

Amazon fires: ‘Justice for workers and the environment are the same struggle’

written by Scott Scheffer
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Jefferson Azevedo



Brenda Gutierrez



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A Sept. 7 public forum focused on the fires blazing in the Amazon forest in Brazil. The event was held at the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice In Los Angeles

and was co-sponsored by the People's Power Assembly-Los Angeles and the American Indian Movement of Southern California.

Two AIM SoCal leaders, Gray Wolf and Brenda Gutierrez, spoke eloquently about the history of AIM, the battles at Standing Rock and about Indigenous peoples' struggles throughout the world. Each of them expressed strong solidarity with the Indigenous peoples who reside in the Amazon and face being forced out by the right-wing drive to exploit the resources of the forest.

Brazilian activist Jefferson Azevedo of the Socialist Unity Party pointed the finger of blame at the capitalist system itself. He spoke about the dominance of the agricultural, meat and mineral corporations that have found a willing partner in right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro.

But their dominance and the reckless destruction of the Amazon didn't begin with Bolsonaro, Azevedo pointed out. Although deforestation slowed when former president and current political prisoner Lula Da Silva was elected, and during the first term of progressive President Dilma Rousseff, it picked up again under pressure from the same forces in Rousseff's second term.

Acevedo attributed the sweeping attacks on progressive politics in Brazil to this same group of rich and powerful capitalists: "Former President Dilma Rousseff being thrown out of office, Lula being imprisoned, the election of Bolsonaro — none of it would have happened were it not for the dominance in Brazilian politics of these right-wing millionaires.

"This explains [Bolsonaro's] silence when it comes to the fire that is consuming one of the greatest wonders of this planet and the habitat of a wide variety of living species."

Acevedo ended his talk on a hopeful note: "Capitalist greed dominates today, but is

digging its own grave. Thousands of Brazilians are protesting against Bolsonaro now, in spite of the history of right-wing violence against working-class and progressive people.

“Protests over environmental issues have been rare in Brazil, but now people see that this is an issue that affects workers, and that justice for workers and environmental justice are the same struggle.”

