Wildfires devastate Native Hawaiian lands

By Will Hodgkinson

This week, wildfires are devastating Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) lands in U.S.-occupied Hawai‘i. The largest fires have erupted on Hawai‘i and Maui, Hawai‘i’s two largest islands, burning over 2,000 acres. As of this article’s publication, over 100 people are confirmed dead. At least 1,000 other people remain unaccounted for, and authorities expect the death toll to rise.

Many residents had no warning of the fires and had to flee into the ocean, where they waited for hours until rescue came. In all, over 11,000 residents have evacuated. These wildfires are the deadliest recorded on a U.S.-claimed territory in over a century. (New York Times, Aug 12)

Lāhainā, the capital of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i — which was invaded and violently overthrown by the U.S. in 1893 — experienced the greatest devastation, with 2,200 structures destroyed. The Lāhainā region is sacred to the Kānaka Maoli, who recognize it as the birthplace of the goddess Kīhāwaihine. (The Conversation, Aug 11)

Cultural sites and artifacts destroyed

The buildings lost in Lāhainā include the Waiolā Church, which housed the remains of several Kānaka Maoli monarchs, the Na ‘Aikane o Maui Cultural Center, home to many important Polynesian and Kānaka Maoli documents and artifacts now destroyed by the fire, and Piʻinana Leo, one of the few immersive Kānaka Maoli language schools still in existence.

Carmen Hulu Lindsey, chairwoman of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs said, “We have watched our precious cultural assets, our physical connection to our ancestors, our places of remembering — all go up in smoke.”

The destruction caused by the fires has worsened an already dire housing shortage for many Kānaka Maoli, who lack access to the land and its resources due to theft by the U.S. settler colonial state. While Hawai‘i’s capitalist government spends tens of millions of dollars every year helping to build luxury resorts and beach houses for predominantly white settlers, thousands of Kānaka Maoli remain unhoused on their own lands. A Stanford Medicine study found that on the island of O‘ahu alone, Kānaka Maoli make up over 50% of the unhoused population. (tinyurl.com/5n9bb23a)

After the fires, many more Kānaka Maoli lost their homes and now lack the assistance necessary to help them rebuild. As Kūhēi Lewis, CEO of the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, explained, “The one thing that gave [many Native Hawaiian residents] stability — a place to stay at night for some there — they don’t even have that anymore.”

While federal aid and relief has been slow in coming to Hawai‘i, where fires continue to rage, the Biden Administration has asked for an additional $24 billion in military aid for the proxy war in the Ukraine, exposing, once more, the priorities of the U.S. militarist, imperialist state.

No government agency is helping us

In the absence of an adequate government response, many Kānaka Maoli have organized their own relief efforts. On Maui, volunteers handed out food, clothes, and other supplies to survivors. “There is no government agency helping us. This is our home, our community,” said Jareth Lumlung, a Kānaka Maoli volunteer leading these relief efforts. (tinyurl.com/q4kldpt7)

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Environmental racism links Lāhainā and Katrina

By Monica Moorehead

August 29 will mark the 18th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, one of the deadliest hurricanes in U.S. history, which devastated much of the Gulf Coast (specifically Louisiana and Mississippi) and devastated much of the Gulf Coast (specifically Louisiana and Mississippi) and disproportionately struck New Orleans. Over 1,000 people died from flooding in this neighborhood alone.

Fast forward almost 18 years later to Aug. 9, when tragic wildfires swiftly devastated huge swathes of the Hawaiian island of Maui, including the historic town of Lāhainā. Over 100 people have died and the death toll is expected to rise even higher. The structural damage for residents is estimated to be over $1 billion with the destruction of over 2,000 buildings.

There were no sirens to warn people before the rapidity of the wildfires as many people died from being burned alive, smoke inhalation and general lack of escape routes. DNA findings are now being required to identify many of the victims.

While no source of the fires has been officially determined, one possibility was the dangerous power lines combined with high mountain winds emanating from Hurricane Dora, a Category 4 storm located to the south of Maui in the Pacific Ocean.

Katrina and the Hawaiian wildfires have more in common than not. Both were impacted by climate change, which has grown dramatically worse between 2005 and 2023.

Regarding the potential impact of Katrina, Kerry Emanuel, Professor of Atmospheric Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, stated in the scientific journal Nature in early August 2005, that “North Atlantic hurricane power was strongly correlated with the temperature of the tropical Atlantic.”

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Government map shows nearly every building in Lāhainā, the capital of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i, destroyed or damaged (dark red and light red).
No more weapons to Kiev

As if Washington had not exported enough misery to Eastern Europe — no, to all of Europe and Russia — in the past two years, the Biden administration has asked Congress for another $84 billion in aid for Ukraine this August. This is on top of $813 billion already approved. Most of the money is for arms and military training. To attract broader support, Biden has linked the war money to funds for emergency relief and border security in the U.S.

Biden has reason to worry about getting approval. This worry goes beyond the visceral rejection of anything to do with Biden by ultra-right Republicans who never met a warplane they didn’t like. A CNN poll published Aug. 4 showed 55% of the respondents opposing more aid to Ukraine. Even more telling, about 80% of those polled believe the war will drag on indefinitely.

This disgust with the war has arisen despite the overwhelming propaganda falsely presenting the Kiev regime as a bulwark of democracy and courage. This is true even with few U.S. troops coming home in body bags, and none officially. This poll foretells an upswing in opposition should the war continue to drag on or to escalate.

Perhaps workers in the U.S. who have no real interest in defending Kiev, in expanding NATO or in demonizing Vladimir Putin, let alone provoking Russia, are casting on to Washington’s plans for Ukraine.

If they read between the lines, even in the corporate media’s war reports, they might decide that the vaunted Ukrainian “counteroffensive” has flopped and that corruption haunts the Kiev regime’s state structure from its top arms dealer — who made billions of dollars disappear — to the military recruiters who accept bribes to excuse individuals from conscription.

War bloggers argue that weapons sent from NATO’s stocks soon go missing, many quickly destroyed by Russian artillery and missiles. For the merchants of death in the U.S. — that is, the owners of the military-industrial complex — this is happy news. This war is a perpetual market for their goods. For the working class in the U.S. and the other NATO countries, it’s a perpetual burden.

The sniff of defeat in Kiev has reached across the sea. Rot stinks. A handful of rich are getting richer on the misery of a war. And this war, as we have shown in articles over the past 20 months, has been provoked by NATO’s eastward expansion. The antivaria movement in the United States must demand: No more funds for war in Ukraine!

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If you are interested in joining Workers World Party: Contact:

National Office 121 W. 27th St., Suite 404 New York, NY 10001
212.627.2994 wwp@workers.org

Atlanta PO Box 18123 Atlanta, GA 30316 404.627.0183 atlanta@workers.org

Bay Area PO Box 22947 Oakland, CA 94609 510.394.2207 bayarea@workers.org

Boston 284 Amory St. Boston, MA 02119 617.536.2615 boston@workers.org

Buffalo, N.Y. 335 Richmond Ave. Buffalo, NY 14223 716.883.2334 buffalo@workers.org

Central Gulf Coast (Alabama, Florida, Mississippi) centralgulfcoast@workers.org

Cleveland cleveland@workers.org

Durham, N.C. 919.322.9970 durham@workers.org

Houston PO Box 3454 Houston, TX 77253-3454 713.503.2633 houston@workers.org

Minneapolis minnesota@workers.org

Philadelphia PO Box 34249 Philadelphia, PA 19101 610.931.2615 philadelphia@workers.org

Portland, Ore. portland@workers.org

Salt Lake City 781.802.8448 slc@workers.org

San Antonio sanantonio@workers.org

Seattle seattle@workers.org

West Virginia westvirginia@workers.org

Workers World 121 W. 27th St., Suite 404 New York, NY 10001 Phone: 212.627.2994 E-mail: wwp@workers.org Web: www.workers.org Vol. 65, No. 33 • August 17, 2023 Closing date: August 16, 2023

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¡Detengan la guerra contra Irán antes de que empiece!

Desde el 8 de agosto, el Pentágono ha desplegado 3.000 marineros e infantes de marina en los mares cercanos a Irán, algunos en buques civiles. Tres semanas antes, el “Secretario de Defensa” de Estados Unidos, Lloyd Austin, envió el “estructor” USS Thomas Hudner, cazas F-35 y cazas F-16 a la zona de responsabilidad del Mando Central de Estados Unidos para defender los intereses estadounidenses... (ABC News, 7 de agosto).

Como de costumbre, los portaviones militares y civiles estadounidenses cubren sus maniobras militares con mentiras, asestando que su objetivo es un enemigo implica en una agresión. Es seguro afirmando que su objetivo es un enemigo en contra de Estados Unidos” (ABC News, 7 de agosto).

Unidos para defender los intereses estadounidenses,... en caminos de desarrollo económico y sus más de 800 bases militares en todo el mundo y su propio país para mantener o recuperar la dominación. O como lo llama el Pentágono, “para defender los intereses de Estados Unidos”.

Este año Washington, que ha estado liberando una guerra por delegación de la OTAN en Ucrania contra Rusia, está nave-gando con buques de guerra en los mares cercanos a Taiwán y Corea para apuntar a China y Corea del Norte, y está a punto de intervenir en la región del Sahel en África. Ahora Irán está en la lista.

Con respecto a Teherán, la administración de Donald Trump rompió un tratado que y velar para imponer sanciones. El grupo del presidente Joe Biden ha continuado con las sanciones. Estas sanciones económicas perjudican el comercio, perturban la economía iraní y hacen sufrir a los iraníes.

Una forma sencilla de evitar el conflicto: Deshacerse de las sanciones!

En hecho de eso, Biden y compañía han recibido a la legítima resistencia iraní aumentando el peligro de guerra. Envíar marineros e infantes de marina a esta región caliente pone a estas tropas en peligro, arriesgando sus vidas para crear un pretexto para un ataque contra Irán - inventado por la máquina de propaganda del Pentágono, si es necesario (recuerden el Golfo de Tonkin, agosto de 1964).

Para los antimperialistas, para aquellos de nosotros en el movimiento que hemos absorbido las lecciones enseñadas por primera vez por el revolucionario rusu V.I. Lenin durante la Primera Guerra Mundial, no hay necesidad de esperar a que un denunciante como el difunto Daniel Ellsberg conozca la verdad de clase de estas últimas maniobras bélicas de Estados Unidos contra Irán.

Somos las fuerzas trabajadoras y infantes de marina estadounidenses de los mares cercanos a Irán. Poner fin a las sanciones económicas contra Irán, ¡Detengan la guerra imperialista antes de que empiece! ☐

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Atlantic during hurricane season, and that both had been increasing rapidly over the previous 30 years or so. It attributed these increases to a combination of natural cli-mate oscillations and to global warming.

Before the recent wildfires, Maui had already been suffering from a combina-tion of a severe drought and high humidity, deadly precursors to wildfires.

Hurricane Katrina and the Maui wild-fires have something else in common: They are both social disasters that expose historical and present-day issues of rac-ism and national oppression that perme-ate every aspect of U.S. society.

Is it surprising that Native Hawaiians reported that the local government did next to nothing? It did nothing to help evacuate people before the wildfires and provided little aid in the aftermath of the destruction.

Is it surprising that thousands of people were unable to escape Hurricane Katrina days before it landed due to apathy and unpreparedness by various levels of gov-ernment – local, state and federal?

The lack of response in Hawai‘i is similar to what happened during Katrina when the Federal Emergency Management Agency rightfully came under heavy fire for its lack of aid for the most marginalized people, especially in the Black community.

The Indigenous people in Hawai‘i and the Black population both constitute national internally oppressed popula-tions who have been historically occupied, exploited and repressed by white suprem-acy for centuries.

Hawai‘i was colonized by the U.S. in 1893 before it became a U.S. state in 1959. Hawaiian lands are now dominated by at least 12 U.S. military bases and thousands of acres of farm have been pri-vatized by billionaires.

Black people were enslaved starting in 1619 and are still denied full democratic rights.

Both groups deserve reparations as a result of all forms of institutionalized discrimination including environmental racism.

Marxism, Reparations & the Black Freedom Struggle

Edited by Monica Moorehead

An anthology of writings from Workers World newspaper.

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Most corporate media coverage of the fires has lamented the damage and disruption experienced by tourists and predominantly white settlers. Many arti-cles have erased the Kānaka Maoli al-though, describing their homelands as a “tropical getaway.” Although a few reports have mentioned the climate cri-sis, the bourgeois press has ignored the direct role of capitalism, imperialism and settler-colonialism in causing these disasters.

Hawai‘i’s wildfires are just some of the many blazes – sparked by record-breaking droughts, heat waves, and extreme weather – which have devastated Indigenous lands around the world. Yet, they are also the specific and direct result of the ongoing settler-colonial occupation of Hawai‘i.

In 1893, U.S. planters and business-men orchestrated a coup d’état that overthrew the sovereign monarchy of Hawai‘i, dethroning Queen Lili‘uokalani and preparing the way for U.S. annexation in 1898. U.S. settler authorities stole and enclosed thousands of acres of Kānaka Maoli land and imposed a system of cash crop cultivation that decimated traditional agriculture, conservation and forestry.

On Maui, white landowners diverted waterways to irrigate sugar and pineapple planta-tions, draining vital reserves. In 1998, a lush wetland nearby to U.S. col-onization, has dried up. The invasive grass that replaced the native vegetation that was stripped to make way for cultivation overran fallow lands and helped fuel the recent wildfires. Today, tourist resorts, golf courses and other playgrounds for the rich continue to pour millions of gal-lons of water every year, denying Kānaka Maoli communities vital resources and environmental protections.

Protests vs. U.S. Navy ship's toxic leaks

As previous Workers World arti-cles have described, ongoing U.S. mil-itary occupation has caused further environmental devastation. Kānaka Maoli activities continue to protest the headquar ters of the U.S. Navy’s Pacific Fleet at Wai Momi (Pearl Harbor), which has leaked tens of thousands of gallons of jet fuel and other toxic chemicals into the aquifer at Kapīkūkā (Red Hill), leaving thousands of residents without clean drinking water. (workers.org/2022/01/06110)

“Our water has been taken away from us,” said Kānaka Maoli organizer Noeālani Alia in a recent interview. “And it’s left us in this dry, barren, almost unrecognizable... condition we’re living in under the settler government. So, you combine the dispos-session with the over-development, and you have this triefeca for disaster.” (Democracy Now, Aug. 11)

The fires in Hawai‘i are yet another horrific consequence of capitalism, impe-rialism and settler-colonialism that con-tinue to inflict environmental and human destruction on an unimaginable scale.

A lasting solution to these environmen-tal catastrophes can only come when the Kānaka Maoli, along with all other Indigenous nations worldwide, including in the continental U.S., win full sover-eignty and take back their stolen lands. ☐