

Climate strike protesters speak out: “There’s willful blindness on this issue, because fixing it conflicts with capitalism”

Our reporters
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The worldwide protests over the environment, dubbed the “global climate strike,” began in the Pacific Islands, New Zealand and Australia, as Friday began, and followed throughout Asia, Africa, Europe and North and South America.

Australia

In the regional city of **Newcastle**, Australia, Daniel and Haily came out to lend support to the students.

“The system is not designed for the human spirit,” said Daniel. “We need to understand we’re not in a system designed to move forwards.

“Currently what’s promoted is greed and gluttony. It’s not designed for ‘Joe Blo’ (like you and I) but for the one percent, the Johnson & Johnson owners and the like. It’s disgusting!

“We need a society which empowers people to pursue social goals. Once people are given the power, there is no shortage to what we can do!”

In **Melbourne**, Australia’s second city, Ellie, a 15-year-old high school student said: “I’m here to fight for my future and everyone else’s as well. I think it’s really good that the youth have come out, and other generations as well.

“I feel like climate change hasn’t been handled and has definitely been ignored in the past. They just say ‘yes it’s a serious issue’ and do nothing about it.

“I guess they might not believe it’s real and just pretend they’re on our side. It definitely could be solved through global action, because it’s not just one country, but an all-round issue. I think this global protest is good, especially considering all the past—the wars and stuff—we are now coming together to create change.”

Germany

Claudia, 41, came to the protest in **Berlin**, Germany with her seven-year-old son. She is a single parent, and was opposed to any increase in the price of gas and petrol, being barely able to make ends meet at present.

“The Finance Minister Scholz nevertheless said recently that several billion euros of additional receipts of taxes flowed into the treasury,” she said. “Why can’t we use this money to build new power lines, so that the energy from the wind parks in the sea can be developed further and fed into the electricity net?”

She denounced the Grand Coalition government for increasing the military budget: “Who needs more weapons? We will all not survive a new war, or if we do, the earth will be so destroyed that we will not be able to survive.”

France

Sarah is studying business and environmental sustainability in **Paris**, France on exchange from Canada. She said she came to the demonstration because “this is one of the most important issues in the world right now.”

“I also think these events are important to show that people care. Coming to an event like this gives me hope. I think the politicians are listening, but I don’t think they’ll do anything to change their policies. Maybe it’s because their mandates are too short, and in four years you can’t address an issue like this.”

“But also I think we need to change the whole system. I think capitalism is the problem. You can’t just change that overnight. It’s like businesses, if they have the option to make a lot of money doing something easy, or invest in infrastructure that will improve the lives of people, they’re going to take the easiest route that will make them money.”

“Also there’s so many causes today, so much you can fight for. I find that I’m passionate about climate change and I’m putting my energy here. I’m also concerned about war. It’s because they spend so much money on the military and have these guns and tanks and they want an excuse to use them.”

Jean-Baptiste is a 15-year-old high school student in outer Paris. His sign says: “Politicians: If you think our environment is less important than our economy, just try to hold your breath for the time it takes you to count your money.”

“It’s a quote I saw,” he said, “and it’s a message to the politicians and the companies because we see the planet getting worse and we hear many speeches from them, but what’s needed is action now and not empty words and laws that might start beginning in 2025.”

“The billionaires are already building themselves bunkers on their own islands. I saw a show about it. It’s totally crazy. They think only of themselves. But we would like to have a future. Even now we have seen dozens of reports from scientists, the last in July that we need to act within 18 months or we will see major environmental catastrophes. We see 60 percent of the world’s species in the process of going extinct.”

“We want actions and that’s why we’re protesting, but it’s now 3 protests that I’ve been to. This is even bigger than in May. But the politicians don’t listen. It’s true we need a change in the system. There is

also a return to war because the arms industry lobbies are so powerful.”

Great Britain

In **London**, Jem, a college student, said, “I think it’s so important that we all come together to make a difference, because the governments aren’t doing anything, and it’s our future. They say all the time that they’ve made plans to address climate change, but nothing serious ever comes of it. The world is still warming, deforestation is still taking place, and they’re not doing anything like enough to combat it... Even if the effects aren’t felt as strongly here in this country right now, it’s our job to try and do something while we can.

“It’s important to get as many people as possible involved. We’re all on this planet together, we all have to do our bit. And nothing can be solved by single countries. The world needs to work together.”

Elisa, a London hospital administration worker, said, “I’m here because of a report that showed 100 companies account for 71 percent of all global emissions. Which means that even if all of us went vegetarian, recycled, stopped using plastic, used sustainable methods to live, that would not account for what is actually the vast majority of global emissions. The companies need to be held accountable. They are polluting for the sake of cutting costs, for profits. I’m here to remind everyone that we can individually do our best but we need to change these 100 companies to really make a difference.

“Climate change impacts the poorest and most vulnerable communities worst. You see on the news the hurricanes, the tornadoes, and the floods, and the communities they impact are the poorer ones. People wonder why the migrant crisis is happening—well a large cause is the global climate crisis which is making it impossible to live in some areas. People are being forced into desperate situations.

“I think it’s very important that this is a global protest. It goes to show how borderless this issue is. It doesn’t matter what your ethnic background is, or your age, it impacts everybody. And future generations too. We have to ask ourselves how our children and children’s children will look back on us.

“I very deliberately told my manager why I’m taking a ‘sick day’ today. Because she needs to know, everyone needs to know that this is a life or death issue. That’s why it was so important for me to come out—I couldn’t stand the thought of being at my desk as usual knowing that I could come out here and remind people that it’s the huge corporations having the worst effect.”

Office worker Karen said, “I’m here as someone whose striking from my workplace. I want to hold the government to account for their inaction and support all the young strikers who have been doing the same for the past few months.

“There’s willful blindness on the part of governments towards this issue, because fixing it conflicts with capitalism. So our economic system needs to change and be replaced with a more reciprocal economy, where money and profit are not the arbiters of what happens. I think if people who are running businesses start to see their profits affected by workers going on strike, that’s the only way they’d even begin to listen.”

Josh said, “I’m here because I recognize the catastrophe around the corner, and because when you have a young baby, the issue becomes all the more heart wrenching and urgent. The money exists to address climate change. They printed trillions to prop up the banks. But there are vested interests in play which keep the world’s resources invested for profit not for vital needs.”

In **Manchester**, Bobby a 14-year-old student at Chapel-en-le-Frith High school in nearby Derbyshire, came to protest with his school friends. “I

want to do my bit before it’s too late,” he said. “No one else is going to do anything. The oil and fossil fuel companies are selfish—it’s all about money!”

In **Leeds**, Emily, a student from Greenhead college in Huddersfield, attended the protest. “I think one person can’t make a difference,” she said. “The government needs to do something, but without globally making a change—just paying lip service—nothing will happen. There’s hundreds of people here and that’s brilliant, but we need to make a difference, not through companies, but sort it out through revolution, by trying to create a socialist environment where we can make a difference and change things. This doesn’t affect the upper class, the people from Eton, the prime minister—he’s not going to care. It’s going to affect us... People in third world countries are going to be affected the most so it’s really harsh.”

Alix, a 16-year-old student in Leeds, said, “I’m here to take a stand for what I believe in, which is that our planet is the only one we get. If we don’t take charge and look after it then we don’t have a future as young people.” Asked why she thought there was government inaction on a world scale, she said, “The big companies and the media, they want to overshadow it and stop the reality getting out because they don’t want people to stop giving them money or lose faith in them and they’ll have less power if we take over.”

Ban and Laila are university students and attended the **Sheffield** demonstration.

Ban said, “We’re here because we want to make sure the planet survives and to show solidarity with the young people all over the world. I agree with your headline that only world socialism can answer the threat of climate change. The rise of fascist forces is having a direct impact on how governments are run. It especially impacts on people at the bottom of society. Socialism, a system that works for all, is the only way to move forward.”

United States

In **New York City**, where the largest US protest took place, Jenny posed the question, “How do we fight climate change? Individual changes are not enough, we need to stop the big companies. The Democrats take big money like the Republicans and won’t make a change.”

Jose said, “As an immigrant I feel like I fled the problems they created and now I’m being made a scapegoat for those same problems by these same politicians, so I’m here to try and listen and learn. One more thing, people talk about different problems, homelessness, poverty, climate change, etc. I feel that the only way to solve these problems is if we unite.”

At the rally in **Washington, DC**, Josh, a worker from Tennessee who has a degree in soil science, said “Everyone needs to go on strike. We need to show them who runs this country.”

Josh told the WSWP about the situation in Tennessee. “I interned at Smokey Mountain National Park. Where I live there is a major drought, so there is a ban on controlled burns in multiple counties. In 2016, a controlled burn in Gatlinburg, Tennessee got out of hand and killed 14 people, according to the official count. I’ve heard over 100 actually died. The fires destroyed 2,500 homes.”

Alex, a student in government from George Mason University, was attracted to the IYSSE’s promotion of socialism. “We need to nationalize fossil fuel and other industries and move towards a form of eco-socialism,” he said. “Young people are fed up, they’ve seen the destruction capitalism has done, to the environment and their lives. Even if many of them don’t have fully formed understanding of it, a lot of them

agree with its main ideas.”

Abby, Bria and Assanatou are three students from Frederick Community College in central Maryland. They told the WSWWS that they had heard the protests outside as they were visiting a museum in the city. “You should not be surprised that young people are out marching,” said Abby. “Young people are aware of the situation they are facing. The fate of the planet is our future.”

Several protesters spoke to a WSWWS reporter in Miami. Sophie said, “I think the most important thing is that the youth have to stand up for what we want to say, because it is our future. It’s important that the youth uses its voice. Even now climate change is affecting us in Miami. Hurricanes are stronger, it’s getting hotter. What are you going to do with your profits if there’s nothing left?”

Gitanjali added, “This is our future and we really need to stand up for it. A lot of school districts think it’s just an excuse to skip class, they don’t see it as an important thing for us to take part in. But this is our future and we’re going to fight for it.”

Julia was one of those given about a minute to speak to the crowd in Miami, but she was told to limit her comments. She told the WSWWS the organizers did not want to make the issue political, and on the organizers’ group chat they were sharing comments about Amazon “committing” to reducing carbon emissions by 2040, as though that was something to be pleased about.

Thousands of **Denver**, Colorado students walked out of classrooms to protest, defying the Denver Public Schools threats to mark them “unexcused.” Sebastian Andrews, 17, from the Denver School of the Arts held a sign with a picture of Bill Nye, the Science Guy, demanding, “Listen to this man.” Shreya Shrestha, 17, held a sign, “Our oceans are rising and so are we.”

Preston Enright, joining the thousands at the state capitol, told the WSWWS, “I think this gathering shows that a growing number of people are concerned. The heart of the problem is capitalism, this relentless pursuit of increased revenues by the fossil fuel industry is an absolute catastrophe. They’ve been undercutting alternatives for decades. As with the tobacco industry, they buried the science and went on to promote their profits. Profit-motive over everything else is a real problem. Agribusiness is putting poisons everywhere.”

“Basically what seems obvious to me at this point is that capitalism has run its course,” said another young man, “When it came about during the Industrial Revolution, it was a different time. Back then, it wasn’t a global economy and we weren’t extracting resources like we are now. It just doesn’t work any more. We’re at a breaking point. What scientists are saying is that our biosphere can’t survive the current model.

“The Republicans are the A team, and the Democrats are the B team of capitalism. They really represent the same people, the same ruling class. I still do vote, pretty much always Democratic but people shouldn’t be fooled in thinking the Democrats are going to help us progress as a human species. I’ve worked pretty much working class jobs my whole life, construction for a while. Workers need to rise up. We have no time to lose.”

Max and Ida from LACES High School came to the climate rally in **Los Angeles**. “I think the protests are an important step,” Max said. “Corporations are so short-sighted. Profit is all they care about. They can’t look further than the ends of their noses. I think the protests are an important step.”

Ida said, “We’re here today because if we don’t protest, no one else will. Our generation has to fix this; the older generations caused it. Democracy in America is not real democracy. If ever there was a time for socialist ideas, it’s now. Capitalist society tries to convince us that the small things we do are responsible for this, when it’s the corporations who are responsible.”

Another protester in Los Angeles, Jose, said, “A lot of problems

affecting climate are not because of individual choices. The little actions we take help, but it won’t be enough until we change the system. Capitalism isn’t a sustainable system. The planet can’t sustain it. Kids are starting to understand that there’s more to this than just personal choices, and talking to their families and people around them. I’ve been making an effort to talk to other people interested in leftism.

“There’s heavy American propaganda against socialism. My dad is from Guatemala, and he used to tell me about Jacobo Árbenz, the democratically-elected president, who was murdered by the CIA for the fruit companies.”

Juan, Devon, and Ynez all emphasized that individual lifestyle changes were completely inadequate for the crisis posed by climate change. “We need a system change,” Devon said, “and to encourage people to act as soon as possible.”

Juan added, “The focus on individual responsibility is a red herring, a distraction. Already, we’re in such dire straits, shortages of food will cause mass starvation and social breakdown. I don’t want a Green New Deal that will be implemented in 2030. We need it now!”

At the rally in **San Diego**, Jennifer came to the rally to support her daughter. “I’m here to support this generation, they’re taking control of their future and making a change. Young people are scared to go to school, church or Walmart because of shootings and everything else. It’s a scary world for them and we need to stand up and make a change.

“We’re all valuable and we shouldn’t have to sacrifice our lives for the rich. When they had fires up north, a direct result of climate change, the people were stuck in death traps because they couldn’t leave. Trump is bringing back all the coal and fossil fuel interests and that should never have happened.”



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