



Turkish mine disaster: this was no accident, this was murder!

Svenja Spunck Fri, 23/05/2014 - 12:42

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On 13 May 13 the worst coal mine disaster in Turkey's history, took place at Soma in Manisa province, in western Turkey. But it was not simply the accident it is being portrayed as ? it was a crime by capital against labour.

Thus far, 301 deaths have been acknowledged. At the time two shifts of miners ? some 787 - were underground, in itself a breach of the country's safety laws. Turkey has an appalling safety record in its mines. A report in 2008 placed the figure for deaths per million tons as the world's highest. In 2012, 78, and 2013, 95 miners were killed in accidents.

Soon facts emerged which proved that this was no purely ?natural disaster?.

Though no official report has yet been made there are credible accounts that a malfunction in the power distributor of the mine led to a small explosion, which should have been isolated from the explosive gas by the security system. But this was either disabled or defective at the time. Also the emergency air conditioning, which should pump in oxygen and pump out the poisonous firedamp and carbon monoxide gasses, was also not working. As a result most workers were killed not by the explosion but by asphyxiation. Why might these vital safety features be neglected or actually turned off? The answer is to save money and make profits.

The mine was privatised in 2005 and the new owner Alp Gürkan is a strong supporter of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP Party. Since privatisation he has lowered coal production costs to one seventh their previous level; boasting ?we're a role model of production in the industry? and explaining his secret; ?It's the dynamics of the private industry.? The average wage for a miner, by the way, is only 360 euros per month.

In fact it is chronic cost cutting - including on safety and the increased overlapping of shifts - in short the superexploitation of the workforce with no concern whatsoever about their safety ? that explains his ?success?. Ironically only two weeks before opposition party deputies had tried to raise a debate in parliament, about new legislation on safety conditions in the mine but were voted down by AKP deputies, who instead wanted to discuss progress in building the third Bosphorus bridge.

SOMA Mining has had tremendous political clout which protected it against investigation. It pays an important role ? along with other c such firms - in the systemic corruption that ensures Erdoğan and AKP is repeated election victories. It is one of the biggest free-of-charge coal providers to the party for its ?charitable coal sack ? distributions. Also miners recently reported that they were threatened with dismissal unless they voted for the AKP in the recent elections.

Erdoğan's first comment about the ?accident? enraged surviving miners and their grieving families: ?Miners are destined to die?. No wonder his visit to Soma produced a riot with heavy repression from the police, using water cannons on miners and their families.

During his visit to the town, Erdoğan himself physically attacked a worker who had lost relatives in the disaster just because he booed at him. His explanation was simple: ?You boo, you get smacked.? His adviser Yusuf Yerkel was actually caught on camera attacking a bystander. This sort of thuggishness is all part of Erdoğan's ?strong man? image a strength he and his party exert directly on behalf of Turkish capitalism.

Action

But the explosion at the Soma mine has led to a social explosion across the country. People in big cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara and the capital of the Kurdish region, Diyarbakir, gathered to demand the resignation of the Government. Pupils from schools and university students went on strike to show their solidarity with the miners. The national trade union association Türk-İSİD is called a "Day of mourning" and a work stoppage. The left trade Union federation, DISK called on its members to join a one-day general strike.

Nevertheless on the streets the police continued cracking down hard against the demonstrators and there have been many casualties. Once again ? as over battles over the Taksim Square occupation in 2013 - Erdoğan's government showed that it would tolerate no criticism. On 22. May, the police killed Ugur Kurt, a thirty year old, when they fired into a commemoration of Berkin Elvan, who was killed during the Gezi Park protests. In Soma, they banned all protests and arrested lawyers of the miners families.

Internationally working class organisations should express our sincerest sorrow for the deceased workers and their families but we should also condemn the government that condones such deaths to guarantee the profits of the bourgeoisie. We must stand side by side with the demonstrators who take to the streets and defend themselves against this inhuman policy!

But calling for the government resign ? important as it is - will be insufficient!

All those responsible for the death of hundreds must be held accountable! The documents computer records that show the links of private profit and bribery between big business, political parties and the state must be brought to light by workers inspections. Not only the mines but also construction companies and all those that violate safety regulations must be expropriated without compensation and under the control of the working class!

This requires political mass demonstrations across the country and strikes that extend into an indefinite political mass strike ? organised by action councils rooted in the factories and popular neighbourhoods!

? Stop the ruthless exploitation of workers! For an economy without exploitation and oppression!

? Long live International Solidarity!

? Her Yer Soma - Soma is everywhere. Her yer Direnis - Resistance is everywhere!

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