

Millions of students and youth march against climate change

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16 March 2019

An estimated 1.4 million students and youth walked out of school and took part in Friday's worldwide demonstrations against climate change. The internationally coordinated protests, the largest in 16 years, were organized in response to the growing realization among young people that the governments of the world are incapable of taking any significant measures to halt global warming.

The latest UN report states that there may be as few as eleven years before the impact of climate change on human civilization becomes exponentially more devastating. The demonstrators have also directed their outrage against international agreements such as the Paris Accord, which have all proven to be worthless in addressing the crisis.

The initial impulse of the movement, known as the Youth Climate Strike and Fridays For Future, was given by 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, who began protesting against climate change outside the Swedish parliament building last August. This has been followed by a series of protests over the past several months.

Yesterday's protests were on a larger scale. The official list counts actions in more than 2,000 cities in at least 120 countries on every continent, including Antarctica. There were 235 in Italy, 214 in France, 200 in Germany, 195 in the United States, 144 in Sweden and 120 in the United Kingdom.

The single biggest demonstration was in Milan, where an estimated 100,000 students and youth marched. Organizers counted 60,000 participants in Montreal, 50,000 in Naples, 40,000 in Paris, 30,000 in Brussels and Rome, 20,000 in Berlin and 10,000 in London. Smaller protests involving dozens or hundreds of students and youth occurred in every corner of the globe, including Cape Town, Tokyo, Moscow, New

Delhi, Mexico City, Jakarta, Buenos Aires and Shanghai.

More than 23,000 German, Austrian and Swiss scientists signed a statement supporting the protests under the name "Scientists For Future." They declared, "The concerns of the young protesters are justified and supported by the best available science... The young people rightly demand that our society should prioritize sustainability and especially climate action without further hesitation. Without far-reaching and consistent change, their future is in danger."

The demonstrations reflect a growing radicalization of young people internationally, not only in relation to climate change, but in response to mounting social inequality, the victimization of immigrants and refugees and unending war.

This was reflected in many of the slogans on handmade banners that students brought to the rallies. Some included: "Capitalism is killing the planet; kill capitalism;" "Profit or future;" "Open borders for refugees;" "Capitalism is killing us;" and "World strike for the future."

Members of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and other supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* attended demonstrations in several countries, where they distributed copies of the WSWS Perspective commentary "The Youth Climate Strike and the fight against global warming" and other statements, explaining the SEP's fight to mobilize the working class against capitalism.

The perspective advanced by supporters of the SEP was in sharp contrast to that promoted by various Democratic Party politicians and their counterparts internationally. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez tweeted that the young people were "beginning to launch climate

walkouts to pressure their governments into acting on real climate change plan.”

Ocasio-Cortez and other Democrats are promoting a “Green New Deal,” which is based on the fiction that anything can be done to stop climate change within the framework of the Democratic Party and the capitalist system.

New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern wrote, “[W]e hear you and we’re getting on with setting a path for carbon neutrality,” referring to the different carbon emission trading schemes New Zealand has attempted in recent years. They were joined by various trade unions and pseudo-left groups seeking to bolster the credentials of the parties of the political establishment.

Many of those who came to demonstrations, however, understood the need for a political struggle against capitalism. They discussed the SEP’s critique of the Democratic Party and the various Labour and social democratic parties as parties of capitalism, equally responsible with their more openly right-wing counterparts for militarism, attacks on democratic rights and austerity.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at the University of Michigan spoke with students and youth in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Marisol, a high school junior at Community High School, said, “The corporations and politicians are totally unwilling to change anything. The working class just needs to wake up and see our power.” She added, “It’s not the fault of the people at the bottom, who have nothing. It’s the rich and the corporations and the politicians who are responsible.”

Lys, a high-school student in Paris, noted that “Today in France there are 280,000 soldiers. They are deployed throughout the world. I find that France has a sphere of action that is far too large. The wars are for private interests, whether they be financial or political, and not for humanitarian concerns. That’s what I find dangerous. That’s also what I’m afraid of for the climate. It’s the private interests that buy politics and power. That’s why I came today.”

The massive influx of resources needed to halt and reverse climate change requires the reorganization of economic, social and political life on an international scale. Energy production must be coordinated on a global scale in order to transition to renewable forms, which in turn requires the most serious scientific

investigation into new techniques and ideas.

Such a fundamental shift, however, comes into direct conflict with the nation-state system and the drive of corporations for private profit. It is not a question of youth appealing to the powers that be, but of directly opposing the domination of society by a handful of billionaires and the social system over which they preside. At the same time, as the global nature of the protests objectively demonstrates, students must turn to the decisive revolutionary and international social force on Earth, the working class.

Just as economic and technical development under capitalism has caused a worldwide ecological crisis, it also contains the ability to address this crisis in a rational way. However, to free up the resources needed to tackle climate change—along with war, poverty and inequality—requires a complete socialist reorganization of economic life. The economy must be placed in the democratic control of the working class, the only social force capable of establishing a society based on human need, including a healthy global environment.



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