

Thirty-one dead as Hurricane Florence continues to ravage the Carolinas

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Across the Carolinas, a scene of utter devastation continued to unfold on Monday. Tens of thousands of people have had their homes destroyed by floodwaters caused by Hurricane Florence, now downgraded to a tropical depression. Fallen trees and flooded highways are blocking rescue attempts as stranded residents struggle to obtain food and water.

Widespread power outages, landslides and tornadoes continue to imperil the lives of those in the region. Entire cities cut off from outside aid, police guarding storefronts against desperate refugees of the storm, dams threatening to burst—this apocalyptic scene is now a routine feature of American life during Hurricane season.

The death toll from the storm has risen to 31, with one of the latest victims being an infant child who slipped from his mother's grasp after their car became trapped in the floodwaters. North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper declared on Monday that "some areas have not seen the worst flooding yet. This is a monumental disaster for our state."

All of North Carolina, including the western and central parts of the state, has been impacted by flooding or has flood warnings in effect. Emergency crews have performed at least 1,000 rescues thus far. Fifteen thousand residents throughout North Carolina were said to be in shelters as of Sunday, with an additional 1,200 in South Carolina.

Throughout the region, at least one million homes had lost power as of Sunday. County officials in the mountainous western part of the state have warned residents of potential landslides.

The rains are expected to continue through Tuesday. State officials warned that flooding might continue until the end of the week. Various counties throughout the state have also been subject to tornado warnings,

and two homes in Pikeville, North Carolina suffered damage from a suspected tornado on Sunday.

Rivers throughout the state were categorized as being in "major flood" stage. In Hoke County, officials urged residents to evacuate due to the threat of a nearby dam failing. Wilmington has been completely cut off from outside access due to the floodwaters.

As global warming fuels ever larger and more dangerous storms, the failure of the ruling elites to adequately prepare for these disasters stands as an indictment of capitalism. Weather forecasts predicted the impact Florence would have on the East Coast of the US at least a week in advance, and still dozens have lost their lives and thousands more have been turned into refugees.

The resources exist not only to evacuate all residents from the targeted areas and provide them with food, shelter and medical aid, but also to build new storm infrastructure that would minimize the impact of future hurricanes. The reason this necessary work has not been undertaken is simple—it would not be profitable for the banks and corporations that dominate American political life.

A predictable pattern has emerged whenever a major hurricane threatens the US. The president, along with the governors, mayors, and other politicians issue dire evacuation warnings, always conscious of the potential political damage of underselling the dangers of the storm. Once the storm hits, those who lack the means to evacuate are left to their own devices while the media offers saturation coverage of the event, without any analysis of the underlying issues.

After the storm passes, those impacted by it have only the meager payouts offered by FEMA and the charity of their neighbors to rely on to put their lives back together before the next hurricane season.

The entire northeast will be affected by Florence in the coming days as the storm breaks up and moves north. Major rainfalls can be expected as far north as New England.

The North Carolina attorney general's office has received around 500 complaints of price gouging. The complaints are mainly related to merchants charging exorbitant rates for hotel rooms, gasoline, or food. Charging inflated rates during a natural disaster is a crime. Police have also arrested five people and charged them with looting a dollar store. It has been reported that the owner of the store had initially asked police not to press charges but relented after they applied pressure on him.

The storm has caused at least five billion dollars in damage in eastern North Carolina alone so far, according to insurers' estimates. Only 35 percent of homes and businesses in the impacted areas are covered by the National Flood Insurance Program. Those not covered by that program will have to seek compensation from either FEMA or the Small Business Administration.

It is estimated that the storm will cost at least \$20 billion in damages from insurance claims alone. Estimated costs for the storm as a whole have run as high as \$180 billion, which would make it the costliest disaster in US history.

This figure is very close to the estimated \$174 billion that the country's wealthiest individuals will save in 2018 due to the Trump administration's tax cuts. It is also roughly equal to the fortune held by Jeff Bezos, the head of Amazon and the world's wealthiest man. It is but a fraction of the over \$1 trillion spent waging war against Afghanistan since 2001, and the trillions spent bailing out Wall Street in the decade since the collapse of Lehman Brothers.

Overwhelmed emergency responders were aided by a large volunteer rescue effort staged by workers across the southeast who came to the aid of flood victims. Informally dubbed the "Cajun Navy" because they originally started organizing rescue operations in the Louisiana area in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the group consists entirely of volunteers who organize over social media and bring their own trucks and boats into flooded areas. Thus far, the group has performed hundreds of rescues across the Carolinas, including aiding in the evacuation of a nursing home in

Lumberton, NC.

It is a testament to the solidarity and ingenuity of American workers that they have been able to mobilize such an effort. Workers of every race and ethnicity have participated in the volunteer rescue operations. This has not only exposed as a lie the media caricature of American workers as lazy, racist and selfish but has also raised the immediate question of what response workers could give if they had the full resources of the US economy under their democratic control.

Occurring simultaneously with Hurricane Florence is the massive Typhoon Mangkhut in East Asia, which has killed at least 66 people in the Philippines and four in China. Just as in the US, workers across Asia have to contend with the indifference of their own capitalist governments in the face of natural disasters. More fundamentally, workers around the world are confronted with the urgent question of who should wield political and economic power. The capitalist class has demonstrated their priorities—protecting their property and maintaining their ability to exploit the labor of billions.

Now the international working class must assert its own interests. Those interests cannot be realized within the framework of the capitalist nation-state system. Only through overthrowing the global capitalist class and replacing it with international socialism can the full resources of the world economy be mobilized to mitigate future disasters.



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