

Turkey: One year of Erdogan's counter-coup

Svenja Spunck, GAM Infomail 954 Tue, 25/07/2017 - 11:19

Svenja Spunck, GAM Infomail 954

Last July there were two coups in Turkey, one failed, one succeeded. On the evening of July 15, pictures showing the Bosphorus Bridge, sealed off by the military, began to spread across the social media together with pictures of government buildings in Ankara being bombed by the army.

To this day, it is not certain who planned and carried out this coup attempt. If the statements of the AKP government and its supporters are to be believed, it was Fethullah Gülen, currently living in United States, and his Hımet movement, trying to take power with their own 'state apparatus' that they had built within the state. To describe this movement the government coined the term 'FETO', short for Fethullah terrorism.

Erdogan's coup

Since then, hundreds of thousands of state employees, primarily members of the judiciary and academics, have been sacked on the basis of the accusation, or excuse, that they were members of this organisation. This is the second, the successful, coup, which continues to the present day. The website < www.turkeypurge.com> documents precisely how many sackings there have been since July 15, 2016 as well as the number of journalists arrested. Nor is it only the 274 jailed journalists that should be noted but also the number of media workers, not registered officially anywhere, who are harassed on a daily basis through searches, Internet blocks and denial of exit visas.

Just as they have created FETO as a justification for purging the state apparatus, so Erdogan and the AKP also control the definition of who belongs to this organisation. It is no secret that the Gülen movement had a close working relationship with the AKP and Erdogan for a long time and collaborated with him in the drive to reduce the power of the Kemalist elites within the state apparatus. It was also active in all the attempts to crush the Kurdish movement and to strengthen the rule of the Turkish state in the East.

The best-known examples of this collaboration were the Balyoz and Ergenekon trials in 2010 and 2013. These were the names of the alleged secret organisations within the military who were supposed to have planned a coup against the AKP government. Whatever the truth of that, the whole operation removed the hegemony of the Kemalists and their replacement by officers loyal to the AKP. The judges and prosecutors in those trials were largely followers of the Gülen movement and it is they who have now been dismissed. One might think that Erdogan is slowly beginning to fear the strong position that Gülen's followers have created.

It should be stressed that the measures which are now being taken against the (alleged) Gülen followers have long been the norm for leftists and Kurdish activists. Disqualification and imprisonment of democratically elected Kurdish mayors was increased after the AKP failed to gain a Parliamentary majority in 2015. It was the success of the HDP in those elections which blocked Erdogan's proposed introduction of a presidential system.

This shortfall in votes was to be overcome in new elections for which the population was prepared with the imposition of civil war-like conditions. Through falsification and theft of votes, the AKP was able to win both the November 2015 elections and the referendum held in April 2017, although the growing resentment against the AKP became very clear in the latter. Approximately 2 million votes had to be falsified in order to secure the AKP even a wafer thin majority. There cannot be any talk of a "democratic mandate" here.

The protests which erupted around the referendum have unfortunately now ebbed away. What they lacked, above all, was a driving political force which could unite the different currents and give them a perspective. Today in Turkey it is difficult to find such a force. One reason for this is the wave of repression. Anyone can be caught up in this for even the most trivial "offence". Those convicted face long years of imprisonment and arbitrary torture. Erdogan described the attempted coup as a gift of God and certainly it was an answer to his prayers.

Prior to that, at the end of 2013, the Gülen movement had published evidence of corruption scandals around Erdogan's family and other high-ranking AKP politicians, evidence for which they should have been prosecuted. The split between the AKP and its former allies deepened. With the declaration of the state of emergency, Erdogan was able to take all the reins of power into his own hands, even before the introduction of his proposed presidential system, and to use them to deliver this resounding defeat of all opposition.

Under the slogan "one people, one flag, one homeland, one state", Erdogan is trying to forcibly unite Turkey under a Bonapartist regime not only against external enemies but particularly those at home. He presents himself as the personification of "national unity" of all Turks, all Muslims. He bases himself on real support from parts of the bourgeoisie but more particularly the petty bourgeoisie in the towns and countryside. For him, the failed coup was a very welcome opportunity to purge the state apparatus, secure permanent dictatorial powers, take control over the media, destroy bourgeois democratic rights and reduce "democracy" to a plebiscitary, populist exercise for endorsing AKP policy.

Opposition crisis

Both rhetorically and in practice no distinction is now made between peaceful oppositionists and terrorists. Students have been imprisoned for years because of Facebook posts. The accusation is always the same: terrorist propaganda. Academics who have been dismissed are demanding reinstatement and have even resorted to hunger strikes. The workers' movement, which is weak politically and organisationally, has not been able to mount any street protests let alone political strikes against government repression. It is true that repression against union members has been limited but that is because a large part of the movement has been under the control of the AKP for years.

The HDP, once the hope of the opposition forces and the oppressed minorities of Turkey, has been extremely weakened not only because its leadership has been arrested but because its undemocratic party structure paralyses all progress and influence from the left and socialist groups. Above all, it has failed to find a political and strategic answer to a populist dictatorial regime. The largest opposition party, the Kemalist CHP, which agreed to abolish the immunity of HDP members of Parliament, is now itself affected by such measures. While it mobilised several hundred thousands for the "March for Justice", the justice they were demanding was primarily for themselves; supporters of the HDP were forbidden to carry their own party's banners and slogans. In this way, the CHP bravely echoed the government which always seeks to present the Kurdish movement as the greatest of all evils. Although it was maliciously condemned by the government for holding the march, the AKP is well aware of the role it can force the CHP to play, that of a toothless opposition, which provides at least the appearance of a democratic system, rather than a dictatorship.

Even though the opposition is so divided, determined resistance to the regime of the islamist AKP remains vitally important. As powerful as Erdogan presents himself, his regime has an insecure economic and social basis. It is entirely possible that Turkey will be hit by economic crisis, for example, the bursting of the real estate bubble upon which much of its economic success has been built. Equally, the struggle in the Kurdish regions may continue to worsen as could the situation in Syria, into which Turkish troops are poised to march.

Nonetheless, it is not enough to wait for a crisis and a spontaneous insurrection, first and foremost we must demand the reinstatement of basic democratic rights; the lifting of the state of emergency, investigation of electoral fraud during the referendum, the release of all arrested parliamentarians, journalists and students. The second important focus around which to build a political mass mobilisation would be the demand for an investigation of the network of corruption, nepotism and private enrichment around Erdogan and his family and other parts of the AKP.

This will require not only international solidarity but an international socialist organisation that can develop a political programme for building a working class party in Turkey and ending the rule of the AKP.

Turkey and the imperialist states

Today, Turkey is well on the road to dictatorship and opposing this needs more than moralising sermons or pacifism. The reality is that people are arrested every day, picked up from their homes or workplaces, and then disappear behind bars for years. Some are not even allowed to speak to a lawyer. In this situation, condemnations by German politicians ring very hollow; they have contributed significantly to the rise of Erdogan and have supplied his army with weaponry. While they preach about morality, they are still persecuting Kurdish oppositionists and organisations such as the PKK as "terrorists" and they cooperate with Turkey in sealing the EU's external borders against millions of refugees.

The German government and the European Union are not concerned about democracy and human rights, all their declarations on this are the purest hypocrisy. The demands for sanctions against Turkey and for the suspension of negotiations over accession to the EU serve, above all, the long-term economic and geo-strategic interests of German imperialism and the European Union. What disturbs them about Erdogan is not that he has resorted to dictatorial measures but that under him Turkey is no longer a compliant junior partner of the ruling powers of the Western world, particularly Germany and the EU. The threat of sanctions is a reminder to a regional power who really has the whip hand.

In its turn, the Turkish regime is trying to manoeuvre between the rival imperialist powers such as Russia, Germany and the USA. Of course, that will not fundamentally challenge the existing political and economic world order, but it can increase its room for manoeuvre. In addition, the Erdogan regime is not only able to present all opponents as supporters of terrorism but also as unpatriotic forces controlled by foreign powers.

The international left and the workers' movement cannot pursue their solidarity with the opposition in Turkey or with the oppressed and persecuted Kurdish people by following in the wake of imperialist criticism of Turkey. On the contrary, they must distance themselves clearly from the hypocritical policies of the German government and the EU and reject the demand for sanctions. Instead, the solidarity movement should be built around the following demands:

Open the borders and grant asylum to all those fleeing from Turkey! Full citizenship rights for all refugees!

No arms or military aid to Turkey! Withdrawal of all NATO troops!

Lift the ban on the PKK and other Kurdish and Turkish organisations!

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/turkey-one-year-erdogans-counter-coup>