

# The earthquake in Japan highlights crimes of the Turkish ruling class

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The 7.6 magnitude earthquake that struck Japan on January 1 was the largest to hit the Noto Peninsula since records began in 1885.

The death toll has now risen to over 200. There is no doubt that many of these deaths could have been prevented. The Japanese government, preparing for a US-led war against China, has allocated a military budget of \$56 billion for fiscal year 2024, but only \$3.8 billion for disaster prevention in 2022. For capitalist governments in every corner of the world, making more profit takes precedence over human life.

This does not exclude a comparison between the 7.6 magnitude Noto earthquake with the two 7.7 and 7.6 magnitude earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023, which devastated Turkey and Syria, to determine the extent of the criminality of the Turkish ruling class.

The earthquakes of February 6, 2023, directly affected 11 provinces in Turkey, flattening some areas to the ground. According to official figures, more than 50,000 people lost their lives and hundreds of thousands of people had their lives turned upside down. According to the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change, 36,932 buildings collapsed during the earthquake and 311,000 buildings were rendered unusable due to damage. For those who survived the devastation, the struggle to survive continues nearly a year later.

In Hatay, one of the provinces hardest hit by the Kahramanmaraş earthquake, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said “it is not possible to be prepared for such a big disaster.” But a simple comparison of the devastation and death toll from the Japanese earthquake with the aftermath of the February 6 earthquake in Turkey contradicts Erdoğan and confirms experts' warnings about preparedness for earthquakes of this magnitude.

With current technology, it is not possible to predict exactly when an earthquake will occur. However, based

on past earthquakes and surveys scientific predictions can be made about which regions are prone to earthquakes and their possible magnitude.

For example, on March 10, 2022, Alican Kop, Director of the Earthquake Research and Risk Center at Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University (KSÜ) and Assistant Professor at the Department of Geological Engineering, pointed out in an article published on the university's website that Kahramanmaraş is a very risky region. They recalled that a 28-kilometer fault zone runs through the city center and is very close to the Gölbaşı-Türkoğlu segment, which has accumulated energy for 509 years.

According to the news published in *Kahramanmaraş Manşet* on February 1, 2020, Kop stated at a meeting on seismicity at KSÜ that “we also have the risk of experiencing two earthquakes in a row. In other words, there is a really high risk of earthquakes in Kahramanmaraş”. He correctly predicted the double earthquake.

Despite the warnings of scientists, the ruling class and its political representatives have taken no significant measures against earthquakes; public safety and infrastructure have been completely subordinated to the capitalist profit system.

Seda Yendir Torisu, a Turkish civil engineer working in Japan, told the BBC on November 3, 2020, that Turkey has specifications and disaster regulations like Japan. However, unlike in Japan building production is left to the initiative of the contractor-subcontractor system and great concessions have been made in the inspection mechanisms.

There is no scientific earthquake-resistant urban transformation. As their indifference to disasters such as the pandemic and global warming shows, for the ruling class an investment that does not bring immediate profit is useless. They are not interested in the catastrophic

consequences of their activities.

Engels expressed this indifference in the following way in *Dialectic of Nature*:

When an individual manufacturer or merchant sells a manufactured or purchased commodity with only the usual small profit, he is satisfied, and he is not concerned as to what becomes of the commodity afterwards or who are its purchasers. The same thing applies to the natural effects of the same actions. What did the Spanish planters in Cuba, who burned down forests the slopes of the mountains and obtained from the ashes sufficient fertiliser for one generation of very highly profitable coffee trees, care that the tropical rainfall afterwards washed away the now unprotected upper stratum of the soil, leaving behind only bare rock?

The Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB), which opposed a 2013 amendment to the Zoning Law, sent a letter to the then-president asking him to veto the law, warning, “With the abolition of professional supervision... unfair competition will deepen, signatory or fake engineers, architects and urban planners will proliferate, and the way will be paved for unqualified contractors who consider survey and project services as an increase in costs and refrain from any kind of supervision for the sake of profit.”

In addition to the problems in the supervision of the compliance of constructed buildings with regulations, one of the main reasons why earthquakes turn into disasters is the zoning amnesties used by the governments as a source of political and economic power. There have been more than 20 zoning amnesties in Turkey, the first of which began in 1948.

Zoning amnesty refers to the issuance of a “building registration certificate” for buildings or structures that are in violation of the building permit. Approximately 7.4 million people benefited from the last zoning amnesty, which came into effect before the general elections in June 2018. Many buildings in Turkey that were built without permits have been legalized through various zoning amnesties.

The main beneficiaries of these amnesties, which were introduced by the governments for electoral purposes and to raise funds, were the multi-story buildings built illegally by building contractors. Huge illegal buildings in the city centers were given a clean bill of health and became the graves of the victims of the February 6 earthquake. None of the officials from the ruling party, nor from the opposition parties that have been in power in the municipalities for years have been held responsible.

Murat Kurum, who served as Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change between 2018 and 2023 and bears the main political responsibility for the buildings that collapsed in the earthquake. He has been selected by the Justice and Development Party as its candidate for mayor of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IBB) in the elections scheduled for next March.

Current mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu, the candidate of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), has been implementing “urban transformation in İstanbul” for four years. Presented as an earthquake preparedness measure, this has been a way to drive working class residents from the city centre and build luxury residences for the affluent. The fundamental aim of the “urban transformation” imposed by the ruling class for years is not to protect residents from earthquakes but to boost profits for construction firms and enrich the wealthiest layers of society.

Concerns among the public and scientists about the Marmara earthquake, which could occur at any moment according to scientific data in Turkey, continue to increase. As the WSWS has previously stated, “Scientific studies indicate that the Central Marmara Fault, which runs through the Sea of Marmara south of the metropolis of Istanbul, generates major earthquakes approximately every 250 years. The last major earthquake on this fault occurred in 1766. Moreover, since movements on the North Anatolian Fault in 1999, scientists have raised ever more urgent warnings that enormous stress has accumulated on the Central Marmara Fault.”

The earthquakes of magnitude 5.1 and 4.2 in the Sea of Marmara last month, which were felt in Istanbul, are a warning. The ruling class is squandering vast social resources that are essential to the well-being and security of the people. The way forward for the working class is to wrest control of the resources of world industry and trade from the bourgeoisie and use them to meet basic social needs, including earthquake safety. This requires workers to unite internationally in the struggle for socialism against capitalism.



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