The future of the planet cannot be left in the hands of the capitalist class

Capitalist civilisation – this world system based on wage labour and production for profit – is dying. Like ancient Roman slavery or feudal serfdom, it is doomed to disappear. But unlike previous systems, it threatens to take the whole of humanity with it.

For over a hundred years the symptoms of its decline have become more and more evident. Two world wars of unprecedented levels of destruction, followed by decades of proxy conflicts between two imperialist blocs (USA and USSR), conflicts which always contained the menace of a third and final world war. Since the eastern bloc collapsed in 1989, we have not seen peace but increasingly chaotic local and regional wars, like the ones currently ravaging the Middle East. We have been through global economic convulsions, like those in the 1930s, the 70s, or 2008, which have plunged millions into unemployment and poverty and which accelerate the drive towards open warfare. And when capitalism has succeeded in restoring accumulation – whether in the wake of massive destruction, as after 1945, or by digging itself with debt – we now understand that the very growth and expansion of capital adds a new menace to the planet through the destruction of nature itself.

Rosa Luxemburg in 1916, responding to the horrors of the first world war, pointed to the choice facing humanity: “either the triumph of imperialism and the collapse of all civilisation as in ancient Rome, depopulation, desolation, degeneration – a great cemetery, Or the victory of socialism, that means the conscious active struggle of the international proletariat against imperialism and its method of war. This is a dilemma of world history, an either/or; the scales are wavering before the decision of the class-conscious proletariat” (The Junius Pamphlet).

Unlike the slave system, which eventually made way for feudalism, or feudalism in turn, which allowed capitalism to grow inside it, this present system in its death throes will not automatically give rise to new social relations. A new society can only be built through the "conscious active struggle of the international proletariat" – through the coming together of all the world’s exploited, recognising themselves as a single class with the same interests in every part of the world. This is an immense task, made more difficult by the loss of a sense of class identity over the past few decades, so that even many of those who feel that there is something profoundly wrong with the present system find it hard to accept that the working class exists at all, let alone that it has the unique capacity to change the world.

And yet proletarian revolution remains the only hope for the planet because it signifies the end of all systems where humanity is dominated by blind economic forces, the first society where all production is consciously planned to meet the needs of humanity in its interaction with nature. It is based on the possibility and the necessity for human beings to take social life into their own hands. It is for this reason that we must oppose the slogans and methods of those organising the current climate protests, calling on us to exercise our democratic rights to demonstrate or vote with the aim of putting pressure on governments and political parties to react to the ecological crisis. This is a deception because the role of all these governments and parties – whether of the right or the left – is to manage and defend the very system which is at the root of the multiple dangers facing the planet.

The choices we are offered by the politicians of all stripes are false choices. A Brexit Britain or a Britain that remains in the EU will not shield the working class from the storms brewing in the world economy. A USA run according to Trump’s “America First” vandalism, or the more traditional “multilateral” policies of other factions, will still be an imperialist power compelled to defend its status against all the other imperialist powers. Governments that deny climate change or governments that chatter about investing in a “New Green Deal” will still be obliged to maintain a profitable national economy and thus carry out incessant attacks on working class living conditions. They will still be caught up in the same drive to accumulate which is turning the Earth into a desert.

But, we are told, at least we can vote for a different team, and in countries where even this “right” is denied, we can demand that it is granted to us. In fact, the illusion that we can have some control over the juggernaut of capitalism by casting our votes every few years is integral to the whole fraud of capitalist democracy. The vote, the polling booth, not only keeps us trapped in the false choices on offer, but is itself an expression of our powerlessness, reducing us to the atomised individual “citizens” of this or that state.

The class struggle of the proletariat has shown a real alternative to this institutionalised impotence. In 1917-19, the working class rebelled against the slaughter of war and formed workers’ councils in Russia, Germany, Hungary and other countries; councils of elected and recallable delegates from workplace and other assemblies that for the first time contained the potential for a conscious control of political and social life. This massive international uprising brought the war to an end as the rulers of the warring camps needed to unite their national uprising brought the war to an end as the rulers of the warring camps needed to unite their powerlessness, reducing us to the atomised individual “citizens” of this or that state.

works of the world, unite!

International Communist Current in Britain

Free/donation

en.internationalism.org
In October 2019 Extinction Rebellion (XR) have planned for 60 cities worldwide. In the UK this involved demonstrations, the occupation of road junctions, the closure of iconic building structures in Oxford Circus, getting arrested, and generally staging stunts that would give publicity to the dire state of the climate crisis. For Hallam, one of XR’s leaders, this event was an opportunity to prove his ideas about the climate emergency in action. Hallam claims that the Met Police were put on alert by XR’s actions. “We were a threat to the social order, and the police had to take action,” he tells me. Hallam and other XR activists have been subject to attacks and criticism, including from government and media figures. XR’s approach to the repressive apparatus of the state is particularly illuminating. Hallam refers to the concept of revolution to mean any kind of social change that challenges capitalist rule. Hallam and some other XR activists oppose “reformists” who claim to offer “radical collective action against the po...
The Green New Deal or the greenwashing of capitalism

Media campaigns on climate change often pit the interests of the working class against those of the greenwashers. But while the interests of the working class are common to climate change, the greenwashers court the particular needs of workers or regions by making promises that cannot be kept.

Climate change is a global problem, one that cannot be addressed by nation by nation, yet the Green New Deal promises to solve this problem. The Green New Deal promises to create green jobs, to allow the rest of nature to speak to us, and to mitigate deeply entrenched racial, regional and gender-based inequalities in income and wealth.

The need to address the destructive effect of capitalism on nature, and particularly the danger of greenhouse gases driving climate change, is undeniable. But so too is the increase in the inequality intrinsic to capitalism, and the fact that economists are already pointing out the way in increases in debt and national debt are the way to clear the way for a new recession. It makes the Green New Deal sound like a no-brainer.

If it sounds too good to be true...

Those who warn against con-men often say that if a deal sounds too good to be true it probably is. So what will the Green New Deal do?

The Green New Deal takes its inspiration from a state capitalist policy in the 1930s, to restart economic growth in response to the depression. The New Deal itself looked back to the state direction of the economy in the previous Great War in 1917–18, and as well as for paying much needed infrastructure the Public Works Administration – “build nurseries, buildings, highways, roads, aqueducts, bridges, etc.” This was in no way the same as the political and social revolution...
Marxism and ecology

The overwhelming consensus of serious sci-
entific opinion is that we are already entering a
global ecological catastrophe of unprecedented proportions. This is not the place to rime all the various dimensions of this future catastrophe, from the pollution of the sea, air and rivers to the impending extinction of innumerable of plant and animal species, but it is certain that this is being posed by the accelerating process of global warming. Suf-
fice it to say that the combination of all these threats is the obliteration of the plane itself uninhabitable, and at the very least unfit to sustain a decent human existence.

It is our contention, however, that it is not enough to come to grips with the facts of mechanistic ec-
ology, or the natural sciences, alone. To understand the underlying causes of ecological devastation, and the possibility of reversing it, we have to un-
derstand their connection to the existing social relations, to the economic system that governs the earth’s capabilites. And for us this means us-
ing the only really scientific approach to under-
standing the structure and dynamics of human society – the method of marxism. One excellent
date of departure here is Engels' 1876 essay 
"The play played by labour in the transition from age to age", an unfinished manuscript that has been included within a broader unfinished anthology, The Dialectics of Nature. In it we find an early application of the under-
standing that only by looking at the human past from the standpoint of a class of labour – and of associated labour in particular – does it become possible to arrive at a true understanding of the hu-
man species. Contrary to the mechanistic view that it is the result of the development of the hu-
man mind, this is a view born in isolation – its growth in size and complexity as the simple result of random mutations – Engels argues that in the final analy-
sis the human being makes himself. That is to say, the dialec-
tical interaction between hand and brain in the collec-
tive production of tools and the transformation of our environment into cultural instruments, the "mechanical" capacities of the brain, the dexterity of the human hand, and the evolution of a specifi-
cally human consciousness. This capacity, the one in which planned, purposeful activity and cul-
tural transmission outweighs the more instinctual actions of previous animal species.

"It goes without saying that it would not occur to us to dispute the ability of animals to act in a planned, premeditated fashion. On the contrary, a planned mode of action exists in embryo wherever we find protoplasm, living albumen, exists and reacts, that is, carries out definite, even if extremely simple, unconscious acts. This is the case, for instance, in the external animal. Such reaction takes place even where there is yet no cell at all, far less a nerve cell. There is some-
thing which nature's own system of self-transfer-
ing plants capture their prey, although they do it quite unconsciously: In animals the capacity for conscious, planned action is proportional to the development of the nervous system, and among mammals it attains a fairly high level... But all the planned action of all animals has never suc-
cceeded in impressing the stamp of their will upon the earth. That was left for man!" 1

All our mastery of nature that is the dialectical
1. This article appeared on our website and in RO 383 with the title: "No solution to the ecological catastrophe
4. "Capital is poisoning the Earth", https://
5. Capital is poisoning the Earth", https://