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Turkey

Spirit of war in Turkey: Party of War vs Party of Bread

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The alleged jubilation at the start of the First World War in Germany is called Spirit of 1914 by some people. If we use the same example we can call current public sentiment about war in Turkey Spirit of 2019.

Of course, neither this war spirit in Turkey today, nor the one in Germany in 1914 are spontaneous, they are a construction. If you listen to the public radio station in Turkey, there is a short segment from “the war front” almost in every 15 minutes. Sometimes it is a paragraph from a soldier’s letter, sometimes a short message from a soldier, sometimes just an anthem or declaration. If you turn off the radio and switch to the TV, you can see news reporters pretending they are actually in a war zone with military outfits while they are taking cover from non-existing bullets or a TV commentator posing wearing bulletproof jacket with a sword in his hand declaring he is ready for war. Newspapers talk about industrial workers as “soldiers in factories” while the biggest labour union in the country is preparing a video full of tanks firing artillery shells and special forces soldiers during their military drills, declaring its support for the war and claiming that workers are on the “work-shift for motherland.” [1]

When the unions in public sector enterprises signed a collective bargaining agreement with a pay increase even lower than the official inflation rate, they defended themselves by saying that our country is getting ready for the war and we have to prepare also economically for the war and he claimed those who criticized this collective bargaining agreement are terrorists and their supporters. War is a good excuse for everyone who wants to attack workers’ rights. Erdoğan has initiated this war in a time while country is struggling with an economic crisis and Government has declared a new austerity programme which will cut workers’ rights substantially. [2] Now in the atmosphere of war and national mobilization, it is almost impossible to discuss any of these issues without being labelled as traitor. So basically politics has been divided between two main political sections “The Party of War” and “The Party of Bread”; while Turkey is engaging a war in Rojava, inside the country “Party of War” is also engaging a fierce war against the “Party of Bread”.

When Erdoğan brought out the military uniforms, the opposition also lined up to wear them. The parliamentary opposition which built a de-facto coalition in the local elections in June (and before that, in March) and somehow managed to sustain this coalition or at least cooperation after the local elections has also joined the “Party of War”. During the parliamentary vote on sending troops to war, all parties in the parliament except HDP, voted in favour of the war while the president of the main opposition party CHP declared that they are voting in favour of the military operation even though “this tears their heart out”. But even their support for the military operation was not good enough to save them from harsh criticisms of nationalists for not supporting “our troops” enough. Once they jumped into the ranks of Party of War, nothing would be good enough for their new comrades to accept them as the full members, they will be always asked to do more, until the time comes that they became the new danger for the country.

While war propaganda is going on full speed, any anti-war statement, demonstration or even social media postings are confronted with arrests and attacks. The police declared that 839 people’s social media accounts have incriminating content regarding the military operation and 186 of these people were detained by police. These statements and arrests are just to intimidate and prevent any real criticism against the war. The nationalist mobilization among the society also creates more room for racist/fascist attacks. Just in one week, one person was lynched for speaking Kurdish in public and killed and another person was attacked and hospitalized. Youth organization of Grey Wolves (extreme right movement in Turkey) gathered all their members in front of Ankara University and attacked left-wing students by declaring that “universities are standing side by side with our glorious army” and they will “scrape the terrorists off from the universities” .

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But unfortunately repression is not the only reason for lack of a peace movement. The left in Turkey is atomized and disoriented. The radical left's lack of ability (and lack of desire) to form a political alternative for so many years has led to this situation where there is no political representation for calling for peace, nor any propaganda for workers' rights against the war. With this gap it is too easy for the Turkish ruling classes to win the proletariat to their chauvinistic, militarist war policies. At a time when economic crisis and austerity policies are hitting the workers most, when wages are suppressed with the excuse of war, the urgent duty of the left is to expose how these militaristic policies are also against the daily needs of working class and win millions of members of "Party of Bread" into the peace movement.

PS:

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[1] See [here](#).

[2] Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Treasury and Finance [New Economic Program](#).