its own lists aimed to prevent the building of a genuine socialist alternative to organize the opposition of the working class and youth against imperialism and state repression, especially of the Kurds. This sentiment found significant resonance among various segments of society, who viewed the ruling and opposition factions of the bourgeoisie with hatred. The T?P sought to neuter the demand for such a political turn.

In the elections held on May 14, 2023, T?P won 4 parliamentary seats with close to 1 million votes (1.76 percent). It did not field candidates in many provinces as part of its alliance with the HDP (which entered the elections as the Green Left Party, now the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party, DEM).

The T?P demonstrated its ability to mobilize tens of thousands of people in May Day demonstrations in Istanbul during the election campaign. It attracted many people who had been interested in socialist politics in the past and who were angry with the capitalist system, while receiving significant support from the upper middle class.

Surrender to NATO and the reactionary campaign of the CHP

That the struggle against imperialist institutions such as NATO and the IMF, which was included in the program of the T?P, was only on paper, was revealed when Finland's NATO membership was approved without a single no vote in a parliamentary session on March 30, just a month and a half before the 2023 elections.

The T?P deputies, who had not opposed the Bill brought to parliament by President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an and enthusiastically supported by the CHP, did not participate in the parliamentary vote and did not say no to NATO expansion. There could be no justification for the deputies of the T?P, who never turn down an opportunity to speak at the rostrum in the parliament, not to participate in such a critical vote when the whole world is being drawn into the vortex of a third world war by the US-NATO imperialist aggression against Russia. It was a signal to the imperialist capitals and the ruling circles in Turkey.

This confirmed that the T?P's alliance with HDP was not a simple electoral cooperation. By abstaining from the vote and declaring

“Finland’s security concerns legitimate,” the HDP gave tacit support to NATO’s expansion. This is in line with the close alliance of the Kurdish bourgeois nationalist leaderships with NATO in Syria and Iraq. HDP representatives also participate in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and chair its various commissions.

The T?P’s orientation towards imperialism and the national bourgeoisie was also revealed in its support for Kemal K?l?çdarolu, the CHP-led Nation Alliance candidate who ran a much more explicitly pro-imperialist campaign than Erdoğan’s People’s Alliance in the 2023 presidential elections.

The alliance consisted of the CHP, the far-right Good Party that broke away from the fascist MHP, the Islamist Felicity Party, from which Erdoğan’s AKP was born, the Future Party of former prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who broke away from the AKP and is one of the main supporters of the CIA-organized regime change war in Syria, the DEVA party of Ali Babacan, former minister of economy and foreign affairs and a trusted figure of finance capital, and finally the right-wing Democrat Party.

The pseudo-left tendencies, notably the T?P, played a divisive role by presenting this right-wing alliance in the service of imperialism and the ruling class as a progressive alternative to Erdoğan’s reactionary government.

It was no coincidence that the T?P did not participate in the vote on and that K?l?çdarolu, whom it supported as a presidential candidate, traveled to the main NATO countries such as the US, the UK and Germany before the elections and met with important members of the political and financial elite.

In the heat days of the elections, which took place amid the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, K?l?çdarolu accused Russia of interfering in the elections without evidence, a clear message to the imperialist capitals. K?l?çdarolu had previously declared NATO “the guarantor of democracy in the 21st century.”

None of this prevented the T?P from fully supporting the CHP and the right-wing alliance it led. Support for K?l?çdarolu, legitimized with the rhetoric of “overthrowing Erdoğan’s one-man regime”, was directly linked to the T?P’s goal of keeping the growing social opposition within the capitalist system through parliament and preventing the development of an independent movement of the working class.

The T?P portrayed the anti-democratic practices of the Erdoğan government not as the result of the crisis of world capitalism and the general policy of the ruling class, but as an arbitrary choice that could be ended by replacing one capitalist government with another. For the T?P, the main antagonism was not between the working class and the bourgeoisie at the international level, but between the “ruling bloc” and the “opposition bloc” at the national level.

The falsity of the claim that it was necessary to support the CHP to “defend democracy” against the government’s police state practices was evident in K?l?çdarolu’s years of supporting the government’s repression of Kurdish politicians and his prominent role in the reactionary campaign against Syrians.

In the run-up to the second round of the presidential elections, K?l?çdarolu took the anti-refugee and racist propaganda even further. He made an electoral alliance with the Victory Party led by Ümit Özda?, a fascist known for his anti-asylum-seeker stance. In the face of this dirty alliance targeting not only Syrian refugees but also Kurds, the T?P, HDP and other sections of the pseudo-left continued to support K?l?çdarolu without criticism.

Nationalist response to the Gaza genocide and other critical global issues

The T?P’s policy in this year’s local elections was a confirmation and repetition of the right-wing line followed in the 2023 elections. NATO’s imperialist war against Russia, the genocide in Gaza and the COVID-19 pandemic were not on its agenda. It formed an alliance with the CHP and spread the illusion that the capitalist system could be improved by winning municipalities where it fielded candidates. With the support of the CHP, the party’s chairman Erkan Ba? was nominated as a candidate for mayor in Gebze, a major working-class area near to Istanbul.

The T?P has never put Israel’s NATO-backed, year-long genocide in Gaza at the top of its agenda. When it was forced to react on the issue, it basically repeated the policy of middle-class pseudo-left organizations internationally to call on political leaders who are directly or indirectly complicit in the genocide, or on the UN, to support a ceasefire.

One of the last striking examples of this was the call of the T?P to the Erdoğan government on September 24. Following Israel’s mass terrorist attack blowing up beepers in Lebanon, which extended the genocide in Gaza, the T?P wrote on X/Twitter: “We call on the government of the Republic of Turkey to stop the imperialist aggression of the murderous Zionist regime and to take diplomatic initiatives to achieve an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon and Gaza.”

The indifference of the T?P reflected the fact that not only Erdoğan, but also the bourgeois opposition parties it turned to had close ties with imperialism and the Zionist state. There was a direct link between the failure to defend the Palestinians and the failure to defend the Syrian Arab refugees, who were scapegoated for all social problems caused by imperialism and capitalism through chauvinist propaganda by its ally the CHP.

It must be considered alongside the T?P’s indifference to other critical issues facing the working class internationally. When the war in Ukraine broke out in 2022, the T?P merely issued a vague statement “calling for peace”. This statement was addressed not to the working class but to imperialist and capitalist governments. However, the war cannot be stopped by calling on capitalist governments and politicians but only by the international working class struggling on a socialist and internationalist basis against capitalist and imperialist barbarism. This is underscored by the US-NATO war against Russia, the genocide in Gaza, and the escalating war in the Middle East.

The T?P and other pseudo-left parties share the same indifference as the bourgeois parties regarding another global crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues with a new wave and has killed at least 27.3 million people as of July 2024 according to *The Economist’s* tracker. The worldwide adoption of the “COVID forever” policy of the ruling classes of the imperialist countries is costing the lives and health of millions of people. For them, the accumulation of profit and wealth comes first, last and always.

The entire spectrum of pseudo-left tendencies, including nationalist-reformist parties like the T?P, is organically incapable of producing solutions to the global crises caused by capitalism. The pandemic, which is a world crisis, can only be fought internationally and with a socialist program based on the working class, as in the case of global warming and climate change. Parties like the T?P, which are inextricably tied to the bourgeois nation-state system, are complicit in the destruction caused by capitalism by not providing solutions.

The struggle for socialism cannot be confined to national borders and the structures of the nation state. The pseudo-left parties that reject the revolutionary role of the working class and the program of international socialism serve to ensure the survival of the capitalist system by dragging the masses in one country and another to defeat. This is the main function of the Democratic Socialists of America in the United States, Jeremy Corbyn in the UK, Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, the Left Party in Germany or the JVP in Sri Lanka.

Jeremy Corbyn as a model for the T?P

It is telling that one of the T?P's main international allies is Corbyn, whom the pseudo-left continues to glorify and support despite his devastating political betrayals.

As Leon Trotsky wrote in 1934:

On the international field the centrist distinguishes himself, if not his blindness, at least by his shortsightedness. He does not understand that one cannot build in the present period a national revolutionary party save as part of an international party; in the choice of his international allies the centrist is even less particular than in his own country.

T?P leader Ba? visited Corbyn, who was forced to run as an independent candidate in the British general elections in London in early July because he was expelled from the Labour Party he used to lead, and they campaigned together.

In the election campaign, Corbyn refused to challenge Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer's support for NATO's war against Russia, Israel's genocide in Gaza and austerity measures. Overall, this campaign was similar to the position of the T?P in Turkey. Like Corbyn, Ba?, while pursuing a NATO-aligned policy, does not oppose the parties he is allied with in their support for the genocide in Gaza and the war in Ukraine. In the election, the Socialist Equality Party, the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, was the only party to advance a socialist alternative to both the Conservatives and Labour and their "left" crutch, the Corbyn campaign.

Corbyn's record as Labour leader includes allowing a free vote on bombing Syria, supporting the Trident nuclear weapons program and NATO, refusing to oppose the witch-hunt of himself and his supporters as anti-Semites, and resolutely opposing any challenge to the Conservatives.

This record is like that of the CHP, which sits with the Labor Party in the so-called Socialist International. As it seeks to block any mass movement against the government, its new leader, Özgür Özel, has initiated a "détente process" with Erdoğan amid a deepening crisis of capitalist rule.

Corbyn's role in Britain is to prevent the development of a genuine revolutionary movement independent of this imperialist, right-wing Labour Party by acting as its left appendage and apologist. Similarly, the T?P has assumed the role of being the "left wing" of the CHP-led bourgeois opposition in Turkey.

The way forward

The fact that tens of thousands of people who had registered in the T?P with the expectation of a socialist revolutionary policy have rapidly distanced themselves from it recently is an expression of a politically unclear reaction to the rapid turn to the right. The demands of the working class and youth do not fit into the reformist politics of the T?P. Only a genuinely Marxist leadership with a principled international socialist program can offer a way forward to the working class and youth from the impasse of national-opportunist politics of the pseudo-left.

The ICFI is the sole representative of the historical continuity of Trotsky's struggle to defend the principles, program and legacy of the October Revolution of 1917, going back to the founding of the Left

Opposition in 1923 and the Fourth International in 1938.

The International Committee was founded in 1953 to defend the Fourth International against the opportunist and revisionist tendency known as Pabloism, which sought to liquidate the Trotskyist movement into parties and organizations controlled by Stalinists, social democrats and bourgeois nationalists.

The ICFI's central goal is to unite the international working class on a socialist and internationalist perspective, to put an end to the capitalist system and to establish socialism worldwide. In his *Transitional Program* published at the founding of the Fourth International, Trotsky declared that the historical crisis of humanity had been reduced to a crisis of revolutionary leadership and said of the cadres who founded the Fourth International, "Outside these cadres there does not exist a single revolutionary current on this planet really meriting the name." The task of building sections of the ICFI today rests on these still valid points of Trotsky.

The ICFI's perspective of international socialism and independent class politics is in irreconcilable opposition to all nationalist, reformist and pseudo-left parties. Workers, intellectuals and youth who are looking for a genuinely revolutionary socialist movement should participate in the building of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi as the section of the ICFI in Turkey.



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