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Protesters from the “Just Stop Oil” organisation were carried away last week from the M25 (a ring road that circles London) by the police after four days of disruption on the busy motorway [1]. This was the latest in a string of protests organised this year, reminiscent of similar campaigns carried out by Extinction Rebellion internationally in the past few years. “Just Stop Oil” attracted public attention last month by throwing soup on a Van Gogh painting [2], spraying paint on various luxury car offices, and tying themselves to a goalpost during a football match [3] as well as other road blockages. What is this organisation and how do their actions effect that which they seek to protest?

Their principal demand, as stated on their webpage, is “That the UK government makes a statement that it will immediately halt all future licensing and consents for the exploration, development and production of fossil fuels in the UK.” [4]. Despite previous declarations promising to lower carbon emissions to the Paris Agreement target by 2030, and achieve net zero emissions by 2050, the UK government plans to license the opening of more than 100 new oil and gas licenses to companies looking to set up operations in the North Sea over the coming year [5]. In addition, the government continues to offer subsidies and tax breaks to fossil fuel monopolists and energy barons (and capitalists in general).

Due to the recent aggravation of class contractions in the UK, spurred on by the cost of living crisis and double digit inflation, the workers’ movement is seeing a revival and with it the number of strikes and protests have drastically increased over the past year. In the wake of this, not only has the government passed laws making the use of strike-breakers easier and the process of balloting for a strike harder, but they have also passed a law that gives itself the right to repress any protest it subjectively deems “disruptive” [6]. On top of this rising working class unrest, the youth environmentalist movement is gaining in supporters.

While “Just Stop Oil” is a very new organisation, only founded earlier this year, many comparable organisations have popped up over the last few years and also grabbed headlines with similar public spectacles and acts of civil disobedience also focused on climate action – like “Extinction Rebellion” and “Insulate Britain”. The climate crisis is indeed a real and serious one, and decisive action must be taken to avert it. However, displays by “Just Stop Oil” and many others like it are futile at best – and directly harmful to the construction of a real revolutionary movement that has the ability and will to affect such drastic action at worst.

These groups do not seek to understand the true causes of the climate crisis and their interconnection with the crisis in the cost of living – their capitalist basis. They do not seek a real campaign against this cause, to form any deep connection with the masses, to expand their ranks within the workers in the energy sector specifically and labour movement in general. They do not wish to partake in the thankless and tedious work of building class consciousness; explaining to the workers the nature of the system of production they live under and their place within it. Instead of explaining to the energy sector workers that it is their surplus value – their labour – that is the basis for wealth of the energy sector capitalists (the same wealth that they use to control the state to rule in their interest and to continue issuing them oil and gas licenses, subsidies, and tax breaks) these eco-activist groups try to deceive the workers they have not already alienated with phrases about “political non-partisanship”, emotional outbursts of political media spectacle, and reformism within the existing property relations and political

hierarchy.

In the class society under which we live, to remain “apolitical” is to concede that the workers can have no say in production and consequent emissions are equally at fault with the owners who have all the say. As a substitute for building a powerful labour movement to the point at which Soviets (workers’ councils) can be formed, where the workers consolidate enough strength and power into their collective hands as a class to be able to meaningfully oppose the machinations of the capitalist government (and even form a government of their own), these people seek to continue tying and gluing themselves to things until the capitalist government pays lip service to their demand. The utter toothlessness of these organisations in terms of real ability to affect change by threatening the system that prevents it, is demonstrated by the fact that they receive millions of pounds in donations from capitalists – notably the daughter of oil billionaire J. Paul Getty [7].

The UK lacks a real communist party to lead the labour movement and the progressive elements of the masses straining to be heard. Only a centralized Leninist party such as this can ensure the ideological constancy of Marxism-Leninism within the movement, the only philosophy which reflects the interests of the working class to forwardly address their problems. As a result, more and more people, who are disillusioned with the system and rightfully furious at the capitalists’ treatment of the planet will be drawn into and become enraptured by the petty-bourgeois ideology and mentality that is so frequently disseminated in popular media and prompted to join organisations like “Just Stop Oil” which are funded by the energy monopolies– leading to more of these acts of eco-adventurism – which we have seen already do not affect real change, or build up the power of those who stand with them against corporate pollution and climate change denialism. Spectacular performances are a spiritual revival of the old anarchist dictum “propaganda of the deed”, the belief that inspiring acts done by individuals can awaken the revolutionary consciousness of the mass, however we have previously demonstrated the harm of this , and you can also read our full criticism of this movement in our critique of eco-activism and eco-socialism.

Sources: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7,

Original article