

How should Los Angeles be rebuilt after the fires?

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The recent wildfires in Los Angeles have left a trail of devastation, reducing entire neighborhoods to ash and consuming thousands of acres. Over 15,000 structures—including homes, schools, and businesses—were destroyed, with many more severely damaged. Tens of thousands were forced to evacuate with little warning as high winds and dry conditions fueled the infernos. Dozens lost their lives, many suffered injuries, and the economic toll is estimated in the hundreds of billions.

The question of reconstruction is deeply political. With investors and equity firms circling like vultures, the key issue is: Who will control the rebuilding process—the capitalist class, driven by profit, or the working class, acting in the interests of society?

Worsening climate change—driven by the same corporate interests that dictate urban development—is amplifying wildfire risks. At the same time, decades of profit-driven urban planning and neglected fire prevention measures have left communities defenseless.

Urban engineers and scientists have long developed methods to mitigate the risks posed by wildfires. Proper urban planning and modern engineering could have significantly reduced the devastation but such measures are systematically neglected under capitalism, where profits take precedence over public safety.

Creating firebreaks—wide, open spaces devoid of flammable material—can slow or even halt the advance of a wildfire. Greenbelts composed of fire-resistant vegetation and strategically placed parks could serve as both recreational spaces and crucial barriers during fire emergencies.

Additionally, strict zoning laws could ensure that residential areas are not built too close to high-risk wildfire zones. Developers typically lobby against such regulations, as building in scenic, fire-prone areas like hillsides or forested regions increase property values and profitability.

Fire-resistant roofing materials, such as metal or clay tiles, and non-flammable exterior cladding could significantly reduce structural damage. Intumescent coatings (which

expand when exposed to heat) can further shield buildings from fire.

Modern technology also offers powerful tools for early fire detection and suppression. Networks of IoT (Internet of Things)-enabled sensors can detect heat, smoke and gas, providing real-time data to fire departments for quicker response. Automated fire suppression systems, such as advanced sprinkler systems, could protect individual structures and slow the spread of fire within neighborhoods. While such systems are already in use in high-value commercial properties, they remain rare in residential developments, especially in working class areas.

Managing the flammable vegetation around urban areas is another proven strategy for reducing wildfire risks. Regular controlled burns and clearing of dry brush could significantly lower the fuel load that drives intense fires. Similarly, burying power lines underground would prevent the sparking of fires by aging utility infrastructure, a known cause of several California wildfires.

As evinced in the recent fires, high winds exacerbate wildfire risks by spreading flames rapidly. Windbreaks, composed of strategically planted rows of fire-resistant trees and shrubs, can slow down wind speeds and reduce their intensity. Additionally, designing urban areas with wind-resistant building features, such as aerodynamic shapes and reinforced materials, can mitigate structural damage and limit the spread of embers. Investment in advanced meteorological monitoring systems could also improve wind forecasting, enabling better-prepared firefighting responses.

These basic life-saving measures are entirely feasible, but they require massive public investment. Instead, the priorities of the ruling class ensure that resources are funneled into war, corporate bailouts, and police repression, while critical infrastructure is left to rot.

Real estate developers resist zoning regulations that would restrict construction in fire-prone areas, as such laws threaten their profits. In order to maximize profits, developers typically cut corners during construction, with cheaper, flammable materials being used instead of more

expensive fire-resistant alternatives.

Utility companies like PG&E and Southern California Edison have knowingly deferred necessary upgrades, even as their faulty power lines ignite some of California's most devastating fires. Rather than investing in underground power lines or modernizing infrastructure, they continue to funnel billions into shareholder dividends and executive bonuses.

This deliberate neglect is a microcosm of a broader social crisis: a capitalist system that prioritizes the accumulation of private wealth over human lives. The same financial oligarchy that opposes fire prevention efforts spends trillions on war and military expansion while allowing social infrastructure—housing, healthcare, and public services—to decay.

The solution lies in reorienting urban development to prioritize human safety and environmental resilience over private profit. This necessarily requires a socialist approach to urban planning, where decisions are made collectively and guided by the needs of society rather than the interests of the wealthy elite. A socialist response would include:

- Utility companies must be publicly owned and directed, allowing for the prioritization of safety-driven upgrades like underground power lines, comprehensive vegetation management and adequate water pressure supply.
- Zoning laws and building codes should mandate fire-resistant construction and prohibit development in high-risk areas.
- Billions must be allocated to community-wide fire prevention measures, including firebreaks, controlled burns, IoT-enabled detection systems, and windbreaks.
- Residents and workers must be involved in the planning process, with education initiatives that teach fire safety and preparedness. This ensures that fire prevention measures are both effective and supported by the public.
- The worsening effects of climate change, such as prolonged droughts, higher temperatures, and erratic wind patterns, are amplifying the challenges of wildfire management. Addressing these underlying causes through aggressive and genuinely international climate action is essential. This includes reducing greenhouse gas emissions, transitioning to renewable energy, and implementing large-scale reforestation projects to mitigate the effects of a warming planet.

The fires in Los Angeles have exposed the catastrophic failure of a system that subordinates every aspect of life to private profit. Instead of investing in critical fire prevention and infrastructure upgrades, successive governments—both Democratic and Republican—have prioritized the enrichment of the financial elite, the buildup of the military, and corporate handouts at the expense of public safety.

The resources exist, but they are hoarded by a tiny oligarchy that has amassed obscene levels of wealth while social needs go unmet. The expropriation of the billionaires and the redirection of the trillions squandered on war and financial speculation are essential for any serious reconstruction effort.

The Democratic Party, which dominates California politics, has no answer to this crisis. It has presided over decades of deregulation, corporate tax cuts, and the systematic underfunding of public services, all while doing nothing to address climate change. Meanwhile, Trump and his administration of social arsonists are engaged in the wholesale gutting of environmental protections, promoting policies that intensify climate change, and launching a fascistic assault on the working class, immigrants, and democratic rights.

The fight for a rational solution to the underlying causes of the LA fires is a class question and a revolutionary question.

Moreover, the construction and rebuilding of the city require not only material resources but also the labor of tens of thousands of workers—many of whom are immigrants, the same workers being targeted for mass deportation. The attack on immigrant workers, who make up 41 percent of the construction workforce, is an attack on the entire working class, aimed at driving down wages and breaking up any organized resistance to the dictatorship of capital.

There is no solution to these problems within the framework of one city, one state, or even one country. The conditions that produced this disaster—climate change, corporate negligence, and the subjugation of all aspects of life to the demands of the market—are global in character. The only real solution lies in the reorganization of world society to meet social need, not private profit, through the conscious political struggle of the international working class.

Nothing short of the expropriation of the financial oligarchy and the reorganization of society on socialist foundations can provide the resources and coordination needed to protect working class communities from disaster. The tragedy in Los Angeles is a warning of what is to come if the capitalist system is not overturned.



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