

International leaflet

Only the international class struggle can end capitalism's drive towards destruction

One of the more popular banners on climate change protests reads: "System Change, not Climate Change".

There is no question that the present system is dragging humanity towards an environmental catastrophe. The material evidence piles up every day: increasingly dangerous heatwaves, unprecedented wildfires in the Amazon, melting glaciers, floods, extinction of whole species – with the extinction of the human species as the ultimate result. And even if global warming were not happening, the soil, the air, the rivers and seas would continue to be poisoned and depleted of life.

No wonder that so many people, and above so many young people who face a menacing future, are deeply concerned about this situation and want to do something about it.

The wave of protests organised by Youth for Climate, Extinction Rebellion, the Green parties and the parties of the left are presented as a way forward. But those who are currently following their lead should ask themselves: why are these protests being so widely supported by those who manage and defend the present system? Why is Greta invited to speak to parliaments, governments, the United Nations?

Of course the likes of Trump, Bolsonaro or Farage constantly vilify Greta and the "eco-warriors". They claim that climate change is a hoax and that measures to curb pollution are a threat to economic growth, above all in sectors like automobiles and fossil fuels. They are the unabashed defenders of capitalist profit. But what about Merkel, Macron, Corbyn, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others who have heaped praise on the climate protests: are they any less part of the present system?

Many of those taking part in the present protests would agree that the roots of ecological destruction lie in the system and that this is the capitalist system. But the organisations behind the protests, and the politicians who trumpet their hypocritical support for them, defend policies that hide the real nature of capitalism

Consider one of the main programmes the more radical among these politicians put forward: the so-called "New Green Deal". It offers us a package of measures to be

taken by the existing states, demanding massive capital investment to develop "non-polluting" industries that are supposed to be able to turn a decent profit. In other words: it's framed entirely within the confines of the capitalist system. Like the New Deal of the 1930s, its aim is to save capitalism in its hour of need, not replace it.

What is the capitalist system?

Capitalism doesn't disappear if it's managed by state bureaucrats instead of private bosses, or if it paints itself green.

Capital is a world-wide relation between classes, based on the exploitation of wage labour and production for sale in order to realise profit. The constant search for outlets for its commodities calls forth ruthless competition between nation states for domination of the world market. And this competition demands that every national capital must expand or die. A capitalism that no longer seeks to penetrate the last corner of the planet and grow without limit cannot exist. By the same token, capitalism is utterly incapable of cooperating on a global scale to respond to the ecological crisis, as the abject failure of all the various climate summits and protocols has already proved.

The hunt for profit, which has nothing to do with human need, is at the root of the despoliation of nature and this has been true since capitalism began. But capitalism has a history, and for the last hundred years it has ceased to be a factor for progress and has been plunged into a profound historic crisis. It is a civilisation in decay, as its economic base, forced to grow without limit, generates crises of overproduction that tend to become permanent. And as the world wars and "Cold War" of the 20th century have demonstrated, this process of decline can only accelerate capital's drive towards destruction. Even before the global massacre of nature became obvious, capitalism was already threatening to obliterate humanity through its incessant imperialist confrontations and wars, which are continuing today across a whole swathe of the planet from North Africa and the Middle East to Pakistan and India. Such conflicts can only be sharpened by the ecological crisis as nation states compete for dwindling

resources, while the race to produce more and more nightmarish weapons – and above all, to use them – can only further pollute the planet. This unholy combination of capitalist devastation is already making parts of the planet uninhabitable and forcing millions to become refugees.

The necessity and possibility of communism

This system cannot overcome the economic crisis, the ecological crisis, or the drive towards war.

It is therefore a deception to demand that the governments of the world “get their act together” and do something to save the planet – a demand put forward by all the groups organising the current marches and protests. The only hope for humanity lies in the destruction of the present system and the creation of a new form of society. We call this communism – a world-wide human community without nation states, without the exploitation of labour, without markets and money, where all production is planned on a global scale and with the sole motive of satisfying human need. It goes without saying that this society has nothing in common with the state-run form of capitalism we see in countries like China, North Korea or Cuba, or previously the Soviet Union.

Authentic communism is the only basis for establishing a new relationship between humanity and the rest of nature. And it’s not a utopia. It’s possible because capitalism has laid down its material foundations: the development of science and technology, which can be freed from their distortions under this system, and the global interdependence of all productive activity, which can be freed from capitalist competition and national antagonisms.

But above all it’s possible because capitalism is based on the formation of a class with nothing to lose but its chains, a class which has an interest both in resisting exploitation and overthrowing it: the international working class, the proletariat of all countries. This is a class which includes not only those who are exploited at work but also those studying to find a place in the labour market and those whom capital throws out of work and on to the scrap-heap.

Citizens’ protests or workers’ struggle?

And it is here in particular that the ideology behind the climate marches serves to prevent us from grasping the means to fight against this system. It tells us, for example, that the world is in a mess because the “older generation” got used to consuming too much. But talking about generations “in general” obscures the fact that, yesterday and today, the problem lies with the division of society into two main classes, one, the capitalist class or bourgeoisie, which has all the power, and one far larger class which is exploited and deprived of all power of decision, even in the most “democratic” of countries. It’s the impersonal

mechanisms of capital that have got us into the current mess, not the personal behaviour of individuals or the greed of a previous generation.

The same goes for all the talk about the “people” or the “citizens” as the force that can save the world. These are meaningless categories which cover up antagonistic class interests. The way out of a system which cannot exist without the exploitation of one class by another can only take place through the revival of the class struggle, which starts with workers defending their most basic interests against the attacks on living and working conditions inflicted by all governments and all bosses in response to the economic crisis – attacks which are also more and more being justified in the name of protecting the environment. This is the only basis for the working class developing a sense of its own existence against all the lies which tell us that it’s already an extinct species. And it’s the only basis for the class struggle fusing the economic and political dimensions – drawing the link between economic crisis, war, and ecological disaster, and recognising that only a world-wide revolution can overcome them.

In the lead-up to the First World War, hundreds of thousands marched in pacifist demonstrations. They were encouraged by the “democratic” ruling classes because they spread the illusion that you could have a peaceful capitalism. Today the illusion is being spread far and wide that you can have a green capitalism. And again: pacifism, with its appeal to all good men and true, hid the fact that only the class struggle can really oppose war – as it proved in 1917-18, when the outbreak of the Russian and German revolutions obliged the rulers of the world to bring the war to a rapid close. Pacifism has never stopped wars, and the current ecological campaigns, by peddling false solutions to the climate disaster, must be understood as an obstacle to its real solution.

International Communist Current 27 August 2019

This leaflet is being distributed in over a dozen countries. Our website contains many articles which go deeper into the nature of capitalism, the threat it poses, and the history of the struggle against it. We are also organising public meetings in various countries about the issues dealt with in this leaflet. One of these will be held in London:

Saturday 19th October
2pm
May Day Rooms
88 Fleet Street
London EC4Y 1DH
(Nearest tube: St Pauls)