

People's Climate March protests Trump attacks on environment

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More than 100,000 people marched down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D.C., around the White House, and rallied on the Washington Monument grounds Saturday, in opposition to the Trump administration's wrecking operation against pollution regulations and research into climate change and global warming.

The People's Climate March was called by a coalition of environmental groups and trade unions before last November's presidential election, to raise concerns over climate change and global warming expressed in the environmental protest held in September 2014 in New York City.

The earlier protest, also called the People's Climate March, was aimed at pressuring a United Nations special session on climate change, then beginning in New York City. That session was part of the diplomatic maneuvers by various capitalist governments that culminated in the 2015 Paris accords, an agreement that does nothing to forestall the dangers of global warming to agriculture, human health and ultimately human survival.

The sponsoring groups initially made plans for a second People's Climate March to be held in April 2017, expecting that it would be used to pressure a Democratic Party administration headed by a President Hillary Clinton to move more quickly to implement the toothless provisions of the Paris accords. Instead, however, the march went forward with a Republican administration headed by Donald Trump that is actively discussing when and how to pull out of the Paris accords entirely.

There was a wide gulf between the political calculations of the organizers of the demonstration, oriented entirely to the Democratic Party, and the sentiments of the tens of thousands of people who took part in the protest.

Most of those attending saw the protest as the latest in a series directed against the Trump administration, including the Women's March of January 21 and the March for Science on April 22. Many of those marching April 29 had participated in one or both of the previous marches.

The marchers gathered near the US Capitol in scorching weather, with the temperature hitting 91 degrees Fahrenheit, the hottest-ever April 29 in Washington, a circumstance that seemed to add force to the demonstrators' concern over climate

change.

The route of the march went past FBI headquarters on Pennsylvania Avenue, where thousands took up slogans against the repressive agency. Most notable was the chant "FBI, CIA, terror made in the USA," expressing a visceral hostility that was not voiced by anyone on the platform at the rally which followed.

Another target before reaching the White House was the Trump International Hotel, also on Pennsylvania Avenue, in an old Post Office building handed over to the billionaire and retained by him despite conflict-of-interest rules barring any federal official from having an interest in the property. Demonstrators took up chants of "shame, shame" as they marched past.

After circling the White House, the bulk of the marchers dispersed to begin finding their way home under conditions of extreme heat and the partial shutdown of the city's Metro transit system, allegedly for "track repair," which forced protesters to walk many miles to reach their buses or cars.

Only a small fraction of the marchers reached the Washington Monument grounds, and only a few thousand assembled near the stage to be addressed by a series of speakers from environmental and racial justice organizations, and a few unions. There were no well-known speakers, and no politicians, although former Democratic vice president and presidential candidate Al Gore was among the marchers.

Many marchers discussed the issues of climate change, environmental pollution and the threat of war with the *World Socialist Web Site* in the course of the day.

Four students from the Maryland Institute College of Art wore signs they had made to demonstrate artistically the plight of endangered species.

One student, Callie, said she had come "to support our Earth, to support our national parks," citing the devastating cuts being made by the Trump administration in maintenance and upkeep of the parks. Callie herself has regularly hiked in Shenandoah National Park, which includes much of the Blue Ridge Mountains, most recently last fall.

Another student, Burton, said that disasters like the poisoning of the water system in Flint, Michigan were a warning sign. "When the infrastructure was made we didn't have the

scientific knowledge we have now,” he said. “It’s a flawed system that needs to be changed.”

Two graduate students in public health at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Priya and Laura, stopped to speak with the WWS. Laura, who is originally from Seattle, Washington, said that a major concern for her was “inequity in access to care. Too many people don’t have the ability to even see a provider, because they don’t have enough money.”

Robert Sanders, an IT worker from northern Virginia, said, “I’m concerned for the future and my children’s future. It’s not just the environment, it’s encroaching fascism, which is threatening human rights. There is real discontent with the system.”

Beverly works at the Perlmutter Cancer Center of New York University Medical Center, and she has also had numerous surgeries herself. As a result, she said, “I’ve seen both sides of the bed. I know what it feels like to be scared, and how it feels to help people and see people walk out of there better.”

“We’re marching because we care deeply about health care patients, and about secure jobs for the health care employees,” she said. “We are killing people with pollution.”

There was a systemic problem, she agreed. “I feel that in large corporations, the higher up people are, the more separated they are from people’s needs,” she said.

Jim Brodie timed his family visit from Toronto, Canada to Washington so that he and his daughter could attend the climate demonstration. A documentary filmmaker, he spent considerable time at Cannon Ball, North Dakota, filming the struggles of Native Americans and environmentalists against the Dakota Access Pipe Line (DAPL) construction, which the Obama administration initially approved and the Trump administration finalized.

“I was heartbroken by how the DAPL was bulldozed through,” he said. “I was there the day in December they announced the Army Corps of Engineers was not going to approve DAPL and would do an environmental assessment. The young people did feel that they had won something through non-violent peaceful protest, and this was important, because so many of them were coming from broken homes and difficult environments.”

The Obama administration delayed the completion of the pipeline only briefly, handing off the final decision to Trump with the sure knowledge that he would rubber-stamp it immediately, as he did.

“It’s the overwhelming power of greed and capitalism against the First Nations,” Brodie said, admitting that no protest by itself would be able to roll back those actions of the federal government and the giant energy corporations.

The speeches at the end of the demonstration offered no perspective to those who marched, except empty appeals to “make Trump listen” and “wake Trump up,” as several of the speakers declared. There was no mention of the record of the Democratic Party as the servant of large corporate polluters,

including the fossil fuel industry. There was no mention of the imminent danger of war raised by US missile strikes on Syria, the use of the huge MOAB bomb in Afghanistan, and the mounting confrontation with North Korea.

One speaker, Nate James, representing American Federation of Government Employees Local 3331, cited his own 20 years in the US Marines, and said that the military oath to oppose all enemies “foreign and domestic” should apply to large corporations as well as foreign countries. He gave the example of Syria, where he claimed, “a few weeks ago, sarin gas was sprayed on people. The US government reacted immediately.” He called for the US government to react just as promptly when American corporations sprayed chemical poisons in America.

Virtually every speaker was chosen to represent one form or another of identity, including Native Americans, blacks, Hispanics, gays, and immigrants, in keeping with the orientation of the march organizers to the Democratic Party.

Even the structure of the march was subordinated to the political perspective of identity politics. The marchers were divided into groups based on such distinctions, with Native Americans in the front, along with African American and other “climate justice communities”—i.e., victims of environmental disasters, as in Flint, Michigan, but categorized as a black community, even though the city’s population is multiracial. The second rank included immigrants, gays and Latinos, the third rank union contingents; the fourth students and peace groups, and so on.

The effect of this organization was to reinforce the separation of the participants into various sub-groups based first of all on race, gender and sexual orientation. It was a striking contrast to the March for Science the previous week, where the main focus of the demonstrators was to celebrate and defend the universal validity of science and knowledge. There was no black, brown, female or gay science, but science for all, as a unifying framework.

Neither demonstration offered a serious perspective on how the struggle to defend science and oppose environmental destruction can be carried forward. This requires a turn to the mobilization of the working class, potentially the most powerful social force, by uniting workers across all divisions of race, gender, region, or immigration status, by advancing a socialist program.



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