

# 2023 was hottest year on record, close to 1.5°C

Every day was over a degree above the pre-industrial level, writes the [Climate & Capitalism blog](#).

The European Commission's [Copernicus Climate Change Service \(C3S\)](#) says 2023 was the first year on with all days over 1°C warmer than the pre-industrial period.

Unprecedented global temperatures from June onwards led 2023 to become the warmest year on record – overtaking by a large margin 2016, the previous warmest year. The 2023 Global Climate Highlights report presents a general summary of 2023's most relevant climate extremes and the main drivers behind them.

C3S Director Carlo Buontempo comments:

“The extremes we have observed over the last few months provide a dramatic testimony of how far we now are from the climate in which our civilization developed. This has profound consequences for the Paris Agreement and all human endeavor's. If we want to successfully manage our climate risk portfolio, we need to urgently decarbonize our economy whilst using climate data and knowledge to prepare for the future.”

## Global surface air temperature highlights

- 2023 is confirmed as the warmest calendar year in global temperature data records going back to 1850.
- 2023 had a global average temperature of 14.98°C, 0.17°C higher than the previous highest annual value in 2016.
- 2023 was 0.60°C warmer than the 1991-2020 average and 1.48°C warmer than the 1850-1900 pre-industrial level.
- It is likely that a 12-month period ending in January or February 2024 will exceed 1.5°C above the pre-industrial

level.

- 2023 marks the first time on record that every day within a year has exceeded 1°C above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial level. Close to 50% of days were more than 1.5°C warmer than the 1850-1900 level, and two days in November were, for the first time, more than 2°C warmer.
- Annual average air temperatures were the warmest on record, or close to the warmest, over sizeable parts of all ocean basins and all continents except Australia.
- Each month from June to December in 2023 was warmer than the corresponding month in any previous year.
- July and August 2023 were the warmest two months on record. Boreal summer (June-August) was also the warmest season on record.
- September 2023 was the month with a temperature deviation above the 1991–2020 average larger than any month in the ERA5 dataset.
- December 2023 was the warmest December on record globally, with an average temperature of 13.51°C, 0.85°C above the 1991-2020 average and 1.78°C above the 1850-1900 level for the month. You can access information specific for December 2023 in our monthly bulletin.

## **Ocean surface temperature highlights**

- Global average sea surface temperatures (SSTs) remained persistently and unusually high, reaching record levels for the time of year from April through December.
- 2023 saw a transition to El Niño. In spring 2023, La Niña came to an end and El Niño conditions began to develop, with the WMO declaring the onset of El Niño in early July.
- High SSTs in most ocean basins, and in particular in the North Atlantic, played an important role in the record-breaking global SSTs.
- The unprecedented SSTs were associated with marine

heatwaves around the globe, including in parts of the Mediterranean, Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and North Pacific, and much of the North Atlantic.

### **European temperature highlights**

- 2023 was the second-warmest year for Europe, at 1.02°C above the 1991-2020 average, 0.17°C cooler than 2020, the warmest year on record.
- Temperatures in Europe were above average for 11 months during 2023 and September was the warmest September on record.
- European winter (December 2022 – February 2023) was the second-warmest winter on record.
- The average temperature for the European summer (June-August) was 19.63°C; at 0.83°C above average, it was the fifth-warmest on record.
- European autumn (September-November) had an average temperature of 10.96°C, which is 1.43°C above average. This made autumn the second-warmest on record, just 0.03°C cooler than autumn 2020.

### **Other remarkable highlights**

- 2023 was remarkable for Antarctic sea ice: it reached record low extents for the corresponding time of the year in 8 months. Both the daily and monthly extents reached all-time minima in February 2023.
- Arctic sea ice extent at its annual peak in March ranked amongst the four lowest for the time of the year in the satellite record. The annual minimum in September was the sixth-lowest.
- The atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane continued to increase and reached record levels in 2023, reaching 419 ppm and 1902 ppb respectively. Carbon dioxide concentrations in 2023 were 2.4 ppm higher than in 2022 and methane concentrations increased by 11 ppb.

- A large number of extreme events were recorded across the globe, including heatwaves, floods, droughts and wildfires. Estimated global wildfire carbon emissions in 2023 increased by 30% with respect to 2022 driven largely by persistent wildfires in Canada, greenhouse gas concentrations, El Niño and other natural variations.

First published by Climate & Capitalism:  
<https://climateandcapitalism.com/2024/01/09/2023-was-hottest-year-on-record-close-to-1-5c/>

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# The Hydrogen Economy – yet another mirage

Sean Thompson writes on [Red Green Labour](#):

Over the past few years, much has been made (particularly by fossil fuel industry lobbyists) of the potential for the development of a 'hydrogen economy'. The great attraction of hydrogen to the proponents of the status quo, whether Tory or Labour, is that it feeds into their fantasies about 'green growth' – a lower carbon version of business as usual. Hydrogen, it is claimed, could replace fossil fuels as an energy source, not only for energy intensive heavy industries like steel and glass production but also for powering cars, public transport, aviation and home heating. However, as the estimable Ben Goldacre said of other sensational claims "I think you'll find it's more complicated than that."

Hydrogen comes in three colours:

- Grey: Hydrogen produced from a natural gas feedstock.

- Blue: Hydrogen produced from a natural gas feedstock with capture of the by-product CO<sub>2</sub>.
- Green: Hydrogen produced by splitting water molecules through electrolysis using renewable energy sources

According to the International Energy Agency, 95 million tonnes (Mt) of hydrogen is produced worldwide and 99% is 'grey'. In 2022, hydrogen production generated more than 900 Mt of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions – more than the entire global aviation industry footprint of almost 800 Mt. At the same time, less than 0.1 per cent of the world's hydrogen production (less than 0.08 Mt) was green hydrogen.

In the run-up to COP28, its president, Al Jaber, Minister of Industry and Advanced Technology of the United Arab Emirates and head of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC), repeatedly urged agreement by governments to almost double current global hydrogen production from 95 Mt to 180 Mt per year by 2030. Reaching that goal with green hydrogen would require a 2,068-fold production increase in seven years. This is, to say the least, a highly unlikely scenario, so the reality would be a massive boom in grey hydrogen and good news for ADNOC and the rest of the fossil fuel industry.

The idea that green hydrogen can replace the energy currently provided by fossil fuels for most transport and for domestic heating/cooling is fanciful in the extreme. Even more fanciful is the suggestion currently being promoted by aviation industry lobbyists that hydrogen might be used to power zero carbon flying, either by using it to manufacture yet to be discovered 'alternative' aviation fuels or via hydrogen fuel cells for electrically powered aircraft.

- A kilogram of hydrogen – the unit of measurement most often used – has an energy value of about 33.3 kWh. So a tonne of hydrogen delivers about 33 MWh and a million tonnes about 33 terawatt hours (TWh). To provide a sense of scale, the UK uses about 300 TWh of electricity a

year.

- Many estimates of the eventual demand for hydrogen are of at least 500 Mt. A world that requires 500 Mt of hydrogen will need to produce 22,000 TWh of green electricity a year just for this purpose. 22,000 TWh is roughly equivalent to 15% of total world primary energy demand, and today's global production from all wind and solar farms is a little more than 10% of this figure.
- A huge global increase in green energy generation capacity will thus be needed to produce 500Mt of hydrogen. As an example of the scale of increase needed, for every gigawatt of capacity, a well-sited North Sea wind farm will provide about 4,400 GWh a year, or 4.4 TWh. At a future efficiency level of about 75%, this will produce around 100,000 tonnes of hydrogen. Therefore most of the UK's current North Sea wind output from 13 GW of wind would be needed to make just one million tonnes of H<sub>2</sub>.
- The amount of electrolysis capacity required to make 500 million tonnes of hydrogen a year depends on how many hours a year that the electrolysers work and how efficient they are. If we assume an average of about 60% of the time, at a prospective 75% efficiency level, then the world will need around 4,500 gigawatts of electrolysis capacity – about five hundred times what is currently in place.

While the creation of such a vast new industry is clearly possible over a period of time, particularly if such an huge initiative isn't left to the hidden hand of the market or the not so hidden hands of the fossil fuel industry, it is clearly not possible in the time left to us to avoid global catastrophe. Nonetheless, the use of hydrogen and the development of green hydrogen production capacity will be essential if we are to move to a zero carbon economy – but because the supply of truly clean hydrogen is going to be limited – certainly for the next two or three decades – it

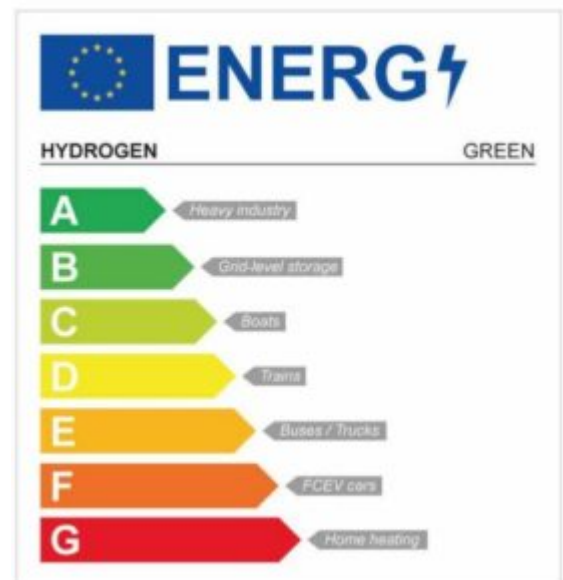
should be prioritised for uses where there are no alternatives.

In an analysis for Bloomberg in 2020, Michael Liebreich pointed out that hydrogen has serious limitations in many applications:

*“as an energy storage medium, it has only a 50% round-trip efficiency – far worse than batteries. As a source of work, fuel cells, turbines and engines are only 60% efficient – far worse than electric motors – and far more complex. As a source of heat, hydrogen costs four times as much as natural gas. As a way of transporting energy, hydrogen pipelines cost three times as much as power lines, and ships and trucks are even worse.”...“What this means is that hydrogen’s role in the final energy mix of a future net-zero emissions world will be to do things that cannot be done more simply, cheaply and efficiently by the direct use of clean electricity and batteries”*

The [UK] Government’s own Climate Change Committee (CCC) analysis in their [6th Carbon Budget Report](#), showed that hydrogen production is not the best use of renewable energy if it can be used in other ways, thus we should only use hydrogen where it is near-impossible to reduce demand or use electricity directly. As a leading analyst at CCC has put it: *“In our view, you should be looking to electrify wherever you can. Where that’s prohibitively expensive, or where that’s not feasible, that’s the role that you’re looking for hydrogen.”*

The EU Energy Cities network has actually put together [a hierarchy of uses for hydrogen](#) (see graphic) which seems a good starting point. A is use by energy intensive heavy industrial processes needing high temperature heat like steel, chemicals or glass, B is grid-level storage – storing otherwise ‘waste’ energy produced by off shore wind during periods of low electricity demand, C, D and E for powering heavy transport – shipping, trains and buses/HGVs respectively. Way down at F and G are hydrogen fuel cells for cars and home heating. Speculative technologies like synthetic aviation fuel don’t even figure on the list.



It’s important that an incoming Labour [UK] government doesn’t commit to high cost options involving blue – or even grey – hydrogen, which would suit the gas industry, but which would do little or nothing to reduce CO2 emissions. And it’s equally important that governments realise that, whilst green hydrogen is vital, it will not be available in infinite quantities and isn’t going to be a panacea for all the delivery challenges and investments that need to be made across buildings, transport and industry.

Despite this, both Tory and Labour politicians, along with a rag bag of lobbyists for various techno-fix solutions, from nuclear to carbon capture and sequestration and the wilder regions of geo-engineering, try to avoid the reality that there are no silver bullets that will somehow exempt capitalism from the laws of physics.

For example, in 2020, the Tory [UK] government launched its ‘Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution’, which included a commitment to investing up to £500m in new hydrogen



technologies. It claimed that the energy produced could be used *“to carry on living our lives, running our cars, buses, trucks and trains, ships and planes, and heating our homes while keeping bills low.”* It announced that as part of a trial of hydrogen heating, two ‘hydrogen villages’ of around 1,000-2,000 homes, in Whitby, near Ellesmere Port and Redcar, Teeside, where the homes would be converted to hydrogen for heating instead of natural gas. In July this year, the plans for the Whitby pilot were abandoned in the face of local opposition and in December the proposed Redcar pilot was also scrapped. This leaves National Grid’s £32m pilot project in Fife, where about 300 homes in Methil and neighbouring Buckhaven in Levenmouth were due to be converted from natural gas to hydrogen next year, as only remaining attempt in the UK by energy industry to show that hydrogen is a viable (and cost effective) alternative to natural gas for domestic heating. Unsurprisingly, the project is much delayed and there are doubts whether it will actually get going. Ofgem has warned that *“delay in the commencement of this project would materially impact the evidence base for an energy system transition to hydrogen as a means of decarbonising heat and industry”*.

Capitalism, dependent as it is on the constant and infinite expansion of the production of commodities, is being forced by the inescapable reality of climate change to move from denial to a (partial) recognition of the terrible price that humanity and the planet as a whole is beginning to have to pay. However, its enthusiasm for the mirage of ‘green growth’ is making it grab more and more desperately at technological straws – some of which, like green hydrogen, have the potential to actually play a valuable, if limited, role in combatting global heating.

Originally published on Red Green Labour:  
<https://redgreenlabour.org/2024/01/01/the-hydrogen-economy-yet-another-mirage/>

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# **The UK's suicidal Rosebank decision – Scotland needs a stronger response**

Rishi Sunak's scandalous decision to go ahead with the exploitation of the Rosebank oil and gas field, alongside Keir Starmer's cringe-worthy non-response – 'yes, we're opposed but no, we won't do anything about it' – has left the Scottish government and the SNP with an open goal. Unfortunately, Humza Yousaf and his Net Zero and Just Transition minister, Mairi McAllan, are being so careful not to blast the ball over the bar, they seem reluctant to kick it at all.

The desire seems to be there, sort of. After weeks of edging himself off the fence on the issue, the First Minister did say this was the wrong decision. Mairi McAllan said the same. The Scottish government's Energy Secretary, Neil Gray, said, rather tamely, that the SNP administration was "disappointed" while pointing out, correctly, that Rosebank would not contribute to 'energy security', as most of the oil produced would be sold abroad. In fact, Equinor, the Norwegian state oil company that has been given the go-ahead to exploit Rosebank, was more forceful in its dismissal of the bogus argument about energy security used by the Tory government in London and the oil lobby in Scotland. It said if the UK wanted any of the oil it plans to extract from Rosebank, it would have to buy it on the open world market.

The sound of opposition from SNP ministers is a lot weaker than that coming from Caroline Lucas, still the only Green MP in Westminster, who called it "morally obscene" and "a climate crime", or from the Scottish Green Party, the SNP's partner in

the Scottish government, whose spokesman, Mark Ruskell, called it an “utter catastrophe” that showed “total contempt for our environment and future generations”.

The day after the announcement, Mairi McAllan told the BBC’s Good Morning Scotland that the Scottish government had had “long-standing concerns” about Rosebank and had been “calling for a very strict climate compatibility test, an evidence-led test, to be applied”. When quizzed on what evidence was needed, she said there were a series of things that needed to be evaluated: firstly, whether it was in line with both Scotland and the UK’s climate commitments, including to the Paris Agreement and its goal of keeping global warming within 1.5 degrees Celsius; but also to things like energy security and the rights of workers in the northeast of Scotland.

We may agree these are vital concerns (although what exactly was meant by energy security could be controversial). However, insisting on them now seems pointless, unless it is just a rhetorical device to avoid saying clearly that no oil or gas should be extracted from Rosebank, or any other new field in the North Sea or elsewhere. We already know because we have been told, endlessly, by the scientists of the UN’s IPCC, by the International Energy Agency, and by Antonio Guterres himself, not to mention the climate justice movement across the world and thousands of representatives and experts from the Global South, that staying within the 1.5 limit is simply incompatible with any new oil or coal extraction, and that we also have to phase out, rapidly, the wells and mines that are currently operating.

Most recently and conclusively, we have also been told by the very oil company responsible (as we mentioned before) that Rosebank and any other new North Sea fossil fuel production will contribute more or less zero to any kind of energy security. And although there are many, justified fears among workers in the northeast, oil workers themselves have told researchers that they want to be involved in a just transition

away from fossil fuels. Some of them have begun to push for that themselves and to design what it might look like, through the important Our Power campaign.

The SNP government's problem is that it feels unable, or unwilling, to confront the oil lobbies or its right wing. It's unclear if the suspension of the right-wing, anti-Green, anti-woke MSP, Fergus Ewing, might signal a small shift in this respect. But the roots of such reluctance run deeper. They flow from the party's history and its character – as a nationalist party caught between its genuine, social democratic desire to build a fairer, more decent country, that seeks to combat poverty and exclusion at home and deal decently with migrants, the Global South and the planet, and its refusal to challenge or even query the iron laws of the market economy. The latter is cemented by its yearning to become a junior outpost of the supposedly progressive, European capitalist class.

This has been accentuated since the bruising leadership campaign at the beginning of the year, when Kate Forbes' explicitly right-wing, business-first, climate-light campaign came within a whisper of beating Humza Yousaf as bearer of the legacy of former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon.

The police investigation into the party's accounts a few weeks later, with the formal questioning of Sturgeon's husband and then herself, drove the process further. Whatever the reality, if any, behind the case, it was certainly used to try to discredit the SNP as a whole and to push the new Yousaf administration to the right.

Ironically, the central target of that campaign, Nicola Sturgeon herself, has come out more strongly against the Rosebank go-ahead than her proteges. She tweeted her agreement with Caroline Lucas calling the approval an act of environmental vandalism, and saying risks slowing the green transition that oil and gas workers need to happen at pace.

The fact is that a sizeable majority of people in Scotland want their government to take urgent action to combat climate change. And despite its constrained powers under devolution, there is a lot it can do too. Taking a clear, unequivocal stand against Rosebank and any other new fossil fuel projects in the North Sea would be a start. It would be one way of marking a clear difference with the pusillanimous position of Starmer's Labour leadership and might even help win the crucial Rutherglen election.

More strategically, that stance against any new oil and gas needs to be clearly stated in the Scottish government's long-overdue response to the public consultation on its seriously inadequate Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan, and built into its new Climate Change Plan, due to be published in November.

It should look at how it can use its existing powers – in areas like planning, transport, and health – to wage a guerrilla campaign against the implementation of new fossil fuel extraction.

And it could put in serious doubt the long-term viability of investments like those of Equinor, if it promised that any government of an independent Scotland would make a priority of nationalising and closing down Rosebank and any other new fields, without compensation.

Such bold action may seem unlikely, unless there is some serious pressure pushing in this direction.

We could all take courage from the historic success of the *Yes to Yasuni* campaign in Ecuador, led by environmentalists and the powerful Indigenous movement, which persuaded nearly 60% of the population to vote in August in favour of mandating their government to leave the oil in the soil beneath the mega-diverse Amazonian rainforest.

*Iain Bruce*

28 September, 2023

Photo: Steve Eason

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## **Friends of the Earth Scotland video brilliantly exposes Carbon Capture greenwashing**

*How the oil industry is pushing Carbon Capture greenwashing*  
[pic.twitter.com/bSR8oilicy](https://pic.twitter.com/bSR8oilicy)

– Friends of the Earth Scotland ☐ (@FoEScot) [July 31, 2023](#)

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## **Uprising: the October Rebellion in Ecuador – Book Launch Glasgow & Grangemouth**

# Weds 12 July, online Monday 10 July

*ecosocialist.scot is pleased to be working with Resistance Books, Anti\*Capitalist Resistance, and other organisations to bring the authors of*

## **Uprising: the October Rebellion in Ecuador**

Leonidas Iza, Andres Tapia and Andres Madrid to Britain in July 2023.

PDF version of info below >>> [here](#)

## **Wednesday 12 July Grangemouth 8pm**

The big public event will be at the opening session of **Climate Camp Scotland at Grangemouth on Wednesday 12 July at 8pm**. (This is approximately four miles from Falkirk, 25 miles from Glasgow/Edinburgh, 50 miles from Dundee). In order to attend this you will need to **register** with Climate Camp Scotland – details are >>> [here](#)

## **Wednesday 12 July Glasgow STUC offices 3pm-4.30pm**

A meeting will also be held **on Wednesday 12 July from 3pm-4.30pm** at the offices of Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), 8 Landressy Street, Bridgeton, Glasgow G40 1BP ([Google Maps](#)). Public Transport – nearest station: Bridgeton, 5 mins from Glasgow Central/Argyle Street; Bus 18, 46, 64, 263 ([SPT Journey Planner](#)).

This meeting is kindly hosted by STUC and will particularly

focus on Trade Union Solidarity and Climate Justice issues.

## Monday 10 July Online/London 7pm

The visit to Britain kicks off with a public meeting and book launch in London on **Monday 10 July** that will also be available to watch and participate online. In person details: Lumen Community Centre, 88 Tavistock Pl, London WC1H 9RS and on zoom <https://bit.ly/ecuadorbkregister>

Meeting sponsored by Resistance Books, War on Want, Global Justice Now, the Climate Justice Coalition as part of the We Make Tomorrow series, Plan C, and Anti\*Capitalist Resistance

Buy the book >>> [here](#)

Organised by [Resistance Books](#)

### ***About the book***



*UPRISING is a detailed description and analysis of the Indigenous-led uprising of October 2019 in Ecuador, written by three people deeply involved in the revolt. The lead author, Leonidas Iza, came to national prominence as one of the central leaders of the rebellion. On the final day of the paro, when the movement forced the government of Lenin Moreno to withdraw Decree 883 and accede to live televised talks with the leaders of CONAIE, the main Indigenous umbrella organisation, it was Leonidas Iza who tore apart the arguments of the finance minister in front of the nation, giving him a master class in the implications of neoliberal economics and the government's deal with the IMF.*



## **About the authors**

*Leonidas Iza* is President of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), and is the best-known of a new generation of Indigenous leaders in Ecuador. He emerged as one of the central leaders of the October uprising, when he was President of the Cotopaxi Indigenous and Campesino Movement.

*Andrés Tapia* is Head of Communications at the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuadorean Amazonia.

*Andrés Madrid* teaches at the Central University of Ecuador. He is the author of *In search of the spark on the prairie*. The revolutionary subject in the thought of the left intellectuality in Ecuador.

## **Contents**

1. Foreword, Michael Löwy
2. Prologue, Leonidas Iza, Andrés Tapia, and Andrés Madrid
3. Preface: Back to October, Hernán Ouviaña
4. Introduction
5. Imminence: Background, accumulated experience and rupture
6. Awakening, determination, struggle and resistance
7. Impact: lessons, debates and perspectives
8. Epilogue: Our day-to-day October
9. Appendix: Platform for the 'Campaign of Escalating Struggle'

## **Recommendations**

*The October 2019 rising in Ecuador was a sign of things to come, as estallidos, or uprisings, erupted later in Chile and Colombia. They represented a “people in movement” – the construction of a new kind of power from below,*

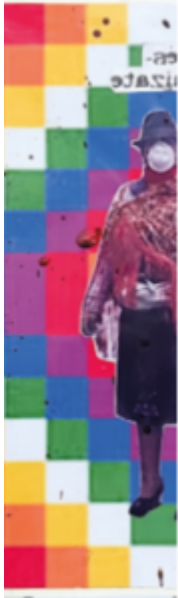


*the merging of new forms of popular resistance with historic expressions of indigenous rebellion, all reflected in the collective voice of rebellion which this remarkable book presents. In the course of those October days, as one speaker puts it, “the everyday became extraordinary”, and a different future beckoned. **Mike Gonzales**, Emeritus Professor of Latin American Studies, Glasgow University*



*This book is an account of a semi-revolutionary confrontation, written by one of its key protagonists, Leonidas Iza, who is now arguably the most important Indigenous leader in Latin America, and two of his*

*comrades. It combines a detailed, first-hand account of what happened, with a profound, Marxist analysis of why and how, and what social movements and the ecosocialist left can learn from it. Unmissable! **Iain Bruce**, journalist and writer, former head of news at teleSUR TV*



BOOK LAUNCH

**Uprising: the  
October Rebellion in  
Ecuador**

With authors: Leonidas Iza,  
Andrés Tapia, and Andrés  
Madrid

19:00 (BST), 10 July  
Lumen Community Centre, 88  
Tavistock Pl, London WC1H 9RS



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# Climate Change Committee Report – None of this is Working

*Mike Small, editor of [Bella Caledonia](#), reports on the latest report of the government's Committee on Climate Change and exposes the latest incarnation of climate denialism and pandemic disinformation at the heart of Westminster.*

John Gummer's latest (and last) [Committee on Climate Change](#) report has just dropped and it's damning. It says we're falling behind and nowhere close to enough on all fronts in tackling the climate crisis and this is caused by the total vacuum of political leadership at the heart of the British government. The headlines are: "UK has made 'no progress' on climate plan, say government's own advisers".

Incredibly fewer homes were insulated last year under the

government-backed scheme than the year before, despite soaring energy bills and a cost of living crisis. There is pitiful progress on transport emissions, and no coherent programme for behaviour change (there's a surprise).

The report also found:

The number of homes receiving energy efficiency improvements under the government's Energy Company Obligation scheme more than halved, from 383,700 in 2021 to 159,600 in 2022. At least 1m to 2m homes should be upgraded each year to meet net zero.

Homes are still being built that will need to be retrofitted with low-carbon heating and efficiency measures, because the government has not yet brought in its promised future homes standard.

No decision on whether to use hydrogen for home heating will be made until 2026, leaving households and boiler companies in complete limbo.

Emissions from transport have remained "stubbornly high" as the government has "made a political choice" to allow an increase in road traffic, instead of encouraging people on to public transport.

There is no clear policy to decarbonise steel production, or emissions from other heavy industries.

In a letter from [Lord Deben \(Gummer\), Chairman of the Climate Change Committee](#), to Rishi Sunak about the 2023 Progress Report he bemoaned "The failure to act decisively in response to the energy crisis and build on the success of hosting COP26 means that the UK has lost its clear global climate leadership." This idea of the success of COP26 or of Britain's 'climate leadership' is a Tory myth and an appeal to national hubris. He also complained about the 'Inaction has been compounded by continuing support for further unnecessary investment in fossil fuels.' Like, No Shit Sherlock.

The illusion of action, the mythology that meaningful change is underway is laid bare.

## Climate Denialism and Pandemic Disinformation

Meanwhile (h/t to Leo Hickman) a letter to the Daily Telegraph has revealed for the first time the names and numbers of the tiny grouping of climate-sceptic UK parliamentarians who call themselves the “Net Zero Scrutiny Group”. There’s no surprises:

Craig Mackinlay MP (Con)  
Sir Iain Duncan-Smith MP (Con)  
Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg MP (Con)  
Lord Frost (Con)  
Esther McVey MP (Con)  
Sir John Redwood (Con)  
Dame Andrea Jenkyns (Con)  
Sir Robert Syms (Con)  
Mark Francois (Con)  
David Jones (Con)  
Kelly Tolhurst (Con)  
Sammy Wilson (DUP)  
Andrew Lewer (Con)  
Jack Brereton (Con)  
Miriam Cates (Con)  
Chris Green (Con)  
Jonathan Gullis (Con)  
Philip Hollobone (Con)  
Adam Holloway (Con)  
Julian Knight (Ind)  
Marco Longhi (Con)  
Karl McCartney (Con)  
Holly Mumby-Croft (Con)  
Philip Davies (Con)  
Bob Seely (Con)  
Greg Smith (Con)  
Andrew Bridgen (Reclaim)  
Scott Benton (Ind)  
Baroness Foster of Oxtton (Con)  
Baroness Lea of Lymm (Con)  
Lord Lilley (Con)  
Lord Moylan (Con)  
Lord Strathcarron (Con)

The Telegraph splashed with a [front-page ‘scoop’](#) from the “Net Zero Scrutiny Group” clearly designed to distract from the Committee on Climate Change’s damning report But as John Bye has pointed out there’s an interesting crossover between the

Net Zero Scrutiny Group and the [All-Party Parliamentary Group 'Pandemic Response and Recovery'](#).

This crossover includes such luminaries as Esther McVey (Chair), Sammy Wilson (Vice Chair), Iain Duncan Smith, Baroness Foster of Oxton, and Lord Strathcarron.

### About the Group

The Group's objective is to provide an open forum for politicians, scientists, economists, business leaders, health professionals and other experts, to facilitate broad, balanced and open discussion, to inform a more focused and feasible approach to government policy; to search for new solutions in pandemic management to prevent suffering and loss in the future.

The APPG will examine evidence from scientists, health professionals, individuals and organisations from both sides of the debate.

#### Co-Chairs



Rt Hon Esther McVey MP



Graham Stringer MP

#### Vice-Chairs



Miriam Cates MP



Baroness Foster of Otford



Rt Hon Sainsbury Wilson MP

#### Members



Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP



Greg Smith MP



The Earl of Leicester



Baroness Montford



Dawn Butler MP



Harry Smith MP



Sir Graham Brady MP



Chris Green MP



Ian Paisley MP



Lord Strathcarron



Philip Davies MP



Baroness Fox of Buckley



Lord Moylan



Baroness Hoekes



Lord Robathan



Paul Givan MP

The APPG group has some interesting backers. As Byline Times reported the group is “being funded and managed by Collateral Global – the successor organisation to the ‘Great Barrington

Declaration' (GBD), established by two of its co-founders, Oxford epidemiologist Professor Sunetra Gupta and Ministry of Defence contractor Alex Caccia."

"The GBD is a pandemic disinformation group [backed](#) by the Koch climate science denial network, known for promoting a 'herd immunity by natural infection' approach to the Coronavirus crisis."



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#### Support from HART and Climate Science Deniers

The APPG has also received PR support from the Health Advisory and Recovery Group (HART), which harbours a range of conspiratorial anti-vaxxer views about the pandemic – including the idea that Coronavirus death certificates are fake, that deaths are really being caused by vaccines rather than COVID, and that the both the disease and vaccines are part of a global depopulation conspiracy by elites.

A press release announcing the creation of the APPG was sent out by Jemma Moran – HART's head of communications.

Baroness Foster was conferred a Life Peerage after a nomination by Prime Minister Boris Johnson as part of the 2020 Political Honours. In January 2021, she was elevated to the Lords as Baroness Foster of Oxton. Not to be confused with Baroness Fox (aka Claire Fox, aka Claire Foster), also a great



Koch enthusiast, also present.

This convergence between the far-right, libertarian conspiracism and climate denialism is not a coincidence.

The APPG also include Labour MP Graham Stringer who is a trustee of the Koch-connected Global Warming Policy Foundation, Britain's most prominent climate science denial lobby group which takes funds from fossil fuels companies.

Stringer has denied the IPCC's conclusion that humans are the dominant cause of current climate change. So has his colleague in the APPG, the DUP's Sammy Wilson, that human-induced climate change is a "myth based on dodgy science".

Today's revelations will be no real new news to anyone. We all knew this anyway, but now it's official, laid out by the government's own committee. While we are led to believe that progress is being made and everything is in hand, the government is actually going backwards, introducing anti-climate policies so that nothing can change.

28 June 2023

[Mike Small](#)

Republished

from:

<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2023/06/28/none-of-this-is-working/>

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# Scottish Government Energy Strategy – what's wrong with it and what we need to change

The public consultation on the Scottish Government's [Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan](#) ends on **Tuesday 9 May 2023**, writes *Iain Bruce*.

That means responding to it will be one of the first big tasks for the new leader of the SNP and Scotland's new First Minister.

The deeply disappointing [consultation document](#) was published on 10 January after a year or more's delay. It fails to build on the recent positive steps taken by Nicola Sturgeon towards opposing any more oil and gas extraction from the North Sea – after she came out against Shell's proposed Cambo oilfield following the mass protests in Glasgow at COP26 in November 2021.

The [consultation document](#) reiterates, at great length, the SNP Government's obsession with false 'techno-fixes' to the climate crisis, in particular hydrogen and carbon capture and storage. It ignores the pressure from environmental organisations and some offshore oil workers and their unions, for a just transition to renewable energy that is led by the communities and workers most affected. And it is partly at odds with the positive steps taken by Sturgeon herself and the outgoing SNP administration, through their [initiatives on 'Loss and Damage'](#), to recognise that a just transition must be just for the global south too.

In the coming weeks we need to build maximum pressure on the

government to change the most negative aspects of this draft strategy.

The interview below with Mary Church of [Friends of the Earth Scotland](#), for the [Rising Clyde Climate Justice show on Independence Live](#), gives a lot of [important context and background](#) for such a campaign.

However, it is also important, for the climate justice movement in Scotland and for the radical forces in the independence movement, to understand and challenge the deeper contradiction that underpins this energy strategy, as it does almost all the Scottish government's economic policy. This is its attempt to combine progressive, humane and necessary steps on a number of environmental and social issues, with an inability or refusal to question the underlying systemic factors which hinder such action, and makes it necessary in the first place – in other words its unwillingness to challenge the priorities of the free market.

**Link to Video:**

Also on Facebook:

[Rising Clyde Episode 10: Scotland's Energy Strategy- leading the way or sitting on the fence? | We talk to Mary Church of Friends of the Earth Scotland, about the Scottish government's new Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan – where it needs to... | By Independence Live | Facebook](#)

7 March, 2023 (YouTube link added 10 March 2023)

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# Cumbria coal mine sparks widespread outrage

The decision to green light plans to open a new coal mine in Cumbria [*on the border of England and Scotland – eds*] has met with widespread opposition from climate campaigners, reports the [Red-Green Labour website](#).

Friends of the Earth [*'FoE England, Wales & Northern Ireland' – Eds*] have issued a [press release here](#), condemning the decision and they may pursue legal action against the decision. Caroline Lucas [*Green Party of England & Wales MP – Eds*] has a [very good article in The Guardian](#).

This [Crowdfunder appeal](#) to raise funds for a legal appeal has been issued by South Lakes Action on Climate Change and is already close to its minimum target of £10,000. It should be supported urgently.

## Red-Green Labour spoke to Cumbrian climate activist Allan Todd about the decision and the ongoing campaign.

He told us that the decision didn't really come as much of a surprise. It was clear which way it was going to go when the decision was pushed back until after COP27, to avoid embarrassing the British government during the climate summit.

Judging from interactions on local social media, it is certainly the case that the mine enjoys some local support. Beyond the usual suspects of climate deniers, many people have fallen for the argument that it will create much needed employment in the area, and also that the coal is only for the

production of British steel and will replace imported coal from China and elsewhere.

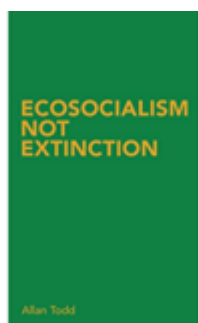
Allan says it is a bit of an uphill battle to counter some of these arguments online but he has been very active in trying. So much so that he has been blocked on Facebook by Copeland's directly elected Mayor, a so-called Independent who immediately joined the Tories after being elected a second time, and who has been a proponent of the mine. Other local politicians from both the Tories and Labour support the mine, but Allan knows of at least some who privately oppose it but have not come out against it publicly for pragmatic electoral reasons.

So, there is a huge job to be done to try to shift public opinion away from support for this project. The basic facts are that up to 85% of the coal is ear-marked for export anyway, and of the remaining 15%, the two main steel producers neither need it, nor want it – particularly as its sulphur content is too high, making it unsuitable for steel production.

The mine is expected to create 500 new jobs. However, feasibility studies have shown that [between 6,000 and 9,000 jobs could be created](#) in the green sector – wind and tidal power generation, and retrofitting homes with insulation. Insulation is a pressing need in West Cumbria, where fuel poverty has long been a problem.

In terms of the campaign, there will be demonstrations in the coming days – [in Penrith and also at the site of the mine](#). However, this is a fairly remote coastal area, isolated and without much chance of public interaction. Allan contrasts this to the Green Mondays which he organised at the fracking site at Preston New Road which took place in full public view. With the moratorium on fracking still in place, the anti-fracking campaigners from the Fylde coast will be able to lend their solidarity to the struggle in Cumbria.

Allan's new book "Ecosocialism Not Extinction" is available from [Resistance Books](#).



Reproduced from Red-Green Labour website, original here: <https://redgreenlabour.org/2022/12/09/cumbria-coal-mine-sparks-widespread-outrage/>

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**COP27 was a spectacular failure – boycotting future COP conferences, however, would only compound the problem**

[Alan Thornett](#) offers his thoughts on a troubling end to COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh.

COP27, the 27th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, held last month in Sharm El-Sheikh to confront the planetary emergency caused by climate change, failed spectacularly in the face of the most challenging set of circumstances a COP conference had faced since the Framework Convention was launched at the Earth

Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

It faced a critical situation from the outset, both in terms of the global geopolitical situation today arising from Putin's invasion of Ukraine and the stage that has been reached in the implementation of the UN COP process itself.

Only a last-minute agreement to establish a "loss and damage" (or "reparations") fund into which the rich countries, which are the most responsible for climate change, would subscribe to help the poor countries, which are the least responsible for global warming, minimise and mitigate the impact of climate change and transition to renewable energy saved COP27 from total ignominy.

Prior to the COP, UN Secretary General António Guterres had argued strongly for such an agreement, warning that unless there is what he called an "historic pact" between the rich and poor countries on this issue, the planet could already be doomed.

The creation of such a fund had been scandalously kept off the agenda by the rich countries for 30 years and was only forced onto it this year after heavy pressure from the developing countries. There was no agreement, however, as to how much money should be paid into it, who should pay it, or on what basis. It was still a step forward, but it was the only one that could be claimed at this conference.

Arguments will continue about the size of the fund and which countries will benefit, and there is a proposal to ask the International Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC) to prepare a recommendation for the COP28 next year in Dubai in the UAE.

When it came to carbon emissions reduction, however, COP27 was an unmitigated disaster.

The UN carbon emissions reduction plan—the so-called "ratcheting up" process adopted at COP21 in Paris in

2015—which required *each member state to determine its own carbon reduction target—or* “Nationally Determined Contributions”—and then enhance them annually at implementation conferences that would be held for that purpose—had fallen apart before the conference was open.

Exactly what happened is not clear. What is clear is that the pledges made in Sharm El-Sheikh, far from building on those made in Glasgow, were well behind those made there, and that the process had suffered a disastrous retreat.

## **The energy debate**

The general debate on energy was also a disaster. Not only had the Egyptian Presidency produced a draft text that blatantly favoured the oil and gas petro-states and the fossil fuel industries in the region, but it had also opened the door to the biggest contingent of fossil fuel lobbyists that a COP conference had ever seen. All the world’s biggest oil and gas producers were there in force, and they used it to the full. Saudi Arabia (no less) ran an event to promote the “circular carbon economy,” under which carbon capture, hydrogen, and other bogus technologies were scandalously presented as clean.

A major target for them was the 1.5°C maximum temperature increase that had also been agreed in Paris. The session dealing with this became so heated that the EU threatened to walk out at one point if the 1.5°C maximum was not protected. Although a reference to 1.5 °C has remained in the final text, the language is ambiguous and widely regarded as unreliable.

The agreement in Glasgow, which for the first time named (and shamed) coal, gas, and oil as major threats to the future of the planet and additionally, in the case of coal, fixed a date for ending its use altogether, was also under attack. In the end, Saudi Arabia and other petro-states, along with China, Russia, and Brazil, who had been campaigning for their removal, were able to get rid of it. Fossil fuels that had



been declared obsolete or obsolete in Glasgow had been rehabilitated in Sharm el-Sheikh. To add insult to injury, the conference agreed to define natural gas as a renewable energy source.

Alok Sharma, no less, the UK's (Boris Johnson appointed) president of COP26, recently sacked from the cabinet by Sunak—but who appears to have become more strongly committed to the cause having been appointed as a stop-gap—was visibly outraged by what had happened to the energy text and lambasted the conference in the closing session:

*“Those of us who came to Egypt to keep 1.5C alive, and to respect what every single one of us agreed to in Glasgow, have had to fight relentlessly here to hold the line. We have had to battle to build on one of the key achievements of Glasgow, including the call on parties to revisit and strengthen their “Nationally Determined Contributions.”*

Repeatedly banging the table, he said:

*“We joined with many parties to propose a number of measures that would have contributed to this. Emissions peaking before 2025, as the science tells us is necessary – NOT IN THIS TEXT. A clear follow-through on the phase down of coal – NOT IN THIS TEXT. A commitment to phase out all fossil fuels – NOT IN THIS TEXT. The energy text, he said had been weakened in the final minutes of the conference to endorse “low-emissions energy”, which can be interpreted as a reference to natural gas.*

The result is a disaster and will directly lead to more death, destruction, poverty, and people having to leave their homes. Climate events become ever more severe as constraints on carbon emissions are lifted. It will speed up the arrival of tipping points that can take climate chaos out of control—possibly disastrously so. It will also give succour to

the climate deniers and offset the defeats they suffered in Paris and Glasgow.

*It's true that this COP27 faced very difficult conditions.* Putin's war triggered an obscene scramble back to fossil energy when it is abundantly clear the only answer to either the economic or the environmental crisis is a rapid transition to renewable energy, which is getting cheaper all the time. The UK government immediately issued 90 new gas and oil extraction licences for the North Sea and is seeking an agreement to import large quantities of fracked natural gas from the USA.

Putin's war, however, was there long before COP27, and the Egyptian organisers did nothing to counter it. In fact, they cynically exploited it for their own ends in order to get emissions restrictions lifted or watered down.

## **So where do we (and the movement) go from here?**

One thing that must be avoided as a result of all of this is a boycott of future COP conferences or the entire COP process by either the radical left or the wider movement. It would simply compound the problem. It was being discussed widely before Sharm El-Sheikh, and it has continued since, both within the radical left and in the broader movement. Greta Thunberg called for it before Sharm El-Sheikh, and George Monbiot advocates it in his November 24 Guardian article.

A boycott by the radical left would primarily be an act of self-harm (or self-isolation), whereas a boycott by the wider movement would demobilise the climate struggle at a critical juncture. Most climate campaigns and NGOs would refuse to follow such a call anyway. The front-line countries certainly would do so because they see the COP process, with all its problems, as their only chance of survival. That is why they

mount such ferocious battles at every COP conference.

There has also been a major change in the climate struggle since the 2015 Paris Accords. This is because the job of the UN COP process has changed from agreeing on a plan to cut carbon emissions (the Paris Accords) to convincing 190 countries with different political systems and vested interests to accept their responsibilities and carry them out. This is a huge task, not least given adverse global geopolitical conditions.

It is clear that the UN has failed to do this, and it is a big unresolved problem. It is important that the left and the climate movement recognise this reality. It is pointless to pretend that this problem does not exist. That they are simply refusing to act when all they would have to do if they wanted to resolve climate change is snap their fingers—which is exactly what George Monbiot argues in his Guardian article. He puts it this way:

*“So what do we do now? After 27 summits and no effective action, it seems that the real purpose was to keep us talking. If governments were serious about preventing climate breakdown, there would have been no Cops 2-27. The major issues would have been resolved at Cop1, as the ozone depletion crisis was at a single summit in Montreal”.*

(He is referring to the 1987 UN Montreal Protocol which banned the use of ozone depleting substances in order to protect the ozone layer that was threatening the future of the planet.)

This is glib in the extreme since there is absolutely no comparison between banning a substance that was easy to replace with no major consequence to anyone involved and abolishing fossil fuels, to which the planet has been addicted for 100 years and has massive vested interests behind it. If you misunderstand (or misrepresent) the scale of the problem, it is hard to contribute to its solution.

# The key strategic dilemma

What we actually face is some hard strategic choices. The problem, as I [argued in my first article](#), is that only governments—and ultimately governments prepared to go on a war footing to do so—can implement the structural changes necessary to abolish carbon emissions and transition to renewable energy in the few years that science is giving us. The radical left can't do it, the wider movement can't do it, and a mass movement can't do it—other than by forcing governments to act.

We are facing a planetary emergency. And under these conditions, it is only the UN Framework Convention—or something with a similar global reach and authority —organised on a transnational basis that is capable of addressing the 190 individual countries that will need to be involved and convinced if it is to be effective.

In terms of the climate justice movement, it is also the only forum through which the climate movement can place pressure and demands on the global elites and around which we can build the kind of mass movement that can force them to take effective action.

A socialist revolution (unfortunately) is not just around the corner, but the task we face is time-limited. We have less than ten years to stop global warming; remember, an ecosocialist society can't build on a dead planet.

The task we face, therefore, whether it fits our plans or not or whether we like it or not, is to force the global elites (however reluctantly) to introduce the structural changes necessary to halt climate change within the timescale science is giving us, and we can't do that by turning our backs on the COP process; we can only do that by engaging with it more effectively and building a mass movement to force it to act against the logic of the capitalist system that they embrace.

# What kind of mass movement?

Everyone in this debate argues that a powerful mass movement will be needed to force the change that is necessary in this struggle—including George Monbiot. It is an aspiration, however, that begs many questions. What kind of mass movement do we need? It would have to be the largest coalition of progressive forces ever assembled (because we have to save the planet), so it would not be socialist at first, a movement capable of confronting the kinds of societal breakdowns that are likely as climate impacts worsen. But how would it come to be, and how would its future path be decided?

Such a movement must include those defending the ecology and climate of the planet in any number of ways. It must include the indigenous peoples who have been the backbone of so many of these struggles, along with the young school strikers who have been so inspirational over the past two years. And it should include the activists of XR who have brought new energy into the movement in the form of non-violent direct action.

Movements that emerge spontaneously are more likely to move to the right than to the left, depending on the experiences gained by the forces during their formation and the balance of political forces within them; the strength of the socialist (or indeed ecosocialist) forces within such a movement will be determined, at least in part, by the role such forces have played in the movement's development and the political legacy they have been able to establish. It must also have a progressive political and environmental driving force within it that fights for an environmentally progressive direction of travel.

Forcing major structural change against the will of the ruling elites will not only need a powerful mass movement behind it but also an environmental action programme behind it such as abolishing fossil fuels, making a rapid transition to

renewables, ensuring a socially just transition, making the polluters pay, and retrofitting homes that can command mass support, not just amongst socialists and environmental activists but amongst the wider populations as they are impacted by the ecological crisis itself.

The key to this is to make fossil fuels far more expensive than renewables by means that are socially just, that redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor, that can bring about a big reduction in emissions in the time available, and (crucially) are capable of commanding popular support. This means heavily taxing the polluters to both cut emissions and ensure that they fund the transition to renewables.

As long as fossil fuel remains the cheapest way to generate energy, it is going to be used. An important mechanism, therefore, for bringing about big reductions in carbon emissions in a short period of time must be carbon pricing—making the polluters pay. This means levying heavy taxes or fees on carbon emissions as a part of a strongly progressive and redistributive taxation system that can win mass popular support.

One proposal on the table in this regard is James Hansen's fee and dividend proposition. It provides the framework for very big emissions reductions, here and now while capitalism exists, and on the basis of a major transfer of wealth from the rich to the poor (as argued above) in order to drive it forward.

As he recognises, it would need to go along with a crash programme of renewable energy production to meet the demand that his incentives would create. It would also need a major programme of energy conservation, a big reduction in the use of the internal combustion engine, the abolition of factory farming, and a big reduction in meat consumption.

# Conclusion

The UN has made a unique contribution to the struggle against climate change, a capitalist institution as it inevitably is, having identified the problem soon after it entered public consciousness 32 years ago. It has confronted opposition from many of its member states, and it has been successful, along with its specialist divisions such as the IPCC, in winning the war both against the climate deniers—who were massively backed by the fossil fuel producers for many years—and in winning the scientific community very strongly over to the climate struggle, without which we would not be where we are today.

It has also been key—along with relentless pressure from the ecological crisis itself—in transforming global awareness of climate change to a level without which the options we are discussing today would not exist.

Today, however, the UN faces a pivotal moment. Its carbon reduction strategy has fallen apart, thanks to the Paris Accords and the Glasgow Agreements. Unless this is addressed urgently, it could paralyse the UN's environmental work for many years. It could weaken the global justice movement and open the door to increasingly disastrous climate events, leading directly to tipping points that could take climate chaos out of control.

Unless drastic changes are made, not only the Paris Accords and the Glasgow Agreements will be rendered obsolete, but also the entire approach to climate change adopted in 1992 under the UN Framework Agreement on Climate Change; the 1997 Kyoto Agreement.

The UN must stop handing COP conferences over to countries that cannot:

- Support the project the UN is collectively seeking to promote

- Ensure the basic right to campaign and protest
- Support the project the UN is collectively seeking to promote
- Drastically limit fossil fuel lobbies the kind of access to its conferences
- Seek to ensure that the UN's carbon reduction project is a success.

A very good start would be to accept Lula's offer to hold the 2025 COP in the Amazon rain forest, which would be a huge boost to the movement.

Guterres told us in his opening speech in Sharm El-Sheikh that "the clock is ticking." We are in the fight of our lives, and we are losing. Greenhouse gas emissions keep growing. Global temperatures keep rising, and our planet is fast approaching tipping points that will make climate chaos irreversible. We are on a highway to climate hell with our foot still on the accelerator.

In his closing speech, he told us that:

*"Our planet is still in the emergency room. We need to drastically reduce emissions now – and this is an issue this COP did not address. The world still needs a giant leap on climate ambition."*

He was absolutely right on both counts. His commitment and his passion for the cause have never been in doubt. His task now must be to make the necessary changes in order for his warnings to be translated into actions by making the UN COP carbon reduction process fit for purpose in terms of the challenges we face in the twenty-first century.

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This article was originally published on Alan Thornett's



[ecosocialist discussion blog](#). This version is reprinted from the website of Anti\*Capitalist Resistance (a revolutionary ecosocialist organisation in England and Wales): <https://anticapitalistresistance.org/cop27-was-a-spectacular-failure-boycotting-future-cop-conferences-however-would-only-compound-the-problem/>

Alan Thornett was a prominent trade union leader in the 1970s in Britain and is the author of "[Facing the Apocalypse: Arguments for Ecosocialism](#)" (£15), published by [Resistance Books](#), and several volumes of [memoirs of trade union struggles](#).

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## **COP27 (Climate) – Fossil victory in Sharm el-Sheikh: only the fight remains**

Daniel Tanuro writes on the COP27.

A few days before the opening of COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, I wrote that this conference would be a "new height of greenwashing, green capitalism and repression". It was a mistake. Greenwashing and repression were more than ever on the shores of the Red Sea, but green capitalism suffered a setback, and fossils won a clear victory.

In matters of climate, we can define green capitalism as the fraction of employers and their political representatives who claim that the disaster can be stopped by a market policy that encourages companies to adopt green or "low carbon" energy technologies, so that it would be possible to reconcile economic growth, growth in profits and rapid reduction in emissions, and even to achieve "net zero emissions" in 2050. This component, known as "mitigation" of climate change, is

then supplemented by a so-called “adaptation” component to the now inevitable effects of global warming, and a “funding” component (mainly aimed at southern countries). On these two levels too, the proponents of green capitalism believe that the market can do the job – they even see an opportunity for capital.

## **From Copenhagen to Paris, from “top down” to “bottom-up”**

The agreement reached in Paris at COP21 (2015) was typically a manifestation of this policy. It stipulated that the parties would commit to taking action to ensure that global warming “remains well below 2°C, while continuing efforts not to exceed 1.5°C”. It should be remembered that COP19 (Copenhagen, 2009) had buried the idea of a global distribution of the “2°C carbon budget” (the quantity of carbon that can still be sent into the atmosphere to have a reasonable probability of not exceeding 2°C during this century) according to the responsibilities and the differentiated capacities of the countries. Such a global distribution was (and remains) the most rational approach to combining climate efficacy and social justice, but this “top-down” approach involved settling the accounts of imperialism, which the United States and the European Union European did not want at any price. COP20 (Cancun, 2010) therefore adopted a “bottom-up” approach, more compatible with the neoliberal air of the time: each country would determine its “national contribution” to the climate effort, and we would see, in the course of the annual COP, 1°) if the sum of the efforts is sufficient; 2) if the distribution of efforts complies with the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility” which is enshrined in the Framework Convention on Climate (UN, Rio, 1992).

As a reminder, this Framework Convention affirmed the will of the parties to avoid “a dangerous anthropogenic disturbance of the climate system”. Six years after Copenhagen, twenty-three

years after Rio, Paris finally came to clarify a little what should be understood by this. This is the formula that we recalled above: “stay well below 2°C while continuing efforts not to exceed 1.5°C...”. But one ambiguity hits you in the face: at the end of the day, where is the threshold of dangerousness? At 2°C or 1.5°C? Asked to shed light on the answer to be given to this question, the IPCC submitted a specific report from which it is very clear that half a degree more or less leads to enormous differences in terms of impact. In the process, COP26 (Glasgow, 2021) gave satisfaction to the representatives of the small island states who are sounding the alarm bell: we must stay below 1.5°C of warming.

But how to do it? The gap between the “national contributions” of the countries and the path to follow to stay below 1.5°C (or to exceed this threshold only very slightly, with the possibility of going back below quite quickly) is an abyss: on the basis of the national contributions, warming will easily exceed the objective. The drafters of the Paris agreement were aware of this “emission gap”. They therefore decided that the parties’ climate commitments would be subject to an “ambition-raising” exercise every five years, in the hope of gradually bridging the gap between the commitments and the objective to be achieved. Problem: six years later, the objective to be reached (1.5°C maximum) has become much more restrictive, and the time available to reach it has become ever shorter.

## **From Paris to Glasgow: “raising ambitions”?**

In Glasgow, the message from scientists was crystal clear: a) global emissions reductions must start now, b) the global peak must be reached no later than 2025, c) CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (and methane!) must decrease by 45 per cent globally by 2030, and d) climate justice implies that the richest one per cent divides its emissions by thirty while the poorest 50 per cent will multiply them by three. All this, without mentioning the

gigantic efforts to be made in terms of adaptation and financing, particularly in poor countries...

In this context, Glasgow could only note the accelerated obsolescence of the five-year strategy of “enhancing ambitions” adopted in Paris: no one could seriously claim that a round table every five years would make it possible to fill the emissions gap. In a very tense context, the British Presidency then proposed that the “mitigation” component be subject to review every year during the “decisive decade” 2020-2030, and this procedure was adopted. The presidency also proposed to decide on the rapid elimination of coal but, on this point, it came up against a veto from India, so that the participants had to content themselves with deciding on a reduction (“phasing down”) rather than an elimination (“phasing out”) of the use of this fuel.

## **In Sharm el-Sheikh: place your bets, there's no more time left**

At the end of COP27, the results are quite clear: there is almost nothing left of these commitments made in Glasgow.

The annual raising of ambitions has not taken place. All the countries should have updated their “national contributions”: only thirty complied with the exercise, and even then, very insufficiently (see my article preceding the COP). It is very likely that this attempt will be the last and that we will henceforth be content with the process of five-year reviews provided for by COP21... while hypocritically pretending to ignore the impossibility by this means of respecting the 1.5°C limit!

COP26 had adopted a “mitigation work programme” which COP27 was supposed to implement. It was content to decide that the process would be “non-prescriptive, non-punitive” and “would not lead to new objectives”. Moreover, the objective of the 1.5°C maximum, adopted in Glasgow, came very near to being

explicitly called into question (it was explicitly called into question, outside the plenary session, by the representatives of Russia and Saudi Arabia, not to mention the trial balloons launched by China and India at certain G20 meetings).

Nothing was decided to materialize the “phasing down” of coal. The Indian delegation, cleverly, proposed a text on the eventual phasing out of all fossil fuels (not only coal, but also oil and gas). Surprise: eighty countries, “developed” and “developing”, supported it, but the Egyptian presidency did not even mention it. The final statement says nothing about it. The term “fossil fuels” appears only once in the text, which calls for “accelerating efforts to reduce (the use of) coal without abatement and the elimination of inefficient subsidies to fossil fuels”. The formula is strictly identical to that which was adopted in Glasgow... (the expression “coal without abatement” refers to combustion installations without CO2 capture for geological sequestration or industrial use...). According to some leaks from the debates between heads of delegations, the Saudis and the Russians opposed any further mention of fossil fuels in the text. The Russian representative is said to have even declared on this occasion: “It is unacceptable. We cannot make the energy situation worse” (*Carbon brief*, Key Outcomes of COP27). It’s the pot calling the kettle black!

We thought we had seen everything in terms of greenwashing, but no: some decisions taken in Sharm -el-Sheikh open up the risk that pollution rights could be counted twice. Paris had decided on the principle of a “new market mechanism” to take over from the CDM (Clean Development Mechanism, set up by the Kyoto Protocol). From now on, the rights market will have two speeds: on the one hand a market for emission credits, on the other hand a free market for “mitigation contributions”, on which nothing stands in the way of the so-called emission reductions being counted twice (once by the seller and once by the buyer!). In addition, countries that conclude bilateral

emission reduction agreements will be free to decide that the means implemented are “confidential”... and therefore unverifiable!

The very fashionable theme of “carbon removal” from the atmosphere considerably increases the risks of greenwashing on the emission credits market. Several methods and technologies could theoretically be used, but there is a great danger that they will serve as a substitute for reducing emissions. So, things have to be very strictly defined and framed. Especially when they involve the use of land areas for energy purposes, because this use obviously risks coming into conflict with human food production and the protection of biodiversity. A previously designated technical body was to look into the problem. It is faced with such a mass of proposals which are contested, or which have never been tested, that the worst is to be feared, pushed forward by an alliance between fossil fuels and agribusiness.

## **“Loss and damage”: the tree that hides the forest**

The media made much of the decision to create a fund for “loss and damage”. This is a demand that poor countries and small island states have been putting forward for thirty years: the climatic disasters that they are experiencing are costing them dearly, whereas they are the product of the warming caused mainly by the developed capitalist countries; those responsible must therefore pay, through an ad hoc fund. The United States and the European Union have always opposed this demand, but in Sharm el-Sheikh, the pressure from “developing” countries was too strong, it was no longer possible to quibble: either a fund was created, or it was the end of the COP process and a deep split between North and South. You should know that this “South” includes countries as different as the oil monarchies, China, and the so-called “least developed” countries.... To prevent all this little world from

forming a bloc supported by the “anti-Western” discourse of the Kremlin, Western imperialism could not afford to do nothing. The EU unblocked the situation by setting the following conditions: 1°) that the fund be supplemented by various sources of financing (including existing sources, and others, “innovative”); 2) that its interventions benefit only the most vulnerable countries; 3°) that the COP “enhances the ambitions” of mitigation. The first two points have been met, not the third.

The creation of the fund is undoubtedly a victory for the poorest countries, increasingly impacted by disasters such as the floods that recently hit Pakistan and Niger, or the typhoons that are increasingly ravaging the Philippines. But it is a symbolic victory, because COP27 only took a vague decision of principle. Who will pay? When? How much? And above all: to whom will the funds go? To the victims on the ground, or to the corrupt intermediaries? On all these issues, we can expect tough battles. Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Qatar will refuse to pay, citing the fact that the UN defines them as “developing countries”. China will most likely do the same, arguing that it is contributing through bilateral agreements, as part of its “New Silk Roads”. It is not tomorrow or the day after that capitalism will take its responsibilities in the face of the catastrophe for which it is responsible and which is destroying the existence of millions of men and women, in the South, but also in the North (even though the consequences there are, for the moment, less dramatic)...

The cries of victory over the “loss and damage” fund are all the less justified since the other promises in terms of financing are still not honoured by the rich countries: the hundred billion dollars a year are not paid into the Green Fund for the Climate, and the commitment to double the resources of the adaptation fund has not materialized.

## **A victory for fossils, acquired in the name of... the poorest!?**

This is not the place to go into more detail, other publications have done it very well (*Carbon Brief*, *Home Climate News*, CLARA, among others). The conclusion that emerges is that the climate policy of green capitalism, with its three components (mitigation, adaptation, financing) suffered a failure in Sharm el-Sheikh. Champion of green capitalism, the European Union almost walked out and slammed the door behind it. On the other hand, COP27 ended in a victory for fossil capital.

This victory is first and foremost the result of the geopolitical context created by the exit (?) from the pandemic and accentuated by the Russian war of aggression against the Ukrainian people. We have entered a conjuncture of growing inter-imperialist rivalries and all-out rearmament. The wars, so to speak, are still only local, and not all have yet been declared, but the possibility of a conflagration haunts all capitalist leaders. Even if they do not want it, they are preparing for it, and this preparation, paradoxically, implies both the acceleration of the development of renewable energies and the increased use of fossil fuels, and therefore a considerable expansion of the possibilities of profit for the big capitalist groups of coal, oil, gas... and the finance capital behind it. It is no coincidence that, a year after Glasgow, the balloon of Mark Carney 's GFANZ (Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero) is deflating: banks and pension funds are less willing than ever to comply with UN rules ("Race for Zero net") on the banning of fossil fuel investments...

Secondly, it is the result of the very nature of the COP process. From Paris onwards, the capitalist sponsorship of these summits has experienced explosive growth. In Sharm el-Sheikh, it seems that quantity has turned into quality. Of the



twenty corporate sponsors of the event, only two were not directly or indirectly linked to the fossil fuel industry. The industrial coal, oil and gas lobbies had sent more than 600 delegates to the conference. To this must be added the “fossil moles” in the delegations of many countries (including representatives of the Russian oligarchs under sanctions!), not to mention the official delegations composed solely of these “moles”, in particular those of the fossil monarchies of the Middle East. All this fossil scum seems to have changed tactics: rather than denying climate change, or its “anthropogenic” origin, or the role of CO<sub>2</sub>, the emphasis is now on “clean fossils” and technologies of “carbon removal”. The delegation of the Emirates (one thousand delegates!) thus organized a “side-event” (on the sidelines of the official programme) to attract partners to collaborate on a vast project of “green oil” consisting (stupidly, because the technology is known) of injecting CO<sub>2</sub> into the oil deposits, to bring out more oil... the combustion of which will produce more CO<sub>2</sub>. The *Financial Times*, which is, it will be agreed, above all suspicion of anti-capitalism, was not afraid to go to the heart of the problem: the grip of fossils on the negotiations has grown so much that COP27 was in fact a trade fair for investments, in particular in gas (“green energy”, according to the European Union!), but also in oil, and even in coal (*Financial Times*, 26/11/2022).

A third factor came into play: the role of the Egyptian presidency. During the final plenary, the representative of Saudi Arabia thanked it, on behalf of his country and the Arab League. The dictatorship of General Sissi has indeed achieved a double performance: establishing itself as a country to be visited despite the fierce repression of all opposition, on the one hand; and on the other portraying himself as the spokesperson for peoples thirsty for climate justice, especially on the world’s poorest continent...even when he was in fact acting in collusion with the most relentless of fossil exploiters, so wealthy that they no longer know what to do

with their fortunes. In his final speech, the Saudi representative added: "We would like to emphasize that the Convention (the UN Framework Convention on Climate) must address the question of emissions, and not that of the origin of the emissions." In other words: let us exploit and burn fossil fuels, no need to remove this energy source, let's focus on how to remove CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, by "offsetting" the emissions (capture and geological sequestration, tree plantations, purchases of "rights to pollute, etc.).

## **Only the mass struggle remains**

The Europeans, Frank Timmermans in the lead, are weeping and wailing: "the possibility of staying below 1.5°C is becoming extremely low and is disappearing", they say in substance. In effect. But whose fault is it? It would be too easy to unload the responsibility on others. In reality, these heralds of green capitalism are caught up in their own neoliberal logic: do they swear by the market? Well, fossils, which dominate the market, have dominated the COP... Time will tell if this is just a hiccup of history. COP28 will be chaired by the United Arab Emirates, so there is nothing to expect from that side. The answer, in fact, will depend on the evolution of the global geopolitical conjuncture, that is to say, ultimately, on social and ecological struggles. Either mass revolts will make the powerful tremble and force them to let go; in this case, whatever the source of the struggle (inflation? one assassination too many, as in Iran? a police confinement, as in China?), a space will open up to unite the social and the ecological, therefore also to impose measures in line with another climate policy. Or else the race to the abyss will continue.

Nobody, this time, dared to say, as usual, that this COP, "although disappointing", nevertheless constituted "a step forward". In fact, two things are now crystal clear: 1°) there

will be no real “steps forward” without radical anti-capitalist and anti-productivist measures; 2°) they will not emerge from the COP, but from the struggles and their convergence.

27 November 2022

•This article was written for the [Gauche Anticapitaliste website](#) (Belgium supporters of the Fourth International). This version is republished from [International Viewpoint](#) online news magazine of the [Fourth International](#) : <https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7898>

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## **Rising Clyde 8: latest issue of Scottish Climate Show on “COP27”**

The latest issue of Rising Clyde, the Scottish Climate Show hosted by Iain Bruce, is now available on YouTube via the Independence Live video service.

In this episode Iain is with Sabrina Fernandes in Rio and Nathan Thanki in Ibagué, Colombia, talking about the few signs of hope among the failures of COP27 – the agreement on Loss

and Damage, the return of Lula, and the blistering critique from President Gustavo Petro. .

## Watch the programme here:

## Previous Issues

Previous Rising Clyde shows on Independence Live can be found here:

[\(1035\) SHOW: Rising Clyde – YouTube](#)

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## Climate Camp Scotland: Meet & Camp Out @ the Kelpies, Saturday 15 October/

From our friends at [Climate Camp Scotland](#) ...

Hey there campers!

We've got some tasty stews on the stove this Autumn so make sure you stop by the kitchen tent...

# Meet & Camp Out @ the Kelpies, 15 Oct

We are beginning to lay foundations for an incredible 2023 climate camp.

On [Saturday 15th October](#) we are going to Falkirk / Grangemouth for a series of **informal tea-time chats** with local organisers, community members and trade unionists to hear about living with **Scotland's biggest polluter**, the recent wildcat strikes, the cost of living crisis, and their aspirations for a just transition.

After our meetings we'll head to a (secret) **fire and camp spot** to enjoy the Autumn leaves and hopefully some stars! It should be a very wholesome and productive day and night, and everyone is welcome to join for as much of the runnings as they feel able.

The day starts at **1.30pm** with the community meeting at **the Kelpies** Visitor Centre Cafe.

[To get a briefing with venue details, travel info, and how to take part click here.](#)

It should be a wholesome and fun day for the group so we hope you'll consider joining us!

Climate Camp have our regular meetings online, organised via Signal. To find out more about these or to get more involved, [join our Signal groups here](#).

*Autumn love and solidarity,*

[\*\*\*Climate Camp Scotland\*\*\*](#)

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# The return of the dinosaurs

As the planet burns, and Britain faces a massive cost of living crisis, writes [Alan Thornett on his ecosocialist discussion blog](#), Jurassic Park has taken over in Westminster, with the climate denier – and ‘hand-out’ hater – Liz Truss as Prime Minister.

Truss has been cynically foisted on the British electorate against their will. Only 6 per cent expect her to make a good Prime Minister, even most Tory voters are not convinced. She was the choice of neither Tory MPs nor Tory voters. Most of them preferred Sunak or for Johnson to stay in office.

Despite such fragile support, she never hesitated in gifting all the top jobs to the cronies who backed her. Only one MP who backed Sunak is a cabinet member today, which is Michael Ellis, the new attorney general. How long such a concoction will hold together when the proverbial hits the fan, of course, is another matter. (She is also trying to model herself on Margaret Thatcher, though whether she is up to that one only time will tell.)

You couldn't make it up. Jacob Rees-Mogg, the climate denier in chief – who wants to squeeze the last cubic inch of oil and gas out of the North Sea, bring back fracking, and who has claimed that climate alarmism is responsible for high energy prices – is now Energy Secretary. His ravings are not only bizarre but completely unworkable, since anything that is extracted – at huge cost to the environment – would have zero impact on UK oil or gas prices which are set by the international market.

## **Lurch to the right**

Truss's election is yet another lurch to the right by an

increasingly xenophobic Tory party – driven by the fundamentalists of the European Research Group.

She is to the right of her (corrupt and despicable) predecessor Boris Johnson, as he was to Theresa May. She was elected in what is now a well-established and dangerous charade. Candidates in a Tory leadership contest, are required, in order to win, to convince the ever-more-extreme Tory members that they are racist enough, little Englander enough, and anti-migrant enough, for the job. Truss fully understood this process and played it to the full.

Nor is Truss any better than Rees-Mogg when it comes to the environment. In fact, her record is appalling.

As Theresa May's Environment Secretary, Truss was an arch deregulator of environmental standards. She cut subsidies for renewables and banned on-shore wind farms – which was (and remains) a huge blow to the UK's renewable energy capacity.

She is also responsible for the catastrophic pollution of our rivers and beaches with raw sewage by cutting millions of pounds earmarked for tackling water pollution. She cut the budget of the *Environment Agency* by £235m, including £24m that had been allocated for the surveillance of water companies in order to prevent the dumping of raw sewage in rivers and on beaches.

Her newly appointed chief economic adviser, Matthew Sinclair – the Gaudian columnist Zoe Williams tells us – “wrote a book entitled *Let Them Eat Carbon* in 2011, in which he argued that “the temperatures we face today may not be the ideal conditions for humanity to live and flourish”. Let warming go wild, in other words. It might be fun.”

### **Trickle-down economics**

Her version of low-tax trickle down, free market, economics will further devastate the UK economy. She told Laura

Kuenssberg last week that she was OK with the obvious fact that her cancelation of the proposed national insurance rise would be worth twice as much to the richest 5 per cent of the population as it is to the whole bottom half of taxpayers.

The scrapping of Sunak's planned return of corporation tax to 25 per cent will cost an estimated £19 billion and will be a bonanza for big business. Her approach will be tested to destruction as the crisis develops further.

She insists, moreover, that the only factors that are driving the current crisis – which is more acute in Britain than any other European country – are the Covid pandemic and Putin's invasion of Ukraine. Otherwise, she says, the British economy is "in good shape".

This is arrant nonsense. There are two other crucial factors as well. The first is that economy has been wrecked by 20 years of Tory rule of which she was an active and uncritical participant. The second is that and it has been ravaged by Brexit – a factor which is being deliberately ignored (or obscured) by both the government and by Kier Starmer.

The idea that Johnson 'got Brexit done' is a sick joke. The whole economy has been destabilised by the ending of free movement of labour and by the developing trade war with the EU – which is the UK's biggest trading partner many times over. Brexit permeates every aspect of British political and commercial life from restricting trade relations to boosting racism and xenophobia.

Sectors such as agriculture, fishing, hospitality, retail, health care and meat processing, have been traumatised by it, whilst racism and xenophobia have been boosted. The problems created by Brexit in the North of Ireland remain entirely unresolved.

Truss's pledge to rip up the North of Ireland Protocol if she does not get her way on it threatens both an all-out trade war



with the EU, plus retaliation from Biden in terms of a future trade agreement with the US.

It remains regrettable that most of the radical left in Britain voted for Brexit. The claim that they were voting for a different kind of Brexit that did not exist makes no sense. The only Brexits on offer were those proposed by various sections of the Tory party.

### **Truss's energy package**

Having refused to discuss rocketing electricity bills during the election campaign – bills that were set to more than quadruple by January – she has now been forced to make a dramatic U-turn after no doubt contemplating the alternative, which was the likelihood that the current strike wave would be joined by rioting on the streets over energy prices and increasing social unrest. She also, no doubt, hopes that the package will give her political breathing space to launch the programme she really wants. We will see.

The resulting U-turn was her so-called the *Energy Price Guarantee*, which she refuses to put a figure on – though some estimates put it at 150 billion pounds. It will freeze household bills for two years, at £2,500 a year. Businesses and public sector organisations like hospitals and schools will get an equivalent deal for six months, after that, only 'vulnerable' businesses will be supported. There will also be more licences issued to drill for oil and gas, and the ban on fracking will be lifted.

Whilst her package is better than nothing, given the scale of the problem, the average UK household will still be worse off, its energy bills will still be shockingly high, and the cost of living will continue to rise. Many businesses see the package as little better than a stay of execution. The *Joseph Rowntree Foundation* has calculated that it will leave low-income families with around £800 shortfall this winter,

leaving them at risk of poverty or at the mercy of high-interest loans.

Her method of repayment says it all. She refuses even to contemplate a windfall tax on the eye-watering and unexpected super-profits that are being made by the oil and gas companies and insists instead on financing by government borrowing which means that it will be paid for by taxation. She has done this under conditions where three quarters of Tory voters say they would prefer a windfall tax to more government borrowing. The long-term consequences of such borrowing, however, might prove a very hard sell.

Starmer has challenged the method of payment, but he also ruled out the nationalisation of the oil companies, arguing, ludicrously, that to do so would be too expensive. His position is a huge liability as the possibility of a Labour government comes closer.

### **The big losers**

The biggest loser in all this – along with the poorest in society as argued above – will be the planet and the future of life on it. The Truss premiership is a direct challenge to the zero carbon reduction targets that are crucial to the protection of life on Earth. And this, moreover, with COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh only two months away.

Her perspective was challenged on the *Today Program* on Tuesday September 6<sup>th</sup> by none other than John Gummer (now Lord Deben), who was John Major's Environment Secretary from 1993-97, and is now the chair of the *Climate Change Committee* – an independent body formed under the *Climate Change Act of 2008* (i.e. under Gordon Brown) to advise the government on tackling and preparing for climate change. The *Committee* has long been critical of recent Tory administrations on the issue.

Gummer argued that whatever the government chooses to do or otherwise the harsh realities remain the same. Human activity has caused the global temperature to rise by 1°C since preindustrial times, and the disastrous consequences are clear to see. At the moment we are on course for an increase of 3°C and if we fail to reverse it the consequences we are seeing would at least treble.

The future, he argued, is with renewables – as is the way out of the current crisis. There are two crucial things, he insisted, that we have to do to defeat global warming and climate change – and we have to do them now. The first is to reduce carbon emissions to net zero, the other is to reduce the demand for electricity and gas via a major programme of energy conservation.

He is right, and the scope for both in the UK is enormous. Recent research by the *Institute for Government* found that the UK is particularly vulnerable to spikes in the price of gas since more than four-fifths of UK homes are still heated by gas boilers, which is much higher than most countries. The UK's housing stock is also the oldest and least energy efficient in Europe. More than 52% of homes in England were built before 1965 and nearly 20 per cent before 1919.

It found that the UK scored worse than other countries in Europe in terms of the energy efficiency of its homes. Citing analysis of a 2020 study, it found that a UK home with an indoor temperature of 20C and an outside temperature of 0C lost on average 3C after five hours – up to three times as much as homes in other European countries such as Germany.

Renewables are getting cheaper whilst fossil fuels and nuclear energy are ever more expensive. Renewables are also being weaponised – in terms of both economic and military conflicts. Putin is currently holding Europe to ransom by withholding gas supplies. In Ukraine the biggest nuclear plant in Europe is being fought over in a terrifying game of (actual) Russian

roulette.

Gummer warned governments that they ignore this reality at their peril. Whilst they can impede progress they can't turn the clock back. Public opinion, he argued has moved on in recent years and people today are far more aware of the consequence if we fail to tackle climate change.

We need a programme for rapid transition to renewables on a war-preparation scale. We don't want 'transitional fossil fuels, or any other kind of prevarication, we want renewables and we want them now. Governments can make major changes fast when they decide to do so, economies can be transformed within months.

This is the message that has to be taken to COP27 in November. We have to ensure that the gains of Glasgow are defended and that that new nationally determined pledges (NDPs) that are to be adopted at COP27 are radical enough to turn the corner on climate change and break the addiction to fossil fuel.

Alan Thornett, September 13 2022.

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**“Total, BP or Shell will not voluntarily give up their profits. We have to become stronger than them...”**  
**Interview with Andreas Malm**

Andreas Malm is a Swedish ecosocialist activist and author of

several books on fossil capital, global warming and the need to change the course of events initiated by the burning of fossil fuels over the last two centuries of capitalist development. The Jeunes Anticapitalistes (the youth branch of the [Gauche Anticapitaliste](#), the Belgian section of the Fourth International) met him at the 37th Revolutionary Youth Camp organized in solidarity with the [Fourth International](#) in France this summer, where he was invited as a speaker.

**As left-wing activists in the climate movement, we sometimes feel stuck by what can be seen as a lack of strategic perspectives within the movement. How can we radicalize the climate movement and why does the movement need a strategic debate in your opinion?**

I share the feeling, but of course it depends on the local circumstances – this Belgian “Code Red” action, this sort of *Ende Gelände* or any similar kind of thing, sounds promising to me, but you obviously know much more about it than I do. In any case, the efforts to radicalize the climate movement and let it grow can look different in different circumstances.

One way is to try to organize this kind of big mass actions of the *Ende Gelände* type, and I think that’s perhaps the most useful thing we can do. But of course, there are also sometimes opportunities for working within movements like Fridays for Future or Extinction Rebellion for that matter and try to pull them in a progressive direction as well as to make them avoid making tactical mistakes and having an apolitical discourse. In some places, I think that this strategy can be successful. Of course, one can also consider forming new more radical climate groups that might initially be pretty small, but that can be more radical in terms of tactics and analysis, and sort of pull others along, or have a “radical flank” effect. So, I don’t have one model for how to do this – it really depends on the state of the movement in the community where you live and obviously the movement has ups and downs (it went quite a lot down recently after the outbreak of the pandemic, but hopefully we’ll see it move back up).

Finally, it's obviously extremely important to have our own political organizations that kind of act as vessels for continuity and for accumulating experiences, sharing them and exchanging ideas. Our own organizations can also be used as platforms for taking initiatives within movements or together with movements.

**For some of us, our first big climate action was during the COP 15 in 2009 in Copenhagen. Now we are in 2022 – what do you think are the lessons that the climate movement has learned since then?**

The COP 15 in Copenhagen was a turning point. I was very active in the run-up to COP 15 and was part of the group that organized the big demonstration there. But the sense that most of us had in the movement after COP 15 was a general sense of failure. Of course, the COP itself was a massive failure, but we also realized that the demonstrations and direct actions didn't really have an impact. The movement realized that the focus on the COP summits that we had had up until then didn't really make sense at all, and it was largely after that that you saw a decisive turn towards opposition to fossil fuel projects, blockades, climate camps and things like that.

I think that this strategic turn will have to be reinforced, particularly given the fact that this year's COP will be held in Egypt and next year's COP will be held in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. These two countries are both completely inhospitable to dissent – it's impossible to organize anything on the ground there and so this is different from the most recent COP happening in Glasgow. The climate movement will have to organize things in other places – we can't bring activists to Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt, this resort town where the summit will happen. So, these two upcoming COPs should be occasions for the movement to pull off mass actions at various places around the world at that time, targeting fossil fuel projects.

I was at the COP 26 in Glasgow last November. Again, there was a very big demonstration – something like 100,000 people, – again, there was an alternative “people’s forum”, and I had a sense of déjà vu. This is something that we’ve been doing for a long time and it doesn’t really get us anywhere. One very brilliant comrade in the climate movement in Portugal, João Camargo, expressed in discussions around Glasgow and in a piece he wrote that we need to decisively turn our backs on the COP process because it’s so useless. As I said, the upcoming two COPs really should be just an opportunity to escalate the struggle in which we engage regardless of COPs.

**Carrying on with the strategic and tactical issues, in your talk the other day you mentioned the question of the role of the workers and the workers’ movement as they are (and they are obviously very different in the different countries). You elaborate a lot on how to block the most destructive fossil infrastructures and companies; how do you see that in relation to the workers – not only in these sectors but more generally – and the workers’ movement as you know it – be it the Swedish example or other countries?**

I think I phrased this a bit unfortunately the other day and I came across as too dismissive of trade unions. That wasn’t really my intention. My concrete experience over the past few years in relation to trade unions has been pretty limited, but my sort of horizon is northern European and in Sweden the trade unions are completely indifferent to the climate issue probably more so than in even in Norway and Denmark. Swedish unions are totally ignorant and uninterested and also totally incapable of putting up a fight for their members interests. We have no strikes in Sweden any longer. This is probably an exception rather than the rule, but the level of class struggle in Sweden is so low that from my point of view it’s extremely hard to imagine that all of a sudden organized labor in Sweden would rise to the occasion and become an important player in climate politics.

In Germany, which is where I have a little bit more concrete experience of climate activism to an extent, the situation is a little bit more complicated. On the one hand, with the Fridays for Future movement in 2019, which was stronger and larger in Germany than anywhere else, you had a moment in the autumn of 2019 when you had a trade union component to these strikes and the big public sector union called on its members to join. On the other hand, you have a very negative experience from the struggle around coal in Germany – which is really a key struggle in the whole European field of climate politics – where the big trade unions have resisted calls for an immediate or even early phase-out of coal and have been very retrograde in clinging to coal.

Out of this experience a position has emerged that has been articulated by my dear friend and comrade Tadzio Müller, who has been sort of a key organizer, strategist and thinker of Ende Gelände. He now almost says that he considers the working class in the global North to be more or less part of the enemy – he thinks that the organized working class is so invested in the existing economy that it will just defend coal and similar things like it has in general. Then there is an opposite position which is very forcefully articulated by another friend in common, Matt Huber, in his recent book *Climate Change as Class War. Building Socialism on a Warming Planet*: he says that the only hope for climate politics is to activate the forces of organized labor and that it's only by turning towards the working class – including by taking jobs in the industry, something like the old industrial turn that we had in the 80s – that we can make any progress on the climate front. So the organized working class is the only conceivable subject of a climate revolution. So these are like polar opposites and here I find myself advocating a kind of centrist position between these two. I cannot accept the idea that the working class is part of the enemy – not even coal workers – but on the other hand I don't really believe in the idea that organized labor will be the prime mover of the climate front.



I think the prime mover of the climate struggle will be and is a climate movement that isn't defined around class. I think there are three routes for someone to be interested in the question of climate: 1) having some kind of personal experience of adverse weather which is becoming more and more common; 2) having knowledge of the severity of the crisis without having personally experienced it, which isn't very hard to get by and doesn't require a PhD or any university degree; 3) being animated by solidarity with people who suffer from climate disasters around the world. I would think that these are the three main routes into the commitment to climate struggle and none of these routes necessarily pass through the point of production. So it's potentially a funnel that draws people into the climate movement from various points along the landscape of class society.

The movement that emerged in 2019 was largely defined not along the lines of class or race or gender, but rather of age. It was primarily a youth phenomenon – with Fridays for Future in particular – and there is a logic to that because the climate crisis has a very distinct temporal aspect: it's young people who will have to deal with this through the rest of their lives while old people have perhaps benefited from the fossil economy and won't see as much of the damage. I think this needs to be theorized and to an extent accepted and understood that the age component of the climate struggle will be significant in the coming mobilizations. I think that Matt Huber and others who argue along similar lines as he does are correct insofar as the climate movement needs an alliance with the working class and with segments of organized labor to amass sufficient strength to turn these things around. The climate movement has to make sure that its politics are compatible with working class interests and can converge with those interests. But that's something else than putting all eggs in the basket of an industrial turn or proletarianization of the climate movement, which I think would be a strategic dead-end. Now the promise of the Green New Deal and of all

these kinds of initiatives that we've seen in recent years – which haven't come to fruition unfortunately, but that doesn't mean that they're useless or doomed – that the climate transition goes hand in hand with improving the standards of living for workers and strengthening the bargaining power in the political position of the working class is something that needs to be pursued further.

When it comes to the concrete tactical questions about relating to workers when you are having a blockade, again, from the German experience I think it would be a massive mistake – a workerist error if you like – to prioritize good relations with the coal workers over having an effective blockade that temporarily damages the interests of these workers because you close their mines for a few days or something like that. There have been numerous initiatives to try to establish contact and dialogue with coal workers in Germany and it's been very unsuccessful, particularly in the east where the coal workers rather tend to move towards the far right – the Alternative für Deutschland, AfD – as a defense of their interests because the AfD wants to continue with coal forever and doesn't believe in the existence of the climate crisis. Then again, we definitely shouldn't give up on the idea that the type of transition we want to see has to ensure that workers in sectors that have to be dismantled completely get equivalent or better jobs, preferably in the places where they live so they don't have to move. This should be a key component of the transition. But eventually you can't expect workers in the fossil fuel industry itself to take the initiative for closing down that industry – it's a basic Marxist insight that their immediate day-to-day class interest is of course to keep their jobs. So the initiative to close that industry down has to come from the outside and the blockade is a manifestation of this: we're coming from the outside and we want to shut this sector down because it's necessary. But you don't want to make these workers your enemies and you don't want to consider them the enemy – you

want to tell them that unfortunately they are employed in a sector that has to be shut down but that we are demanding that the transition ensures that they get equivalent or better jobs where they live.

I really felt the mistake I made the other day – coming across as too dismissive of the trade unions – when I was at this workshop about eco-unionism, where I heard several cases – some of them I knew about – of workers in factories actually proposing a conversion of their production. We've had a comrade in the Swedish section of the Fourth International (FI) who has been doing absolutely heroic work in the metal workers' union in the auto industry for decades; he has been trying to establish the idea that auto workers can save their jobs by proposing a conversion of their plants to something like electrical boxes or wind turbines or whatever it is that could be used for the for the transition. Unfortunately, he just hasn't made any progress because he's so isolated and the trade union bureaucracy has such complete control. I have sort of followed his efforts for two decades, and he's banging his head against the wall of trade union bureaucracy trying to get somewhere with this idea. I've sort of lost faith in it because it hasn't produced any results; but in cases where it does produce results, I'm obviously extremely excited and happy to be proven wrong. Nothing would make me happier than the spreading of these kinds of examples of workers in factories having ideas about the transition.

**A glimpse of hope from Belgium then. It's not like the trade unions are very green and climate friendly – well, they say they are but in reality they're not, as demonstrated for instance by their position in favor of the extension of the airport in Liège to build a hub for Alibaba's activities in Europe – but still, in the 2019 Youth for Future movement, we saw a new group called Workers for Climate that was created by grassroots and left-wing unionists. What's more, the main unions – including the bureaucracies – sent delegations to the**

demonstrations, and the most progressive wings of the CSC union, organizing for instance the retail workers but also the aviation branch, officially covered the workers who would strike. It's very symbolic, but still it was made public and the workers received the information that they could go on strike and be covered by the union.

This is a universe away from Sweden, it would never happen there – but it's great!

Another thing: in the Belgian public transport sector, there is a real interest in the climate issue. This reminds of the [statement by Naomi Klein](#) that railway workers on strike are actually struggling for climate. There may be some sectors of the working class and some unions in some countries that could more easily be reached regarding the climate issue.

My limited understanding of Belgium is that you still have a fairly significant industrial manufacturing sector and a working class that every now and then engages in some serious battle for its interests. So you have some class struggle happening in Belgium – we have nothing in Sweden, absolutely nothing! But where there is class struggle happening, of course the potential exists for workers themselves taking initiatives or for the climate movement drawing them in or for convergence or productive interaction, and this should be taken up. It's exclusively a question of the level of intensity of the class struggle. At the COP 26 for instance, there was this strike happening in Glasgow by garbage collectors, and Greta Thunberg approached them and expressed her support for their strike, and they joined the big march. That's just one example of how these things can play out. Sweden is perhaps an extreme case, but the problem is that generally I think that the intensity of working class struggles is very low compared to what it was in the 80s, 70s, 60s – not to mention of course the 1920s. If the climate issue had exploded in the 1950s and 60s, it could have played out completely differently. Now it has exploded in a moment of

doldrums where the working class is historically quite weak.

**One last example of how at some point we could find another potential, in Belgium at least: during the last general strike before the pandemic, in February 2019, the airspace was shut down and there were no flights at all for 24 hours. This shows what unions are still able to do and how they could potentially change things for real. On another note: now there is a huge energy crisis which is also part of the reason why there is a very high inflation in several countries, and this is a major topic which is being discussed within the labor movement in general and which also mobilizes people to demonstrate. Could there be a point of convergence here, where we can easily highlight the need to solve the energy crisis for environmental reasons as well as for social reasons?**

Absolutely. I guess that two demands should be efficient in that situation. First, roll out renewables as fast as possible, also because they're now cheaper than fossil fuels actually, so the cost of a unit of electricity is lower if it comes from wind and solar than if it comes from any fossil fuel in Europe. There should be massive public investments in order to deploy renewables as fast as possible. Secondly, in this situation of rising energy prices, it should be seen as fundamentally perverse that private oil and gas companies are swimming in these insane superprofits and you should be able to whip up some kind of public anger about these.

**Definitely. In France – but probably also elsewhere – there has been a proposal from the parliamentary Left to implement a special tax on these profits – and even a limited number of Macron's MPs, who usually act as loyal soldiers for his authoritarian neoliberalism, seem to be inclined to agree on this idea. Now these are immediate demands, but you also put forward transitional demands to be taken up by the climate movement, i.e. demands that enter in direct contradiction with the ongoing capital accumulation. What are some of these demands?**

One of them is the demand for not a single additional fossil fuel installation or infrastructure. This can apply to an airport, a highway or a gas terminal or oil pipeline among other things. Another transitional demand – and obviously none of this is my invention, it's something that is being discussed more and more – is nationalizing the private energy companies and taking over oil and gas and coal companies and forcing them to do something different, to stop their extraction of fossil fuels as fast as humanly possible and perhaps instead roll out renewable energy or even engage in carbon dioxide removal – that means taking down CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere in one way or another. But these are only two dimensions, they are not the only ones and again, it depends on where you find yourself. In some countries, the oil and gas and coal sectors are already nationalized – there, you would have to formulate this differently.

**You mentioned carbon dioxide removal (CDR), which is a great opportunity to discuss geoengineering. You warn a lot about solar geoengineering and Naomi Klein also does, and we can fully understand why when we see the nightmare it could be when we read or hear about that. Yet in the media in general there is not much writing about that – then again, you say you fear that it might come out all at once – and we seem to hear much more about carbon dioxide removal. Why is that? What's your take on solar geoengineering? And what's your take on carbon dioxide removal – given the state of things now, is it becoming unavoidable as a necessary yet insufficient part of the solution, to be deployed next to massive reductions of emissions?**

This is a massive field which we can talk about for hours. I have a research project on this topic with a Belgian colleague from Lund university, who is also a friend and comrade, Wim Carton. We have a research grant and this coming autumn we will do research with a whole team of interns – made up of students from my Master's program in human ecology – on

various aspects of carbon dioxide removal. We will write a book with Verso in the spring, which would be about both carbon dioxide removal and solar geoengineering and whose working title right now is Overshoot. Climate Politics When It's Too Late. I spent the past couple of months writing about solar geoengineering and trying to understand it. This might sound bizarre but I'm trying to use psychoanalysis to understand solar geoengineering because it has the component of repressing a problem as in the Freudian model of repression, where you push something out of the conscious so that it appears not to exist, but under the surface it's bubbling and sooner or later it explodes.

CDR and solar geoengineering need to be distinguished as they work in different ways. You're absolutely right that solar geoengineering isn't much talked about. Some vulgar Marxists have sort of anticipated that big fossil fuel companies would promote solar geoengineering as a way continuing with business-as-usual. That has not happened: neither ExxonMobil nor any other big fossil company say anything about solar geoengineering, nor is there any government that's advocating it and there's no far right party advocating it – although during the Trump era there was this expectation that he would soon flip over into advocating solar geoengineering, none of that has happened. On the contrary, carbon dioxide removal, which works very differently, is something that all the big oil and gas companies say that they are planning on doing as part of their net zero propaganda, and you can see far right parties – someone here on this camp mentioned Berlusconi the other day – advocating in favor of planting trees and things like that, and there are also a lot of startups and capitalist companies who see carbon dioxide removal – perhaps particularly direct air capture – as a new line of business where you can produce commodities and make profit from them. So you have this sort of the burgeoning field of business opportunities in CDR that doesn't exist in solar geoengineering because that doesn't produce any new

commodities that you can sell.

There are many differences between them but another one is that CDR, just as you suggested, is going to be necessary because the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere is already too high. We need to get CO<sub>2</sub> down from the atmosphere, back under the ground, locked into subsurface storage – where it was originally before it was taken out in the form of fossil fuels and set on fire. The only way to do that on a massive scale seems to be to use some kind of advanced technology – planting trees is not going to be enough because you can't return carbon to the passive part of the carbon cycle, under the ground, just by planting trees. Planting trees affects the active carbon cycle, but to get it back sequestered under the ground, where it's locked out geologically from the active carbon cycle, you need something else. A technology like direct air capture has promise in this respect because it can actually capture CO<sub>2</sub> and mineralize it, so you turn it into stone under the ground.

There are now plants on Iceland doing that and it's essentially a proven technology, but the problem there in our analysis – Wim and I wrote an article about this in *Historical Materialism* – is that this technology is being captured by private interests who don't see any profits potential in taking the carbon and burying it underground, because that means that you essentially put a resource out of the business cycle. What they can do instead to make profit is to capture the CO<sub>2</sub> and turn it into a product such as synthetic jet fuel or they can use it in fertilizers or capture CO<sub>2</sub> and sell it as fizz to Coca-Cola – this is what Climeworks, one of the big direct air capture companies, does. When you use it as a commodity, then you can make a profit, but that's just recycling the carbon because it doesn't actually put it under the ground. So if you want to put it under the ground you need to sort of liberate this technology from the compulsion to make profit – that's our view.



Solar geoengineering on the other hand is a very different story because it comes with so many dangers of messing with the climate system. The biggest risk, of course, is what is known as the termination shock: if you do solar geoengineering, you have this sunscreen but you continue to build up CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere; what happens is that all of this CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere is just waiting to exercise its radiative forcing – its impact on the climate; – so if the sunscreen is taken down for some reason, boom, all of a sudden this accumulated CO<sub>2</sub> creates an enormous rise in temperatures. (Picture boiling water on which you put a lid and it continues to boil, it burns hotter and hotter, and then you take away the lid and the whole boiling water comes out of the pot.) That could lead to the most unimaginably disastrous spike in temperatures and there are all sorts of other dangers with geoengineering. Therefore, solar geoengineering isn't something that people on the left should advocate for, and here I part company with someone like Kim Stanley Robinson for instance. He's a novelist who wrote a great novel called *The Ministry for the Future*, probably the best climate fiction so far, but he advocates in favor of solar geoengineering – which forms a big part of that book – from sort of a left-wing perspective. A colleague of mine, Holly Jean Buck, does the same thing in the US: she's written about solar geoengineering, and she says that this is something that the left should look upon as a potentially useful technology.

I don't think it is useful, I don't think we should ever advocate it, but we should prepare for it because it's so likely that it will start; the likeliness does not come from any aggressive sponsorship, so far like we said it's almost never talked about, but there is a logic to it which is that there is only one known technology that has a potential to immediately reduce temperatures on earth. Carbon dioxide removal would have effect over decades, and likewise, if we were to stop emissions now you wouldn't see a drop in temperatures – you would see the temperatures rising more

slowly and then perhaps flattening out. If you are in a situation where you feel we are in a total emergency and we have to do something and reduce temperatures, the only thing you can do to accomplish that is to shoot sulfate clouds into the atmosphere. It's the only known technological option for doing this. With every summer, with every new season of disasters, my feeling is OK, when will the order be given to implement geoengineering? When will things break, when will the system snap and when will there be a sudden real sense of emergency that – as in during the pandemic – we have to do something and when will there be this moment where governments start looking around: “what can we do? The American West is on fire”, or becoming a desert, or the entire Europe is burning or whatever? And then there is only one thing you can do.

If we are in such a moment and the planes take off, I'm not saying we should for instance shoot down those planes or sabotage them or something like that. But we should think about what a left strategy in such a moment would be because it looks increasingly likely for strictly logical structural reasons. There are more and more signs that part of the sort of bourgeois intelligentsia is moving towards this. For instance, there is a think tank called the Paris Peace Forum which aspires to be like the World Economic Forum in geopolitics – they have put together a commission on overshoot which is chaired by Pascal Lamy who was previously chairing the WTO, and he said a few months back that we need to look into geoengineering, that there is no other way... You know this guy?

**Yes, he is or used to be a neoliberal member of the Social-Democrats in France, he was EU commissioner for trade and then he went to the WTO...**

Right. Another sign is that about a year ago the US National Academy of Sciences put out a long report advocating a national research program into geoengineering, and I think that it's far more likely that Biden and the Democrats

initiate moves towards this than Trump and the Republicans. So this is something to closely monitor and prepare for.

**This leads us to the question about the state. Many people and many leftists say that the climate and more generally the ecological disaster is a reason why we need to take up the question of the state and not only focus on something like local alternative societies, because it's so global and so bad and it will require so many investments and decisions and so on, that you need to find something as a state to act. But then of course there is the question of what kind of state we are thinking of. You talk about it a bit in in your book on the pandemic – it would be interesting to explore that question.**

Fundamentally, I think that the observation is correct that this crisis, however it's dealt with, is going to be dealt with by the state. Solar geoengineering would be an incredibly extreme intervention into the whole planetary system and it would be carried out by some states. Carbon dioxide removal on a large scale obviously requires massive involvement from the state. Emissions reductions also require the state because the reductions will have to be so big and quick and comprehensive that no other agent than the state can conceivably do it. Here we should point out that all scientists who advocate carbon dioxide removal and/or solar geoengineering are perfectly clear that none of this will work without massive emissions reductions. Those who advocate solar geoengineering nowadays never say that we can do this instead of emissions reductions, they say that we have to do both at the same time; the question is "is it really likely that both happen at the same time?" They think so, I think that's an optimistic illusion. What I mean here is that there is no serious way out of the climate crisis without massive emissions reductions, and they have to be extraordinarily fast and deep and radical.

Now in whichever path states follow, I think states will undergo changes into their character. If you have a state that

is implementing solar geoengineering, that state will become extremely powerful because it will rule the climate of the planet, so you would have all sorts of dangers of authoritarianism and extremely centralized control over climatic conditions in other parts of the world. There are all sorts of scenarios: solar geoengineering might cause monsoon failure in India or some other very bad side effect somewhere in the global South. But the state that does geoengineering – it could be the US for instance – will probably continue regardless and thereby exercise incredibly centralized power over humanity.

Now a state that undertakes massive emissions reductions could also change character. it might be authoritarian because it needs very forceful steering of the economy and of society if you're going to have these rapid emissions reductions. But there could also of course be a deepening of the democratic substance of that state: for instance if you nationalize private fossil fuel companies, what you do is that you essentially extend the democracy to the sphere of energy production. In other words, you put it under public control and take one sector of the economy into the hands of the democratic polity, which in a way pushes against the limits of bourgeois democracy which says that democracy is this strictly political sphere and that the economy is a sphere that runs itself and should not be intruded. If you take over the energy sector and put it inside the political sphere then you sort of extend democracy into the economy. I think that a real transition requires this kind of deepening of democracy and that it can take on potentially something like a rupture, a revolutionary change in the sense that if you are ever going to accomplish this you probably have to defeat a very important part of the class enemy because it's not like Total or BP or Shell will voluntarily give up and say "OK, take our companies and we will never again have any profits and we're just going out of business and dying voluntarily". That's not how it works usually in history. So if we are going to

accomplish that, we need to become stronger than them which is a very tall order because they are so much stronger than us right now. So we need to become stronger than them and if we were to defeat them, then that doesn't necessarily mean total social revolution but it's a change in property relations that could perhaps set in motion a process that goes beyond the current order of things.

**Apart from the question of the state and of local initiatives, there is the question of the role of the individual. There is an important, frequent narrative put forward by corporations and governments that it's essentially the responsibility of the individuals to solve the ecological disaster, but there is also sometimes pressure in the activist circles to live and act differently and maybe sometimes even to solve this question by individual or small changes on the scale of the individual or the community. What is your impression about this?**

It is a question that always pops up and that we struggle with all the time. Generally, I think it's important to point out that individual lifestyle changes will never be the solution and that what you can do as an individual has extremely limited effect. Buying into this whole narrative that I as a consumer can change things by shopping differently is to capitulate to a bourgeois narrative about society that is fundamentally false. First of all, you as a consumer can affect extremely limited change on your own. And you acting as a consumer is fundamentally unequal in the sense that it's the richest consumer that has the most influence: you don't want to base your politics on your affluence. A working-class consumer might have no capacity – or no time – to buy the more expensive, more ecologically sustainable alternative. Bill McKibben was at my university once and he was asked the question “what's the most important thing I can do as an individual?” and he said “stop being an individual, join with others and do things together, that's the only way to change

things”, and that’s correct.

On the other hand, the idea that what you do as an individual doesn’t matter at all is the opposite mistake. This isn’t about impact but it’s about credibility: if we advocate ecological war communism or a total transformation of society, it would be hypocritical of me or anyone arguing along these lines to make no changes in their own lifestyles and just go on flight binges or eat endless amounts of meat for instance. Saying that it doesn’t matter what I do as an individual so I can do anything but I’m all for a total change of society is not a way to make yourself credible. You need to practice what you preach just at least a little bit.

Now there is this saying by Adorno which you might have heard: “there is no good life in a bad one”, which is sometimes translated as “there is no right life in a wrong one”. To me, this means that if you’re stuck inside in a system that is fundamentally rotten it’s extremely difficult for you to purify or purge yourself and live in a completely sustainable fashion. That’s virtually impossible, unless you go out and live on your own as a hunter-gatherer in the forest to escape from the dirt of capitalist industrial civilization. We cannot strive for complete purity, it’s impossible because you want to be part of society and you want to affect change in that society – you don’t want to stand isolated outside of it. And as long as you’re inside of it, which again is a prerequisite for changing it, then you have to make concessions to the society in which you live. This has always been the situation with our struggles: the workers have a relation of dependence to their employers and receive wages from their employers; they fight against their employers but they’re still in a relation of dependence and can’t just escape that dependence. In the same way, we are locked into a system that makes us consumers of fossil fuels and we can’t just parachute out of it completely.

This means for each and one of us that we need to negotiate

this in our own lives and make decisions balancing what's the right thing to do. And here the thing that most often comes up is flying because that's the worst thing you can do as a private consumer in terms of emissions, and it's also an act that is hard to resist sometimes because for instance if you want to go to North America for some reason – there might be a political reason for you to go there – then there is no other option than flying. Last December I needed to go to Egypt because that's a country I have connections to. And for the first time in human history you can't get on a boat on the northern Mediterranean and cross to the southern Mediterranean – there are no boats to Egypt! That's bizarre because that's how people have traveled for millennia for instance between Egypt and Italy – but it's not there any longer because an entire capitalist society has enforced aviation is the only mode of transportation that is available. What do I do then? Do I sit home and say I can't go to Egypt because there are only flights? No, that's not what I did, I took a flight to go there. On the contrary, when I discussed about how I were to come here to this camp [in central France], I was first told that speakers are asked to take the cheapest transportation to the camp, which in my case would have meant flying here but that wouldn't have felt right – I try to avoid flying within Europe. And then I was alerted to the bus of the Danish delegation leaving from Copenhagen, so of course I took the Danish bus because that's a much better thing to do. But I think that there is no general rule for how to deal with these things in individual lives other than try to avoid excessive emissions and try to avoid emissions-intensive choices when possible. Of course you have to weigh this against other factors – the political projects you're involved in or family affiliations and so on. In any case, we need to abandon first the idea that my individual actions are what's going to change society and secondly the idea that you can become pure and free of sin and guilt in this society.

In [your interview](#) with Stathis Kouvélakis for Hors-Série, you

**added another argument about how consumers don't have control about how things are produced, about the global chains of production and so on, and that's another important issue for us as Marxists.**

Yes, for instance the steel sector which is crucial when it comes to emissions – there is no way that a consumer of final products really can make an impact on choices in the steel sector because steel is an input into other commodities, and as a consumer when you buy a car or whatever it is you don't get into contact with the steel industry directly, you cannot boycott it.

**One word on Sweden where you come from. What's the state of the climate or ecological movement besides Greta Thunberg and what are the challenges for the Left in the country?**

Well, Greta is an anomaly because the climate movement in Sweden is extremely weak. Sweden is generally a graveyard for social movements and Greta became famous in Sweden because she first became famous in Europe. She was kind of discovered by the Swedish media all of a sudden – “so there's this Swedish girl who's becoming very famous in Europe so we need to cover her here as well”. But Fridays for Future as a movement was always weaker in Sweden than in Denmark, not to mention Germany or even Belgium. We never reached the stage where you were – at some point in late 2019 there were a couple of fairly big demonstrations in Stockholm but still far from the influence and the magnitude seen in other countries. There are initiatives here and there. At the time this interview is published there will have been a small scale Ende Gelände type of thing in late August against a cement company on Gotland, an island to the east of Sweden. There was a massive flop in early June: an attempt by activists in Stockholm – I was part of it in the beginning – to establish a campaign called “Pull the Plug” during a summit which took place in early June and didn't receive any media attention. The summit was called “Stockholm+50” because in 1972 there was an important UNEP



summit there that was sort of a milestone in the development of international environmental politics – so the idea was that 50 years later, the Swedish government and UN would have a 50 year anniversary summit. We wanted to make actions at the same time, but the only thing that eventually happened was a march between various apartments where CEOs of oil and gas companies and banks in Sweden were living. We were going their outside of their apartments, burning some Bengal fires, chanting and so on – a great idea, but there were only 100 people. 100 people after half a year of attempts at mobilizing: a complete failure. Embarrassing even.

And then there is the question of the Left. There is the Left Party, which is the former Communist Party, and our FI section dissolved itself as a party – we used to be the Socialist Party and now we are called Socialist Politics – largely to be able to work inside the Left Party. Now the Left Party has a new chairwoman since a couple of years, Mehrnoosh Dadgostar, who goes by the name Nooshi. She has abandoned the climate politics of her predecessor Jonas Sjöstedt. He was an auto worker who used to work at the Volvo plant in Umeå in northern Sweden and was very close to some of our FI comrades because the largest metal workers union in northern Sweden is led by members of the Swedish section. He sort of started the process of inviting us into the Left Party in the years when Podemos and Syriza were interesting left-wing forces. He wanted to open up the Left Party and make it more that kind of party and suggested that we work together. He had a personal commitment to climate politics and he made it a profile issue of the Left Party. But Nooshi's strategic project is to win over working class voters from the Sweden Democrats – the far right – back to the Left Party. Now I'm simplifying a bit but she kind of has the idea that the working class is essentially the white working class in old industrial or postindustrial towns in rural areas, and that in order to win back these voters from the Sweden Democrats we have to tone down our climate politics and our anti-racism. Our current – Socialist Politics – and

quite a few others within the Left Party are of course dissatisfied with this turn – this is a controversial line that she has taken. She’s styling herself as an old-fashioned Social Democrat, very pro-industry – she likes to go to construction sites and put a helmet on and take photographs of herself posing as a worker, this kind of workerist attitude...

**This sounds similar to the short-lived experience of Sahra Wagenknecht’s Aufstehen in Germany.**

Yes, it is that sort of thing. You have this tension all the time: should we be against “identity politics” and just go for hardcore class issues or should we have a broader understanding of class and the revolutionary subject. And unfortunately she has a very clear tendency towards the former position in this debate.

**One last word about Code Rouge, the action we’ve already mentioned at the beginning of the interview. As Gauche Anticapitaliste, we are members of a quite large coalition – with organizations such as Greenpeace for instance – which is planning an important action of civil disobedience in the beginning of October. The goal is to block a big infrastructure from Total...**

Oh, wonderful!

**We agree with you! (Total bought the main Belgian oil company Petrofina 20 years ago by the way.) We aim at mobilizing more than 1,000 activists for this action. It’s really ambitious – we would like to accomplish something like Ende Gelände, which is very inspiring. We are working hard to make it a success...**

Do you have dates for this action already? Where will it be? Is there a website?

**Yes, it will take place during the weekend of 8-9 October. There is a website which is <https://code-rouge.be/> (in French and Dutch). The place has not been disclosed yet – we’ll**

**disclose it at the last moment to have more chances of success in this confrontational action.**

Of course, it makes sense. Perfect! Unfortunately I can't make it on these dates, but if I could I would definitely join!

*July 2022*

Originally published on International Viewpoint, 12 September 2022 <https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7810>