

## Worker-run hotel under threat

BY JACK STAUNTON

THE Hotel BAUEN in Buenos Aires, Argentina, occupied by its workers since early 2003, is under threat of eviction by the local government in an effort to return the hotel to its original owners. They charge that since the workers' seizure of control over the hotel was illegal, it must now be returned. Dozens of other worker-managed workplaces and co-operatives in Argentina fear similar attacks, as BAUEN is a key symbol for the labour movement.

Five years ago, some two hundred businesses were taken over by workers not prepared to go without work in the wake of an economic collapse. This "recovered factories" movement not only included industry and factories — such as the Zanon ceramics plant in Neuquen — but also meat packing plants, printers, textiles and even the Hotel BAUEN itself. When the owners abandoned BAUEN in financial chaos, it was up to a nucleus of thirty workers to get a hotel stripped of supplies and with no power back to work again — in 2007 there are 160 staff, all 200 rooms are in use, and a new cafe/bookshop opened out the front of the hotel. They did this from scratch, with no finance and relying on their own hard work.

But a capitalist economy will not allow islands of workers' management to continue to exist — while Zanon is still run by assemblies of its workers, who receive equal pay and short hours, most of the occupations were forced out by legal challenges, supplier boycotts and market pressure. Others became traditional co-operatives, with hierarchical management structures barely distinguishable from those of any other capitalist firm.

While the great popular support for Zanon and the resilience of its workers have allowed it to win numerous court challenges — it recently obtained a three-year extension of its "legal expropriation order" — BAUEN is highly vulnerable. The Zanon workers have raised the demand of "nationalisation under workers' management", maintaining their independent rule but with state financial and legal authority — while the immediate task is to fight off the eviction order, a similar demand would be well-posed to keep the hotel free from a return to the rule of the bosses.

# Turkey's General Election: a victory for democracy

BY ALAN THOMAS

THE recent general elections in Turkey saw a decisive victory for the ruling, mildly Islamist Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AK Party) of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The election, called in light of the Turkish constitutional court's intervention in the presidential selection process and also following sabre-rattling from the Army who have previously toppled Islamist-led governments, saw the AK Party increase its vote by almost 13% on the previous general election. In fact, Erdogan took more than 46% — a margin unheard of since the 1980s. This obviously gives him a mandate for future governance and represents a step forward for Turkish democracy in that the Kemalist generals have not felt able to simply scrap an election which produces a result that they dislike.

However, of perhaps even greater significance for the left is that the new parliament will contain over 20 representatives from a slate dominated by the Demokratik Toplum Partisi, the left-nationalist Kurdish grouping which is strong in the south-east of the country. The ability of Ahmet Türk's party to circumvent its previously excluded status (Turkey's electoral system is rigged to exclude Kurdish parties, as it requires all parties to gain 10% of the national vote to enter parliament even if they are strongly represented in particular region, as the DTP is) came from its tactical decision to run all of its candidates as independents, and have them coalesce under a partisan banner only when they physically enter parliament. What is remarkable about the thawing of Turkish politics under the AKP, is that this appears at this stage to have been more or less universally accepted in political circles. Again, it would also seem that the military's agitation in the Turkish Kurdistan region, including threats to invade the north of Iraq, has been decisively rejected by voters who largely



*Demonstrators for secularism hold pictures of Ataturk during the stand-off between the Islamist-rooted government and the army over presidential elections earlier this year*

split between the AKP and DTP in that area.

Furthermore, other left-wing figures were elected by this method, including Ufuk Uras, the he former leader of the leftist Özgürlük ve Dayanışma Partisi. The ÖDP is a broadly left-social democratic party, in which Trotskyists have had some limited intervention in the past.

Meanwhile, the elections were a disaster for the "old" Kemalist opposition Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi which barely increased its vote, and which actually lost seats due to the eccentricities of Turkey's electoral system. The feared ultra-nationalist surge in light of the arrest of liberal author Orhan Pamuk and murder of Armenian newspaper editor Hrant Dink. also did not happen, with the fascist Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi coming a distant third, though it did gain sufficient votes to re-enter parliament.

The election provides the left outside of Turkey with a political choice. It has decisively demonstrated that the "standard" model used by many on the left of a stark choice between an anti-democratic ruling elite and an ultra-conservative "anti-imperialist" mass is simply nonsense. In the AKP there is a party which has reached its dominant position by all but dropping its Islamist political frontage, and softening its image with the wider public. In the DTP there is now a liberatory force in national politics to which the left can relate, as well as one which has a significant left wing of its own. The elections are excellent news therefore from all democratic perspectives, and it is to be hoped that the left will engage with the opportunities that they represent.

## WORKERS' NEWS ROUND-UP

BY PABLO VELASCO

### IRAN

#### Free Salehi and Ossanlou Now!

A demonstration to secure the freedom of imprisoned worker activists and support the independent labour movement in Iran was about to take place as we went to press.

The protest was due to take place on 9 August outside the Iranian embassy in London and at other embassies around the world. It is part of a week of solidarity with workers in Iran, called by exiled Iranian workers' organisations and the International Transport Workers' Federation.

Salehi was imprisoned in April this year and Ossanlou arrested in July. Many other workers were arrested on May Day this year.

### CHINA

TWO big strikes have taken place in China in recent weeks, according to reports on the China Labour Bulletin website.

More than 3,000 bus drivers in the northeastern city of Jinzhou went out on strike on 19 July, demanding higher wages and protesting at the municipal bus company's privatisation plans.

All bus routes were cancelled and hundreds of drivers staged a protest outside the Jinzhou Municipal Party building. The city-wide strike caused serious disruption and prevented many commuters from getting to and from work, and according to

many blogs from Jinzhou in the early stages of the strike, most people were sympathetic to the bus drivers' cause.

By 23 July, most of the drivers had returned to work but over one thousand remained out on strike. The current status of the strike is unclear.

Some weeks earlier, on 29 June more than 3,000 workers at the giant Shuangma Cement Plant in Mianyang, Sichuan Province, downed tools and went on strike to protest against the company's proposed severance package.

Shuangma, a former state-owned enterprise, was in the process of restructuring after being acquired in May by the world's leading building materials company, Lafarge. Shuangma's proposed severance package of 1,380 yuan for each year of employment was the equivalent of the average monthly wage in Mianyang and included a clause which meant workers agreed to forgo all other retirement, medical and welfare benefits. When this package was presented to the workers on 27 June as the company's final offer, it was immediately rejected. The strike has now ended but it is still unclear as to whether or not the workers have agreed to management's terms.

The response by management and the local authorities and police to both strikes was to seal the town off from the outside world to prevent news leaking out. However, in the early stages of the strikes at least, internet postings and blogs provided a valuable insight into the day to day developments of these significant protests.

Chinese workers may be using the run up to the Olympics in Beijing next year to press their demands.

More information:

<http://www.china-labour.org.hk>

### PALESTINE

On 17 July Hamas gangs raided the Gaza and Khan Younis offices of the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions, as part of their attempt to clamp down on democratic rights and impose an Islamist mini-state. Seizing property from the PGFTU, Hamas interrogated trade unionists and have maintained an occupation of the union's offices, paralysing their activities.

This came as a result of the union's refusal to subordinate themselves to Hamas's rule, which has also included a wave of attacks on Fatah and the free press. But this is nothing new — early this year three assassination attempts were made by Hamas on Rasem Al Bayari, the union's deputy general secretary, which included a rocket attack on his home in January and the bombing of his office in February.

Palestinian labour movement organisations are not only under attack from Hamas.

On 7 July the Israeli army had occupied the PGFTU's Ramallah base, smashed up the offices and arrested two people. Just one week later, the PGFTU's long-time leader Shaher Saed, himself a Fatah sympathiser, was forcibly taken from a Nablus restaurant by Fatah militiamen in masks.

Saed said the men threatened him with violence if he did not resign from his trade union position. He was released after around half an hour, but quickly resigned his role in order to protect his life.

In the face of these sectarian militias, the Palestinian labour movement badly needs our solidarity.