



WW COMMENTARY

A socialist view of climate crisis

By Otis Grotewohl

The summer of 2023 was recorded as the hottest summer, at least in a very long time, according to the European Union Climate Change Service. The average temperatures between the months of June and August were abnormally high in many parts of the world, surpassing previous records. In one alarming study, the global ocean saw the warmest daily surface temperature on record and had its warmest month overall. (Reuters, Sept. 7)

Despite this summer's scorching heat, some experts warn the summer of 2023 "may be the coolest summer" in comparison to what they believe is to come. Ashley Ward, director of the Heat Policy Innovation Hub at Duke University's Nicholas Institute for Energy, Environment & Sustainability, predicted: "It isn't beyond the scope of our imaginations to believe that this might be the coolest summer for the rest of our lives." (today.duke.edu, July 24)

The thought of increasing summer temperatures is scary for many working class and oppressed people who are directly impacted. Many UPS drivers have died as a result of heat exhaustion and lack of air conditioning. In late August, one 57-year-old Teamster died while making deliveries for UPS in Texas, where the heat was 101 degrees Fahrenheit. (HuffPost, Aug. 31) Nonunion delivery drivers tend to also lack air conditioning, but without representation, they cannot speak out without the risk of being fired.

The summer of 2023 faced the possibility of a major nation-wide strike led by the Teamsters against UPS. The strike was

averted when a contractual tentative agreement was reached in late July. One of the major victories of the agreement between the Teamsters and UPS is for the company to require in-cab air conditioning in most UPS delivery vehicles purchased after Jan. 1, 2024.

Heat is detrimental for other workers, as well. Many migrant workers and incarcerated workers are especially impacted by high temperatures.

Wildfires and other disasters

The summer of 2023 also saw an epidemic of wildfires in Canada that are still wreaking havoc. The fires started in late April in the western provinces of British Columbia and Alberta, displacing more than 30,000 people at their peak. (Reuters, Aug. 19)

Wildfires in Quebec, Ontario and Nova Scotia were particularly unusual this year. The wildfires have harmed and displaced Indigenous communities and taken the lives of at least six people, including four firefighters.

The fires in Quebec and Ontario also affected the air quality of cities and towns throughout the East Coast and Midwest in the U.S. At one point, people in New York City witnessed a dense orange sky as a result of the smoke that was carrying over from Canada. People were discouraged from going outside as the smoke in the air was potentially hazardous for people with asthma and other respiratory issues.

Wildfires also plagued working class and oppressed people in Hawai'i, particularly Native Hawaiians, this summer. While





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no one knows the definite cause of the fires in Hawai'i, many experts say that the wildfires' devastation is due to a mix of high temperatures, strong winds from a Category 4 storm near the islands, and drought conditions that dried out grasses, all of which are undoubtedly tied to the climate crisis. (Time, Aug. 15)

Information also came out "implicating the privately owned utility Hawaiian Electric, which left its poorly maintained power lines running despite the threat of fire. Preliminary data have identified critical faults in other Hawaiian Electric lines at the sites of the major fires." (Workers.org, Aug. 22)

Severe storms also caused flooding and other devastation in the U.S. and around the world, including thousands of lives lost in the coastal city of Derma, Libya. In July, Montpelier, Vermont, received a record breaking 5.28 inches of rain, flooding the city and damaging thousands of homes. (noaa.gov, Aug. 8).

Socialist revolution is best solution to climate crisis

There are forces on the right who deny the existence of the climate crisis, but their ignorance only benefits the class interests of billionaire industrialists and big business.

During the Republican Primary debates on Aug. 23, GOP candidate Vivek Ramaswamy ridiculously claimed, "The reality is more people are dying of bad climate change policies than they are of actual climate change." Ramaswamy's statement does not align with scientific facts or reality, but he received applause, nonetheless.

A recent poll shows that 71% of people in the U.S. believe the climate crisis is a dangerous threat. (axios.com, Aug. 15) Many

progressive-minded people have different ideas about how to combat the climate crisis.

For Marxists, the future of the planet and the climate crisis depends highly on which class owns the means of production. Technology and automation, including artificial intelligence (AI), can be helpful to advance material conditions of the working class, but only if the devices, gadgets and programs are owned and operated by the working class. Under capitalism, technology and automation, especially AI, are a disaster for working people and have a reputation of being job killers.

In contrast to capitalist countries, technology in socialist countries, such as China and Cuba, is used to benefit people. While capitalist countries use technology to help the wealthy few, Cuba sends doctors around the world. China is expanding green technology at home while assisting with the building of infrastructure in many African countries, with the use of technology.

No one truly knows with 100% certainty what future summers will be like. As Sam Marcy, founder of Workers World Party, would often say, "Marxists don't have a crystal ball," meaning we cannot predict the future.

At the same time, as dialectical materialists, we do look at scientific evidence to reach conclusions. Studies show that climate change is due to the burning of fossil fuels that create greenhouse gas emissions and trap the sun's heat and provoke temperatures to rise. (Greenly Institute, Aug. 8)

Climate change started with the large extraction and burning of natural resources, such as oil, gas and coal, in the late 1800s. Resource extraction and consumer use led to an increase of carbon dioxide in the air. The plundering of Indigenous lands was conducted for the sake of profits, and irreparable damage was done in the process of stealing minerals for capital gains.

Unusual and abnormal weather conditions are a painful reminder of the harm inflicted upon the Earth. While a lot of the destruction may be irreversible, any revolt or struggle against corporations responsible for environmental devastation is a step forward. Unity among environmental and labor activists is important because our class enemy is the same.

Due to the severity of the climate crisis, an anti-capitalist and pro-working class response is most needed. The only way to truly ensure a sustainable ecosystem and put a halt to the ongoing crisis is to put a stop to the very same profit-driven system responsible for the crisis. □

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