



Produced in conjunction with Socialist Movement Pakistan

POOREST SUFFER MOST AS EARTHQUAKE STRIKES KASHMIR, AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN AND INDIA

Yet again the poorest are suffering worst as natural disaster devastates a whole region of the planet. But much of the nightmare facing the peoples of Pakistan, Kashmir, Afghanistan and India is not 'natural' but a consequence of the capitalist profit system.

MANZOOR AND KHALID BHATTI of the Socialist Movement Pakistan explain what is happening:

The Western media is full of interviews by Pakistani federal government officials and military officers who claim that a full rescue mission is underway and that "all resources are being mobilised". Don't believe them! This is a typical spin operation mounted by the Musharraf government.

The lives of the working class and poor peasantry across south-east Asia are normally filled with misery and catastrophe. Now things have become intolerable. The earthquake has affected worse the most mountainous and outlying areas. These are also the areas where some of the poorest people in our region live. In many of the villages people's houses are made of mud and have collapsed immediately.

Television reporters estimate that over 300,000 Kashmiris, including the injured, are lining the roads, shocked and homeless, waiting for help which does not appear to be coming.

The mountainous regions of North West Frontier Province (NWFP) have also been very badly affected. A village called Kalam in Swat province, where the Socialist Movement has a branch, has been destroyed.

Shocking state of public services

What has become clear in the last few hours is how shocking the public service infrastructure is in Pakistan as a result of decades of neglect. In every city, town or village, even those mildly affected, the buildings which have shown the most damage have been schools.

Many of the casualties have been amongst primary and high school students attending classes which

collapsed around their ears. This is directly because of the complete lack of funding for many decades.

Civic agencies like civil defence and the fire service have hardly been able to intervene because they hardly exist - again because of lack of funding. The health service has been completely overwhelmed because of lack of doctors and hospitals. The injured in different parts of the region are being operated on in courtyards and in some cases on the streets, because the clinics and hospitals are full. And that is for those who are lucky enough to get there!

In Pakistan, 45% (US \$3.5 billion) of the budget goes on defence. And yet only 1.7% is spent on health! The difference between these two figures will cause casualties in a situation like this to be much higher. And despite all the military spending there are insufficient armed forces helicopters to reach all the affected areas of Kashmir.

Despite the claims of government ministers, the rescue operation has hardly begun - local communities have been forced to fend for themselves. While things will become clearer in the next day or so it is clear that capitalism and feudalism has made this disaster far worse.

The government has issued an appeal for more helicopters. The US has agreed to send eight helicopters but they have hundreds of helicopters in Afghanistan, some of them heavy lift types, just one hour's flight away.

People here are shocked and angered by the lack of response from the US and British governments

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[Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, pledged a paltry £100,000 and only 60 emergency/support staff].

Ordinary working-class people have responded by donating what little they have to the injured. The SMP is campaigning in the working class areas for relief.

Although people are very poor they are donating sweaters and clothing even though they know they cannot replace these items. But as far as the ruling elite is concerned their response is very slow. In the posh areas of Lahore there are no collections taking place. Medical supplies are short but multinational

and local pharmaceutical manufacturers are not donating enough.

The government is well aware that people's anger is already rising. Spokespersons for the Musharraf regime have continually said on the media that this is a national emergency in which national unity should be to the forefront and there should be no criticism of the government.

The most the government has announced to date was ten food trucks being sent to NWFP - a whole province with a population of millions!! The federal government has announced a Rs1 billion aid package (£10 million) but this represents

just a drop in the ocean of what is needed right now!

This terrible disaster has overwhelmingly made victims of working class people and the poor. But it has also shown the spirit of the working class, with help and solidarity provided by working people to the devastated areas.

The earthquake also demonstrates clearly the callous disregard for the lives of the majority by the ruling class and the imperialist powers.

If ever there were an argument to get rid of the system we live under, this is it!

The Socialist Movement Pakistan (SMP) will be raising the demand in the next few days for local earthquake disaster committees to be elected to direct the rescue and rebuilding operation.

The SMP will call for:

- A full rescue operation using all the resources of the airforce and navy, including the setting up of field hospitals, provision for free of temporary accommodation, and food kitchens.
- Distribution of tents, food, medical aid, financial grants, and drinking water should be under the control of local earthquake disaster committees.
- Assessment of damage to local communities should be carried out by representatives of the committees and not government officials as in previous disasters. For full compensation equal to the cost of rebuilding for all of those who have lost accommodation.
- Rent and property price controls to be implemented immediately.
- A cap on the price of cement, bricks and all other building material to be implemented immediately.
- For the renationalisation of all companies concerned with building and repair.
- For a massive increase in public spending to improve infrastructure.

The Socialist Party is a sister section of the Socialist Movement Pakistan. Both parties are part of an international socialist organisation, the Committee for a Workers' International, which organises in 36 countries worldwide including Pakistan, Pakistan occupied Kashmir and India. The Socialist Party will be supporting the SMP and trade union and community campaigns in organising aid to the most affected areas, campaigning around the above demands and assisting in rebuilding the trade unions in the region.

Come to our public meeting:



For more details on the campaign go to www.turcp.org or www.socialistworld.net.

I would like to find out more/join the Socialist Party

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