

Fighting the California fires requires an international and socialist strategy

Statement of David Moore—California gubernatorial candidate of the Socialist Equality Party
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As the Socialist Equality Party candidate for California governor, I demand the immediate implementation of the most far-reaching measures to suppress the devastating fires that have engulfed the state. There must be a massive redistribution of wealth from the state's ruling oligarchy to rebuild and modernize power infrastructure to protect current and future generations from the ravages of human-induced global warming.

The ongoing fires in California have burned through more than 1,650,000 acres of land, and wildfires nationally have now consumed more than 5,020,000 acres. More than half the total is still on fire, and only one of the 85 active large fires has been contained.

Tens of thousands of people have been evacuated, over 1,000 homes have been destroyed, with thousands facing the trauma of losing everything. Some are reliving the nightmare from the 2018 Camp Fire that destroyed the town of Paradise, killing 86 people.

Air quality continues to range from unhealthy to hazardous for large parts of Northern California and Oregon. Smoke from the fires has traveled as far south as Louisiana, to the south, and Newfoundland, Canada, to the north. Health officials warn that extended exposure to high levels of smoke can cause asthma or other long-term health problems, as well as make those impacted more vulnerable to COVID-19.

That such massive catastrophes continue to occur every year is a staggering indictment of capitalism and its media and ruling elite. Every year, increasingly massive wildfires erupt across California and large portions of the American west as has been predicted by climate scientists for years. Yet the resources necessary to both fight and prevent these fires across the state and country have remained essentially static over the past decade.

And when more personnel have been directed toward firefighting, they are often drawn from the state's prison population. Each year, an estimated 3,000 inmates are worked in 24-hour shifts for as little as \$2.90 to fight fires, through policies defended by Vice President Kamala Harris when she was California Attorney General, and carried out under a series of state administrations, both Republican and Democratic.

The systematic defunding of infrastructure and public safety is the other side of the vast transfer of wealth from public coffers to the state's wealthiest individuals and corporations. According to data from Forbes, 160 billionaires reside in California and are collectively worth more than \$984 billion, much of which was gained during the pandemic as a result of government bailouts through the CARES Act and similar legislation. Just one percent of this wealth is more than triple California's fire budget and would provide for a vast and necessary expansion of the state's firefighting and fire prevention efforts.

Among the companies directly responsible for the fires, none stands ahead of Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), which has prioritized ensuring billions in stock dividends are paid to investors by divesting any efforts to maintain and modernize the power grid. The utility giant has also been found criminally liable for specific fires, including the catastrophic Camp Fire in 2018, which their antiquated equipment sparked. To evade compensating the victims of the Camp Fire, and wildfires started by the company, PG&E declared bankruptcy. At the same time, California Governor Gavin Newsom moved to bail the company out indirectly through utility rate hikes and directly with public funds.

There is widespread anger at both PG&E and Newsom for their actions, anger which was tapped into

to spur the recall campaign itself. Newsom's ruling class opponents in the recall election are, however, just as beholden to capitalism as he. Republican Kevin Faulconer is seeking to militarize firefighting, having called for a "war footing" to fight the blazes. Republican John Cox has similarly called for an "air armada" to fight fires.

The dangers of wildfires are also exacerbated by the accelerating coronavirus pandemic. Hospitals across the state are filling up with cases as schools open amid an explosion of the Delta variant nationally and internationally. Not only do the fires and resultant smoke make cases of COVID-19 worse, full hospitals mean there is less space for any injuries caused by the wildfires. And the tens of thousands fleeing the flames are forced to temporarily reside in close proximity with hundreds of others, further spreading the deadly disease.

Like the coronavirus pandemic, a fight against the wildfires is not just a question for California workers. The fires reflect the broader changes of Earth's climate as a result of global warming and are now causally linked to increased global temperatures as a result of capitalist industrial and agricultural activity. It is thus scientifically necessary that a concerted, systematic and international response be mounted to combat climate change on a global scale, lest the fire seasons of the past several years become normal, with even more extreme infernos to come.

Climate change is also behind the increasing incidents of extreme weather events, such as Hurricane Ida, which devastated New Orleans and led to the massive flooding catastrophe in New York City and the surrounding region. More than 60 people have been killed in eight states. The fires sweeping across the Mediterranean and the floods in western Germany are part of the same deadly process.

Any effort to address climate change is blocked by two factors: first, the subordination of Earth's resources to private profit, which drives the overuse of fossil fuels and other activities for the enrichment of corporate executives and Wall Street bankers. Second, the necessary globally coordinated response to climate change is blocked by the division of the world into competing nation-states, all fighting for the interests of their own financial elite.

The only genuine solution is for the working class to

fight for its own independent class interests. Climate change and the coronavirus pandemic will never be resolved without an international strategy that places social need over private profit. The fortunes of the ruling elite in California and around the globe must be expropriated and that wealth used to fight wildfires and the underlying problem of climate change.

I urge all those who agree with this perspective to contact my campaign and take up the fight for socialism among the working class in California, the United States and around the world!

Support the campaign of David Moore for governor!



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