

“They’ve done nothing ... Now we’ve lost everything”

Australia: Brisbane flood victims condemn government response

Michael Newman
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Following a week of severe flooding that has led to the deaths of 11 people, clean-up efforts began on Saturday in Brisbane, Australia’s third largest city. A volunteer Mud Army moved into some affected suburbs along the Brisbane River to assist, only to be stood down yesterday by Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner due to the threat of further storms.

Floods devastated homes throughout the southeast of the state of Queensland, inundating at least 15,000 residences in Brisbane alone. It was the second time in a decade that large parts of the metropolitan area were swamped, exposing the lack of federal and state government disaster preparation and infrastructure.

Once again, as in 2011, worst-affected residents were in outlying working-class suburbs where many people have moved because of sky-rocketing property prices and rents.

The losses suffered in these flood-prone areas, where most people are not covered by flood insurance, were made even greater by the lack of warnings issued by the state Labor Party government and its agencies.

Since the disaster struck, they have been essentially abandoned by governments, and left to fend for themselves with the help of neighbours and volunteers.

Now Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk is asking ordinary people to “dig deep” and donate to flood-affected households. Yesterday she announced her state government would start a flood appeal with just \$2.1 million, to be spread across five charities. This is a pittance compared to the losses that residents have suffered. Last week, Palaszczuk estimated the damage bill across southeast Queensland could reach up to \$1 billion.

World Socialist Web Site correspondents spoke to

working-class residents in Goodna and Rocklea, which were some of the low-lying suburbs badly affected by the floods due to their proximity to the Brisbane River.

Mark, a carpenter, lives in Goodna with his wife Melissa, who is unemployed, along with their son, daughter and her two children on a rental property. It was flooded after they received little warning from emergency services. Living without flood insurance, the family has been hampered by a lack of financial support and government assistance in the area.

“They’ve done nothing,” Mark said of the governments, “not a cent from them. We’ve had nobody come here to offer help, including the local council, and not even the Mud Army [volunteers]. The street we’re living in is isolated. Last Tuesday morning, when everybody came back, they were doing their own houses themselves. Nobody has come here to explain what’s going on.

“The SES [State Emergency Service] only came at 7:00 in the morning a week ago when they told us to get out, which was pretty much all they said. By then, the creek and the park nearby was gone, and when it got to 8:00 in the evening, the house was flooded, but the SES hasn’t been back since.”

Mark was also concerned about economic conditions in the area. “Goodna has more people living on unemployment benefits than there are those who are employed. This isn’t a rich area, it’s a lower-class area and that’s why we’ll get cleaned last...”

“The media coverage and the information given was all criss-crossed. It wasn’t until the Sunday morning [February 27] that we were told the place was definitely going to flood when we could have had that information on Friday, so that we could go get a truck

and pack up what was underneath our house. Now we've lost everything."

Jaya, a labourer, is currently paying off his mortgage. He has lived in Rocklea for 10 years but was not affected by the floods in 2011 despite the area being a critical floodplain. Jaya had received a one-time \$1,000 compensation payment from the government, but no other assistance.

"I was told that this was a floodplain, but not much has happened here and I wasn't affected by the floods in 2011. We don't know what's going on... I wasn't told when acquiring the property that waters would go up to the level as they did this week. I'm not angry though because everyone's in trouble, but we are still waiting for outside help. They need to send more people here to find out what happened.

"The authorities also haven't given us anywhere to go; when I got hit by the floods I looked everywhere. During the Sunday and Monday, when southeast Queensland was drowning, there was only a studio where people could go for a few days."

"At the moment, they're still processing everything. We might check in a few weeks to see what's happening. But now we don't have much in savings to cover everything, including the mortgage and fixing what we have lost."

Amelia had been living in Rocklea for three months after moving from Townsville in northern Queensland with her husband, a storeman, when their rental property there was also flooded, forcing them to terminate their lease.

"Most of the people in our area have been here for quite a while. Our next-door neighbours own their place and went through the 2011 floods. The rents and houses around here are fairly cheap, considering everything else that's around the local area. When we first moved here, we weren't told that this was a flood-prone area.

"We didn't even know that we were going to be flooded this time. They didn't send us a text message to warn us of flash flooding because the SES was being sent out. So we didn't get any advance notice beforehand. The floods were already coming into the house when we first woke up.

"We lost most of our white goods, along with essentials and a lot of clothing. The local churches were very helpful in providing food packages and hampers,

but in comparison the \$1,000 compensation we got from the government was pretty lousy. We now have to get a new house, which means more money and I've had to stop working because of this disaster."

Asked if they were aware of the federal government's virtually unspent \$4.8 billion Disaster Recovery Fund, Amelia replied in the negative. "They're pretty lousy, bankrupt anyway. They could send more weapons to Russia or Ukraine than how much they send to us."

On the failures of the government, Amelia's husband answered: "The real question is what we are going to do for the next generation. We're still in the same boat with all these people struggling. I mean, what are we actually going to do because clearly the government doesn't listen, so what's the point in giving them all these questions? They're not doing anything about this.

"If you look at history, it just repeats. The fact that people aren't learning from their own history makes them a fool. There's still the Stolen Generations, there's still people suffering."



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