

# Capitalism's climate catastrophe: How fossil fuel giants fueled the storm crisis

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On Sept. 26, Hurricane Helene hit near Tampa, Florida, and tore north and then northwest through Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, even reaching the eastern part of Tennessee.

Helene stretched about 400 miles across and sustained 140 mph winds, smashing into homes and leaving millions without electricity. The flooding and devastation from the wind were at a historic level.

No areas near the path were spared, and the mountain community of Asheville, North Carolina, was utterly destroyed by flooding. A local journalist reported seeing two homes being swept away by raging water that then crashed into each other.

Just two weeks later, Hurricane Milton landed 75 miles south of Helene's landfall and ripped its way north/northwest across the panhandle and then out into the Atlantic. Work crews were clearing debris from Helene when Milton arrived.

It's not unusual for hurricanes to spawn a few tornados. Usually, they're weak and fizzle out quickly. Not these. The storm yielded a record 38 of them, and they smashed everything in their paths.

As of Oct. 15, the combined death toll had climbed to 268, and there were still 192 people unaccounted for. Damage estimates are all over the map, from \$35 billion to \$200 billion.

These were two of the most destructive storms in history. "Thousand-year" storms are happening frequently now. Hurricanes, droughts, and cyclones are increasing in severity. Heat waves are more frequent and threaten to make some cities that millions call home uninhabitable.

This is all a product of the capitalist economy. Giant energy companies and their banking partners have pushed the exploitation of fossil fuels, spewed gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>, methane, and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, and caused global

warming.

They've spent millions of dollars to spread misinformation to deny climate change or push the responsibility onto individuals. British Petroleum invented the whole idea of a "carbon footprint," as if the working class could just change our habits and solve the problem.

Oil company scientists have known the consequences of continued fossil fuel use for decades. They kept the information secret, ridiculed scientists who sounded the alarm and ignored endless dire warnings from the United Nations.

Fracking for natural gas intensified as the U.S. took over the European market, a consequence of the U.S. proxy war against Russia. During roughly the same period, Biden began handing out new oil drilling contracts like candy on Halloween.

Instead of yielding to the growing awareness and anger over the global capitalist destruction of the planet, the energy giants have literally stepped on the gas. Emissions of greenhouse gases are now at an all-time high.

Scholarly reports have also revealed that military activity is responsible for a hefty percentage of greenhouse gases. But the U.S. is the motivator of constant military exercises to threaten China, active wars in Ukraine, and now the horrible Zionist genocidal campaign against Gaza and war against the people of Lebanon.

### **Hurricanes are not only more severe**

As the earth's atmosphere has heated, hurricanes are not only more severe but also intensify more quickly, leaving less time for preparation and evacuations.

This was particularly so with Helene and Milton. That rapid intensification was noted about Hurricane Otis in October 2023, which slammed into Acapulco, Mexico, as well. High ocean temperatures also fueled a cyclone in February of last year that

was the longest-lasting cyclone ever recorded — Cyclone Freddy. It lasted for 36 days, crossed the entire Indian Ocean, and ravaged Madagascar, Malawi, and Mozambique.

Ocean temperatures have reached all-time highs in the last several years, alarming climatologists.

This phenomenon is creating superstorms. Rising sea temperatures are destroying marine life and acidifying seawater, and sea levels are rising.

That happens for the same reason that a pot of boiling water rises as it warms. Water expands from heat.

The Gulf of Mexico's rise in sea level is nearly twice that of the rest of the world, which means storm surges are worse. Beyond that, the heat and energy from the oceans is being picked up by tropical storms, fueling their rapid development into more destructive, less predictable hurricanes.

As they develop, the storms pick up much more moisture as they work their way across oceans. It isn't uncommon now for hurricanes to slow down after landfall and dump rain on a region for sustained periods. What Katrina did to New Orleans and now Helene did to Asheville, North Carolina, are perfect examples of that.

Global warming and climate change can be reversed. Renewables in the form of solar, wind, and geothermal energy are already an important component, even with the question of intermittency, which still needs to be resolved. Electric vehicles can limit emissions from the millions of cars traveling daily.

The People's Republic of China has been instrumental in the progress that has been made in those areas. Other technologies and ideas may improve on these or spawn whole new ideas that can lower global temperatures.

The hard science developed around climate change proves that fossil fuels are the root cause. But another kind of science leads us to the solution: social science. Private ownership of the means of production – the profit system – is a roadblock to our planet’s recovery. Part 2 will explore the role of the U.S. empire in causing global warming and the role China is playing in cleaning up the atmosphere.

