

New Orleans day of action demands real hurricane relief

written by Gregory E. Williams
October 1, 2021



SLL photo: Gregory E. Williams

On Sept. 26, several revolutionary and progressive organizations came together for a day of action in downtown New Orleans. Organizers were responding to the horrible conditions affecting working class and oppressed communities following Hurricane Ida, as well as the capitalist-made crises that preceded it.

All the organizations raised demands and outlined visions for a broad, mass fightback, based on non-sectarian cooperation and unity through struggle.

Cancel the rents

The Party for Socialism and Liberation (PSL) – Central Gulf Coast started things off at City Hall with a Cancel the Rents rally, as part of a national campaign. The campaigners are calling for an immediate cancellation of rent debts and an indefinite eviction moratorium.

A PSL organizer said that, while doing aid work in southeast Louisiana, “We were struck by the compounding crises. The Supreme Court had just thrown out the eviction moratorium. ... Just a few weeks ago Louisiana was the COVID epicenter of the entire world. And now people are trying to survive in the aftermath of a hurricane with no power, some with no water, and some in 100-degree weather.

“When we were in LaPlace, we noticed that the local police were patrolling the streets, not to help people, but to protect property, looking for looters.”

Hold Entergy accountable — make FEMA pay

The March for Real Hurricane Relief kicked off at City Hall after the Cancel the Rents rally. Sponsoring organizations included Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO) – New Orleans, New Orleans Renters Rights Assembly, New Orleans Hospitality Workers Alliance, Unión Migrante, Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition, New Orleans Mutual Aid Society and the Socialist Unity Party.

The march went from City Hall to the Civil District Court Building (where evictions happen) to the Federal Building.

At City Hall, Serena Sojic-Borne with FRSO said: “We need public-run utilities. That means the government manages the power grid. But more importantly, we need a people’s board that oversees the government running the power grid!”

In front of the civil court building, Daiquiri Jones represented the Renters Rights Assembly, stating: “In that climate [of COVID-19 and other crises] it’s unconscionable that they’re opening eviction court and prioritizing the interests of a

few people. We still don't have adequate assistance for the people who are actually paying the property taxes [renters], the people who are going to work every day—they're the ones supporting the city. ... The idea that the burden is on the people who work the most, and support the city the most, is unconscionable.

"We have reasonable demands. We want \$500 million in rental assistance to southeast Louisiana. We want eviction court to stay closed until all rental assistance is distributed to the people, not just writing the landlord a check."

On the street, organizers building toward an Ida Survivor Town Hall event distributed a flyer calling for a movement where survivors can "propose demands for consideration, to debate these proposals and to vote on whether a proposed demand is to be part of the collective voice," citing the historical lessons of Hurricane Katrina, and the folly of "throwing ourselves at the mercy of politicians, bureaucrats and disaster capitalists." They can be reached at howellnow1958 [at] gmail [dot] com.

The crowd chanted as they began to march, "All the money for the people!"



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There was no plan

At the Hale Boggs Federal Building, a speaker with Unión Migrante said: “We are indignant at the injustice of being totally exploited as immigrants. We’re not eligible for support from FEMA and so many government programs because of being undocumented. Our neighborhoods are the last to have their trash picked up, and the mayor is not doing a very good job as mayor.

“She didn’t have an evacuation plan or anything when the hurricane came. We as Unión Migrante made a video informing the community what to do when a hurricane came and then when the hurricane came around, nothing was actually orchestrated. And the mayor just says, ‘save yourselves, whoever can get out.’ But there was no plan for how to actually implement that.”

A Unión Migrante sign read, “We built this city! We deserve hurricane relief too!”, referring to the fact that immigrants did so much of the rebuilding following

Hurricane Katrina.

Jackie of the New Orleans Mutual Aid Society explained that, although Ida hit and caused an emergency, “what all the mutual aid groups in New Orleans are responding to is the emergency that preceded the emergency, which is that people don’t have what they need. We’re trying to meet those needs, but we can’t do it because the need is too great.”

They elaborated that the problem is the historical effects of capitalism and oppressions like racism, which have made communities vulnerable.

Echoing Jackie’s words, David Brazil with Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition said that the disaster of the storm “took place within the larger disaster, which is capitalism, and the larger disaster, which is white supremacy.

“The real source of wealth in society is workers. All the money that FEMA has is workers’ tax money. It’s our money! And as soon as we need it, it should be coming back to us.

“It’s great that people have come together, but we cannot fill the gap by asking community members to step in where social services should exist,” Brazil said. “We need to get together as a community — and this rally is a great example of what it looks like when working class people from many different backgrounds and regions get together to make common cause.

“We have to struggle together. These people aren’t coming to save us. There is no plan. Rather, we saw the plan. The plan is abandonment. It’s ‘good luck’! That’s the plan. And we’re going to continue seeing climate disasters, and disasters like this pandemic. So we as working people have to get it together to begin to build the alternatives now, because the government is not going to do it for us.

“I am so grateful to FRSO for organizing this, for keeping the working class and

class struggle at the center of this, for naming and denouncing capitalism, because we have to fight this thing or it's going to kill us all!"

