

One month since Hurricane Sandy

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A month has passed since Hurricane Sandy devastated coastal and low-lying sections of New Jersey, New York and Connecticut, taking the lives of more than 100 people and destroying the homes and livelihoods of tens of thousands more.

The TV cameras and reporters have long since departed. The pledges from politicians, beginning with President Obama, to do “everything in our power” to aid the storm’s victims have already been forgotten.

The brutal reality of families left to their own devices by a political and economic system that is utterly indifferent to the plight of working people emerges more clearly with each passing day.

Tens of thousands of families remain homeless, many with little prospect of ever returning to the homes that were destroyed or heavily damaged by the hurricane. Eight-and-a-half million homes and businesses lost power, and some have not had it restored to this day.

Aid available to ruined homeowners is utterly inadequate to cover their losses and rebuild. On top of this, residents of the worst hit areas of Queens, Staten Island, Long Island and the New Jersey shore—and even those along the Northeast US coast who were not severely impacted—are about to be hit with massive increases in flood insurance costs that will force many families to move away for good.

As the *New York Times* reported on Thursday, premiums for flood insurance will begin rising an average of 20 percent a year after January 1, under the provisions of a law passed last July to shore up the federal flood insurance fund. (Private companies refuse to provide flood insurance). A former member of the New York Planning Commission predicted “a massive displacement of low-income families from their historic communities.”

In some seaside areas, wealthy families and real estate developers will seize on the forced exodus of middle- and low-income families to grab up the

choicest spots.

Mass transit in the New York area was paralyzed for days after the storm and in some areas it will be months before full service is restored. Workers were unable to reach their jobs, which in some cases were wiped out by the hurricane.

The class divide that has been growing for decades and has deepened during the so-called “recovery” from the financial crash of 2008 was on full display. While little or nothing was done to provide relief to hundreds of thousands of storm victims, the New York Stock Exchange was up and running two days after the storm. Meanwhile, residents of city housing projects in flooded areas remained without power for weeks and were forced to walk up many flights to their apartments in the dark.

The headquarters of Goldman Sachs was protected from flooding, while residents of Brooklyn’s Red Hook section, Staten Island and other areas were left to fend for themselves. Evacuation centers were crowded and unprepared to deal with the many families that needed assistance, while the wealthy stayed in high-priced hotels or one of their multiple residences.

Both the electrical utilities and the politicians charged with their regulation are guilty of criminal negligence. Scientists and planners have warned for more than a decade of exactly the sort of calamity that Sandy wrought. Numerous studies have proposed measures to prepare for such a storm, but nothing has been done.

The utility companies have placed profits over the needs of the population—cutting their work forces and imposing concessions in pay and benefits, while failing to make the necessary investments in maintaining, let alone upgrading, their antiquated facilities to deal with increasingly frequent and violent storms.

In the wake of the storm, politicians and the media have focused criticism on the utilities for the long delays in restoring power. But the political

representatives of big business ignore their own responsibility. They have done absolutely nothing to call attention to climate change and develop a comprehensive plan—including flood protection and infrastructure improvements—to prepare for weather events whose frequency and destructive force have been increased by past indifference and neglect.

The hurricane was not only a natural disaster. It exposed the rottenness of the capitalist system, which cannot ensure a stable and secure environment, much less decent jobs and living standards for the vast majority of the population. Trillions of dollars have been spent to bail out the banks and finance imperialist wars, while the social crisis grows ever more desperate, with millions facing long-term unemployment and millions more losing their homes to foreclosure as well as their medical insurance and pensions.

In the wake of the elections, the ruling class, under the pretext of the “fiscal cliff,” is preparing even more brutal attacks on the working class. Both Democrats and Republicans agree on the need for sweeping cuts in social spending that will leave even fewer resources to deal with future storms.

The repeated claim that “there is no money” to meet social needs is a lie. The abundant resources of society must be taken out of the hands of the financial-corporate parasites and administered democratically for the benefit of all.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for immediate measures to be taken in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, including:

- * A moratorium on rent and mortgage payments for all working people who have lost their homes due to the storm, as well as for small business owners.

- * An increase in unemployment compensation to provide a decent income and the extension of benefits to all workers who have lost their jobs because of the storm.

- * The opening of housing stock owned by the super rich and real estate interests for immediate occupation by storm victims.

In addition, the SEP calls for serious planning to protect the population from future storms and deal with the burning issue of global warming. This must include:

- * Trillions of dollars to improve the infrastructure and provide protection against severe weather conditions.

- * Permanent relocation at public expense of renters, homeowners and small businesses from those areas that cannot be effectively protected.

- * Massive investment in scientific research and the development of technology to increase energy efficiency and reduce waste emissions that contribute to climate change.

To carry out such a program, the basic levers of economic life, including the utility companies, must be taken out of private hands and placed under public ownership and democratic control. Only on this basis can they be marshaled for the public good, rather than private profit and the satisfaction of mindless greed.

The first and indispensable step in the fight for these demands is a complete political break with the twin parties of big business and all of the representatives of the ruling elite, from President Obama, New York Mayor Bloomberg and New York Governor Cuomo on down, and the building of a party of the working class that fights for a socialist program.

This is what the Socialist Equality Party fights for and we urge all those who support this program to join the SEP.

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