

Puerto Rico weathers threat from Hurricane Dorian

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Tropical storm Dorian became a Category 1 hurricane Wednesday morning, hitting the US Virgin Islands as well as the southeast of Puerto Rico and its offshore islands of Vieques and Culebra on Wednesday afternoon. The island was placed under a flood warning, with the threat of landslides and power outages.

Weather forecasts have placed the storm as a Category 3 hurricane by early next week, set to strike the eastern coast of Florida with potentially catastrophic impact.

Dorian's pass by Puerto Rico comes only two years after Hurricane Maria, and Irma before it, devastated the island, claiming an estimated 3,000 lives.

The storms left millions without basic necessities such as clean water, food, shelter and medical services, while devastating the already crumbling electrical grid, causing widespread and protracted power outages. Many Puerto Ricans were left without power for almost a year.

The effects of the inadequate response to the hurricane by the local and federal government can still be felt, with an estimated 30,000 homes still using blue tarps to cover hurricane-damaged roofs, leaving their occupants vulnerable to even heavy rainfalls.

Many on the island are still suffering the effects of post-traumatic stress resulting from the devastation and widespread deaths inflicted by Maria, with the threatened strike by Dorian reviving all of the trauma of two years ago.

In a tweet Tuesday, Trump repeated his absurd claim that Puerto Rico had received \$92 billion in aid: "Wow! Yet another big storm heading to Puerto Rico. Will it ever end? Congress approved 92 Billion Dollars for Puerto Rico last year, an all time record of its kind for 'anywhere.' "

The reality is that only \$42.7 billion in relief aid was appropriated by Congress for Hurricane Maria in 2017, a completely inadequate amount to actually rebuild the island's infrastructure, and of that only \$13.8 billion has been spent.

The negligent response of the US government was a deliberate policy backed by both the Democrats and Republicans. Instead of providing serious relief, the crisis was exploited to impose severe austerity, slash pensions, and close hundreds of schools with the aim of meeting payments to Puerto Rico's bondholders on the island's crushing debt.

The recently ousted administration of Puerto Rican Governor Ricardo Rosselló and the Trump administration in Washington bear chief responsibility for the social crisis that has developed in the wake of the hurricane.

Trump continued to bully and insult Puerto Rico on Wednesday, stating: "Puerto Rico is one of the most corrupt places on earth. Their political system is broken and their politicians are either Incompetent or Corrupt. Congress approved Billions of Dollars last time, more than anyplace else has ever gotten, and it is sent to Crooked Pols. No good!" he wrote, "And by the way, I'm the best thing that's ever happened to Puerto Rico!"

Democrat and mayor of San Juan Yulín Cruz tweeted Tuesday, "Three thousand Puerto Ricans did not open their eyes this morning because this racist man did not have it within him to do his job. So get out of the way, President Trump, and let the people who can do the job get the job done."

Once again, there has been barely any attempt to prepare the Puerto Rican population for what could have been another disastrous storm. While President Trump declared a federal emergency for the island on

Tuesday, it was revealed on the same day that his administration has redirected funds away from disaster relief to continue his prosecution of immigrants. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Homeland Security Department announced on Tuesday that they are diverting \$155 million from FEMA's disaster relief fund to pay for "detention beds" in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) concentration camps.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer issued a meek criticism of the move, stating, "The Trump administration's plan to divert money away from FEMA at the start of hurricane season to continue its efforts to separate and jail migrant families is backwards and cruel."

Despite this nominal "opposition" to diverting funds away from emergency funds towards ICE, the Democratic Party has played a critical role in funding this American Gestapo.

In June, House Democrats voted by a clear majority for an appropriations bill that gave \$4.6 billion to ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The supposedly "left" Democrats Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley and Rashida Tlaib provided crucial support for the measure, voting in favor for the key measure to bring the bill to the floor of the House.

Just as with their support for the attack on immigrants, the Democrats share responsibility for the social catastrophe in the wake of Hurricane Maria in 2017. Ex-governor Rosselló is a member of the New Progressive Party (PNP) and the Democratic Party, and a member of the Democratic Governors Association. He was a delegate at the Democratic National Convention for Hillary Clinton in 2008 and Barack Obama in 2012.

The Rosselló administration was faced with an eruption of mass protests last month that brought over 500,000 Puerto Ricans into the streets. Triggered by the leaking of 900 instant messages by the Puerto Rican Center for Investigative Journalism, the protests expressed the pent-up social anger of the island's working people over not only the protracted social disaster wrought by the hurricane, but the effects of a recession that has gripped Puerto Rico for the last dozen years.

What was revealed by the leaked messages was what

workers already knew: that those in the top echelons of the island's government were engaged corruption all down the line and held the masses of Puerto Rican workers and youth in complete contempt, going so far as to joke about bodies filling the morgues after Hurricane Maria.

Rosselló announced his resignation from his post as governor on July 24, after 12 days of mass protests calling for his ouster. His replacement, Puerto Rico's secretary of justice, Wanda Vázquez, who is implicated in the sweeping corruption scandals, has faced protests against her appointment, with the hashtag #WandaRenuncia (Wanda Resign) trending on Twitter.



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