

Rise to fight for the Climate!

As the earth heats up, the main cause, fossil fuel emissions, hit an all-time high in 2017. The acceleration of warming caused by the release of the potent greenhouse gas methane from the warming Arctic tundra and sea looms. Western forests and grasslands have dried out, resulting in record wildfire seasons up and down the coast, two years in a row in British Columbia. These fires have not only destroyed the natural environment and harmed peoples health due to smoke inhalation, but they've *nearly tripled* B.C.'s annual carbon footprint. Furthermore, these kinds of alarming events are taking place when the world's annual temperature has warmed just 0.54° C, *not* the 1.5°C to 2°C limit on warming talked about in the Paris Climate Agreement. And we have a monstrous enemy of the environment in the White House.

But everywhere people have been rising in mass struggles to stop pipeline construction, fracking, refinery expansion, coal trains and coal ports, the Tacoma LNG plant, and more. Alongside this, people have been fighting against privatizing and poisoning earth's water (including lead-poisoning), against plastic poisoning of the oceans, and on other environmental issues. These fights show the need to further integrate the struggles against carbon emissions with the struggles against other environmental poisoning and wrecking. Further, in conditions where Trump is arrogantly tearing up environmental regulations in defiance of mass opposition, they show the importance of the ongoing fights on regulation.

This overall situation underscores the timeliness and importance of the “Rise for Climate September 8” marches. The majority of the people know that burning fossil fuels must be rapidly and dramatically decreased. They know fossil fuels must be replaced with renewable energy sources. They know the polluting industries fight against this in order to defend their money-making. And

everyone wants action with results. But what are the results we're seeing?

The world's governments and politicians, liberal and conservative alike, continue to pursue failing market solutions to the great crisis that is upon us. The issue is that while market measures may reduce greenhouse gas emissions a little, they've failed to achieve *sufficient* reductions. For example, after 13 years of carbon trading (“cap and trade”)¹, various European Union countries now admit they won't meet their 2020 goals. Now, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund—famous for imposing austerity upon the working people in poor countries in order to bail out the interests of the rich—have been pushing another market measure: carbon pricing, or the carbon tax, and it has been implemented in several countries. But the carbon tax¹ has also failed to achieve sufficient emissions reductions. What about the carbon fee being backed by mainstream environmentalists and Governor Inslee?

Initiative 1631: an environmental injustice that won't adequately reduce emissions

Well, with some important exemptions,² it requires major polluters to pay a fee for each ton of carbon dioxide they release into the atmosphere beginning in 2020, and with increases every year until 2035. But it's a regressive fee because big oil will largely pass it onto the consumer by raising fuel prices in order to maintain profits,³ with the first year's increase estimated to be 13-14 cents per gallon of gas. But these higher gas prices aren't going to radically reduce its usage. In British Columbia, for example, the 10-year-old carbon tax has indeed raised the price of gasoline. And the result has been that while *per capita* sales have fallen, *overall* petrol sales have risen.

The “compensation” for making the people pay, not the polluters, is that the state guesses that the initiative will bring in roughly \$2.2 billion in its first five years. This money will no doubt go to

many projects that are worthy and needed, including to wind and solar power. But \$440 million per annum minus administrative costs is not a lot of money (the state budget is over 100 times that amount), and overall the initiative won't achieve the needed reduction of green house gas emissions. Look at Europe: There the gasoline prices are much higher than anything I-1631 would bring about. They've also long invested more revenue in wind and solar power and mass transit systems than I-1631 would. They also usually have much stricter building codes and other regulations that save energy or stop pollution than in Washington. And in addition to carbon trading, some countries now have carbon taxes. But carbon emissions are *still too high*. After some leveling off, E.U. carbon emissions grew 1.8% in 2017, and in June the largest polluter, Germany, conceded that it is on course to widely miss its 2020 emissions target.

Thus, if Initiative 1631 passes the results won't be enough, and the struggle against climate change and other environmental crises will continue. Could carbon pricing be done better? We don't think so. Carbon taxes or fees are an attempt to avoid direct regulation, and, moreover, they're inevitably so complicated that it puts corporate lobbyists in charge, while it's hard for activists to even know what a law contains. Instead, we think a key part of the continuing struggle to save the environment must be to force abandonment of the entire market-measure, save-the-polluters'-profits orientation that dominates the politics of both the Republicans and Democrats, and which is leading to ecological disaster.

An orientation that we should struggle for

Environmental activists cannot worry about infringing on the sacred profits of the polluters.

There must be more direct environmental regulations. And there must be environmental and economic planning that takes account of the

masses' livelihood. Leaving it to the market to "manage" the closure of whole industries and the start of new ones, the creation of mass transit systems that go everywhere, the resettlement of millions of climate-change refugees, the rejuvenation and/or replacement of ruined croplands, and more, means disaster. (In this light, it's not enough to re-train laid off workers for green jobs that may exist sometime in the future. The jobs must either exist or these workers must be given income until they do. Otherwise a whole section of the working class is pitted against necessary environmental measures.) But there also must be mass mobilizations and fights to ensure mass involvement in the formulation and enforcement of regulations, to force them to be just and effective. As well, there must be fights for mass involvement in planning, and fights against plans that tread on the mass interests. And both require fighting environmental racism and defending treaty rights.

Mass participation in formulating environmental policy under capitalism will always be very limited, but the developing climatic crisis is showing we cannot wait until after the socialist revolution to begin fighting for it. In this struggle we need to look towards the working class in its hundreds of millions, not the business world, as the bastion of environmental movement. <>

1. For more on the failures of carbon trading, see <http://www.comunistvoice.org/42cCarbonTax.html>. And for more on the failings of the carbon tax, see <http://www.comunistvoice.org/42cCarbonTax.html>
2. These exemptions include Boeing and aircraft fuel, exported fuel, big aluminum manufacturers like Alcoa, and the power and light companies.
3. The polluters may not be able to shift every cent of their fees onto the backs of consumers. This is probably a reason big oil has contributed about \$8.6 million to defeat the initiative. Another probable reason is that they don't want to see state revenue invested in wind and solar competition.

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