“These greedy oligarchs toss lint at the locals”: Anger mounts over storm response in Gary, Indiana and the Calumet region

Kristina Betinis
24 August 2026

On August 11, a derecho swept across northern Illinois and northwest Indiana, an industrial area known as the Calumet region. The storm produced hurricane-strength winds and eight confirmed tornadoes. Downed trees, utility poles and power lines caused widespread destruction across Chicago’s southern suburbs and northwest Indiana, including Gary, Hammond, Whiting and Merrillville.

For nearly two weeks, thousands of residents were effectively thrown back in time, deprived not only of electricity but of the basic necessities of modern life. Families lost hundreds of dollars in spoiled food and refrigerated medicine. Diabetics watched their insulin become unusable, while residents dependent on electrically powered medical devices scrambled to find generators, hotel rooms or some other place with electricity. School openings were delayed, businesses remained dark and residents traveled long distances simply to charge phones, obtain food or buy gasoline. Yet, as the WSWS previously reported, US Steel ordered employees at its Gary Works mill to continue reporting for work, warning that absences caused by storm damage or the loss of electricity could result in disciplinary action.

Over the weekend, power was restored to parts of Gary, Portage and other communities. On Monday, August 24, the Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO) said electricity would be restored to all remaining areas by Tuesday.

Monday was the first day of school for many children in Gary, though some schools remained closed and others opened two hours late. World Central Kitchen began serving hot meals in Gary late last week. Churches and community organizations continue to distribute meals and water and organize activities for families.

Cleanup remains underway throughout the Calumet region, with working class families largely left to manage the devastation themselves. The inadequate response from the state and federal governments and the giant corporations that dominate the region has provoked bitter anger.

A BP Whiting refinery operator, who has been locked out with roughly 850 other workers for nearly five months, told the WSWS that the situation had been “disproportionately awful.”

“I’ve been trying to donate a bunch of decent clothes and backpacks, but nobody next door in Gary has power and half my town is out still.”

Referring to the giant corporations that dominate the region, including BP, Ford, Cargill, Cleveland-Cliffs and US Steel, he said:

“They could ABSOLUTELY fix it all. Instead, this Republican suck hole Indiana keeps approving more and more data centers and more and more tax incentives. Instead of water bottles, they could’ve absolutely provided generators for homes and food deliveries. It would’ve been mere pennies. These greedy oligarchs toss lint at the locals and only when they need more from them.”

He condemned the response of NIPSCO management and the token relief offered to Gary residents.

“They gave away, I think, $150 food vouchers in Gary to a supermarket with empty shelves because all the food went bad. It’s criminal!”

The worker said flooding, power failures and decaying infrastructure were already common throughout Hammond and Whiting, but that the

© World Socialist Web Site

destruction caused by the derecho was unprecedented.

"This is the absolute worst I've ever seen. Thank God they're building a $12–15 billion data center in Hobart! That's gonna help!"

Hobart is approximately 10 miles south of Gary. The worker contrasted the enormous resources being devoted to the data center with the refusal to provide generators and other essential assistance to residents.

"They plan on having millions of dollars in generators and also millions in diesel storage for power outages. When this happens and the data center is up, this will be disastrous for the community."

In the Crete-Monee area, a retired teacher told the WSWS:

"The first tornado that went through here on Tuesday took out the power and ripped the siding off our garage. It even took off some of the wood under the siding. There's a $3,200 deductible with insurance to get that repaired. And we were lucky.

"Many people had trees land on their houses and cars. Trees were completely uprooted and even pulled up the sidewalk in places that had roots underneath. We had a second tornado come through on Wednesday, with more trees pulled up.

"We were without power for three days. We shared a generator with two other neighbors. We each took turns for about five hours to keep our refrigerators going. Then we passed it to the next neighbor.

"I have really bad asthma and the air quality was bad, so the last night without power I went to a hotel in another state to get air conditioning and to be able to plug in my nebulizer machine for breathing treatments.

"I had to go get gas for the generator and there was nowhere local that had power, so I drove a half an hour away and paid $5.99 a gallon. Capitalism at its finest!"

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site