Shipments continue at HABA? as demands for an independent investigation and paid leave are rejected

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Almost a week has passed since the massacre at the HABA? iron and steel plant in the Alia?a district of ?zmir, where 19 workers were killed on 9 November. Workers and their supporters have demanded an independent investigation and paid leave, and both demands have been rejected. Meanwhile, finished products continue to be shipped out of the plant so that the company's flow of profits is not interrupted in any way.

Paid leave has reportedly been granted only to workers in the melting shop, where the explosion took place. An undated video, said to have been sent by a HABA? worker to the Aegean Workers' Unity (Ege ??çi Birli?i), and the comment written with it sum up what workers are facing: "This is a video of the place where it happened. In an environment like this, if you neglect the maintenance of the crane, the columns and the crane rails, what you commit is not an accident but planned murder."

President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's government has rejected the demand for a parliamentary inquiry into the deaths at HABA?. It is taking no measures to change the dangerous working conditions and lack of inspection that cost the lives of around 2,000 workers every year.

On the evening of 13 November, the body of the missing worker Bar?? Güney was reached under the rubble. The death toll was confirmed at 19, and search and rescue operations ended. This removes the last obstacle to clearing the rubble and restarting the melting shop.

The nine people jailed pending trial in the investigation are middle managers: the plant manager, the melting shop manager, maintenance supervisors and engineers. HABA? Chairman of the Board Mehmet Rü?tü Ba?aran, on the other hand, was released under "house arrest." According to press reports, Ba?aran is serving his house arrest in his historic waterfront mansion in Yeniköy, Istanbul, reportedly worth 2 billion lira.

This picture is not new. In Soma, where 301 miners were killed in 2014, Alp Gürkan, the owner of Soma Holding, was never jailed and was acquitted. Today none of those responsible for the Soma massacre are in prison.

A notice posted at the plant entrance on the morning of Friday, 13 November, showed that the main culprit in the deaths of 19 workers, far from answering for them before the courts, is still giving orders to the workers called back into the plant, a crime scene. The notice, issued "on the instruction of our Chairman of the Board, Mr. Mehmet Rü?tü Ba?aran," required workers to hand over their phones to security. This was an unlawful attempt to stop workers from bringing out the facts being hidden from the public.

Workers on the night and morning shifts protested by refusing to enter the plant. At the gate, they chanted "Management, resign!" and "Türk Metal, resign!" Türk Metal union representatives tried to get workers inside by telling them, "There's no work going on inside." The workers responded: "Don't lie. We work every day, and there are shipments every day." People who physically attacked a spokesperson of the Aegean Workers' Unity as he addressed workers outside the plant on Friday were driven away by the workers.

Workers and their supporters demanded five days of paid mourning leave for their dead co-workers. They demanded that the plant be inspected by independent bodies such as the Chamber of Mechanical Engineers, and that production not resume until safety measures were in place. The state responded by sending in the gendarmerie. Workers who blocked the road in protest were beaten and detained. The gendarmerie also tried to detain *Evrensel* reporters covering the events. Those detained were released in the evening. The ?zmir Bar Association stated that the workers had been held at the police station without their statements being taken and without any formal detention order.

On the same day, the Türk Metal union, which had been silent since 9 November apart from a statement of "condolences," held a press statement outside the plant together with other unions affiliated with the Türk-?? confederation. Deputy General President Mürsel Öcal called the deaths a "workplace homicide." He tried to justify the union's silence, stating: "If we have held back until today, it is out of respect for our dead."

This is a revolting lie, told over the bodies of workers who died because of conditions the union tolerated. Türk Metal never called for production to stop despite these dangerous conditions. Since the 9 November massacre, it has allowed the plant to carry on shipments, including exports, and it rejects the demand for an independent investigation. According to a subcontracted worker interviewed by the WSWS, no safety measures have yet been implemented at the factory. Some of the permanent workers refused to take the union flags distributed by Türk Metal for its press conference only for show.

The aim of Türk Metal's demonstration was to bring back under

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control the anger that has escaped the union bureaucracy's grip, and to restore some of the credibility the pro-company union has completely lost. Calling the deaths a "workplace homicide" and demanding that "those responsible be punished" costs Türk Metal nothing. The real question is why the union did not halt production despite three fatal workplace killings in three weeks, and why it is rejecting workers' demands for paid leave and independent inspection today. This is not an organization that defends workers' interests, but the company's industrial police force.

The independent inspection demand is being systematically blocked. A technical delegation set up by the ?zmir Provincial Coordination Board of the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) was refused entry to the plant on 10 November despite submitting a formal application. TMMOB representatives reported that in the same days, provincial officials of Erdo?an's Justice and Development Party (AKP) entered the site together with a minister, held a press statement there and posted videos of it on social media. A broadcast ban unconstitutionally prohibiting all news reports, interviews, criticism and commentary on the incident also remains in force.

Utku Gümrükçü, ?zmir provincial chairman of the Republican People's Party (CHP), announced that a person who had inspected the plant in 2025 had contacted them. According to Gümrükçü, this person said that the area where the explosion occurred had been marked "red" in an inspection report a year earlier, but no action had been taken. Gümrükçü also acknowledged that inspection companies being paid by the corporations they inspect creates a "problem of independence."

This claim shows once again that an inspector or occupational safety specialist paid by corporations cannot protect workers' lives. But the solution the CHP proposes is limited to "making inspections more effective" and "imposing sanctions." In other words, it is a "solution" that does not question the profit system or pro-company law, and once again drives workers to the institutions of the same state.

At 4 p.m. on Saturday, 14 November, a joint press statement was issued outside the plant at the call of independent unions. The protest was called by Ba??ms?z Maden ??, DGD-SEN, Enerji-Sen, ?n?aat-??, KATA?-SEN, OT?S, the Private Sector Teachers' Union, Tar?m-Sen, TSS-?? and Yap? Yol-??. Smart Solar workers, who are continuing their struggle against layoffs in Alia?a, also supported the protest. In a speech on behalf of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International) at the protest, the statement of the HABA? Workers Rank-and-File Committee Initiative was read out.

HABA? workers who could watch the protest from inside the plant showed their support with occasional applause. Management then sent the workers out of the plant through a side gate on the company shuttle buses. There was a heavy police and gendarmerie presence around the plant. At the same time, trucks continued to go in and out of the plant.

According to data from Health and Safety Labour Watch (?S?G), at least 1,930 workers lost their lives at work in Türkiye in the first ten months of 2026. The workplace killings that have continued without pause since the Soma massacre of 2014, in which 301 miners died, show that these deaths do not only stem from the greed of one capitalist or from one pro-company union. The Soma experience shows what happens when workers' struggle for accountability is handed over to the courts and the government: the bosses are cleared, responsibility is pinned on a few middle managers, and the wheels keep turning the same way.

This is why the HABA? Workers Rank-and-File Committee Initiative raised the question of what production is for and who controls it, putting forward the following demand: "Key industries, such as iron and steel, must stop being a source of profit for a handful of oligarchs. They must be put into public ownership under the democratic control of the workers. Only in this way can workers' safety be guaranteed."

The words of the subcontracted HABA? worker who spoke to the WSWS on Saturday showed that this urgent demand will quickly win support among workers: "If workers are in control, there will be no deaths."

In its statement, the rank-and-file committee initiative also drew attention to the global character of both the problem and the solution: "Our goal is to end the deaths of about 330,000 of our fellow workers around the world every year in preventable 'accidents.'" The message "Your pain is our pain," sent to HABA? workers by steelworkers in the city of Ahvaz in Iran, which is under imperialist offensive by the United States and Israel, reflects a developing consciousness of this common interest. It is in the hands of the workers themselves to stop workers dying in workplaces or in imperialist wars, and to reorganize the world economy based on social need instead of private profit. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) provides the framework for organizing this unity of the workers.



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