

Victims blamed in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike

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Days after Hurricane Ike devastated Texas and other areas on the southern coast and midsection of the United States, the storm's death toll now stands at 50. Deaths attributed to the hurricane span several states including Louisiana, Tennessee, Kentucky, Ohio, Missouri, Illinois and Arkansas. While floodwaters and debris caught in high winds led to a number of deaths, others have occurred not as a direct result of the hurricane itself but as the result of victims trying to cope with its elements and aftermath.

In Texas, carbon monoxide poisoning has killed at least three who attempted to use generators to restore power to their homes. Deaths have also occurred from house fires begun as a result of residents using candles to cope with the lack of electricity. The Associated Press has reported incidents in which two people in need of dialysis treatments on Galveston Island died and another woman with cancer whose breathing machine had stopped working during the storm.

In addition to loss of life, the storm has caused considerable damage in at least 10 states across the nation. Missouri, including the St. Louis area, saw major flooding and crops in the southeastern part of the state suffered major damages. At least 85,000 were left without power across the state.

A state of emergency was declared for all of Kentucky; the city of Louisville suffered the worst power outage it had seen in three decades and the Louisville International Airport and the Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International Airport near Covington were forced to close. More than 600,000 people statewide lost power.

Cincinnati, Ohio reported a loss in power to 927,000 customers (out of roughly 2.1 million people in all). Accompanying the loss in power was a shortage in water supplies in central Ohio and a loss of no less than

20 percent of the state's corn crops.

Gaining the most attention, however, was the aid crisis facing Texas, where there have been inadequate supplies available to those in need. At the time of this writing, 30,000 forced to leave their homes remained spread across 300 shelters. Filling stations have been without gasoline and electricity, making it impossible for residents to use their cars either to leave the damaged areas or to get relief supplies. Many storm victims have been forced to walk great distances to distribution centers where they then had to wait hours for precious resources. The AP reports that survivors consumed "1 million bottles of water, 1 million meals and 600,000 pounds of ice in the first 36 hours after the storm passed." This when there are approximately 2 million citizens without power in Texas.

Ten thousand people came searching for basic necessities at just one Houston-area distribution center on Monday. On Wednesday it was reported that the number of distribution centers would now be *quadrupled* to what is still likely to be an inadequate 60.

On the hard-hit Galveston Island, where some 20,000 out of 57,000 remained during the storm, homes were destroyed and debris scattered far and wide. In many cases, floodwaters burst into homes and flushed out the belongings inside, dragging furniture and other household items across the coast. The infrastructure, as Rick Barte, the assistant fire chief of the Phoenix Fire Department, described it to *Newsweek*, "is totally devastated to the point that there is no running water, no electricity and no gas."

Teams of rescuers also searched for roughly 350 residents who remained on Bolivar Peninsula, effectively made an island by the storms. The state's game warden, Bobby Jobes, told reporters "We're

trying to pull 'em out, but some of 'em just plain refuse to leave. These are some hard-headed folks.”

Among the “hard-headed” described by Mr. Jobes was an 89-year-old woman who didn’t want to leave her cat and dog behind. Others said to have “defied” the evacuation order, like Debra Germet and her 81-year old mother Marry Isaaks, did in fact attempt to leave. After helping her mother and another elderly resident into her car, however, Ms. Germet found the roads flooded making it impossible to escape.

Some residents of the Peninsula, painted as stubborn and ignorant by state officials and the media, tied ropes around themselves and selflessly waded through floodwaters attempting to save motorists whose cars were rapidly going under the rising tide.

It has been an especially vile element of the Ike story that state officials and the news media have continually blamed and insulted such victims of the storm, many of them poor and working class or suffering from physical disabilities, while themselves escaping criticism for their own inefficient evacuation of residents in many areas and the inadequate supplies and distribution of aid. Further exposing the longstanding incompetence and neglect of authorities, some Texans who did not leave in advance of Hurricane Ike’s landfall described not wanting to be caught up in another poorly executed evacuation such as had occurred in earlier storms and remained behind believing they would be safer in their homes than stranded on highways in the impossible-to-navigate traffic. In other cases, those living in areas that were not under either mandatory or voluntary evacuation orders told reporters that they should have been ordered to leave and would have done so if properly warned.

One searches in vain for those who have faith in authorities, and no wonder. Hurricane Ike is just the latest in a series of natural disasters that have revealed the inability of the capitalist system to provide for the people who fall in their path. Adequate warning before such natural disasters or the necessary infrastructure to survive and cope with a disaster and its aftermath are simply not in place.

In the face of tornadoes such as those that killed 59 in the southern US in February, wildfires such as those that burned in southern California in October 2007, or Hurricanes like Ike and, most horribly, Katrina, capitalism has failed every challenge. By and large, it

has been working people that have most suffered as a result.



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