COP31 convenes in Türkiye: The climate theater of the capitalist oligarchy

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The 31st Conference of the Parties (COP31) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) opened November 9 in Antalya, the tourism capital on Türkiye's Mediterranean coast.

The conference will continue until November 20. It is being chaired by Murat Kurum, Türkiye's Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change. The negotiations are being led by Australia's Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Chris Bowen.

"This is the first COP where it is clear beyond a reasonable doubt that the world will overshoot the 1.5-degree target," Kurum said. He then declared the target to be a "compass." The 1.5-degree target was set by the 2015 Paris Agreement, which rested on non-binding national pledges that were not subject to any sanctions.

Kurum announced that, rather than setting new targets, the summit would focus on the "implementation" of existing commitments. The hosts are marketing the gathering as the "Implementation COP." What will actually be implemented in Antalya is the same policy that has been implemented for three decades: the subordination of the planet and the lives of billions of people to the profit and geopolitical interests of the giant corporations and the imperialist powers.

The summit has convened after a year marked by scorching heat waves in Europe, forest fires in Indonesia and devastating floods in Nepal. The World Meteorological Organization has placed 2026 among the hottest years ever recorded.

In the October 14 floods, nine people lost their lives in Istanbul and Kocaeli. Most of the dead were workers, among them a child worker and a migrant worker. In the aftermath of the floods, the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) stressed that summits such as the upcoming COP31 serve to give a "green" veneer to the horse-trading between the imperialist powers and the energy monopolies, and to open up new fields of profit such as carbon markets.

Addressing the Leaders' Summit on November 11, UN Secretary-General António Guterres declared: "The brutal truth is that the climate crisis is outrunning us." He added: "This is the path to mutually assured destruction." Guterres noted that even if current national plans are fully implemented, "the world would be above 2.5 degrees [hotter] by the end of this century."

Drawing a concrete comparison, Guterres said: "In the last quarter alone, the nine largest oil companies pocketed $95 billion in profits. Meanwhile, the Loss and Damage Fund has received around $600 million. That is what these companies made in about 14 hours." As Reuters reported, ExxonMobil, Chevron, BP and Shell have posted windfall profits since the war against Iran began at the end of February.

The UN chief's proposed solution was the bankrupt perspective of appealing to governments: "It's time for governments to tax these windfall profits." The reality is that the capitalist oligarchies that control governments everywhere are not going to tax themselves. They are determined to finance rearmament and state debt through a ferocious social assault on the working class. It is this class struggle that lies behind the movement of young people and workers into the streets, in Europe and many other parts of the world.

At the opening session on November 9, Guterres had called on leaders to "get serious." But what "seriousness" looks like became clear immediately. An item proposed by African countries calling for the tripling of adaptation finance was kept off the agenda following objections from the European Union (EU). According to the UN, developing countries will need $305 billion a year for adaptation by 2035. That is roughly ten times what they receive today. Before the summit, a senior EU official had already stated bluntly that there would be "no political will" for new commitments.

Most of the finance on offer comes in the form of loans, not grants. According to Oxfam and CARE, developing countries pay back roughly $7 for every $5 they receive. The bill for the catastrophe created by the imperialist centers is being handed, with interest, to the workers and peasants of the poorer countries.

Previous summits had already demonstrated, if only through the choice of their hosts, how seriously this critical global issue is taken. COP28 in Dubai was presided over by Sultan Al Jaber, CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). COP29 in Baku was chaired by Mukhtar Babayev, a former executive of the state oil company SOCAR. The WSWS characterized the Baku summit as an expression of "the normalization of mass death" and described its final text as "another empty agreement."

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As was noted at the opening and in the aftermath of last year's COP30 in Belém, a significant number of world leaders did not even attend. The fossil fuel lobby, meanwhile, with some 1,600 people, formed the largest delegation apart from that of host Brazil. The final text did not so much as mention fossil fuels by name, and the "roadmap" backed by more than 80 countries was relegated to a voluntary basis.

The United States, the world's second-largest greenhouse gas emitter, is absent from Antalya. The Trump administration has pulled the country out of the Paris Agreement for the second time and did not send a single official to COP31. The Democrats arrived with a congressional delegation. But the Obama administration, which signed the Paris Agreement, and the Biden administration, which rejoined it, both drove oil and shale gas production to record levels.

The largest conglomerates of the Turkish bourgeoisie occupy the summit's shop window. Koç Holding is the "Global Business Partner" and Sabanc? Holding the "Electrification Partner," while Cengiz Holding is among the sponsors. Limak, IC Holding, Rönesans and Sinpa? top the list of "climate supporters." Conglomerates that operate coal-fired power plants and are planning new mines and power stations are being welcomed in Antalya under the title of "climate partner." Alongside the construction monopolies and the major energy and real estate companies, the sponsors include banks. Garanti BBVA is present as the "global banking partner."

The record of these "climate partners" speaks for itself. Cengiz Holding operates a 1,320-megawatt imported-coal power plant in Karabiga, in Çanakkale province, and has launched an environmental impact assessment process for a new 1,050-megawatt unit. Limak and IC are partners in the Yeniköy-Kemerköy lignite power plants in Mu?la and bear responsibility for the destruction of the Akbelen Forest to make way for a coal mine. In October, the Council of State, Türkiye's highest administrative court, rejected the lawsuit seeking the annulment of the urgent expropriation order. According to *Climate Home News*, Koç Holding and Tüpra?, the oil refiner it controls, cut their 2030 reduction targets for emissions from their own operations from 27 percent to 20 percent in 2025.

On November 9, the day the summit opened, President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an heralded the discovery of 135 million barrels of oil in place at Gabar, in ??rnak province. According to Global Witness, gas production by the state oil company TPAO is expected to nearly triple, from 8.2 billion cubic meters in 2025 to 22 billion cubic meters in 2035. Companies in co-host Australia are on the same course. Woodside is preparing to double its LNG output by 2032, while Santos plans to increase its crude oil output eightfold by 2035.

Addressing the Leaders' Summit, Erdo?an declared: "Today, humanity is experiencing perhaps one of the deepest existential crises in its history, driven in part by the greed of excessive consumption." But the cause of this existential crisis is not the "greed of excessive consumption." It is the capitalist system, which subordinates the global economy and the fate of humanity to private profit and the accumulation of wealth, and the rule of the oligarchies that control it.

Erdo?an went on: "Wars, crises, migration, hunger and poverty are increasing the need for international solidarity day by day. Alongside people, nature too is paying the heavy price of armed conflicts." These words come from the leader of a country that has NATO's second-largest army and is a military-strategic ally of US imperialism.

COP31 convenes amid an escalation of imperialist war stretching from Eastern Europe to the Middle East. The US-Israeli war of aggression against Iran and the accompanying blockade have sent oil prices rocketing, while the war waged by the NATO powers against Russia through Ukraine continues to escalate. The European governments are raising military spending to record levels, even as they declare there is "no political will" for climate finance. The world's militaries are among the largest consumers of fossil fuels, yet their emissions are largely excluded from climate accounting.

Much of the debate in Antalya centers on the transparency of the sponsors or on the lack of "political will." But the problem is the capitalist system itself, which is based on the profit motive and divides the world into rival nation-states. The scientific and technical means exist to take the steps needed to rapidly reduce global emissions. What blocks their implementation are the interests of the capitalist oligarchy that controls energy, construction, finance, the entire economy and the nation-states themselves.

The lesson of three decades of COP (Conference of the Parties) summits is clear: the climate crisis cannot be resolved through appeals to the governments of the capitalist class that created it. The energy, construction and banking monopolies must be expropriated and placed under the democratic control of the working class. Production worldwide must be reorganized to meet social need, not private profit. This requires the unification and mobilization of the working class all over the world in the struggle to take power and implement socialist measures.

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