

On fifth anniversary of Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rican workers denounce lack of response to new flooding

Julio Patron
20 September 2022

Torrential rains continued to pour down on Puerto Rico Tuesday, more than a day after Hurricane Fiona struck the island on the way to its destructive path through the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean nations.

On the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Maria, the floodwaters, destroyed homes and power outages of the last three days have renewed the sense of dread, helplessness and anger among residents of the US territory. “We’re feeling the trauma all over again, just as people were healing from losing their homes and loved ones,” Carmen, a retired worker in Arroyo, told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “People remember the 3,000 or more who were taken by Hurricane Maria and all the waiting for help. The people I run into don’t have any faith in the government in San Juan or Washington.”

The storm is expected to dump up to 15 inches of rain on Puerto Rico, and major flooding has already damaged much infrastructure and many homes. The National Guard has rescued hundreds of people who have been left stranded throughout the island. As of Tuesday, 90 percent of residents were without power. Workers are lining up at gas stations for up to two hours to get fuel not only for their vehicles but for home generators. Food is rotting inside of non-functioning refrigerators.

Without electricity, filtration systems cannot run, and there is no power to pump water into homes for drinking, bathing or flushing toilets. On Tuesday morning, the Puerto Rico Aqueducts and Sewers Authority said more than 760,000 customers had no water service or were suffering significant interruptions. This means only 40 percent of

households currently have clean running water.

In addition to the power outages, workers cannot draw water from rivers because they are surging from the heavy rains. “Most of the rivers are too high,” Pagán Crespo said during an interview with WKAQ 580 AM on Monday, *El Nuevo Día* reported.

Governor Pedro Pierluisi said power should be back for the majority of residents “within days.” Residents, however, are skeptical of such claims. Pierluisi’s predecessor Governor Ricardo Rossello left large swaths of the island without electricity for more than half a year, while sitting on FEMA donations which were left rotting in warehouses.

Residents are taking to social media to denounce the current administration for the lack of preparedness in the face of the storm, and there are many posts calling for help.

One person commented on Governor Pierluisi’s Twitter account, saying, “What is happening right now is also your fault for repeating the lie that this wouldn’t be like [Hurricane] Maria. That’s why everyone stayed at home, because it ‘wasn’t like Maria’.”

Another stated, “SOS for those in high-rise condominiums, where the elderly cannot go downstairs to fetch water for toilets, bathing or cooking. They also don’t have gas stoves. How much they suffered because of Hurricane Maria! Bring them water and prepared meals, please!”

There are also many posts calling on people not to donate anything to the government but to donate instead to small community groups due to the real threat that local government officials will line their own pockets with the money.

One person commented, “How can anyone be ok

right now if they're still carrying [the weight of] Maria? The only thing the 'leaders' of the island do is steal, steal and steal more."

The criminal negligence of the US government and local authorities led to Hurricane Maria causing the official deaths of 2,975 people, but a Harvard study estimated that there were nearly 5,000 actual deaths as the government of Puerto Rico attempted to cover up the true death toll.

Biden phoned the island's governor from Air Force One on his way back from the funeral of Queen Elizabeth, promising a "surge of federal aid." While trying to distance himself from Trump's criminal response to Hurricane Maria, the Democratic president's words are just as empty.

In fact, as vice president Biden supported Obama's imposition of a financial oversight board over the island in 2016, which has privatized public services and exacerbated the economic and social crisis afflicting Puerto Rico's 3.2 million citizens.

This includes the privatization of the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA) on June 1, 2021 and its takeover by the US-Canadian joint venture LUMA Energy. Electricity failures on the island have been a normal part of everyday life ever since, with power outages going for 24 hours or longer, while the costs for electricity have skyrocketed since privatization.

Only weeks before Hurricane Fiona, hundreds of residents were protesting the constant power outages and the increased energy bills. Many workers have said they have lost thousands of dollars worth of electrical appliances due to the constant outages and brought them from all over the island and threw them in front of the governor's mansion in San Juan. Police were brought out and brutalized the protesters, including the elderly.

The east coast of the Dominican Republic was also hit by the hurricane, leaving just under a million residents without power. Fiona has cut off several towns in the country and damaged or destroyed local farms. Many areas are still without power as of this writing.

Although Hurricane Fiona was initially a Category 1 hurricane—and much weaker than Category 5 Maria—it has caused widespread damage due to massive rainstorms and heavier flooding. Scientists have said that the heavy rainfall is due to climate change. Higher

temperatures lead to more ocean evaporation and warmer air holds more moisture. This leads to more severe and sustained rainfall during storms.

Fiona has been declared a Category 3 storm and is heading towards Bermuda after rocking Turks and Caicos. While Fiona has caused much damage to Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands, it is only the first hurricane of the season, and more are expected in the region.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact