

Hurricane Flooding Exposes Mass Poverty, Class Oppression in America

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On Wednesday, President Donald Trump toured portions of North and South Carolina still reeling from the record-setting floods spawned by Hurricane Florence.

Trump carefully avoided the scenes of intense human suffering and destruction in the region, including thousands of homeless residents in impoverished areas still waiting for desperately needed aid. He avoided any mention of the hundreds of thousands still without power five days after the storm made landfall. He said nothing of the lack of flood insurance for the vast majority of devastated homeowners, or the failure of the government to make any preparations for a new storm following the catastrophic flooding unleashed just two years ago by Hurricane Matthew.

Instead, he staged a press event at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point near New Bern, North Carolina, a town ravaged by flood waters of the Neuse River, where he reprised the litany of empty promises and lies he gave out last year in a similar public relations visit to Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

Alongside Democratic Governor Roy Cooper, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator Brock Long, various military and police officers and other notables, Trump boasted of the “incredible” response to the hurricane by his administration and state and local authorities. Hailing the “planning that went into this” as “beyond belief,” he promised the victims of the storm:

“We will never forget your loss. We will never leave your side. We’re with you all the way.”

Trump will have forgotten the workers whose lives have been turned upside down even before Air Force One takes off for Washington, and the corporate media and politicians will drop the issue soon after. No less than in Puerto Rico, Houston and Florida last year—and New Orleans 13 years ago—the victims of the storm will be left to fend for themselves with only token assistance from the government.

Following the mutual backslapping at the Marine air base, the press recorded Trump handing out box lunches to residents of a New Bern neighborhood that had been flooded. His real priorities emerged when he stopped to ask the CEO of Duke Energy about the conditions around Lake Norman, where the Trump National Golf Club-Charlotte is located.



President Donald Trump hands out prepackaged meals to people in cars at Temple Baptist Church in an area impacted by Hurricane Florence (Source: The Greenville News)

As of this writing, 37 people have lost their lives. Many hundreds more are homeless. A quarter of a million people have no electricity. More than 10,000 remain in shelters as several rivers have not yet crested. Long sections of major roadways remain impassable. Fourteen rivers in North Carolina have overflowed their banks; some of which are pouring livestock waste and coal ash downstream. Over one million poultry birds and five thousand hogs have drowned.

With each passing day, the storm reveals more clearly before the eyes of the world the rotten core of American capitalist society. Once again, a natural disaster—compounded by official negligence, callous indifference and the systematic downgrading of basic infrastructure—has revealed the reality of pervasive poverty and class oppression in the United States.

Trump is only the most grotesque expression of the moral depravity, backwardness and criminality of the ruling class as a whole. Its stranglehold over the economic levers of society at every point blocks the rational and humane mobilization of the resources—which exist in abundance—to mitigate the impact of natural disasters and make whole those who are victimized by them.

In Fayetteville, a large city on the Cape Fear River in central-eastern North Carolina, hundreds of residents remain in shelters and county officials have confirmed two deaths. The city has a poverty rate of 18.4 percent. One in four children lives in poverty.

In a statement to National Public Radio, Fayetteville resident Adrienne Murphy, 38, recalled the widespread displacement and food shortages after Hurricane Matthew and issued a message to Trump: “Next week is a long time—you have to act now!”

To the south is the flood-soaked city of Lumberton, where Interstate 95 remains partially closed. Robeson County, where the city is located, has a poverty rate of 27.8 percent, or

double the national average. A staggering 70 percent of children in the county live below the poverty line. The Lumber River flooded severely in Hurricane Matthew, leaving over 1,500 residents displaced for months.

Robeson County drafted a “Resilient Redevelopment Plan” after Matthew, which included upgrades to the Lumber River levee and the construction of a floodgate where the levee opens for a railroad crossing controlled by the CSX railroad corporation. The aim was to avoid a repeat of the 2016 storm, when the river broke the levee and destroyed low-income neighborhoods of south and west Lumberton.

CSX refused to cooperate with county planners, and Governor Roy Cooper refused to acquire the property by declaring eminent domain.

In nearby Pembroke, also inundated by flood waters, 60 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. After Hurricane Matthew, the mayor sought to clear the area’s swamps and canals of fallen trees and debris to improve drainage, but the Army Corps of Engineers refused to take on the project.

In Wilmington’s Northside, a predominantly African-American neighborhood, the power remains out and residents are struggling to clean up and salvage what they can from the flood. Median income in the neighborhood is between \$14,000 and \$17,000 a year.

In South Carolina, a press release Wednesday from the state’s Emergency Management Division advised residents near the Big Pee Dee, Waccamaw, Little Pee Dee and Lynches rivers that flood waters would continue to crest over the weekend and into early next week. The state fire marshal had already assisted in 518 evacuations over the preceding 24 hours.

Two women died Tuesday night in rural South Carolina when a Horry County Sheriff’s van drove off of a flooded road. The victims were being transported pursuant to a court-ordered evacuation of facilities for the mentally ill. They were handcuffed and chained inside the van.

In a statement published September 2, 2005, entitled “Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath: From natural disaster to national humiliation,” the *World Socialist Web Site* editorial board wrote:

Hurricane Katrina has laid bare the awful truths of contemporary America—a country torn by the most intense class divisions, ruled by a corrupt plutocracy that possesses no sense of either social reality or public responsibility, in which millions of its citizens are deemed expendable and cannot depend on any social safety net or public assistance if disaster, in whatever form, strikes...

The storm that breached the levees of New Orleans has revealed all of the horrific implications of 25 years’ worth of uninterrupted social and political reaction.

The real results of the destruction of essential social services, the dismantling of government agencies entrusted with alleviating poverty and coping with disasters, and the ceaseless nostrums about the “free market” magically resolving the problems of modern society have been exposed before millions.

This was written before the 2008 Wall Street crash and Great Recession, which destroyed millions of jobs, led to the foreclosure and eviction of 9 million homeowners, and wiped out

the life savings of millions of workers. Since then, the plundering of society by the financial oligarchy has intensified, first under Obama and now under Trump. The decay of infrastructure and levels of social desperation have only grown worse, alongside the record rise in stock prices and the fortunes of the top 5 percent.

What emerges from the unfolding disaster in the Carolinas is the failure of the capitalist system and the need for the working class to replace it with a system based on common ownership of the banks, corporations and natural resources, the expropriation of the wealth of the oligarchy, and the satisfaction of social need rather than private profit—that is, socialism.

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