

The Changing Climate of Struggle

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Climate change isn't a linear process but one in which effect alarmingly assumes the role of cause. We learn, for example, that the wildfires and droughts that are produced by climate instability are undermining '[the land's capacity to soak up atmospheric carbon](#).' This web of causality has the most serious implications for us all and it is revealing itself relatively early in the development of climate change, with the heating process only just beginning to breach the [1.5C mark](#).

There are those who hope that those with economic and political power will accept that climate disaster is upon us and act upon this realization, but this is a serious miscalculation. In his [Capitalism in the Anthropocene](#), John Bellamy Foster presents capitalism as an "irrational system of artificially stimulated growth, economic waste, financialized wealth, and extreme inequality that needs to be overturned if we are to create a society of ecological sustainability and substantive equality." So compelling is capitalism's competitive drive to accumulate that rampant carbon emissions continue even as the polar ice caps melt.

Though Foster advances an ecosocialist view, he also argues that we will pass through an 'ecodemocratic phase' marked by a "mass struggle to 'demand a world of sustainable [human development](#).'" This seems to me to be a vital consideration. While the present social and economic system is incompatible with a sustainable relationship with the natural world, the vital question posed is what can be done to stay its destructive hand. In this regard, appeals to those on high to act responsibly will have a very limited effect and thus what is urgently needed instead is social mobilization in the face of the intensifying climate crisis.

Given the severity of the threat we face, we must anticipate that the forms and objectives of the class struggle within this society are going to be deeply impacted by it. I believe that two main fronts of struggle are opening up before us. Firstly, we must greatly escalate the fight to curtail emissions and transition to viable sources of energy and forms of production. Secondly, we must ensure that the escalating effects of the climate crisis aren't disregarded and that all possible measures are taken to ensure the survival and well-being of threatened populations. In both cases, the vital local and national struggles that are taken up will need to unfold as part of a robust and coordinated international climate movement.



In the struggle for a just transition, unions and social movements will need to place a huge emphasis on exposing and defeating the stalling tactics of fossil fuel interests and their political enablers. This means delegitimizing the greenwashing, fraudulent 'tech fixes' and phony consultative processes that delay meaningful action. Chief among the latter are the UN "conferences of the parties" summits, which have become so discredited that even solidly respectable commentators are concluding that they are "[no longer fit for purpose](#)."

Such a challenge to the power structure and its official discourse will require communities to act decisively and unions to go beyond their approved role in bargaining on wages and working conditions, taking up demands over what is produced and how it is produced. Initiatives like [Green Jobs Oshawa](#), which has advocated publicly owned and environmentally useful production, offer us a glimpse of what is possible in this regard.

When destructive industrial activity is curtailed, the workers involved must not be dumped on the scrap heap. In the UK, the phasing out of [North Sea oil production](#) poses such a threat and it is essential to prevent a repeat of the abandonment that the miners faced at an earlier time.



As climate impacts intensify, the fight against abandonment in the face of them will be decisive and the recent [floods in Valencia](#) posed this consideration sharply. The protective measures that should have been taken there were neglected with terrible results. The [outpouring of anger](#) that emerged in the wake of this preventable tragedy was of great importance but this needs to go over to demands that are advanced before such dire results occur.

Many working-class struggles across the world will relate to surviving the extreme weather and chronic effects produced by climate change and to maximizing the ability to recover and rebuild in their wake. Moreover, the broader fight against austerity and social cutbacks will merge with climate struggles. The international drive to degrade public services, especially healthcare, that has marked the last several decades must be reversed decisively, if working-class populations are to withstand the dislocation and devastation that climate change brings with it.

Finally, the reshaping of the class struggle must be truly international in its scale and focus. The countries of the Global South, though they have the least responsibility for carbon emissions, face the worst impacts. Major resources must be made available to them and the burden of debt taken off their shoulders. In the coming decades, rising sea levels and extreme heat will produce a great number of [‘climate refugees.’](#) The racist backlashes and efforts at exclusion that we may expect must be challenged and defeated by robust and principled working-class internationalism.

As it plays out along the fault lines of social and economic inequality, climate change is reshaping the class struggle. We must develop the political perspectives, the strategic orientation and the organizational forms necessary to develop a powerful and effective solidarity for survival in the face of this dire and unprecedented threat. □

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