

Epic storms batter California as global climate crisis worsens

Alex Diaz, Alan Gilman
10 March 2024

Over the last several weeks, California has been subjected to a series of extreme weather events. Los Angeles, which averages 14 inches of rain a year, received over 12.5 inches in February. A series of torrential storms flooded sections of the city, causing over 500 mudslides and the destruction of dozens of homes and buildings, with over 40,000 people without power for various periods of time.

Last week, a historic blizzard barreled through the mountainous Sierra Nevada region in Northern California. The storm encompassed a 300-mile area and dropped as much as 12 feet of snow in some locations, and was accompanied by hurricane scale winds, which reached up to 145 miles (233 kilometers) per hour.

These conditions resulted in the 100-mile closure of highway I-80 north and west of Lake Tahoe. The interstate had become impassable because of several feet of snow. Hundreds of motorists were stranded in these life-threatening conditions, along with troopers and other emergency personnel who had attempted to rescue the drivers. Countless vehicles, including big rig trucks, were left abandoned, as authorities resorted to ferrying motorists to safer locations amid whiteout conditions.

Yosemite National Park as well as many ski resorts were forced to close due to the heavy snow, very high winds, road closures and power outages.

Even after the storm subsided it proved challenging to open many of these resorts. At Sugar Bowl, in order to even enter the resort employees were required to dig down several feet of snow to reach the front entrance and were then met with even more snow blocking the doorways from floor to ceiling on the second level of the resort.

Moreover, tens of thousands of people isolated in their homes had to endure the bitter cold without heat,

as power outages made heating systems inoperable. Most workers were unable to work, as virtually all businesses closed because of the impassable conditions.

Snow plays an important role in California's water levels, but these increasingly epic storms are a symptom of the alarmingly warming atmosphere. Atmospheric rivers are usually the main contributor to winter storms, which primarily impact the western sides of the coastal ranges and Sierra Nevada. Although the melting of snow and heavy rainfall from these precipitation-dense corridors can result in flooding hazards, they are responsible for ending more than a third of the region's major drought conditions.

That being said, an atmospheric river was likely not the main cause of the blizzard in the Sierras. UCLA climate scientist David Swain explained why this blizzard was so unique. "This is not an ordinary storm," he said in his YouTube forecast, noting that the system was unique because it delivered cold Arctic air with substantial moisture and cold winds.

"In a lot of Sierra Nevada snowstorms," he continued, "the wind and the snow are somewhat disconnected from each other. As they don't occur at the same time, the big wind events are often different than the big heavy snow accumulation events. But in this case, there's going to be extremely heavy snow and very strong winds at the same time."

As these extreme weather events impacted California, a raging wildfire continued to burn in the Texas Panhandle. After consuming more than one million acres in Texas, it has now spread to Oklahoma, burning over 30,000 acres in that state. The fire has killed over 6,500 head of cattle, with the number expected to rise to over 10,000.

These weather events are not normal and should not be regarded as "just another snowstorm" or "just

another wildfire.” The effects of climate change are not limited to a state or country but are global in nature.

Last month was the warmest February on record. According to the European Union’s Copernicus Climate Change Service, the planet has experienced its ninth consecutive month of record-breaking warmth, with February rounding out the Northern Hemisphere’s hottest meteorological winter on record.

Carlo Buontempo, the agency’s director, said: “The climate responds to the actual concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, so unless we manage to stabilize those, we will inevitably face new global temperature records and their consequences.”

Buontempo and many other climate experts have acknowledged for decades that man-made greenhouse emissions are the cause of climate change. The fact that they have not been drastically reduced or eliminated is not a scientific problem, but a political one that only socialism can solve.

The climate crisis cannot be seriously addressed within the confines of the capitalist system, which places profit before human needs and is based on nation-states compelled to compete against each other. Socialism, based on internationalism and production for human need, provides the historically necessary solution to the worsening global climate crisis.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact