

Capitalism Climate Crisis – Summary

The current ecological crisis has reached new heights. Forest fires on a gigantic scale and the COVID-19 pandemic, which are the result of capitalist overexploitation of nature, speak for themselves. The crisis has long since become global, and irreversible tipping points of the climate system threaten to trigger uncontrollable domino effects.

It is to the credit of *Fridays for Future* that the drama of the climate crisis has been brought into the general discourse. The young environmental movement has so far focused on appealing to political reason and referring to the scientific facts of the crisis. As “politics” is not making any effort to change anything, it is time to ask “why.” In its most general form: “Why is nature being destroyed in the first place?”

Human life can only exist through metabolism with nature. This metabolism, however, has taken different shapes in the history of mankind. Today, nothing is produced if there is no prospect of profit behind it. The fact that production is not guided by the needs of life but driven by profit is characteristic of our capitalist society. The drive of capital for profit is in principle boundless, and the forces of nature are misused as free or cheaper factors. Capital strives for market shares and the highest possible profit. It is subject to the compulsion to grow to stay ahead of its pursuers or at least keep pace with them. Wherever possible, capital must therefore exploit nature as a “free productive power.”

Even though everyone knows that humanity must stop burning coal, oil, and gas as soon as possible, this simply cannot happen under capitalist conditions, for capitalism only makes sense if it generates more and more profit. Nature is only a resource and a dumping ground. Its limitations cannot be considered in this context. The technical solutions to replace fossil fuels with renewable energies have been available for a long time. However, this economic system does not produce enough of them in the short time available because there is not enough profit to be made. So, there is no technology problem, but rather a capital one! Even the state cannot find a remedy for this, because it does not want and must not put national capital at a competitive disadvantage on the world market. Investments, including those in coal, must be protected to safeguard the overriding principle of capitalist ownership of the means of production. Therefore, in recent decades, all technical, market-leading, and/or administrative methods of achieving the necessary reduction in greenhouse gases have failed.

“System change, not climate change!?” The merciless mechanism of profiteering is an expression of all social contexts—the “system” that must be changed! The conditions within this system are neither “natural” nor in accordance with the essence of the human being. They are simply social structures and conditions that have been created by human activity under certain historical conditions. In everyday life, these conditions may seem natural to us, but they can also be eliminated by humans.

The private ownership of work equipment is the reason why today all products are made for the market, that is, as commodities. Capitalist commodity production is not primarily concerned with the production of useful objects, but with market shares and profits. However, when it comes to the really important things—health, well-being, education—most people do not trust the laws of the market, especially when it comes to dangerous matters such as nuclear power. But why do we let market forces determine anything at all? Why not allow everyone to live well without a concern for capital, in a home, with good food, enough clothes, and culture? Today, money, markets, and profit interests govern our daily lives. Why not regulate them ourselves? We would have to plan democratically how many and which consumer goods our society needs and how much working time this costs society. These working hours would then have to be distributed among all members of society. We would have to determine which natural resources are needed for production and



which respective stocks or regeneration would be required? They would have to be produced for the needs of society and for the account of society. Under these conditions, we could plan how to stop using coal, oil, and gas as quickly as possible. Similarly, we could plan how to mine coveted raw materials and for which necessities they have to be used. Recycling processes could be perfected because the foundation would finally be created for humankind to use the laws of nature to maintain a beautiful environment. This would produce a sustainable consciousness from which truly sustainable action could spring.

However, this would require the elimination of private ownership of work equipment. Production would then no longer be regulated by exchange in the sense of buying and selling, but by conscious democratic decisions of the producers. The compulsion for growth and profit maximisation would be overcome. The trick would be a calculation of working hours for society as a whole, the basic measure of which would be the socially necessary average labor (time).

But the profit interests of the powerful prevent this urgently needed socio-ecological progress. The search for consensus and compromise is therefore for naught. Instead, other ways of working, building, and living, other forms of mobility would have to become the decisive questions of political debate—and this against the capitalist profit interests. Even the social distortions of capitalism are no longer bearable and cannot be separated from the ecological question. **Instead of closing ranks with leadership, the young environmental movement should therefore seek an alliance with the wage laborers—ecology as class struggle!**

Until now, the ecological issue has been perceived as something quite different. Not as an idea of how the majority of people can change their standard of living for the better, but as the lifestyle of a well-heeled and nutritionally conscious elite. This must stop! Instead of looking desperately at how to tackle the climate crisis individually as consumers, we need to organise joint movements. We must start by overcoming the profit economy. This includes immediate measures that have to be taken now—preferably today—in our society. Overcoming the compulsive growth society and implementing immediate measures are mutually dependent. These emergency measures must represent a socio-ecological turnaround, targeting capitalist property, which has so far prevented such a turnaround. To this end, the following examples could be realised:

- Coal phase-out by 2025 at the latest with compensation only for (former) workers.
- A massive expansion of renewable energies.
- The obligation to renovate housing to make it more energy efficient, with a ban on rent increases.
- The shifting of agricultural subsidies in favour of organic farming with high environmental requirements.
- The declaration of all forests as protected areas without compensation.
- Free public transport and a massive reactivation of disused railway lines.
- Freight transport on the railways.
- The abolition of all tax advantages for individual, motorised transport
- Strict speed limits.
- Personalised contingents for long-distance flights.
- Bringing climate protection into (work) meetings.
- And, as free time is the real wealth, the introduction of the 30-hour work week with full wage compensation, and a minimum wage of 16 Euros must be demanded.

The climate crisis knows no boundaries and the struggle for socio-ecological emancipation is ultimately a global issue. But Germany, where the authors are from, plays an important role on the

world market. It is the strongest economic power within the European Union, and Germany is the world champion in burning lignite and being an export-oriented “car country.” **It is therefore worth throwing down the gauntlet to capitalism in Germany, even if the wider perspective must be European and ultimately global.** Instead of seeking a consensus with politicians who represent the logic of the current social order, or individual capital fractions, it is important to radically question this social order itself. The urgently needed socio-ecological progress is a matter of a socio-ecological class struggle and ultimately of the free association of producers.