

A socialist policy for the victims of Hurricane Sandy

Jerry White (SEP candidate for US president)

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As the Socialist Equality Party's candidate for US president, I want to express my solidarity with all those who have suffered the devastation of Hurricane Sandy. I call for the allocation of hundreds of billions of dollars to make the victims of this disaster whole and rebuild the homes, schools and infrastructure in the storm-ravaged states.

Tens of millions of people in New Jersey, New York and other states are facing a catastrophic situation. The death toll is quickly approaching 100 as rescue workers pull more victims out of the rubble. Across a 1,000-mile swath of ten states, powerful winds, flooding and fires have destroyed homes and cars and left millions without electricity.

Much of the New York City metropolitan area—the most densely populated region in the country—has been cut off from subway, commuter rail and airport connections. Damaged and ruined businesses have left workers, already living paycheck-to-paycheck, without any income. Power outages and shortages have left residents to forage for food and wait in line for hours for gasoline.

The official response—by the Obama administration, state and local authorities, and the utility giants—has been an insult. At every juncture, the social needs of the population come into conflict with the profit interests and prerogatives of the corporate and financial elite that both the Democrats and Republicans defend.

As the bitter experience of Hurricane Katrina and other disasters shows, many homeowners and small businessmen who lost everything will never recover. Insurance companies are expected to pay out no more than \$10-20 billion—a fraction of the estimated \$50-70 billion that was lost.

The homeless have been piled into rescue shelters and victims told to apply for aid from the Federal

Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which is notorious for delays and denying help to disaster victims.

Like everything else, the allocation of resources has been directed to the top. The city's billionaire mayor and the utility giants made sure electricity was quickly restored to the New York Stock Exchange so Wall Street investors could continue reaping their profits. The lights were also turned on in the luxury high-rise apartments in lower Manhattan.

Meanwhile, working-class and poor residents of the city have been abandoned. In Staten Island, one woman told the news media, "We are not getting help because we are a working class neighborhood and it's a kind of fend for yourself thing."

In public housing projects—without water and electricity for lights or elevators—residents have been forced to get water from open fire hydrants and lug containers up multiple flights of stairs in the dark. One resident—a transit worker who had spent the previous 24 hours helping to restore the train system—told the WSWS, "Different classes get taken care of differently."

Opposing any significant allocation of resources needed to address this crisis, the politicians and the corporate-controlled news media have stressed the need for "self-reliance," telling victims the government cannot do everything and recovery will take a very long time. Moreover, they say, the government is already facing a fiscal crisis that will limit the response.

The Socialist Equality Party rejects these claims. This disaster demands a massive, socially coordinated response. The country's full technological, financial and human resources must be marshaled to provide immediate relief to those in need and rebuild homes, schools, businesses, and transit and infrastructure

systems in the affected areas.

There are millions ready and able to work. The national jobless rate for construction workers alone is over 16 percent, with some 2.2 million fewer workers employed in the industry today than in 2006. These workers must be put to work—at guaranteed good wages and benefits—through a massive government-funded public works program. This must include a comprehensive program to upgrade and modernize anti-storm and flood-control systems, mass transit, and the electrical generation and transmission system.

To claim that there is no money for these essential needs is a lie. The Bush and Obama administrations made an estimated \$23 trillion available to bail out the criminals on Wall Street who plunged the economy into the worst crisis since the Great Depression. After being handed the keys to the US Treasury, these financial sharks are making more money than ever. On top of this, four trillion dollars have been wasted on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq on behalf of the energy conglomerates and big banks.

Far from providing any relief to the victims of Hurricane Sandy, both millionaire candidates—Obama and Romney—are committed to a “Grand Bargain” to slash \$4 trillion from the federal deficit. This will involve savage cuts in Medicare, Medicaid and other programs that will cost lives and make the population even more vulnerable to the impact of such disasters.

Hurricane Sandy has once again exposed the impossibility of addressing the needs of a modern, mass society within the framework of the outmoded capitalist system. Again and again, social needs run up against the absolute obstacle of an economic and social system in which the productive forces of society—and all of the decisions about the allocation of resources—are monopolized by a tiny handful of the population.

Scientists have repeatedly been warning New York city and state officials of the probability of a weather disaster involving widespread flooding and damage to electrical and transit systems. Proposals for the building of strategic storm barriers in and around the New York harbor—which would have prevented the catastrophic flooding—were rejected out of hand because of the estimated cost of \$10 billion. This is nothing compared to the profits and bonuses of the banks and financial institutions headquartered in Manhattan.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the

nationalization of the banks and their transformation into publicly owned entities. The working class, which produces the wealth of society, should take control of these resources so that human need takes precedence over the greed and ever-greater enrichment of the financial aristocracy. At the same time, a radical change in course and social priorities is needed, including a policy to contain global warming and upgrade basic infrastructure.

Such a transformation is not possible through a political system completely dominated by the rich. The working class must build a mass socialist party to fight for a workers’ government and genuine social equality.

My running mate Phyllis Scherrer and I entered these elections to fight for these policies and to build a new revolutionary leadership of the working class. I urge you to make a class-conscious vote for us on November 6, and above all, to make the decision to join and build the SEP to lead the fight for socialism.

For more information and to become involved, visit socialequality.com



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