

Veteran Trotskyist Barbara Slaughter addresses Leeds climate change demo

Our reporters**18 February 2019**

Over 1,000 school and university students gathered on the steps of Leeds Town Hall on Friday to rally against climate change. Many had walked out of school despite the opposition of their head teachers. Homemade banners expressed their anger with slogans like, “One Planet, One People,” “We demand a future,” “Planet not Profit,” “What I stand for is what I stand on” and many more. They listened intently to the speakers that addressed the rally, many of them also school students.

Barbara Slaughter of the Socialist Equality Party was one of the speakers. She was warmly welcomed, especially when she described the global character of the crisis and the necessity for global action to address it.

She said, “Today’s strike of school students in the UK is part of a global movement of youth against the disaster of climate change that has already resulted in floods, drought, wild fires, typhoons, hurricanes, widespread hunger and disease. According to the UN, 210 million people have been driven out of their homes as a result of extreme drought since 2008. This is a global problem and requires a global solution.

“Seventy percent of all greenhouse gases released from 1988 to 2018 came from companies controlled by millionaires and billionaires. The top 10 percent of society are driven by the profit motive. They oppose any measures that impact on the profits of the major corporations.

“The fundamental problem is the capitalist profit system and division of the planet into competing nation states. This system prevents a rational scientific plan from being implemented which is necessary to achieve rapid reduction in carbon emissions. And the greatest danger that confronts mankind and the very existence of life on the planet today is the danger of nuclear war,

which is being prepared for in the Pentagon and elsewhere.

“All the catastrophes we face—poverty, inequality, fascism, attacks on democratic rights, climate change and the growing threat of war—are products of the capitalist system, where private profit is the driving force of the economy.

“As the leaflet we are distributing today states, ‘The global character of the student strikes and protests has fundamental significance. Young people are organising across national boundaries in recognition that climate change has global causes and global consequences. In doing so you are meeting up with an international resurgence of the class struggle.’”

She continued, “Millions of workers across the planet are uniting in strikes and protests to defend their wages, living standards and basic rights. Teachers in the US, the UK and Zimbabwe, airline pilots, railway workers, Amazon workers, the ‘yellow vests’ in France—the list goes on. The international working class is a powerful social force. And it is only through the unity of the working class with the growing international movement of the youth that a solution can be found.

“Nothing less than the reorganisation of the global economy in the interest of social need not private profit can resolve the climate crisis. The only answer to the environmental crisis is international socialism. To achieve this requires a break from all the old organisations like the Labour Party, the trade unions and all the organisations that promote them. They are all tied to the nation state and are defenders of the profit system.

“The Socialist Equality Party and its youth movement the International Youth and Students for Social Equality stand for the end of the division of the world into nation states and the end of private ownership of

the wealth of society by a tiny financial elite. The resources of the planet must be utilised to provide for social need not private profit. I urge you all to study our leaflet, read the *World Socialist Web Site* and join us in this fight. Thank you.”

WSWS reporters spoke to some of those attending the protest in Leeds. Steph, a zoology student at Leeds University, said, “We were inspired by Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old Swedish girl who first went on strike. Governments are failing to do anything. They just water down the facts. If the youth can take action, why can’t the government? They make all kinds of promises but the temperatures continue to rise. They make agreements then don’t carry them out. It needs a change in the system, to target the big companies. Seventy percent of emissions come from the big companies. Change has to come from the bottom.”

A school pupil from Horsforth School in Leeds didn’t want to give her name because head teaching staff there were strongly opposed to the strike. She said, “Five or six of us came here today. We all passionately believe that we need to act now. Not enough is being done by those who have the power. My school is strongly against the strike, they claim for ‘safeguarding reasons.’ I understand where they are coming from, but we came anyway.”

Loup, from France, is a young man who lives in Leeds. He said, “It really seems like climate change is part of a systemic fault: The system is fundamentally broken and incremental changes of the system cannot solve these issues. The issues arise because of the system itself. To me it makes much more sense to think about a revolution and to bring in a change of system rather than make incremental changes within the system, which is what seems to be suggested by most policies being put forward around the world at the moment. Most people are aware of the problems, but they don’t know how to solve them.”



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