

UK school pupils and students protest climate change

By our reporters
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Up to 15,000 young people demonstrated throughout the UK Friday in a strike to protest government inaction over climate change.

School, college and university students left their classes in order to participate in the protests in at least 60 towns and cities. Around 3,000 protested in London and 2,000 in Oxford. Thousands more gathered in Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Brighton, Bristol, Exeter, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast.

The protests, organised by the UK Youth Climate Coalition and Youth Strike 4 Climate, were the latest of a series throughout Europe, including in France, Germany, Sweden and Belgium. Members of the IYSSE circulated thousands of copies of the statement, “Climate change and the fight for socialism,” at the UK demonstrations.

In London, protesters carried banners with slogans including, “Our future, Save our dying planet,” “Brexit Won’t Matter When We’re Dead” and “When did the children become the adults?” The main protest was held in Parliament Square.

Protesters blocked roads outside Parliament and were confronted by mounted police. Some of the students refused to move before the police moved them on. Three arrests were made—of a 16-year-old girl, a 17-year-old boy and a 19-year-old man.

Sheffield

Around 500 high school students rallied outside Sheffield Town Hall, with dozens addressing the crowd through an open microphone to loud cheers. “My name is Noah. We are here to save the world! Save the oceans! Save the trees! Save the whales! Save the monkeys! Save the orangutans! Save the bees!”

Large contingents rallied from King Edward School, High Storrs and Silverdale and were joined by students from as far away as Derby.

Abian from High Storrs told those assembled, “All you lot, you’re not 18, so you can’t vote! They say you don’t have a voice! They say you don’t have an opinion! We’re being educated for the future when there will be no future. There is one planet. There is one human race. We need to take care of it!”

Lydia from King Edward School said, “You’ve got kids under 18 coming out here and protesting and you just sit in your parliament doing nothing. Wake up!” Dewi from South Africa said, “This isn’t just a problem here, it’s a problem everywhere! This is our world too.”

Liv from High Storrs said, “All these adults have dictated how

we live our lives for far too long... Sat up in their posh houses, not saying anything, and telling us ‘you’re too young to have an opinion!’”

Latifah from High Storrs said, “I’m here today because honestly all these adults they’re treating us like s**t. it’s our chance to let the world know exactly what we want. And what we want is, no climate change and we want the world to be a good place to live in!”

Students denounced Prime Minister Theresa May and the Conservatives and condemned climate change deniers such as US President Donald Trump. Not a single student mentioned the name of Jeremy Corbyn, who has spent the past two-and-a-half years as Labour leader accommodating himself to the party’s Blairite right wing.

Nevertheless, rally organisers called on students to support the parliamentary opposition parties. Sheffield Lord Mayor Majid Majid from the Green Party was introduced as a hero, but he leads a party committed to the defence of the very capitalist system responsible for the climate change catastrophe.

Manchester

Schoolchildren protested in St. Peter’s Square, Manchester. Students from both of the city’s universities and the Royal Northern College of Music joined the protests. A group of year 11 students (15–16 years old) from Manchester High School attended.

Meera said, “We have to build a sense of community among the younger generation because the politicians are doing nothing. We need a system change, science has to rule in the future. The politicians are making the rich richer and the poor poorer.

“It’s interesting how the media report our rallies as violent,” she continued. “Yet war is normal to us.”

Roisin thought it is “the people who don’t have money who realise there needs to be a change. People think capitalism is outdated.”

Qasim said he was one of 50 protesting on the demonstration from Chorlton High School. “It’s our world, our future. We’ve got to take a stand now,” he said. “The politicians are focusing on unimportant things like Brexit. The poor are getting poorer, and they don’t have access to change things.”

Asked his thoughts on the Labour Party, he said, “I hope Labour can do better than this government. But 2 million lives went for no reason in Iraq.” (The 2003 war was organised while the last

Labour government was in power.)

Marina from Chorlton High School said, “My mum gave me permission. She said it’s for the greater good. I hope this will persuade more people to do something. The rich usually stay in power. Hopefully normal working-class and middle-class people should come in power.”

Fleur, also from Chorlton, said, “Some schools are threatening fines. But they can’t tell us all off. The government is spending billions on Buckingham Palace, making it look nice. They’re spending a lot of money on Brexit, but soon there’s not going to be a world.”

Sofia from Xaverian College said, “We’ve only got one planet, and the longer we leave it the harder it will be to fix. Governments are avoiding doing anything because it costs time and money.”

Karol, an 18-year-old student from Bolton, came to England from Poland when he was five years old.

“I’d rather march in the streets not under the watch of the police,” he said. “People should be less milquetoast and fight for direct democracy. The economy should be dismantled and rebuilt. If it’s a choice between Marxism and what we have now, I’d rather have Marxism. As for [Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn], it’s a band-aid fix to vote for him. A web site like yours will have a massive impact on the youth right now.”

Ben is studying politics in Manchester and said, “I think it’s a positive thing to come and spread awareness, but I don’t think governments are going to listen to ordinary people just because they go on strike. The only action that is going to end climate change is a revolution and to organise everything centrally.

“We don’t live in a democracy. Our system is purely undemocratic. Real democracy is being involved in the economy, in having power over your own life, having real power over the economy. If you look at the chaos of the capitalist system, we can’t change the way we produce food or the way we farm other than through the profit system, and the capitalists have no motive to change.”

Asked his comments on the programme of the Labour Party and Jeremy Corbyn, Ben had “very little faith” in it, “because Labour has never been a party of the working class. Its fundamentally a party of the ruling class.”

Glasgow

David and Kevin are school students in Glasgow. David said, “I think this showcases how we have very limited time available to be able to change our ways and save the planet. We’ve only got a few years left. Socialism is the only way we are going to be able to change things.

“Young people all over the world are the future. I’m a socialist. For a while it seemed that less and less people were socialists, but now its rising again.”

Angela Rowe, a parent, said, “If you start with the kids who are the future, people should be listening to these people who are willing to do things. ... There is a massive need for global solidarity, but it is very hard when people are just struggling to survive. This is the first time I have protested for quite a long time.”

Michael, a philosophy student at Glasgow University, said,

“This is to do with capitalism and consumerism, that’s the biggest part of it. It’s clear from the climate summit there is inequality worldwide. Some countries can’t even afford to move towards helping the environment, they just don’t have the resources. We need to come together globally to fight this.”

Lara, who is studying climate justice at Caledonian University, said, “We are all in this together and the protests have been all over the world. Everywhere, people stand up and say, ‘This is not OK.’ We need to act as one world community and not as different nationalities or countries. The rich people get richer every day and benefit from the situation, and the poor don’t get anything.”

Bournemouth

More than a hundred people took part in the protest in Bournemouth. Dozens of striking children from several schools and some students from Bournemouth University were in attendance.

Michael said, “It is shocking to read in your statement that 71 percent of the world’s carbon emissions are produced by the top 100 companies. Regulations on carbon emissions by large companies are not tight enough. I think these regulations need to be hugely increased. And we need to find some way of adding sanctions to companies that are not trying to reduce emissions.

“War has become a way of making money. I don’t believe war is ever the right answer for the problems we confront. It’s particularly shocking that reasons for going to war are simply financial gains and control of resources.”

Emma is planning to study environmental science. She said, “All our appeals to the governments and big companies have fallen in deaf ears. I read your leaflet and I certainly agree that corporate greed is the most important factor in climate change. We don’t have any say, but the companies have. Even some world leaders like US President Trump are in denial of climate change because dealing with climate change will cut across the profit interests of big companies. I am glad that more and more people, students and youth are awakening to the world reality.”

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