

# Scandal exposes bankruptcy of Turkish healthcare system, killing at least 12 newborns

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In recent weeks, Turkey has witnessed a scandal involving the killing of at least 12 babies as part of the subordination of the health system and public health to capitalist profit, which has sparked widespread public outrage.

The existence of a gang in Istanbul, working in partnership with people at the 112 Emergency Call Centre and hospitals, who refer emergency infant patients to the neonatal units of private hospitals with which they have prior arrangements has become a hot topic in the media and on social media.

47 suspects, 22 of whom have been arrested, are accused of causing the deaths of at least 12 babies and making unjust profits from the Social Security Institution (SGK). It was announced that the licences of 10 private hospitals had been revoked as part of the investigation. The indictment against the gang was finalised on October 16.

What the investigation has revealed is not just the criminal acts of malicious individuals. It also exposes the nature of the current healthcare system, which is increasingly being hollowed out in a capitalist system where profit comes before human life.

On Tuesday, the Turkish Medical Association (TTB) and the Istanbul Medical Association (ITO) held a detailed press conference on the issue. TTB Central Council President Dr. Alpay Azap said, “At the point we have reached, the health system has completely collapsed. It hurts us all to realise this in a very painful way with the infant deaths... What has happened is the inevitable result of the policies that have been implemented.”

Azap continued his speech as follows: “Problems in the health system cannot be solved with a band-aid approach. The health system has to be rebuilt... We know that this problem cannot be solved by temporary

measures, by saying that it is the work of a group of people who have no morals and no conscience. We will do our best to change this system. An equal, qualified, free and accessible health system is possible.”

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan went to great lengths in a speech on Tuesday to conceal his government’s undeniable responsibility for the crime.

Erdoğan claimed that they had carried out a health revolution since 2002, that the incident had nothing to do with the health system and tried to portray the perpetrators as “a few rotten apples”.

Erdoğan responded to criticism of the government’s policies that have rendered the public health service dysfunctional and subjected the public to private health facilities by saying, “The fact that the opposition and the opposition media... are targeting us, our ministries, our health system and even our health workers as a whole is a great lack of awareness on the part of our country’s politics and media.”

In reality, the almost complete subordination of healthcare to the capitalist market is the material basis for the formation of such criminal structures. The Erdoğan government has culminated the process of privatisation of healthcare, which was initiated by its predecessor governments and which is one of the most important social attacks of the bourgeoisie on the working class worldwide in the last decades. It therefore bears the political responsibility for such crimes.

Contrary to Erdoğan’s claims of a “health paradise”, his Justice and Development Party (AKP) has accelerated the process of transferring public services to the control of big banks and corporations since it came to power in 2002. The 2003 “Health Transformation Programme” was a major turning point in the transformation of health services. Implemented

for more than 20 years, this programme turned hospitals into capitalist commercial enterprises and patients into “customers”.

According to the Ministry of Health’s 2023 Yearbook, there are 1,566 hospitals in Turkey, including 933 public, 68 university and 565 private hospitals. In 2002, there were 1,156 hospitals, including 836 public, 50 university and 270 private hospitals. According to the data, the number of public hospitals increased by 12 percent, while the number of private hospitals increased by 110 percent. The share of private hospitals among the total number of hospitals increased from 23 to 36 percent. In addition, Turkey’s population, which was around 68 million in 2002, had increased to more than 85 million by 2023, by 25 percent.

In 2023, the proportion of intensive care beds in the private sector was 36 percent, in line with the hospital ratio. On the other hand, the figures for neonatal intensive care beds, considered a very profitable area, show that today 7,144 (52.3 percent) of the total number of 13,657 such places are in private hospitals. According to the Ministry of Health, the number of neonatal beds in the private sector was only 1,420 (38 percent) in 2008.

The criminal nature of the “profits before lives” policies of capitalist governments around the world found its sharpest expression with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Government policies have led to an excess of deaths approaching 30 million worldwide. These policies have been driven not by the fight against a preventable disease to protect public health, but by the impulse to prevent the disruption of global supply chains and financial markets.

The deaths of millions of people abandoned to their fate in the face of the pandemic, especially the elderly and those in need of care, were welcomed by the ruling class as it meant a reduction in social spending.

According to latest health ministry data 102,000 people in Turkey have died from COVID-19. However, Güçlü Yaman, who prepared reports on “excess deaths” in the TTB Pandemic Working Group, had identified more than 335,000 excess deaths due to the pandemic by the end of 2023.

The response to the wider health crisis and the ongoing pandemic requires the establishment of universal, socialised medicine. The profit motive must

be removed from the entire health system and replaced with quality universal healthcare that is free and accessible to all.

This cannot be achieved without a frontal attack on the wealth and power of the ruling class. The working class must respond to the global war on public health with its own global socialist strategy.

The lie that there is “no money” for health and other vital services must be rejected. The domination of private hospitals and insurance companies must end, and the wealth of the super-rich and the resources wasted on war must be reallocated to meet the urgent needs of the population, including quality, free and accessible public healthcare and the eradication of COVID-19.



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