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# Train wrecks, earthquakes and profits

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Toxic mushroom cloud rises over East Palestine, Ohio.

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What's the connection between the earthquake in Syria and Turkey with the train wreck in East Palestine, Ohio?

More than 41,000 people, including thousands of children, have been killed by the Feb. 6 earthquake. No one has died so far in the Feb. 3 train wreck or from the dangerous chemicals that were released because of it.

Earthquakes are terrible natural events caused by the shifting and collision of plates inside the earth. Reinforced buildings designed to withstand shocks can greatly reduce fatalities.

Real estate sharks seeking more profits aren't interested in constructing safer

buildings. Thousands of people were killed because of contractors trying to cut costs

There was nothing natural about the wreck of the Norfolk Southern freight train that derailed. The 150-car train was 9,300 feet long and weighed 18,000 tons.

Railroad tycoons like long trains, which are part of their Precision Scheduled Railroading model. PSR has helped destroy [62,000 railroad jobs](#) since 2015 while [increasing average train length](#) by 25%.

It's simple logic that the longer a train is, the more likely there will be an equipment defect. Excluding the locomotives, a 150-car freight train has 600 axles.

An overheated roller bearing on a wheel axle apparently failed, causing 38 cars to derail with catastrophic results. Another 12 cars were damaged.

Twenty cars carried hazardous materials. Residents of East Palestine were told to temporarily evacuate and drink bottled water.

A huge mushroom cloud rose above the town. Dead fish have been found in streams within 7.5 miles of the catastrophe. Toxic residue was found in the Ohio River.

While Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine was holding a news conference on the train wreck, his state troopers arrested Evan Lambert, a Black TV reporter for News Nation. Lambert's resisting arrest and trespassing charges were later dismissed.

Five tank cars were deliberately exploded on Feb. 6. "We basically nuked a town with chemicals so we could get a railroad open," [said Sil Caggiano](#), a hazardous materials specialist.

## **Cancer time bomb**

Among [the dangerous cancer-causing chemicals](#) that continue to be released into

the air, soil and water are vinyl chloride gas, butyl acrylate, ethylhexyl acrylate and ethylene glycol monobutyl ethers. Also released was phosgene gas that was used in World War I to kill and blind soldiers.

Railroad workers cleared the important transportation artery by Feb. 4. That's what Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw and the outfit's big stockholders care about: keep the trains rolling and the profits coming in.

Among the [10 biggest Norfolk Southern stockholders](#), holding a total of more than 24 million shares, are JP Morgan Investment Advisors, BlackRock and Wells Fargo.

Shaw made \$4.5 million last year but doesn't want to give any sick days to railroad workers. Shaw's lobbyists got Trump to throw out a safety rule adopted under the Obama administration. It mandated a new electronic braking system for trains carrying hazardous goods like the train that derailed.

Big-hearted [Norfolk Southern](#), which hauled in \$4.8 billion in profit last year, is offering \$1,000 "inconvenience checks" to East Palestine residents. Warren, Ohio, [Attorney David Engler](#) is advising clients not to take the chump change since it could be used as an excuse by NS management to deny further compensation.

## **Economic sanctions and deindustrialization**

In the Turkey-Syria quake, construction shortcuts helped kill children and their parents. So did the U.S. capitalist government.

The Pentagon has been at war with the elected Syrian government since 2011. U.S. forces seized Syrian oil and wheat fields.

U.S. sanctions, some of which have been lifted, prevented aid from going to Syria. U.S. sanctions against socialist Cuba haven't stopped Cuban doctors and other healthcare workers from helping Syrians.

One of the biggest U.S. Air Force bases is in Incirlik, Turkey, near the earthquake zone. Nuclear weapons continue to be stored there.

East Palestine, Ohio, almost touches the Pennsylvania border. Western Pennsylvania and Northeastern Ohio were once one of the biggest concentrations of steel mills and heavy industry in the world.

Hundreds of thousands of union jobs were destroyed in a region that includes Pittsburgh and Cleveland. Deliberate deindustrialization is also an economic sanction.

East Palestine is named after the country of Palestine. David Ben Gurion was the first prime minister of the apartheid regime that occupies Palestine.

He said of the Palestinians driven out during the Nakba or catastrophe that “the old will die and the young will forget.” Palestinians have never forgotten their homeland and are continuing to fight for their freedom against a racist colonial government.

If East Palestine becomes a cancer cluster 10 or 20 years from now, railroad owners also hope that “the old will die and the young will forget.” Many of those possible cancer victims will be youthful.

The U.S. government has shoveled over \$140 billion into Israel while it has lavished money on railroads for 160 years. General Custer had it coming, and he died for the Northern Pacific Railway that was invading Lakota Sioux land. The Northern Pacific is now part of billionaire Warren Buffet’s BNSF railway.

From Palestine to East Palestine, it’s poor and working people who suffer from capitalist disasters.

*The writer is a retired Amtrak worker.*

