

Three Articles on Saving the Planet

Build Back Fossil Free vs. False Solutions

by Joseph Green, *Detroit Workers Voice*

(Below are Excerpts from Detroit/Seattle Workers' Voice list for October 11, 2021 - full text at <http://www.comunistvoice.org/DSWV-211011.html>)

At the Youth4Climate summit in Milan, Italy on Tuesday, September 28, Greta Thunberg mocked the empty words of the establishment leaders, saying:

“Build back better. Blah, blah, blah. Green economy. Blah blah blah. Net zero by 2050. Blah, blah, blah. This is all we hear from our so-called leaders. Words that sound great but so far have not led to action.”

... the need for the Build Back Fossil Free actions shows that the struggle against global warming isn't simply a fight against the conservative climate denialists. It also involves a struggle against establishment leaders who verbally recognize the existence of global warming, but sponsor false or insufficient measures that will lead to a global catastrophe. It shows that there are two types of climate denialism today, that which denies the environmental problem altogether, and that which talks about global warming, but sponsors dead-end measures that won't stop the coming to disaster. And it shows that Greta Thunberg was right to denounce the “blah, blah, blah” of Build Back Better, because it itself won't suffice to deal with global warming.

A good deal of discussion around Build Back Better and also COP26 is based on how much money will be given to this or that program. But the critique by certain members of the Build Back Better coalition shows that “false solutions”, not simply unfunded solutions, are contained in Build Back Better. The question isn't just money, it's that market measures, carbon offsets, carbon trading, the carbon tax, and other forms of neo-liberal measures have led to an environmental fiasco. This stand isn't universal among the Build Back Fossil Free coalition, and it's important that the mass actions be followed up with serious discussion of what steps need to be done so that the demands of the demonstrators can be met. ...

The statement “The Decade of False Solutions: Our Position on the Bipartisan Infrastructure Package & Build Back Better Act” [by the Indigenous Environmental Network, Climate Justice Alliance, and Grassroots Global Justice Alliance]... shows

how, once one looks at what is being proposed and not the rhetoric, these bills are not only half-hearted with respect to the climate crisis, but they contain a number of harmful measures. The issue isn't simply the amount of money being allocated, but the nature of the programs they are allocated to. Thus the statement denounces both bad plans, such as carbon capture, “clean” coal, and nuclear power, and market measures, such as “cap and trade/offsets/carbon tax/carbon pricing”.

The denunciation of false solutions in this statement is certainly not common to all the groups involved in the Build Back Fossil Free coalition. But the putting forward of these stands by a substantial section of the movement shows that they should be carefully considered. We at the Communist Voice Organization have also denounced market measures for years, including both offsets and the carbon tax, and we have pointed to the failures that have resulted from the plans of establishment environmentalism. (See, for example, my article “Al Gore's Nobel Peace Prize and the fiascos of corporate environmentalism”, <http://www.comunistvoice.org/41cAlGore.html>). ...

The IEN/CJA/GGJA statement does not, however, describe the different trends inside the environmental movement. It does not go into why the establishment environmentalists would uphold these dangerous false solutions. It ignores the stands of the large establishment environmental groups, which return the favor by ignoring the stands of the militant indigenous movement about false solutions. And while criticizing Congress and the Biden administration, it holds that the “U.S. elected leadership is in the position to redirect course on behalf of Mother Earth and future generations”. But as this elected leadership represents the stands of this or that faction of the bourgeoisie, it is not in a position to take decisive action on the environment. It will take the building up of a strong working-class environmental movement, free from corporate greenwashing and the lure of market measures, for there to be a major, protracted fight against the false solutions.

But, although we do not agree with everything in the IEN/CJA/GGJA statement, and have somewhat different ideas about what type of measures would replace the false solutions, we think it deserves the close attention of activists. It would be very helpful to the movement to have a serious discussion of the points raised by this statement. Excerpts from it ...can be found at <https://www.ienearth.org/the-decade-of-false-solutions-our-position-on-the-bipartisan-infrastructure-package-build-back-better-act/>. ◇

Youthful climate strikers say: Politicians fiddle while the world burns

by Pete Brown, *Detroit Workers' Voice*,
October 2, 2021

On Friday, September 24th, demonstrators gathered in 1,500 locations around the world for a renewal of the climate strike initiated by Greta Thunberg in 2018. This was the first large, in-person, in-the-streets climate protest since the beginning of the pandemic. Since then Thunberg's Fridays for Future protests have been largely online. But this year, with the relaxation of some COVID restrictions, organizers felt confident to resume protests, and youth around the world readily responded. Especially large protests were held in major cities of Europe – Paris, Rome, and Berlin. There were also protests in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Warsaw, Istanbul, Milan, Turin, Vienna, and Helsinki. Smaller but spirited demos took place in Nairobi, Kenya and New Delhi, India. Demonstrators in Bangladesh rallied against the effects of global heating on their country. There were also protests in Baluchistan and Japan. Protesters in Uganda targeted the East African Crude Oil Pipeline being built in the Lake Victoria basin, a source of water and livelihoods for 40 million people. Tens of thousands marched in Montreal, Canada. In the U.S., demonstrations were held in New York, Los Angeles, Houston and Portland. (1) This edition of Fridays for Future was not as large as similar demos in 2019, before the pandemic, but as the climate crisis deepens and news about COP26 spreads, more and larger protests are expected.

Over 400 protests were held in Germany. Thunberg herself spoke at a rally of 100,000 people in Berlin, outside the Reichstag building. This occurred just days before German parliamentary elections, in which all three major parties – the center-left SPD, the center-right CDU, and the Greens – were making promises about dealing with the climate crisis. But Thunberg expressed skepticism towards all the politicians' promises, saying "It is clearer than ever that no political party is doing close to enough" (2), and "They simply don't give a damn about us. ... You must vote but remember that voting only will not be enough. We must keep going into the streets." (3)

Climate strike demonstrators in New York

As the planet heats up: Corporate environmentalism is a swindle

by Frank Arango, *Seattle Workers' Voice*,
August 18, 2021

emphasized the need to stop Line 3. This is an oil pipeline being built to bring Canadian oil into the U.S. through Indigenous lands in Minnesota. Members of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe were present at the demo in New York. They pointed out that even though it was the Trump administration that gave permits for construction of Line 3 to be built, since taking office the Biden administration has defended the permits and is allowing construction to continue. (4)

Demonstrators in Portland decried the excessive heat, the continued drought, and the devastating wildfires raging in the western United States. (5) This past summer hundreds of people collapsed and died of heat stroke in the Northwest, in Oregon and Washington but especially in British Columbia, as the temperature soared above 110 degrees Fahrenheit in many places. Forest fires burned out of control and threatened cities like Lake Tahoe and national monuments like the 4,000-year-old trees of Sequoia National Park. Thousands of people were forced to evacuate their homes and hundreds of homes were burned. Even today, after the summer heat, school children are kept indoors in some places to avoid playing outside in the smoke-polluted air.

The overall theme for the Global Climate Strike was "Uproot the System" and many demonstrations carried banners calling for "System Change Not Climate Change." These calls to change the system are positive steps forward, but there is no single interpretation of them in the present movement, which needs to develop further. Fridays For Future puts forward climate justice and equity as one of its main demands, along with keeping temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Centigrade and listening to the science. How to achieve these demands and what more exactly they mean are yet to be determined.

Youthful climate strikers should continue to hold the bourgeois politicians' feet to the fire and demand significant action to reduce carbon emissions. These demonstrations could be one step towards the masses having a say on the environment.

For notes, see original article at
<http://www.comunistvoice.org/DSWV-211002.html>

This has been a summer of record-smashing heatwaves, unprecedented floods and mega-droughts. The heat and drought conditions have also contributed to wildfires that are releasing scores of millions more tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. And once there, these wildfire emissions are mixing with the emissions coming from the burning of fossil fuels, which is the

biggest cause of Earth's rapid heating. Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said the new Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report is a "code red for humanity," while the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says July was the world's hottest month ever recorded.

So these are the latest warnings that humanity faces a truly existential crisis due to global warming. They show that, among other things, radical measures must be taken now in order to stop the burning of fossil fuels. But the fossil fuel industry and its political supporters are resisting this in every way they can.

Fighting to profit until the last oil derrick is in flames

Over the next decade, the world's biggest oil companies plan to pump more oil than ever. According to research commissioned by the Guardian, "Shell and ExxonMobil will be among the leaders with a projected production increase of more than 35% between 2018 and 2030 – a sharper rise than over the previous 12 years," and none of the top 20 oil companies dispute the projections in the Guardian article. (1) Additionally, in 2020 China built over three times as much new coal power capacity as all other countries in the world combined, and it's presently on a binge of building still more coal-fired power plants. (2) Along with this, the British government refuses to rule out licensing a new coal mine in northwest England, and Biden has refused to reverse Trump's executive that allows coal to be exported from West Coast ports.

Using carbon offsets as a scam

But while the big coal, oil, gas and other polluting capitalists are planning to pollute as much or more than ever, large numbers of them are at the same time pledging to have zero net emissions, or carbon neutrality, by 2050. They do this by claiming they're offsetting the emissions they're responsible for by investing in planting forests and other projects that capture carbon dioxide. But carbon off-setting has been going on for a long time, and it has proven to be a spectacular failure. For example, a voluminous report commissioned by the European Union has shown that 85% of offsets failed to reduce emissions. (3) Further, it has been estimated that for just one oil company, Shell, to offset its continued fossil-fuel activity by planting trees would require a forest the size of Brazil. (4) And, in this regard, ecologist Dr. Bonnie Waring summarizes her forest research with the following warning:

"But the fact is that there aren't enough trees to offset society's carbon emissions – and there never will be....If we absolutely maximized the amount of vegetation all land on Earth could hold, we'd sequester enough carbon to offset about ten years of greenhouse gas emissions at current rates. After that, there could be no further increase in carbon capture." (5)

Thus, the need to radically reduce greenhouse gas

emissions now.

Looking to technology for salvation

President Biden's special presidential envoy for climate, John Kerry, confessed as much when he told the April "Leaders Summit on Climate" the following:

"You said twice, getting to net zero is going to be hard, really hard. And just remind everybody that it will depend on whether or not we have breakthrough technologies, some breakthrough inventions ... " (6)

Well, yes. Driven to profit until their doom, the polluters and their political supporters have long looked to technological innovations that would allow them to continue with business as usual. Some of these, like inventing large machines to suck CO₂ from the air, seem far down the road. But in order to reach their goal of reaching zero net emissions, the polluters have seriously been working on two innovations for years, Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) and its spin-off, Bioenergy Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS). The results have not been good.

CCS involves capturing CO₂ from smoke stacks and transporting a liquefied form of it to suitable geological storage sites. But except for a small demonstration project, this has never been done. Moreover, it is tremendously expensive. The theory behind BECCS is to grow trees or other crops that suck carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, burn their pellets in power stations in order to produce electricity, capture the CO₂ emissions from the smokestacks and then bury the compressed CO₂ deeply in the earth. Moreover, the BECCS proponents hold up the government-subsidized Drax power station in England as the model of what can be done. But besides burning wood pellets instead of coal, it has done very little to help the environment while doing a lot to harm it. For example, during the decade and more that it has been burning wood pellets, except for a tiny experimental project, it has captured no emissions. In fact, the owners now say the first carbon capture unit **could** be operational by 2027, and it needs six units. (They don't say when they'll be ready to implement their plan to bury the compressed CO₂ in abandoned North Sea oil wells.) What's more, Drax has had to ship in its wood pellets from as far away as western Canada and the southeastern United States, as well as from Estonia, Latvia and Portugal. But mono-culture tree plantations decrease biodiversity, and logging to supply Drax with pellets is having a devastating overall impact on Baltic forests in particular. (7)

Moreover, since the Drax plant only produces six or seven per cent of England's electricity, how much land would have to be devoted to tree plantations globally for Bioenergy Carbon Capture and Storage

to do what its proponents claim it would do? Well, estimates range from an area the size of Australia to an area the size of the Indian subcontinent to an area twice the size of the Indian subcontinent. That does not leave much room for planting multi-species forests with the intent of letting them grow for hundreds of years in order to capture CO₂, as well as for many other reasons.

Large and sustained cuts in human-caused greenhouse gas emissions must be made rapidly

In April, three well-known scientists, including a former Chair of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released an article denouncing what has been done under the banner of achieving zero net emissions. (8) Among the many things they argue are that "The idea of net zero has licensed a recklessly cavalier 'burn now, pay later' approach which has seen carbon emissions continue to soar...Current net zero policies will not keep warming to within 1.5°C because they were never intended to. They were and still are driven by a need to protect business as usual, not the climate...In principle there is nothing wrong or dangerous about carbon dioxide removal proposals. The problems come when it is assumed that these can be deployed at vast scale. This effectively serves as a blank check for the continued burning of fossil fuels and the acceleration of habitat destruction..."

Well, achieving net zero would be progress, but many of the largest polluting corporations in the world are pledging to achieve zero net emissions while at the same time increasing their emissions. For example, the UK aviation industry has pledged a net zero target while at the same time planning to expand Heathrow Airport (one of the world's busiest) and to increase overall flight numbers. What they're all gambling on is that some day, some way, someone will come up with a technology that removes their greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere. But from our side, it would be ludicrous to stake the future of billions of people on such a gamble.

We need a radical movement fighting for real solutions

Such a movement must fight for a quick reduction of

human-caused greenhouse gas emissions, and it cannot concern itself with the profits of the coal, oil and gas companies.

Nor can this movement concern itself with the wealth of the capitalists more generally. Trillions of dollars are going to be needed to feed and house tens of millions and then hundreds of millions of climate refugees all over the globe, trillions more to pay for defending coastlines from rising seas and for other vast infrastructure projects, trillions more for radical changes in industry and agriculture, etc. The rich should be forced to bear the burden of these costs, not the working people.

Such a movement must demand that governments go over to economic planning and regulation that is transparent and has teeth. For example, there must be a plan for such things as how much fossil fuel production can be ordered shut down each year as it is replaced by renewables, and for where the fired workers will get new jobs. These things cannot be left to the market or to vague promises about green jobs, there have to be such jobs waiting.

What's more, the masses of people must demand that their voices be heard in all government planning and regulation, and they must rely on street and other mass actions whether or not they're allowed into meetings. There is no other way to defend against the bureaucrats, technocrats and politicians ignoring the interests of the indigenous peoples, national minorities and the broad working class.

Meanwhile, from this framework we should support all efforts of environmentalists to get better organized, as well as support ongoing struggles like the fight to stop the logging of the remaining old growth forests on Vancouver Island (Fairy Creek) and the fight against Enbridge's expansion of Line 3 in order to pipe more Alberta tar sands oil across Minnesota to Superior, Wisconsin. (9)

For notes, see original article at <http://www.comunistvoice.org/DSWV-210818.html>

Read *Communist Voice!* CV is a journal of revolutionary theory. It exposes the capitalist system, and also tackles controversies facing activists. It upholds real Marxism-Leninism, which has nothing in common with the false "communist" regimes like the former Soviet Union, or China and Cuba, or with Trotskyism, Stalinism or Maoism. **For more articles on the environmental crisis, see <http://communistvoice.org/00SavingThePlanet.html> and <http://communistvoice.org/New.html>.**