

New York City area paralyzed by heavy flooding

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A month's worth of rain fell in New York City on Friday. At least 150 schools were flooded, in some cases with raw sewage. Massive traffic jams produced life-threatening situations across the city as storm drains overflowed, inundating city streets, and trapping residents in their cars, particularly in Brooklyn and Queens. At least one hospital in Brooklyn was evacuated.

In Queens, nearly 8 inches of rainfall was recorded at JFK Airport, while there was 6 inches in Midtown Manhattan, and nearly 7 inches in Brooklyn in 24 hours. Many of the city's subway lines stopped functioning because of flooding and long delays persisted on others.

The sudden amount of rainfall was attributed by scientists to climate change and global warming, since air at a higher temperature retains more moisture. In the northeast of the United States, rainfall has increased 13 percent since 1970, and it is becoming more common for five or six inches of rain to fall in short periods of time. Weather events like Friday's storm, formerly categorized as "once-in-a-century" events, now happen with alarming and unpredictable frequency.

There was extensive flooding in the city's transit system, which impacted commuter rail and subway service for the roughly 4 million daily riders. Several subway lines and commuter rail lines were suspended and more partially suspended. Delays plagued the rest of the system, large portions of which opened in 1904.

Rainwater cascading into subway stations is nothing new. It is a problem that has been largely neglected for decades. However, the priority of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), which operates public transit, bridges and tunnels in the region, is to funnel money to bondholders and put off repairs, often leaving dangerous conditions for transit workers and riders alike.

One conductor told the WSW: "All the outside trains were under water. Many of these outside train routes in the open air were out of service. Some of the trains underground were out of service. Many of the trains were packed with passengers. This is not the first time this has happened. Water and the third rail which provides the electricity is a very dangerous combination. It's very fortunate that nobody got electrocuted and died."

Many flights into the area were canceled. Terminal A at

LaGuardia Airport experienced severe flooding, with several feet of water in parts of the terminal, leaving travelers stranded.

Local news media showed images of massive traffic jams as flooding of sections of highways effectively shut many down. Social media was full of images showing flooded and impassable underpasses and sections of highway. Highways in the city are below surface level or elevated in places so as not to conflict with the dense network of local streets.

Some highways and major thoroughfares in the area such as the Long Island Expressway in sections of Queens, one of the busiest highways in the country, follow the historical route of rivers and streams that have been long paved over and are particularly vulnerable to flooding.

Woodhull Hospital in Brooklyn, run by the city's Health + Hospitals agency, was forced to evacuate 120 patients after a power outage caused by the storm.

As with so many other climate and natural disasters around the world, the political authorities were caught entirely unprepared. Despite ample advance warning of the impending storm, schools and most businesses remained open as usual.

New York's Democratic Governor Kathy Hochul declared a state of emergency on Friday and urged people to stay off roads as New York City and surrounding counties were hit hard by the flooding. Eric Adams, the city's Democratic mayor, did not even appear in a media briefing until noon on Friday, at which he defended the conduct of his administration during the storm.

Both Adams and the Chancellor of Schools David Banks defended the Department of Education's decision not to switch to remote learning that day. In comments, Banks told the media, "Our kids need to be in school. ... This is what allows parents to be able to continue their day and get to work and do all the other things that need to happen. Whenever we make a decision as to close schools, it is a major, major disruption. And so, it is really only used really as a last resort."

This, of course, is hardly surprising. The chancellor is using the same rationale that Democratic Party officials from Biden to Hochul to former mayor Bill de Blasio and now Adams have used to reopen schools and expose children and adults to the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. One can only speculate that Banks and Adams would keep schools open during a nuclear disaster.

Educators and parents were outraged. One educator tweeted, “Our school’s families shouldn’t have had to wade through toxic water today. All our early childhood classrooms and some offices (counseling, speech) were filled with sewage water. NYC has bad weather remote days built in. They’re rarely used. This should have been one.”

Charles, a teacher in Brooklyn, told the WSWS the conduct of the city was “just a total disgrace. How can we say we are a functioning, developed city when one day of rain can bring all public services to a halt? How can budget cuts be justified when our existing infrastructure is being battered and crumbling around us? How can we say that children’s safety is a priority when we cancel their after schools, and their parents have no means to come and pick them up?”

Another teacher, Jimmy, told the WSWS on Friday, “Today should have been remote. I walked 36 blocks in the rain because the subways failed to work and there are no cabs left to hail. This problem was the exact one they promised they’d fix post-Katrina, in 2005—18 years ago. Another failed promise. I’ll be lucky if I get home by 8 p.m. My train ride is normally almost 2 hours long on a good day. But tonight, I already know the drill: any departing LIRR train will be packed like sardine cans because half the normal ones are already canceled from the storm.”

A parent of two teenagers in public schools said, “To be really honest this should’ve been planned for. Something like, these kids stay home and have remote learning and workers too so they don’t miss a work day and paychecks.”

While no deaths have been reported so far, it will not be possible to measure the full effects of Friday’s deluge for several days, and weather events in the city in the past have resulted in the loss of life.

In the fall of 2012, 43 people died as a direct result of the Sandy “superstorm,” and in 2021 at least 13 people died from flooding caused by the remnants of Hurricane Ida passing over New York, including a family of three who were trapped in their basement apartment in Woodside, Queens.

Immigrant workers suffered heavily again on Friday. In one shameful act, migrant workers were forced out into the pouring rain at the Jefferson Street shelter in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn because their 60-day stay limit—a new regulation initiated by the Adams administration—had expired. *The City* quoted one worker as saying, “Let us wait till the rain passes and then we’ll go. Give us until the morning. But no, they kicked us out and look how we are now. We were here for two months, why not one more night?”

The effects of climate-change-induced weather are now being felt regularly in New York. Large swaths of the city, particularly in densely populated Queens and Brooklyn, are built on coastal wetlands and marshes with elevations only nominally above sea level. The city’s geography, which is largely defined by rivers, straits and large bays, creates natural traffic flow bottlenecks even on normal days. These become

completely overwhelmed in severe weather conditions. The scientific and city-planning expertise to make New York function under adverse conditions, let alone to reverse climate change, exists. But the will of the ruling class does not.

The city’s government, run by the Democratic Party, which functions in the interests of the city’s powerful real estate and financial magnates, has issued vacuous nostrums in the past regarding climate change, but has invested relatively few resources in addressing the problem.

The Democratic politicians routinely claim that “there is not enough money” to fund vital infrastructure projects despite the largest US city being home to 107 billionaires and hundreds more multimillionaires. By many yardsticks, it is the wealthiest city in the world.

In fact, while the incomes of the rich rise into the stratosphere, there are severe cutbacks to public necessities like housing, transportation, education, and infrastructure development and repair. Mayor Adams recently announced budget cuts totaling 15 percent this year for city departments. The MTA, which operates the city’s public transit system and is managed by the state, is \$48 billion in debt for its capital fund alone.

Several Democratic state politicians affiliated with the pseudo-left Democratic Socialist of America (DSA) have promoted a “Green New Deal” in the state legislature, which resulted in the passing of the farcical Build Public Renewables Act this year, which proposes to address climate change within the framework of the capitalist profit system.

These politicians have taken essentially the same tack as New York DSA-backed Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s promotion of a Green New Deal at the federal level. This program, as the WSWS noted, “excludes any encroachment on the fortunes of the ruling class ... Everything is phrased as part of consultation with business’ leaders.”

The flooding in New York City on Friday has once again exposed the inability of the capitalist system to deal with the urgent problems presented by climate change, let alone the basic social needs of the population. The federal government has lavishly funded the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, refusing to allow anything or anyone to interfere, systematically starving social and infrastructure funding, which could not only save lives but improve the quality of life for millions.



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