

# The Reflections of the International Relations Bureau of TKP on Turkey's June 24 Elections

## *Why is there a snap election'? What forced AKP and Erdogan to reset the timing of elections?*

Until April, AKP seemed to be determined to hold elections in 2019, making preparations for three administrative levels, parliamentary, presidential and local. However, a number of external and internal factors wherreted the timing of these elections. The Afrin operation targeting the Kurdish group - PYD in Syria, though perhaps successful in terms of military, did not render Turkey to gain an upper hand in the power balance in Syria, weakening AKP's objectives of foreign policy. The rhetoric based on 'national unity' for eliminating terrorists, listed by AKP as FETO (Gülenists) PKK (Kurds) and ISIL, became increasingly doubtful and had to be consolidated in domestic politics. AKP tried to achieve this by allying with the Nationalist Movement Party – MHP, but this in turn led to a tough bargaining in sharing economic opportunities especially in local politics, so that the overlapping of elections posed a risk of disintegration. Eventually the economic downturn that could get worse aggravated this risk, necessitating an early parliamentary election and presidential election, popularly named as a 'snap election', leaving aside the local elections for 2019.

Turkey's central administrative system had been a parliamentarian one from the outset, the 'President of the Republic' elected by the parliament and playing a symbolic role above politics. AKP changed this system by a series of constitutional amendments; first, enabling the election of the president by the people that strengthened its powers vis-a-vis the parliament; then, permitting political membership of the president that abolished its impartial position representing the 'Republic'; lastly, replacing altogether the parliamentary system with a presidential system. As a result of these changes, not only did invalidating the separation of powers concentrate power in the hands of Erdogan, it also eased the immediate realization of capitalist class' interests by empowering the executive against the judiciary and legislation through which the organized struggle of the working class could be influential in resisting the attacks of capitalists.

The holding of early elections was proposed by MHP and accepted by AKP according to this proposal. However, AKP had been perceiving the pressing need to implement the presidential system since Erdogan's apprehension of losing the command over politics could only be compensated in gaining absolute dominance over the system. Establishing a



system of dominance would ensure the opposition groups to be confined to Erdogan's dictates and enable him to pay off the disgruntled segments of society without being held accountable. However, such a strategy also seems to be the last option of Erdogan to save his neck, considering the increasingly credited strategy of the bourgeois opposition striving for a way to come into terms with AKP provided that Erdogan's leadership is put aside.

### ***What has been the course of Erdogan's relationship with imperialist centers?***

Erdogan's stressed relation with Western imperialist centers is an outcome of the current crisis of imperialism and an extension of the historical quest of the Turkish bourgeoisie. Turkey has been a loyal ally of the United States since its NATO membership in 1952. This intimate bond continued after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, added with the seeking of Turkish capitalist class for new missions within the imperialist hierarchy. The restoration of US imperialism in the former socialist geography accelerated following the September 11 attacks and coincided with the accession of AKP to power in Turkey in 2002.

Turkey under AKP played a critical role in consolidating the military and political alliance of the US in the Middle East. However, AKP's pioneering the new-Ottomanist ideology also enabled Turkey to play this role under the guise of a Islamic patron in the region. At the beginning, in 2004, Erdogan had declared himself the co-president of the Great Middle East Initiative, which was the notorious political project for the resurrection of US imperialism in the region. But the problematic occupation of Iraq and the problems within the US administration gave Erdogan the opportunity to take initiative. In 2009 he made the claptrap 'One minute' show in Davos allegedly challenging Israel. This was followed by the attempt of liaising with the Muslim Brotherhood at the outset of the Arab Spring in 2010.

Apart from the personal initiative of Erdogan to act as a representative of the Islamic world, certain representatives of the Turkish bourgeoisie in the state, such as those in the ranks of the military, were also mentioning that Turkey could turn towards a Euroasian alliance. However, neither did such an alliance in the international power balance come into being as a real alternative to the West, nor did the bourgeoisie actually envisage a regional disengagement from NATO. While the resistance of Syria against the Western imperialist operation involving AKP's malevolent plans seriously damaged new-Ottomanism, Erdogan's conflict with the Gulen movement which was finally settled after the 2016 coup attempt gave him the opportunity to consolidate his power in a nationalistic axis. It was obvious that US imperialism had implicitly supported the plotters. The Turkish capitalist class supported the regeneration of Erdogan as a bargainer among rival imperialist centers but also expected more reliable partnerships.

In the meantime, the Presidency of Donald Trump, both as a by-product and an escalator



of the crisis within imperialism had opened up cracks in the US imperialist hegemony. The emergent regional powers such as Russia and China, with their anti-Western rhetoric, embarked on regional imperialistic quests which showed transient confrontations and rapprochements with other powers rather than establishing consistent alliances. Erdogan took advantage of this chaotic situation and started acting like an independent power by shifting alliances, disregarding the vulnerability of the fragmented Turkish state under AKP and the high fragility of the Turkish economy. Remarkable is his collaboration with Putin on energy projects, military and trade agreements and negotiations over Syria, which has been absolutely pragmatic.

Before the elections, AKP still pledges to satisfy the material interests of foreign monopolies from different imperialistic centers. However, Erdogan's increasing inconsistent political excitations and intimidations against his partners has raised doubts about the sustainability of his way of managing affairs. Moreover, these changeable friends-foes of Erdogan are also concerned with the discontent of the secular, urban population in Turkey. This population mostly consists of a newly proletarianized youth that showed itself in the 2013 July movement which was not easy to manipulate towards a 'coloured revolution'. The delegitimation of AKP's both imperialistic and reactionary policies poses a danger of radicalising this population against the social order. So the Western imperialist pursuit to cancel out or balance Erdogan is accompanied by a pursuit of legitimizing the idea of a Western-friendly political intervention or of a restoration of relations with imperialist partners on libertarian grounds.

### ***How does the "post-April 17 referendum" Turkey look like?***

The state of emergency (SoE) conditions, which have been extended recently for a seventh time, have been absolutely misused so far for the interest of Turkish capitalists and the Erdogan "dynasty". The SoE allows the country to be ruled by emergency decrees. On that base, countless legislations have been changed, the Wealth Fund has been introduced -despite the modest level of resources and "wealth"- in order to subsidize and finance the monopolies out of the workers' savings and earnings. Over a hundred privatizations have been put into practice. Many people have lost their jobs upon dismissal from civil service and academia, military and other public institutions due to arbitrary accusations. The essence of the bourgeois parliament enabling political discussions, opposition to statutory degrees, representation of the organized struggle of workers etc., was abandoned. Neither the parliament nor the Supreme Court have undertaken their responsibility to supervise the SoE decrees. Even before the presidential system was put in practise, several decrees have tied the intelligence service, the military industry, many other public institutions directly to Erdoğan, so that the power is held in one hand, that of his own.

The SoE decrees worked for both pacifying the opposition with oppression and threats



over workers (for instance a major strike of 180 thousand steelworkers all around the country in January 2018 was banned due to the pretext of national security) and also for deepening the exploitation by means of unjust, unplanned legislations, arbitrariness, privatizations, expanding flexible and insecure working conditions in public and private sectors and so forth. Meanwhile there has been a great amount of recruitment of police forces, militarization of the country has increased upon demands of NATO but also as a reflection of fascist tendencies of the government.

Nevertheless, despite all the attempts of Erdoğan government and their infinite provisions for the capitalist class of Turkey, the Erdoğan regime has been weakening and losing the consent of the Turkish capitalists simultaneous with the abating support of imperialism. The bilateral mutuality between the state and the capital has started to crack. The contribution of Erdoğan's policies in the instability in the region, the volatilization of Turkish economy due to structural factors and the high degree of fragility and insecurity has provoked the capitalists to shift their investments from Turkey. The credibility has been dropped, indebtedness of private and public sectors has grown exponentially up to over 300 billion Turkish liras and eventually the value of lira decreased significantly.

### ***How did bourgeois politics take shape throughout AKP power and what is expected from the presidential elections?***

The skill of AKP in monopolizing bourgeois politics was first acquiring the backing of the so-called liberal-conservative coalition in Turkey. This was an ideological block represented in the political arena, in the bureaucracy and in the press that wanted to liquidate the secular Republican remnants in bourgeois politics left over from the sweeping 1980 coup. With this support, AKP managed to amend the constitution in 2010, opening up the way for such a monopolization and also for a presidential system. It is remarkable that certain socialist groups supported the amendment in the name of eliminating the 'nationalistic bureaucratic state' and the Kurdish movement boycotted the referendum instead of resisting by saying 'No' as the communists had done.

Later on, AKP virtually incorporated right-wing politics by transferring some cadres, such as the present minister of interior Suleyman Soylu, and eventually by forming an alliance with the fascist party of Turkey, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The Vatan (Homeland) Party (VP), a chauvinist and sort of a 'national-socialist' group lead by a controversial figure named Dogu Perincek also lended indirect support for Erdogan. However, in the meantime, AKP also experienced a dispersion among its own cadres as Erdogan concentrated power in his own hands. Although Erdogan's leadership was never questioned by these cadres, there were attempts to balance his personal conduct and to carry on with the mission of liquidating secular Republican politics on behalf of a broader political spectrum, including factions of other liberal and conservative elements.



The traditional secular and social democratic party of Turkey, the Republican People's Party (CHP), was influenced by the popularization of AKP supported by this liberal-conservative coalition and changed its rhetoric in line with the trajectory of AKP. Especially after Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu took the leadership of the party, CHP recurrently declared that there is no more a problem of secularism in Turkey, that CHP also concedes the religiosity of the public sphere and that AKP's economic performance should be approved in terms of carrying out neoliberal policies. Hence, the supposed secular, pro-independence and public interest oriented line of the Republican People's Party was transformed along with the transformation of the Turkish Republic by AKP, adopting openly pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist and pro-Islamic notions.

Following the 2016 coup attempt, bourgeois politics as a whole tried to distance itself from Fethullah Gulen movement that had penetrated in all of its segments, including the social democrats and the Kurdish movement. Erdogan made use of the wide-range persecution of Gulenists in the state bureaucracy to repress the opposition, while the opposition accused AKP of retaining the political representatives of Gulenists in politics who had been the main partners of AKP. However, as AKP formally monopolized the right-wing line of politics by separating out all liberal elements and allying with the MHP, there emerged a new right-wing line by the recomposition of traditional opposition groups with these elements.

On the one hand, a fraction broke off from MHP opposing the AKP orientation in the nationalist movement and established the İYİ (Good) Party (İYİP). CHP transferred several of its MPs to İYİP as a tactic to ensure their participation in the elections which AKP had tried to prevent. On the other hand, CHP discussed nominating right-wing and especially Islamist cadres offended by Erdogan for presidency and for parliament membership. Later on, it became apparent that CHP eliminated the more left-wing MP candidates for the parliamentary elections who had questioned the nomination of right-wing candidates for presidential elections.

The most controversial right-wing figure one was Abdullah Gul, the former President of the Republic, nominated by AKP in 2008 as Erdogan's closest companion during the establishment of AKP and who had retreated from active politics after the presidency of Erdogan while preserving his AKP identity. Although Gul was not eventually chosen as the presidential candidate of the nominated by of the opposition in this election, the discussion on his candidateship was not denied by CHP. Another one, Abdullatif Sener, also a previous AKP founder and an Islamist liberal, became the MP candidate of CHP. CHP finally made an electoral alliance with İYİP together with the traditional fundamentalist Islamic party of Turkey –from which AKP had emerged in 2001- named Saadet Party (Felicity Party - SP) against AKP, even nominating some SP members as its own MP candidates.





Despite the opposition's rejection of the 2017 referendum results that had been officially declared as the majority's approval of the presidential system -but evidently manipulated by AKP, the same opposition parties ambitiously participated in the presidential elections as soon as the system started to be implemented. Moreover, Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of CHP, had led a long march after the referendum against the fraudulent results with the slogan 'Justice' which had evolved into a massive movement supporting CHP's leadership in resisting AKP's fait accompli, albeit, the party had afterwards lapsed into silence.

Beside this inconsistency, the candidates of the bourgeois opposition in the presidential elections are themselves stained figures with their past deeds. The prominent candidate Muharrem Ince, nominated by CHP, pledges to return to the parliamentary system while making promises as a 'presidential candidate' mainly to restore the capitalist economy. Meral Aksener, the leader and candidate of İYİP is an ex-minister of interior affairs of the 1990s and is known to embrace the several bloody operations conducted against the Kurds during those years. Temel Karamollaoglu is the leader and candidate of SP, notorious with his role as the mayor of Sivas during the massacre of 1993 where 33 people mostly artists and from Alevi origin had been killed by fundamentalists.

These three candidates are expected to support the one who will get ahead against Erdogan in the likely second ballot. On the other hand, the candidate of VP, Perincek, addressing nationalistic sentiments and drawing Kemalist elements from the ranks of bureaucracy that find CHP ineligible of preserving the Turkish Republic is expected to support Erdogan in the second ballot. While Erdogan clings to power by provoking his voter base against all opposition, the opposition parties try to appeal to those AKP voters who incline to recede from the AKP-Erdogan dual power by questioning the reliability of either the former or the latter. The opposition challenges Erdogan by putting forward that the polarization he has caused has damaged the country and that the society needs conciliation. This involves tacitly pardoning all the crimes committed throughout AKP power and relieving those engaged in AKP, especially implying an immunity for Erdogan to whom the AKP voters feel an affiliation, without openly offending the masses who are in fury against him.

### ***What has been the TKP's reaction to the government's decision of snap elections and how was the electoral campaign of communists shaped?***

The presidential elections is in one sense the denial of the main inclination of people during last year's referendum, in which at least half of the popular strata were against the system that facilitates the policies in favour of the capital by unifying the legislative, executive and judiciary powers in one hand and minimizing the obstacles in front of exploitation and plunder. The TKP considers the presidential elections in Turkey as illegitimate and calls for spoilt votes during the elections as a means of protest, since neither can any of the candidates (including the conservative, nationalist, social democrat



alternatives) genuinely pledge to reverse the system nor can they represent the interest of peoples.

In the final analysis, the process that Turkey has experienced can be interpreted as a regression towards backwardness in all aspects. Elections are no longer a platform that people vote according to their preferences based on consistent values and principles, or simply ideological preferences, but instead they cast their votes according to complex strategies that are based on seemingly “logical” calculations that they think would diminish the power of the counter forces.

In the past few months TKP has accelerated its organized presence in the working class and consolidated its forces which has been noticeable in the general atmosphere of silence and oppression. Unsurprisingly the Party has been challenged by the government’s attacks, for instance 4 CC members, including the General Secretary of the Party Kemal Okuyan, received penalties of incarceration upon the pretext of insulting Erdogan and some of the organizational activities received assaults from fascist paramilitia, etc.

On the eve of approaching elections, by several attempts of the party to prove that it does fulfill the legal criteria to run for, arbitrary barriers -that were not objectified in the constitutional frame, but were mainly made-up preconditions- were imposed by the bureaucracy of Turkish electoral system. Finally, TKP was withheld by a fait accompli from exercising its electoral rights as a political party.

Obviously, the aim of a communist party when running for elections is different from that of the bourgeois parties. For communist parties, parliamentary elections in a capitalist system constitute a base for propaganda and a means of politicizing people. The barriers imposed on the Communist Party of Turkey indirectly demonstrate the incapacity and fears of the bourgeoisie order (and its implicit collaborator social democracy) of a political agent that has the potential to inspire the people for struggle. As history has presented, not a single government or a tool of oppression will be able to restrain the communists from politics and class struggle. To establish its own independent political line in the elections, to reach all parts of the working class through elections and to link the party with the class, the TKP has taken an initiative to create a platform for independent communist candidates under the name “**“This Social Order Must Change” Platform**”. All 17 candidates in the platform are party members who will be running for elections in Turkey’s most populated and industrial 15 provinces.

The aim of the platform is to serve as an alternative, to bring hope to and be the voice of the masses, and as the name implies, to revitalize the demand for socialism among them, given the shaking conditions of world capitalism and Turkey’s status in it, TKP considers the socialist option a more valid possibility than ever. Indeed, when looking at the



spectrum of other parties and candidates running for MP elections, the Platform's candidates are the only ones that can be considered truly left-wing and that can be clearly demarcated from other MP lists of social democrat or opposition parties. The Platform and the campaign has created a wave of excitement among the workers and endorsed by some of the prominent figures of Turkey's left, Yet on the other hand TKP is now being accused of taking away the votes of other so-called opposition candidates by those supporting the replacement of Erdogan no matter who- a similar accusation that has always been directed to TKP in the history of elections in Turkey.

***Where does the "Left" stand in this scene of the preconstruction of the snap polls?  
Does TKP stand alone on its path?***

The one thing all the Leftists in broad sense agree upon is that these elections will put an end to the never ceasing urge to achieve the most extensive Left front. TKP has clearly spoken out its aim for the partition of the votes. Our target is to achieve the partition between the ones who accept this social order and the ones who claim to abolish it.

This Social Order Must Change (TSOMC) candidates constitute the only platform which is openly against capitalism. TSOMC platform's focus is to embed the notion of socialism clearly and openly in its election campaign. TKP is the only political party which represents the will for power. TKP's claim is to establish the Socialist Republic of Turkey, where the working class will rule. This is just definite. And no other Leftist group or political party, yet another socialist/communist agent endorse this position.

Within the groups, activists and political parties who identify themselves as Left Wing, two main trends come forward. Majority of the liberals, some socialists, and a couple of progressive figures kept up with their open support for Kurdish politics by taking their side as a follower, attendant or member of the HDP. TKP and the TSOMC have a very assertive position on this trend. As we have stated in our thesis, joining the Kurdish politics buries the equality and freedom requests of Kurdish people within the interests of international capital and the strategic calculations of imperialist centers.

The Kurdish national movement ceases to be a component of Turkey's socialist revolution not only because it stands behind politically illegitimate terrorist actions based on vengeance, but also because it settles onto a pro-market, reactionary and pro-imperialist line, in contradiction to its own poor peasantry and working class base. Negotiating with the formerly paramilitary jihadist group from the Kurdish region HUDAPAR Party for an election alliance, taking Rojava under the US protectorate in Syria as an example for emancipation and advocating the integration of Turkey to the European Union are its manifestations. The ones who follow the path of the HDP acknowledge that they part ways with the working class struggle. Finally, the candidate list of HDP confirms this impression. Many socialist party leaders are nominated by HDP indicating to an





unscrupulous and opportunist policy to gain a position in the parliament under this political framework of HDP.

On the other hand there is another trend between the Left wing which mainly develops plans and calculations around the presidential elections. The presidential candidate of CHP, Muharrem İnce, has become their only hope to shake Erdoğan off. This segment of the “Left” has forgotten about their rejection of the presidential system just a year ago in the April referendum and started calculations to conspire against Erdoğan in the presidential election. The “anti-Erdoğan” motivation overwhelms any other principle or ideology, amongst the “Left”.

TKP’s position is once again clear and definitive on this issue as well. “TKP believes that the struggle against current political power is an irrecusable and top-priority mission. This struggle undoubtedly includes the struggle against Erdogan’s ambition and claim of being the executive president. However, “Executive Presidency” cannot be handled as a the-end-of-the-world type matter. In this reductionist approach, who will lose will be the people at all events.” (Article 21.of TKP’s Thesis and Tasks document)

### ***What to expect after the elections?***

How will the landscape of Turkey after the elections seem has a range of possibilities, determined by a range of factors that are discussed throughout this information sheet. What is clear though, is that at least not a single issue on the table is to be solved, nor will the political and economical crisis that Turkey is passing through will become more “manageable”. On the contrary, the clues pointing a deepening economical crisis are becoming more apparent.

It is improbable that Erdogan will accept an electoral defeat, so the political crisis should be expected to continue. The results of such a crisis will depend on the mobilization of the people against the Erdogan figure but also, and even more, on the questioning of the social order, which allowed Erdogan to seize such power. On the other hand, the united and determined action of the wide array of bourgeois political groups against Erdogan depends on the resolution of the international monopolies and Turkish big capitalists to get rid of Erdogan. If this will be the case, the implanting of the ‘Left’ within such a coalition either as a supporter of CHP or HDP will certainly play a critical role in legitimizing the ‘normalization’ of Turkish capitalism after Erdogan. Another possibility is the prolonging of the AKP-Erdogan power balanced by a stronger opposition after the elections.

