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Sosyalist Eşitlik Grubu (Turkey)

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Hold those responsible for the earthquake disaster to account! Oppose the anti-Syrian campaign and police crackdown in Turkey!

After the massive earthquakes struck both sides of the Turkey-Syria border a week ago, the official death toll has approached 35,000. Hope is dwindling for tens of thousands of people still feared to be under the rubble. Thousands of buildings have been rendered uninhabitable and millions of people have been left homeless. Basic social services are still not provided in many places. There is a social catastrophe and humanitarian crisis in the two countries that directly or indirectly affects tens of millions of people.



Turkish rescue workers carry Ergin Guzeloglan, 36, to an ambulance after pulling him out from a collapsed building five days after an earthquake in Hatay, southern Turkey, early Saturday, February 11, 2023. [AP Photo/Can Ozer]

In Turkey, both the failure to take any safety precautions, despite the fact that a major earthquake was expected in the region, and the total failure of the official search, rescue and relief operation have led to enormous social anger against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government and the capitalist system as a whole for enabling this social massacre.

People protested against governors and ministers in many places in the 10 provinces affected by the earthquake. Most recently in Diyarbakır, protesters against Justice Minister Bekir Bozdağ were detained. However, the government and the entire ruling class are aware that social anger is explosive and extends throughout society.

The ruling class is sitting on a social powder keg. Despite Erdoğan's attempts to blame the earthquake disaster on "fate," the masses disagree with this fatalism and have lost confidence in the capitalist political establishment. In Turkey, where the "let it spread" policy against the COVID-19 pandemic led to over 300,000 excess deaths in three years, there is a prevailing feeling that the tens of thousands of lives lost in the earthquake could have been saved if necessary measures had been taken.

Under these conditions, a dangerous and misleading media campaign is being whipped up with the encouragement of a faction of the ruling class. In the earthquake-affected area, people, especially Syrians, who have never been tried or convicted in any way, are being beaten as "thieves" or "looters" in actions captured on video. These criminal actions, which appear to involve police officers, are shared on social media to legitimize them.

The Sosyalist Eşitlik Grubu (Socialist Equality Group) calls on workers, intellectuals and youth to oppose this fascistic campaign. At least 30,000 people have died and tens of thousands are still under the rubble, in a disaster whose consequences could have been prevented. There is clearly a carefully coordinated campaign aiming to make alleged incidents of "theft" by Syrians the main issue and to legitimize extrajudicial executions.

The rightful anger of those who lost their loved ones and homes in the affected region, and the millions of people who share their grief, is buried by false news reports. As always, these reports scapegoat the most vulnerable members of society.

This right-wing campaign serves to hide, and even whitewash, the obvious responsibility of the government and the ruling class for these preventable mass deaths.

In fact, the January-June 2022 report of the Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change Ministry identified, one by one, the buildings that would collapse in such an earthquake. The Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) reports revealed that the state was unprepared for big earthquakes. It was known that the

“construction amnesties” brought to parliament by the government, which were not opposed by the bourgeois opposition parties, paved the way for this destruction and the mass deaths.

Under these conditions, while officials across the political establishment and the state should be facing trial for mass murder, no official has been arrested so far. In places where major earthquakes are expected, especially in Istanbul, still nothing is being done. In fact, immediate official action must be taken to build earthquake-resistant buildings and cities to prevent larger social disasters.

This fascistic media campaign has been intensified since the government made so-called “looting” incidents, which it had previously called “isolated,” one of the justifications for declaring a state of emergency. Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) spokesperson Ömer Çelik said on Friday, “We will be extremely ruthless in the face of looting incidents. They will live with this shame for the rest of their lives.”

The Victory (Zafer) Party, a breakaway from the far-right Good Party, has been particularly prominent in the anti-Syrian lie campaign. The Good Party is the major ally of the Kemalist Republican People’s Party (CHP) in the Nation Alliance.

The Victory Party’s leader Ümit Özdağ targeted Syrians after the earthquake, making numerous false claims on his Twitter account. Although each of the allegations was refuted, he continued his lies without fear of any legal sanction.

This party is trying to divert the massive social anger that has developed after the earthquake and to divide the working class with a foul resort to anti-Syrian chauvinism.

Anti-refugee campaigns in Turkey did not start after the earthquake disaster. The millions of Syrians who fled the destruction and death caused by the war for regime-change in Syria launched by the NATO powers, including Turkey, in 2011 have been scapegoated by the entire political establishment, especially the bourgeois opposition parties, for years. The victims of the crimes of the imperialist powers and the Turkish bourgeoisie have been hit hard by the earthquake on both sides of the border.

In Syria, the people have not only witnessed the destruction of their war-torn homes due to the quakes. The crippling sanctions of the United States and the European Union have worsened the situation, while the imperialist powers have turned a blind eye to the catastrophe in Syria.

Many Syrians living in the earthquake zone in Turkey were trapped under the rubble. The survivors have faced discrimination in the provision of aid, such as tents and food, due to a

long-standing chauvinist campaign in the country. Now they are being targeted as looters and thieves.

The attempt to strip people of their right to a trial and subject them to lynch-mob attacks is a serious warning to the working class. This fascistic violence, which today targets the most vulnerable, i.e., Syrians, could tomorrow be directed against workers and against people involved in relief activities for earthquake victims in the region. This violence, as history clearly demonstrates, is a threat to the emerging movement of the working class.

In fact, the ruling class and the political establishment are troubled that the impotence of the state was exposed in the eyes of the masses after the earthquake on the one side, and that millions of working people and youth spontaneously responded to the disaster in a much stronger way on the other.

Since last Monday, tens of millions of people across the country and around the world have mobilized to help those in the affected region in an important act of solidarity. Many people traveled to the region voluntarily. They are trying to help search and rescue workers and earthquake victims in places where the state is unable to provide basic needs such as electricity, water, shelter, sanitation and security.

It is possible to build earthquake-resistant cities and prevent natural disasters from turning into mass slaughter. For this, the great mobilization and anger of the masses must be armed with a socialist program, made conscious and mobilized against the capitalist system, the main cause of this catastrophe. The only way to achieve this is through the international unity and political independence of the working class.

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