

Youth at global climate protests speak out on capitalism, socialism and scientific planning

Our reporters
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Reporting teams from the *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed students who protested in countries around the world on Friday for action on climate change.

Britain

Ladan, 18, who had left classes at her school in Oxfordshire, told the WSWS, “Me and my friend really care about climate change and have wanted to do something about it for so long. If we don’t do something soon, we won’t have another opportunity.”

Asked why so many young people had come to the demonstration, Ladan’s 16-year-old friend Lucy said, “A lot is due to social media. It’s much easier to access and find an answer. There are so many accounts that advocate doing something about what is wrong. People are realizing that capitalism and money aren’t the most important things anymore.

“Capitalism is responsible for climate change because capitalists want to find the cheapest solution to sell things to people.”

Four students from the Tunbridge Wells Bennett Memorial School held up banners declaring, “We are the revolution for the solution” and “Change the government. Not the climate.” They told the WSWS that they thought climate change is the biggest problem for young people.

“It is also political,” one student noted. “We need to change the system and the approach to climate change. Because right now there is no real policy.

“Our school was telling us to write [about climate change], not strike, but we decided to strike. It makes a difference to come here. Because we are all together. Young people were portrayed as apathetic to politics but now they are finding a way.

“This planet is one thing we have all got in common. And it is being ruined by capitalism for the sake of profit. It is going downhill so quickly.

“They don’t care about wealth for ordinary people. It’s got to the point where money, profit margins are what matter. It’s not about the people that work or the people who do the production that matters anymore.”

One of the students declared, “The two-party system is not working anymore.” Another said, “I’m proposing a democratic form of socialism, where there isn’t the one percent that controls 60 percent of the wealth anymore.”

Three other students had also come to the demonstration together. One, holding a “Kill Capitalism. Kill Climate Change” banner, explained that he had attended the previous demonstration in the UK on February 15 and wanted to “stop the slide forward to catastrophe.”

His friend explained that recently MPs had held a climate change debate and only 30 were present. “It was the first debate for two years and no one turned up. It shows they do not care.

“One of the reasons governments don’t care about climate change is

that they are lobbied and funded by oil corporations. We can change things through protests but also calling for public ownership instead of private property. Today is a good way of making change.”

Another of the students insisted though that “There is little you can do individually. It comes down to international agreements and cooperation with other countries.”

His friend said, “It’s much more about changing ownership. People realize that the system has got worse and seen the rise of right-wing extremism. It’s about controlling corporations and putting them into the hands of the people.”

France

Lys, a high-school student in Paris, said, “We came to the protest to show that the youth have a chance to change things and that we want things to actually get done—not just more promoting the government’s image.

“There is pressure from lobbies. There are fake solutions put in place. Hybrid cars—that’s great, because they don’t pollute in the cities, but the batteries still pollute a lot ... I want actions to happen on a world scale, across Europe or the whole world.

“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 which buy politics and power. That’s why I came today.

“I think it is totally unhelpful to tax products from gas usage. People living in rural areas have no other means of transport than their car. Parisians drive to work but could do without them.”

A high school student from Lycée Saint-Louis in Paris said:

“We’re not going to revolutionize the environment through a petrol tax. We have to change everything; the society, the economic model that is made for the profits of the banks and capitalism. I think that it’s by changing the economic system fundamentally that we’re going to save the planet. At the moment we are not deciding things based on saving humanity but on saving profit.”

“As far as I see it the Paris agreement was a big show to give the impression we were doing something.”

Asked about Macron’s announcement of compulsory military service in France, the student said: “Go fight for Macron? Absolutely not. Nor for France. I don’t consider myself ‘French’ but a human being. My only region is that of humanity. The service should not be for the military but to teach us things like first aid.”

Germany

Arvid and Finn are physics students at the Free University of Berlin.

Arvid said, “I am enthusiastic about the mobilization that has taken place in recent weeks for climate protection. But I think it’s very difficult to tackle this great task of climate protection with the current economic system where everything is designed to compete. In this system, companies or nations fight for themselves. Capitalism is not the best way to meet this challenge.”

Finn added that “every effort to protect the climate is considered a ‘competitive disadvantage’ in this system.”

Liz, Pascal, Valerie and George are geography students at Humboldt University.

Pascal said, “Climate policy concerns us all. We are natural scientists, geographers. The politicians have slept on this for years, even though we know the limit of global warming of 1.5 degrees set by science to prevent a natural disaster. We can’t accept that. It’s the generation taking to the streets today that will be massively affected. It will change all our lives. But I think we can still turn the rudder around. But we only have 10 years left and that is an extremely short period.”

George said he was not opposed to the capitalist system, but that it would need to be “restructured” in order to address the problem of climate change, so that it was not focused on “growth.”

“We have lost about a quarter of our humus soil in the last 25 years,” Pascal said. “Nobody from government politics is interested in that. It is dramatic and we see the dangers everywhere. Biodiversity continues to decline. We must act now, at all levels.”

United States

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at the University of Michigan spoke with students and youth in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Marisol, a high school junior at Community High School, said, “I feel that we are living with a cloud over our heads. 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.” Isaac agreed the capitalist system was the root of the problem of climate change: “We need to break out of the two-party system for sure, they are both for the rich.”

Nissa and Isaac, who are students at the University of Michigan, came to the protest because they think climate change is among the most pressing issues facing the working class today. Nissa explained, “I believe this is a systemic issue, meaning the capitalist system. And in order to solve it we need to understand that. The world elites are so far from fixing this issue, and they can’t. Nothing has been done, it’s actually getting worse.” Isaac added, “I think we both agree that the only people who can solve this is ordinary people, the working class.”

At New York University, IYSSE campaigners attended several protests around the city. Lucie, a New York University student majoring in European and Mediterranean studies, said, “I was inspired by marches in Europe and we need to show our support. We don’t have a planet B. We are not seeing the change that is needed. The politicians are not changing laws that were written before this research was done, and they act like it is too hard to change now.” When asked if she thought change was possible under capitalism, she added, “No! We need radical changes now. The alternative needs to become the norm.”

Lucie’s friend, Audrey, said, “I don’t understand why everyone is not here. We see that this issue hits some people harder, but it affects everyone. The politicians are just ignoring us and pretending that everything is fine.”

An IYSSE campaign team in New Orleans interviewed Darryl. He said, “I think this growing worldwide movement driven by the youth is really key in getting something to happen. I think we need to have a complete change in policy on energy issues and keep oil and gas in the ground and move rapidly toward solar and renewable resources.” When asked what it would take to implement these policies, Darryl said, “I think it’s going to take a mass political movement. I’ve seen the Green New Deal but it needs to go a whole lot farther than what they’re talking about.”

Canada

A WSWs team interviewed students in Montreal. In response to a question about the inaction of governments around the world, one student replied: “We have to change them, but they all end up the same.” His friend added that “everyone has to oppose their governments,” otherwise, the consequences would be that “there will be nothing left on our planet in a couple of generations.”

Explaining why he was protesting, Theo, a high school student, replied, “We are here to protest against climate change, because governments do nothing, and big business does nothing.”

Emphasizing the international character of the protests, the WSWs reporter asked another group of students what they thought about its significance. In response, they pointed to their sign, which said “F**k capitalism.”

“What’s needed is a system change,” one student said, adding, “It’s good to see all people, students, people who have kids, old people, coming together to protest.”

Fanny, a student from Switzerland, said she had already participated in similar demonstrations in her own country. Recognizing the importance of the international character of the demonstrations, she stressed the need for global political action, adding that attempts to present climate change as an individual problem must be countered. “Governments dodge responsibility for this by presenting it [environmental action] as an individual issue.”



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