

The global significance of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria

David North
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The following is the text of a video statement delivered by WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North from Istanbul, Turkey. The video is also embedded below.

Last month, on February 6, two devastating earthquakes, measuring 7.6 and 7.7 on the Richter scale, struck the city of Marash in southern Turkey, close to the Syrian border. Within the space of nine hours, these quakes cost the lives of 100,000 to 150,000 people. The actual toll may in fact prove to be higher.

This tragedy cannot be adequately described as only a natural disaster. Of course, the movement of tectonic plates is a powerful geological phenomenon. However, the response to and impact of such events is socially determined.

The real responsibility for the loss of life lies in the inadequate preparation, which is a product of two interrelated factors. One, the dominance of politics by purely national considerations, and two, the determination of policy on the basis of profit, the accumulation of wealth.

The measures that were necessary that should have been taken, despite all the warnings of scientists, were not taken.

I am presently in Istanbul. Behind me, the portion of the historic harbor is an area that, if an earthquake struck this city, as is widely predicted by seismologists, would result in a devastating loss of life here and throughout the city, perhaps numbering in the millions.

This is a situation which has global implications. We live in a world where almost on a weekly, if not daily basis, we hear of disasters of one form or another.

Just a few days ago, the train derailment in Greece. The catastrophe in East Palestine, Ohio. The common denominator in such events is always the subordination of life to profit. And such events are taking place

beneath the shadow of a pandemic which has claimed the lives of millions and millions of people throughout the globe.

And even beyond that, not far from where I am presently, across the Black Sea, a war in Ukraine threatens to escalate into a nuclear catastrophe.

What conclusions are to be drawn? We live in a social system, an economic system, which is obsolete. The capitalist system, the nation-state system, the rule of the capitalist class, are entirely incompatible with the needs of modern mass society.

The earthquake that has had such a devastating impact in Turkey and Syria is a global and historic event. It will have political consequences. It brings to mind another historical episode of a similar character, the great earthquake that struck the city of Lisbon in Portugal in 1755.

At that time, the apologists for the existing feudal structure claimed that the disaster, which cost tens of thousands of lives, should not disturb faith in the existing system, that what had happened was part of a divine plan. No matter how great the loss of life, it was not to be questioned. It was all for the good. Indeed, man lived, they claim, in the “best of all possible worlds.”

This conception came under powerful attack by Voltaire, who wrote his famous book, *Candide*, in response to this empty theory of reactionary optimism. No, we did not live in the best of all possible worlds. We lived in a world that had to be changed, in which life, society could be subject to human action.

That set into motion and accelerated a process of reason, of scientific thought, which gave rise to the American Revolution of 1776, the great French Revolution of 1789 to 1794, and all the great social struggles of the 19th and 20th century to change the

world, and to bring about through human action a society which regulated conditions in the interests of humanity.

One must fight for a recognition that what has happened here, and all the other events which are having such a devastating impact on the conditions of human life, will lead to a new and powerful revival of revolutionary thought.

This is the perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the Trotskyist movement. Become part of that fight. Take up the struggle for socialism. Build the revolutionary movement of the working class that can renew and transform society in the interests of all humanity.



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