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Speak Out Now

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Wildfires Put the System on Trial – GUILTY!

The 150,000-acre Camp Fire that burned the town of Paradise to the ground was not caused by careless campers. The fire was named because its origin was at Camp Creek Road. All evidence for the cause of the fire points to California's arsonist in chief – PG&E!

For the second time in a little over a year, the private corporation that controls the majority of California's gas and electric delivery system is responsible for mass murder. At this time, 77 people are known to have perished in the fire, more than 1,000 are reported missing, and 9,844 homes have burned to the ground. Many of the more than 81,000 people who fled the fire are now living in tents in a Walmart parking lot in Chico, or in county fair grounds, churches, or schools.

The trauma people experienced in the face of this massive firestorm is unimaginable. Hundreds were blocked by walls of raging flames, fanned by 50 mph winds devouring an acre a second. First responders – especially firefighters – performed heroic feats, rescuing people while trying to contain the fires. Others risked their lives, saving friends, neighbors and strangers. And there are the ongoing efforts of everyday people around the state, collecting money, blankets, clothing, baby formula, tents, water, pet food, toys and other things to help those who have been forced from their homes. People set up kitchens, preparing food to provide support to help people get through this disaster.

Where are the massive resources of this state, with more billionaires than most countries and a GDP equal to that of France? When the U.S. military invaded Iraq, whole towns were built in the desert providing tens of thousands of troops with places to sleep, eat and bathe. There is no excuse that these resources and more couldn't be mobilized for the people of California.

The real concern of those who control the resources of society hasn't been for the people impacted by the fire. They are leaping into action to save PG&E from the billions of dollars in lawsuits it will face because of the Camp Fire by passing the costs on to us. This concern for the wellbeing of PG&E is not new. A little over a year ago, massive wildfires raged across Sonoma, Napa and other northern counties, killing at least 43 people

and leaving thousands homeless. All the evidence for the cause of those fires pointed to PG&E's failure to maintain power lines and trim tree branches that could take down lines with high winds. Following the fire, Gov. Jerry Brown and Sacramento politicians passed legislation that would shift the costs resulting from lawsuits (more than \$10 billion) to PG&E customers.

What can be more insane than having a for-profit company responsible for providing a basic need like electricity? The goal of those who control the company is to maximize profit. And that doesn't translate into spending money to carry out preventative maintenance, repairing or replacing parts of the system before they pose a threat to health and safety. And why bother, when you have guardians like Jerry Brown?

This strategy has worked for PG&E. Even following last year's fires, PG&E reported a yearly profit of \$1.66 billion. Geisha Williams, PG&E's CEO, was paid \$8.6 million for overseeing PG&E last year. This was 106 percent higher than the pay she received in 2016.

But it's not just about PG&E. This disaster is an example of the way a society based on capitalism functions. What are its priorities? Profits before all else. The conditions that fuel the firestorms are largely the result of the massive amounts of carbon put in the atmosphere by burning oil, coal and gas. This has led to a warming of the earth's climate. Everything is drier and fires are no longer containable - they are firestorms. Scientists have warned of this for decades. But the politicians aren't going to stop the massive oil and coal industries and the other industries connected to big oil from continuing to produce fossil fuels. They can't. Their job is to guard the profits of these corporations and the functioning of a system based on profits.

We have tolerated this situation for too long. A profit-driven society is pushing us to destruction. The values of a system based on profit are not the values of the majority. In the midst of that destruction, we see what is possible. We see the efforts of people who reach out to those in need. And we see that we don't need those who sit on top of this inhumane system to be in control. We could do a lot better running society ourselves.