

TURKEY/SYRIA EARTHQUAKE

**DEVASTATION WORSENER BY CAPITALISM'S FAILURES
BUILD A MOVEMENT TO KICK OUT ERDOGAN!**

**YOLSUZLUK VE KÂR DÜZENİNİN FELAKETİ
ERDOĞAN'I DEVIRMEK İÇİN KİTLESEL BİR MÜCADELE İNŞA EDELİM**

A devastating earthquake – with a magnitude of 7.7, at a relatively shallow depth – struck south-eastern Turkey and northern Syria in the early hours of 6 February, killing more than 36,000 people and leaving thousands injured with the numbers still growing. The earthquake was followed by more than 648 aftershocks, including one that was almost as large as the first. The epicentre of the earthquake is Kahramanmaraş, a city close to the Turkey-Syria border.

The World Health Organisation estimates that 23 million people are affected in one of the most deprived regions of Turkey and in war-torn northern Syria.

This is the biggest and most destructive earthquake in Turkey since the Izmit earthquake of 1999 near Istanbul, which killed more than 17,000 people.

The scale of devastation shows that nothing has fundamentally changed in 24 years since. Yet again, thousands of buildings that do not comply with building codes have collapsed and the state has failed to respond to rescue people and provide the basic necessities for survivors. The scale of devastation shows that nothing has fundamentally changed in 24 years since. Yet again, thousands of buildings that do not comply with building codes have collapsed and the state has failed to respond to rescue people and provide the basic necessities for survivors.



The government aid agency said the day after the earthquake hit, that more than 11,000 buildings were reported to have collapsed. Even hospitals have collapsed. Severely damaged, airports and motorways could not be used in the first few days after the earthquakes.

Shockingly, locals report the collapse of newly built buildings. Belated new construction standards were brought in after 1999, but these have not been enforced; the corrupt government has turned a blind eye to violations. Profiteering property developers and construction companies have used shortcuts and cheap materials to save costs rather than constructing earthquake-resilient buildings. Moreover, video footage of care patients waiting outside in the freezing cold, with no state or local authority assistance, have gone viral on social media. In the cities, towns and villages ruined by the earthquakes, reports estimated more than 150,000 still trapped beneath rubble, 24 hrs after disaster struck.

The failure of the government to send adequate rescue teams is criminal. Many people trapped under the rubble are dying waiting for help. Locals and volunteers are trying to help their families, in most cases using their bare hands as there are no tools or equipment provided by the authorities. Hatay, a multicultural city that borders Syria, has been one of the worst affected cities, thousands waiting for days for rescue teams to arrive.

On TV, Gokhan Zan, a famous football coach in Hatay, pleaded to officials to use the unused excavators in the city. We would add that all vehicles and equipment that can be of use should be expropriated from construction companies. There are severe shortages of fuel, food, water, toilet facilities, medicines, tents, electricity and many more necessities in the regions affected. Most people are still sleeping in their cars, or staying outside in the freezing cold. Empty properties and rooms in hotels must be taken over to house the many people left homeless.

In his televised speech on the third day, after the earthquakes the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan admitted that the government couldn't respond effectively on the first two days.

However, it was those two days when proper planning, coordination and rescue operations were most needed to save lives. It took 60 hours for specially trained, experienced miners from Zonguldak (a coal mining city in northern Turkey) to be transported to the affected region.

Inevitably many questions about building safety and the government response to the crisis will be asked. There should be an independent inquiry by trade unions and local communities to identify the property developers and government officials responsible for the scale of the disaster.

Turkey and Syria are earthquake prone countries. But it is not necessarily the earthquakes that kills; it is the poorly constructed buildings, profiteering, and the lack of planning, coordination and resources that kills. In other words, it is capitalism that kills.

The horrible scenes we are witnessing are yet another indictment of the failings of the rotten capitalist system that puts profit first rather than the safety of people.

In war-torn Syria, infrastructure was already very weak because of the civil war and continuing economic sanctions. Authorities in both the government-held and rebel-held areas in northern Syria failed in their response.

'Where is the state support?'

'Where is the state support?' is repeated by people across Turkey. The abysmal response to the disaster is likely to add to the growing resentment against president Erdogan. His popularity was already historically low as a result of high inflation, which is predicted to stand at 121% as of January 2023.

Trade unions, left-wing organisations, community groups and thousands of volunteers are trying to rescue trapped people in the rubble, and provide basic necessities for people who survived. These initiatives are promising and can be a stepping stone towards the formation of democratic local neighbourhood teams, made up of workers and local communities, to coordinate rescue operations and provision of basic necessities in the immediate term.

There is an incredible mobilisation of ordinary people across Turkey, and also from other parts of the world, to send basic necessities to affected areas. Ordinary people are making donations to non-governmental organisations that do not have links with the government. This is a reflection of the low levels of trust in the government. Erdogan's party still lead in the polls with a small margin, before this disaster.

Despite being one of the richest countries in the world, with huge resources and skills, the Turkish state has failed miserably to respond to this disaster. Rather than investing in communities and making sure all buildings are earthquake resilient, the profiteering rich pocketed the money. There was no plan or preparation to deal with such an event, as the government and big business are mainly motivated by their short-term interests.

JOIN THE SOCIALISTS!

The Socialist Party has supported the strike wave and offered our ideas for a way forward. Our members have campaigned in the unions for national action and coordination. We have argued for workers to all strike together, and also argue the case for a new workers' party. Despite the cost of living and growing poverty, there is actually enormous wealth in society – it's just not in our hands!

Join us to fight for a socialist society! Where the economy is owned and controlled and planned democratically in the interests of the vast majority, to end poverty, inequality, oppression and environmental destruction.

The government not only ignored construction companies that violated building codes, but Erdogan's government issued a zoning amnesty in 2018 for illegally constructed buildings, without making sure they were safe to be inhabited. The government made \$3 billion in revenue from applicants who registered their illegal buildings.

State of emergency

President Erdogan has declared a state of emergency in affected cities. It will cover ten cities and last for three months, ending just before the presidential and parliamentary elections due to be held on 14 May. The government wants to silence any opposition and fears the spread of any information that exposes its incompetence. The state of emergency gives sweeping powers for the police to conduct stop and search in the area, it prohibits any protest and the production and distribution of unauthorised newspapers and leaflets.

Erdogan and the ruling party will use the earthquake as an opportunity to increase their powers and trample on democratic rights. Given the appalling response from the government, it cannot be ruled out that the May elections could be cancelled or postponed.

The earthquake graphically illustrates the failings of a decaying capitalist system. Officials in both countries have failed to provide homes, safety and basic resources for people affected by such disasters. Without any doubt, this earthquake will deepen the crisis for Erdogan's regime and Turkish capitalism. It is too early to gauge the mood in the society, but the anger against the regime is already clearly visible.

Socialist policies, such as an emergency mass, earthquake-resilient, affordable house-building programme, and a fully funded national health service with inflation-proof pay rises for health workers, are required to begin to heal this tragedy. Alongside these immediate measures, the nationalisation of housing, food and water supply industries under democratic working-class control is necessary, in order to stop profiteering by big business.

But we cannot trust Erdogan or the main opposition alliance led by the Republican People's Party (CHP). It is an alliance that defends the capitalist system that prioritises profit over safety and the needs of ordinary people. They also share responsibility in the scale of this disaster. We need a mass workers' party that fights for socialist policies.

Only with a socialist planned economy, where production and distribution is under the democratic control of the working class, can we create a world where the needs of the whole of society are met rather than just those of the billionaires.

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