

# Europe's record heatwave: Climate catastrophe or world socialism

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The worst European heatwave on record is sweeping across the continent, burning through records in country after country as temperatures soar up to 18 degrees Celsius (32.4 degrees Fahrenheit) above their seasonal average.

Hundreds of millions of workers are slaving through 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) heat as the super-rich glide through air-conditioned homes, private lounges, luxury cars, planes and offices. Their bank balances, global temperatures and extreme heat deaths tick inexorably upwards together.

Over 1,300 excess deaths have already been attributed to the heat, primarily among the elderly and the very young. Based on previous heatwaves in 2022 and 2024, the final toll will be in the high tens of thousands, if not higher.

These mass casualty events are the result of capitalism-driven climate change and criminal government neglect. Decades after warnings were made of global heating, and nominal targets set, carbon emissions continue, and nothing has been done to prepare society for the consequences.

According to the World Weather Attribution consortium of scientists, the June temperatures seen in the last week would have been virtually impossible 50 years ago. Daytime temperature peaks would have been 10 times less likely even in 2003, and nighttime peaks 100 times less likely. Globally, since the 1980s, the rate of severe heat events has increased sevenfold.

Social infrastructure has been left totally unprepared. Power generation systems, including nuclear facilities, have been taken offline across the continent and transport has ground to a halt, with a section of the German motorway literally bursting apart at the seams. Houses and hospitals are overheating in all the major cities; thousands of schools have closed or shortened their hours.

In agriculture, over 200,000 poultry were killed in France in the heat, an example of the stress being placed on livestock. The impact of dried-out soil on crops and the rising threat of wildfires compound the problem. Italy's longest river, the Po, has almost wholly dried up, letting seawater advance 18km (11 miles) inland.

According to the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit, foods sold in the UK hit by extreme weather are rising in price more

than twice as fast as the average groceries inflation rate, accounting for 30-50 percent of the inflation seen in the past two years. A 2024 study by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research warned that continued global heating would amplify food inflation by 30-50 percent up to 2035.

In this new normal created by climate change, every year will bring weeks of insufferable heat, the danger that workers will collapse on the job or that an elderly relative or child will succumb to a suffocating death. The ability to travel, to learn and receive healthcare will be interrupted. The cost of energy, squeezed between reduced generation and soaring demand for cooling, will spike. Food prices will continue to rise.

Measured financially, the cumulative cost to the continent is expected by insurance group Allianz to climb to over \$600 billion by 2030, with France, Spain and Italy the worst affected. Previous less-severe heatwaves cost the continent as much as 0.5 percent of GDP, rising to 1 percent in the south.

These losses—plus those caused by drought, flooding and storms—will be borne by the working class through reduced wages, unemployment and cuts to public services.

Every inhabited continent confronts the same dangers. A looming heatwave in the US threatens 40-degree C (104-degree F) temperatures in major US cities by July 4 and will be met with the same shocking headlines, and the same official indifference.

The impact in the two richest continents in the world, home to barely 15 percent of the global population, serves to emphasise the far worse social catastrophe facing most of the world's working class in Asia and Africa.

With dire consequences for food production, a University of Oxford study indicates that the number of people experiencing extreme heat will double by 2050 from 1.54 billion people to 3.79 billion. A separate study from the Climate Impact Lab reports that 90 percent of the deaths resulting from these rising temperatures will come in poorer countries in Northern Africa, the Middle East and Southwest Asia.

In all these events, the working class is immediately confronted with the struggle to protect life and health and secure access to essential social services. A halt should be called to work in extreme heat with no loss of income. Resources must be secured for retrofitting homes and places of

work—with a priority on schools, hospitals, old age homes and essential industries—to keep them cool.

Floods and storms demand their own responses. All require the organised initiative of rank-and-file workers against the trade union bureaucracies keeping them on the job in intolerable conditions.

The ruling class will resist these efforts with all its might. In each country, the corporations are squeezing every penny out of their workforces to compete with their rivals. Governments are directing all the resources they can towards rearmament. Military spending last year was roughly equal to the gap between current climate financing levels and the very lowest estimate of what is required to reach net zero by 2050.

These facts make clear the titanic, revolutionary and socialist character of the struggle necessary to move from a rearguard action against the consequences of climate change to an offensive against its source—private production for profit.

Heatwaves are not a purely natural threat to society. The incredible development of human productive power has brought the planet's climate, indirectly, under our control. That this increasingly results in the degradation and worsening of environmental conditions for the majority of humanity reflects the exercise of that control by a tiny capitalist class in its own destructive social interests.

Climate catastrophe, like war and global economic recession, is one of the crowning proofs of the Marxist critique of capitalism and insistence on the need for social revolution. The problem was brilliantly analysed by Karl Marx's collaborator Friedrich Engels over 140 years ago in the *Dialectics of Nature*:

All our mastery of [nature] consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws... And, in fact, with every day that passes we are learning to understand these laws more correctly, and getting to know both the more immediate and the more remote consequences of our interference with the traditional course of nature...

To carry out this control requires something more than mere knowledge. It requires a complete revolution in our hitherto existing mode of production, and with it of our whole contemporary social order.

As Engels explains, the capitalists “engaged in production and exchange for the sake of the immediate profit” are structurally incapable of looking beyond the “first, tangible success.” For them, “the sole incentive becomes the profit to be gained on selling.” And this profit is vast: The net income of stock market-listed oil and gas companies in the US alone in 2022 was \$916 billion, of which 84 percent was captured by the richest tenth of the population, and half by the richest 1 percent.

To attempt to address the climate crisis by issuing appeals to

governments to regulate this oligarchy, or directly to the boardrooms themselves—as do the green and environmentalist movements—is like discussing vegetarianism with a pack of hungry wolves.

The profits of fossil-fueled capitalism not only insulate the super rich from the effects of climate change but render them indifferent to the democratic sentiment of those who are affected. The ruling class stands to lose between \$1.4 and \$2.4 trillion in stranded fossil fuel assets and investments in a move to a net-zero emissions society. A comparison of the time and resources spent by the European governments on each confirms that they are more prepared to contemplate war with nuclear-armed Russia than such a transition.

Safeguarding human life on earth means seizing power away from these arsonists by expropriating the oligarchy and toppling capitalist governments in a world socialist revolution.

The international working class—the overwhelming majority of the world's population and objectively unified by global production—is the sole force capable of bringing an end to the profit drive of the bourgeoisie and the anarchic competition for control of the world markets and resources that threatens the destruction of humanity and the planet itself through climate catastrophe and nuclear war.

Only a socialist society established by the working class can begin the democratic planning of production on a global scale necessary to create the “higher” future envisaged by Marx in *Capital*, in which:

private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even a whole society, a nation, or even all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors ... and, like *boni patres familias* [good family fathers, trustees], they must hand it down to succeeding generations in an improved condition.



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