COP 30: Entrenching the crisis of climate politics

As the dust settles after COP30 in Belém, the scale of the failure becomes impossible to ignore. The world is on a path toward catastrophic warming, ecological systems are collapsing, and millions across the Global South face annihilation, not in the distant future, but today. The world's political and economic elites arrived in the Amazon to negotiate when the 1.5°C target had already slipped out of reach, and they left with little more than symbolic gestures. No binding emissions cuts. No serious plan to phase out fossil fuels. No meaningful climate finance for adaptation. No accountability for the destruction already unleashed.

The gap between official international climate policy and the lived reality of a warming world has never been wider. In Belém, that gap became a chasm.

The world is heading towards roughly 2.8°C of warming by the end of the century. This is not a scenario compatible with human dignity – or even, for many, with life itself. Rising seas, extreme heat, drought, and flooding are eroding food security, displacing communities, and driving inequality to historic heights. The economic costs of climate disasters are skyrocketing, but the social and human costs are immeasurable: lives lost, livelihoods shattered, ecosystems irreversibly damaged.

These worsening crises play out in a world shaped by neoliberal austerity and debt dependency. Countries battling climate shocks are forced to cut social spending, privatise public goods, and surrender sovereignty to creditors. Governments continue pouring billions into militaries, fossil fuel subsidies, and the enrichment of corporate elites. The current political economy accelerates both warming and war.

The growing irrelevance of the COP

COP30 offered no mechanisms for enforcement, no firm deadlines, and no clear pathways to keep warming below 1.5°C. Nor did it include a fossil-fuel phase-out; oil-producing nations blocked binding language, and the final deal focused on voluntary road maps instead. What it did offer was an expanded space for corporate actors, carbon traders, and mining interests seeking to greenwash extractivist projects.

What is staring society in the face – and what too few scientists are willing to acknowledge – is that the climate-crisis regime cannot be separated from the logic of capitalism. So-called "green transitions" simply open new arenas for profit while remaining embedded in the same global system of accumulation. Renewable energy may be expanding, but it does not replace fossil fuels; it merely adds to an energy expansion rather than driving a real transition.

Climate summits have become a "safety valve" for capital. They offer the illusion of action, while allowing the core exploitative relations to continue. For workers and communities already suffering climate breakdown, it is indisputable that the COP has failed them.

The Just Transition heist

COP 30 adopted the Belem Action Mechanism for a Global Just Transition (BAM) – a proposed new institutional arrangement under the UNFCCC designed to address the current fragmentation and inadequacy of global just transition efforts. Trade unionists and workers should have no illusions about this mechanism. It has no finances or concrete plans to protect workers and communities affected by energy and other decarbonising initiatives. There are no resources for a re-industrialisation in harmony with the protection of nature. So workers and other vulnerable sectors will simply be left behind. Words and policies in COP statements are a dime a

dozen. Reality is harsher.

Why mass movements matter – and why institutions don't

If COP30 cannot deliver the mechanisms for decarbonisation or social protection, then the hope must lie in movements of people: workers, peasants, indigenous people, women, youth, and the urban poor. Outside of a global mass movement rooted in national realities, the necessary steps to confront the climate crisis will not occur. Yet such a movement cannot be built if it fails to address the immediate needs of the working classes and the poor. The fight for climate protection and ecological justice must therefore begin with the fight for life itself – for clean water, decent housing, jobs, food, and security against the elements.

Right-wing climate denialists exploit the desperation of the poor to drive a wedge between ordinary people and climate action. They present environmentalism as a threat to livelihoods rather than the path to survival. To win the majority, our movement must link ecological transformation with social justice. We must demand the redistribution of wealth and power away from the billionaire class, big tech, and ruling elites who plunder the planet for profit.

By Brian Ashley, First Published in Amandla!, 25 November 2025

Brian Ashley is a member of Zabalaza for Socialism and serves on the Amandla! editorial collective