The past 20 days have been the hottest ever recorded

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Saturday marked the 20th consecutive day of the hottest temperatures recorded in human history. Since July 3, the average global temperature (the temperature over Earth’s entire surface, averaged over 24 hours) has remained above the previous high of 16.92 degrees Celsius (62.46 degrees Fahrenheit) recorded in August 2016, according to preliminary data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Several regional temperature records have been set concurrently. Greece, Italy and Spain have seen new record high temperatures of 45 degrees Celsius (113 F). Temperatures in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, have reached 49 degrees Celsius (120 F) and Algeria has witnessed temperatures of 51 degrees Celsius (just under 124 F). Much of the Mediterranean region is 5 degrees Celsius (9 F) above normal.

In the United States, high temperatures in Phoenix, Arizona have stayed above 43 degrees Celsius (110 F) for 21 days and above 32 degrees Celsius (90 F) for the past 70 days. On parts of the US-Mexico border, where thousands of migrants are seeking refuge in the US each day, temperatures have soared to more than 50 degrees C (122 F). At least 167 Mexicans have died as a result of the heatwave in Mexico, and an unknown number of refugees have been left to die in the scorching desert as they are refused entry into the US by customs and immigration authorities.

The two major factors of the current global heatwave are the onset of El Niño, a semi-regular pattern that warms the Pacific Ocean, and the formation of four high-pressure regions known as heat domes, which simultaneously trap heat over a region and prevent cooler weather from moving in.

The simultaneous heatwaves across the world are a direct result of global warming. The uncontrolled release of greenhouse gases, primarily carbon dioxide and methane, into Earth’s atmosphere by capitalist industry traps more and more energy from the Sun, increasing temperatures globally and causing weather extremes regionally. From longer and more intense heatwaves, wildfires and droughts, to more powerful hurricanes and, in contradictory fashion, to more frigid polar vortexes and torrential flooding.

The ongoing heatwave in South Asia that peaked in April and May serves as an example of the stark dangers of climate change. In the past, the severe heat that caused temperatures to reach above 50 degrees Celsius (120 F) in Thailand and which killed 13 people in a single day in India would have been characterized as a “once-in-200-years” event. Now, such events are 30 times more likely to occur each year as they were before global temperatures began to rise. And if temperatures continue to rise as they have, such heatwaves could occur in South Asia once every two years.

Heatwaves are among the deadliest extreme weather events. Tens of thousands of people worldwide die every year from dehydration and heatstroke. Extreme humidity can prevent heat from properly radiating. And both are especially deadly for those who work in construction, agriculture and other essential outdoor jobs, where employers often do not provide adequate breaks, shade and water, all of which would eat into their profits, although these are absolutely vital for workers to stave off the many dangers caused by working in high temperatures.

And while the dangers of spewing more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere have been known for more than a century, the world’s capitalist governments have proven completely incapable of resolving the crisis. It is not that the various ruling elites are incapable of seeing the crisis—though, of course, there are the
particularly right-wing climate-change deniers in every
country—but that global warming, a fundamentally
international problem, cannot be resolved within the
framework of the existence of rival capitalist nation-
states.

The recent visit by John Kerry, the US special climate
envoy, to China to reopen climate talks between the
two countries, is an expression of this contradiction.
For three days last week, Kerry met with his Chinese
counterpart, Xie Zhenhua, amid one of the worst global
heatwaves ever recorded, and yet were able to come
away with no concrete results to deal with the crisis.
Kerry was at best limited to calling the talks
“productive.”

Productive toward what? These talks were the first
between the two countries in a year, a delay resulting
from Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan in 2022, when she
was still Speaker of the House. That visit further
undermined the “one-China” policy that had been
acknowledged by the US until the Trump
administration, and further encouraged Taiwanese
separatism in an effort to goad China into a
confrontational military response. To reinforce her
ability to travel to Taiwan, which Chinese officials
repeatedly warned they would “stop,” Pelosi was
accompanied by a full US aircraft carrier battle group.
The provocation risked inciting world war with a
nuclear-armed power.

Since then, top US generals have been beating the
war drums in the Pacific, with Air Force General
Michael Minihan even asserting that the US will be at
war with China over Taiwan by 2025. Under such
conditions, any talk of US-China cooperation in the
global climate crisis is entirely fanciful.

The discussions between Kerry and Xie addressed
rival economic interests as well. The longstanding US
position is that China must reduce its consumption of
coal, which has powered much of China’s growth in
recent decades. In contrast, China asserts that emission
reduction targets should focus on cumulative historic
emissions, which would especially target the
greenhouse gas emissions of countries which
industrialized earlier, in Europe and North America.

In other words, the main focus of the talks is not
about fighting global warming by the two countries that
emit the most greenhouse gases, but using the ongoing
and accelerating climate crisis as another lever in
global political maneuvering which carries with it the

These objective contradictions are why no faith can
be placed in agreements between the various capitalist
powers, much less nationally based “Green New
Deals” in the US or elsewhere. Global warming is a
fundamentally international problem that requires the
mobilization of the only fundamentally international
social force, the working class. The solution is not
merely scientific, but political: in overthrowing the
social order—capitalism and the profit motive—that has
created the vast ecological devastation humanity is now
confronting, and replacing it with a higher society
based on rational planning and a scientific restructuring
of the world’s economy to meet human needs, on a
socialist basis.

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