

The climate crisis reaches a tipping point

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A joint statement released Thursday by the European Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) confirms that the first three weeks of July have been the warmest three-week period ever recorded and predicts that the month will be the hottest ever experienced by human civilization.

Carlo Buontempo, the director of C3S, noted as part of the statement, “Record-breaking temperatures are part of the trend of drastic increases in global temperatures. Anthropogenic emissions are ultimately the main driver of these rising temperatures.” He continued, “July’s record is unlikely to remain isolated this year, C3S’ seasonal forecasts indicate that over land areas temperatures are likely to be well above average, exceeding the 80th percentile of climatology for the time of year.”

The record broken this July was last set in August 2016, when the global average temperature spiked to 16.92 degrees Celsius (62.46 degrees Fahrenheit), as measured by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). But since July 3, the worldwide temperature averaged every 24 hours skyrocketed past that, reaching a new height of 17.23 C (63.01 F) on July 6. The coolest day since then was July 14, falling to 16.94 C (62.49 F), still just above the previous peak.

Earth’s tropics and Northern Hemisphere have been hit particularly hard by the ongoing heatwave, with temperatures in those regions currently about 0.9 C (1.6 F) and 1.2 C (2.1 F) above average, respectively. Ocean temperatures in the North Atlantic have been shattering seasonal records since March, reaching almost 1.5 C (2.7 F) above average, while world ocean temperatures outside the poles remain 0.8 C (1.4 F) above average, including a new record 21.1 C (69.98 F), also set in March. It is increasingly likely that 2023 as a whole will become the hottest year ever recorded.

Among the most catastrophic consequences of the record temperatures this year have been the wildfires in Canada, which have burned more than 100,000 square kilometers (38,600 square miles), nearly double the previous record set in 1989, and blanketed the North American Northeast with toxic levels of smoke and ash. Large portions of Southern Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and the entire Southern US were or still are under heat alerts. Floods have killed 47 people in the US, including 13 from the flash floods in July, while wildfires in Europe and North Africa have killed more than 40. Hundreds

have died from heat stroke in Algeria, China, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Mexico and Spain.

Moreover, the disasters caused by climate change now are the precursors to even more catastrophic events. The water temperatures off the Florida coast—38.38 C (101.1 F)—and the extent of Antarctic sea ice—more than 2.6 million square kilometers (about 1 million square miles) below average—are indicators of what is to come. Warming oceans threaten critical coral systems and the global plankton population with disease and mass die-off, which in turn threatens the base of the entire food chain. The lack of Antarctic sea ice constantly poses the mortal danger of land ice falling into the ocean, raising ocean levels worldwide and permanently flooding coastal areas where an estimated 3 billion people live.

There is no longer any doubt that global warming has been caused by the exploitation of Earth’s resources by anarchic capitalist production, particularly the essentially unregulated burning of coal, oil and natural gas for a century and a half. The pressing question is for a resolution to the ongoing and accelerating ecological crisis.

In response to the C3S and WMO report, UN Secretary-General António Guterres noted at a press conference that “Humanity is in the hot seat [and] humans are to blame.” This is a false equivalency, and Guterres knows this.

“Humanity” is not to blame; capitalism is. What really blocks every effort to seriously address the climate crisis is the profit system, the subordination of economic life to private profit and the division of the world into rival nation-states.

In 2008, the US Socialist Equality Party statement of principles declared,

The irreconcilable conflict between the profit system and the very survival of humanity finds, in a literal sense, its most noxious expression in the crisis of global warming and the natural environment. The cause of this crisis lies not, as is falsely claimed by the bourgeois media, with population growth. Nor is it the result of science and technology—whose development is critical to the advance of human civilization—but, rather, with their misuse by an irrational and obsolete economic order.

It concludes,

All scientific evidence points to the fact that nothing short of the socialist reorganization of the world economy—in which the planetary environment would no longer be held hostage to either the profit motive or destructive nationalist interests—will achieve the reductions in greenhouse gases necessary to prevent disaster.

Every international conference to address climate change, most recently the COP27 climate summit, has ended in abject failure, as a result of the impossibility of addressing a fundamentally global problem on the basis of feuding capitalist nation-states, all of which are reneging on whatever climate pledges they made in an earlier period as they massively expand military spending.

The capitalist profit system, which organizes society on the basis of the self-interest of the capitalist class, is organically incapable of the massive level of social planning and organization necessary to address the climate crisis.

According to the Carbon Majors Report, which was most recently updated in 2020, the top 108 fossil fuel companies (e.g. Saudi Aramco, Chevron, Gazprom, BP, ExxonMobil) are responsible for 70 percent of greenhouse gas emissions since 1751 (the year often used as the baseline for global warming), half of which have been emitted since 1990. Just 20 of those companies are responsible for 30 percent of global emissions.

The profits are astronomical. The head of the International Energy Agency, Fatih Birol, stated this past February that oil and gas profits globally shot up to \$4 trillion in 2022, further enriching the investment firms and financial institutions in every major capitalist country that control these companies.

While multimillionaires and billionaires gorge themselves on the resources of the Earth, it is the working class and rural masses who pay the price. The heat wave in Europe last year killed more than 61,000 people, a toll that is expected to be equalled or surpassed this year. Last year's climate change-induced flooding in Pakistan displaced 33 million people. Around 500 million people who farm livestock are at risk of losing their livelihoods. Nearly 1 billion people are at risk of starvation as the land they rely on for sustenance becomes too arid to sustain human life.

In other words, the fight against climate change is fundamentally a class question. The impact of climate change is most directly and catastrophically felt by the working class, including through droughts, famine, wildfires and floods. To this one can add all the workers who labor under and die as a result of extreme weather and the myriad other consequences of global warming.

All appeals to any section of the capitalist ruling elite are

therefore bankrupt. Whether led by the Democrats or Republicans in the US, or the Conservatives or Social Democrats in Europe, the major capitalist powers stand exposed as incapable and disinterested in dealing with the crisis. They are far more interested in enriching themselves through various “carbon trading” schemes and invading and destroying whole countries.

The response of world governments to the coronavirus pandemic serves as a further example of the interests of this tiny social layer. Rather than initiating a global campaign to prevent the spread of the deadly disease, the US and every major power first sought to ensure that corporate profits, not human lives, would be protected. The underlying policy of “malign neglect” has left an estimated 24 million dead and tens of millions more suffering from Long COVID.

As for the middle class environmental movements, their evolution is epitomized by the Greens, who have become supporters of militarism and critical instruments of class rule. The German Green Party, in particular, has, as a result of its support for capitalism, become one of the most fervent advocates of imperialist war, including the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

The political trajectory of these parties and tendencies makes clear that any effort to abate and reverse global warming that is not based on the development of a movement of the working class to overthrow capitalism on a global scale is hopelessly utopian and bankrupt.

The record-breaking upsurge in global temperatures is taking place at the same time as the emergence of a massive strike movement around the world. Just this past year has seen sharp struggles in the auto, healthcare and logistics industries, with explosive class battles at UPS, USPS, West Coast docks and the Big Three auto companies already taking shape in the United States alone. Just as with the fight against the coronavirus pandemic and imperialist war, the fight against climate change is inexorably bound up with the development of the class struggle.

It is urgently necessary to arm these mounting working class struggles with a socialist perspective for the reorganization of society on a rational basis to address human needs, not private profit. This is the only means by which the climatological catastrophe can be averted.



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