

IMPERIALIST EXPLOITATION AND CAPITALIST NATIONAL RIVALRY VS CLIMATE ACTION

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We have undoubtedly entered a climate breaking point. We are seeing increasing heat waves, wildfires, floods and changes in weather patterns on a more regular basis, impacting lives and the environment. As the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) looms closer, one topic that is totally overlooked by the ruling class when discussing climate change is the role of national competition and the vicious exploitation of the neocolonial world – both the land itself, but also indigenous peoples and minorities.

Indigenous peoples tend to live in relatively natural environments, rather than in towns and cities, growing and making much of the food and other products that they need to survive. This makes them much more reliant on their intimate knowledge of local weather, and plant and animal life. Traditional wisdom on matters such as when to plant crops or where to hunt for food has been accumulated over many generations. But now that the climate is shifting, some of these understandings are proving to be no longer valid, and will continue to change as we see further shifts in weather patterns. Climate change, and the rapidly increasing amount of land stolen for either plantations of biofuel crops or grazing land for capitalist farming, threatens the very existence of some cultures. Some have already had to relocate because of the impact of climate change.

Big business sets its sights on indigenous land

A prime example of how capitalist companies exploit the planet and indigenous communities is KoBold Metals, who proudly announce on their website that they have obtained 1,000 square kilometers of land near the Raglan nickel mine in Quebec, Canada, owned by the notoriously anti-worker company Glencore, to search for cobalt.

Anger is already building within the indigenous community as the Raglan mine is located between the two Inuit communities of Salluit and Kangiqsujuaq. Among its five top mining projects, KoBold Metals names the development of a new production hub for Rio Tinto's iron ore business in the Pilbara, Koodaideri in Australia. Just last year Rio Tinto in Pilbara was responsible for the Juukan Gorge disaster, in which a 46,000-year-old cultural site was destroyed in the name of expanding mining operations and creating more profit.

Another supposed top project is the Khoemacau Copper

mine in Botswana and Namibia. Local opposition politicians are vocal in their criticisms because the benefits go to the multinational companies and not the local population.

KoBold Metals has signed an agreement to explore parts of Greenland, which have made major mineral resources accessible due to receding ice-caps. They are competing with the interests of China's misnamed 'Communist' (in reality, capitalist) elite. Controversy has been so high that it forced a general election early this year, which the main opposition party won.

It would come as little surprise to most working class people that billionaires Michael Bloomberg, Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates are all investors in KoBold Metals – such is the nature of capitalist imperialism. What gets passed off as 'developing' the neocolonial world is more often than not a means of funnelling the proceeds of labour from workers in these countries into the pockets of the rich in the 'developed' world.

The Amazon rainforest

In the Amazon there are still indigenous tribes that live in the rainforest, protecting it and depending on it's rich biodiversity. Many of these tribes will either disappear or disperse with the ongoing destruction of the Amazon. These tribes are not only known for their cultural heritage, but also their struggles against the devastating race for growth and profit under capitalism. One of the most famous figures in these struggles was Chico Mendes, who was murdered in 1988 for trying to organise indigenous groups against the destruction of the Amazon, their home and means of survival. It is widely thought that his murder was arranged by the big agricultural and mining companies, along with the state that exists to serve them. Today this destruction of the Amazon continues, with recent reports indicating that

the Amazon now emits more carbon dioxide than it takes in due to deforestation through "accidental" fires.

In most cases of forest fires, it is necessary to be cautious and have concrete evidence before talking about arson, or even consciously planned fires. But in the case of the Amazon, which has been threatened by big business interests for decades, and especially when countless fires have broken out simultaneously in different places, it is naive to talk about "accidental events". The bulldozers moved too slowly for capitalist interests, so the flames conveniently came along for them and cleared the field. Bolsonaro's election gave the green light to speed up this process.

But why is the Amazon destroyed? What do those who attack the heart of this "useless" forest want? Lately, oil and gold companies have been increasingly harassing the indigenous communities that protect the Amazonian forests. Big livestock companies dream of converting even more of the forest into pastures. Most of the rainforest is seen as nothing more than new farms and fields for grazing. But how many fields do we need on the planet? Aren't the existing fields enough for them? After all, the destruction of the Amazon is not new, but has been going on for many decades.

No, the fields are not enough for them, because the soil of the Amazon is not suitable for growing soybeans. It is suitable for the preservation of tropical forests, but is very low in the nutrients needed for agricultural production, especially on the intensive basis of modern capitalist agriculture. Thus, after one or two years of production, the "field" becomes obsolete. So the food companies will find another field, in another

equally unsustainable part of the Amazon. Centuries of natural history, incalculable natural resources, cultural heritage, unmapped biodiversity as well as human lives are being destroyed to produce agricultural products for a year or two.

The same goes for the industries that have targeted the area to extract gold or other raw materials, leaving huge destruction behind, and taking all their profits to tax havens.

This summarises the absolute absurdity of the capitalist system – one that we must fight to replace with democratic socialist planning to take into account the needs of indigenous communities, workers and the planet.

Unequal impact

As well as the impact of climate change on indigenous people and minorities is the oppression they face under capitalist society. One of the most shocking examples of minorities' greater exposure to climate change is in India, where some 170 million people known as 'Dalits' according to the Hindu caste system, are physically, socially and economically excluded from the rest of society. As a result they and two other minorities, Adivasis and Muslims, were worst hit by the unusually severe monsoon floods in 2007. Many Dalits lived in rickety homes in flood-prone areas outside main villages, leaving them especially exposed. They were

often last to get emergency relief, if they received it at all, because relief workers did not realize that Dalits live outside the main villages, or because dominant groups took control of distribution or were given priority. A survey by Dalit organizations of 51 villages in August 2007 found that 60% of the dead were Dalits, that none of the Dalit colonies (or tolas) attached to the main villages had been visited by government relief officials and that Dalits' housing had suffered the worst damage because most was of poor quality and in low-lying areas.

Black Americans in New Orleans were also disproportionately hit by the floods caused by Hurricane

Katrina in 2005. A Brookings Institution report on the disaster found that "those areas hit hardest by the flood were disproportionately non-white. Overall, black and other minority residents made up 58% of those whose neighborhoods were flooded, though they encompassed just 45% of the metropolitan population." Within the city itself, 80% of people who lived in the flooded areas were non-white. Escaping the stricken city was harder for people in flooded areas where one in five had no access to a car, compared to one in ten without access in dry areas.

We should have no confidence in anything concrete being agreed at COP26. After all, this is the 26th such meeting, and little has been done resulting from the 25 previous meetings. While hiding behind an 'eco-friendly' exterior, they will seek to delay any action, knowing that anything done to protect and reverse the condition of the climate will hurt their friends in the oil, mining and agricultural businesses in their nation states.

US-China cold war weaponises the climate crisis

Even the inter-imperialist cold war between the US and China is playing it's part to wreak havoc on the climate. Back in June, the Biden administration ordered a ban on US imports of a key solar panel material from the Chinese firm Hoshine Silicon Industry, at the same time as banning exports from the US to four Chinese firms, including Hoshine Silicon Industry, citing forced labour of Uyghurs and other Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang. While Socialist Alternative condemns the violence and the use of detention camps by the Chinese state, and have campaigned against this alongside the Solidarity Against Repression in China and Hong Kong campaign, the US at the same time has trade deals with many other states around the world who use violence against minorities, without taking any action. They have no genuine interest in the rights of ordinary people in China. But it is clear that the upcoming summit will be defined by national competition and rivalry, rather than the united, international action that is urgently needed

China is the worlds' largest polluter, with 27% of total greenhouse emissions, and the US the second, with 11% of emissions. Even if nation states were able to ignore the needs of big business at COP26 – which they won't – the imperialist battle between these two states would ensure that nothing would be achieved. Capitalism cannot solve the climate crisis due to its overriding need to put the profit of the capitalists in their own state above any other issue.

Instead of waiting for COP26 to again kick the can down the road, International Socialist Alternative (ISA), will be building for protests at COP26, and will be organising an international contingent of ISA members to join the protests and put forward a socialist solution to the climate crisis, as we recognise that the climate issues are international in nature and require an international response.

The school strikes of 2019 were incredible, and we have already seen the beginning of a resurgence of some of these on the 24th September and this is an important step, but the climate movement needs to link up with the organised working class, specifically trade unions, who have the capacity to grind society to a halt. But this will not also be done without a programme for transforming the unions, turning them into genuine organisations of struggle from the ground-up. The recent gains for the left in both the Unite and Unison trade unions will have to be built on with a programme for escalating action of all workers impacted negatively by the effects of capitalist-driven climate change.

Only through determined, internationally coordinated action by the working class can we fight to end capitalism and fight for a socialist planned economy, where the needs of society, and of the planet, are put before the chase for profit at whatever cost to the climate that we currently see.

NEW PAMPHLET!

Student Socialist Alternative has produced a new pamphlet outlining our ideas and solutions to the climate crisis and will provide an invaluable tool to socialists, climate protesters and the wider trade union movement in the struggle for socialist change and against the climate crisis.



It's available for £2/£3 solidarity price plus postage. To order your copy, get in touch with us through scanning the QR code, or go to bit.ly/ClimatePamphlet

See you at COP26!

