Devastation from winter storm that wreaked havoc in Texas felt across North America

William Quartermaine
21 February 2021

As millions in Texas were left without power, food, clean water or shelter into the weekend, the record-breaking winter weather which hit last weekend left devastation across North America. Nightly below-freezing temperatures gripped cities in northern Mexico, particularly those on the border of Texas, while the provinces of Quebec and Ontario in Canada have been hit by two powerful snowstorms last week alone. The impact of these events internationally has proven disastrous, as power blackouts, road and school closures and deaths continue.

A review of the trajectory of Winter Storm Uri, as it has unofficially been named by the Weather Channel, shows its broad impact. Starting on February 13, a frontal storm off the coast of the Pacific Northwest started to spread southeast at a rapid speed culminating above the Rocky Mountains on the same day. As it moved further south and southeast, the storm began to develop more as it reached Oklahoma and Texas, all the way to northern Mexico. On February 16, the storm strained northern Mexico's power grids to such an extent that 4.7 million homes and businesses in Mexico lost power.

While the storm moved rapidly through the southeast United States and into Mexico, on February 16 the storm developed another low-pressure center in the north and moved rapidly toward the northeast. The storm quickly broke in half, with one half moving northwards through Quebec while the original storm system continued toward the northeast United States.

In Canada, the storm passed through Quebec, Ontario, and finally into Newfoundland. While bus lines closed in Toronto and schools closed temporarily in Halton and Durham, the densest snowfall in Ontario was around 30 cm in St. Catherine's and Hamilton along Lake Ontario. Another snowstorm, fueled by moisture from the Gulf of Mexico and pushing northwards with the current storm in the United States, brought more snow to Ontario this weekend.

Intersecting with the ongoing crisis of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the storm's impact on US transportation infrastructure contributed to delayed shipments of the Pfizer vaccine to Canada by at least one day this week, according to CBC News. Pfizer's vaccine is shipped from its facility in Puurs, Belgium to Canada through Louisville, Kentucky by air. A significant buildup of snow and ice shut down distribution from United Parcel Service Worldport, the corporation's gigantic shipping hub located at the Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport.

Residents of Mexican towns along the Texas border have been experiencing the similarly dire consequences of their US neighbors. While temperatures have begun to return to normal, last week was one of catastrophic conditions in northern Mexico. Over the course of the week, temperatures dipped to as low as -18 degrees Celsius (0 degrees Fahrenheit) in the cities of Nuevo León, Coahuila, Tamaulipas, and Chihuahua, on the Texas border. Over a dozen people have died. Photos taken in the border town of Ciudad Juarez show people walking through heavy falling snow while others show workers huddled near makeshift fires on the streets to stay warm.

The rolling blackouts in seven northern Mexican states were the outcome of the close economic relationship between Mexico and the US. Due to adverse weather conditions earlier this week, Mexico was unable to import a quarter of the four billion cubic feet of natural gas it receives daily from the US. As a result, hundreds of thousands of mainly working class residents in northern Mexico had their power shut off. Roughly 60 percent of all electricity in the country is

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generated through natural gas and, as of 2019, 96 percent of Mexico's natural gas imports come from the United States.

As well as impacting homes and small businesses, the sharp reduction of natural gas imports into the country has also had an immediate effect on Mexican steel and aluminum plants. According to S&P Global Platts, "Mexican steel and aluminum producers were under pressure to reduce natural gas consumption, but many of them ended up suspending production as operating with lower gas levels was unsustainable and lossmaking for them."

The effects of this halt in production could have a number of consequences, including the delay of sizeable back orders and new orders of steel and aluminum to be exported abroad. Aluminum product prices in general are expected to rise amid the robust demand from auto makers. Like their brothers and sisters in the US, hundreds of workers at these plants could also face speedup to make up for lost production time as well as job and wage cuts as a result of the disruption to the production of profits.

On February 17, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) announced that to offset this loss of natural gas, the country would immediately increase the output of oil and coal to generate electricity. However, rolling blackouts across northern Mexico were in effect at least until the end of the weekend. In his statement, AMLO made sure to blame the frigid weather in Texas for the shortage of natural gas but declared there would be "no retaliation" on the part of Mexico for the current energy crisis.

Echoing the callousness of his US counterparts in the ruling political establishment, AMLO placed the burden of the social disaster squarely on the backs of the working class, telling workers and residents Thursday to "help us by consuming less" and "switch off extra light bulbs during the peak evening hours ... to be totally sure that our electricity system is maintained and that we don't suffer from blackouts." Touted as a "left-wing" and "progressive" president by the media and pseudo-left groups worldwide, AMLO's true class character is on display once again in his dismissal of the suffering of workers and complete subservience to the interests of the global energy corporations.

Unable to receive the needed energy from US sources, the Mexican government has sought to secure gas supplies from Asia. As of Thursday, it was reported that two Malaysian-flagged tankers carrying liquefied natural gas were set to arrive in the Mexican ports of Altamira and Manzanillo. According to the Mexican government, additional cargoes are expected to reach Mexican ports from Asia in the following days.

On one hand, the crisis triggered by Winter Storm Uri showcases the international character of the ruling class' criminally inadequate response. As all of North America experiences the ravaging effects of the storm on homes and businesses alike, the ruling class utilizes the flow of natural gas and other energy sources to fuel the private profits of massive energy corporations.

As the decay of capitalism continues to produce catastrophes of a global character, including the exacerbation of naturally occurring storms through man-made climate change, the ruling class continues to respond by prioritizing the wealth of a few billionaires over the health and lives of billions of workers.

On the other hand, the social crisis brought on by the storm highlights its solution, which lies in the mobilization of the world's resources and the international working class to coordinate the production and distribution of energy to the billions who need it.

In contrast to the profit interests of a handful of wealthy oligarchs, the stock markets and the banks, the working class united across national boundaries must fight to put an end to the control of energy for private profit and instead put forward a program to fight for public control over the production and distribution of the world's energy supplies to fulfill social need. The demand must be raised for the major energy companies in every country to be placed under the democratic control of the international working class.

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