

COP30, capitalism and the socialist solution to the climate crisis

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The UN's climate change lead Simon Stiell opened the ongoing COP30 climate summit last week by telling the represented states, "Your job here is not to fight one another. Your job here is to fight this climate crisis, together." But the fine words rang even more hollow than usual.

For years, the *World Socialist Web Site* has named the proceedings of the annual conference for the fraud they are. Whether promises were made or not made, the outcome was the same: a failure to even approach the measures necessary to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial average—even as record extreme weather wracks the planet.

In the last year, governments and corporations have largely given up on the pretence. When it came to COP30, the largest delegation outside of Brazil was sent by the fossil fuel lobby, whose 1,600 representatives—a 12 percent rise on last year—occupied one in every 25 places at the summit. The main actors could no longer be bothered even to show their faces and left the farce to their understudies. Only 60 world leaders are in attendance, down from 165 two years ago.

None of the leaders of the world's five largest greenhouse gas emitters—US President Donald Trump, Chinese Premier Xi Jinping, Indian President Narendra Modi, Russian President Vladimir Putin or Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi—was present. Trump, head of by far the world's largest historic source of emissions, refused to even send a delegation, after using a speech at the UN in September to call climate science "the greatest con job ever perpetrated on the world." His climate policy is for fossil fuel companies to "Drill, baby, drill."

And they have. The Stockholm Environment Institute's Production Gap Report for 2025 explains that 20 of the largest fossil fuel-producing countries are planning coal, oil and gas production up to 2050, which is 120 percent above the 1.5 degree Celsius heating pathway and 77 percent above the 2 degrees pathway.

In the United States alone, Trump's presidency will add an estimated 4 billion more tonnes of carbon to the atmosphere than expected under the previous trajectory—equivalent to the combined yearly output of the European Union and Japan, or twice the savings from renewable infrastructure deployed in the five years up to 2024.

The dire consequences have been confirmed by UN reports, which show the planet is on course to heat by 2.6 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, even based on current climate commitments.

According to authoritative studies, such a scenario would expose billions of people to one or more of extreme heat and regular life-threatening heatwaves, regular droughts and wildfires, coastal and riverine flooding, far more frequent extreme storms, newly prevalent diseases and food shortages and price shocks. Each new study and experience suggests that the predictions of earlier assessments are underestimates.

All of these phenomena, which will result in widespread death, displacement and economic damage, fall overwhelmingly on the poorest people of the world, who have drawn the least benefit from fossil-fueled development, above all, in sub-Saharan Africa.

They come on top of multiple other ecological crises, from microplastics and forever chemicals to deforestation and species extinction. A recent report from Amnesty International found that over 2 billion people face the associated health risks—cancer, respiratory conditions, heart disease, premature birth and death—of living within 5 kilometers of a fossil fuel facility. Almost half a billion live within 1 kilometer.

The oligarchy, social inequality and war

This is social murder on a global scale carried out by the capitalist class, which owns humanity's productive forces and runs them in its own interests.

When Trump denounces climate science, he speaks in his customary brutish style for an entire oligarchy. This fact was confirmed by centibillionaire Bill Gates' advice ahead of COP30 for delegates to reject a "doomsday view of climate change" which focuses "too much on near-term emission goals." This social layer has no intention of abandoning its profits and lifestyles, which are inextricably bound up with runaway emissions and climate catastrophe.

Trillions of dollars have been sunk into a still-expanding fossil fuel infrastructure. For the oligarchy, the choice between abandoning the return on investment represented by these projects or sacrificing huge numbers of people around the world to the consequences of climate change is no choice at all. They would be loathe to surrender so much as one private jet, superyacht or luxury home—which help to account for the 375 times larger carbon footprint of a person in the richest 0.1 percent than someone in the poorest 50 percent.

The scale of the abuse of the planet's resources, which ought to have been used to build a flourishing, sustainable society, is sickening.

At the current rate of fossil fuel use, society will reach the carbon emission limit for a 50 percent chance of keeping global warming below 1.5°C in just four years. With these resources it has delivered: 2 billion people facing moderate or severe food insecurity each year, the same number living in slums and shanty towns, 2 billion lacking safely managed drinking water, over 2 billion relying on cooking methods which produce harmful household pollutants, 4.5 billion people not covered by essential healthcare services, and three-quarters of a billion without access to electricity.

These problems must now be addressed under conditions in which the world's 41.6 billion net tonnes of carbon emissions a year must be reduced to zero within the space of decades, if broadly the same billions are not also to suffer the symptoms of a superheated planet. Sustainable technologies—triumphs of human ingenuity—point the way to the solution, but they are insufficient in themselves, requiring widespread implementation and the parallel dismantling of fossil-fueled systems.

Resolving this crisis requires international collaboration on a scale unprecedented in human history. Instead, the ruling classes are fighting among themselves for every last cent of profit through trade war and predatory campaigns of violence and intimidation. A new wave of colonialism is underway. Far from unifying capitalist states, the development of new green technologies has created new bloody conflicts for resources, to go with those that still rage over fossil fuels and which have been intensified by climate change.

In the last decade, global military spending has increased by more than a third, accelerating in the last three years since the war in Ukraine. Even in 2019, the world's military powers accounted for an estimated 5.5 percent of carbon emissions, more than shipping and civilian aviation combined.

NATO alone accounts for 55 percent of the total. Its new 3.5 percent of GDP target for military spending for member states would add the equivalent of the combined annual emissions of Brazil and Japan to the atmosphere by 2030—by itself canceling out the EU's supposed plans to reduce emissions by 55 percent by 2030 compared with 1990 levels.

All of which is to say nothing of the damage which would be wrought by the armies and weapons themselves, including an expanding collection of nuclear weapons, threatening not only the climate but all life on this planet.

Only socialist revolution can fix the climate crisis

Billions of people around the world realise the urgency of the situation; multiple studies report 80-89 percent support globally for stronger action on the climate crisis. And millions have been prepared to mobilise in its support. The "Fridays for Future" protest movement in 2019 saw over 7 million people, overwhelmingly youth, take to the streets in protests across 150 countries.

The world's governments have responded by retreating even from their own inadequate targets. Where Green parties have come to power in coalition governments in Europe, as in Germany, Belgium, Austria and Ireland, they have participated in the same politics of injustice and inaction as their predecessors.

What this experience shows is the bankruptcy of any and all attempts to address climate change, or any aspect of the ecological crisis, without trespassing on profits and private property in the means of production. By this approach, either the costs are placed on the shoulders of the working class and poor, producing a backlash, or the efforts are curtailed and abandoned in the face of fierce resistance by the capitalist class.

This is the unavoidable result of such a perspective. There is nothing accidental about the contemporary ruling class and its character, and there is no better faction waiting to replace it. It is an expression of a social system which operates according to laws just as certain as those of physics, chemistry and biology, which are now inexorably raising the earth's temperature and collapsing its ecosystems.

Capitalism is based on the division of the world's productive forces into private capitals competing in the market for profit, supported by rival nation states. It inevitably produces levels of social inequality and the monopolisation of vast swaths of wealth which are fatal to democracy and social reform. Out of these conditions arises an increasingly degenerate ruling class, of which Trump is only the most fully developed (or devolved) expression, incapable of addressing social problems outside of the "solutions" of war, dictatorship and mass death.

An oligarchy that does not bat an eyelid at sacrificing millions of lives on the altar of profit in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments which risk war between nuclear-armed powers and which facilitate genocide in Gaza will not act to save the lives and livelihoods endangered

by climate change.

The sole feasible programme of action is the expropriation of the super-rich through world socialist revolution. Reversing climate change demands a scientifically planned global restructuring of the world's energy industry to transition from a reliance on fossil fuels to renewable energy. This would necessitate a similar restructuring of transportation, logistics, agriculture and the whole of society. Such changes would also demand an end to all artificial national boundaries and the restriction of production to the dictates of accumulating corporate profits.

The only form of economic life in which the world's productive forces can be organised on such an internationally coordinated scale is socialism.

Released from the cancerous influence of the profit motive, the irrationality of the market and destructive national interests, humanity's relationship with the natural world can be fundamentally transformed: making use of the remarkable achievements in science, technology and engineering to meet human need, including an enormous increase in the standard of living for the vast majority of the population.

In Marx's words in Volume Three of *Capital*, written 160 years ago, the freedom represented by socialism

can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature.

Only the international working class which sets into motion the world's productive forces, gathering around itself the rural poor and the most progressive sections of the middle class, is capable of accomplishing this historic task. The desire to safeguard the environment and secure a livable future for humanity, which animates billions around the world, will not be fulfilled by 100 COPs, but by building the revolutionary tendency which can lead this class to power: the International Committee of the Fourth International and its Socialist Equality Party sections.



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