

COP29, climate change and the normalization of mass death

Bryan Dyne

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This year's COP29 climate summit, hosted in Baku, Azerbaijan, is the latest in a series of meetings in which the world's capitalist governments made a pretense of putting forward a solution to the ongoing and accelerating worldwide ecological crisis caused by climate change. Instead, the summit again demonstrated the impossibility of fighting global warming within the confines of the capitalist system.

The toll of climate change, especially in the past 15 years, has been immense. A World Economic Forum report estimates that since 2009, the cost of extreme weather events alone was about \$143 billion a year, a number which continues to rise as more and more such events occur. Damage from this year's hurricane season is currently estimated at a record-breaking \$500 billion.

The more powerful hurricanes, longer droughts, intense heat waves, frigid winter storms and other forms of extreme weather are estimated by the World Meteorological Association to cause hundreds of thousands of deaths each year. And a UN report published for COP29 estimates that, each year, weather-related disasters cause at least 22 million people to be forcibly displaced from their homes.

The International Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates that by 2050, there will be more than 1.2 billion such "climate refugees" worldwide. Decreased agricultural yields caused by global warming threaten more than 821 million people with starvation by the end of the decade and could make regions unlivable for up to 3.2 billion men, women and children who currently reside in the areas most impacted by climate change.

Any serious effort to solve these issues would involve:

- The scientifically planned global restructuring of the

world's energy industry to transition away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energy

- A transformation on the same scale of logistics and agriculture to predict and adapt to current and future dangers posed by climate change

- The rapid and massive expansion of public transportation over further developments of cars and other forms of private transit

- The implementation of a worldwide plan to ensure full public access to high quality utilities

Instead, COP29 embraced the same policy that has been adapted since such climate talks began in 1995: The subordination of Earth's environment and the lives of those impacted to the corporate and economic demands of the United States and the other major capitalist powers.

The most concrete result from the summit was a "commitment" of \$300 billion a year by 2035 from "developed" to "developing" countries and island nations to offset the already disastrous impacts climate change is having on the populations of those countries. The claim is that these funds will "help countries to protect their people and economies and climate disasters."

The entire framework is absurd. The money itself is a paltry sum compared to what is needed to actually fight climate change; estimates from the journal *Nature* indicate that at least \$10 trillion will be needed each year by 2035.

Moreover, like every other climate agreement, nothing is enforceable or guaranteed. The United States in particular is well known for either backing out of climate deals, such as what Trump did with the Paris Accords in 2017, or not joining them in the first place, as when Clinton did not send the Kyoto Protocols to Congress for ratification in 1998.

And while much was made in the corporate press and by the pseudo-left of Biden rejoining the Paris Accords in 2021, Biden's real policy aim has been world war. Ever since the US and NATO provoked Russia to attack Ukraine in 2022, all pretenses of fighting climate change have been dropped in favor of policies to prop up the transportation of American liquefied natural gas exports to Europe over the resources coming from Russia. This includes the bombing of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline between Russia and Germany, an act of political and ecological terror.

The US military itself is a massive polluter. A 2019 report from Boston University noted that the wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria have released at least 400 million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere since 2001. And that enormous figure, which is more than many countries, is only a third of the total greenhouse gas emissions emitted by the Pentagon's global operations.

The situation will only be exacerbated under Donald Trump, who has again vowed to withdraw the US from the Paris Accords. Trump has nominated Chris Wright, CEO of the fracking company Liberty Energy and staunch supporter of fossil fuels, for energy secretary.

The fact that climate change is not merely ignored but actively speeded up is another example of the adoption of a policy of mass death. Similar to the response of the world's ruling elites to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, every effort to seriously address the crisis is thwarted, while the basic problem, the continued emission of greenhouse gases into Earth's atmosphere, is accelerated.

As scientists have warned for decades, the consequences are and will continue to be disastrous. Along with extreme weather, the global melting of ice caps and glaciers threatens to drown every coastal city and island community, which together encompass somewhere between one-third and one-half of the world's population.

In addition, the accelerating warming has destabilized essentially every ecosystem, initiating a mass extinction event on a scale which has not been witnessed on Earth for tens of millions of years.

What was expressed at COP29 is the fact that these summits are subordinated to capitalism, the division of the world into rival nation-states, each of which defends its own national corporate and geopolitical

interests.

The fight against climate change is fundamentally a class question. The devastating impact of the climate crisis—extreme weather, rising sea levels, population displacement, food insecurity, and disease—falls overwhelmingly on the working class and the oppressed masses worldwide. It is also the working class, united across all borders in the process of global production, whose objective interests lie in abolishing the capitalist nation-state system that drives environmental destruction.

Resolving the climate crisis requires a direct assault on the wealth and power of the capitalist oligarchs who control the energy giants, financial institutions, and major corporations. An emergency response to the unfolding catastrophe must begin with the expropriation of these industries under the democratic control of the working class. The trillions of dollars currently hoarded by the ruling elite must be redirected to produce energy sustainably, develop public transportation, and invest in the technologies needed to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

This is not a utopian vision but a necessary and realistic solution to the crisis. The technologies needed to stop climate change already exist. What is required is the removal of the capitalist barriers that subjugate science and production to profit.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers and youth to take up this fight. The resolution of the climate crisis demands the revolutionary transformation of society. Only the socialist reorganization of global economic and social life, based on scientific planning and the abolition of private profit, can secure a future for humanity and the planet. The working class must act decisively—this is not only a fight against climate change but for the survival of all life on Earth.



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