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UN Climate Report

System change to fight climate change!

A new report by United Nations climate scientists found that if greenhouse gas emissions continue at the current rate, our atmosphere will warm-up by a further 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2040. The authors warn that the world needs to dramatically restructure the economy around green energy within 12 years if we are to avoid the earth becoming uninhabitable in many areas.

Rose Lichtenstein
National Committee

What are “Greenhouse gases”?

Greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, trap heat from the sun in our atmosphere, which in turn heats up the Earth’s surface and oceans. Without these gases Earth would be too cold for human life. However, since the start of the Industrial Revolution human activity has increased greenhouse gas emissions by burning coal, oil and gas, changing land use, and destroying forests and wetlands that serve as natural carbon dioxide removers.

Snow and ice caps at the poles reflect some of the sun’s heat. But these natural “solar shields” are melting. With Earth’s natural protection decreasing, the “greenhouse effect”, which has allowed life to flourish, will spiral towards temperatures too hot for life as we know it to continue. That is, **IF** we continue on the destructive profit-driven path that capitalism has set us on.

71% emitted by 100 companies

According to the Carbon Majors Report, since 1988, only 100 companies have been responsible for 71% of greenhouse emissions. In the top 20 culprits are BP, Shell, Total and BHP Billiton. No well-intentioned individual can make the changes needed when major corporations



are refusing to put the environment ahead of their profits. Many environmentalists champion adapting our lifestyles, but these changes are often unaffordable to the vast majority of the working class and plays on individual guilt rather than focusing on the biggest culprits.

International solution needed

The Nile River currently flows through 11 different countries: what Uganda does in its waters affects Egypt downstream. In fact, the damming of the Nile in upstream countries has had a negative effect on Egypt’s agricultural production due to less nutrient rich sediments being delivered by the river. Similarly, our oceans and our atmosphere are not confined to the borders of capitalism’s nation states. For example, Canada exports harmful gases and tar sands, is home to nearly 75% of the world’s mining companies, all whilst boasting “green” hydro energy solutions and environmental friendliness at home.

The consequences of pollution or exploitation of natural resources in

one country will affect neighbouring countries, and eventually the entire planet. Therefore, we cannot fight the drivers of climate change in one city or one country; we must look towards an international solution.

A socialist world is possible!

The UN scientists’ report confirmed that the technology exists and can be further developed to deal with the challenges of climate change. It is however evident that in a system like capitalism, where the very people in power profit from the exploitation of both the working class and the environment, it is impossible to utilize these technological advances to secure a sustainable future. The unplanned capitalist economy means that one third of food produced in South Africa is wasted – enough to feed 20% of the population, many of whom go to bed hungry. Every year the energy used in the production and transport of this wasted food could power Johannesburg for 16 weeks, and the water wasted could supply Cape Town for roughly 8 years.

The lack of concern to rehabilitate decommissioned mines, fix public transport, and maintain water and electrical grids are prime examples that both capitalist politicians and the private sector won’t look beyond their bottom lines. When the fossil fuels sector is threatened by environmental activism, the bosses threaten mass job losses. The same is true for mining and large-scale agriculture.

Our planet’s future cannot be held ransom in such a way. We know there are jobs in rehabilitating the environment and developing green energy. Workers can be retrained. The time has come to nationalise these sectors, restructuring them to be sustainable, and to push for a green revolution under democratic workers’ control. As we fight for a world free of oppression, socialists also fight for the preservation of our natural world and all the enjoyment it brings.