

Capitalist climate disaster strikes Indonesia

written by Scott Scheffer
January 20, 2020



Jakarta residents evacuated from the home on Jan. 1.

As deadly bushfires were raging up and down the eastern part of Australia in late December and early January, Indonesia's island of Java and the nation's capital city of Jakarta suffered historic floods.

Rivers swelled and burst their banks, while some neighborhoods saw over 20 feet of flood water within hours of the start of the rains. The waters have since receded, but more rainfall is expected.

Some 67 people have already died by electrocution, hypothermia, drowning or being buried alive. Those who live in the poorest and most vulnerable neighborhoods suffered the most.

According to NASA's [Earth Observatory website](#), the immediate cause was that winds which blew from the northeast of Java met warm winds blowing from the Indian Ocean and formed the torrential rains. This weather pattern is common for Java but has become more frequent in recent decades.

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago and is comprised of some 18,000 islands. Its capital city of Jakarta is located on the western side of Java and is one of the world's "megacities." Its 10 million residents experience overwhelming rain and floods every year. Forty percent of the city is below sea level and-similar to Amsterdam-relies on hundreds of pumps to keep it habitable.

Even with the elaborate pumping system, the city is sinking further below sea level with each passing year. Half of the city will be submerged in 30 years. President Joko Widodo has proposed moving the capital to Borneo, in the center of Indonesia's largest land mass, but the narrative that surrounds the proposal denies that climate change or rising sea levels are a factor.

As news spread about the flooding and the death toll, meteorologists asserted that

although Java has historically dealt with flooding, this rain was different.

On New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, more rain fell than has been recorded in a 24-hour period since the Dutch colonizers began keeping records in 1886. In other words, this may have been the greatest rainfall ever.

Power failures, mudslides and rising flood water displaced 175,000 people.

Bosses dismiss climate crisis

Like Australia, Indonesia has a president that denies the role of climate change, and the media march in lockstep.

Worldwide, representatives of giant corporations-and fossil fuel capitalists in particular-try to propagate the idea that extreme weather has always been and always will be, that it is normal that the earth experiences warmer periods that come and go, and-in the wildest version of climate change denial of all-that climate change science is a Chinese conspiracy. None of it is based on actual science.

In recent years, although climate scientists and meteorologists cannot connect any particular storm or weather event to climate change, they are in agreement that global warming from CO2 and other toxic emissions is warming the earth's atmosphere, melting the polar ice caps and raising the sea levels. All of this is increasing the frequency and intensity of disastrous weather events.

As Jakarta grew, its development was shaped by frequent flooding and its vast income inequality. The city's wealthy live in areas out of harm's way. The rich live in posh neighborhoods less prone to flooding, but the majority live in areas where the risk of disaster is greatest because they have no choice.

When flooding occurs, the gap between Indonesia's tiny handful of wealthy capitalists and the majority of Indonesians comes into stark relief. A 2015 World

Bank report analyzed the gap between rich and poor Indonesians: “Indonesia’s economic growth has been enjoyed by only the top 20 percent. ... On the other side, people ... struggle to find productive employment. They are trapped in low-paying jobs.

“Some work in farming and fisheries in rural areas, others work in the informal sectors – market coolies, domestic workers, drivers, etc. As their wages increase more slowly than for skilled workers, the income gap widens.”

CIA coup blocked social progress

Indonesia may have developed along a different path were it not for a CIA engineered coup that overthrew its president, installed a right-wing general, and led to a massacre of more than 1 million communists in 1965. At the time, the Communist Party of Indonesia was the world’s third largest communist party, behind only the USSR and China.

The Indonesian people wanted to reorganize their country to attack the problems of massive poverty and inequality, much as China was in the process of doing. It was the height of the Cold War. As the U.S. military was trying to turn back similar efforts by the Vietnamese people, Indonesia’s anti-colonial president, Sukarno, was also in the crosshairs of U.S. imperialism.

The CIA facilitated right-wing Gen. Suharto’s rise to power and stood by as one of the greatest crimes of the 20th century was carried out. Indonesia’s revolutionary movement was destroyed, and a great step forward for human progress was turned back.

Social progress has to move forward in order to manage the effects of climate change. Endless imperialist wars and corporate pollution are a one-way ticket to the planet’s destruction.

Only a planned economy and the elimination of private ownership can develop the science and implement the decisions that are sorely needed — free of corporate control.

