

Voices from UK climate change protests

“Climate change is a class question—we need socialism”

Our reporters
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World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to some of the demonstrators attending last Friday’s climate change protests in Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Bournemouth.

Many protesters brought homemade banners to the demonstration in Leeds. Among the slogans were, “Raise your voice not the sea level,” “We want change,” “Science not silence,” “Planet not profit,” “The tides are rising! So are we!”; “Don’t be fossil fool,” “Don’t let our planet down,” “Whose future? Our future!” and “They said the Titanic couldn’t sink!”

Molly, aged 13, from Roundhay High School, brought a homemade banner reading, “Bigger than Brexit!” She said, “The news has been focussed on Brexit for ages. Climate change is a long-term and much bigger issue ... It is an international issue and cannot be tackled in one country. We all need to do our part.

“The oil and gas companies make lots of money. But the people who benefit are at the top of society. I think that ordinary people all over the world have to get together to resolve the problem.

“I didn’t go into school this morning because they said we couldn’t take part in today’s demo so I came straight here.”

Corin, aged 15, is also from Roundhay High School. He said, “It’s really important to let people know that this is our issue. It seems that politicians and people making up the rules are getting more nationalistic in their outlook. The world is about more than one country. In order to make the world a better place, we have to unite across national boundaries and make real radical policies to help change the way we live and interact with our environment. We should look out for each other and use our combined power to make real change.”

A university student brought a banner which made a reference to the French revolution. He said, “Young people are very upset about growing up in a world that is being destroyed in an irreversible way and in a way we can do nothing about.

“This change is being orchestrated by the billionaires, CEOs and politicians who don’t care about the future and are being driven purely by greed.

“We are taking a stand against all that. This is the beginning of our efforts to prevent this destruction. I’m not sure what amount of action will be required to make this happen. I’m not sure because this campaign is so global. I am young and naïve. I still hope that speaking collectively will bring about the change we need. But if it comes to it, I think that my sign says it all. It says, ‘You choose—Climate Action or Guillotine Action!’”

Iman, aged 13, from Lawnswood High School said, “I care

about my future and the future of everyone else ... All of our actions will affect the future. We need to take action now.”

“In 12 years if we don’t reduce carbon emissions the world will be destroyed. I don’t want my life to end when I am 25 years of age. Me and my friends sometimes joke about the weather and climate change, but we all know it’s not a joke, it’s a reality ... The climate emergency is international. All MPs [Members of Parliament] and governments around the world understand that, but they do nothing. We are starting a movement that I believe is unstoppable.”

Brannoc, age 16, from Roundhay High School wore a T-shirt and held a placard with the same slogan: “Planet not profit!” He said, “I went into school this morning and at 9:30 a.m. I stood on a table and said, ‘I’m sorry but I’ve got to interrupt this lesson. I’ve got to go to the demo to act on climate change.’ Ten others came out of the class with me.”

He said, “I 100 percent agree it is necessary to change the system. But there are two ways of doing it—through the rising up of the people or from within the system itself. I think we have to try both of them.”

David, 16, from Halifax, made a speech to the rally stating, “Climate change doesn’t ask our school’s permission to exist. It is universal, affecting countries all over the world much more drastically than in this country. Catastrophic floods, dry and barren landscapes are displacing hundreds of thousands all over the planet. It is the poor and the elderly who suffer the most.”

Around 600 students from schools across Sheffield and northeast Derbyshire attended the rally outside Sheffield Town Hall.

Blue from Meadowhead school said, “Nobody has done much about climate change. It’s sad that kids are having to take control like this like the adults should.

“Our planet and our people are dying through wars and climate issues. People are saying what about the animals, but I say what about the humans as well!”

Thomas, 15, said, “I feel like capitalism plays a huge role in climate change and lots of companies get away with it because they take a cut and it gives them a stronger base to be able to be in positions of power. The capitalists and politicians would rather save their own necks than the planet.”

Thomas made a connection between lack of any action or rational planning and education budget cuts. “The cuts in education have meant that last year for the last five months of the academic year you couldn’t get anything printed [to assist study].

Our government lets the billionaires get away with it. We should all be able to have the best life we can.”

Iona and **Ella** are first year biology students at the University of Sheffield and joined a march from there to the town hall rally. Ella said, “It’s our planet and just giving in to [climate change] is wrong. A lot of us aren’t old enough to do anything about it. This march gives young people a chance to have a voice.”

Asked her thoughts on the growth of strikes by teachers internationally, Ella responded, “Those who are taking up these issues [in the climate change protests] are talking for people a lot younger and they don’t necessarily understand that teachers are opposing capitalism because they think about the children.”

Maria and **Caitlin** travelled to Sheffield from nearby Bakewell. Maria said, “Our school threatened students who were walking out with isolation. We thought it was wrong, so we decided to come. It’s great ... it is showing that kids care and the need to do something about the planet and war.”

Shamaya, a Year 11 student, said, “Everyone has the right to an education, and I don’t like how they kick people out if they don’t behave. Look at the homeless people on the streets, they can’t get a job. Everyone deserves a decent life.

“I am concerned about knife crime. It’s so sad that so many young people are dying needlessly. I lost a friend to this last year. There are no youth clubs or centres so people get into things out of their control. Instead of all the talking we need action ... People need to be heard, not profit.”

About 1,000 young people gathered in Manchester’s St. Peter’s Square. Some of the sea of home-made banners proclaimed, “People not Profit,” “Planet before Profit,” “There’s no Planet B,” “Respect Existence or Expect Resistance,” “Sick of Pollution Youth Revolution,” “Why pay £40,000 for an education when the government doesn’t listen to the educators?” During the protests, dozens of youth sat on the tramlines in the square, bringing services to a halt and impacting on the Metrolink network citywide.

Tabitha, aged 13, from Hazel Grove High school attended the march and rally with school friends, **Gracey**, **Emma** and **Max**, all 15. Tabitha said, “I want to have a safe and healthy future. Shouldn’t we be enjoying being a child instead of worrying about whether we’ll be adults? We have the equipment to change things, but aren’t. They [politicians] need to listen. For them it’s for money. It’s not for the planet, it’s for profit.”

Emma added, “They’ve [the capitalist class] already developed the world but they’re throwing it away.”

Gracey asked, “Why can’t we have a vote? There are only 100 companies that produce 80 percent of the world’s [carbon] emissions. That really needs to change. I was for [the] Labour [Party] but I’m not so sure now.”

Pointing to the demonstrators, Max added, “These are the people we need in power, not the politicians.”

Elsa, aged 13, from Stretford Grammar school said she encouraged her school friends, Dylan, 15, and Michael, 13, to attend. “There needs to be more actions like this to bring [the issues] to everyone’s attention. We’re part of it, and if we don’t do something nobody will,” she said, adding, “The only way is to fight the capitalist system, but we have to understand it.”

Dylan said, “People in the past have screwed up our future. It’s all big business. The politicians don’t care, they’re all liars.”

Around 300–400 demonstrated outside the town hall in Bournemouth. Milla Neumann is a student from Germany and studies in the UK as part of a student exchange programme. He said, “There is a real threat of climate change and that is why I am taking part in this event. If you think about what is going on with the climate change, everything is scary. I think so many things in our society have to change to reach our goal ... the whole political system has to change.

“I come from Germany and we have a lot of refugees ... many are war refugees or political refugees. Some of them are refugees of climate change. They say that their houses have been destroyed and they can’t stay there.

“If we allow people like Donald Trump to rule the world nothing is going to change. They say that climate change is not real and it’s not important. I agree that climate change is definitely a class question. Capitalism should be changed, and we need socialism.”

Amelie is a student from Bournemouth. “Our generation has to change the world we are living in,” she said. “I think these big corporations have too much power. But they have to take responsibility for what they are doing with regard to emissions.”

Leo, an English language student from Switzerland, said, “We are here to show the world that we are aware of what is happening, and we have to change things. From big industry to how we live has to change ... Everyone has to take part in actions and strikes, otherwise the governments won’t listen.”

Augustin, an English language student from France, said, “I think this strike is very important to open the minds of everyone. The world has to be changed to meet the needs of everyone, not only the needs of the rich.” He said, “As a result of the ‘yellow vest’ movement in France everyone has started to talk about essential political questions. It is not a secret that socialism is the answer to all these questions.”

Rick Stafford is a professor in Marine Biology and conservation in Bournemouth University and spoke at the rally. He told the WWSWS after his speech. “The big issue we are facing is climate change. All the environmental problems we have are a part of the current issue. We need to have a huge system change ... Inequality is a driver of environmental issues. We need to address that.”

Maria said, “The government is cutting funds for education; it can have a massive impact on the infrastructure of schools.” She added, “But if there was a social change, and a move towards socialism, then I think values would also change, so we can then think about wider issues, environment being one of them.”



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