

“This is man-made—it’s going to hurt a lot of people”

Louisiana residents speak on flood disaster

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The Louisiana bayou region has been deliberately flooded by the US Army Corps of Engineers in a bid to prevent the inundation of cities and industrial operations along the Mississippi River.

As a result, 25,000 residents will feel the effects, and thousands of the poorest people will lose everything they own. The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed residents Wednesday on their experiences.

Morgan City, population 12,000, centers on the seafood and oil industries. The town is surrounded by floodwalls, and authorities have said flooding will be minimal. WSWs reporters noted, however, that a large gate on the floodwall running between the downtown area and the Atchafalaya River docks was leaking profusely.

Some residents, recalling the levee failures that submerged New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, are deeply concerned and distrustful of official announcements.

“There’s so many different stories, you know? It’s hard for me to believe it’s not going to happen,” Keela Junifer said. “They say it’s okay and then we all end up on rooftops.”

Keela said her neighborhood was going to be flooded, and she plans to evacuate. “It’s scary. I have two kids and I know I can’t swim.”

Asked by WSWs reporters about the federal response in comparison to the 2008 financial crisis, Keela expressed anger. She noted that the levee system has been underfunded, while the federal government has channeled trillions of dollars in public funds to the very wealthy.

“We have to think about everybody, not just them,” Keela said. “It is not okay for a tiny few Americans

making more money than the entire world combined to just sit back and let this happen to us. But you know what? They’re going to look stupid when it floods. It’s just really not fair.”

The Morganza diversion is making its way southward toward the Morgan City area, sweeping away hundreds of thousands of acres of cropland and inundating small towns. Evacuations have for the most part been voluntary, last-minute, and unplanned.

Municipalities throughout the region are poor and relying on the aid of volunteers and charity groups. Local emergency-response providers have had limited coordination among a patchwork of locations and organization.

In Patterson, Louisiana, Red Cross workers at a community center were unaware that the center had been publicly designated as the primary receiving location for Morgan City evacuees. Workers said they thought the center had been listed as the “number three” shelter after community centers in Bayou Vista and Berwick. The manager expressed concern over lack of a generator to power the building.

In nearby Stephenville, 75 miles south of the Morganza Floodway, few of the 1,400 residents are staying with their homes. The town has laid 400,000 sandbags, put plastic sheeting up around some buildings, and sank a barge in an effort to block rising floodwaters from the Atchafalaya River.

James Governale spent 10 days stacking sandbags around his house. While hoping to stay, he explained, “It depends on how high the water gets, really. I got a pump system in case it gets really bad.” James added, “They should’ve tried to build [the levees] higher. But

it's all about the money...they need to put all that money toward infrastructure, especially the roads. It's terrible here."

"I think they need to take the money and spend it on repairing the locks, period," a Stephenville fisherman told the WSWs. He said that in addition to the dilapidated water system, "Every time the oil industry builds another rig, it stops the water flow. They're part of the problem too."

The fisherman, who lived in a mobile home along a canal near the Atchafalaya, said he may be forced to evacuate. His entire neighborhood worked in fishing. Like many residents in the region, he had no flood insurance.

"We're probably going to flood by Tuesday, so we're going to see how high the water gets," he said. The city had provided some materials for fortification against the rising waters, but he commented, "Just the raw materials. We had to do it all ourselves."

The floodwaters have put increasing strain on levee walls, in some cases threatening a breach. In response, authorities have imposed restrictions on boat transit along the waterways, shutting down critical barge traffic and fishing activities. "I can't fish," he commented. "They need to let us fish. Our little boats don't make a big enough wake to hurt the levee."

"This is man-made, you know?" he commented about the decision to open the Morganza. "It's going to hurt a lot of people. I mean, they're doing what they've got to do at this point, but they need to take care of all of us."

"If they would've opened the locks three months ago, this wouldn't have happened," he said. "It would've trickled in little by little. I know these waters, I tell you—I've been fishing on them my whole life. Instead, they decided to wait until the last minute and drown us all."



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