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# Speak Out Now

[speakoutsocialists.org](http://speakoutsocialists.org)

[mail@speakoutsocialists.org](mailto:mail@speakoutsocialists.org)

(510) 343-9105

## California Fires: Profiting from Destruction

Last week, California was on fire. Again! Of the state's 58 counties, 43 were under a "Red Flag" warning, which means a severe danger of wildfires. At one point 12 separate wildfires were raging across the state, which have burned over 100,000 acres. The Kincade Fire in Sonoma County forced 200,000 people to flee and destroyed over 350 buildings and over 77,000 acres. About 50,000 people evacuated in Santa Clarita, north of Los Angeles, and another fire broke out in Ventura, forcing 11,000 people to evacuate as about 10,000 acres burned.

At the same time, the utility companies, PG&E in Northern California and Southern California Edison (SCE) in Southern, had shut off power to over 3 million people in order to prevent wildfires from breaking out. In Northern California, this was the second time this month that millions went without power and were notified less than 24-hours in advance. But despite this massive disruption to people's lives, PG&E still likely caused five of the recent fires in Northern California, including the Kincade fire, and SCE has been accused of starting some of the fires in Southern California.

Overhead power lines are dangerous fire hazards in tree-lined areas surrounded by dry brush, where any damage to the lines can create a spark. California has seen record temperatures for the past several years, along with some of the driest summers ever recorded within the last 20 years. This past July was the hottest month ever recorded on the planet.

And skyrocketing temperatures bring record-breaking winds. Hurricane-force winds reaching 100 mph spread the Kincade Fire within minutes, leaving little time to evacuate. The Camp Fire in 2018, which killed 85 people and leveled the town of Paradise, saw gusts of wind reach 70mph. California's fire season is now year-round, with fires occurring in every month of the year. Students in California now regularly face school closures due to smoke days almost as often as students on the East Coast deal with snow days.

This extreme weather is not an accident. A record amount of greenhouse gasses has been released into

the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels leading to rising global temperatures. Eighteen of the hottest years on record have occurred since 2001, with the last five years being the hottest. Rising temperatures are causing extreme weather all over the world, leading to drought and crop failure, which is forcing people to flee their homes for survival. Arctic glaciers continue to melt at increasing rates. An estimated 150 million people are now living on land that will be underwater by 2050. Scientists have warned of these catastrophes for decades, and yet governments around the world, including here in California, have done nothing to confront this problem. Instead, they continue to defend the corporations that profit from this destruction.

PG&E is a poster child of this policy. They pocketed \$100 million that was supposed to be spent on fire safety and putting their power lines underground. And they still gave out \$24 million in salaries to executives even after last year's deadly fires, including \$9.3 million to the ex-CEO. PG&E's equipment was responsible for more than 1,552 fires since 2014. PG&E doesn't just profit from destruction – they profit from murder!

PG&E is no exception. This entire system rewards investors even when it leads to devastation and murder. They will continue to ravage the planet to amass their fortunes, even if it means that our homes get scorched and our lives are threatened. We have tolerated this situation for too long. We don't need those who sit on top of this inhumane system to remain in control. We could do a lot better running society ourselves.

### **U.S. Economic Policy: What's in Store for the 99%**

Why are billionaires getting richer while the rest of us barely scrape by? Why hasn't the economy recovered for working people? Come hear Jack Rasmus, professor of economics and politics, discuss the current economy and its impact on us.

**7pm, Saturday November 9th**

**South Berkeley Senior Center (2939 Ellis St.)**

**\$5 admission – no one turned away**