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## ***Turkish government persists with mass COVID-19 death policy***

As the COVID-19 pandemic rages internationally, the Turkish government's determination to end social-distancing measures and keep schools open in the interests of the ruling class is leading to mass slaughter.

According to Worldometers, Turkey ranks sixth in the world in total number of cases with nearly 8.3 million persons infected since the pandemic began. The number of daily new cases in Turkey has been over 20,000 since the end of August and around 30,000 in November. Since the second half of August, 200 to 300 people have died of COVID-19 every day.



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister of Turkey (Paul Morigi Photography/Flickr)

While the official death toll exceeds 72,500, this is clearly far below the actual number of deaths. According to calculations of Güçlü Yaman, a member of the Pandemic Working Group of the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), excess deaths caused by the pandemic in Turkey reached 208,000 on November 4.

This tragic situation is the direct product of the “social murder” policy implemented by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s government, with the support of the bourgeois opposition parties and trade unions. Insisting on keeping all non-essential workplaces and schools open, the government lifted almost all measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

Erdoğan emphasized on Monday his determination to continue this policy. He bluntly stated his government’s priorities, declaring: “From the early days of the pandemic, we have built a system that will not allow any disruption in industrial production. By doing so, we have not only maintained our export volume, but also boosted it.”

Trying to normalize preventable deaths and infections, Erdoğan added: “The numbers of patients, admissions, ICU patients and deaths are all at a manageable level.”

According to the weekly incidence data for October 23-29 announced by Health Minister Fahrettin Koca on Sunday, the northwestern city of Karabük leads with 534 cases per 100,000 people; in only 8 of Turkey’s 81 major cities is it less than 50 per 100,000. It is 293 in Istanbul (population 16 million) and 287 in the Turkish capital, Ankara.

As schools become a hotbed of coronavirus, with many teachers and students infected, social opposition is growing against sending children to unsafe schools so parents can be sent to work. According to a survey by NG Araştırma Şirketi, 76 percent of parents think that “reopening of schools will lead to an increase in the number of coronavirus cases.”

However, Erdoğan has declared, “The debate on whether schools will stay open or close should come to an end. Face-to-face education in schools will definitely continue.”

According to Health Ministry data, 35 percent of new cases in October were youth under the age of 19. If students tested positive for COVID-19 in Turkey, the classroom is quarantined, not the school. Moreover, to stop in-person education in a classroom, there

must be at least two cases. If there is only one case, the class continues as if nothing had happened.

The information provided to *bianet* by Eğitim-İş union official Orhan Yıldırım shows contagion in schools reaching gigantic proportions. According to Yıldırım, at least 1,000 classrooms are quarantined every day in Turkey. “We express the number of closed classes per day in thousands. Every day, some classes are closed while some classes reopen,” he said.

COVID-19 is killing children and causing long-term health problems. The government refuses to disclose data on teachers and children. However, it is known that one of the latest child victims of COVID-19 was Yiğit Parlak, an 11-year-old secondary school student in Samsun.

He was a child who was more vulnerable to the COVID-19 due to his chronic lung disease. According to his father, he was treated for coronavirus in the hospital for 12 days after being diagnosed with COVID-19, but shortly after returning home he fell ill again and tragically died.

Nonetheless, Education Minister Mahmut Özer said, “Our biggest advantage in keeping schools open right now is the high number of vaccinated teachers. We are in the decision to continue face-to-face education by revising the pandemic measures from time to time.” He announced that 87 percent of 1.2 million teachers received two doses of vaccine. However, only 58 percent of the population in Turkey is fully vaccinated, and vaccination has come to a standstill.

Moreover, teachers are heavily affected by COVID-19 and are forced to work despite being exposed to virus. Yıldırım commented: “We can say that 10 percent of the teachers are Covid positive or contacts. We talk about a number about 100,000 and this is the weekly number.”

Yıldırım all but admitted that there are no precautions in schools, and that the government implements a policy of mass infection, declaring: “[The ministry] doesn’t send teachers who had contact [with COVID patients] home as well. In fact, if one teacher in a school has COVID, all teachers should be considered contacts. However, they don’t implement

this but just send the COVID-positive one home. They don't consider [students] in a classroom whose teacher is COVID-positive, either, and this causes the [COVID] numbers to appear lower.”

Health Minister Koca admitted this murderous policy at the end of October, declaring: “Unfortunately, the spread will continue until herd immunity is achieved.”

Ümmühani Yeşilkaya, 33, who died from COVID-19 during her pregnancy in October, was one of the teachers who fell victim to this herd immunity policy. As her condition worsened, doctors decided to give birth by cesarean section to save the baby's life, but the mother tragically died.

The government is trampling upon scientists' calls for a more humane policy. A member of the government's Science Board, Prof. Alper Şener said: “In case of a jump to 60,000 or 70,000 cases per day, there may be situations such as lockdown and closing of schools.”

Immediately afterwards, two ministers stressed their determination to keep schools open. While Education Minister Özer said face-to-face education would continue, Health Minister Koca said, “I came across a news article that talks about the possibility of schools closing. This news is false. Our Science Board does not have such an agenda.”

Although the vaccination age has been reduced to 12 in Turkey, vaccination at that age is not obligatory, and many children aged 12-18 are still unvaccinated. Children under the age of 12 are not in the vaccine program. Koca announced: “We do not think [to vaccinate] under the age of 12 in Turkey. It will not be correct for the next period for now.” While Koca does not take the trouble to scientifically explain this position, children under the age of 12 continue to be sent to schools under unsafe conditions.

The “herd immunity” policy that created this disaster is implemented with the support of the entire political establishment, including the pseudo-left parties and trade unions. The so-called opposition parties organize crowded ceremonies, celebrations, or festivals in municipalities they control, as if there were no pandemic.

Similarly, education unions, including Eğitim-İş, have never demanded the closure of unsafe schools. On the contrary, they advocated opening schools, claiming that children must not fall behind in education.

Against this alliance of death, the only social force that can stop the pandemic and save lives is the international working class. Workers must demand and fight for nonessential workplaces and schools be closed until zero cases are reached, together with mass vaccination, widespread testing, contact tracing and isolation of infected persons and other public health measures. There must be full income support for all workers affected by these measures.

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