

In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy: Aid for Coney Island too little and too late

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New York City's Coney Island was badly hit by Hurricane Sandy on Monday night and has received minimal aid from government agencies.

Although it is known for its beaches, amusement park and other attractions, the peninsula of Coney Island along the Atlantic Ocean in Brooklyn is also a predominantly working class community of 50,000 people. But one would have little idea that a disaster had struck this community by reading or listening to the official media in New York or nationwide.

Flood waters four to six feet high deluged the streets, knocked out gas and electricity and irreparably damaged many homes and businesses. Cars floated away or were otherwise destroyed by the water. Power was restored to parts of the neighborhood only on Thursday, and some people still do not have heat, even as the temperatures continue to drop in the evenings.

Stores have been destroyed or stopped functioning, and food has begun to rot in people's houses and apartments.

Transportation to and from Coney Island has become a hardship. Subways have stopped running to the area, and bus service is infrequent and crowded. Indeed, traffic is snarled throughout south Brooklyn. Thousands of drivers queue up for a diminishing supply of gas.

The reaction of the city government has been to send hundreds of police into the neighborhood to keep order, but almost nothing in the way of supplies, generators, pumps or temporary housing.

On Friday, for the first time since the storm, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had set up a small encampment and begun distributing food. By the time *World Socialist Web Site* reporters arrived in the afternoon, FEMA was turning away residents,

telling them that they had run out of supplies.

The official neglect has created a sense of outrage in the neighborhood. It was not lost on residents that the affluent gated community of Sea Gate that abuts the Coney Island neighborhood saw the arrival of fire trucks and ambulances hours after the storm subsided, while the working-class residents had to wait days to receive any help at all.

At the FEMA encampment, the World Socialist Web Site spoke to a number of Coney Island residents about their experiences with the storm and the official neglect afterwards.

Herbert Norwood, a maintenance worker, told us, "On Monday, there were buses to evacuate the elderly, but I didn't see them putting anyone on. On Tuesday, the water came rushing down and knocked down a lot of trees and knocked out the power. Cars were moving in the flood. My electricity went out. It was my wife and me.

"When the water receded there really wasn't that much help. I saw Con Edison, but they went down to Sea Gate. They dealt with them first. They didn't help us or the people in the [housing] projects. No power, no water, no Internet. Everything was gone, so we left.

"I asked the police why the response was so slow, and they said, 'Well, they'll get to it.' They just forgot about us. They were worried about Manhattan – I know that's the moneymaking place. A lot of people need help here, too. All of the ambulances were headed toward Sea Gate. The police never knocked on people's doors. Down there in Sea Gate they did. I think we deserve the same treatment.

"I just learned that FEMA came down. I went over to the Rockaways. It's crazy there too. We work the same

as the rich do. Just give us a fair shake. The power is still out in New Jersey. All this money they have, giving it to Central Park? Come on.”

His wife Shante said, “We have eight kids at home. After the second day of no power we had to go stay with a relative in Queens. We have power now, but the food is spoiled.” We asked her about the politicians who were congratulating themselves for a job well done in the aftermath of the storm, and Shante replied, “What job well done? I don’t see a job well done. There are a lot of people in Coney Island still in need. We don’t have anything.”

An unemployed worker, William Banks, said, “We live at the end of Coney Island, a block away from Sea Gate. We were just lucky that we didn’t die. Our basement is flooded. There is nobody to pump out the water so we’re going to have to move. Everything is damaged. The clothing is gone. The food is gone. There’s no hot water. We have no light and this has been since Tuesday.

“The New York City Police Department brought us food, but it was inedible. There was no water to cook it in. They didn’t bring us even a loaf of bread, just military rations and dog food. Why did they bring that to us? People are hungry here. We don’t have nutritious food. People shouldn’t have to live like this. I think they’re trying to wrap this up.”

His friend Terrance added, “The reaction from FEMA was if you don’t have a bank account and a certain financial status, you’re in a lot of trouble. That is wrong. We’re human, too.”

Andre Brown, a transit supervisor and resident, also spoke to us. “We can’t take this loss. There are no stores. Everything was looted but the police came after the fact.

“They asked us to evacuate before the storm. A lot of people thought this would be like [Hurricane] Irene, not so bad. We were doing okay until the lights went out and the water got shut off. We live on the 15th floor and we were basically stranded for about two days.

“We had radios and we wanted to find out what was going on, but we heard nothing about Coney Island. We were wondering what was going on, what kind of help

we were going to get, who was going to be sent out here to assist us. We got none of that. We asked family and friends, what kind of media coverage are you seeing about Coney Island, and the answer was basically nothing. We didn’t get anything until Wednesday.

“We know there were a lot of elderly that were stranded. We heard fire and ambulances, but my understanding was that they were going to Sea Gate. They weren’t here. The people were forgotten here. We’re working families and they have more powerful people behind those gates. It’s atrocious that we have to go through so much.”



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