

# **Crisis in Turkey and the perspectives for the left**

**Modernisation, authoritarianism & political Islam**

Ender Yilmaz & José Antonio Gutiérrez D.

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Turkey has been under the spotlight this year, due to the threats of the Army against the possibility of an Islamist party taking the presidency. This move came to pose a number of questions to the European establishment, as Turkey has been negotiating its entry to the EU. The apparently uneasy two alternatives of government in Turkey are political Islam or the old fashioned authoritarian Kemalist secularism, which has the army as its vigilante sector of the ruling block. The European bourgeoisie has been quite keen to support the ruling AKP Islamist party, instead of the military, sending a clear message that they won't favour a dictatorship in the vein of that of 1980. Actually, they have compared the authoritarian tradition of Turkey to Greece, saying that entry to the EU would eventually help to democratise it. In this context, it is necessary to understand the underlying factors that shaped Turkish society and its historical roots, in order to grasp correctly the current crisis: The nature of the current state, the nature of its crisis, its relationship to the ruling blocs, and the *sui generis*<sup>1</sup> nature of Turkish political Islam. In the broader light, we can see this crisis, as well, as natural to the re-alignment of forces after the Cold War and in the new era of the "War on Terror". In Turkish political Islam, the "West", not only has a neoliberal ally, but as well, an Islamist ally, in spite of the fact that the base of support of this tendency remains hostile to the US, and increasingly disenchanted with the EU.

Turkish politics are full of contradictions and paradoxical situations. But the bottom line is that both the "democratic" political Islam as well as the "authoritarian" army are elite alternatives opposed to the basic interests of workers, that have agreed on the fundamentals and will likely keep agreeing in maintaining the repressive political structures of the Kemalist state, apart from some cosmetic change, much to the dismay of those who expect a liberal wave of renewal from political Islam.

Almost ten years after the post-modern coup of 1997<sup>2</sup>, in which the coalition government of Islamist Welfare Party (WP also known as Refah) and right-wing True Path Party (DYP) were forced to step down and later banned, another move by the powerful Turkish military came as a reminder of the role they keep in politics. Following the nomination of Abdullah Gül as president by Prime Minister Erdoğan in April, there was a parliamentary boycott organised by the secularist opposition of the White Turks, led by the RPP (Republican People's Party). Although there were past decisions supporting the case of the government, the Council of State favoured the opposition, but not before the military issued a warning on April 27<sup>th</sup>, resurrecting fears of military intervention and renewed repression that have plagued the last century of Turkish public life -signalling that the political might of the army is well and strong<sup>3</sup>.

Two days later a massive demonstration as a part of a series of "Republic Meetings" was held in Istanbul. The concept was created by the pro-army Republic newspaper months before the presidential election and the participants came from secularist moderate or pro-army NGO's. These urban secularist middle and upper classes were also denoted as White Turks. The demonstrators chanted against an Islamist government, but also, against military intervention. This added a new dimension to the crisis.

The current impasse with the army came to pose blatantly one of the paradoxes of Turkish life: that of secularism as being an authoritarian force, while political Islam is left to play the

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<sup>1</sup> 'sui generis' is a Latin expression, literally meaning 'of its own kind' or unique in its characteristics

<sup>2</sup> The coup is described in Turkish society as "post-modern", a term used to describe the fact that it was a coup staged by the military but through the Courts, not through a military uprising as usual.

<sup>3</sup> Turkey's army is the second biggest of NATO after the US Army.

democratic cards<sup>4</sup>. But to understand the real nature of this apparent paradox it is important to dig a little bit into the history of Turkish society.

## The Kemalist State and Industrialisation

Turkey was one of the first countries to develop an Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) economic model in the '30s. This was an attempt to eradicate the reliance on imported goods. The Kemalists wanted to create a native bourgeoisie out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, after its defeat in the First Great War. It represented a particularly authoritarian and militaristic drive to modernization, led by Mustafa Kemal, later given the surname Atatürk which means "the father of the Turks". He was the leading general of the armed resistance against the British-sponsored Greek occupation of Western Turkey in the 1920s and founded the RPP which became the single ruling party of the country between 1923 and 1950. Though initially having a liberal free market orientation, after the 1929 crisis, an ISI model that attempted to eradicate the reliance on imported goods was put in place for this modernizing endeavour. They protected some new born industries, to industrialize the country, to make self-sufficient and to modernize it. They attempted to turn Turkey from a Sultanate into a modern western Republic<sup>5</sup>.

Not only did it stimulate a native Sunni Muslim and Turkish bourgeoisie; it subjected religion to State authorities. The idea was not only to create a modernizing essence (a national bourgeoisie), but also an "appearance" of it through forced secularism.

After the Second World War both US directives and internal opposition from the large landowners<sup>6</sup> forced RPP to accept a multiparty system. In the first free elections after three decades, RPP was defeated by the Democratic Party (DP). Thus, in the '50s the focus of growth shifted from industry to agriculture, but industrial capitalists re-gained their previous role after the military coup of 1960. The banned DP continued as Justice Party (JP) and with the support of the large rural population it became a major party in the parliament during the following two decades. Because it was only with the backing of the army that they could win the 1961 elections, the RPP tried to change its image into a more popular alternative. In the late '60s it declared itself "left of the centre" and with slogans like "land belongs to those who cultivate it, water to those who use it" the RPP formed government many times in the '70s. In 1973, the industrialists formed TÜSIAD, a business association, which became a major political actor<sup>7</sup>.

The ISI model was largely successful, but though self-sufficient to a great extent, Turkey still badly needed both oil and new technologies/machinery from foreign markets. The two oil crises in the '70s ended the stable and low energy prices regime, which was one of the bases of global

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<sup>4</sup> A similar paradox existed in some of the old Arab socialist-nationalist States like Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Algeria.

<sup>5</sup> 'Economic Change in Twentieth Century Turkey: Is the Glass more than Half Full?' Şevket Pamuk, Working Paper no.41, the American University of Paris. Presentation of January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> During the Ottoman Empire generally the state had the supreme authority on land. Only in regions like Kurdistan and Lebanon can we see more feudalism-like social structures. The last tendencies toward feudalism beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were defeated in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the help of British imperialism who favoured a weak Ottoman Empire instead of an entrepreneurial aristocracy. Therefore big landowners in 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey were capitalists rather than feudal lords, except for in Northern Kurdistan.

<sup>7</sup> Though they were greatly favoured by the economic model, they understood the limits of it in the long term much better than the State bureaucracy especially, and started a propaganda campaign against ISI policies in the late '70s.

US hegemony and deepened the crisis in Turkey. A huge problem was that its industry, though in a position to cope with the internal demand, was not able to compete in the foreign markets. This led to the main source of the crisis: the inability to obtain foreign currency (dollars) that was critical in order to obtain both oil and technology<sup>8</sup>.

This led the government to borrow heavily, which caused major imbalances and a big debt crisis. This crisis, which expressed itself violently at the end of the '70s, with the clashes of the left with right-wing nationalists, found an authoritarian "solution" in the coup of 1980. Differently to the previous two military coups (1960 and 1971), this coup was a particularly brutal attempt to uproot for good the revolutionary left in the country, which had pushed massive workers' struggles and resistances during the period from 1961–1980, under the banner of the revolutionary trade union DISK, and saw a left-leaning intelligentsia and a radical students' movement emerge in the '70s; while at the same time, it made a number of structural changes in the ISI economic model.

In a vein similar to the one of Pinochet's Chile, the authoritarian framework of the State was useful in order to carry out a number of unpopular changes that would have been impossible to be carried in a democratic context. And once the changes were carried out, the physical elimination of leftist militants made sure that there would be no one, in the near future, in a capacity to challenge the new order from a revolutionary point of view. But not only did the putschists use the authoritarian framework of the State for its own ends: they exacerbated its authoritarian features, by means of a new Constitution (approved in 1982) and a new institutional figure called the National Security Council (NSC)<sup>9</sup>.

## **The 1980 Coup: The Turkish State as a Counter-Insurgency State**

In Latin America, as well, the NSC has been in place in many states since the counter-revolutionary period of the '70s. It is not mere coincidence that in Turkey we see the same figure emerging after the military intervention. The crucial position of Turkey as a strategic ally of US imperialism and NATO in the face of an explosive and politically unstable Middle East makes the NSC no coincidence but a logical response from the Army and a monopolist bourgeoisie that is unable to have a hegemonic position even with the other sectors of the bourgeoisie (non-monopolist, petty bourgeoisie, etc.). There are many parallels between the Turkish State created during the coup and the counter-insurgency state prevalent in Latin America, explicitly designed to suppress revolutionary or even reformist movements and ideologically based on the National Security Doctrine. Therefore, we will resort to the Latin American theoretician Ruy Mauro Marini's description of the counter-insurgency State, not to try to forcefully look for similarities and differences, but to look for useful categories that allow us to better understand the Turkish political system from a revolutionary point of view. His structural description of these kind of States – beyond the particular political facade that they can present – is useful for the Turkish case:

"The counter-insurgency State (...) presents a hypertrophy of the Executive power (...) in relation to all others (...) with the existence of two central decision making bodies within the Executive. On the one hand, the military body, constituted by the Staff of the Armed Forces (...);

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<sup>8</sup> Çağlar Keyder, "The Turkish Bell Jar"

<sup>9</sup> Keyder, op.cit.

the National Security Council, the supreme decision making body, where the representatives of the army entwine with the direct delegates of Capital; and the intelligence services that inform, orient and prepare the decision making process. On the other hand, we have the economic body, represented by the economic ministries, as well as by the State owned companies of credit, production and services, which have their key positions filled by civilian and military technocrats. Thus, the National Security Council becomes the space for the encounter of the two bodies, where they entwine one another, and becomes itself the top, the vital organ of the Counter-Insurgency State.”<sup>10</sup>

It therefore represents a space where both the Monopolist capitalists and the Army share power. But it also represents, as Marini states, a peculiar form of bourgeois State that has four powers instead of the classic three (Executive, Legislative and Judicial) the fourth one being the National Security Council, which guarantees the Armed Forces the ultimate say in politics, an authoritarian “moderating” role in a political context plagued with internal contradictions.

As described by Keyder for the Turkish case, “within the NSC, military chiefs of staff met with top cabinet members and dictated the politics to be followed. The NSC was endowed with a permanent secretariat and staff, designed to pool all intelligence and to develop policy to be implemented by the relevant bureaucracy, often bypassing the politically appointed ministers (...) Virtually everything, from foreign and military policy to the structure of civil and political rights, from secondary school curricula to energy policy, was eventually decided in the monthly meetings of the NSC, invariably along the lines formulated by its secretariat”<sup>11</sup>

The counter-insurgency State does not exist only under conditions of military dictatorship, but exists as well under democratic wrappings. In the Turkish case, it clearly survived the putschist junta, thanks to the 1982 Constitution, and is present in today’s democracy –the main characteristics of the “democratic” counter-insurgency state being the prevalence of this Fourth Power (the NSC), the restricted character of democracy (usually, these restrictions expressing themselves in the very electoral procedures too<sup>12</sup>) and the existence of a number of laws of exception and a broadly interpreted anti-terrorist law.

All these authoritarian features of the State were further exacerbated with the Kurdish conflict, in the period spanning from 1984 to 1999. And with both an increasing conflict between rival factions of the bourgeoisie and a renewed wave of PKK attacks in the south east since 2003, it is quite likely that, notwithstanding some liberalisation, at least some of these features will be maintained in the long term and even reinforced at times when needed.

## **Neoliberalism and the New Blocks in the Ruling Classes**

With the 1980 coup, deep changes took place in Turkish society, not only at the level of the State. The military junta closed all political parties and all unions except the state union Türk-İş. There was a massive wave of economic neo-liberalisation that would have been impossible to be carried out if it wasn’t through *manu militari* i.e. under the exceptionally repressive circumstances of

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<sup>10</sup> “La cuestión del fascismo en América Latina”, Cuadernos Políticos, México, Ediciones ERA, núm. 18, octubre-diciembre, 1978, pp. 21–29.

<sup>11</sup> Keyder, op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> In Turkey, there’s a requirement that any party, to enter Parliament, needs at least 10% of the national votes. This was designed mainly to prevent the representation of radical minor parties, but after the rise of the Kurdish national liberation movement in 1984 it became an obstacle for Kurdish parties to make it to the Legislative body.

military rule. So, without any hassle from the labour movement, the State started a drastic set of measures to liberalise the economic model, which included privatisations, downsizing of the public sector, flexible employment and deregulation of the economy. The predictable results of such measures were the devaluation and stagnation of real wages, a forcefully reduced share of wages in the national income, the dismantling of some industries with the consequent impact on employment figures and the destruction of the labour force behind trade unions<sup>13</sup>.

Three parties participated in the first elections after the coup, in 1983: Motherland Party (ANAP), pro-army Nationalist Democracy Party (NDP) and social-democratic Populist Party (PP). Contrary to the expectations of the military junta, NDP was defeated by ANAP and later dissolved itself. After a series of transformations and name changes PP became the current RPP.

The ISI model was replaced by IMF-dictated fiscal austerity measures and Export Oriented Industrialization (EOI). The new economic regime was not quite successful, despite the fact that it managed to 'solve' one of the biggest barriers against a stable capital accumulation: organised working class resistance. Even the modest growth levels in the '80s could only be achieved at the expense of a growing foreign debt. In contrast to the modest gains of the Istanbul industrialists, the Anatolian<sup>14</sup> small petty and not so petty bourgeoisie benefited enormously from the EOI. The so-called Anatolian Tigers developed industrial zones in Anatolia exploiting the lack of unions and their strong Islamic community ties. They had little state support and were alien to the life of the traditional elites i.e. the state bureaucracy and TÜSIAD. On the political arena they formed in 1983 the Islamist Welfare Party (WP) following the tradition of two parties in the late '60s and '70s<sup>15</sup>, but not only succeeded in gathering together the Anatolian bourgeoisie, but also increasingly mobilised popular support behind them (Right-wing parties like the DP in the '50s, had strong support among the significant rural population. The immigrants in the cities continued to support these parties due to patronage networks provided by them. The RPP and the left managed to gain the support of small peasants and urban immigrants in the '70s, but this was over by the '80 coup. The vacuum in the cities was filled by Islamic NGO's in the '80s culminating with the rise of Refah).

The Turkish banking system was plagued by structural problems and corruption during the '90s and this caused the financial crises of 1991, 1994, 1998 and the most severe of them between 2000 and 2001. The living conditions of the working class was terribly worsened in the '80s, until a wave of protests in 1989, mainly by public sector workers, caused important increases in real wages and sowed the seeds of the current public sector unions<sup>16</sup>. This caused an increase in government spending, on top of the cost of the anti-PKK war, which the government thought could be financed through foreign capital flows. Behind these crises, however, was the liberalisation of the Capital Account in 1989 i.e. eliminating the barriers against financial in and outflows, while Turkey had a very weak legal and administrative framework to regulate the banking system and lacked macroeconomic stability. The Turkish financial capitalists made huge profit through this ill system. They bought debt from the State and granted loans at ridiculous real interest rates, sometimes of even 20%.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Keyder, op.cit. See as well, Pamuk, op.cit, pp.17–18

<sup>14</sup> Anatolia is a region in the centre of Turkey

<sup>15</sup> Both parties had been banned with the respective coups of 1971 and 1980.

<sup>16</sup> These protests were called "Spring Actions".

<sup>17</sup> Pamuk, op.cit, pp.19–20.

The Anatolian bourgeoisie organised itself in MÜSIAD, the business association that was the counterpart for TÜSIAD, in the '90s and backed the uneasy WP-DYP<sup>18</sup> coalition government in 1996–97. Contrary to the outward orientation of the Anatolian bourgeoisie, this government had an inward orientation and tried to increase the cooperation with Middle Eastern states. This coalition was marked by the scandal behind the famous car accident in Susurluk in November 1996, where a former Deputy Chief of Istanbul Police and the leader of the fascist Nationalist Action Party's (NAP) violent youth organization died; a DYP's MP who was also the leader of a Kurdish tribe and a large group of anti-PKK village guards in Northern Kurdistan were injured. This exposed the connections between the security forces, politicians and organised crime.

The fall of the WP is denoted as a post-modern coup. It was done through a regular NSC meeting on 28 February 1997 and the army used a popular campaign<sup>19</sup> to mobilise people against the government, which they accused of trying to subvert the secular order. In reality, this was nothing more than another chapter in the inter-bourgeois conflict for hegemony. With Refah (WP) banned, the WP tradition then formed another party, Fazilet<sup>20</sup>, which was also banned in 2001, with two parties emerging immediately out of this: the hard-liners of Saadet<sup>21</sup> and the moderates of AKP<sup>22</sup> who are the current governing party and have a little less than two thirds of the MPs.

## **New Millennium, New Intra-Elite conflicts**

The devastation caused by the 2000 and 2001 economic crises had a similar impact on politics, and the November 2002 elections gave the AKP more than the absolute majority in the parliament. This hadn't happened since the DP victory in the '50s. The parties of the previous coalition government<sup>23</sup> got only 13% of votes.

The AKP government took a pronounced neoliberal turn and made several privatisations. This also created a huge foreign capital flow into Turkey, which financed the increasing Current Account Deficit i.e. the net difference between exports and imports. Inflation was reduced to below 10%<sup>24</sup> and since 2002 the Turkish economy has grown by 7.5 % annually. On the other hand, unemployment is worsening, showing that the growth was due to an increasing exploitation of the employed labour force rather than by absorbing the unemployed. The future of the economy, however, virtually depends on the perceptions and mood of global financial forces and any bad sign could provoke a crisis similar to the Asian one of 1997–98.

Over the last four years, four blocks in the rulings classes became visible: The army, TÜSIAD, MÜSIAD and the Fethullahist TUSKON. Fethullah Gulen left the traditional Nursist<sup>25</sup> movement

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<sup>18</sup> Truth Path Party, a right wing party.

<sup>19</sup> The Susurluk accident was followed by a popular campaign called "one minute darkness for permanent brightness". The people were turning off their lights at 9 p.m. every day. When the army barracks also began to do the same, they incorporated the movement easily through the mass media.

<sup>20</sup> Virtue

<sup>21</sup> Contentment

<sup>22</sup> Justice and Development Party

<sup>23</sup> ANAP, MHP and the DSP.

<sup>24</sup> Inflation rates averaged around 80% in the 1990s and nearly 50% in 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Said-i Nursi was a Kurdish Muslim scholar who tried to synthesize Western modernity and Islam, which had been tried by generations of Ottoman intellectuals beginning from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He withdrew from politics during



and created a new empire under his rule, consisting of corporations, high schools, universities<sup>26</sup>, etc. In 1999 the assets owned by this empire in Turkey were estimated at \$25 billion<sup>27</sup>. Gulen had good relationships with the centre-right governments, has a strong pro-US line and in recent years his associates formed their own business organisation called TUSKON. In 1999 he was accused of trying to infiltrate the state apparatus at every level (army, police and bureaucracy) and left Turkey after that. Gulen lives in the USA but still has a great deal of influence, with the Fethullahists, probably having an active role in the last frictions between AKP and the army.

Except for MÜSIAD, all three have very close ties to US imperialism and that's its main difference with TUSKON, sharing otherwise a common political history. The army and TUSIAD share a common cultural background and history, being the traditional ruling block for many years. All business groups, though, are critical of the role of the army and favour a more parliament-oriented bourgeois politics. Especially TUSIAD is in the foreground of pro-EU reforms, but we should remark that TUSIAD is controlled by a few family holdings. Therefore, their criticisms against the political role of the army may not be shared by most of the members.

The occupation of Iraq by the US crushed the political balance in Turkey. The army did not organise a campaign in favour of Turkish participation and thanks to the traditional anti-US Islamism of many of the AKP MPs<sup>28</sup>, the parliament did not approve the use of Turkish soil for an attack<sup>29</sup>. The anti-war movement failed to attract the masses, who felt a strong opposition to the war, into the demonstrations, but the biggest failure was to remain silent about the war in Turkish Kurdistan in order not to upset the average person. Today, a de facto Kurdish state is established in northern Iraq and the PKK ended its 4 year-long ceasefire in 2004 which began after the imprisonment of its leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999.

After the November 2004 negotiations with EU, the army began a "psychological" campaign in spring 2005<sup>30</sup>. Today we can say that the main aim was to channel the anti-US feelings among the Turkish population against the moderate Islamist government and against any attempt to solve the Kurdish Question peacefully. The first provocation was made in the Kurdish Newroz celebrations, on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005. The following day, newspapers reported that Kurdish children attempted to burn the Turkish flag. The children claimed that a man with a black suit gave them the flag, but this was never investigated. This was followed by lynching attempts against leafleting leftists who were accused of chanting pro-PKK slogans or waving the PKK flag. We cannot list all the events of this provocation campaign here, but they include bombs against Kurdish civilians in Diyarbakır, the murder of a priest in Trabzon and missionaries in Malatya and the suppression of Kurdish protests against the use of chemical weapons against PKK guerrillas in Diyarbakır, which resulted in over 15 deaths.

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the Kemalist rule which excluded any idea related to Islam from the political mainstream. He was a proponent of jihad through propaganda of ideas, but also a public supporter of anti-communism in the 50s during the reign of the DP.

<sup>26</sup> He has schools not only in Turkey but around the whole world and in the former State-Socialist countries they were probably aided by US interests.

<sup>27</sup> [www.hri.org](http://www.hri.org)

<sup>28</sup> Though not of its leadership, that were keen to support the invasion in spite of strong public opposition. Check Cihan Tuğal "NATO's Islamists" in the New Left Review 44, March-April 2007.

<sup>29</sup> AKP did not include these MPs in its candidate lists for the elections on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July.

<sup>30</sup> "Psychological operation" is actually an official term. In 2003 a newspaper – Radikal which is the left liberal newspaper in the big Dogan media cartel which controls about 60 % of the press – published the notes of the NSC meetings. There is a secret Psychological Operation Bureau in the army

Meanwhile, there were police operations which further uncovered the relations between the mafia and the State; the so-called “deep State” in Turkey has a very long past<sup>31</sup>. In 2006 the local Kurdish populace in Shemdinli in the south-eastern corner of Turkey captured members of the Turkish counter-guerrilla force<sup>32</sup> who threw a hand bomb into a library. The head of the army, Büyükanıt, said about one of the officers: “I know him. He is a good boy.” Their trial remains a dead end like many other state-related mafia trials.

Another major event in this campaign of provocation was the assassination of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, member of the “libertarian socialist” Freedom and Solidarity Party (FSP). Probably due to the Fethullahists inside of the police, the murderer and minor planners were quickly captured and their relations with the counter-guerrilla networks were somewhat revealed. This did not lead to confronting the army, because as a part of the ruling classes, the Fethullahist elites do not dare an open confrontation. One gang of the ruling class is fighting against another using the body of Hrant Dink.

The left managed to react quickly and mobilised thousands of people on the day of the assassination. The FSP depoliticised his funeral by banning slogans, similar to their silence about the war in Kurdish provinces during the anti-war events, and even the mass media advertised the funeral. Despite being on a Tuesday, more than 100 thousand people walked behind the banner “We all are Hrant Dink! We all are Armenians!”. The slogan became a major trump in the hands of Turkish nationalists who used it to “highlight” the non-Turkishness of the participants.

## **Towards the Parliamentary Elections<sup>33</sup>**

The army successfully managed to prevent the election of a non-Kemalist president<sup>34</sup> for now and used for this purpose NGOs and its website — ANAP and DYP MPs did not participate in the presidential election on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April after an e-declaration of the army warning against anti-secularist and anti-nationalist currents<sup>35</sup>, meaning obviously the AKP. Most of the people at the Republic meetings of April 29<sup>th</sup> were not in favour of a military coup, but they perceive the army itself as the sole ultimate guardian of Turkish democracy.

Meanwhile, the centre-right has been unable to form an opposition block to the AKP, having failed in an attempt to merge ANAP and the DYP, now called DP, as the ‘50s party. This means that most of the bourgeois block will end up eventually supporting the AKP in the end anyway.

Today the main theme of bourgeois politics is whether the army should launch a military operation against the PKK bases in Northern Iraq: in early April, the army’s big man Büyükanıt spoke in favour of it. Since then the Turkish army has been amassing troops on the South-East border with Iraq<sup>36</sup>, though the Prime Minister says that there is no written petition for any extra-

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<sup>31</sup> Probably the two main historical sources of the “deep State” are the late Ottoman secret service which also organised the massacres against Armenians and Greeks at the demise of the empire, and the anti-communist Gladio network of NATO which was revealed in European countries after the Cold War, but continues to be untouched in Turkey

<sup>32</sup> Called Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele, or JITEM.

<sup>33</sup> This article was concluded on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2007, before the election took place. See ‘Supplement’ below for an update on the post-election situation.

<sup>34</sup> Non-Kemalist is a better definition than Islamist to emphasise the transformation of the AKP leadership.

<sup>35</sup> Recently a controversial e-declaration was made calling people to “show their mass reflexes against terrorism”.

<sup>36</sup> Recently there were rumours that the Turkish army had already invaded Northern Iraq; though later proved false, they were enough to send shivers all over the region.

border military operation. The US does not favour a Turkish operation nor do the Kurdish elites in Iraq i.e. Talabani, the president of Iraq, and Barzani, the president of Iraqi Kurdistan, because this could threaten the unique peace found in Northern Iraq<sup>37</sup>.

Mehmet Agar, the leader of the DYP (now DP) and an ex-counter-guerrilla chief who proudly declared in the past that he guided “a thousand operations against the PKK”, became a proponent of a peaceful solution. He declared that they will call on the PKK “to make politics on the plains rather than fighting on the mountains” and proposed a common market system consisting of Turkey, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This received a very negative reaction, although some bourgeois journalists partially backed him. The change in his mind is also attributed to his relations with the Fethullahist capitalists who, because of their links with the US, see the strategic importance of good relations with Kurdistan given the events in Iraq – they need an alliance between Israel, Turkey and the Kurds to hold a grip over the volatile region. Anyway, because of the coming elections, he wouldn’t dare to speak too much on this issue.

AKP leader Erdoğan also began to use strong words against the PKK and ignore the Kurdish Question, for the army could use it as a tactic to lower the vote of AKP. The PKK officially ended its ceasefire in June 2004<sup>38</sup> and a bombing killing 6 civilians in the centre of Ankara created a strong reaction among the Turks. PKK leadership in Iraq and also the legal wing of the Kurdish nationalist movement, DTP (Democratic Society Party) denounced it, but it was probably done by one of them, who exploded it at the wrong time – it was probably aimed at Büyükanıt. The leadership in Europe did not denounce it and said that we should look at the socio-political reasons behind it<sup>39</sup>. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, the PKK announced a new ceasefire just after Erdoğan’s call for an informal “security summit” to discuss tactics against PKK.

The DTP is entering the elections together with independent candidates to jump over the 10% required nationally to be in parliament<sup>40</sup>. While the AKP and RPP in the parliament passed new legislation to reduce the number of independent MPs, the Kurds will quite likely have to informally ally with AKP in the new parliament, which favours a political solution to the Kurdish conflict instead of a purely military one. The PKK’s new ceasefire was also partially aimed to debase the criticisms against AKP concerning national security. Meanwhile the Kurdish nationalist movement is competing also with Islamist currents among the Kurds<sup>41</sup>, which are supposedly linked to the Fethullahists.

The current anti-PKK discourse may cool down after the elections, but it may also get stronger. The RPP moved to the right by including famous right-wing candidates on its list. Meanwhile the ex-fascist NAP made a long journey from extreme right to the centre right in the last decade. A RPP-NAP coalition government could increase the repression. We should note that this requires little effort: The AKP government passed a very harsh “Anti-Terror Law”, the notorious 301<sup>st</sup> article, which punishes any behaviour against “Turkishness” and over the last days new legislation enormously increased the rights of the police.

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<sup>37</sup> The US is also probably waging a covert war against Iran through the Iranian Wing of the PKK, called PEJAK.

<sup>38</sup> Though since 2003 there was a new wave of attacks.

<sup>39</sup> Another bomb attempt was recently discovered, probably targeting the Minister of Defence.

<sup>40</sup> In the western provinces at first they were to support the independent candidates from the left, but this ended up in nothing.

<sup>41</sup> There was a 100,000 strong meeting in Diyarbakır protesting the publication of caricatures of the Islamic prophet in a Danish newspaper.

## Perspectives for the Left

The left is in a period of defeat. In the last year every relatively big semi-legal left-wing organisation suffered from police operations. The left in the universities is minimised by investigations and fascist attacks. The left was not able to use the anti-war impetus as a springboard, because it lacks a program of struggle and oscillates between soft reformism and militant marginalised positions. Only few organisations managed to grow or at least keep their organisational structure. Their success is based on their programmatic strength and/or their militant insistence to create a base among the labouring masses. This success is also based on their anti-democratic centralist structure, but this will turn against them sooner or later (It has already become the source of a counter-productive sectarianism). Anarchist communists should be able to learn from the experience of every organisation whether it is Leninist or not, whether it is successful or not.

The left should be able to formulate its tactics on class lines both at the level of theory and slogans and at the level of practise. The majority of the left tried to use unifying slogans in the anti-war movement ostracising the Kurdish question. In contrast to that, it emphasised solidarity with the minorities in the funeral of Hrant Dink. In the first instance the silence about Kurds paved the way for the manipulation of anti-US feelings by the army to target the Kurds. In the second case, putting forward a moral anti-nationalist position just helped the psychological operation of the army to increase Turkish nationalism.

Most leftist organisations pointed to the false dichotomy between the old-style republicans like the army and RPP, on the one side, and neoliberal democrats like the business blocks and AKP on the other side. Both sides favour the attacks against the working class through neoliberal economic measures and repressive anti-union and anti-left legislation. Likewise both have no real opposition to the role of US imperialism in the Middle East. While the parties who sided with the army in the last events were harshly criticised and virtually ostracised by the currents in the radical left, critical support to AKP liberals by reformists<sup>42</sup> and the socialist parties allied with the Kurdish nationalist movement is not challenged. A futile anti-fascism is emerging among the ranks of the non-Kemalist left and this reduces it to a defence of liberal elites due to the lack of a class-centred understanding of anti-fascism. Due to this, it also ignores the fact that the foundations of more repressive measures in the future are established by the AKP government itself.

The secularist/Islamist debate provides a barrier for the prioritisation of more important issues like unemployment and the low purchasing power of the working masses<sup>43</sup>. What it conceals is that both sides need each other. Therefore the Islamists in the state apparatuses cannot reveal all the links between the state and illegal organisations and the Kemalist elites cannot destroy the power of religious sects. The main victims of these intra-elite frictions are the women whose bodies have been the battleground for the debates between moderniser males for more than a century. Tolerance to and equality among religious beliefs can only be achieved by the liquidation of class privileges and statist hierarchies. Without a social revolution every bourgeois block will try to use any religion to compete with other blocks of the ruling classes and to fight against working class resistance. The left should not fall into any of these two bourgeois categories and

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<sup>42</sup> Like the FSP

<sup>43</sup> A nation-wide survey from June 2006 concluded that these two have been the most important issues both in 2002 and in 2006. At the same time more than 65 % think that civil servants and university students can use headscarves, while only 9 % wants an Islamic state. Source: [www.milliyet.com.tr](http://www.milliyet.com.tr)

has to participate in the current struggles and unite them on an anti-patriarchal and anti-elite basis.

The main practical problems are the lack of contact between the left and the working masses and its sectarianism. The left could have had a more correct position in these issues, but correct positions would not help much, if one does not have ways to bring them to the people. This can be achieved only by two ways: Firstly the left should have a pivotal role in struggle for minor, but achievable, reforms and understand that the most radical demand is not necessarily the most useful one. Only then can we attract people. Unionisation struggles, extra-union associations to organise workers and community associations exist presently and they are important vehicles to reach this aim.

Secondly the cooperation among left-wing organisations should increase and it should come from below and aim for clear objectives. The present cooperation attempts are based on platforms of representatives of organisations. This cooperation structure proved to be very inefficient to do anything other than small press declarations. This structure not only excludes the people in the locality, but also the rank and file of the organisations from the decision making structures. No wonder that the state propaganda claiming that left-wing organisations are just using the innocent people is very successful to marginalise the left. Is it not the time to criticise ourselves rather than being only criticising the state?

## **Supplement on the elections**

The general election of 22<sup>nd</sup> July was a determining event to change the power struggles among the ruling blocs, because it was a test of legitimacy for each of them. The obvious winner was AKP government and the obvious loser is CHP (Republican People's Party) and the army. AKP got nearly half of all votes and the voter participation was about 85%. Although some Islamists and liberals presented this huge increase as "a civil memorandum" to the coup threats of the army, probably it is related to the success of AKP to fill the empty space in the centre right. Traditionally, the right wing parties got about 60–70 % of the vote and the left gets the rest.

In this election the nationalist MHP appeared too radical for most voters and also too similar to the elitist "left"-Kemalism of RPP. Also traditional centre right parties like DYP and ANAP got incredibly discredited. Meanwhile the so-called left (RPP and DSP bloc) was so much into nationalism that it forgot to propose any socio-economic program for the working masses. Therefore, people from all classes tended to vote for stability i.e. AKP. The MHP managed to enter the parliament, but it got only 14 % compared to 18 % in 1999 elections. Since three rather than two parties managed to get more than 10 % AKP lost seats, but the new parliament is more AKP-friendly. RPP is almost isolated and even its ally DSP accepted the popular legitimacy of AKP.

One reason for the softening of anti-AKP feelings is obviously the fact that the Kurdish party, DTP, lost many votes to AKP. Technical reasons like the low literacy rate among the Kurds who recognised the party from its emblem, but cannot differentiate between the names of many independent candidates had an effect. But the social reasons are far more important. DTP lacks a definite program to define and solve the Kurdish national question. It also lacks a socio-economic program to satisfy the needs of the Kurdish masses. On the other hand, the Kurdish territories were bases of Islamism in the early 80s and therefore the success of AKP has deep roots in Kur-

dish society. An Islamist commentator noted that the biggest religious sect in Turkey i.e. Gülen sect made a very strong campaign for AKP.

The second man of AKP, Abdullah Gül, became quite peacefully the new Turkish president. The next fights among the ruling blocs will be around the new constitution. AKP will renew the constitution and proposes to delete the references to Kemalism and Atatürkism. The EU also advises to cancel the 301<sup>st</sup> article which protects “Turkishness”. But all of these debates should be seen as inter-elite conflicts which do not have anything to give to the working class and working class activists. Even if these liberal changes are made we will still have the harsh anti-terror and police laws created by the previous AKP government.

Meanwhile the attack on the working class continues. The public employees were among the leading elements of the working class in the first half of 1990s, but their bargaining process became a bureaucratic fraudulency. Right now negotiations in many private sectors are stopped due to the open attack of the bourgeoisie. Even the most bureaucratic unions cannot accept these conditions easily. The bourgeoisie imposes eventual de-unionisation and atomisation to the working class and the union bureaucracy either surrenders or “fights back” (of course for their privileges rather than the interests of the working class). Without an organised wave from the rank-and-file workers these attacks cannot be stopped. And we have seen many positive examples of such a counter-attack recently around the world and also in the history of the working class of Turkey.

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