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Turkey

Fundamentalist fall?

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The military, and the public opinion, have forced the fundamentalist-nationalist coalition government to resign. Conservative opposition leader Mesut Yilmaz has been invited to form the next government, which will probably be a 'non-clerical' coalition with the social democratic opposition.

Military and public pressure in recent weeks de-stabilised former Prime Minister Ciller's conservative True Pathparty (DYP) to the point where fifteen deputies switched their allegiance to the opposition. But the governing coalition between the DYP and the larger, Islamic fundamentalist Prosperity Party (Refah) survived a vote of confidence, by the narrow margin of four votes.

Many wavering deputies were won back to the government benches by Ciller's husband, who's shady role between government and business circles has earned him the nickname "Mr Ten Percent." Some deputies were tempted back by fat commissions, others blackmailed with threats of exposure of their past corrupt deals.

Nevertheless, Ciller and Refah leader Erbakan had less and less room for manoeuvre, in the face of the opposition of Turkey's powerful generals to the fundamentalist's continued presence in government. Recognising the precariousness of their situation, they called a new general election. Erbakan even promised to surrender the post of prime minister to Ciller, whose DYP was the junior party in the government.

By inviting Mesut Yilmaz to form a new government, Turkey's president Suleman Demirel has blocked this plan. Yilmaz has the agreement of both social democratic parties, and dissidents from Ciller's party, to form a new, non-clerical coalition, which can count with the support of the army, the bourgeoisie and the media.

The generals v Refah

The crisis is far from over. What is certain, however, is that the army, which represents the general interests of the regime, has gone too far in its struggle against the government to be able to pull back.

The army recently convinced the Public Prosecutor to request that the Constitutional Court dissolve Refah, which he accuses of "wanting to provoke a civil war" and "install an Islamic regime," in contradiction to the non-clerical framework installed by modern Turkey's founding fathers after the first world war.

This is the first time in history that a Constitutional Court will consider the dissolution as anti-constitutional of a party which is in government, on the basis of 21% of votes in the last general election. A party which includes both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice. At least this proves that the Turkish judicial system is independent of some parts of the executive!

The army has also accused the government of "cutting off funds," by refusing to finance the recent intervention into Northern Iraq to combat the separatist Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). [Official Turkish sources report 2,000 PKK deaths].

As in any other self-respecting bourgeois state, denying the army the resources they need to defend the motherland

is equivalent to treason. If the current crisis ends in another military coup d'Etat, this could be a pretext for the imprisonment or even execution of Erbakan and Ciller. But the short term objective is more modest – to spread panic among deputies from Ciller's DYP party, and encourage them to support the opposition against their former colleagues.

Last round

A merciless struggle is underway between the generals and the Ciller-Erbakan grouping. In the short and medium term, the balance of forces seems more favourable to the generals. So the main question is whether they will be able to remove the current government by "democratic parliamentary" means, or at least by manoeuvres which will protect the democratic facade of the regime, without threatening the major capitalists' projects for closer integration with the European Union. Or whether there will be another Coup d'Etat, which in the current situation could degenerate into a semi-civil-war.

In the long term, everything depends on the capacity of the bourgeoisie and its political personnel to reform the political and institutional system to the point where they can present a new bourgeois alternative, sufficiently credible to win the passivity of the masses.

In the immediate, all depends on how many of Ciller's deputies can be frightened into voting against their own party, even if this means losing their place at the trough, and having their past misdeeds publicised by Mr Ten Percent.

The "enemy within"

As the recent military alliance with Israel shows, the Turkish general staff has modified its global strategy in recent years. After 50 years of strategy designed to contain a "principle threat" defined as "the external communist danger, with a Fifth Column inside the country," the new preoccupation of the armed forces is the "threat posed by the internal enemy and its external supporters." This threat has been openly described by top generals as "Kurdish separatist terrorism and the fundamentalist threat."

The entire "security" apparatus (police, judiciary, defence forces, secret services and diplomatic corps) has been instructed to adapt itself to this new overall strategy. The ideological propaganda machine is toning down the anti-communism, and stressing unitary nationalism and the non-clerical principles of "the father of modern Turkey," Kemal Ataturk.

In foreign policy, the new "enemies" are those who support the PKK and the Islamic fundamentalists: Syria and Iran. The Turkish state intends to impose this global strategy on each and every bourgeois government which the country may elect, whatever the nuances of programme and outlook between the political parties concerned!

Ruling class divided

The current crisis reveals a triangular struggle within the bourgeoisie. The main actor is the large, traditional industrial bourgeoisie, and its allies in the small business sector, the army, the media and the parliamentary opposition (including the social democrats). The political project of this fraction of the bourgeoisie is the integration of Turkey

with the European Union, and a bourgeois democratic set-up more or less comparable with those of the European countries.

This fraction of the ruling class seeks to gain the support of the working class and the progressive intelligentsia for this project, by frightening them with the spectre of Islamic fundamentalism. By offering "democratisation," they hope to win the left's support for privatisation and re-structuring. The process has certain parallels to Spain's "Moncloa Pact" which ensured a stable transition from dictatorship to bourgeois democracy.

The second force in this triangular struggle is the Islamic fundamentalist sector of the bourgeoisie, which is particularly strong among the middle-size companies in central Turkey. This current, politically represented by the Refah (Prosperity) party, is trying to win the support of the pauperised and semi-proletarian layers of urban society, and the Kurdish peasantry, in the name of an elusive "religious fraternity and solidarity." The fundamentalist wing of capital hopes to break the power of the grand, classical bourgeoisie, by creating a reserved "Islamic economy," based on "the specific consumption patterns and lifestyles of the Islamic ghettos."

Internationally, Refah would like Turkey to distance itself from the European Union, and adopt a neo-protectionist economic system. The middle east and south-east Asia would become Turkey's preferred markets. The Islamic bourgeoisie probably controls a turnover of US\$2 billion, with \$800m. of exports, mainly to the Middle East.

The third sector of the bourgeoisie exists in the "parallel" or Mafia economy. This sector grew rapidly in the Kurdish region during the "dirty war," and all over Turkey during the neo-liberal "miracle" of the late 1980s and early 90s, under President Turgutal. This sector looks for support to lumpenised (depressed) sectors of the proletariat and intelligentsia, appealing to them on a "nationalist" basis.

The police force and landowner layers are also a fertile base of support for this current. Ciller's DYP used to be allied to the grand bourgeoisie. But under the growing threat of investigation for corruption, Ciller switched alliances, and formed a coalition with the fundamentalists. Much of her party's support now comes from this "parallel" sector. Ciller's switch is at the origin of the current political confusion. Even the fascist Grey Wolves (MHP) have been thrown into a crisis of orientation, deepened by the death of their historic leader.

The working people of Turkey, and the Kurds, stand to pay the costs of this internal, confused battle between bourgeois factions. Unless, of course, they can develop a pragmatic, intelligent strategy to compensate for the unfavourable balance of forces. Without a clear orientation of class independence and the defence of democratic and social rights, the working class may be side-tracked into one of several possible false, catastrophic alliances, or slumber in criminal passivity.