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## As Trump is inaugurated, victims of Los Angeles fires fear no help from the government

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As Los Angeles faces the devastating aftermath of a series of wildfires, the city stands at a pivotal moment, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. With Donald Trump being inaugurated as the 47th president of the United States on Monday, the unfolding disaster in Southern California highlights the urgent crises confronting humanity and the systemic failures to tackle them.

The wildfires have resulted in at least 27 fatalities, forced around 200,000 residents to evacuate and destroyed over 40,000 acres of land along with nearly 15,000 structures, showcasing the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related disasters. Firefighters have made notable strides, managing to contain the Palisades Fire and the Eaton Fire to 52 and 81 percent, respectively. However, the damage inflicted on the landscape and the communities affected is significant.

As of Friday night, Cal Fire reported that the Lidia, Archer, Woodley, Sunset, Kenneth, Hurst, and Auto fires were fully contained. However, the forecast of strong, damaging Santa Ana winds on Monday and Tuesday poses a serious threat, as the region remains dangerously dry.

The impact of climate change on California’s wildfire risk is increasingly clear. The state’s increasingly dry conditions are not an anomaly but rather a consequence of a warming planet. Professor John Abatzoglou, a specialist in climate and fire science, remarked for CalMatters, “The numbers were literally off the charts,” in reference to the unprecedented combination of heat, drought and dryness indices fueling the Los Angeles fires. Yet, despite

the growing body of scientific evidence, politicians of all stripes persist in spreading misinformation and neglecting the underlying causes of these disasters.

Trump’s inauguration on Monday adds a painful irony to the ongoing tragedy. His rise to the presidency symbolizes the emergence of reactionary forces determined to deny science and roll back even the minimal climate measures put in place by previous administrations. Trump’s first executive orders in 2017 included pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement and revoking federal emissions standards, marking a troubling escalation in the US government’s neglect to address climate change.

Trump has consistently minimized the seriousness of the climate crisis, labeling it as “a hoax.” He has suggested that victims could have avoided disaster by simply “raking their yards” and has placed blame on Democrats for spending cuts to social services that he and the Republicans fully endorse and are preparing to launch more significant ones.

This distortion of reality not only diverts attention from systemic issues but also seeks to preemptively clear his administration of any accountability. Trump and the Republican Party have already threatened to withhold federal disaster relief, leaving victims to navigate one of the worst fire seasons in history on their own.

The human impact of these fires goes far beyond the immediate loss of life. According to Yale Climate Connections, the indirect death toll from the fires in Los Angeles could ultimately reach into the thousands. Prolonged exposure to smoke, displacement, and the

breakdown of local healthcare systems have intensified the suffering of many residents. Vulnerable groups—the elderly, low-income individuals, and those with pre-existing health conditions—are facing the worst of these cascading effects.

At the same time, the systemic failures in disaster preparedness and response are glaringly evident. While billionaires like Rick Caruso and Kim Kardashian are able to employ private firefighters to save their properties, Los Angeles' housing crisis and increasing inequality have left many residents with no options. Evacuees are crammed into temporary shelters, enduring unsanitary conditions and limited access to essential resources. The responses from state and local officials are woefully inadequate given the magnitude of the disaster.

The WSWs spoke to several Altadena residents impacted by the fires. What transpires is the realization of a systemic failure as well as the class character of this social tragedy.

A disabled survivor commented about her horrific experience: "I've lived here my whole life. We got an evacuation warning for my home. Went to my uncle's on the other side of town where they didn't get an evacuation warning. Left in the middle of the night. His house burned down. And now we don't have any power."

She made a connection between the inadequate response to the fires and spending cuts in social programs, including fire department budgets: "In Altadena [an unincorporated community in Los Angeles County], we're at the whims of LA County, and those cuts mattered," she stated. "The response should have been better. And yeah, it's just really painful."

The future for most people is a difficult one. "A lot of my friends have family homes that are gone. It's really sad. I don't know that many of them will be able to rebuild. A lot of them only had those homes because they had them generations ago. A lot of people are hurting and traumatized."

She reflected on the ability of the rich to spare themselves from disaster: "I think of [Pasadena-born writer] Octavia Butler's writings about kind of the same thing happening, where firefighting [service] is a privilege, not a right, and only the rich are protected, and those with less are just left to fend for themselves."

A full accounting of the losses suffered will take months, but they are becoming evident as evacuees tell their stories. Dorothy, another Altadena resident, described her horror: "I had a total loss in my house. At 4:30 a.m., my smoke detectors went off and, when I

opened my eyes, I couldn't see. When I opened my front door, everything around me was on fire."

Dorothy told the WSWs that she runs "a daycare for seniors and youth. It's been a heavy process and some of my seniors are still missing." Commenting on the speculative vultures circling the area, she reported: "For people to call and wanting to purchase your home ... asking you if you want to sell your land. You know, it's just insane."

"I don't even know the database that they [speculators] are getting this information from, but a large part of my seniors are being asked to sell their homes, when they haven't even processed that they're homeless. So it's just a very egregious situation."

Dorothy reacted to the ability of wealthier residents to pay for private firefighting services: "I think it's very odd because I thought we were one nation, one unit. That's a human basic need for your government to make sure that you're safe during a natural disaster. That shouldn't be gauged by how much money you have in the bank because my life has the same value as a billionaire's life. The homeless people matter just as much as the billionaires."

She commented on how major social events expose social reality: "In those moments we should have all mattered. I don't try to really engage in those [political] conversations because it's too stressful for me. I like to deal with human kindness, but I do recognize the wickedness. I'm not ignorant to that, so I don't know the social things that are going on and the depth that I probably should, but it might be time that I dig a little deeper."



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