

When a Government that only Serves the Rich Fail to Act, the People will Save Themselves!

——Observations on Grassroots Activities by Left-Wing
Organizations during the Eaton Fire in the United States

Outpost

The Eaton Fire, which started at 6:18 PM Pacific Standard Time on January 7, has so far claimed 17 lives, left 24 people missing, and spread across 5,713 hectares, with 9,418 buildings destroyed. The fire not only brought devastating flames but also caused heavy smoke and debris that pose long-term health threats to the local residents. In addition to the famous middle-class neighborhood of Altadena, nearby cities such as Sierra Madre, Palisade, Altadena, as well as Pasadena and Flintridge, which are close by, have all suffered varying degrees of damage, leading to significant losses in both life and property in California. From the start of the fire until 10:36 AM on January 8, the Los Angeles Fire Department still had zero control of the fire. It wasn't until 5:52 AM on January 16 that the government achieved over 50% control of the blaze.

Let's take a look at how the West Coast's bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie have reacted in the face of the Eaton Fire: California real estate agents and companies raised prices, gouging victims by inflating property prices and rents in the Flint Ridge area; numerous luxury private residences and hotels in the surrounding areas remained closed to evacuees; the Resnick family, who treated the water resources that could extinguish the fire and save lives as private property, stood by and did nothing; Karen Bass, the mayor, insisted that budget cuts wouldn't affect firefighting efforts while requesting the National Guard to urgently arrest looters during the disaster, but turned a blind eye to the real looters—the insurance companies that ran away with huge amounts of money under disaster-induced compensation claims;

Gavin Newsom, who failed to act against the insurance companies' theft while claiming that budget cuts wouldn't harm fire response efforts; and Donald Trump, who, in interviews on fire-related matters, still used tired double entendres and attempted to help large agricultural corporations, who have been holding California's agricultural resources, seize more of the limited public water resources. However, all the above individuals and organizations are pale in comparison to the following companies.

Southern California Edison, for its own benefit, was slow to cut off the power supply after the fire, disregarding public safety and becoming one of the culprits responsible for starting the blaze. Meanwhile, companies like ExxonMobil, Chevron, Koch Industries, and Shell used the "Water Edge Election" system to evade taxes that should have been used to support local firefighting efforts. Implemented in 1986, this system allows corporate groups to choose to pay franchise taxes based only on California-based income, not global income; multinational corporations in California could exclude their foreign subsidiaries' income from California's taxable revenue, significantly reducing their tax burden in the state. According to a report by The Climate Center, the Water Edge Election causes California to lose over \$4.3 billion in tax revenue annually, with oil and gas companies receiving tax reductions as high as \$146 million through this mechanism. These avoided taxes could have been used to support California's firefighting budget, climate projects, and public services. Due to the tax loss caused


by the Water Edge Election, the California government had to cut crucial public service budgets, including funds for firefighting, directly affecting the training of rescue personnel and the renewal of firefighting equipment. Even though California residents were highly dissatisfied with this system, oil and gas companies continued to use lobbying and political donations to ensure the continuation of the Water Edge Election policy. For instance, the Western States Petroleum Association and Chevron lobbied to block the “Polluters Pay Climate Cost Recovery Act,” which would have required polluting companies to compensate for the environmental damage they caused. In 2024, the California government attempted to pass SB 167 to limit the abuse of the Water Edge Election system, but the California Taxpayer Association (composed of representatives from companies like Chevron and Koch Industries) immediately filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the bill. These companies have proven to the people of California that democracy and freedom are bullshit in their eyes. Their actions not only expose the capitalist system’s inability to respond to emergencies but also reveal its indifference to the safety of people’s lives. In the face of a crisis, the profit-first logic of capitalism continually sacrifices public safety.

In contrast to the ill-prepared government before the disaster, the PSL Los Angeles chapter and Day Labor Network (NDLON) organizers sprang into action after the fire. The group, primarily composed of new immigrants, includes some unregistered workers (undocumented laborers) and international volunteers who assist the local fire department in organizing supplies, coordinating shelters, and attempting to restore order amidst the chaos. NDLON, founded in Northern California, is dedicated to improving the quality of life for immigrant and low-wage workers and establishing mutual aid networks. It has initiated various Day Laborer Workforce Initiatives in multiple areas to help local

immigrant workers by providing employment counseling, legal aid for labor disputes, and free skills training services for multilingual workers. Now, in the aftermath of the disaster, immigrants, particularly undocumented temporary workers, have become an indispensable part of the unofficial disaster response efforts in California. However, even though they have chosen to participate in the arduous task of post-disaster reconstruction, they are still shadowed by the threat of arrest and deportation. While disaster relief operations continue, news of immigration raids in Kern County reached the media—how ironic! The official security forces in Los Angeles, who are sluggish in post-disaster reconstruction, suddenly gets energized when scrutinizing against undocumented immigrants.

Nevertheless, volunteers have done their best to ensure that essential supplies such as drinking water, food, and medicine flow to community residents, ensuring that these vital resources reach those suddenly thrown into precarious situations. Volunteers’ efforts have improved the dissemination of water-related instructions, and their work in cleaning streets has restored some traffic. They have also raised funds for the affected regions, filmed and interviewed groups like the Los Topos USAR Brigade, a non-profit professional firefighter and rescue team from Mexico City that has been responding to disasters since 1985, and helped spread the grassroots funding policy issues faced by local communities. These actions are helping the underprivileged in local communities to endure the aftermath of the disaster with greater strength.

Republican trickle-down economists, dedicated to criticizing the arrogance of the traditional left, have argued that this arrogance is causing them to gradually lose the trust of working-class people. According to them, only by first safeguarding the interests of big capitalists can the trickle-down effect ensure that the



working-class receives their “water source.” If the trickle-down valve of large capital groups becomes blocked, the left-wing figures they criticize will have only one option in the face of the working class: sitting idly. The Republicans also work to link the left-wing image with the Democrats, who are accused of only causing dissatisfaction, provoking disturbances, and exaggerating issues, while presenting themselves as the so-called “pragmatists.” Ironically, these Republican viewpoints often find support from shiny left-wing intellectuals and cultural scholars trained by the Democratic Party, who, unfortunately, mostly have the ability to incite and manufacture crises but lack the potential to rebuild order in times of crisis. In California, we can see that, even without the trickle-down from large capital groups or the support of cultural scholars, people from different countries with different cultural backgrounds and skin colors can still help each other during a crisis, rebuild the grassroots order that belongs to them.

A government that serves billionaires may appear to be concerned about disasters and the people, but in reality, it is skilled in calculating and tilting resources toward large capital enterprises that have suffered damage in the flames. The authorities are busy appeasing other predators, worried about losing a few bites of meat or sips of blood, while ignoring the common people who truly need help. However, in the shadow of this hypocrisy and indifference, the people of California did not surrender. They did not wait for redemption from those in power, but chose to work together, protect one another, and rebuild hope amidst the ruins. In the face of a crisis, only the people will save the people!