“If workers are in control, there will be no deaths”

WSWS, Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi at HABA?: Workers say “No safety measures have been taken”

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) went to the gates of the HABA? iron and steel plant in the Alia?a district of ?zmir on Saturday and spoke with workers. Nineteen workers died at the plant in a preventable explosion on November 9. Outside the plant, Ula? Sevinç, chairman of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International), read out the statement of the HABA? Workers Rank-and-File Committee Initiative. The statement was handed out to the few workers who were able to walk out of the plant at the end of their shift.

By Sunday evening, the video of the statement had been viewed more than 60,000 times across Instagram, Facebook and TikTok and had received over 1,500 likes. Many angry comments were posted below it. “As long as there’s production for the boss, they don’t care who dies,” one wrote.

A former HABA? worker commented: “When the unions used to march, they would chant ‘Workers are brothers, bosses are heels.’ Now it’s become ‘Bosses are brothers, workers are heels.’” Another wrote, “Those who run this country should resign. We want justice, justice.”

But the massacre of workers on November 9 has shown once again what “justice” looks like under the existing system, which serves to protect the interests of a handful of capitalist oligarchs. On Friday, people who gathered outside the plant demanding an independent investigation, a halt to production and paid leave for the workers were detained by the gendarmerie until evening. Meanwhile, the company owner, HABA? Chairman of the Board Mehmet Rü?tü Ba?aran, the prime suspect for the deaths, was not jailed but rewarded with “house arrest.” Ba?aran is reported to be staying at his waterfront mansion on the Istanbul Bosphorus.

From Saturday morning, ahead of a press statement called for 4 p.m. by independent unions, there was a heavy police and gendarmerie presence around the plant. To prevent workers inside from joining the protest at the gates in any way, the company shuttle buses were sent out through a side gate. A security cordon was set up at the plant entrance. Meanwhile, trucks were going in and out of the plant without interruption. According to what workers told the WSWS, exports and deliveries of other orders are continuing.

WSWS reporters spoke with subcontracted HABA? workers leaving the plant. We are withholding their names for their protection.

A subcontracted worker, who said he is not a union member, explained that nothing has changed since November 9: “No safety measures have been taken since November 9. Everything is carrying on the same. People have been sent back into the melting shop, into production. They say it’s going to start production again.”

The worker said he had not heard of anyone being given paid leave and that the plant is continuing to ship goods from stock: “As far as I know, nobody was given paid leave. All the subcontractors are in the plant. For two days we’ve been waiting inside without working.” When asked which departments were still operating, he

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replied: “Only the stockyard. Production isn’t running, but exports are continuing. The stock is being shipped out.”

Describing the mood among workers inside as “grief and mourning,” the worker spoke about their anger towards Türk Metal union: “Nobody likes the union anyway. Yesterday they were handing out flags and vests here. They gave me a flag too. I’m not in the union. I wanted to give the flag to the older permanent [and unionized] workers I work with. None of them would take it. The workers said, ‘This is Türk Metal’s, it’s not something we can accept.’” According to him, workers “think the union is a friend of the employer.”

The worker, who said he had previously worked in oil refineries in Alia?a, described the conditions at HABA?: “This is the first time I’ve seen a system like this. There are absolutely no occupational health and safety measures. The managers don’t walk around the site. There’s no inspection either. I’ve never seen anything like this before.” When we asked why, another worker standing next to him was blunt: “Because they’re on the boss’s side.”

The first worker recalled co-workers who had died only recently: “Brother Hakan died. Eyüp E?inli from Bergama died. This is a very wrong system. This isn’t a place anyone should have to work.”

When we asked why they work there, the two workers answered at the same time: “Other places won’t hire you until you’ve done your military service.” That young men who have not yet done their compulsory military service cannot find other jobs and are condemned to the most dangerous workplaces like HABA? shows how vulnerable the company’s workforce is. Eyüp E?inli was 20 years old when he died. The first worker added: “This isn’t a place you should work for the minimum wage,” which is 28,000 Turkish liras or US$560 a month.

The WSWS reporters noted that around 2,000 workers are killed on the job in Türkiye every year, and around 330,000 worldwide according to the ILO. They asked who could put an end to this, and how. The worker replied: “I think, if workers are in control, there will be no deaths.”

The young worker’s words confirm, from workers’ own experience, the central call of the HABA? Workers Rank-and-File Committee Initiative, which stated: “In this country, about 2,000 workers die every year on the job, and every workplace is a potential deathtrap. Those in power, the corporations and their trade union auxiliaries, have proven that they will do nothing about it. But we know it is possible to change this situation. That requires us to intervene as an independent class.”

The organisation that will put this call into practice is a rank-and-file committee elected by the workers from among themselves, independent of Türk Metal and all the union bureaucracies. Such a committee can oppose reopening the production area before an independent workers’ investigation has been carried out. It can unite permanent and subcontracted workers, and reach out to workers and their families at every workplace in Alia?a and in the mines of Soma.

We call on HABA? workers and their supporters to contact us to build the HABA? Workers Rank-and-File Committee—in conjunction with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC)—to demand accountability for the 19 workers who lost their lives and to fight to prevent further deaths.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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