

# Turkish government lied on COVID-19 infection and death statistics

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The COVID-19 pandemic’s resurgence in Turkey is intensifying, due to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s back-to-work campaign, supported by the bourgeois opposition parties and the union bureaucracy. Officially, around 1,500 new infections are recorded daily, and the total number of COVID-19 patients has reached 315,000. The daily death toll is between 65 and 70, and total deaths have passed 8,100.

On Wednesday, however, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca confirmed widespread suspicions that the Turkish government has deliberately lied to the public in order to downplay the severity of the pandemic and force workers back to work.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a COVID-19 case is “A person with laboratory confirmation of COVID-19 infection, irrespective of clinical signs and symptoms.” However, Koca said: “Not all cases are patients, because there are those who show no symptoms at all even though their tests come back positive. These amount to the vast majority,” admitting that from the beginning of the pandemic, “We have given this as the daily number of patients.”

When Koca said last month that “The number of people who have no symptoms and who are only vectors does not matter, as long as they do not infect someone else,” the WSWS explained that he “all but admitted that ‘herd immunity’ is his government’s strategy against the pandemic.”

After the health minister has acknowledged that his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has lied about and downplayed the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey, endangering public health, the Turkish Medical Association (TTB) issued a statement denouncing the government.

“We have been saying this for six months. You haven’t run the process transparently,” the TTB

declared, adding: “You have concealed the truth. You haven’t prevented the spread of the disease.” In response to this scandal, thousands of people used the hashtag “What is the number of cases?” in protest on social media.

Koca’s admission comes after CHP (Republican People’s Party) deputy Murat Emir published a document on September 29 allegedly coming from the health ministry’s internal records. It showed the number of positive cases on September 10 were 29,377, compared to the 1,512 new patients announced by Koca on the same day.

Moreover, Mustafa Ad?güzel, another CHP deputy, had announced in early September that only in five large cities, including Istanbul, Ankara, ?zmir, Adana and Antalya, which are governed by the CHP, total death toll from the pandemic was 8,850 according to the official municipality data compared to nearly 6,800 deaths announced by the health ministry in that time.

These revelations expose not only the government’s lies, but also the complicity of the bourgeois opposition parties like the CHP. As the AKP government lied about the pandemic, the municipalities also refused to publicize their own statistics on deaths from COVID-19. In fact, the CHP supported the back-to-work and back-to-school campaigns, pursuing virtually identical policies in its local administrations as the AKP did at the national level.

The reopening of schools has already caused disastrous results, and three teachers in Kayseri have lost their lives due to coronavirus. Confirmed cases among workers in this CHP-led Ankara municipality have reached 981 last week, though it was only 235 just one month ago. Anger and opposition are escalating among health care workers, as more than 100 have lost their lives fighting the pandemic without serious

measures taken by the government.

Ultimately, the government found no way except lies and manipulation to contain growing anger and opposition among workers at the official response to the pandemic and the growing social crisis.

Real unemployment and job losses after the pandemic have reached 14.2 million in June. Workers' purchasing power is constantly falling as the Turkish lira continues to depreciate against the US dollar. Over the year, Turkey's minimum wage of 2,300 liras has fallen from \$385 to \$300. Since the pandemic began, hundreds of thousands of workers have been forced to take unpaid leave on only 1,170 liras. This forced "unpaid leave" process was extended until July 2021 with the votes of the bourgeois opposition CHP.

In response to the widespread popular outrage that emerged over his government's lies, Health Minister Koca tweeted yesterday, using capital letters, like US President Donald Trump, "Let's remember that, as it combats the epidemic, our state is protecting NATIONAL INTERESTS AS MUCH AS PUBLIC HEALTH, because the epidemic affects all areas of life."

This statement has made clear that the "national interests" mean the interests of the ruling class and its war policies across the region at the expense of the vast majority of society. Events are demonstrating that the ruling elites' only concern during the pandemic has been to transfer trillions from working people to the banks and companies, and to suppress growing opposition to the "herd immunity" policy.

These policies are not peculiar to Turkey or the Erdoğan government. They have an international and bipartisan character amid the resurgence of the class struggle all over the world. Governments all over the world have lied about the danger COVID-19 poses, trying to manipulate figures to contain growing anger within the working class amid the raging pandemic.

Last month, it was revealed that US President Trump consciously sought to downplay the danger posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ignoring warnings from US intelligence and Chinese officials on the seriousness of the pandemic, he pressed ahead, leading to more than 200,000 deaths in the United States alone. Trump said, "I always wanted to play it down ... I still like playing it down, because I don't want to create a panic."

His response only reflected major concerns of the

ruling classes not only in the US but internationally. As the WSWS explained, "What 'panic' was Trump speaking about? He was primarily concerned with containing a stock market selloff before the bailout of Wall Street had been prepared. Furthermore, with workers in factories increasingly uneasy about the spread of the disease, he was afraid of mass working class walkouts, such as those that ultimately led to the closure of the US auto plants in March."

While the most prominent example of this malign neglect policy of the ruling classes all over the world is the Trump administration in the United States, the European governments have also lied about and manipulated the real situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the fact that the German Interior Ministry reported in March that inaction would lead to over a million deaths just in Germany, president of the German parliament, Wolfgang Schäuble, said in April, "The truth is, we all hoped among ourselves that it wouldn't get so bad," in response to a question on why his government had not acted more rapidly against the pandemic.

This international capitalist conspiracy against the working class has vindicated the warnings made by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) from the beginning. Only the mobilization of the working class can halt the herd immunity policy imposed by the ruling classes internationally, impose lock-downs to achieve social distancing and prevent a massive loss of life.



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