

The earthquake in Syria and Turkey

Anarchist Communist Group

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Contents

Let's build solidarity and the struggle against this order .	4
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Two earthquakes hit south east Turkey and north west Syria on February 6th, as many will know, causing the deaths of at least 44,000 according to latest figures, but with the likely final figure being as high as 100,000.

The earthquake affected seven provinces in Turkey and encompassed an area of 150 kilometres with a population of 13 million. The earthquake triggered landslides, rockfalls and the collapse of many buildings. It hit railway lines, airports, highways and bridges, as well as affecting energy and communication lines. Both the Assad regime in Syria and the Erdoğan regime in Turkey have given the go ahead to construction companies to build flimsy buildings where the population is packed together, despite the area being well known as having a high risk of earthquakes. In 1999 whole streets and indeed whole towns and villages were demolished in the quakes.

Many died instantly, and many who were buried alive died of their injuries, hunger and thirst. The situation was aggravated by a severe winter storm.

The Erdoğan regime failed to act for two days, thanks to bureaucratic nature of the administration. The Army was mobilised but problems of communication hindered their operation, as it did the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority, controlled by Erdoğan's sidekicks. At the same time there was a clampdown on anarchist and left groups organising their own aid to the victims, alongside a propaganda campaign via the state-controlled media to show how effective the regime was in handling the crisis. There was also a clamp down on social media, using the excuse that negative propaganda was being disseminated. This at a time when people buried beneath the rubble were attempting to use social media and the internet to attempt to communicate with rescue teams.

Any independent grassroots aid and that organised by local municipalities has been shut down and only action organised by the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority was permitted.

Erdoğan then announced a state of emergency for the quake stricken regime on February 8th, using the flimsy excuses of looting and lawlessness.

The Army and security forces have arrested people taking stuff from empty buildings, handing out severe beatings resulting in the death of at least one man. In this they have been assisted by right wing militias.

After the deaths of over 18,000 in quakes in the 1990s, new policies were introduced to demolish unsafe buildings and replace them with

quake-proof architecture. However, the State turned a blind eye to the flouting of these new regulations by property developers. A boom in investing in property enabled this. Many buildings were constructed with shoddy materials and people were packed into high rise structures. For a fee to the government, contractors and developers received exemptions for their building programmes. 75,000 exemptions were granted!

The situation was even worse in Syria. The area is controlled by various rebel forces and the Syrian government failed to provide aid to the region. Both the Assad regime and its backers in the Russian government limited access to aid organisations across the border in Turkey. Eventually, the Assad regime was pressured to temporarily allow access to international aid organisations.

Assad will manipulate aid and assistance to make sure that the areas held by opposition forces are deprived of such help. In this he is being enabled by the Putin regime.

We publish below the statement of various anarchist groups in different cities in Turkey.

The following is syndicated from veryuzupostasi.org.

On February 6th, anarchists from different cities issued a joint declaration on the aftermath of the earthquake. Here is their full statement as published on the social media account Sandıkta Çözülmez (Unsolvable at the Ballot Box)

Let's build solidarity and the struggle against this order

On February 6, we were shaken by two earthquakes, one at 4:17 a.m. in Pazarcık district of Maraş with a magnitude of 7.7 and the other at 1:24 p.m. in Elbistan district of Maraş with a magnitude of 7.6. Even according to official statements, we are already facing a disaster in which thousands of people have lost their lives, thousands have been injured and hundreds of thousands of people have been directly affected.

Although earthquakes are natural events, what happens next is beyond an inevitable "natural" disaster. First of all, it should be emphasized that the centralization, dense urbanisation and metropolitanisation caused by capitalism lie at the root of why earthquakes are so destructive. However, this earthquake has once again revealed the consequences

of capitalist development in Turkey in recent years being based on real estate, rent and plunder.

Despite warnings from scientists for years, despite the fact that it was known that there would be a major earthquake in that region in the near future and what should be done, the fact that nothing was done, and the continuation of uncontrolled and unplanned construction despite the so-called earthquake laws, invited this disaster. Hospitals, police stations and buildings even a few years old were destroyed, roads and bridges were rendered unusable.

The disaster was compounded by the “performance” of the state after the earthquake. Although the first day was very critical, the state did not use a significant part of its means. The much-vaunted massive militarist apparatus did not act when people’s lives were at stake; search and rescue teams and aid could not reach many places even after hours.

While the state did not mobilise its power, the natural feelings of solidarity that we know very well exist among the workers, the oppressed and the peoples were roused. Thousands of people mobilised with their own resources to rescue people under the debris and to show solidarity with the earthquake victims. In a very short time, an enormous mobilisation of social solidarity began all over the country.

While people were struggling for their lives, the government again resorted to the usual methods to absolve itself of responsibility. Along with the discourse that Turkey is an earthquake zone and that these disasters are almost fate, a representation of “national mourning” was put on stage, embellished with the reading of the sala from mosques and the calling of those who lost their lives as “martyrs”. Again, they try to conceal the interests of the ruling classes behind nationalism.

On the other hand, the contractors who built buildings with bad materials in unsuitable places, the opportunists who hid basic necessities and sold them at exorbitant prices, and those who did not see that this system stole our lives, did not hesitate to accuse the earthquake victims of thievery and looting because they took the food and rescue materials they needed. Some fascists, trying to cover up what the state did and did not do, were not even ashamed to openly suggest that “soldiers should be ordered to open fire on looters”.

Hidden in this shamelessness is the fact that the main duty of the state is not to protect people’s lives, but to defend the interests of capital and their own power at all costs.

Capitalism has once again killed us horribly and massively. Capitalist barbarism and those who benefit from this order, all capitalists who feed directly or indirectly from construction rent, all central governments and local administrations that have so far pursued policies based on construction rent and the plunder of cities– in other words all parties and politicians of order– are responsible for this mass murder. Today we have been deeply wounded. We, as millions of workers and oppressed, will heal our wounds by building solidarity. But we call out to the actors of that politics of order: we will never forget what you have done and what you have not done. We have lost friends, families, loved ones, but we do not mourn. We feel anger, we hold grudges.

A free world will blossom in our anger.

Anarşist Kütüphane



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