

A report from Tokyo

12 March 2011

The following is an edited report, sent last night from a World Socialist Web Site reader in Tokyo.

Japan has been hit by the strongest quake ever recorded in this island nation. Even more damage was caused by the following tsunami, with tsunami warnings now extending as far as North and South America, i.e., the whole of the Pacific.

The quake struck at about 2.46 p.m. off the coast of the north-eastern prefecture of Miyagi and was strongly felt throughout the main island of Honshu and the northern island of Hokkaido, and especially in the Iwate and Fukushima prefectures. Within hours of its striking, there are 91 confirmed deaths related to different accidents caused by the quake or tsunami throughout the country. Hundreds more are feared dead in the tsunami-hit city of Sendai alone. There are reports of oil refineries and factories in flames. Some nuclear power stations are down as well, with admissions of possible radioactivity emissions.

Aftershocks are still ongoing and too numerous to count. Without any doubt, the falling night is going to be hardest on the residents of the prefectures closest to the centre of the quake. They are completely shut off from the rest of the country, with no power, gas, phones and no news reaching us in the capital. Most of the people will have to spend the night relying on their own resources, even though it is snowing in the whole region.

As far as the capital is concerned, millions of homes in Tokyo have suffered power and gas outages, and all the train services of the biggest railway company, Japan Railways East, have been discontinued at least until Saturday morning, pending security inspections of the tracks. Even though at the time of writing there are

reports of some private metro lines resuming service around 9 p.m., this will still undoubtedly leave millions of commuters stranded in downtown Tokyo, with no means of returning home and without shelter from the cold.

Taxis and functional bus services are reported to have waiting lines of four hours or longer, and mobile phone services are not functioning, so that a lot of people may not be able to confirm the safety or whereabouts of their family until the morning. Traffic jams, with both vehicles and pedestrians congested for miles, can be seen from the helicopter shots in the news, and firefighter and ambulance sirens can be heard all the time. Significant damage to structures and buildings can be seen, and the landmark Tokyo Tower is said to have been bent. Many web pages are also inaccessible, overwhelmed with people seeking information.

As the night falls, the measures to alleviate the damage are being discussed in terms of cost-effectiveness and the budget deficit. The hardest hit will be the working class, either directly through property and job losses, or indirectly through rising prices of less available goods and damage to local infrastructure, to be repaired at public expense, entailing cuts elsewhere.



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