

The Youth Climate Strike and the fight against global warming

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Hundreds of thousands of students and young people are expected to take part this Friday in a worldwide Youth Climate Strike to protest the inaction of governments on the issue of climate change. That the international demonstration has evoked a broad response is an indication of both the serious nature of the ecological crisis and the radicalization of youth all over the world.

The strike is the culmination of a series of international protests that began last August after 15-year-old Greta Thunberg began picketing the Swedish parliament every Friday. Since then, students and youth, some as young as 12, have organized weekly walkouts, protests and strikes in many parts of the world. Friday's demonstrations, which will be the largest to date, will take place in more than 1,200 cities in at least 92 countries across six continents—including in Australia, Brazil, China, Great Britain, India, Iran, Italy, the Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Somalia, Sweden and the United States.

The protests have expanded amidst a series of reports indicating that global warming is accelerating, and that the destruction already caused by climate change from hurricanes, heat waves, droughts and other extreme weather events will become qualitatively more catastrophic as early as 2040. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has warned that the measures taken by governments to halt global warming are so much empty bluster. It estimates the potential economic damage from unabated climate change to be between \$54 and \$69 trillion worldwide.

Perhaps the most tragic consequence of global warming is the creation of so-called “climate refugees,” those forced to permanently flee their homes as a result of climate change-related disasters. The United Nations estimates that 210 million people worldwide have been displaced since 2008, and that up

to one billion will be displaced by 2050.

The student strikes reflect the politicization and leftward trajectory of a generation that has come of age in a world of unprecedented social inequality, ongoing environmental degradation, growing state repression and expanding imperialist wars.

Polls consistently show a leftward movement of young people and growing support for and interest in socialism. Central to the perspective of genuine socialism is the understanding that there is not a single social problem confronting humanity—from climate change, to poverty and unemployment, to authoritarianism and war—that can be resolved except through the political mobilization of the international working class in a revolutionary movement to overturn capitalism and establish a society based on social need, not private profit.

The objective basis for such a revolutionary movement is beginning to emerge in the growth of the class struggle internationally, beginning in 2018 and escalating this year.

Mass protests and strikes in the past several weeks have paralyzed the Algerian government. Protests in Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal and Sudan have erupted against pro-business austerity and the victimization of refugees. Workers in different parts of Iran have been regularly striking for 15 months. Tens of thousands of autoworkers in Mexico have been on strike since January, and tens of thousands of teachers in the United States have gone on strike this year, in conflict with the pro-company unions. Students themselves are joining in these struggles, particularly in support of teachers and to defend public education.

It is to the working class that young people must turn, not to the corporate politicians and government institutions. Young people must study politics and come to an understanding of the role played by

organizations that claim to be “left” or “green,” but work to channel opposition behind the ruling class and its policies of war and austerity.

In the United States, New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a Democrat and member of the Democratic Socialists of America, has advanced the proposal for a “Green New Deal” to address climate change. The proposal is based on political fictions—namely, that global warming can be halted on a national basis, that the Democratic Party can be made to carry out major social reforms, and that progressive change can be achieved within the framework of the existing economic and political system.

In the upcoming 2020 presidential election in the US, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders is once again seeking to appeal to the anger and opposition of young people and workers in order to direct this anger behind the Democratic Party. His campaign, like the “Green New Deal” proposal, is characterized by a basic contradiction between the limited reforms it proposes and the absence of any realistic strategy for their implementation. The Democratic Party, which both Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez are dedicated to promoting, is fully responsible, no less than the Republicans, for implementing the right-wing policies that are driving workers and young people into struggle.

Similar efforts to promote the parties of the ruling class are present in every country. Whether it is the Labour Party in Britain, the Socialist Party in France, the Social Democratic, Green and Left parties in Germany—all have played leading roles in implementing policies of war and social counterrevolution.

As for their supposed “solutions” to climate change, these are so many empty pledges and toothless measures. The track record of every international agreement and climate summit shows that none of them are capable of solving the crisis posed by climate change. They are ultimately dominated by the major corporations, which are responsible for global warming in the first place. Any measures that are adopted, such as carbon emissions trading, are thinly veiled mechanisms for these companies to continue business as usual—and even turn the poisoning of the environment into a new source of speculative profit.

The urgent measures needed to address climate change require a major reorganization of economic life

on a global scale. The framework of energy production has to be transitioned from one that uses fossil fuels to one that relies on renewable energy. This, in turn, requires an international effort, involving a massive influx of funding for infrastructure, the development of current technologies and the investigation of new ideas.

All such measures come into conflict with the nation-state system, the basic political framework of capitalism, which itself has become an intolerable brake on the development of the world economy. They also collide with the foundation of capitalist exploitation of the working class—private ownership of the means of production and production for profit. As long as a handful of billionaires dominate society, with every aspect of economic life geared to their personal enrichment, not a single social problem, including climate change, can be solved.

This makes the solution to climate change an inherently *class* question and a *revolutionary* question. It is the working class that will suffer the brunt of the impact of global warming. It is the working class that is objectively and increasingly defining itself as an *international* class. It is the working class whose social interests lie in the overthrow of capitalism and the abolition of private ownership of the means of production, which will open the way to the establishment of an economic system based on the satisfaction of human need, including a safe and healthy environment.

The growing opposition of workers and youth must be developed into a conscious, international socialist movement. We call on young people participating in these demonstrations, and all workers and youth internationally, to join the Socialist Equality Party and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, to lead this fight.

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To contact the WSWS and the
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