

## II. Science and Technology

# Maui Fires: Not Climate Change, But Economic Folly

by Richard Freeman

Aug. 15—The horrendous, ongoing wildfires that began Aug. 8 on the island of Maui, one of the archipelago of Pacific islands that make up the state of Hawai'i, are the deadliest U.S. wildfire event in over a century. Shrill environmentalists are demanding that President Joe Biden immediately declare an unprecedented climate emergency with sweeping powers. *EIR's* investigation has thus far found that the Maui fires were due, not to climate, but to the destruction of industry and agriculture of the United States.

Thus far, 111 people have died on Maui, although that total will rise; hundreds remain missing. The Pacific Disaster Center and the Federal Emergency Management Agency [reported](#) Aug. 11 that the fires damaged or destroyed an estimated 2,207 structures; of the buildings, 86% were classified as residential. The surviving inhabitants have no homes; their cars were incinerated.

To grasp what actually happened, one has to go back to how Hawai'i was run. Pineapple plantations were established in Hawaii in the 1890s, and by the early 1980s, they were sprawling, mostly under the control of the food cartel giants Dole and Del Monte, located on the islands of Oahu, Maui, Kauai, Lanai, and the Big Island of Hawai'i. There were also sugar cane plantations. The farmers of the plantations, mostly indigenous Hawaiians, were paid low wages and lived in drab housing. Cartel managers lived in luxury.

In the mid- to late-1980s, Dole and Del Monte

moved most of their pineapple production out of Hawai'i, and had abandoned it completely by the first decade of the 21st Century. The last sugar mill in Hawaii closed at the end of 2016. The food cartels moved their pineapple plantations to areas of lower labor costs: Indonesia, the Philippines, and Guatemala. The workers



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*The real cause of the disastrous fires on Maui: Productive farmland, neglected for decades, was allowed to become overgrown by invasive varieties of grass that are highly inflammable when dry. Shown: pukiawe shrub and grassland at the Ulupalakua Ranch, Maui, Hawai'i.*

were abandoned.

At this time, on the abandoned plantations, alternative crops of nutritious food should have been planted, reforestation carried out, and some manufacturing facilities built. Nothing was done for decades. Overall, during the last 40 years the real value of Hawaiian farm products was cut in half, and the state turned toward

tourism, the source of more than 75% of the revenues on Maui today: The Valley Isle of Maui is the second most popular tourist destination on the Hawaiian islands.

### **Dry Grass Now on 25% of Hawaiian Landmass**

When mankind strays, nature has its own way of warning man of his folly. Parker Clayton Trauernicht, PhD, a professor in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Management at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, told *USA Today*, in its Aug 9 article, "How Did the Maui Fires Start?" that it was necessary to look to the unmanaged, non-native grasslands that have flourished in Hawaii after decades of declining agriculture, where nothing was planted on cleared farmland.

The *New York Times*, in an article Aug. 9, "How Invasive Plants Caused the Maui Fires to Rage," reported on:

the relentless spread of extremely flammable, non-native grasses on the idled lands where cash crops once flourished. Varieties like guinea grass, molasses grass and buffel grass—which originated in Africa and were introduced to Hawaii as livestock forage—now occupy nearly a quarter of Hawaii's landmass. Fast growing when it rains and drought resistant when lands are parched, such grasses are fueling wildfires across Hawaii, including the blaze that claimed [in Maui] at least 93 lives.

Simultaneously, the passing Hurricane Dora generated 60-mile-per-hour winds, which helped spread the fire.

Melissa Chimera, who coordinates the Hawai'i-based Pacific Fire Exchange, which shares fire science among Pacific Island governments, asserted, "[T]hese grasses are highly aggressive, grow very fast and are highly flammable."

This is the culprit, the cardinal singularity that orders the whole process. It has nothing to do with climate, or anthropogenic carbon dioxide. Why did these grasses grow? Because the crops were not planted, the factories not built, the infrastructure not constructed to industrialize Hawaii, and thus the land was taken over by the "highly flammable" grasses.

In an interview with *Democracy Now!*, Professor

Trauernicht said that Hawai'i had discussed in 2019, and should have been "re-implementing agriculture, building fire-break networks, and [doing] reforestation." In 2019 some 20,000 acres had burned in Hawaii, and people gathered to figure out what should be implemented.

### **Junk 50 Years of Bad Policy**

In the ten days following the Aug. 8 outbreak of the Maui fires and complete destruction of the town of Lahaina, other reports have been added of "green" policies and "Gaia" beliefs contributing to the disaster. On Aug. 17, Hawai'i Governor Josh Green acknowledged firefighters dealt with unnecessarily low water pressure, and that that low pressure had been the result of "fighting" over policy in the state government. Apparently referring to his Deputy Director for Resource Management who professes a culture of "revering sacred water" rather than "using" it, Governor Green stated:

One thing that people need to understand, especially those from far away, is that there's been a great deal of water conflict on Maui for many years. It's important that we're honest about this. People have been fighting against the release of water to fight fires. I'll leave that to you to explore.

We have a difficult time on Maui and other rural areas getting enough water for houses, for our people, for any response. But it's important we start being honest. There are currently people still fighting in our state [against] giving us water access to fight and prepare for fires, even as more storms arise.

But the business of blaming individual officials diverts from the real problem and the real cause of this disastrous fire: allowing productive farmland to be neglected for decades and allowing it to become wild grassland grown over by invasive varieties of grass.

Various environmentalists of genocidal intentions are calling for President Biden to declare and put the United States under a national climate emergency. Far better, for the United States to ditch that hoax, junk its last 50-year policies of self-destruction, and join with the BRICS-plus, the Global South, and China and Russia, in rebuilding the world.