



Speak Out Now

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Hurricanes Show Their System Offers No Solutions

Over the past weeks, Hurricanes Helene and Milton ripped through parts of the southeastern United States. Milton was the second-most intense tropical cyclone ever recorded. And Helene was one of the deadliest hurricanes in the U.S. since Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The most devastating impacts of Helene were in the Appalachian region of North Carolina, where it wiped out whole cities and infrastructure. The destruction was so severe that it will take years for the region to recover. The death toll from both hurricanes exceeds 270 people. More are likely dead as hundreds are still missing.

These hurricanes have also unleashed chaos in the lives of millions in the region. Many people have had their homes destroyed or severely damaged due to flooding. And in the process of evacuating, a stark contrast emerged between those who could afford to escape and those who couldn't.

Those with money could escape by driving to safety or booking last-minute flights, while many poor and working-class people were forced to stay in life-threatening situations. Many had nowhere to go and no way to get there. Some were forced to continue working until the hurricanes made landfall.

For those that survived, many still face miserable conditions. Three weeks after Hurricane Helene, there are thousands of people without electricity or access to clean water in North Carolina. And after Milton, almost a million people are still without electricity in Florida, and 30% of gas stations in the state have no gas.

Hurricane Helene also damaged a factory in North Carolina which produces about 60% of the intravenous (IV) fluids used by medical facilities in the country. IV fluids are critical to help treat patients and deliver medication. And now there is a nationwide IV fluid shortage, with hospitals rationing IV fluids, and forced to cancel many important surgeries and procedures.

To call an event a natural disaster means it occurs for reasons independent of human influence. That's not the case here at all. There is nothing natural about these disasters. This was not a disaster simply from nature, nor even a disaster simply from weather — this was a disaster of capitalism. Extreme weather events like this are driven

by climate disruption caused from the burning of fossil fuels. And the system of capitalism requires fossil fuels to function, in order to continuously produce and expand, and to amass greater wealth. In the face of more frequent and more destructive extreme weather events, or severe droughts and fires, the system of capitalism is only accelerating climate destruction.

And in response to these frequent disasters, insurance companies have begun to cancel flood and fire insurance. Airlines even raised their prices as people were trying to flee Florida before the storm hit. And in the wake of these disasters, there is minimal relief offered to the thousands of people whose lives are destroyed. The infrastructure of the wealthiest country on the planet cannot withstand the disasters caused by this system.

In poorer countries the situation is even worse. Many of the migrants arriving at the southern border from Central and South America are fleeing desperate conditions, exacerbated by extreme weather caused by the climate crisis. And they are being treated as criminals for trying to survive. Imagine what might happen to people in Florida or North Carolina who have lost everything. Where will they go? Will they, too, be criminalized for becoming homeless?

These hurricanes and the chaos they unleashed show us the total bankruptcy of a system that values profits over human lives. It's a system that can't keep us safe and is a danger to us all if we allow it to be left in place. Those in power may offer crumbs to help, but they aren't coming to save us, and their system offers no solutions.

At the end of the day, just as it is ordinary people who make this society run before disasters like these, in the wake of these disasters, it is always the actions of ordinary people who provide the real relief. Whether power is restored, whether water is turned back on, whether infrastructure is rebuilt — all of this depends on the labor of working people.

If we want to see an end to the destruction of our planet and the chaos that comes with it, we will have to take control of our society, and take it out of the hands of these corporations. Only then will we be able to organize a society that meets our needs and serves our interests.