

3 workers killed in industrial accident at Turkish steel giant

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Three workers were killed and one injured in a horrific accident at the Çolako?lu Metallurgy plant in Dilovas?, Kocaeli on Sunday, April 5. The injured worker was reportedly discharged from hospital on Tuesday. The plant’s section manager, an engineer, and an occupational health and safety specialist have been arrested.

Three maintenance workers and one subcontracted cleaning worker, who were performing routine maintenance on top of an arc furnace, plunged approximately 10 metres when the rotating platform they were standing on collapsed. It appears the workers had been sent up onto the platform without any safety measures in place—most notably, without lifelines.

Selçuk Karstarl?, a member of the Kocaeli Health and Safety Labour Watch, told the daily *Evrensel*: “Workers are expected to secure themselves to a lifeline. That lifeline must comply with the EN 795 standard and must be designed, installed, and periodically inspected according to the maximum number of persons who will be attached to it.”

The same newspaper reported that the occupational health and safety specialist at the plant had previously warned management to strengthen safety measures around the platform. The fact that 10 workers have died at the factory since 2008 underscores these risks and warnings, as well as the company’s indifference. With more than 1,500 workers on its payroll, Çolako?lu is Türkiye’s third largest steel producer, according to 2024 data, and the country’s 14th largest industrial enterprise. Türkiye, which ranks seventh in global steel output as of 2025, leads Europe in steel production.

In 2023, Tuncay Özsoy, who worked in the packaging section of the rebar rolling mill, was electrocuted. In 2010, a worker named Hamza Zengin was killed when a forklift fell on him. And in 2009, Engin Gündüz, a 30-year-old maintenance worker in the plant’s materials section, was crushed to death on the production line.

According to a report by the Health and Safety Workers Watch, at least 2,105 workers were killed in workplace fatalities across Türkiye in 2025 alone. According to the Ankara Medical Chamber’s report dated December 2024: “Based on data from the Social Security Institution (SGK) and Eurostat in 2019, the rate of fatal occupational accidents in Türkiye is approximately ten times higher than the European

Union (EU) average. Türkiye, which has the highest rate of worker deaths in Europe, is among the countries with the highest number of deaths from workplace accidents.”

This is the direct consequence of policies pursued in the interests of the ruling class and international capital. President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an spelled out this agenda in December 2020: “We are determined to make our country an attractive centre with low risk, high confidence, and satisfactory returns for both domestic and international investors.” For capitalist investors, a “satisfactory centre of attraction” means minimizing restrictions—including those related to workplace safety—as much as possible in order to maximize profits.

The result is that corporations treat health and safety measures as an unnecessary cost. The trade union confederations, for their part, are complicit in imposing precarious, “flexible,” and dangerous working conditions on the working class. At the Çolako?lu plant, the union in operation is Türk Metal, Türkiye’s largest trade union.

The judiciary’s response to those who draw attention to the capitalist property relations and exploitation underlying these deaths exposes the role of the state as an instrument of the ruling class. Last month, Mehmet Türkmen, leader of the independent rank-and-file union B?RTEK-SEN (United Textile, Weaving, and Leather Workers’ Union), was imprisoned after a speech he gave at a work stoppage by S?rma Hal? workers in Gaziantep, in which he highlighted how workplace deaths and injuries are the product of a mechanism built on the collusion of corporations, the state and the union apparatus.

Türkmen declared: “The responsibility for every drop of blood spilled in the factories lies not only with the owner of that factory, but with the state that fails to carry out inspections, with yellow trade unions and with this system that condemns workers to a regime of slavery.” His imprisonment was a warning to all workers who are increasingly questioning and fighting back against the devastating consequences of the capitalist system—including workplace killings.

The district of Dilovas?, where the plant is located, is a major industrial hub dense with petrochemical and steel facilities. The area has become notorious as one of the places in Türkiye where the most savage consequences of the capitalist profit

system are visited upon workers.

Last year, on November 8, an explosion and fire at a perfume-filling warehouse owned by Ravive Kozmetik in Dilovas? killed seven workers, including three children. The facility had operated for years without safety inspections, without a licence, and without protective measures. The workers were employed off the books, without social insurance. Despite repeated complaints from employees and local residents, the disaster was allowed to unfold in plain sight.

The factories of Dilovas? are deadly not only for workers, but also for the surrounding population. Local residents call the district the “poison plain” or the “cancer plain.” Sait A?dac?, President of the Kocaeli Branch of the Chamber of Environmental Engineers, has pointed out that, according to 2017 data, while the cancer death rate is 12.5 percent globally and 12.9 percent across Türkiye, in Dilovas? it rises to 33.7 percent.

The dangerous working conditions that produce these workplace deaths and injuries are everywhere, and made possible by the complicity of all the establishment parties.

This truth was underscored on Wednesday, April 1, when driver Sabri K?l?nç was killed in a workplace incident at the ?ZSU Çi?li Wastewater Treatment Plant, run by the ?zmir Metropolitan Municipality, which is governed by the Republican People’s Party (CHP). K?l?nç’s waste collection truck plunged into a pit filled with sludge. His death—resulting from the refusal to provide even the most elementary safety measures (barriers, lighting, signage), and from his being sent alone into a hazardous area—stands as a damning indictment of the CHP.

A statement posted to social media by K?l?nç’s nephew, responding to the municipality’s characterisation of his death as a “tragic accident,” laid bare the hypocrisy that prevails within bourgeois parties:

... He was like stone after 12 hours; we struggled to get him out, but to no avail ... If we hadn’t realized how serious the situation was, he might have stayed there another 12 hours. The whole city government didn’t even send a crane to pull our uncle’s body out of the mud. We pulled our own corpse out of that sludge using our own resources and the crane we’d rented. When they sent us off like lambs to the slaughter, everything was fine; but when we came to retrieve the body, everyone had scattered...

You’ve offered condolences with flowery words, but a blazing fire has fallen on our hearth! Should it have been that difficult to put up a fence or pour some concrete there? Sending a truck loaded with a victim to a place where you can’t even tell where the mud is—like playing a gamble—what is that? Someone explain it to me; I can’t take it anymore. ...

The events that claim the lives of countless workers every year in Türkiye and around the world are not accidents. They are murders produced by the capitalist profit system. The millions of workers who go to work each morning to support their families may not know that the conditions awaiting them could end their lives. But corporations, the union apparatus, the establishment parties and the state apparatus as a whole are fully aware of which legally mandated safety measures are not being taken at their workplaces, and of what the consequences may be. Behind every link in this chain of killings—stretching back decades—lies a safety violation ignored for the sake of profit, a maintenance job never carried out, and a sentence never handed down by any court.

The necessary lessons from decades of experience must be drawn. Bringing these killings to an end and ensuring safe working conditions cannot be left to the good will of corporations. Appeals to the authorities or faith in the courts will likewise prove futile. In the Soma massacre of 2014, which claimed 301 miners’ lives, the mine owner served only eight days in prison for each worker killed, while not a single official faced any punishment.

Workers must intervene against corporate indifference, official negligence and willful blindness, and union complicity. To do so, independent rank-and-file committees must be built in every factory as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). These committees must independently investigate workplace incidents and intervene to enforce safety measures in the strictest and most uncompromising manner. This struggle must be guided by the understanding that putting a definitive end to workplace killings requires the working class to take power and abolish the capitalist profit system.



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