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UN climate change conference

Mobilize for NYC Environmental Actions, Sept. 19-23

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UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon has called a special Climate Summit at United Nations Headquarters in New York City on September 23, 2014. This meeting, which is in addition to the annual UN Climate Change Conferences within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is intended to “mobilize action and ambition on climate change”. Because this event will take place during the annual UN General Assembly meeting, Ban can expect a large number of heads of state to attend, as well as the “business, finance, civil society and local leaders” that he has invited.

The UN has played a vital role in funding the science that, through the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, establishes beyond reasonable doubt the catastrophic consequences of climate change and its human origins. With respect to concrete action to halt climate change, however, the UN's track record looks more like its rate of success at “peacekeeping”. Given the scale of the problem, the various agreements that have been reached, in particular the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Copenhagen Accord (2009), have modest goals and at best would fail to even stabilize greenhouse gas emissions at their current level. Worse yet, the agreements are either non-binding or have not been ratified by key players (for example, the United States in the case of the Kyoto Protocol). The problem of course is that agreements with any teeth are routinely sabotaged by the powerful countries.

Given this litany of failure and a growing left tradition of disrupting the business-as-usual mentality of international gatherings of the powerful, UN climate change conferences have often been the scene for protests of various sorts, including walkouts by environmental NGOs (for example, in Warsaw, 2013), marches and direct actions (most notably in Copenhagen, 2010), and alternative summits (Copenhagen, 2010 and later that year in Cochabamba, Bolivia).

This tradition will continue in New York City this September; in fact some are predicting the largest gathering of climate activists in history. A coalition of hundreds of organizations, spearheaded by 350.org, is planning a People's Climate March for Sunday, September 21. The organizers call for activists “to demand ... a world with an economy that works for people and the planet; a world safe from the ravages of climate change; a world with good jobs, clean air and water, and healthy communities.” It's encouraging that “good jobs” is part of the call, and significantly, 36 labor organizations (at last count) have signed on to the event. Solidarity and System Change Not Climate Change are also on the list of endorsers.

In his June article in Rolling Stone calling on people to participate in the Climate March, 350.org leader Bill McKibben notably calls for “changing the system that's powering our destruction”. But the “system” he's talking about changing is not capitalism itself. As important as the march will be, it will not provide a space for the articulation of radical, anti-capitalist perspectives on the environmental crisis. To complement the march and provide such a space, System Change not Climate Change and the Global Climate Convergence coalition are partnering to organize the NYC Climate Convergence: People, Planet, and Peace over Profit, to take place on the evening of Friday, September 19 and all day Saturday, September 20. The organizers are clear where they stand on the UN framework: “As the corporate captured UN proposes false solutions like carbon trading and sets meager greenhouse reduction targets, we will show the world what tackling global warming from the bottom up looks like.” They are also clear on what the real problem is: “an economic system that exploits people and the planet for profit”. Solidarity was one of the first organizations to endorse the Climate Convergence.

The organizers have invited speakers for the opening and closing plenaries that represent the environmental justice movement in North America as well as in the Global South. The Program Committee of the Convergence is now

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accepting proposals for workshops and teach-ins for the conference, and the Ecosocialist Working Group of Solidarity is considering a range of topics for submissions.

The Climate March and Climate Convergence in New York City in September offer an unprecedented opportunity for North American ecosocialists to participate in and build the broad coalition that will be required to forestall the disastrous effects of climate change and environmental degradation, to create links with grassroots climate justice organizations in the North and South, and to convince receptive members of the mainstream environmental movement that our common enemy is the capitalist system itself. Solidarity members are urged to spread the word about the events in NYC, to attend the Climate Convergence on September 19 and 20, and to join the System Change not Climate Change contingent in the Climate March on September 21.