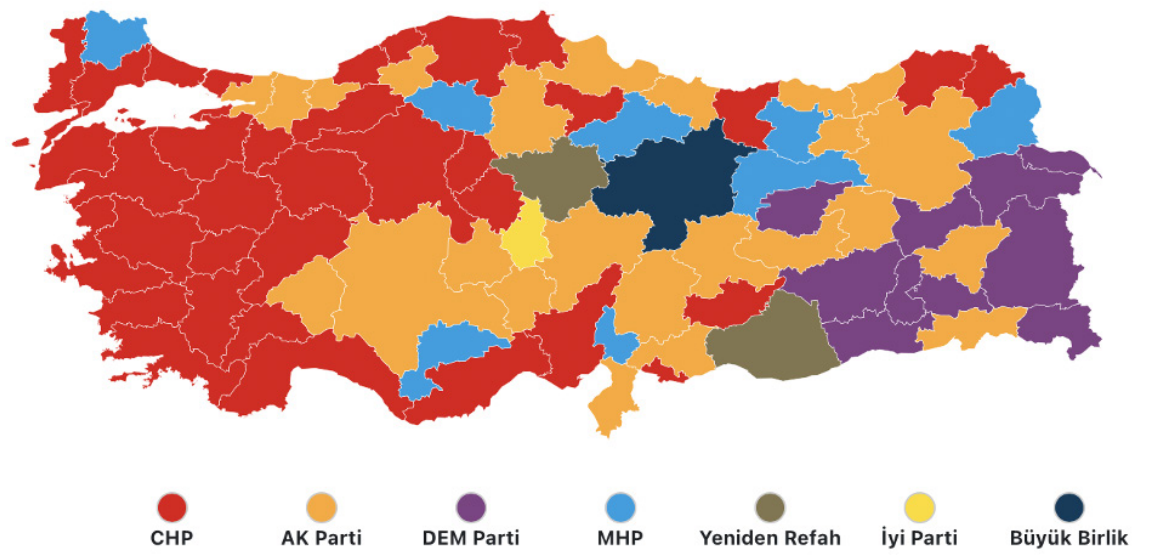


March 2024 Municipal Elections from a Class Politics Perspective¹

Levent Dölek

The March 31 local elections (2024) resulted in a major defeat for the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP). The metropolitan municipalities held by AKP decreased from 15 to 12 from 2019 to 2024. The total loss in municipalities (35 percent loss, from 776 to 507) was much higher. In this election, AKP votes fell to the historic lowest point of 32.42 percent. In contrast, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) looks triumphant. The main criterion of this victory is again in the mayoralties won. CHP increased the metropolitan cities it won from 2019 to 2024 from 11 to 14; in total, the number of CHP's municipalities increased from 263 to 420. CHP achieved first-party status in terms of vote share, receiving 34.47 percent of the votes. The dominant color on the map of Turkey reflecting the election results, became red, which historically represents CHP.

¹ This article was previously published in Turkish in the 57th issue of *Devrimci Marksizm* journal (Summer 2024). For its yearly English edition, *Revolutionary Marxism*, certain sections have been cut or summarized, some explanations have been added for readers who are not familiar with the politics of Turkey, some political developments over the past period have been discussed, and the conclusion has been updated and rewritten accordingly.



A crucial data point that stands out in the election was the low participation rate. The participation rate of 78.55 percent was 6 points lower than the participation rate of 84.66 percent in the previous local elections held in 2019. 13 million people did not go to the polls, and 4.5 million invalid votes were cast. There was also an increase in invalid votes in this election. This “reaction party”, expressed in the increase in the groups that did not go to the polls and cast invalid votes, whether compared to the previous local election (6.6 point increase) or general elections held 10 months ago (10.6 percent increase), is in the position of the third party following AKP and CHP, and is ahead of the 6.1 percent vote of the YRP, which is led by Fatih Erbakan, the son of Necmettin Erbakan, the historical leader of the political Islamist movement in Turkey. It is a visible and tangible fact that not going to the polls and casting invalid votes is a reaction to the government. Erdoğan himself said that the will of 16 million voters, including invalid votes, was not reflected in the ballot box and stated that the low participation rate was one of the main reasons for the decline in his party’s votes.

The fascist threat continues

In the May 2023 elections, fascist and fascist-origin parties² reached a total of 12.6 million votes and a rate of 23.2 percent. These high voting rates led to widespread comments that “the winners of this election were the nationalists.” We took this

² These parties consist of the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP), which has historically formed the main body of the fascist movement in Turkey, founded by Alparslan Türkeş and known internationally as “Grey Wolves”; Great Unity Party (*Büyük Birlik Partisi*, BBP), which separated from MHP with more Islamist emphasis under the leadership of Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu after the military coup on September 12, 1980; Good Party (*İYİ Parti*), which separated from MHP under the leadership of Meral Akşener after the rapprochement of MHP with AKP in 2014 and Ümit Özdağ’s Victory Party (*Zafer Partisi*), which he founded after leaving the İYİ Party in 2021, and is modeled on the proto-fascist parties in Europe that center on hostility towards immigrants.

peak very seriously and described it not simply as a rise of nationalism but as a “fascist threat”. A completely different picture emerged in terms of vote rates in the May 2024 elections. According to the votes given directly to the parties for the Metropolitan Municipality Assemblies and Provincial General Assemblies, MHP received 6.58 percent (3 million votes); İyi Party 4.6 percent (2.1 million votes); Victory Party 2.44 percent (1.2 million votes); BBP remained at 0.4 percent (200 thousand votes) and the vote share of fascist parties dropped to a total of 14 percent (6.5 million votes).

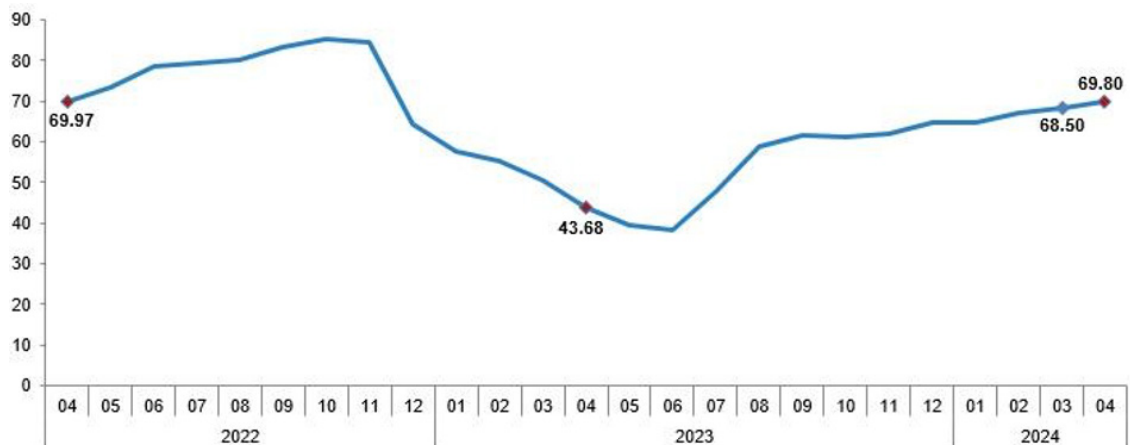
It would be reckless to look at this picture and think that the fascist danger has passed with this election. The fascist danger cannot be seen as limited to voting rates. The international economic and social conjuncture that laid the groundwork for the rise of fascism (Third Great Depression, deglobalization, the immigration question, the possibility of regional wars or a world war, etc.) continues. Some features of the conjuncture in Turkey mingle with and reinforce this global conjuncture. The dynamics of economic crisis push down the classical petty bourgeoisie, which forms the mass base of fascism. Turkey is the country where the immigrant problem is experienced at the most striking level in quantitative terms in the world. As the bourgeoisie attacks the working class under the pressure of the economic crisis, the possibility of needing harsher methods to atomize the class increases, and the expansionist ambitions of the bourgeoisie strengthen the tendency towards militarism. All these tendencies are most intensely reflected in the ranks of the fascist movement. The institutions that form the backbone of the military wing of the semi-military regime (especially the police and gendarmerie) are treated as if they were the natural quota of fascist parties.

Most importantly, AKP and CHP, which constitute the central forces of both the government and the opposition, often borrow the arguments of the fascist movement in their political discourses. For example, Erdoğan has been using the Rabia sign (showing four fingers), which he uses in reference to the Muslim Brotherhood movement, in rallies together with the fascistic slogan “one nation, one flag, one homeland, one state” for a long time. CHP, on the other hand, has begun to place anti-immigrant sentiment at the center of its politics, and has included many candidates of fascist origin or using fascist rhetoric when choosing its parliamentary and mayoral candidates. Therefore, although the vote share of fascist parties has decreased, fascism’s sphere of influence does not shrink, and perhaps even expands.

Municipal elections and the impact of the economy: What changed in the economic sphere between May 2023 and March 2024

One of the main themes of politics in Turkey in recent years has been the economic downturn. In Turkish politics, former center-right leader Süleyman Demirel’s words, “There is no government that an empty pot cannot overthrow”, are frequently quoted. However, despite the negative trend in the economy, Erdogan was the winner in the two-round presidential election held in May 2023. The

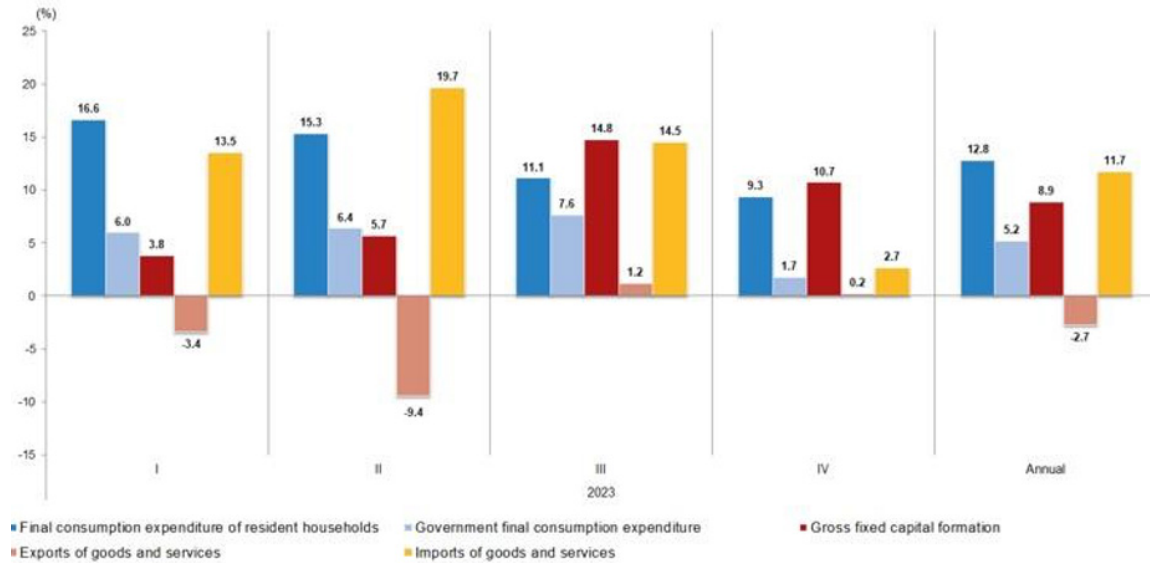
parliamentary majority clearly switched to the People's Alliance. In May 2023, official inflation rate dropped to 40 percent, albeit due to the base effect (ENAG figure was 109 percent), and in March 2024, when local elections were held, official inflation was measured as 68.5 percent³ (ENAG figure were 124 percent). Inflation is a phenomenon that increases the cost of living and impoverishes large masses of people. Of course, high inflation has a political cost to the current political power. It is clear that higher inflation will come at a higher cost.



The devastating effect of high unemployment on the masses comes at a much higher political price for the governments compared to high inflation. We can explain this as follows. Inflation shows us the rate of increase in prices. However, during inflationary periods, wages may also increase. Moreover, these increases occur at a higher rate than in periods when inflation is low. As a result, since the rate of increase in prices is higher than the rate of increase in income, purchasing power decreases and impoverishment occurs, but during each wage increase period, employees experience a temporary increase in purchasing power. This phenomenon is called the “money illusion”. This plays a soothing role in the social tension created by inflation. As we experienced before May 2023, public banks can increase their credit volume, leading to an increase in household consumption. In an inflationary environment, people who think that goods and services will become more expensive in the future tend to increase their consumption even more. As a result, when household consumption increases—even if driven by the illusion of wealth and borrowing—the societal stress caused by the high cost of living can be alleviated to some extent.

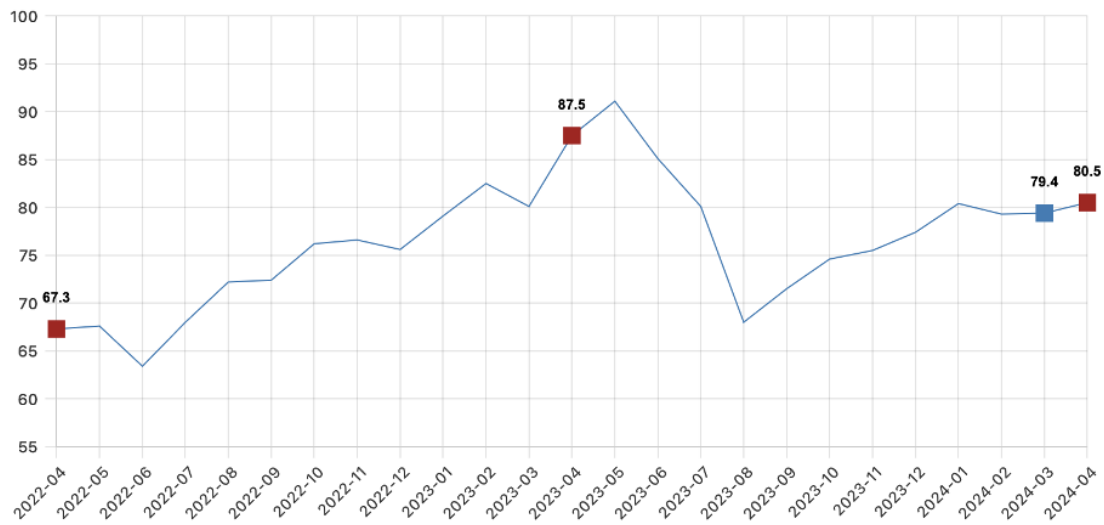
³ TÜİK, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Consumer-Price-Index-April-2024-53614>

Turkish elections from a class perspective



Analyzed from this perspective, we see that household consumption was increasing rapidly in the run-up to the May 2023 elections, and that in the first two quarters of 2023, household consumption was the engine of economic growth with high growth rates of 16.6 percent and 15.3 percent, respectively. After the general elections, the growth rate of household consumption decreased to 9.3 percent by the end of 2023. We can most clearly observe the money illusion the election economy created on the society in the Consumer Confidence Index figures. The consumer confidence index, calculated from the results of the consumer trend survey conducted in cooperation with the Turkish Statistical Institute and the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, reached its peak at 91.1 in May 2023, at the end of a long increasing trend. The consumer confidence index, which entered a downward trend immediately after the May 2023 elections, dropped to 79.4 in March 2024. These figures help explain why the public reacted relatively mildly to the economic downturn in May 2023. As the May elections entered their final phase, the front of despotism launched an intense wave of chauvinistic propaganda. This included portraying Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, then the CHP chair, as the candidate of Kandil—referring to the mountainous region in Iraq where the armed militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK) are based—through fake videos and social media manipulation. If this attack softened the reaction based on economic reasons in the AKP-MHP voter base and achieved a certain consolidation, the main reason for this was the continuation of the increase in household consumption despite inflation.

Consumer confidence index, April 2024

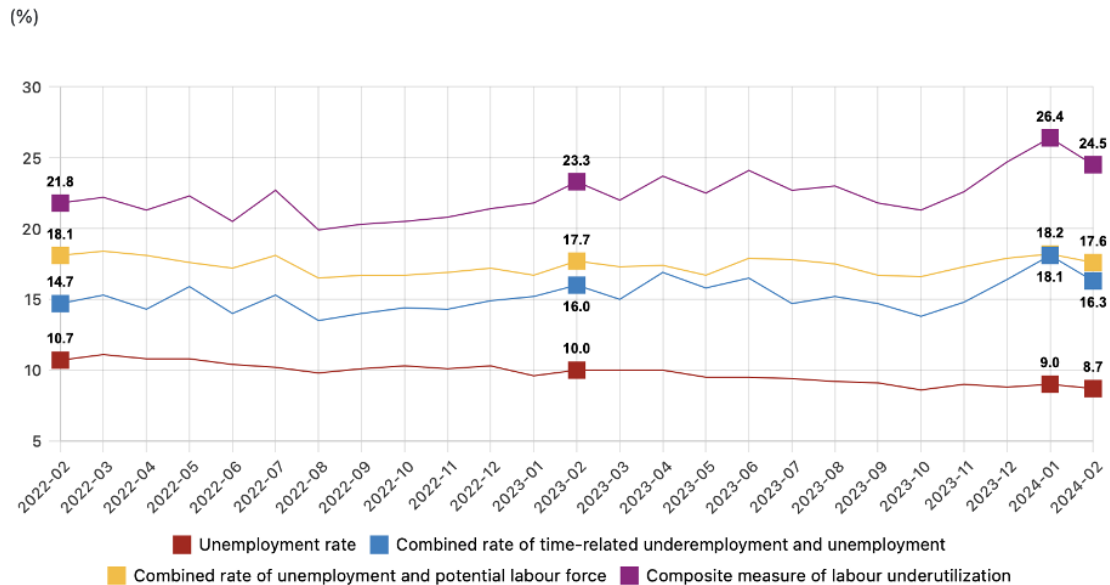


But unemployment is different. A completely different picture emerges for an unemployed person - especially if it takes longer to find a job at the same income level again. When debts and rents cannot be paid, economic, social and psychological destruction wrecks the family. The anger and reaction this destruction triggers is much harsher. The political cost of a general increase in unemployment level to the government in office is much heavier. For this very reason, when we say that governments practice “electoral economics”, we generally understand the effort to prioritize and control growth and employment at the expense of high inflation and budget deficits. Although the narrowly defined unemployment, which was 9.5 percent in May 2023, seems to have decreased to 8.7 percent in March 2024, broadly defined and real unemployment rate (which includes the unemployed who have given up looking for a job, those working in temporary jobs, etc., the idle workforce) increased from 22.5 percent in May 2023 to 24.5 percent in March 2024.⁴ All this data provides us with important grounds as to why the masses made the government pay a greater political price in March 2024 compared to May 2023. At the very least, it shows that the economic data in question is quite decisive in increasing the political price paid by Tayyip Erdoğan’s People’s Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*).

4 TÜİK, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Labour-Force-Statistics-February-2024-53509xzk1çv÷üm90ö>

Turkish elections from a class perspective

Seasonally adjusted supplementary labour force indicators, February 2022 - February 2024



However, we should point out the following here. The economy was in an extremely dire condition in both May 2023 and March 2024, due to its structural features. The deterioration of the macroeconomic indicators mentioned above between the two elections is not structural but superficial. The crisis dynamics of Turkish capitalism arise from the structural features of a capitalist economy dependent on imperialism, within the global conjuncture determined by the Third Great Depression of world capitalism. The data we are talking about are the surface manifestations of these underlying dynamics. It can be said that the Turkish economy has cancer. What we are talking about are some blood values that affect the body's daily energy, vitality or state of weakness and exhaustion. Imagine that these values are corrected with drugs or supplements administered by the doctor externally, the fever is reduced with antipyretics, etc. However, none of these has any healing effect on cancer cells that have invaded the body. On the contrary, the cancer progresses during this period.

Why Erdoğan did not (or could not) resort to electoral economics in the municipal elections?

We can now clearly see macroeconomic data showing “the state and course of the economy” in popular language and their impact on the elections. However, there still remains a question to be answered. Why didn't Erdoğan and his allies implement the economic policy that won them elections in May 2023 in the local elections in March 2024? Why was Mehmet Şimşek given the helm of the economy

with the slogan “return to rational policies” right after the elections? The story so far shows that Erdoğan has spent all the ammunition he has for the May 2023 elections. It should not be concluded from this that Erdoğan could not give retirees a raise even if he wanted to. Not giving a rise to retirees was a class-based choice. If he was sincere, he would have checked out the interest payments that make up more than half of the budget deficit for the resources necessary not only for pensioners but also for education, health and other public services. Of course, Erdoğan could not have such a class preference. The only factor that could motivate him in this direction would have been political. However, politically, Erdoğan had to strategically focus on keeping the central power in his hands.

The economic ammunition Erdoğan could use for the elections was limited. Imperialist financial centers such as London, Frankfurt and New York, demanding high interest rates and structural reform, cut off the hot money flows. In an economic environment where external resources have been cut, both the state of the Central Bank reserves and the increasing budget deficit prevented Erdoğan from pursuing electoral economics that would cover both elections. It was a necessary strategic choice for Erdoğan to consume all the ammunition he had in May 2023, knowing that it would put local elections at risk. We can guess how difficult this choice was for Erdoğan, who knows very well the importance of local governments, especially Istanbul, in his rise to power and consolidation of his power. Erdoğan thought that he could manage a possible local election defeat by holding onto the central government, and now he is doing exactly that. But it is clear that the opposite would not be possible.

Great strides for compromise among the bourgeois ranks: “Four year-period without elections” is a political program, not a prediction

While Erdoğan was trying to heal the wounds of the defeat in the local elections by holding onto the central power, Özgür Özel refrained from speaking in a triumphant tone and emphasizing his own victory and the AKP’s defeat, both on the election night and afterwards. This should not be seen as a mere show of humility. Under Özgür Özel’s soft tone were the class interests of the bourgeoisie. These class interests dictated that Erdoğan and his government, who were already carrying out the strategic attack of capital with the Medium-Term Program (*Orta Vadeli Program*, OVP) and plotting a foreign policy course that was even more clearly imperialist-aligned than before, not be forced or pressured. Özgür Özel continued to follow a line loyal to these interests after the elections. The most concrete expression of this line is that Özgür Özel did not demand a new election, stating that “there are 4 years without elections”, right after the municipal elections, when Erdoğan and the AKP were at their most politically fragile. Özgür Özel presented this as a responsibility towards the AKP and MHP voters from whom he had received votes. However, the actual reason is different. Since the May 2023 elections, CHP has been defending the austerity program with concepts such as rational policies, structural reform,

central bank independence, and a reliable investment environment. In fact, Mehmet Şimşek's Medium-Term Program is almost identical to the economic program of the Nation Alliance led by CHP, point by point. As a matter of fact, if Kılıçdaroğlu had been elected President, he would have handed over the economy to Ali Babacan (previously Erdoğan's state minister in charge of the economy and foreign affairs minister). Erdoğan won and put Mehmet Şimşek at the helm.

Therefore, we can say that the statement of a 4-year period without elections is not a prediction but a political program. This program is the program of an unofficial alliance in line with the interests of the bourgeoisie. This alliance is unofficial, but it is not an unnamed alliance. Its name is "Turkey alliance". Both Erdoğan and Özel, as well as in the discourses of different parties and leaders from the ruling and opposition sides, have mentioned the so-called "Turkey alliance" many times in various times and contexts. Özgür Özel puts forward this concept with a kind of "constructive opposition" approach that is careful not to pressure the government, stays away from early elections, and blocks any demands that may come in this direction. This aspect of the matter reflects the general interests, demands and expectations of the bourgeoisie. But Özel does not stop here. By saying "We are Turkey's main opposition party, but abroad, we are Turkey's party first", he gave a guarantee that he will act in accordance with the priorities and sensitivities of the semi-military regime in specific topics like the Kurdish and Cyprus questions.

Hence, Özel's position was tested in two cases in the first two years following the local elections. First was the Öcalan opening that Bahçeli started, the other was Turkey's foreign policy during the fall of Assad and the HTS's seizure of power in Syria. Özel followed a policy in accordance with the government.

The reactionary character of the search for a great compromise

The grounds for this compromise are clear in Turkey. In foreign policy, the expansion of Turkish monopoly capital into the Arab world, the Muslim world, and Africa, as well as access to Asian markets on the one hand, and the desire not to break ties with the European Union—its largest trade partner—on the other, are shared goals. In fact, advancing integration with Europe by updating the customs union agreement, reducing foreign dependency in energy, and ensuring energy security are common objectives for all wings of the Turkish bourgeoisie. While the European Union stands out as a strategic priority for the Westernist-secular bourgeoisie, the Islamist bourgeoisie attaches more importance to opening up to the Arab and Muslim world, where it has a comparative advantage. In the same vein, while the Westernist-secular bourgeoisie is ready to sacrifice more for its goal of integration into the EU, the Islamist bourgeoisie can act more reckless and damage its relations with Europe, the USA and the West as it moves towards the east, where it has a competitive advantage. But at the end of the day, these contradictions are secondary. When relations with the EU approach the breaking point, we see that the Islamist bourgeoisie always hits the brakes. On the other hand, the Westernist and secular sensibilities of the Turkish Industry and Business Association (*Türk*

Sanayicileri ve İş İnsanları Derneği, TÜSİAD) can soften considerably in the face of Islamism and pan-Sunnism that provide access to energy resources and markets. TÜSİAD is an organic element of the imperialist yoke established over Turkey through NATO and the EU. It is the domestic partner of imperialist finance capital. However, this does not prevent TÜSİAD capital from pursuing investments in Russia, the Gulf countries, or Africa. TÜSİAD positions itself as a key partner in China's Belt and Road Initiative, and these interests make the inclination to remain within the NATO circle—framed by the current government as a “balance policy”—and to pursue an autonomous foreign policy without severing ties with the imperialist West, particularly appealing to the Western-oriented secular bourgeoisie.

The pro-western-secular bourgeoisie is more likely to make concessions in Cyprus in order to integrate with the EU. Although the Islamist bourgeoisie does not abandon the rhetoric of “Mujahid Erbakan, the conqueror of Cyprus”, it can be extremely eager to jump on the bandwagon of European imperialism, as we have seen in the past during the Annan Plan process. On the Kurdish issue, the Westernist-secular bourgeoisie can support “opening” policies under the umbrella of the EU Charter of Local Governments Autonomy, while the Islamist bourgeoisie can support “opening” policies on the basis of a Sunni Islamic brotherhood from an ummah-oriented perspective. On the other hand, in the final analysis, all wings of the bourgeoisie have colonial interests in the island of Cyprus and the Kurdish regions. The bourgeoisie thinks that its colonial interests in these geographies are guaranteed by the military presence of the Turkish Armed Forces. For this reason, even the seemingly most liberal wings of the bourgeoisie can quickly switch to the “survival” discourse that helps mobilize the nation to protect their colonial interests. In short, the basis for compromise is the class interests of the bourgeoisie.

The compromise need not be realized peacefully

We are talking about the tendencies of compromise within the bourgeoisie and the developments in this direction. This compromise has not yet been achieved. Opposing tendencies may manifest themselves in a much harsher way than in the past, under all kinds of economic, political and military failures, tensions and crises. Moreover, the compromise itself does not have to come about peacefully. In other words, there is a dialectical unity of violence and dialogue in politics. Threat is a method of dialogue in itself. From this perspective, it can be easily seen that the first responses to Özgür Özel's gentlemanly show that started on election night were not peaceful at all. Erdoğan told the CHP that they should not get into a fuss just because they won in the local elections: “Poor people who think they will rule Turkey!”, he reminded them in a not-so-kind way. While Erdoğan is uttering these words, Bahçeli is showing the stick of the semi-military regime by saying “this country was not established through the ballot box”. Finally, the front of despotism quickly put its words into action and showed that there is no such thing as municipal power, that municipalities are subject to the central power, and that the state is ultimately based on the armed coercive apparatus and its extension, the

courts, by arresting CHP's fledgling Kepez mayor, Mesut Kocagöz. After this first step, a trustee was appointed to the Esenyurt municipality, which was taken over from the AKP by the alliance of CHP and HDP, and the CHP (former HDP) mayor Ahmet Özer was arrested. This wave of repression continued with the arrest of Rıza Akpolat, the CHP mayor of Beşiktaş, one of the richest and largest districts of Istanbul. A lawsuit is still ongoing regarding Ekrem İmamoğlu, one of the future presidential candidates of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and CHP, which will deprive him of his political rights.

The antithesis of the search for a "great compromise" between the CHP and the AKP is the scenario in which CHP brings together the broadest possible opposition front, especially the Kurdish movement, which is in conflict with the Turkish nationalist elements of this opposition front, in which CHP stands at the center, with the common denominator of anti-Erdoğanism. Erdoğan and Bahçeli are implementing carrot and stick policies not only for CHP but also for CHP's possible allies. For the Kurdish movement, while the Öcalan initiative and Dem Party delegations are visiting İmralı Island, detentions and arrests are continuing simultaneously. A similar process is taking place in the nationalist wing of fascist origin. Meral Akşener, formerly aligned with the CHP in the opposition ranks, moved closer to Erdoğan, prompting defections from the İYİ Party to the AKP. While the blessings of power are extended to the elements of the fascist wing other than MHP, they are simultaneously shown the stick, as was the case during the arrest of Victory Party leader Ümit Özdağ.

Are the Kurdish people included in the Great Compromise? Or is the Great Compromise against the Kurdish People?

The Dem Party's local election policy was discussed within the Kurdish movement and the left, and around the concepts of "urban consensus" and "third way", a terminology that gradually spread to the entire public opinion. The Dem Party was torn between the "urban compromise" tactic, which emphasizes alliance with the opposition in the western provinces for the municipal elections, and the "third way" orientation, which it thought to be facilitating a possible opening process with the current government. Dem Party had lost the initiative to determine the interlocutor of a possible opening process after Erdoğan won the 2023 presidential election and the People's Alliance won the parliamentary majority. The interlocutor was now set. A political line that would encourage this interlocutor to engage in dialogue and somewhat reduce the influence of the parties against dialogue, such as MHP and the army, seemed rational, and despite the reaction of the Kurdish people to Erdoğan's record of intensified repression and violence in the last 7-8 years, the politics of hoping for new openings was being voiced with more confidence. On the other hand, the recent past record left no room for doubt, and there were no concrete signals or steps to convince the Kurdish people during the local election process. The AKP's policy of "let us win and then we'll see" was not convincing but rather revolting.

It is known and experienced that the AKP's abstract and unofficial promises could be revoked at any moment, and it could take steps in the opposite direction. Therefore, following the third way policy all the way through carried a great risk. On the other side, there were concrete proposals to the Dem Party, albeit on opportunist grounds, ranging from municipal council memberships to determining who would be the mayors of some districts. While the AKP's abstract but larger promises drew the Dem Party towards the third way, and the CHP's concrete but partial offers drew it towards the urban consensus, the Kurdish movement entered the local election process with a mixed orientation with a relatively high dosage of urban consensus. The Kurdish electorate, on the other hand, has clearly set its stance in the direction of holding the regime of oppression accountable and responding to it. The reaction of the Kurdish people, which went beyond the Dem Party masses and manifested itself as a national attitude throughout Turkey, must be listed among the decisive factors in the AKP's defeat.

The despotism front foresaw this possible development before the elections and kept the trustee stick as a threat in addition to the carrot of opening. As a matter of fact, in the first month or two after the local elections, trustees were appointed only in Hakkari, and the summer months were spent with preparations for a military operation against Northern Iraq. The rumored cross-border military operation did not materialize, but with the onset of parliamentary sessions in October, the MHP wing of the government started to make opening strides towards the Dem Party. The MHP leader first shook the hands of Dem Party deputies at the opening of the parliamentary session. While the public was debating the nature of this gesture, Bahçeli made another shocking statement. Bahçeli suggested that Öcalan should come to the parliament, speak in the Dem Party group and announce that he had dissolved the PKK, in exchange for which he would be released after 26 years of imprisonment by exercising his "right to hope". Bahçeli's initiative was approved by Erdoğan and Dem Party executives held a meeting with Öcalan in İmralı prison on December 29. However, during this time, trustees were appointed to 6 Dem Party municipalities and 2 CHP municipalities won in alliance with the Dem Party, in line with the carrot-and-stick policy. Hundreds of politicians, trade unionists and journalists from the Kurdish movement were detained and arrested. Finally, Turkey started to exert intense military pressure on Rojava after the fall of Assad in Syria with the move of HTS and the Syrian National Army attached to the Turkish army.

This whole process illustrates that the Turkish bourgeoisie's search for a great compromise does not include the Kurdish people but the Kurdish bourgeoisie. The Turkish bourgeoisie, through the hands of the collaborator Kurdish bourgeoisie and with the support of imperialism, is trying to pull the Kurdish movement into a line compatible with its colonialist interests in Iraqi Kurdistan and Rojava. In this context, the process that started with Bahçeli's Öcalan opening is in harmony, not in contradiction, with the trusteeships, arrests, etc., repressions, cross-border military operations against Kurdish regions. In the background of this process, a "New Constitution" debate continues. Although the New Constitution agenda is seemingly based on the criticism of Turkey's "old" constitution, which was a product of a coup, the main subject of this agenda is Turkey's "old" borders, which have become

an obstacle for the expansionist interests of the colonialist bourgeoisie. Turkey's foreign policy, which is expressed with the Kemalist motto of "peace at home, peace in the world" and focuses on protecting its borders, is now changing. This policy, which envisages assimilating the Kurds domestically and keeping the Arabs away from Turkey in states such as Iraq and Syria abroad, is in contradiction with an expansionist perspective. In order to expand its influence towards regions where Kurdish and Arab peoples are densely populated, Turkey's colonialist bourgeoisie prefers an Islamist orientation, which is suitable for establishing a dialogue with these masses on the basis of Sunni Islam, in contrast to the exclusionary perspective of Kemalism. Within the framework of this orientation, the current government is pursuing policies that push the legal boundaries of secularism in Turkey.

The secular structure and the established Kurdish policy, which have deep roots within the Turkish state, are still widely adopted within the semi-military regime, especially in the army ranks. The riskiest step of this orientation, which envisages changes in Kurdish policy and the secular state structure and is a serious source of tension within the semi-military regime, is the Öcalan initiative. The risks of this initiative may deepen the political consequences of Bahçeli and Erdoğan's local election defeat. The success of this initiative, despite all the risks, may enable Bahçeli and Erdoğan to reverse their local election defeat. For Bahçeli and Erdoğan, the success of the Öcalan initiative will not only bring political prestige, but will also destroy the foundations of alliance ("urban consensus") between the Kurdish movement and the CHP-centered bourgeois opposition.

The socialist movement has carried the Menshevik politics of CHP tailism from general to municipal elections

Neither during the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections nor the 2024 municipal elections did the Turkish socialist movement come to the fore as an independent force. The socialist movement mostly backed the CHP. The socialists who supported Kılıçdaroğlu in the presidential elections continued to support the CHP in the metropolitan cities of Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir, which constituted the main agenda of the local elections. The fact that in some districts of metropolitan cities, and in some provinces and districts in Anatolia where the socialist left has been influential since the past, socialists ran separately from the CHP, and that socialist parties won small municipalities in a few districts does not change this overall picture.

Those who supported the bourgeoisie in the metropolitan municipalities, which constituted the main agenda of the elections, pursued policies based on reactionary utopias under the name of socialist/communist municipalism in the small districts and towns where they were relatively effective. In the few municipalities won by the socialists, no example of the socialist/communist/revolutionary municipalism described before the elections has been created, and such a thing will never be possible under conditions where municipalities are politically, administratively and financially subordinated to the central government. What is possible is a mass

mobilization of the local working people to fight against the central power with the support of the municipality in line with certain demands. After the elections, the few socialist municipalities have not been seen to be instrumental in such a mass mobilization.

Local governments are secondary to the central government, local elections are secondary to the presidential elections. But the tendencies emerging in establishment politics on the occasion of the local elections have features that will directly affect the class struggle that will sharpen in the coming period. The damage caused by the Menshevism and class collaborationism that dominate the socialist left in the ranks of the working class is much greater than one might think. As important as the position the Kurdish movement will take in this process is the extent to which the working class politics will be able to combine the right of nations to self-determination with the anti-imperialist line on the Kurdish question, and to put the fraternity of peoples alongside the unity of the workers on solid foundations. We said that the “four-year period without elections” is the program of the bourgeoisie. But on the other hand, a period without elections (for however long it lasts) can also be a good thing for us to get rid of the mental eclipse in which every election throws the ranks of the socialist left like a straw in the wind, where the socialists of the country forget even to visit the strikes and resistances of the workers in the rush for elections. But only if the right lessons are learned during this period, if we break away from the tail of the CHP and the politics of order, and turn our faces to the working class and class politics...

As a matter of fact, the summer of 2024 witnessed a serious stirring in the labor movement. Union protests against the rising costs of living and heavy taxes increased. Turkey’s largest labor confederation, Türk-İş, gathered 150,000 workers in Ankara after a series of regional rallies. DİSK also organized various actions and rallies, albeit with more modest crowds. Later, public-sector workers, particularly in the health and education sectors, also organized work stoppages and rallies against low wage increases. The resistance of workers at the Polonez meat factory in the Çatalca district of Istanbul against dismissals and for union recognition and the march on Ankara for constitutional rights brought the demands of the working class to the agenda of the country for six months. Similarly, mine workers organized a similar march from Soma to Ankara. These protests were encouraging examples of workers not giving up and not retreating despite all the police repression and violence of the despotic regime, and finally achieving gains. At the end of 2024 and the beginning of 2025, there was a serious showdown in the steel sector between the DİSK Birleşik Metal-İş union, one of the leading representatives of the combative tradition of the working class, and the Metal Goods Industry Employers’ Union (Türkiye Metal Sanayicileri Sendikası, MESS), one of the strongest bourgeois organizations in Turkey. Erdoğan intervened in favor of the MESS in the strikes in İstanbul, Kocaeli, İzmir and Gebze and banned the strikes. Despite the bans, strikes actually continued and the right to strike was defended again by strikes. These de facto strikes have resulted in collective agreements with various gains that frustrated the threats of dismissal made by the bosses by taking the strike ban behind their backs. This stirring in the class movement has shown that a different

path for the left in politics, a path of class politics, is both necessary and possible.

The equation set up by the Menshevik approach is that it is essential for the bourgeois opposition (a wide spectrum ranging from liberals to social-democrats, from political Islamists to fascists) to prevail against the despotism, and that a class politics is only possible in the relatively democratic environment created by the bourgeois opposition. Developments have proved the Menshevik political line wrong in every way. The bourgeois opposition, far from becoming a focal point of struggle against despotism, each of its components moved in different ways and at various paces to take the side of despotism at the first opportunity they saw. Examples of such moves include the CHP's support for the "normalization and détente" process with Erdoğan and the Mehmet Şimşek program, the splitting of the İYİ Party and the group led by Meral Akşener, the leading figure of the National Alliance, taking steps towards joining the AKP, and the political Islamist parties that entered parliament under the umbrella of the CHP-led National Alliance (*Millet İttifakı*) announcing their support for the AKP in the discussions on the new Constitution. Apart from the opposition of the establishment, even the Kurdish movement, with its elements under the influence of the Kurdish bourgeoisie, has moved away from perspective of "urban consensus" in the context of Bahçeli's Öcalan opening, and approached the line of the "third way", which expresses a de facto rapprochement with the regime of despotism.

Once again, we must remember that all this took place after a period in which the CHP won a municipal election victory and the front of despotism was defeated in the same election. Contrary to Menshevism's expectations, the bourgeois opposition that triumphed in the local elections did not turn the positions it gained into a focus for a liberation struggle against the despotic regime. On the contrary, the despotic regime attacked these positions by using the central state apparatus, especially the judiciary, as a stick. The message of the despotic regime to the bourgeois opposition is that if the opposition wants to benefit from the material blessings of municipal governments, it must be in harmony with the despotic regime and avoid turning the victory in municipal elections into a platform for gaining central power. The bourgeois opposition is acting in accordance with its class interests, responding to the attacks of despotism with a low profile. So much so that the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality of the CHP and Ekrem Imamoglu, which threatens the front of the despotism the most and has the greatest opportunities, have started to act as a separate party (or an opposition alliance) outside the CHP. Time will tell whether this newly emerging de facto İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality party will turn into a focus of opposition aiming to defeat the despotism or, like other elements of the bourgeois opposition, will use its power for a more favorable compromise with the despotic regime.

Class politics is possible, necessary, and mandatory

In any case, the mainstream opposition, on which Menshevism had relied against the despotic regime, is in complete misery. Nevertheless, for the majority of the

socialist movement in Turkey, there is no serious sign of breaking away from the opposition of the establishment. The Menshevik majority of the Turkish socialist movement watched the rise of the class movement from the outside, and when the class movement rose to a level that would put a stamp on the agenda of the whole country, they turned towards it, but even while turning towards it, they could not go beyond the limits of the bourgeois opposition by staying away from the rallies of Türk-İş. On agendas such as the appointment of trustees to CHP municipalities, the Menshevik left was immediately distracted and began to pursue the agendas of the establishment opposition. The Menshevik left, which does not appear at the rallies of Türk-İş, the largest organization of the working class and which carries hundreds of thousands of workers to the field, even though it is controlled by the government, is in a race to be on the rostrums of the bourgeois opposition.

However, the stirring in the labor movement will continue in 2025. The regime of tyranny has shown that Mehmet Şimşek will not back down from his austerity program. In addition to the scheduled headlines of struggle such as the contracts of public workers and the big group contract with MESS in the metal sector, it is possible that resistance will start at any moment in many workplaces with demands such as unionization, demand for a raise, etc. Experience has shown that the bourgeois opposition, due to its class interests, seeks to compromise with tyranny at the first opportunity, while the labor movement is able to mobilize even the masses of workers under the ideological hegemony of the parties of the despotic regime such as the AKP and MHP in the struggle for bread and freedom. Experience has confirmed the misery of the politics of order and shown that it is both necessary, possible and mandatory to break from mainstream politics and turn to class politics.

Zionist genocide and resistance in Palestine following the Al Aqsa Flood

Kutlu Dâne

Introduction

To understand better the events that took place around the line separating Gaza and the 48 territories¹ on October 7, 2023, and their aftermath, one must place these developments within the context of Palestine's colonization history and, in parallel, imperialism's long-term strategy in the region and around the world. The opposite would lead us to see the Al Aqsa Flood as a criminal incident, a terrorist attack, an act of vandalism targeting "civilians" sitting at home and "young people having fun peacefully" by those who crossed the "border", as presented by the imperialist and Zionist media. Such an approach would inevitably lead to conclusions that are disconnected from reality, such as a peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine, at best. This article aims to present a correct perspective on the issue, against the propaganda that imperialists, Zionists and their collaborators have been making since October 7 to justify Israel's genocide, which unfortunately has been accepted

¹ 48 lands, or what some call "Israel", is a part of the historical Palestine excluding the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem. It is under direct Zionist domination formed after Israel's advances in 1948 and 1967 and its withdrawal from parts of the historical Palestine following the 1973 war.