

September 11, 2017



Speak Out Now

revolutionaryworkers.org speakout@revolutionaryworkers.org (510) 343-9105

These Are Not Natural Disasters!

Hurricane Harvey was called the most devastating hurricane ever – until Hurricane Irma. Hurricane Irma is setting records for size and devastation in the Caribbean, destroying 95% of the buildings on some islands. And now Irma has landed in Florida and the level of destruction is only starting to become clear just as Hurricanes Jose and Katia are hitting the nearby region.

The news media and politicians are quick to just call these natural disasters as a way to avoid talking about how climate change intensifies storms. Scientists, however, are saying that while climate change may not have caused the hurricanes to form, it has impacted how intense and long-lasting they are. Global warming doesn't just warm the earth's atmosphere but also the oceans. Hurricanes get their destructive energy from the warmth of the ocean, and the region's ocean surface temperatures, like the atmosphere, have been at record levels. The connection between the dependence on fossil fuels and the growing threat from hurricanes cannot be ignored – especially as energy companies continue to invest in and profit from these fuels.

Despite Trump's photo ops and attempts to show concern for the victims of these powerful hurricanes, the policies of his administration will only make matters worse. The Trump administration is composed of climate change deniers who have made it a priority to remove environmental restrictions, only to accelerate the problem of global warming. At the same time, Trump appointees have struck down a requirement for federally funded building projects to consider climate change risks, such as raising structures in flood zones beyond the reach of flood-waters. And Trump's federal budget proposal would cut about nine percent from the very programs that provide disaster relief, including FEMA, flood protection and a whole host of other necessary relief programs.

But it's not just the Republicans. Democratic administrations at the federal, state, and local levels have also done little or nothing to prepare for hurricanes and other disasters. They have let

infrastructure deteriorate, like the levees in New Orleans that failed during Hurricane Katrina. And they too have done nothing to tackle the problems of climate change in any serious way. When the priorities of this society are profits and not our own well-being, we will continue to see the kind of devastation we have seen from Katrina to Sandy to Harvey and Irma.

We cannot rely on a government that doesn't care about our interests. While hurricanes themselves are natural occurrences, the resulting devastation is the effect of a system that puts profits before life itself.

We can do much better! Consider what they do in Cuba to prepare for hurricanes with many fewer resources. Deaths and property damage from hurricanes in Cuba are far less than in other countries. Its last 17 hurricanes have resulted in only 35 deaths. Rather than rely on individual initiative or the last-minute mobilization of the National Guard, Cuba engages every citizen year-round in hurricane preparedness. All adults participate in evacuation training. All schools incorporate hurricane training into their curricula. Cubans know where they should go in an evacuation. They update emergency plans annually. Communities and the government work together to tape up windows, organize transportation, identify and plan for the most vulnerable residents.

If Cuba can do it, why can't we? We have seen thousands of ordinary people in Texas and Florida show their courage, innovation, and determination to help others. Just imagine what it could be like if all the abilities that we possess to come together and tackle these problems collectively were encouraged and relied upon on a daily basis.

A Speak out Now forum:

We Are the Majority! We must Defend Ourselves!

The far right is growing with its hate speech and attacks on Muslims, immigrants and others. We must organize to say "No" to their message of hate.

Saturday, September 23 at 7pm (doors open at 6:30)

South Berkeley Senior Center - 2939 Ellis St. in Berkeley

\$5 donation (no one turned away for lack of funds)