

Letters on the US hurricane disaster

9 September 2005

The following is a selection of letters to the World Socialist Web Site in response to recent articles on Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, including “Readers report on Katrina disaster”, “As Katrina’s toll emerges: US ruling elite rejects policy shift to confront disaster”, “After New Orleans disaster: human misery and the profit principle”, and “Astrodome refugees report hellish conditions in New Orleans”, as well as other reports referenced below.

With astonishing ferocity, the Republican rulers of the United States have declared war on the poor of New Orleans. Only this week, the infamous Rick Santorum, reactionary senator from Pennsylvania, told Congress that the most urgent requirement in the storm’s aftermath is severe penalties for the poor who refuse to leave their homes. Despite George Bush’s insincere “compassionate” posturing—he diverted the much-needed services of an entire team of expert firefighters to appear as extras in staged presidential photo-ops—the real message is that the poor of New Orleans are to blame for failing to see their calamity as an opportunity to roll up their sleeves and jump on some magical bandwagon of capitalist success that the storm has conjured up for the virtuous.

Given the blatancy of this nonsense—and the alarming, if predictable, fact that the Reaganized masses of greater America appear to be swallowing it whole—it is not surprising that the more leftward-tending commentators have focused on the obvious racism and victimization of the poorest under the present corrupt and vicious system.

I do not wish in any way to deride the importance of those revelations. I do, however, wish to protest sharply against the “liberal” idea that *only* the poorest or the designated “lesser breeds” are endangered in this crisis. *Everyone* who does or, under conditions of social equality and justice, would do genuinely productive work in this country is being victimized by the forces of advanced capitalism as led by Bush and his fellow criminals. Formerly semi-prosperous working people climbed into their cars when asked to do so, left the city, drove until they ran out of gas, and were left with nothing or next to nothing. The poorest, with only a short distance to go toward absolute destitution, were the first to perish. But all working people were and are endangered and at risk.

The true story thus is not the liberal fiction that “we” are safe and prosperous, and only need to extend charity via the government to a small group of the “poor and unfortunate.” Rather, it is the story of ruthless, murderous, unrelenting and implacable class warfare waged by the capitalist elite against all working people. This class warfare is an established fact of society, not something that a few deranged “terrorists” are trying to start. Its true face is that of a week-old corpse floating on the toxic waters of a flooded city. Everything else is a mask.

The belated but now-massive relief effort testifies to the unwillingness of the American people, however misled, to tolerate the abandonment of their fellow citizens. Sensing this, the politicians are scrambling to obfuscate their indifference, indeed glee, at the spectacle of such massive misfortune, with its ensuing opportunities for buying cheap, employing cheaper, and generally profiteering from the reconstruction effort. But if the only lesson of this storm is yet more pabulum about love and charity and sharing and niceness and coming together and “non-partisanship,” the one-sided war of the capitalists against the unresisting masses will not be impeded in any way.

It is vital that progressives somehow get the truth about class warfare across now, while the proof of it is still visible.

FG

7 September 2005

I express my sympathies to all the victims of Katrina. It is not only a pity but also a matter of great shame that the mighty military strength of the US could not save the 100,000 citizens of New Orleans! It is very clear that the US military has been trained only to invade and destroy, and not to save people—not even to save its own people. It is an indelible shame on the powers that be in the US!

AA

New Delhi, India

5 September 2005

A Canadian couple visiting New Orleans was featured on our local television station (CTV) last night in an interview from outside of the stadium. I was *shocked* to learn that in their attempts to get out of the city, the military were firing warning shots in the air and ordering people to return. They had no choice but to turn around and go back to conditions that might have ended their lives. While I have been dumbfounded by the lack of federal response until this point, red flags immediately rose in my sociological head upon watching this newscast.

Rewind the media tapes: the use of words like “looting,” “lawlessness,” “chaos” and “anarchy” coincide with images of ethnic looting and burning fires, and justify the marshalling in of armed forces that seem more concerned with patching up the broken levees (and lost profit from the damaged oil industry) than with rescuing the people of Louisiana, Mississippi, or Canada for that matter. Following public criticism of this, we learn from everyone from Bush to Kanye West that the culprits are “unacceptable bureaucracy,” “government” and “American administration.”

While I would never have expected him to have read “The Communist Manifesto,” let alone understand “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” I suspect Bush of having the political aspirations of a postmodern prince. But who would ever have thought that the executive of the United States administrative elite would use this catastrophe as the revolutionary force needed to smash the welfare state apparatus?

While I look at the worn-out and weary faces of middle America—and that includes Canada and Mexico—I cannot help but wonder what Bush et al have in store for them/us next. I do not hesitate to offer up donations to help the people of the world, but I cannot help but wonder, what is really being built by the world’s generosity with Bush, Bush and Clinton at the helm?

SLS

Canada

4 September 2005

Your writing on this matter was correct in the fact that the masters are falling over themselves trying to find ways to make the most of the suffering of humanity. I am certain that they are also giddy to the point of having an accident in their pants at their good fortune provided to them by “an act of God.”

What other cities are cussing that New Orleans has all the luck? They have gotten rid of all of their poor and all of their ghettos and didn’t have

to spend any money or listen to any bleeding hearts. The *Wall Street Journal* is beside itself with glee as to the profit to be made in this disaster. If we cannot see from all of this that we the people are nothing but shit in the eyes of the elite then we deserve everything that we receive at their hands.

Bob Dylan's "A Hard Rain Is Gonna Fall" is playing in the background and we need to listen to it. We may never again have this opportunity. We may never again have the eyes of the entire nation focused upon the failings of the government and capitalist society.

Our brothers and sisters are dying and being treated as less than dogs and beasts. We need more outrage and compassion and noise. If we remain asleep at this time we may never awaken.

RAV

Upper Marlboro, Maryland

7 September 2005

On "Hurricane Katrina's aftermath: from natural disaster to national humiliation"

An outstanding analysis that gives expression to the immense sense of loss and frustration we all feel about this disaster.... What otherwise might appear as an a-political, Poseidon-like natural catastrophe is revealed as a waste of life and land, made worse by human error. While the negligent will try to claim that the screw-ups were honest mistakes in judgment, your web site points out that this disaster was engineered as a matter of long-standing policy. Rather than allocating capital, ownership and resources to those areas and people who need them most, the politically powerful in this country protect the "right" of the grossly affluent to hoard more of what they already have. Worse, the nation's assets are squandered abroad in an unjust foreign war of aggression. Tragically, the Louisiana-Mississippi dead and homeless are more "collateral damage." The Katrina survivors are American refugees, persons displaced by a failed economic/war policy.

On a side note—isn't it ironic that President Bush and others in this administration think that the Intelligent Design "anti-theory" ought to be taught side by side with Darwinian evolution, as if the latter isn't undeniable? Presumably they fail to see or admit that the weak *are* being selected as candidates for extinction by unconscionable, yet relentless policies of "social Darwinism." The levees be damned. Those who "choose" not to evacuate will have to fend for themselves. Meanwhile, as our cities and communities beg for increased infrastructure security here in our Homeland, our president quips, (in the aftermath of the London bombings to terrorists everywhere), "Bring it on!"

PT

Michigan

6 September 2005

Amazing that the levee breach was not declared in our national media but was in European—just another day at the beach for our spin doctors.

Now with this call for complete evacuation; it has been on our media and in the papers that a previous flood was directed into the black community with much claim that damages would be made good; they weren't. Is it any surprise that the people whose parents lost everything by being lied to by government are reluctant to leave the only possessions they have?—clearly they believe that their absence will allow their presence to be erased in much the same way as before.

Indeed, is it possible that plans call for diverting flood waters into low-lying areas? Is it possible that the toxins will accumulate in low-lying areas, or even be diverted there, with the result that the once-residential area will become a toxic dump? Inasmuch as the poor were forced to build in areas no one else wanted, the lands would have been low to begin with. Now, are we going to see history repeated—will the toxins end up where the poor are now barricaded in their homes?

KS

Duluth, Minnesota

7 September 2005

On "Hurricane disaster shows the failure of the profit system"

There will be another disaster that shows the failure of the profit system, another that the Bush administration has been warned about but has not risen to the challenge of, at least not enough to save millions of lives, another example of a gutted social service system that had it been funded would save millions—that disaster is a pandemic, quite likely the H5N1 avian flu. Scientists have predicted that humanity is way overdue for this, but who in the Bush administration listens to science? There may be enough time to create vaccines for a favored few, but not for the many—can we guess who those few will be?

Peak oil, global warming, pandemics and religious crusades are about to converge in a most unfortunate way. The US economy and much of the world's economic health is on the verge of collapse. If you build a pyramidal society where the top rules the bottom, and the top starts to degrade, dismantle, destroy what the base of society needs to function, that pyramid will fall in the manner of the Twin Towers.

The world's elite are now in a battle for resources with the average working person caught in the middle. The poor—or as Kissinger once referred to them, the useless eaters—are least on the minds of the oligarchy, as demonstrated by the New Orleans holocaust—death by neglect. But like the Nazi ladder system, we must ponder who is the next rung to be neglected.

I have no doubt the Americans will go into mass denial a few weeks from now. Wal-Mart's corporate atrocities are invisible under the glare of its charitable contributions. Mr. Bush poses as a now "caring" president, a pose that will most likely be rammed down our throats by the purchased presses obscuring the once bewildered, stupid look he often dons. But memory may not fade so quickly if disaster keeps following disaster, if ignorance keeps usurping knowledge, if faith keeps belittling rationality.

God and prayers are likely to infiltrate the media as well. But we must remember the Easter Islander Syndrome: when civilizations collapse and neighbors start eating neighbors, God goes out the window. My only hope is that men and women of principled conscience, a characteristic that can hardly evolve in a profit system, will win the day; a new socialism where society is truly a level playing ground rather than a pyramid, where, it is hoped, we can share resources in a sustainable, earth-friendly way and stop this insanity before the last person on earth sucks the marrow out of the bones of the second-last person on earth.

SN

Powell River, British Columbia

6 September 2005

On "As hurricane disaster mounts, Bush scapegoats state, local officials"

Your excellent article should come as no surprise to anyone. The history of the Bush administration has been to refuse any responsibility for anything bad. No administration official has ever stepped up to the plate to admit failure. Rather, what you described on Saturday was the opening salvo from the right-wing propaganda machine directed by the White House and disseminated primarily through think tanks and talk radio to get their talking points spread to the faithful throughout the nation. This had already begun earlier in the weeks when media anchors such as Lou Dobbs constantly tried to get reporters to shift blame from the Bush administration even though these reporters were on the scene and saw first-hand the results of the callous, almost criminal, indifference of the Bush administration. And, of course, don't expect the Democrats to offer more than token disagreement, as many of them were compliant in those government policies.

MZ

Maryland

5 September 2005

Although you wrote that local and state officials "are far from

blameless” in the Katrina disaster and debacle, your emphasis is squarely on the Bush regime. Of course, Bush and his gang of corporate criminals richly deserve the lion’s share of blame, including their slowness of response, and cuts to the Army Corps of Engineers’ budget to reinforce the levees and flood walls.

But in terms of the evacuation and “law and order” response of Democrats, Mayor Ray Nagin and Governor Kathleen Blanco, more needs to be said. Nagin commanded, “Y’all leave, now” over radio and television, and then departed for Baton Rouge. Does this deserve the name “evacuation plan”? Were there no transit and school buses available to get folks out of harm’s way? Why weren’t people bused to the Superdome and convention center and those places stocked with water and food?

Blanco transformed herself into Ms. Macho after an initial crying spell and appeal for prayers. She threatened “looters” with death, saying that Guardsmen recently returned from Iraq had their “weapons on lock and load” and I “expect that they will shoot to kill.”

Since it is the system of boss rule—administered by Republican and Democrat alike—that delivered death to the poor of New Orleans, let’s be evenhanded when assessing and assigning blame.

BS

5 September 2005

On “Eyewitness to the New Orleans disaster: report from a WSWs reader”

Very well-phrased indignation. I think everybody understands what the USA is all about, I hope this will bring a change for the good

RP

6 September 2005

Thanks so much for this on-the-spot report. This is a disaster of monstrous proportions, to be sure, but the natural disaster, big as it is, is dwarfed by the disastrous exposure of incompetence and insensitivity demonstrated by our government. Today’s *Oakland Tribune* carried an article, and I quote: “As President Bush battled criticism over response to Hurricane Katrina, his mother declared it a success for evacuees who ‘were underprivileged anyway,’ saying many of the poor she has seen while touring a Houston relocation site were faring better than before the storm hit.... [She] said in an interview Monday with the American Public Media radio program Marketplace... ‘And so many of the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway so this is working very well for them.’ ”

She was apparently touring with her husband as part of a campaign to counter criticism of the sorry response to the storm. And was in the company of Bill Clinton—you remember, the guy that has been referred to as the “first black president.” This should clear that up once and for all.

I’m especially grateful to the author for making known his appreciation of the invaluable contribution blacks have made to American culture and the lack of any acknowledgement or appreciation for it by the powers that be. It’s unfortunate that it takes a disaster of these proportions to bring things into focus.

GC

Oakland, California

7 September 2005



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