

Australian flood victims in Sydney speak out, condemning government response

Our reporters

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Australia's east coast states of Queensland and New South Wales (NSW) have been devastated by two weeks of severe floods. Starting in and around Brisbane, the Queensland capital, and parts of northern NSW, the heavy rain and thunderstorms moved south hitting Sydney, Australia's most populous city.

The worst affected Sydney areas were working-class suburbs in the city's southwest, where 11 evacuation orders were issued on late Tuesday night or in the early hours of Wednesday, impacting more than 60,000 people.

The toll of the floods continues to grow. At least 5,000 houses are now deemed "unliveable," and 21 deaths have been recorded. Tens of thousands of people have been left impoverished and homeless with governments—state and federal—abandoning the victims and forcing them to deal with the disaster on their own.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to residents of Chipping Norton, a southwestern Sydney suburb next to the Georges River.

Angelo, 28, owns a small business renting boats. "We had our first flood on Thursday [March 3], the water had receded, the flood warning dropped. Then we had a flood watch alert because of the rain, by the time it was updated to a flood warning we already had water on the street. We didn't have much time, somewhere between three and six hours. Try moving a whole house in six hours.

"Normally when there's a flood warning, the SES [State Emergency Service] will come round, knock on doors telling everyone that you need to evacuate. That hasn't happened in either of these two floods, so a lot of people assumed it wasn't going to be big. There was no advice, no build up, we just got one letter drop in the mail and that was it.

"This is a lot of damage. Almost everyone's garage

suffered some loss, whether it was cars, bikes, boats, engines, parts, power tools. Then you've got people who have their living quarters on the ground floor. They've lost kitchens, their household, photos, memorabilia, it's endless. It's sad, it's an older generation who live along this strip, so you try to help as much as you can," he said.

"When the water hit a metre deep—in places it went to two metres—I took the boat out every half hour doing runs up and down the street, calling out to people that I knew were more vulnerable, checking in.

"At about 4 a.m. [on March 8] there was an Asian man who was walking through the flood water literally up to his neck with just a life jacket on. He was trying to reach his truck that wasn't insured. It was his livelihood and unfortunately, he lost it. I dragged him up on the boat and took him to a safe spot, but it could have been really ugly for him. He had a truck, so if he had enough warning, he could have taken off well before," Angelo explained.

"The government is sending money overseas to fight a war they've got nothing to do with in Ukraine, but look at Lismore, Brisbane, Wiseman's Ferry, the Hawkesbury [River], the Nepean [River]. Everyone's livelihoods are gone, everyone's house is gone, people have got nothing and you're sending hundreds of millions overseas. The price of five weapons they've sent would cover everyone here.

"Petrol is at \$2.50 a litre, there's talk of interest rates going up, the cost of living is through the roof. We've got our own problems here, let alone natural disasters. I don't support war. The war was provoked by Biden. It's everyday people who pay the price. Get Biden and Putin in a room together, why does everyone else have to fight and die when they don't even know what they are fighting for?" he asked.

“At the end of the day the world is run on money, so if people can rebuild it would make things a lot easier than having to live in a friend’s house. How many people don’t have a fridge now because of flood damage? I’m not saying give everyone \$50,000 but set something up where you feed people, or where you’ve got builders to supply timber, gyprock, or something that is going to help.

“I don’t agree that everyone pays for insurance. For the whole time we’ve lived here we’ve never had an insurance claim approved or been covered. We’ve gone through five or six floods. Just along the Hawkesbury there’s people living in caravan parks who don’t have a home anymore, people in Lismore who don’t have a home anymore. Insurance companies aren’t paying, the government isn’t paying, so it’s up to people to break their back and pull favours,” he said.

Michael, an 82-year-old originally from Hungary, has lived in the same house for many years. He lost most of his right hand, except for a thumb in an industrial accident, working in the textile industry. He told the WSWS that he and two fellow residents of the house were informed they would have to evacuate as the water started rising.

Michael drove his car to a nearby bridge where other residents in the area were evacuating and slept on the bridge in his car all night. Michael showed us his insurance bill, where flood insurance cost over \$13,500 per year, nearly 10 times more than his current annual premium.

Steve, a truck driver, was shovelling mud from the floods outside his house when the WSWS team spoke with him. He has just lost his job. “I’m nearly 60, I had COVID, and I thought I was going to die. I had a month’s holiday, and I came back from that, and I got COVID, I was off work for three weeks. Then between all that we got the floods, so I was backwards and forwards from work. I told my boss that I had to get home to deal with this stuff. My boss said you had too much time off, I’m going to have to let you go.

“I’ve been cleaning out the garage and I’m still going. I’ve been going now for about two weeks since the 3rd of March. I’ve cleaned it up, the floods came again and I’m cleaning it up again. I’m not crying poor, I’m not looking for help, I just need to have time to do it,” he said.

Asked if being infected with COVID impacted on

Steve’s ability to work, he replied, “It does. I never believed in COVID, and I never believed in the vaccine, although I’ve had my jabs. I thought it was a conspiracy. But I got COVID, and I got it bad. I got it on the lungs, and it has affected my voice. I had it for three weeks.

“My wife, on several occasions, was going to call the ambulance and I refused. I’m scared to go to hospital because our health system is ruined. I didn’t want the ambulance to bring me to hospital and then be put into ICU, pushed into a corner and left to die. I thought if I’m going to die from this thing I’m going to die in my house.

“I did everything possible that I could to keep breathing. I couldn’t sleep and I was coughing so bad. When I would wake up in the morning the first couple of coughs had blood,” he stated.



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