

Reclaim our environment

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Throughout history, human productive activity has involved degradation of the natural environment. Until the development of capitalism, these changes were local, leaving the bulk of humanity and the planet as a whole unaffected. Industrialisation ruined the immediate environment in which workers worked and lived and the working class movement, therefore, led the struggle to clean up these life-threatening conditions.

Capitalist driven consumer culture means overproduction and the creation of vast mountains of waste, poisoning the environment. Species of wildlife are dying out on a daily basis, and tons of poisonous fertilisers and weedkillers are sprayed on our foods to overproduce while products which do not fit the supermarket image of perfection are destroyed. At the same time big corporations are pushing for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to enter our food chain in order to make yet more massive profits, gambling with our health and our environment.

Moreover, capitalist industrialisation and the plunder of the earth's raw materials threatened a qualitative change in the dangers to the life systems of our planet ? because this was the first worldwide mode of production.

The increase in the scale of production in the twentieth century has created a situation where the whole world ecosystem is threatened. The destruction of the equatorial rain forests ? the lungs of the world ? threatens massive climate change. A man made cataclysm threatens to occur in the new century because of global warming. This will have terrible effects on human beings ? social, economic and psychological. Agricultural decline, the spread of disease, starvation and stress will make a living hell of large parts of the planet. Already, the land, rivers and seas are contaminated with toxins and the very air we breathe deteriorates by the day.

The ?Greenhouse Effect? is caused by increasing amounts of gases such as CO₂ in the atmosphere. The main causes of this increase are the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation. The climate changes this causes already appear to be having the most serious consequences. Weather patterns will alter, leading to floods and droughts. Some parts of the world will get much hotter ? others much colder. Water levels will rise as the seas warm and the ice caps melt.

The USA has systematically blocked and sabotaged even the weak global agreements (Rio, Kyoto, Johannesburg) designed to limit greenhouse emissions and climate change. This is because the interests of Big Oil ? companies like Exxon ? come before those of the world's population.

Capitalism is environment unfriendly by its very nature. Capitalists need ever-greater profits to compete, so resources are used up without regard for peoples' needs and the effects on future generations. Capitalists are reluctant to conserve resources, control pollution or recycle, as these are often ?expensive? options. It is cheaper to pump pollutants into the environment than to clean it up.

Yet the combination of scientific and technological advance has created the potential of superabundance

for all of humanity.

The working class has a vital interest in stopping capitalism laying waste to our world. Throughout its history, workers have fought to stop dangerous production methods and impose safety standards on the capitalists and on their state. Through forcing legislation on the ruling class, it has made tangible gains, helping to create a habitable environment in many cities and towns again. The working class can take the lead and rally the poor peasants, the inhabitants of the world's barrios, to halt and reverse this degradation.

Humanity needs a dramatic shift away from energy production based on the burning of fossil fuels and a massive investment in alternatives such as wind, wave and solar power. We need a huge global programme of reforestation. We need a massive expansion of public transport to combat pollution caused by the growth in use of the private car.

The working class and all those who see the need to save our planet must fight for strict controls and punitive penalties to clamp down on corporate polluters. Corporations ? like the big oil companies ? that defy these must have their property confiscated and their power broken.

Energy production through nuclear fission represents a severe environmental risk, particularly under capitalism since security and environmental measures are expensive and reduce profits. Nuclear energy must not to be run for profit. We oppose privatisation and call for nationalisation of the nuclear industry.

The Chernobyl disaster proved, however, that state ownership in itself is no guarantee of acceptable security, if it is under bureaucratic control. We are for workers' inspection of all nuclear plants and closure of those found to be unsafe. We are for the fullest workers' control of nuclear plants' security ? involving representatives of the employees, the local communities, the trade unions and environmental groups.

We oppose the indiscriminate closure of nuclear plants because of the acute threat of devastating climate change that would result from a shift to fossil fuel burning.

None of the above demands for a sustainable environment can be secured permanently on a national basis alone or without the seizure of political and economic control from the capitalists. Therefore in order to fight for a clean and safe environment we need to struggle for workers' control, the expropriation of capitalist corporations and a democratic global plan of production. Only in this way can we eradicate the huge disparities between overcrowded cities choking in traffic congestion and a deprived, depopulated, countryside.

A militant defence of the environment from the depredations of capital; a rational reconstruction of the urban and rural environment to abolish the disequilibrium between town and countryside; a socialist society based on social ownership and democratic planning: these are all preconditions for the construction of lasting, harmonious and free human communities in the twenty-first century.

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