

# Scottish Kurds protest against Erdoğan invitation

*Kurds in Scotland and their supporters have protested at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh against any invitation to Turkish state President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to visit Scotland, reports Mike Picken for ecosocialist.scot.*

The apparent invitation arose after Scottish First Minister, and leader of the governing Scottish National Party (SNP), Humza Yousaf met briefly with the Turkish state President while they were both in Dubai in December 2023 for the COP28 summit. Kurds are angry that Erdoğan is using the Gaza crisis to launch military attacks on Kurdish populations inside both the Syrian and Iraqi state and continue his persecution and murderous policies towards the 10 million Kurds inside the Turkish state. In the Kurdish-led liberated region of Rojava in neighbouring Syria, Erdoğan has [committed exactly the same sort of brutal bombing and attacks on civilian infrastructure](#) that he accuses Israel of in Gaza.



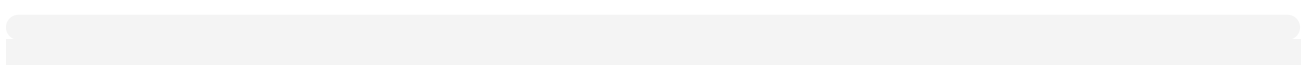
Damage caused by Turkish air attacks on civilian electricity infrastructure in Suwaydiyah North & East Syria. Photo: Rojava Information Center

So when news that Yousaf had invited Erdoğan to Scotland came

out in the media in January 2024, Kurdish and solidarity organisations such as [Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan](#), alongside trade unionists Mike Arnott of the Scottish TUC and Stephen Smellie of UNISON Scotland, moved swiftly to condemn the invitation by issuing a public letter of protest. The Kurdish community in Scotland organised a demonstration at the Scottish Parliament on 25 January to demand the SNP refuse to invite Erdoğan and instead condemn his regime's murderous policy against the Kurds. The protestor's views were recorded by progressive media outlet The Skotia on Instagram (video below) and the open letter of protest received [wide media coverage](#).



[View this post on Instagram](#)



A post shared by Media for a better Scotland. (@theskotia)

Prominent Glasgow SNP councillor Roza Salih, herself a refugee from Iraqi Kurdistan, had previously drawn attention to the matter in a post in December on Twitter/X in December, covered by The National daily newspaper:

*“Humza being friendly and laughing with Erdogan is an offence to the Kurdish people”*

*Roza Salih, Scotland’s first refugee councillor, has criticised Humza Yousaf for shaking hands with the Turkish president <https://t.co/XHu2iH28P0>*

– The National (@ScotNational) [December 2, 2023](#)

## International Movement demands release of Öcalan on 25th Anniversary of his incarceration

Meanwhile the Kurdish movement internationally is organising a global mobilisation to demand the release of Kurdish political leader, **Abdullah Öcalan**, with demonstrations across Europe up to the **25th Anniversary** of his unjust imprisonment and solitary confinement by the Turkish state. An Internationalist Long March is poised to spotlight this anniversary, beginning in



Basel-Switzerland on 10

February, and will include key events such as a conference in Strasbourg on 15 February and a pan-European demonstration in Cologne and Düsseldorf, Germany, on 17 February. SNP Westminster Member of Parliament, Tommy Sheppard, recently met with Öcalan's lawyers at the Council of Europe meeting and has written to UK government foreign secretary to call on him to take up Öcalan's incarceration by the Turkish government and demand his release (text below).

## **Text of Open Letter by Kurdish solidarity organisations and individuals on the invitation of Turkish president Erdoğan to Scotland**

### *STATEMENT:*

*We, the undersigned, condemn the invitation that the First Minister of Scotland, Humza Yousaf, has made to Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan.*

*The Turkish state's record on human rights abuses is well documented, both internally and externally. Women, ethnic minorities and migrants bear the brunt of its oppressive policies. In particular, the Turkish state continues a policy against the Kurdish people that seeks to suppress basic human rights and political autonomy through military force, legal repression, and assimilationist policies.*

*Erdogan's party destroys civilian infrastructure beyond Turkey's own borders for political leverage and to disempower an already economically disadvantaged population in Syria and Iraq. Yousaf's response to journalists was dismissive when*

challenged on this. We condemn the cooperation between Erdogan and any segment of the British state. The First Minister's response to press questioning whether the invitation was "a good idea considering his treatment of the Kurds" was that "as a NATO ally", it was a legitimate invitation "if he was visiting the UK". This is hypocritical: The SNP positions itself as distinct from Westminster and with a more discerning eye towards human rights abuses and regional autonomy.

While Erdogan has been vocally supportive of Palestinians, 40% of oil imports to Israel come via Turkey, and the two governments have a long term and high value arms industry relationship that has been ongoing throughout the periods of intensification in Israeli attacks over the last decade. Erdogan does to the Kurds everything that he accuses Netanyahu of doing to the Palestinian people. Both Israel and Turkey have been crafting a Middle East where business and trade with western countries are more valuable than justice or freedom. The power to define terrorism and the legitimate use of violence are now highly developed tools to repress even the most basic self-determination of peoples.

From January 13th – 16th 2024, Turkish military forces carried out 224 ground and air strikes in north-eastern Syria, targeting agricultural and energy infrastructure such as oil fields. In nine locations, electric power stations were struck, which led to power outages and water supply issues that are currently affecting millions of people. This type of attack is a frequent but under reported reality and Erdogan is exploiting this moment when the world media is rightfully watching Gaza. The targeting of vital infrastructure is itself a war crime and these attacks are also an unprovoked act of aggression.

BAE Systems, Thales, Leonardo and other weapons manufacturing companies that have factories in Scotland supply both Israel and Turkey. In 2019, white phosphorous – banned for use as an

incendiary chemical weapon – was reported to have been used by the Turkish military in north-eastern Syria. An investigation at the time showed 70 British export licenses for phosphorous.

Domestically in Turkey, the political repression of the left-wing parliamentary party HDP has led to more than five thousand of its members being arrested, the stripping of MPs' parliamentary immunity and their imprisonment, and widespread implementation of the "trustee" system by Erdogan's party that forcibly removed all elected HDP mayors from office and replaced them with government-appointed officials. This has disproportionately affected the Kurdish people in Turkey, where attempts at democratic expression are crushed, and more than eight thousand Kurdish political prisoners are languishing in Turkish prisons. Kurdish language musicians, teachers and campaigners are often met with criminalisation – the Kurdish language is unrecognised by the Turkish parliament despite being the second most spoken language in the country, and language rights are linked to terrorism as a method of delegitimisation.

The UK government and the European Union countries have shrewdly wedded themselves to facilitating Erdogan's AKP government in exchange for the policing of Europe's land and sea borders and its imprisonment of displaced peoples subject to these "push-backs".

As residents of Scotland and members of human rights organisations, we request that the First Minister and the SNP condemn Erdogan and the AK Party for their actions. The targeting of civilian infrastructure and use of chemical weapons are war crimes, regardless of whether the state that does so is a NATO member.

We request Mr Yousaf's support in condemning these attacks on north-east Syria. We also ask him to assess the human rights abuses that the Kurdish peoples are subject to within the

*state borders of Turkey and that he supports the struggle for the freedom of political prisoners in Turkey.*

*We are in a moment that requires brave leadership on myriad human rights abuses, the repression of the self-determination of peoples and the destruction of the earth, happening across the globe. We implore the First Minister and Scottish government, particularly in this moment, to resist shallow alliances that fail to look at the geo-political situation holistically. The moment demands an uncompromising acknowledgement of the colonial legacies of the current genocidal treatment of the Palestinian and Kurdish peoples.*

*We ask Mr Yousaf to meet with the Kurdish communities in Scotland and campaigners to discuss this issue. We believe that Scotland can do better and we would like to talk about how.*

#### *LIST OF SIGNATURES*

*Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan*

*Kurdish Community Scotland*

*Zagros Community Scotland*

*Women's Rights Delegation from Scotland to North and East Syria, May 2023*

*International Human Rights Delegation on political prisoners in Turkey, December 2023*

*Edinburgh University Justice for Palestine Society*

*Mike Arnott, President of Scottish Trades Union Congress*

*Stephen Smellie, Depute Convenor UNISON Scotland*

*International Solidarity Movement (ISM) – Scotland*

## **Text of Letter from SNP Westminster**

# MP Tommy Sheppard to UK government foreign secretary David Cameron

TOMMY SHEPPARD MP



*The Rt Hon Lord David Cameron  
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development  
Affairs  
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH  
26th January 2024*

*Dear David*

*I am writing on behalf of several constituents to ask you to make representations to the Turkish Government in the case of Abdullah Ocalan.*

*You will know that Ocalan is regarded by millions of Kurds throughout the world as their leader and he is key to achieving a permanent and peaceful solution which respects the rights of the Kurds in Turkey and neighbouring countries.*

*He has been held in solitary confinement on the island prison of Imrali for almost 25 years. This is contrary to several judgements of European Court of Human Rights which have found the manner of his detention to be in violation of the statutes to prohibit torture.*

*As a UK member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I met with Mr Ocalan's lawyers earlier this week.*



*They tell me that he has been denied any communication with the outside world and any visits from his legal team for almost three years now.*

*This case does great damage to Turkey's reputation and is an egregious breach of international human rights law. It is also a running sore and an insult to the many thousands of Kurdish people who have made this country their home.*

*I would ask you to take up this case with the Turkish authorities, demanding that Mr Ocalan be allowed access to his lawyers, that his isolation end, and that after a quarter of a century in solitary confinement, his case is reviewed, and plans made to end his incarceration.*

*I look forward to your response.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Tommy Sheppard*

*Member of Parliament for Edinburgh East*

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## **Gaza: Support the New Hetherington Occupation at Glasgow University**

*Students have occupied a building at Glasgow University to demand divestment from arms industries in the light of Israel's genocidal war in Gaza. Jennifer Debs reports for **Heckle** – online journal of the Republican Socialist Platform.*

Almost thirteen years have passed since Glasgow University's

Hetherington House was last alive with student protest, but as of Monday 22nd January, that long dry spell has come to an end.

Once again, the windows of the building are brightened by flags and protest signs, and once more the halls are filled with political chatter and radical demands. Nearby, university security guards hover uneasily, keeping an eye on the front door and everyone that comes and goes. Looking at the scene, you might [think it was 2011 again](#).

But this is a new generation of student activists, even if the causes they fight for, like that of Gaza, were also upheld by a previous generation. The new occupiers are part of the Glasgow Against Arms and Fossil Fuels (GAAF) group, and they have taken over Hetherington House with the demand that the University of Glasgow divests from its investments in the arms industry.



Credit: [@gaafmovement on Instagram](#)

Inflamed by the brutal invasion of Gaza, the latest chapter in Israel's campaign of genocide against the Palestinian people, GAAF are taking action to pressure university management into

taking a decision that would have a concrete impact on the funding of murder in the Middle East. GAAF argue that the university has blood on its hands, and that it profits by the shedding of that blood – something that must be stopped as soon as possible.

The occupation is aiming to put specific pressure on the university's finance committee, ahead of its next meeting in February, to make a decision in favour of divestment. GAAF has reason to believe its goal is feasible, given that Glasgow University previously made commitments to [divest from fossil fuels in 2014](#) after a successful campaign by student activists.

Of course, any commitment the university makes will be one that it must be held to, and that will doubtless be a part of GAAF's work should they win the current struggle. The university cannot be allowed to kick this issue into the long grass, not when so much is at stake in Palestine, Yemen, and other sites of imperialist slaughter in the world today.



Credit: GAAF

For now, the occupation is focused on its first goal of winning a commitment to divestment, and on keeping itself running. Yesterday, Wednesday 24th January, a solidarity demonstration of students and supporters rallied outside Hetherington House before marching to the main building of the university. There were speeches about the goals of the campaign and the necessity of arms divestment, and the crowd made plenty of noise to let the university management know they aren't going anywhere.

This is only the beginning. GAAF intend to keep the occupation going until they win their goal, and they naturally need as much support as possible. With this action, these brave students are striking a blow at the imperialist war machine, and lending a hand to the people of Palestine in their hour of need. Every socialist in Scotland should support this occupation.





Credit: GAAF

If you live nearby, go along to 11 University Gardens, have a chat with the students guarding the door, bring them some snacks and fruit, and let them know they are not alone. Occupations always need food and supplies, so find out what they need, and help them get it if you have some cash to spare. If GAAF call a demonstration, get along and show your support. The university and the broader public must know that these occupiers are backed up by a great well of support from the working class.

If you live elsewhere, why not think of organising a solidarity action through your trade union branch, your student union, your tenants' union, or your group of friends? And if the university management attempt to punish the occupiers with disciplinary action like suspension or expulsion, then we as a movement must help GAAF resist and overturn any such decisions. Any victimisation of the

occupiers must be confronted with a firm response: nobody left behind!

When the original Hetherington occupation took on university management all those years ago, they had a network of student groups and anti-austerity collectives at their side, supporting them and taking action in Glasgow and further afield. If the new Free Hetherington is to survive – and not just survive, claim a victory too – then it cannot be a single event. It must be answered in all the rich variety of action and expression the student and workers' movement is capable of.

There are many more institutions that fund genocide in Palestine, and this cannot be allowed to continue. But take heart – today we are seeing a new era of student militancy, and hopefully there will be many more occupations to come, not just in Glasgow, but also Dundee, Paisley, Stirling, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. The arms economy needs a good beating. Let the second Free Hetherington be a kick in the teeth, but not the last!

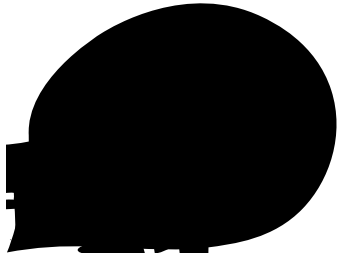
All together – defend and extend the Free Hetherington!

Books not bombs!

No profit from blood!

*You can keep informed about GAAF and the occupation on [their Instagram page](#). The occupation is located at [11 University Gardens, Glasgow G12 8QH](#).*

Originally published on **Heckle:**  
<https://heckle.scot/2024/01/support-the-new-hetherington-occupation/>



To join the Republican Socialist Platform,  
visit: <https://join.republicansocialists.scot/>



**Republican  
Socialists**

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## From Ukraine to Palestine – Occupation is a Crime

Ukraine socialist organisation, [Sotsialny Rukh](#) ('[Social Movement](#)') has published the following statement on the war against the Palestinian people in Gaza. The translation is by the [Ukraine Solidarity Campaign](#).

*The Social Movement stands for a just peace in the Middle East, which requires the elimination of structural oppression of Palestinians and systemic violence against the civilian population. We also condemn the Iron Swords Operation launched by the far-right Netanyahu government in response to the condemnable October 7 attacks and the war crimes being*

*committed in its process.*

The war in the Gaza Strip has been going on for more than two months.

The Social Movement stands for a just peace in the Middle East, to achieve which it is necessary to eliminate the structural oppression of Palestinians and systematic violence against the civilian population. Our organization condemns the bloody attack carried out on October 7, 2023 against the civilian population as part of the attack on Israel by the militarized Islamist movement Hamas. The brutal massacres of kibbutzim women, foreign workers, Bedouins and other civilians, which claimed more than a thousand lives, as well as the kidnapping of civilians as hostages, cannot have any justification.

However, we condemn the Iron Swords Operation launched by the far-right Netanyahu government in response to the October 7 attack and the war crimes being committed in its process. The actions of the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip are punitive against its entire population, about half of which are children. Israel has imposed a total siege on the Gaza Strip, which has been under an illegal Israeli-Egyptian blockade since 2007, preventing the supply of water, electricity, food and medicine to Gaza's more than 2 million people, turning it into "the world's largest open-air prison".





According to various data provided by international organizations, within a few weeks of this operation, up to 18,000 civilians, including 7,800 children were killed and another 50,000 people were injured; 85% of the nearly 2 million population of the Gaza Strip – were forced to flee their homes. More than 200 medical workers and more than 100 UN employees were among the dead. UN confirms that at least half of the population of Gaza is reduced to starvation. It seems unacceptable to justify the imposition of a humanitarian catastrophe and the terror of a powerful military machine against the civilian population under the pretext of a “war on terror”, as the Russians did in Ichkeria/Chechnya or the Americans did in Iraq.

Israel’s next military operation in the Gaza Strip is the exact opposite of an effective resolution of the conflict. Such a policy has been going on for decades, since the state of Israel, after confrontation with neighboring Arab countries, reinforced by British colonial policies, displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their land, after which millions of their descendants were doomed to flee (events known as the Nakba – “catastrophe” in Arabic). The Israeli authorities continue to ignore numerous UN resolutions, the latest of which was adopted on October 27 by

the votes of 120 of the 193 member states in the General Assembly and called for a ceasefire. Reports from the UN and human rights organizations have repeatedly compared the segregation of Palestinians practiced by Israel to the apartheid regime in South Africa.

Israeli settlers, many of them militant fanatics, continue their policy of colonization and violence against the Palestinian population in the West Bank with the connivance of the Israeli authorities, who carry out the daily humiliation, arbitrary detention and killing of Palestinian men and **women {and children}??**. Even before this year's events, according to the calculations of the Israeli human rights organization Bezelem, since 2000, Israelis have killed more than 10,000 Palestinian men and women. Moreover, the general rule is the disproportionality of violence on the part of Israel, with which it responds even to exclusively peaceful protests. For example, during the suppression of the Palestinian **[Great March of Return]** to the wall blocking Gaza Israeli security forces killed 195 Palestinians, including 41 minors **[in a year since March 2018]** (data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). And in terms of the number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank, 2023 became a record year for the entire time that the UN has been keeping statistics (and this is as of October, when Israeli security forces killed more than a hundred people in this part of Palestine, which does not have any Hamas bases). The indifferent reaction of the world community, no more than "deep concern", led to the further despair of local residents in peaceful ways of resolving the conflict, which is what the fundamentalist forces are using.

The current Netanyahu government, also filled with reactionaries and religious fanatics who openly dehumanize the Palestinians and call for their murder and genocide, has gone even further than its predecessors. Israel itself at one time played a not insignificant role in supplanting the mainly

secular and non-violent resistance to the occupation among the Palestinians of the time of the first Intifada with a more right-wing, violent and fundamentalist variety. Netanyahu and his officials admitted that they have encouraged the reactionaries and religious fanatics from Hamas, because that weakened the Palestinian Authority, introduced additional discord into the condition of Palestinians and sabotaged the prospects of building a sovereign state for them.

This reckless policy did not change even after Egyptian, but also Israeli intelligence, current and retired military ranks warned of possible escalation as a result of the blockade and colonial policy. Thus, the former head of the Israeli Navy and the Shabak secret service, Ami Ayalon, warned that “when Palestinians see us destroying their homes, fear, frustration and hatred grow. These are the reasons that push people to terrorist organizations.”

Netanyahu, like other conservatives, constantly used the rhetoric of “defence against threats” to justify their attacks on democratic freedoms and further build-up of the security apparatus, which, however, did not avert the attacks of Hamas from Gaza but instead was preoccupied with terrorizing the Palestinians in the West Bank. After all, the never-ending spiral of violence has not and will not increase security for anyone except extreme conservative-nationalist forces. Such an atmosphere has already led to the most right-wing Knesset and government in Israel’s history. And the current war has provided an indulgence for the Netanyahu cabinet against which mass protests continued for most of 2023 (characteristically, a poll conducted on the eve of the escalation showed that the majority of the population of Gaza did not trust the Hamas movement, which more than a decade and a half ago after a civil conflict with Fatah established an authoritarian one-party government here).

At the same time, the mainstream of both leading parties of the main patron of Israel – the United States – demonstrated

an immediate readiness to provide unconditional military and diplomatic support for almost all actions of the Israeli government. Here, both the contrast with the hesitation regarding arms supplies to Ukraine and the desire of the most reactionary circles of the American ruling class – the right wing of the Republican Party – to finance the ethnic cleansing and adventures of the Netanyahu government at the expense of depriving Ukrainians of aid are notable. In this, the Trumpists are similar to many other far-right forces in the West: having many anti-Semites in their ranks, such parties at the same time protect the ability of both Israeli and Russian security forces to kill residents of Palestine and Ukraine with impunity.

What's more, Washington itself contributed to the current rise in tensions, supporting Israel's encroachment on Jerusalem as its capital exclusively since the Trump administration. Now the US is vetoing initiatives in the UN Security Council, such as Brazil's proposed provision of humanitarian corridors or the latest ceasefire resolution of December 8, which was voted for by 13 out of 15 members of the UN Security Council. As in the case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this once again proves that the permanent members of the UN should be deprived of their veto powers which paralyze the ability of the international community to stop the carnage.

Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine has increased the atmosphere of international tension and impunity, enabling the escalation of a series of conflicts that put entire communities on the brink of survival as already happened with the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh as a result of the aggressive actions of the Aliyev regime in September of this year. The current round of confrontation in the Middle East is of the same ilk and resulted in disturbing trends in the rest of the world, in particular, a surge in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia (up to attempted Jewish pogroms, such as in the North Caucasus controlled by Putin's Russia, armed attacks on

Palestinians such as the students in Vermont, or the murder of people such as the Palestinian boy in Chicago or the police shooting of Jewish tourists and a local guide in Egypt).

Unfortunately, the reaction of the Ukrainian authorities also reveals an extremely biased and one-sided approach: rightly condemning the attacks on civilians in Israel and honouring the dead, it at the same time prefers to ignore the dead civilians in Palestine. Despite the fact that Ukrainian diplomacy at the UN has consistently condemned the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands and other violations by Israel in almost all cases, whose authorities take an ambivalent position on the Russian occupation and provide the latest precedents to follow. Instead, the shameful rhetoric of demonizing Palestinians, declaring all of them, from infants to the elderly, as “terrorists” prevails in the Ukrainian media.

Yes, one should be aware that for many of the self-proclaimed “friends” of Palestine, whether they are well-known Hamas partners and sponsors, such as the authoritarian authorities of Qatar, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Russia (which maintained emphatically friendly relations with both the Netanyahu government and with Hamas), the tragedy of the Palestinian people is only a bargaining chip. But reducing the Palestinians to “proxies of Tehran and the Kremlin” in the domestic information space is as illiterate and outrageous a caricature as the “proxy” justification of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Instead, it is in Ukraine that the suffering of the Palestinian people should be understood: there, too, the occupation by a state that possesses nuclear weapons and superiority in the armed forces continues, simply disregards UN resolutions and international law, denies the rights to subjectivity and resistance. The tragedy we are now experiencing should sharpen our sensitivity to similar human experiences in all corners of the world. The Ukrainian letter

of solidarity with the Palestinian people, posted on the platform of the “Spilne” magazine website, demonstrated such alternative voices to the official one, which affirm the universal right to self-determination and resistance to the occupation.

“How lonely are you, our loneliness, when they win their wars,” asked the Arab writer Hiba Kamal Abu Nada in her poem, when “your land is sold at auction, and the world is a free market... This is the age of ignorance, when no one will intercede for us.” The 32-year-old poet became one of the thousands of civilian victims of Israeli airstrikes this year. The duty of the world is not to leave the oppressed alone, especially when faced with the threat of their physical extermination. Not to put up with bombs and rockets flying at their heads. Neither in Ukraine nor in Palestine.

**Therefore, the “Social Movement” calls for an immediate ceasefire and the admission of humanitarian aid to the region, and also expresses its support for the Palestinian people in their legitimate desire for a just and lasting peace.**

*Originally published by Ukraine Solidarity Campaign:*  
<https://ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org/2024/01/26/from-ukraine-to-palestine-occupation-is-a-crime/>

*More information from:* <https://rev.org.ua/english/>



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# USA Election 2024: Deform & Dysfunction

*The Editors of USA socialist journal 'Against the Current' write on the forthcoming US Presidential election.*

IN A POLARIZED, angry, anxiety-and-crisis-ridden United States of America, wide swathes of a fragmented and divided electorate find common ground at least on what they don't want: a 2024 repeat of a presidential election between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. Yet eleven months in advance – subject to change, but not easily – that spectacle is just what we'll get.

Such a prospect, along with Trump's criminal trials and Biden's policy stumbles, may help explain a peculiar popular climate of simultaneous political agitation and apathy. Many millions of voters including working-class people (aside from Trump cult loyalists) will find themselves voting for presidential candidates and political parties they despise the least, not for choices they actually like.

This malaise, rather than any hopeful excitement, also accounts for why the anti-vax and racist certified crackpot candidate Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. is polling as high as 24% as an independent, or why the rightwing Democratic Senator Joe Manchin might undertake a "No Labels" third-party campaign to "mobilize the middle" that could throw the election any which way.

No one should underestimate what a revived Trump presidency might mean – with his operatives' overt, already promised concentration/deportation camps to be constructed for asylum seekers, forced removals of students for pro-Palestinian activism, targeted attacks on the press, mass firings of government employees to be replaced by regime loyalists,

wholesale pardons for the January 6 aspiring insurrectionists, and who-knows-what chaos in imperialist global management.

The campaign of Trump's emerging leading Republican rival Nikki Haley has been endorsed (purchased) by the Koch Brothers' "Americans for Prosperity" (Plutocracy) outlet. This represents an attempt to consolidate a grossly reactionary, but more establishment neoconservative alternative to the runaway criminality of Trump and his prospective second term. That option would surely have appeal to much of the U.S. capitalist ruling class. (One rightwing commentator, Nolan Finley in the *Detroit News*, urges that Haley become the "No Labels" candidate.)

## **Activism and Ironies**

To avoid a one-sided overly bleak portrayal, we should cite positive cases of social action that have made a difference. First, as we've discussed frequently, is the labor activist revival, culminating in union contracts with big gains for auto workers, at UPS, and steps forward in organizing places like Tesla and Amazon.

Second, at the present critical moment, is the outpouring in the streets demanding a ceasefire in Israel's war against Gaza and Palestine, which we discussed in our previous issue (ATC 227, "Catastrophe in Palestine and Israel: Apartheid on the Road to Genocide") and continue our coverage in the present issue.

Third is the continuing popular revulsion against the cynical and deeply evil anti-abortion extremism of the right wing, which is prepared to sacrifice women's lives to the "pro-life" cause, along with book bans and state-level voter suppression measures.

Such examples show that class and social movements continue – as also shown by myriad state, local and community struggles,



including around abortion, trans and housing justice among other issues. The fact that these are not generating much positive energy at the level of national electoral politics is one indication of a deformed and dysfunctional political system.

In this space we will not attempt to prognosticate, or chew over polling data, or (for the moment) seriously approach the prospects of an independent progressive alternative. The latter, critically important possibility must be a topic for future in-depth discussion. Here we want to explore some of the multiple ironies at the beginning of the electoral season.

If there's one policy arena where Biden-Harris administration should get at least passing marks and maybe some plaudits, it would be the general health of the post-pandemic economy. Yet that is exactly where polls show "greater confidence in the Republicans" – whose policies have been the most blatantly to enrich-the-rich, impoverish-the-poor, and run-up-deficits while pretending to be fiscally responsible.

It's an astonishing public-relations triumph of plutocracy posing as populism. Democratic pundits and operatives are visibly distressed that "Bidenomics" fails to garner the approval it deserves. The reasons for this apparent anomaly go far beyond its mediocre "messaging."

It's true that this administration came in with a Build Back Better program that had some inspiring, even transformative potential (even if much of it came cloaked in nationalist rhetoric about countering the rise of China). As it emerged from the desk of Bernie Sanders and the ambitions of Green New Dealers, the program included some serious federal spending – on infrastructure and energy transition – amounting to something like half the annual military budget.

Thanks to Senator Manchin among others, the best part of the program was trimmed back to what became the Inflation

Reduction Act. For example, pandemic-relief subsidies that cut U.S. childhood poverty in half – a very significant accomplishment in this brutally unequal society! – ran out. Thus in Manchin's own state – according to official Census Bureau's estimates, West Virginia's child poverty rate – the highest in the nation – increased from 20.7% to 25.0% between 2021 and 2022.

Most important, the measurable benefits of the recovery flow overwhelmingly to the high-income layers of the population, who need them the least. Folks at lower-middle income or less levels see very little if any difference in their daily lives.

Inflation levels are well down from their brief eight-percent high point, but that still leaves prices of basic necessities far higher than they were – while the Federal Reserve's interest-rate hikes that were ostensibly needed to “curb inflation” have themselves exacerbated a housing crisis that especially afflicts young people (and many limited-income senior citizens too).

The cumulative result is that macroeconomic statistics for the moment look reasonably good, but for many tens of millions of people the real-life economy doesn't feel that way. That hurts the electoral prospects for an incumbent administration, i.e. for Biden in 2024 as it did for Trump in 2020.

## **Further Irony: Demographics**

If there's one factor that should be pushing the Republican Party toward permanent marginality even as it hurtles toward extreme-right lunacy, it's that the United States is demographically becoming no longer a “white” country, and that younger generations are each more diverse than the previous one.

It's precisely young, African American and other nonwhite and immigrant communities, and the LGBT and non-binary population,

who are the front-line targets of white-supremacist, Christian-nationalist and religious-right ideologies that thoroughly dominate today's Republican Party – including of course the Trump cult but not only that sector.

Yet it's precisely those younger, less white and less affluent sectors where the Democrats' presumptively overwhelming majorities are narrowing. Polls are showing nearly a quarter of African Americans preferring Trump over Biden, an astonishing (even if it turns out to be short-lived) index of disillusionment.

*What's happened?* Mainly, we think it's that the Democrats have overpromised and under-delivered real change – in terms of racial justice, student debt relief, immigration reform, tackling climate change, and more. Partly too, it was only a matter of time until the feeling of relief from the (first) Trump nightmare wore off.

To some extent, also, Biden's age and immovability present a bad look. But on key issues that are really hurting the Democrats' prospects in 2024, it's not Biden that's senile, but *American policy*.

This is particularly illustrated in the present Israeli genocidal war on Gaza. The crucial young sector of the Democrats' voter base is increasingly sympathetic to Palestine, alienated from the party's traditional unquestioning support of Israel, and no longer duped by feeble bleats about a long-dead "two-state solution." The December 1 resumption of the full-scale Israeli offensive, along with escalating murderous military and settler violence, accelerates that deepening and absolutely necessary disgust with Washington's active complicity in the massacre.

As for the Arab American and Palestinian communities, the fury over "Genocide Joe" Biden is difficult to describe if you haven't witnessed it. Leaders in communities like Dearborn,

Michigan, a key to the Democratic success in 2020, are openly vowing “we will never vote for Biden again even if the alternative is worse.” It’s impossible to say right now how this feeling will translate into votes or non-votes next November – keeping in mind the maxim that “all politics are local” – but the Democrats are willfully blind if they underestimate its importance.

Another factor that will require close further attention is the flood of bipartisan money from AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and rightwing sources to defeat progressive, pro-Palestinian congressional representatives like Rashida Tlaib (MI), Cori Bush (MO) and Ilhan Omar (MN) in their primaries. AIPAC has been promising to throw \$20 million toward any candidate who’ll challenge Tlaib. Any Democratic leadership connivance in these efforts could have fatal electoral consequences.

## **Immigration Crisis**

Another issue bedeviling the Biden administration, clearly, is the immigration and asylum crisis. This is a powerful case of imperialism creating a problem it can’t solve. The numbers of desperate refugees and asylum applicants seeking entry at the southern border are overwhelming U.S. and northern Mexican cities, towns and support networks attempting to shelter and feed them.

The refugee crisis is a thoroughly bipartisan product of decades of destructive policies that we’ve discussed in these pages: decades of “free trade” that’s wiped out much of family farming in Mexico, genocidal counterrevolutionary wars in Central America, economic sanctions that greatly contribute to the unraveling of Venezuela as well as Cuba, serial catastrophic interventions in Haiti, and more.

Worst of all, 50 years of an insane U.S. “war on drugs” could not have been more brilliantly designed to turn the drug trade

over to violent criminal cartels while shattering lives and communities in North America. On top of all this, the escalating effects of climate change are wiping out means of subsistence such as, for example, coffee crops in Honduras. We've noted before that desperate immigration journeys and calamities are global in scope, as the miseries in the Mediterranean and cruelties of the Italian, British and other European governments illustrate.

This crisis eats away at domestic confidence in the Biden administration's grip on policy, even though it's not of their making – and even though the “alternative” is the outright sadism of the Republicans.

A freshly passed Texas law enables local police to arrest suspected “illegals” on any or no pretext, and local courts to initiate detentions and deportations. In usurping clear federal jurisdiction over immigration, this law is so blatantly unconstitutional in its application, and so fascistic in its implications, that only the prevailing White Supremacy Court of the United States (WSCOTUS) majority would seem likely to uphold it. (The ACLU is mounting court challenges before the law takes effect in February.)

There remains one area where the right wing and the Republican Party seem determined to self-destruct: their drive to complete the banning and criminalizing of abortion in the United States. In one state after another, where the right to abortion comes to a choice by voters, it wins – decisively. The horrific implications of a Republican sweep of the White House and Congress will keep not only women but a big slice of the entire electorate on side with the Democrats. The Republican determination to continue a losing anti-abortion crusade is rooted in the centrality of that issue to the overall “culture war” assault on gender, racial and social literacy – in libraries, schools, college campuses, and everywhere else.

That specter might, just barely, preserve the Democrats' grip on power after a looming 2024 election choice that hardly anyone outside the Trump cult actually wants. That's a pretty weak reed to grasp, and certainly nothing for a progressive left to bank on. The struggle for an alternative must look elsewhere, beginning with the rising activism we've seen for labor, for Palestine, for immigration and reproductive justice!

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Graphic from Against the Current, title: 'The sequel – not by popular demand'

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## Tom Nairn and 'The Break Up of Britain' by Neil Williamson (from the archive)

The work of the Scottish political theorist Tom Nairn (1932-2023), and his seminal work, *The Break-up of Britain* (available [here](#)), was the recently the subject of a well-attended conference in Edinburgh's Assembly Rooms (for an account of the conference see [Sean Bell's article in Heckle](#)). However, whilst there was much of value at the conference, a critical perspective on Nairn's work – from a left perspective – was largely noticeable by its absence. It was not, however, always so. Shortly after the appearance of the first edition of Nairn's book in 1977, the following review, written by the

late Neil Williamson (who tragically died in 1977, obituary [here](#)) was published in **International**, the theoretical journal of the [International Marxist Group](#) (then the British section of the [Fourth International](#), forerunner of [ecosocialist.scot](#)).

Despite, being written some decades ago, it remains an important assessment of Nairn's views on socialism, nationalism, and on the nature of the British State, and – as such – it retains much contemporary interest and relevance.

### REVIEW OF TOM NAIRN, THE BREAK-UP OF BRITAIN, 1<sup>st</sup> EDITION, NEW LEFT BOOKS (1977)

As the rate of inflation on its way up meets the rate of exchange for the pound on the way down, an ideal climate is created for books about 'the crisis'. Given the fixation with Britain's decline shared by bourgeois and socialists alike, it is amazing how vacuous and tepid most of these studies have been. Tom Nairn's book *The Break-up of Britain* is a welcome exception. For once we have a study which goes beyond a ritual listing of symptoms, and starts to examine the specificities of Britain as an imperialist state in the late 20th Century.

It will be easier to understand Nairn's book if his argument is discussed in two parts. First, the survey he makes of British imperialism, its rise and present demise; then secondly, the more theoretical conclusions he draws about nationalism and its place in European and world history. Although this order may seem back to front, it relates to the order of the book itself and also corresponds to a much firmer and confident first section which will allow us to make more sense of the author's more speculative and tentative conclusions.

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Nairn starts off by describing what he calls the 'transition state' [1] of 18th century Britain which combined in its

ruling caste elements from both the agrarian aristocracy and the modern constitutional bourgeoisie. Neither part of the 'old world' of Absolutism, nor the 'modern world' of representative bourgeois democracy, the result was a social formation with a remarkably 'low profile' state and an extremely cohesive, if deferential, civil society.

The basis for the remarkable stability and class quiescence of this society was of course its phenomenal success as an overseas Empire builder and ruler. Unlike the aspiring German or Italian capitalisms, there was literally no necessity in Britain for the restless dynamism so typical of her competitors in the 19th century. It was thus the 'external' relations of Britain to world development which moulded and dictated her 'internal' social structure.

One of the most crucial features of the complacent rule of Britain's patrician elite was the wholesale incorporation of the English intelligentsia into the service of the state and its rulers. The civil service and the Oxbridge-public school network were the social cords which bound the loyalty of the British upper middle classes to the 'ancien regime' with its monarchy, Lords and assorted paraphernalia which was to disappear elsewhere over Europe by 1920. But there was to be no 'second revolution' in Britain, no dramatic rupture with the dynasties of tradition as seen in the Romanov, Ottoman, Habsburg or Hohenzollern territories. The very success of British society (in world terms) was the basis for the social pact between the ruling class and Britain's 'hard-headed' urban middle class. A potentially much more serious threat was of course the developing labour movement. But according to Nairn this threat never materialised. The energy of working class politics was channelled into the Labour Party, probably the most humble and deferential political animal in British politics.

In Scotland a distinct sub-plot was unwinding. Despite its impressive pedigree of national life (its Church, financial



system, etc) the partnership colonial and imperial plunder removed the necessity for the middle class of taking the road of forced march to modern development under the banner of nationalism. The result was a withered and pathetic apology for nationalism with Oor Wullie [*newspaper cartoon strip from 1936*] and Dr. Finlay [*fictional GP, televised in the 1960s*] as Scotland's national symbols. Likewise the intelligentsia of 19th century Scotland found themselves functionless in 'their own' society. Some moved south or overseas, where their talents were put to the natural use of ruling the masses. Others stayed in Scotland and, cut off from the metropolis, their parochialism and dourness was only compensated for by the secure living to be made as captains of industry in the Clyde or Tay valleys.

The spiralling economic collapse of British Imperialism, the world of IMF loans and 'one more year of austerity', has undermined the basis of that old stability. Today it is no longer the virtues of talented and successful amateurism which stand out. Instead it is the vices of a creaky and arthritic political rule which personify Britain.

Again according to Nairn, the labour movement has been totally unable to mount any effective challenge to the British state and its 'consensus'. Even the most self-active struggles have not gone beyond the bounds of loyalty to Labour's parliamentarianism. In fact it is bourgeois radicalism which is the most dangerous to the prospects of the British constitution, a bourgeois radicalism in the shape of nationalist movements. Based on oil and the prospects of social-economic renovation which can be derived from its ownership, a mass movement has developed which threatens to go beyond piecemeal reform and political repairing of the 'normal' party system. Independence, argues, the author, would in fact shatter the old political order for ever. The 'ancien regime' is in no position to absorb and incorporate such a radical restructuring of its operations. In fact, the very

inflexibility of the British political order (no federalism, no TV in Parliament, obsessive secrecy, etc.) means that even a mere 'political' break in the Constitution entails a considerable social revolution, regardless of the wishes of the participants.

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Although this is only the barest sketch of Nairn's argument, it describes fairly accurately his central thesis. In its detail it is an impressive, often brilliant, analysis, a panoramic survey of British imperialism's place in world history. It is not necessary to agree with the entirety of his writing to say that the chapter on the 'stunted' nature of Scottish nationality, its 'schizophrenia' (a nation but not a state), and its reactionary culture, is the most perceptive survey ever written on the subject. Likewise his designation of the nationalist movement as bourgeois radicalism correctly defines the social and class nature of a phenomenon which so mystifies much of the left. But perhaps the most impressive feature of the early section of the book lies in its method.

The book is above all a study of the political nature of the 'crisis', in contrast to the predominant economic bias of other doomsday scenarios. As the author explains, this concentration on locating the economy as the source of the British malaise is itself a partial product of the dazzling weight of civil society (e.g. economics) over state life (politics).

But the very ambition of his project is partly responsible for some of the worst defects of the book, for it constantly forces Nairn into a dubious style of argument, constantly vacillating between the extremes of astute political sensitivity on one band and crass impressionism on the other. Two examples can be used to illustrate lack of concern for political detail.

First there is the decision (presumably the author's) to reprint almost unaltered an analysis of 'English' nationalism written seven years ago. But these seven years have seen the face of 'English' nationalism change dramatically with the growth of the National Front/Party into the largest far-right movement in Europe outside Italy. Inside the very heartlands of working class communities, organised fascism is growing where the far left has only the slimmest of toe-holds. But, according to Nairn, this is '... largely a distraction. The genuine right – and the genuine threat it represents – is of a quite different character.' As this chapter spells out, that character is no less than [*Tory politician*] J. Enoch Powell . Now it is quite true that Powell's literary and political ramblings sum up quite nicely many of the ideological threads of English reaction – the Midlands self-made man, nostalgic for the village church. But seriously to suggest that this 'English' dreamland is in the same political league as the strident 'British' nationalism of the National Front explicitly imperialist, racist and self-organised – is a dangerous mistake for a socialist to make.

The same flippancy towards political details is shown in his view of the efficacy of bourgeois radical nationalism in bringing down Britain's political house of cards. The Scottish Nationalist Party [*sic*] is no longer a party of cranks and eccentrics, and their own perspective is a real and crucial factor in the dynamic of events. As their last conference demonstrated, not only is the central leadership of the party acutely aware of the clapped out condition of British bourgeois democracy, it is also completely dedicated to preserving it.

Many members [2] of the party are in favour of a formal training period of devolution to prevent any sudden radicalism, most [3] are in favour of some jointly administered use of oil resources, and all [4] are in favour of retaining Elizabeth of Windsor, the Commonwealth and the

Christmas message as essential features of our new independent Alba. Of course they may not succeed in channelling the aspirations of Scottish working people into such neat constitutional packages (in fact, if anything, it is unlikely), but at least their conscious desire to do so, when combined with their prestigious role at the head of the SNP should have been given a passing note.

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The greatest strength of Nairn's book is its understanding of the unique continuity of the British state, for its class lineage and powers of incorporation are described in a clear and exemplary way. But paradoxically the author's (justified) concentration on the strengths of the system lead him to a pessimism about the potential of the forces arrayed against it. We shall return to this in discussing Nairn's views on nationalism, but an amazing problem emerges in his narrative of British imperialism. For here is a book written to assess the nature of the present 'crisis' which has nothing to say about the only other period when such a term was really justified – that of 1910 to 1914.

These years are unique in Britain's history for a simple reason. It was only then (as opposed to 1919 or 1926) that the working class experienced a dramatic rise in class confidence and combativity at the same time as the ruling class was increasingly split and demoralised.

The story of the 'industrial explosion' of these years is well known. The 1910 miners' strike, the 1911 transport strike, the 1912 dock strike, and the 1913 lock-out in Dublin were more than isolated economic disputes. Entire communities were involved in often serious confrontations (involving deaths at Tonypandy) with the naked might of state repression. Solidarity strikes were common, and a new leadership was thrown up deeply influenced by the anti-capitalism of syndicalism and vehemently hostile to the reformism of the

trade union and Labour leaders. The real dynamic of these events was seen in the support given to the 1913 lock-out, led by Jim Larkin. With his tour of Britain and in the massive support given to the Dublin workers, a political basis was laid for the political link-up, an 'ideological regroupment', to use a phrase, between the secular Republicanism of Connolly and Larkin and the proletarian syndicalism of the pits, docks and engineering works of the British mainland.

This was the working class who found a ruling class deeply divided as the complacency and inertia of the British 19th Century state came under increasingly vehement attack. Opposition to the passivity and general stupor of the Liberal Government had led the Tory Party under Bonar Law to step outside the framework of parliamentary consensus in an explicit support for armed rebellion from Ulster. That Sunday afternoon in March 1914 when General Gough, commander of the Third Cavalry Brigade at the Curragh, fresh from a point blank refusal to obey the lawful government of the day, sat down to discuss with the leader of Her Majesty's Opposition was an ominous day indeed for the British Constitution.

With syndicalism and Irish Republicanism on one flank, and Tory-army sedition at the head of Ulster's rebellion on the other, this must surely be a crucial episode in the history of British imperialism a vital one to discuss in any survey of a coming 'breakdown' of the Whitehall-Westminster state. Yet in Nairn's book the entire chapter is dismissed in some four lines. 'It is true', he explains, 'that neither the Tory right [?) nor the more militant and syndicalist elements of the working class were really reconciled to the solution up to 1914. The clear threat of both revolution and counter-revolution persisted until then, and the old order was by no means secure as its later apologists have pretended.' And that, it would appear, is that.

This is no academic quibble over historical opinion. There are important reasons why Nairn is forced to dismiss such a

central crisis in British imperialism, for his estimation of the forces involved leaves him no choice. Without misconstruing Tom Nairn's views, his assessment of the social forces involved in the pre-1914 crisis can be summed up as follows: *Syndicalism* – a sub-branch of Labourism, no more than the militant wing of a movement almost ready made for incorporation and assimilation into the very pores of British constitutionalism. *Republicanism* – a theocratic, backward-looking ideology, full of morbid ghosts and superstitious ritual. *Ulster Protestantism* – a superstitious creed, but nonetheless a legitimate movement for self-determination.

Through such tinted spectacles it is little wonder that Nairn can see little of importance in the pre-1914 period. It means that his survey of imperialism is totally lopsided, unable to discern the real and crucial weaknesses of bourgeois power which lurk beneath the all-powerful exterior. A bad mistake to make in historical analysis, it can be a fatal one to make in contemporary practice.

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The exact reasoning behind this view of Britain's last political crisis is found in the last chapter of the book, where Nairn spells out a general thesis on nationalism and its relation to socialism. Correctly he starts from the premise that nationalism itself has unduly influenced attempts to theorise nationalism. Too often arbitrary appeals to the 'national community' or to 'historical continuity' have substituted for a materialist and, rigorous approach to nationalism. However, for the author, this inability to understand the phenomenon is not restricted to bourgeois thought, for nationalism is, in his opinion, Marxism's great failure [5].

In its theorising on the subject Marxism has failed to go beyond the 'great universalising tradition', a tradition which stretches from Kant through German philosophy, English

political economy, and French socialism to the proletarian internationalism of Lenin and the Comintern. It is this tradition, Nairn claims, which can only see nationalism as some 'exception' to the general internationalist rule, an irrationalism which human progress and world development will overcome. In fact, he claims, the opposite is true. Nationalism has an eminently rational and materialist basis in the very structure of world development. The uneven development of capitalist modernisation has meant that 'progress' for the peripheral areas of the world (everywhere outside Britain in the early 19th Century) could not be a linear or even one. Consciously led, *forced* social development was the only way to avoid being left on the margins of historical development. Nationalism was rarely democratic, but always populist, drawing on the symbols and slogans of the ethnic masses. For the first time the masses were invited into the making of history, if only as genuinely enthusiastic footsoldiers of the new 'national' elites fighting for their political lives against stronger and more modern neighbours.

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For that reason any neat division between 'progressive' nationalism of the Vietnams in modern history and that of the reactionary variety in Germany or Italy is not helpful. All nationalisms, by definition, have to contain both forward looking and reactionary aspects. Nairn describes the egoism and irrationality of all nationalisms with the following metaphor: 'In mobilising its past in order to leap forward across this threshold (of development) a society is like a man who has to call on all his inherited and unconscious powers to confront some inescapable challenge. He sums up such latent energies assuming that once the challenge is met they will subside again into a tolerable and settled pattern of personal existence.' It is thus from the 'inherited and unconscious powers' that the myths and symbols shared by all nationalisms, no matter what their nature, are drawn. It is the very

progress of humanity, the 'tidal wave of capitalist modernisation' lurching forward in drastically uneven ways, which makes nationalism an inevitable phase of human history. Since 1914 Marxism has therefore been on the defensive, its only gains seen in the Third World, where it has contributed to the perspectives of the anti-imperialist revolution. Outside of that unlikely theatre of proletarian revolt, Marxism has been swamped by nationalism, betrayed to its own bourgeoisie.

To this picture Nairn adds a footnote on a new species of nationalism, those of the 'overdeveloped' national communities, surrounded by more historically backward nationalities. Israel, the Basque country, and Ulster [6] are cited as examples of the intractable nature of the national question in these areas. He derives from the 'development gap' between north and south Ireland that only an independent Stormont – independent, that is, of Britain and Dublin – could lay the basis for a 'rational' solution. Ulster nationalism (as opposed to British loyalism) therefore has to be supported as strenuously as an all Irish republic has to be opposed.

From that brief summary everything discussed in the preceding section falls into place. The impotence of 'internationalist' socialist and labourist movements, the progressive nature of some very unlikely candidates for social progress such as Ulster 'nationalism', the remarkable absence of any tradition in Britain of social populism from left or right – all are seen by Nairn as being derived from the inexorable march of nationalism. Essentially there has been a fundamental flaw in socialism, its internationalism turning out on closer inspection to be a naïve cosmopolitanism.

. . .

Before challenging his thesis it is necessary to point out some of the more perceptive points that he makes in his argument. To start with, he is correct in his concentration on



the uneven development of capitalist modernisation as the central dynamic behind nationalism. Nairn goes beyond this not exactly original thesis to draw out the necessity of rejecting any view of nationalism as some internally generated political process (i.e. the need for a national market, a national tariff barrier, etc.), a view which has prevailed on the left since the days of Stalin. One of the merits of the book is that hopefully it kills forever the dogmatism and static sociology behind Stalin's famous definition [7]. It is correct to dismiss arbitrary lists of what is, or is not, a nation. 'Dialects', for instance, have a habit of becoming a 'language' when they get an army mobilised behind them, regardless of their literary merits. As Nairn points out, nationalism does not awaken nations to self-consciousness it invents them where they do not exist. His survey of nationalism and uneven development, regardless of the conclusions he himself draws actually makes it easier to locate nationalism historically with its rise as a system of social thought and its role in class society over the last century and a half.

However, it is very strange that other aspects of advanced bourgeois nationalism were not examined in this book. For instance it is obvious that the participation of the masses in bourgeois democracy, and the visions of self-rule and popular sovereignty which go with it (regardless of their form), is deeply connected with a belief in one's 'own' nation, one's 'own' state. To a large extent such a view more or less sums up belief in parliamentary democracy – that it is actually possible to win anything the majority of the population desire inside a given geographical boundary. This myth reflects of course a certain capitalist reality, for within the 'normal limits' of the system the majority of electors actually do decide who their government should be. As an entire lineage of social democrats from Karl Kautsky to Tony Benn have shown, once you actually believe that one day the state may be yours through electoral victory (bourgeois democracy) then it

becomes increasingly necessary to defend it against intruders (bourgeois nationalism). This remains a crucial theme for later studies on the nature of modern nationalism to take up.

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Despite certain insights by the author, its fundamental argument remains flawed. His conclusion on socialism is summed up thus: 'Exceptions to the rule (of socialism's predominance over nationalism demanded explanations – conspiracy theories about the rulers, and rotten minorities speculation about the ruled. Finally these exceptions blotted out the sun in August 1914'.

Such a strange summary, for three years after the dance of reaction and nationalist hysteria came another momentous historical event – the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. To examine the last fifty years through the prism of August 1914 without any acknowledgement of 1917 obviously produces a gross pessimism towards socialism and bestows on the defeats and setbacks of the last three generations a permanency and depth they do not have.

Instead of some historically inevitable process (which is in essence Nairn's view of nationalism) the experiences of 1914 and 1917 form, in microcosm, a view of world history which has real self-active agents conscious and able to change the course of that development. The choice between *defeat* with its bourgeois hysteria and its nationalist frenzy, and *victory*, with its internationalism and a genuinely new social order, was not decided by some 'law' of history, no matter how materialist it appears.

These two dates are of course only symbolic, for in fact in the decade after the Russian revolution, despite the defeats, a class confidence and (for the want of a better word) socialist culture flourished all over Europe. One has only to think of the response by millions of working people to the

first Russian revolution, to the first German soviets in 1919, to the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923 to the civil war in Spain, to understand that there was a 'universalist' consciousness which extended far outside the ranks of intellectuals or party cadre. That consciousness, partly gained from the experience of the mass parties of the Second International, partly developed from the lessons of the Russian revolution, was a tangible and viable building block in the construction of a socialist society.

The most crucial element in the last forty odd years of European (and in that sense world) history is unseen by Nairn. What took place was a dramatic *regression* of class consciousness inside the European working class. Again it has to be stressed: this was fought out by self-conscious agents, for there was nothing 'inevitable' about fascism's victory in Germany or Franco's march into Barcelona.

Some idea of the extent of that regression may be gained by looking at a place like Scotland and its contrast with today's corrupt Labour Party and ageing Communist Party. Maclean's role is best known, but there are many more examples of a socialist internationalism among working people which today is not even a memory. When Countess Markievicz, heroine of the Easter Rising, spoke at the Glasgow May Day parade in 1919 there were about 150,000 workers there to listen to her, but this level of popular mobilisation was only reflective of a genuine political sophistication incredible by today's standards. Discussions around constituent assemblies, principled support for self-determination, opposition to imperialist war and militarism were actually commonplace inside the broad labour movement in the immediate post-war period [8].

It was this proletarian consciousness which fascism, the slump and the post-war Cold War were responsible for destroying. The hysteria of nationalism was a logical, if not inevitable, result [9]. It is the possibility of working class people

regaining that type of elemental consciousness which today gives the material precondition for socialism – something which Nairn, regardless of his personal view, cannot fit into his theoretical universe.

Tom Nairn has written an important book, but one whose weaknesses are often those of over-ambition and consequent impressionism. As a study of imperialism in its death agony it should be read, sceptically perhaps, but read. Its faults only serve to remind us Just how far the Marxist left is from producing its own 'concrete analysis' of world capital and its British component.

**NEIL WILLIAMSON June 1977**

### **Notes**

1. As the author acknowledges, this argument is largely derived from the Influential essay by Perry Anderson 'Origins of the Present Crisis', in *New Left Review* No. 23, January 1964. However also ever-present, but never recognised, is the important study of class structure by Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*(1966).

2. See assorted speeches of Neil McCormick, son of the party's founder and Professor of International Law at Edinburgh University.

3. See the article by David Simpson (Economics Dept., Strathclyde University), published in *Radical Approach*, edited by Kennedy important reasons why Nairn is forced to dismiss such a central crisis (1976). For a fascinating look at the British ruling class's outlook, see Peter Jay's article in support In *The Times*, 13 May 1976.

4. This was the position adopted by the 1977 conference In Dundee with the unanimous backing of the party's leadership.

5. Again, as the author states, this argument is heavily

influenced by Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (1964), and its chapter seven on nationalism.

6. This section of Nairn's argument is, frankly, total rubbish. His over-developed category of nations is totally arbitrary; what does the Basque country, today the most class conscious and combative part of the population in Spain, have in common with Ulster Presbyterian sectarianism? Why is South Africa not on Nairn's list surely an 'over-developed' country if ever there was one? Perhaps because the contortions necessary for any socialist to support self-determination for white South Africa were more than the author could manage. On Ulster only a comment is possible in this review. Why is there no indication of Ulster nationalism, despite the way it has been kicked about by the British Government since the Troubles began?

The Protestant population can only define themselves in terms of the British connection, and it was this stark fact of political life which led to the eventual demise of the Peace Movement – an inability to take a simple 'yes or no' position on the security forces, and thus on the whole arsenal of Imperialist repression In the Six Counties.

7. *Marxism and the National Question* by J. Stalin, where he states his famous definition listing historical continuity, common language, common territory, and common economic and cultural life as the defining features of a nation.

8. See, for instance, the STUC annual conferences 1919-1923; Labour Party Scottish Advisory conferences 1917, 1918 and 1921, for excellent insights into the debates at the very heart of the labour movement. We can note for instance that the Scottish Council of the Labour Party reported to its 1921 conference on the nine large meetings it had held to demand self-determination for Ireland, all over Scotland.

9. This is not to say that the support behind the spectacular

rise of the SNP (or some party *quid et qua* for that matter) in the post-war world is some linear continuation of fascism. There is little in the content of these movements which corresponds to the demoralisation and political decay of 'traditional nationalism'. Unfortunately, a vigorous analysis has yet to be constructed of the features of this new (nationalist) bourgeois radicalism, with its aspirations of social reform and yet its profoundly electoralist and atomised practice.

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*Main photo – revised edition of The Break Up of Britain by Tom Nairn, published 2021.*

**For the full archives of International and other International Marxist Group journals of the 1960s and 1970, see: <https://redmolerising.wordpress.com/international-img-journal/>**

**Also see another major article by Neil Williamson from 1977 here: [SOCIALISTS & THE NEW RISE OF SCOTTISH NATIONALISM](#)**

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# **Five reasons why agriculture**

# should be central to our ecosocialist vision

*Agriculture (including marine and fishing) are important parts of the Scottish economy. Jess Spear from the Irish ecosocialist magazine [Rupture](#) writes about why it is central to an ecosocialist vision.*

## **1. Industrialised agriculture is undermining our life support systems.**

Wildlife populations are collapsing and many species, unable to scrape a living, are simply going extinct. Deforestation and land clearance destroys ecosystems and replaces them with monoculture crops (eg, wheat, barley, soy) or farmed animals. Big monoculture farms effectively starve wildlife of food and pollute the soil and adjacent lakes, rivers and streams. The continuing expansion of intensive farms means further destruction of ecosystems, more wildlife starvation, and more animals going extinct.

## **2. And fueling the rise of new pandemics.**

Loss of habitat drives wildlife into areas inhabited by humans and increases contact between human populations and wildlife, which then increases the likelihood of zoonotic spillover (that is, infectious diseases jumping from animal to human). In fact, [most human diseases originated this way](#). Big factory farms, with billions of chickens, pigs, and cows reared in often cramped and unsanitary conditions, are also breeding grounds for new pandemics.

## **3. Climate change will disrupt our food supply.**

Millions of people are already suffering from food insecurity because of our rotten, for-profit food system. However, the situation stands to get worse with multiple extreme weather events happening simultaneously – such as a heatwave and

drought at the same time, as we saw this summer and last – lead to harvest failures and disrupt supply chains. A decrease in the overall food supply will undoubtedly lead to price spikes and more people suffering deprivation. We are already seeing this and should expect more to occur with increased magnitude and frequency as Earth's temperature rises. In fact, a study published this summer outlines how [current models underestimate the risk of harvest failures in multiple breadbaskets](#).

#### **4. Top-down changes in agriculture are fueling the rise of the far right.**



Not only is the capitalist response to the climate and biodiversity crises inadequate, what little is being done is far too often unplanned and under the control of private industry. Farmers in Europe in particular are greatly impacted by new regulations meant to curb nitrogen fertiliser pollution. But, rather than working with small farmers and assisting them in the necessary transition away from intensive farming, governments have dragged their feet – in Ireland they continue to drag their feet – and now are forcing farmers to rapidly change the way they farm. This haphazard approach opens the door to the far right, who deny climate change and spread conspiracy theories about land theft. We should all take note of what took place in the Netherlands where the farmer-citizen movement, founded only four years ago, won the



municipal elections and immediately cancelled the new environmental policies.



## **5. We must oppose the new enclosures.**

Since the economic crash in 2008, international investors have been [buying or leasing huge tracts of agricultural land](#) used by subsistence farmers or indigenous peoples. While the global working class, with its tremendous latent power and common interest in overthrowing capitalism, will undoubtedly play a leading role in transforming society, peasants and indigenous peoples are already battling big corporations and states that support them (and winning in some cases). Ecosocialists should support these struggles unconditionally. Additionally, we support the international peasant movement – La Via Campesina – for food sovereignty and for getting rid of the transnational agribusinesses dominating our food system.



[Interview: Jess Spear- Agriculture and Eco-socialism](#)

[Rupture Radio By Rupture Media Jan 09,](#)

**2024**

***This article is taken from Rupture 11 which has a feature dealing with Land. Subscribe today to support Rupture and get the print magazine delivered to you three times a year.***

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- *Was Marx a Degrowth Communist? by Diana O'Dwyer*
- *Five reasons why agriculture should be central to our ecosocialist vision, by Jess Spear*
- *Toward an Irish Marxist Political Economy, by Conor McCabe*
- *The Fight Against Extractivism, interview with Fidelma O'Kane (Save Our Sperrins)*
- *Trees, for example, Ash, by R.S.*
- *Pigs' Meat, poem by Ciarán O'Rourke*

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**Ukraine's Fight is Our Fight  
– Seminar in Edinburgh  
Saturday 3rd February 1pm-5pm**

**<https://bit.ly/USCScot24>**

# UKRAINE'S FIGHT IS OUR FIGHT

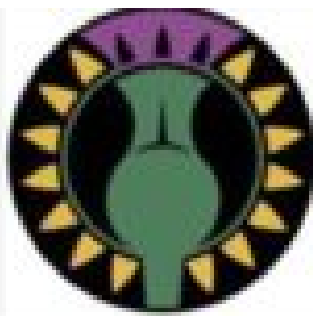
Perspectives from social movement and trade union activists  
Edinburgh's Augustine United Church, Saturday 3rd February 2024, 1pm-5pm.

Free seminar with guest speakers including:

- Tommy Sheppard MP & Katy Clark MSP
- Chris Ford of Ukraine Solidarity Campaign
- Dr Taras Fedirko on the Ukrainian economy
- Iryna Zamurajeva on the environmental crisis
- Irish historian Conor Kostick on self-determination

More info & registration: [bit.ly/USCScot24](https://bit.ly/USCScot24)

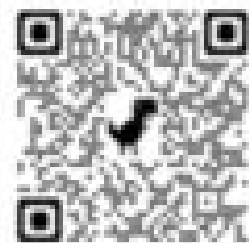
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# The John Maclean Centenary Concert in Glasgow

*Jim Aitken writing for [Culture Matters](#) reviews the Concert in commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of Scottish revolutionary marxist John Maclean attended by 2,000 people in Glasgow held on 19 January 2024 to launch the Celtic Connections festival of celtic and world music. See also [the review on Bella Caledonia by Alistair Davidson](#).*

Celtic Connections put on a wonderful concert recently, in memory of Scotland's great Marxist revolutionary, John Maclean (1879 -1923). Glasgow's magnificent concert hall had the 2,000 strong audience deeply engaged with poetry readings and songs all commemorating a figure who entered Scottish folklore and legendary status after his untimely death, at the hands of a British state that had reduced him to appalling poverty and ill health.

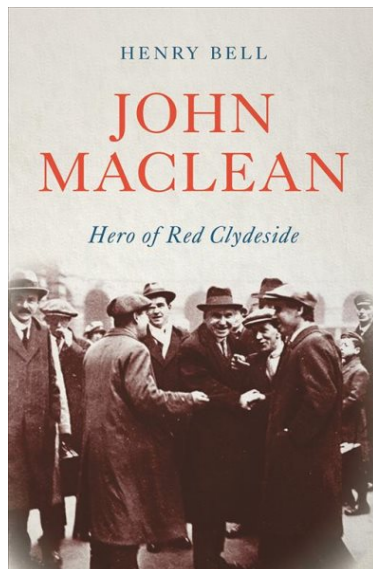
Maclean's parents were Highland clearance folk and came south to Glasgow to find work. Maclean became a primary school teacher in the city and was imprisoned several times for his anti-war activity in opposing the First World War which he said was –'a bayonet... with a worker at both ends.'. He was given a brutal stint in Peterhead jail of five years hard labour and maintained his food was poisoned while he was there.

Large crowds turned out to meet him when he returned to Glasgow after his release. He founded the Scottish Workers' Republican Party, Scotland's first pro-independence party. Maclean also supported Irish independence and would speak at meetings in Glasgow in support of Irish and Scottish

independence.

After his death his memory entered Scottish literature with Hugh MacDiarmid and Hamish Henderson, Edwin Morgan and others all writing poems and songs in his honour. In 1973 a pamphlet called *Homage to John Maclean* came out to commemorate him 50 years after his death. This pamphlet was published by the John Maclean Society which formed in 1968.

The centenary concert featured songs and poems from this pamphlet including Matt McGinn's *Dominee, Dominee*, which is the Scots word for teacher. MacDiarmid had several poems in the pamphlet and at the concert his poem *John Maclean* was beautifully read by Scotland's former Makar, Jackie Kay.



The evening was put together by Siobhan Miller and Henry Bell. While Siobhan is a singer who is well known in Scotland, Henry Bell is the author of possibly the finest biography written of Maclean which came out in 2018 called *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, published by Pluto. Both should be congratulated for putting together such a fantastic evening with terrific performers.



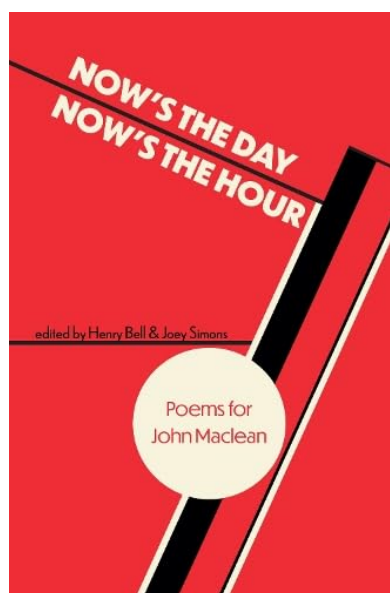
Everyone who performed on the night was superb. Karen Casey, an Irish singer, caught the mood when she said she felt she could say whatever she wanted to say to such an eager audience. Karine Polwart, Karen and Siobhan came together to sing *Mrs Barbour's Army*, written by Alistair Hulett, and recalling the struggle of Glasgow's women in refusing to pay increased rents as their husbands fought in WW1. Mary Barbour was a formidable woman and a comrade of Maclean's. A sculpture to her and her women comrades stands proudly outside Govan tube station.

Billy Bragg was well received but the best cheer of the night was for Dick Gaughan who has been singing and campaigning for socialism over decades in Scotland and beyond. He has performed at previous Celtic Connection events and the crowd seemed to give him such deserved applause precisely because he has been such a champion for socialism and internationalism over so many years. He told the crowd with pride that he was a Scottish Republican which went down well with them. He sang *The Red Flag* with Billy Bragg to its original tune of *The White Cockade* by Robert Burns. Eddi Reader sang Burns' *A Man's a Man for a' That* in her very distinctive way of singing Burns' songs. She has become by far the best singer of Burns' songs in recent times.

What was rather moving was to see and hear Maclean's

granddaughter, Frances Wilson, who came on stage to read out one of her grandfather's letters to her mother. That was a really special moment and she was clearly delighted to receive such applause and to realise that so many people still held her grandfather in such high esteem.

Maclean's speech from the dock was also read out in which he says '*I am not here, then, as the accused; I am here as the accuser of capitalism dripping with blood from head to foot.*' Such words are as relevant today as they were then.



Speaking to people after the concert, it was clear that many lamented the fact that such radical, internationalist politics is sorely lacking today. And after folk left the hall, they could have bought a copy of *Now's the Day, Now's the Hour: Poems for John Maclean*, published in late 2023 by Tapsalteerie. This book contains many of the poems and songs from the 1973 pamphlet along with new material from another generation of Scottish writers. The book is edited by Henry Bell and Joey Simons and was first launched in *The Griffin* bar near where Maclean would speak his anti-war, socialist and internationalist message.

The concert was very much a Scottish night but also an internationalist one. At the end of the concert both *The Internationale* and Henderson's *The Freedom-Come-All-Ye* were



sung by all the performers and by many in the audience.

John Maclean has been dead for one hundred years but his spirit clearly lives on in poetry and in song. If only his politics could live on too!

Originally published by Culture Matters:  
<https://www.culturematters.org.uk/index.php/arts/music/item/4446-the-john-maclean-centenary-concert>

## **About Culture Matters**

*(from the Culture Matters website)*

*We (Culture Matters) are a group of writers, artists and activists [from England and beyond] who think that culture matters.*

**Culture matters.** *The arts (films, plays, paintings, music etc.) and culture generally (sport, religion, the media, eating and drinking etc.) can be wholesome and liberating. They please the senses, stimulate the mind, arouse emotions, and feed the soul. But class-based divisions in society, founded on unequal property ownership, constrain and prevent our enjoyment of cultural activities, which are essential to enjoy life and be fully human.*

**Culture matters.** *Cultural activities and experiences can promote awareness, arouse indignation, inspire creativity and imagination, create a sense of equality, community and social justice. They can help us in the 'mental fight' to build Blake's new Jerusalem, a more democratic, equal, socialist society – not only in England but across the globe.*

*So the **Culture Matters** website aims to publish relevant creative material (poems, images, music etc,) and critical material (reviews, articles, interviews etc.) We also run*

*Bread and Roses Arts Awards, publish books and pamphlets, and work with the labour movement through workshops and campaigns on culture issues.*

### ***Donations***

*We rely on donations to keep going, so if you have enjoyed visiting the Culture Matters website, you can support our mission by using the button below.*



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# **John Maclean's Legacy – 100 Years On. Talk by Henry Bell to a Scottish Socialist Party Event**

On 24 January 2024 at Townhead Village Hall, Glasgow, **Henry Bell**, author of the biography "*John Maclean – Hero of Red Clydeside*", gave the Jim McVicar Memorial Lecture for the Scottish Socialist Party. Bell examines some of the life, times and core principles that the revolutionary marxist John Maclean represented. He asks if these still relate to the world today – a century after Maclean's tragic and untimely death.

Independence Live recorded the lecture and will be making it available on YouTube below

Find author Henry Bell's website <https://henryjimbells.com/>

John Maclean – Hero of Red Clydeside is available from Pluto Press: <https://plutobooks.com>  
<https://www.plutobooks.com/9780745338385/john-maclean/>

Find more info and publications etc from Scottish Socialist Party: <https://scottishsocialistparty.org/>

The **Jim McVicar Memorial Lecture** is an annual event organised by the Scottish Socialist Party to commemorate the life of Jim McVicar, founder member of the Scottish Socialist Party and its Treasurer at the time of his untimely death in 2020 (Obituary by Scottish Fourth Internationalists here: <https://socialistresistance.org/jim-mcvicar-1958-2020/21311>)

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## **Rising Clyde Episode 17: COP28 Again – Historic breakthrough or corporate capture?**

The latest issue of Rising Clyde, the Scottish climate justice show hosted by Iain Bruce is now available on YouTube thanks to Independence Live.

The Show asks what really happened at the recent UN climate talks in Dubai and what we should do about it, including a look at what role the Scottish government is playing in the process, with two activist experts who were there: Scott Kirby in Edinburgh, from the UK Youth Climate Coalition and in London, Dorothy Guerrero of Global Justice Now.

# Rising Clyde Show – the Scottish climate justice show.

**Rising Clyde** examines the key issues and the big challenges facing the struggle for climate justice in Scotland. After the surprisingly big and hugely diverse protests in Glasgow during COP26, how can the breadth of that movement be held together, how can we build on its energy?



- After the suspension of Cambo, can the movement stop any more new oil or gas projects in the North Sea?
- How can we wind down the whole oil and gas industry in Scotland in this decade, while ensuring no layoffs and decent new jobs for all those affected?
- Was the Scotwind auction a major step on the transition to renewable energy, or a sell-off of the family silver?
- How can an independent Scotland tolerate one of the most unequal and damaging systems of land ownership on the planet

For half an hour on the first Monday of each month, we'll be talking to activists and experts about these and many other issues that will shape this country's future.

The host of Rising Clyde, **Iain Bruce**, is a journalist, film maker and writer living in Glasgow. Iain has worked for many years in Latin America. He has worked at the BBC and Al Jazeera, and was head of news at teleSUR. He has written books about radical politics in Brazil and Venezuela. During COP26, he was the producer and co-presenter of Inside Outside, a

daily video briefing for the COP26 Coalition.

**Playlist...** To see previous episodes, start the video below, then click on the top right icon.

<https://youtu.be/0qK7olrAtvk?list=PLxc3IWpJ3vJZLQg9hFjnGWvvfSHdIrnXG>

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## **Bangladesh and the BKF, an overview: history, political situation, peasant struggles...**

*This interview by Pierre Rousset (of [Europe Solidarity without Borders ESSF](#)) with **Badrul Alam**, president of the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF), was conducted shortly before the parliamentary elections on January 7, 2024. The ballot predictably ended in victory for the Awami League, which won a large majority in the face of a boycott by the main opposition parties. However, the League was unable to secure a high turnout, which stood at around 40% of voters. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won a fifth term of office, her fourth consecutive since 2008. The opposition denounced the election as a “sham”, with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party going so far as to accuse the government of ballot-box stuffing.*

**Pierre Rousset** – Could you present Bangladesh, the country, for readers who know little about it?

**Badrul Alam** – Bangladesh achieved its national independence in

1971 through an all-out people's war against the Pakistani army and its collaborators in Bangladesh. 3 million people sacrificed their lives and 200,000 (two hundred thousand) women (mostly mothers and sisters) lost their chastity.

Formerly, Bangladesh was part of India during the British rule. British occupied undivided Bengal in the mid-18th century and continued occupying the entire India gradually. Concretely, the then British East India Company (EIC) took over power in 1757, killing Siraj ud-Doulah who was the Nawab of Bangal (Governor of a particular region: Bangla-Bihar-Odisa). It pillaged Bengal, destroyed the economic resources of the rural population. Famine became widespread between 1769 and 1773, causing the deaths of maybe up to 10 million people. Soon, Britain became the virtual ruler of Bangla-Bihar-Odisa. In 1857, widespread unrest led to a mass uprising against the EIC's rule and the authority of the British Crown. In 1857-1858, one hundred years later, Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. The struggles for independence in the subcontinent were crushed in bloodshed. Queen Victoria established its direct colony and ruled for 190 years (including the company's 100 years' rules). In 1947, at the end of the WWII, the British handed over the power to native political entity dividing India into two countries — India and Pakistan.

East Bangla became part of Pakistan with the new name of East Pakistan — as a province of Pakistan, even if the two parts of the newly formed Pakistan State were separated by some 1700 kilometres, had a different history and did not speak the same language. British empire divided India on the basis of religion. They handed Pakistan to Muslim leaders and India to Hindus leaders. In this way, the greater Bengal or Bangla was split, its eastern part being included in Pakistan. After partition, West Pakistan started off with imposing a colonial style of rule on the eastern part. In every step they began to neglect Bengali people living in East Pakistan or East Bengal.

In order to strengthen their power and rule, they hatched a conspiracy against Bengali offering Urdu as one and only state language in the whole of Pakistan in 1948, just 8 months after the partition. Bengali people did not welcome their proposal; rather they strongly resisted any step in this regard. As a result, there was a blood shedding incident taking place in Bangladesh that claims several people's lives because of the shooting of Pakistani law and order forces in 1952. It was called "language moment".

In the following course of events, Bengali people built the hope of independence in their heart, resulting in many movements and struggles. They were people's uprising in 1969, when the Iron Man Field Marshal Ayub Khan, then President of Pakistan, was forced to quit power. Moreover, in a national election in 1970, Bangladesh bagged majority seats with a landslide victory but, unfortunately, the power was not handed over to the elected representatives. In the course of time, in 1971 Bangladesh declared the independence of the country, rejecting Pakistan. Consequently, Pakistan invaded Bangladesh on 26 March 1971 in the name of Operation Search Light. Actually, they brutally committed genocide on Bengali people. The Bengali people did not sit idle, they started guerrilla fight against the well-equipped army of Pakistan. Through a nine-month tough struggle Pakistani army were defeated, and forced to surrender and leave the country on 16 December 1971. On 3 December 1971, the Indian army had joined their forces with the freedom fighter to accelerate the victory. Bangladesh gained a place as a new independent country in the world map.

Now Bangladesh has completed 53 years of its independence. It is still a low-income group country, with the identity of poor economic performance, although there is a propaganda campaign, from the ruling class, according to which Bangladesh is getting up and will be developed country by 2041.

Bangladesh has big potential agricultural sector, which claims great nursing/attention for its actual development, but this

sector is always neglected and the people who are engaged within this sector (peasants) are also neglected. Poverty, pauperization, marginalization, malnutrition and exclusion are common phenomenon in the rural agricultural area. Basically, the development of the country is rested on how importance is laid on agriculture.

Whereas all ruling governments since the independence laid emphasis on the structural development of the country, which always brings sufferings to the lives and livelihood of the ordinary people.

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**Geography:** Located in South Asia, to the north of the Gulf of Bangalore, it is virtually landlocked within India, sharing a small border with Burma. Most of the country is taken up by the Ganges delta, a fertile plain, but very flat and prone to tropical cyclones, floods and monsoons, and threatened by rising sea levels due to global warming.

**Demographics:** With a surface area of 147,570 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 170 million, it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world (1,286 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>).

**Language:** Bengali

**Independence:** 1971

**Capital:** Dhaka





*Geography of Bangladesh – Wikipedia. en.wikipedia.org*

**Let's start with the evolution of the situation in Bangladesh...**

The bourgeoisie election campaign is going on. This election is going to be controversial, as before, as the major opposition parties will not join the election. It will be a monolithic election, somehow. The opposition is still in the street, demanding that the elections be under the responsibility of a caretaker government. More than 5000 people have been put in jail by the government, calling them obstacles to the elections. The ruling party will hold the

election at any cost.

The election commission called off all political activities until election is over. We have 2 or 3 activities during this period. We are wondering how to perform those.

Last year, Bangladesh experienced a major political crisis. The situation of the ruling party was very precarious. The onslaught of monetary and price inflation made life miserable for the population. The price of basic necessities soared. People couldn't eat the food they needed and wanted. The poor, the lower-middle class and the middle class were forced to cut their family expenses drastically. Since the start of COVID 19 in 2020, ordinary people's incomes have fallen, and this is still the case today. The number of poor people has risen alarmingly. However, the government claims that a person's average income per year is US\$2,800, which is not true. It makes propaganda about its structural development projects, such as building bridges, subways and elevated expressways, but it doesn't think about people's concrete lives, their suffering, their problems of life and death.

Health crisis is still with us. The dengue and cold situation have become an issue of concern in the country. About 2000 people died in 2023 already. Every day people are dying of dengue.



*Bangladesh Krishok Federation Kurigram District Unit General Secretary Mokaddes*

*Hossain gave away warm cloth to poor people*

Last year, the social situation was not very good either. There were numerous cases of child abuse, repression of women, murder and enforced disappearance throughout the country.

Many emigrant workers returned home from Middle Eastern countries, and many emigrant women returned with empty pockets, as they were unable to tolerate the sexual torture inflicted on them by male family members there. Women work mainly as domestic servants in the Middle East.

**How would you characterize the present political regime?**

Last two terms, it came to power by electoral manoeuvring and engineering. They are also going to hold a same type of election this year, with no participation of major opposition groups. The regime is already branded as a fascist-like one by many. With this election it will not get rid of this brand. Rather it will be possible to call it fascists in a way people have not ever seen before.

Presently, the party in power is called the Bangladesh Awami League. It led the country's liberation war in 1971. Sheikh Hasina is the Prime Minister, with executive power. She is the daughter of the veteran leader Bango Bandhu (title given by the people before the independence of the country) Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was the key leader of the Awami League during and after the independence struggle.

In effect, after the independence, Sheikh Muzibur Rahaman wanted to concentrate all power in his hand, forming a new party which was to be the only party, banning all other political parties in the country. The regime also banned all dailies except for four newspapers.

This one-party system rule and the killing of freedom of expression were not accepted by the then standing forces, religious groups and some leftist groups as well. Consequently, conspiracy started at national and international level that resulted in the pathetic history of Muzib's family. He was killed with his family members, except for his daughters, Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana.

On top of that, twice, martial law was declared. One was declared in 1976 by General Ziaur Rahman, who as the husband of the opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia, and another by General Ershad in 1982. Since 1991, a bourgeois democratic system became more functional, with all its weakness, after the collapse of Ershad regime. Till to date, bourgeoisie governance with a parliamentary system is in effect with general elections. Therefore, in short, it can be said that the characteristic of the government in Bangladesh is bourgeois till now.

### **What has been the social responses to the crisis?**

The last couple of years, several movements were built to control the prices of basic necessities, but nothing changed. The main bourgeois opposition tried to overthrow the current

government, but failed. In order to oust the government, they resorted to various actions. All their efforts went in vain. Different people's organizations and social movements also raised their voice, especially against price increases.

The government is always suppressing people's movement. Most of the time, it takes stern measures against protesters. Arrest, torture, confinement, false case are the tools of the government to suppress the movements. Forced disappearance of opposition has also become part of its political culture.

Despite receiving a huge financial stimulation from the government, the biggest industrial sector, the garment one, has become vulnerable due to COVID 19 and different adverse measures taken by the importing countries. As a result, there is an unstable situation in the garment industries around the question of increase in salary of the workers, who are mostly women. The garment workers would get paid with 8300/- as a monthly salary. They claimed 23000/- in view of price inflation, increase in living standard, etc. In face of such a strong movement, the government was compelled to concede the demands, but it approved only a 12500/- monthly wage. The representatives of garments' organisation got frustrated by the government decision, but accepted it for the time being. However, many garments organisation rejected the decisions, telling it unrealistic. Whatever, the government decision came into effect.

The money laundering has become a big issue in the country. Quite a number of people who are rich and super rich siphoned off incredible amount of money to different countries using so called tax haven countries. They built luxurious houses and other establishments in Canada, Malaysia, UAE (United Arab Emirate), and so on. The last couple of years people have raised their voice very strongly, demanding to stop illicit capital flight, which is against the people's interest.

After every national election, there are attacks against the

minority groups in Bangladesh. The miscreants and criminals set fire to, and vandalize the houses and properties of the minority. They torture, injure and kill minority people. Sometimes, they create such a situation of panic that minority people are forced to leave their homestead and land property. It took place hundreds of times since independence in 1971. However, the minority people never got justice.

### **What is the state of the Left?**

The left-wing Marxist-Leninist forces [which in Bangladesh means non-Maoist] have remained poorly organized. They have come together in different platforms with different strategies. Some Marxist-Leninist-Maoist parties are still part of the ruling party alliance. There are some groups of leftists who are trying to get organized with the commitment of people's uprising but they are very weak in happening that.

The Trotskyist party has organized various street actions against the corruption of bureaucrats and business leaders.

It is true that there is an ebb tide in the left movement in the country, but the positive side, a source of optimism, is that they still exist in a country where religious fundamentalism is always active to destabilize left forces. According to fundamentalists Left people are Kafer (anti-religion). They should not have a right to living in a Muslim country like Bangladesh. They might feel happy if they could kill the leftist people. They target not only the political left, but also the progressive intellectuals.

Leftist political parties and groups are financially very poor in Bangladesh. This is because of the fact that they cannot raise funding from the public owing to the Anti-extortionist Act, which is being used by the government randomly. Moreover, the poor people are the main force of the leftist people and they have lost their capacity to give dues to the party, although they have still real support to give.

Some leftist people left politics for their very survival and joined different NGOs. Some were engaged in business, though it is very challenging for them as a political activist. Some left politics for ever from the ground frustration. Now they have a very negative attitude to the left politics and socialism as well as communism.

By the way, in spite of all impediments it can be pointed out that the left politics are still alive and bit by bit it is trying to make space in the national politic to become mainstream.

### **Could you present your organisation, the Bangladesh Krishok Federation**

The Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF, Bangladesh Peasant Federation), as a grassroots organisation, has a long history of working on behalf of the peasantry in Bangladesh. Although its main focus is on land-related issues, it also gives importance to many other issues such as the environment, ecology, agriculture/agroecology, food sovereignty, climate change, land reform, genetically modified organisms, the commons, tax justice, water, water bodies and gender, etc.

When it was founded in 1976, the Bangladesh Krishok Federation began its activities by raising just one very concrete issue: that of the land that should be distributed to landless peasants and smallholders who were suffering a subhuman lifestyle in our society. Right from the start, this issue gained momentum, supported by local chapters. The BKF then focused on land which is mainly Khaschar (small islands without owners surrounded by water which emerged from the river bed) and which is not subject to any particular property rights. In principle, the land belongs to the government. The BKF mobilized the landless, agricultural workers and peasants to raise their voices to assert their right to land, drawing the attention of all the other organizations working on the same issue, in order to strengthen the movement.



Although these Khaschars were left uncultivated, they were not left unattended. Local influential groups and henchmen wanted to keep these lands illegally. That's why the idea was to dislodge them through a movement, a mass mobilization. In early 1992, this movement met with real success, thanks to a vast occupation of land by the landless. Previously, in 1980, huge tracts of land had been occupied, but there had been a setback. The landless were unable to keep the land, as the then government declared the occupation illegal. The main leaders of the BKF were then arrested and imprisoned. Subsequently, the BKF carried out an assessment of the movement's setback. Two findings came up as a problem: 1. The lack of legal documents in the interest of the landless; 2. The low participation of women in the movement.

During the 1992 movement, these two conditions were fully met. That is why the occupation was maintained. Nothing could dislodge the landless peasants from their possession of the land. Of course, there were battles between the landless peasants and influential local interest groups. There have been many victims and bogus court cases against landless peasant leaders. However, all the cases were dealt with effectively and efficiently in the lower and higher courts by the organisation. Based on this success, further land occupations have taken place in many other parts of the country. To date, 76600 acres of Khasland have been distributed to over 100,000 landless people across the country. Among them are 22 small islands in the south of the country, 9 shrimp-growing centers in the southwest and 12.5 kilometres long abandoned Khasland on the railroad built by the British regime in northern Bangladesh.

In 2022, we faced a major challenge, namely the occupation and colonization of new Khasland lands. A small area of Khasland close to an existing occupied island was taken over by the landless and the land was distributed among 41 new landless families. These families have become dignified owners of a



plot of land that guarantees them food sovereignty. They were able to build their homes, cultivate the land and raise cows, buffalo and poultry. Around the issue of land and food sovereignty, we ran 13 mobilization, training and national consultation campaigns. Through these programs, we have raised awareness among peasants and landless people of the legal aspects of action and the right of landless peasants to the government's Khasland.

We have linked the issue of food sovereignty to that of the land movement, because they are complementary. No food sovereignty can be guaranteed without land. And the central concept of food sovereignty [superior to that of food security] is in fact the right of peasants to land. We first came into contact with the concept of food sovereignty in 1996, at the World Food Summit in Rome, Italy. Since then, we've been developing the idea from a Bangladeshi perspective. We were also the first to promote and disseminate the idea in Bangladesh. We have also repeatedly pushed the government to incorporate food sovereignty as a principle in national agricultural policy, even though it has opted for the traditional concept of food security.

As part of this campaign, we endeavoured to convince peasants to use local seeds on their arable land, to grow culturally accepted foods and food for human consumption, and not to cede their lands to land grabbers. The farmers were able to understand the importance of food sovereignty. The people who joined the program also remembered the great caravan campaigns of 2011 and 2014, in which food sovereignty was one of the main themes. So, our sustained campaign on food sovereignty has at least succeeded in popularizing the issue. People can understand what food sovereignty is. Previously, they only knew the concept of food security, which is a major international program. Under this campaign, the international communities have not been able to eradicate hunger and poverty in the world, which is the main objective of the food security

concept. Rather, it is the implementation of food sovereignty through mobilizations that could optimally eliminate hunger and poverty in rural areas.



*Seminar on 'What is the relationship between land movement and food sovereignty?', October 15, 2022 organized by Bangladesh Krishok Federation*

We have also set up various agitation programs on agroecology, the environment, ecology and climate change. Our country has a Ministry of the Environment, Forestry and Climate Change. So, the state is concerned about climate, the environment and forests. It is not concerned with agroecology and ecology. Agroecology is a very recent concept promoted by the FAO and the UN. Agroecology enables people to obtain food that is healthy, nutritious and free from toxicity. It is a simple and scientific agricultural method. It is not a one-way approach; rather a diversified one with a holistic approach. There are many agro-ecological practices in different parts of the world. These are practices that respect the environment and ecology, and help combat climate change.

Bangladesh is an agricultural country. Its agriculture began converting to chemical farming in the mid-sixties under the name of the "green revolution". This method initially led to a considerable increase in production, but we gradually lost the fertility of our soils, our plantations, our greenery, our

fish, our health, our environment, our ecology and the micro-organisms present in the soil. To save the whole agriculture, which is our culture and heritage, we need to adopt agroecology.

Bangladesh is a front-line victim of global climate change. Consequently, the rich industrialized countries of the North, which have been emitting carbon for 250 years since the Industrial Revolution, owe an ecological and historical debt to countries like Bangladesh, which are vulnerable to climate change. We shifted the focus of our ongoing campaign on climate change last year, concentrating on this issue of reparation. The issue of ecology and environment is also included. The campaign was conducted in 13 points of the country's 64 districts. During our campaign, we demanded reparations from the countries responsible for climate change resulting from greenhouse gas emissions. We also demanded compensation for the losses and damage suffered by the countries affected. We demanded legal protection within the framework of the United Nations for migrants forced to emigrate by the climate crisis.

Bangladesh is a country where the available land is small relative to its population. The current population is 170 million. To feed this large population, well-organized land management is essential. What is needed, therefore, is a comprehensive and genuine land and agrarian reform that would give landless peasants the right to cultivate the fields as first choice. This reform would be distributive and redistributive in nature. The State's initiative will be indispensable for this. We have been campaigning for real reform for a long time. The idea of agrarian reform is not new. It appeared officially after the independence of India and Pakistan from British rule in 1947, but never materialized. It has always remained on paper. Even at the time of the creation of Bangladesh [formerly East Pakistan], after the war of independence in 1971, there was no progress

on reform issues, although they were discussed on several occasions. There is also a controversial land ownership system. Last year, we prioritized this issue as part of our movement and campaign.

Like land, water and water bodies are our source of sustenance. Unfortunately, water and water bodies are being monopolized by national and international transnational corporations. This happens in the name of purchasing, housing, urbanization, export processing zones, industrialization, eco-parks and so on. Most of the time, this happens in areas populated predominantly by indigenous people [Adivasi], who are evicted from their homes. Our partner organisation, Bangladesh Adivasi Samity, remains very active against illegal encroachment on indigenous customary land ownership. It also fights against illegal logging and proliferation by the Forest Department. Together, we are fighting against land, water and lake grabbers. In 2022, we set up a program to protect our common property rights which were gradually being privatized. The government's privatization policy, prescribed by the World Bank and IMF, is at the root cause of this phenomenon.

Last year, we focused a lot on the issue of tax justice. We have raised this issue both nationally and internationally. Basically, we have a very regressive tax system from which our population suffers greatly. The universal VAT (value-added tax) hits the poor hardest. It's an indirect tax imposed on the population. In addition, the income and corporate tax system is also inequitable. Large corporations benefit from tax exemptions, tax cuts and so on. They also evade taxes and send money to other countries via tax havens. They also embezzle money through over- and under-invoicing. In addition, some of the super-rich have smuggled billions of BDT [the national currency] from Bangladesh to various countries to settle their families. The government should bring this money back home and use it for the cause of the poor. To rationalize the tax system, the administration must propose a progressive

taxation system. That's why, last year, we worked hard on tax justice. We organized human chains, rallies, demonstrations with flags, festoons, banners, placards, etc. at national level.

The Bangladesh Krishok Federation has a broad mass base nationwide, 30% of whom are women. We're trying to increase this number to 50%. The LGBTQI issue is very sensitive in our country, which is primarily Muslim. We organize seminars/workshops on this issue, but we don't try to identify them, as this is not accepted by society and could put them in danger. However, transgender people are automatically exposed and they are the poorest of the poor in society. They can join our organisation openly. Our main gender issue is to establish women's rights in society. We have a long history of women's movement in Bangladesh, based on the 14 points of demands raised by our sister organisation called Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (BKS), which is an organisation made up of 100% peasant women. In addition, our organisation is especially involved in the land occupation movement to establish women's right to land. The gender issue was seriously explained and highlighted in the 2022 campaign.

In 2022, we carried out numerous humanitarian actions. There were deaths and serious injuries on an island occupied by our organisation. The peasant leader Bakul Begum was killed and her sister Mukul Begum is still alive, but seriously injured. She had to stay in hospital for over three months. Being unable to move about, she required considerable medical support. Complaints have been lodged with the police station. These cases are still pending.

*Leaders of Civil Society in the press conference protesting the killing of Bakul Begum on 6 December 2022*



*Bakul Begum*

Another executive member had to undergo brain surgery. She also received partial support. A patient suffering from a serious kidney disease whose kidney was transplanted was also supported on several occasions by our organisation as a senior member.

In 2022 and 2023, we provided humanitarian aid to those affected by the climate disaster, and also helped those affected by Cyclone and Corona to recover.

In addition, we organized numerous regular programs, such as various celebrations of national and international days.

Source: [Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières \(ESSF\)](#)

Main Picture: October 30, 2023, at 12 noon in the organization of North Char Shahjalal landless families in Dashmina Upazila of Patuakhali district, with the cooperation of Bangladesh Krishok Federation and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha

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## Ecuador on the brink of the abyss

An immense wave of violence has been unleashed throughout the country: more than ten dead so far; police officers kidnapped; 329 detained; burning cars, shootings in shopping centres, bombs in different cities, the takeover of Channel 10 television station, highway robberies. The country's main prisons remain under the control of criminals who are holding 142 prison guards, employees and officials hostage. Two of the main leaders of the mafia groups escaped from prison. Throughout the educational system, in-person classes have been suspended. Almost all commercial establishments have closed their doors. Traffic in the cities has been chaotic, as people leave their jobs and run to take refuge in their homes. Fake news have proliferated on social networks, with neither public nor private media clearly indicating what had happened. Ecuador is going through a moment of very deep crisis, perhaps the most serious in its history.

The immediate background to this situation is:

1. Revelations of the penetration of drug trafficking and organised crime in state agencies: administration of justice, police, armed forces and political parties. Investigations have brought to light audios and documents that have clearly exposed the way organised mafias operate, including by corrupting officials and politicians in order to put them at the service of drug trafficking.

2. Changes in the leadership of the police and the armed forces, and the decision to transfer mafia bosses from certain prisons where they had complete control, to others where they would not have the same power to operate or confront other criminal groups. To this we can add the announcement of possible extraditions, the construction of maximum security prisons and the government's decision to regain control of the prisons.

3. The government's announcement that it was declaring war on the mafias and that the army would be part of this fight. In fact, the central axis of the possible questions for the Popular Consultation [being proposed by president Daniel Noboa] focus on the participation of the army in the fight against organised crime.

The government's first reaction was to decree a state of emergency, which involves a curfew and the mobilisation of the police and the armed forces, and subsequently a state of internal war against 22 organised crime groups, which it describes as terrorists. The government is seeking to regain control in this way . But it is not possible to know the course that this confrontation will take. Prisons remain in the hands of organised crime, the country cannot return to normality yet, in several cities commerce has only partially opened and classes continue to be held online. From the beginning, the Noboa government has not only adopted a discourse of internal conflict against criminal organisations that have broken the state's monopoly over force. It has also raised the heat by declaring that Ecuador is in a state of



internal war, or civil war, and that its objective is the elimination of these 22 criminal groups. But these groups have tens of thousands of combatants, are heavily armed, control prisons and neighbourhoods in the country's main cities and have built, by force and money, social support bases while holding important sectors of the population hostage to its reign of terror and extortion.

The mafias have achieved what they wanted and put the state and the population on the ropes, even beyond the effective magnitude of the attacks and criminal actions. We are clearly facing a population without any experience with these types of violent attacks. Nobody knows what to do, nobody knows how to react, nobody knows what to propose.

The first effects of the situation have been negative for the Ecuadorian people: a wave of fear runs through the country, businesses have closed, transportation is paralyzed, the economic damage is enormous, hopelessness grows, people turn their sights, once again, towards migration, everyone wants to flee. The leaders of the extreme right are attempting to fish in troubled waters, while social organisations are cornered and prevented from operating and demonstrating against neoliberal policies.

The fundamental question now is what to propose and how to act from the working class sectors and social organisations. These moments are very dangerous, when far-right discourses, such as that of [El Salvadoran president Nayib] Bukele, are strengthened because the conscience of the population is easily manipulated in moments of so much anxiety and fear, where a viable future seems impossible and pessimism spreads. Likewise, this will also be used as an opportunity by the right to pass its most repressive laws and implement its neoliberal project against workers. The defeat for the popular camp could be profound.

Faced with this, it is essential that social organisations,

especially the FUT (Unitary Workers' Front) and CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), together with feminist, environmental and neighbourhood organisations, stand up and propose working class solutions to the crisis. Here are some elements that we propose:

As soon as the state of emergency passes, call for a large demonstration for peace and against the violence of organised crime, to show that the Ecuadorian people will resist the onslaught of crime and that the cities, streets and highways belong to the people and not to crime.

This mobilisation will also demand that the government take actions, not just immediate but also fundamental ones, that strike at the structural causes of the problem we are experiencing, because military intervention will never be enough; and not allow these tragic events to be used as pretext to launch measures against the poor who are the ones who pay the consequences of the economic crisis and insecurity.

Demand the immediate repeal of the decrees that forgave the debt of capitalists, force them to pay and clearly indicate that this is also a form of corruption, in this case in the private sector. This money from unpaid taxes should be immediately allocated to social programs aimed especially at young people from the most impoverished working class sectors.

Immediately suspend payment of the external debt to stop the economic crisis and obtain resources to confront organised crime, meet the urgent needs of the population, pay the state debt with the IESS (Ecuadorian Institute of Social Security), resolve the energy crisis, pay debts to municipalities and provincial governments, and improve the quality of healthcare.

In working class sectors, it is essential to strengthen community organisations, peasants, neighbourhoods, small producers, feminists, environmentalists, rural and urban

workers, as the best way to resist the penetration of crime, as well as drug mafias and drug trafficking. We urgently need to develop a national plan for these organisations to fully participate in self-organised resistance against crime. Without the active participation of the population nothing will be resolved, which is why strategies must be designed from below. Only in this way will we win our young people away from organised crime.

Launch a campaign against all forms of violence, which ultimately feed the macro-violence of organised crime. This means combating gender violence, which is generated on social media networks, a place where hatred and fake news are incubated, and rejecting the symbolic violence that is present at every step in political struggles. To the extent that the causes of insecurity are not only national but also international, the government should request the formation of a United Nations commission for solidarity and support for our country. Likewise, a Latin American commission will have to be established for the same purpose.

A POPULAR RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS AND VIOLENCE OF ORGANIZED CRIME IS URGENT

Quito on January 11, 2024

by Movimiento Revolucionarios de las y los Trabajadores

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# COP28: Trashing the UN is easy, but where is the alternative?

*Alan Thornett writes on Ecosocialist Discussion blog about COP28 and debates the key issues raised.*

Despite being held in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – the sixth biggest oil producer in the world, and presided over by a top oil executive with the biggest fossil fuel lobby ever seen at a COP conference, COP28 was a surprisingly productive event.

It met at a time of dramatic acceleration in global warming, of course. 2023 was not only the hottest year since records began, but it did so by an unprecedented margin. The global average figure for 2023 was 14.98°C, a massive 0.17°C above the previous record. For the first time, every day in that year was 1°C above the pre-industrial level. Almost half were over 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level, and two were more than 2°C above it.

It was against this background that COP28 agreed—after a heated debate and an overrun of the conference—that the conference agreed unanimously to call for “a transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science”.

UN Secretary General António Guterres told the [Guardian](#) on December 13 that. “Whether you like it or not fossil fuel phase-out is (now) inevitable”. “Let’s hope it hasn’t come too late.” I agree with him on both points. Fossil fuel is now an obsolescent energy source in which investment will become increasingly problematic and which must be replaced by

renewables with the utmost urgency.

He is absolutely right. It is an important strategic breakthrough that could eventually spell the end—or at least the beginning of the end—of fossil fuels and the fossil industry. He is also right to question whether it has come too late to save the planet from catastrophe, which only time will tell, unfortunately. We are, however, better placed to defend the planet with this agreement in place than without it.

It is of comparable importance, in my view, to the two key decisions agreed in Paris in 2015. The first was that global warming is anthropogenic, i.e., a product of human activity. The second was the recognition that achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 could only be achieved by holding the global average temperature increase over preindustrial levels to below 1.5°C.

A last-minute decision to remove all references to oil and gas sabotaged a similar proposal to phase out fossil fuels at COP26 in Glasgow in 2022. Remarkably, fossil fuels had never been mentioned as such before at a COP conference, presumably to avoid frightening the horses.

Johan Rockström, a hugely respected Earth systems scientist, a member of the Stockholm Resilience Centre, and the leader of the team that developed the concept of planetary boundaries, welcomed the decision.

He told the Guardian that the agreement is a “pivotal landmark” in the climate struggle. It does, he says, deliver on making it clear to all financial institutions, businesses, and societies that we are now finally—eight years behind the Paris schedule—at the true ‘beginning of the end’ of the fossil fuel-driven world economy.”

[Greenpeace](#) said that while there are still some important loopholes to address, this package is “a powerful milestone.” While much more campaigning will be needed over the next year

to make this happen as soon as possible, “its game on from here!”

## Other key decisions

The first item on the agenda in Dubai was the “loss and damage fund,” which was agreed upon in principle at COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh. It was declared operational on the first day of COP28, with an initial \$700 million to fill the fund. This is a drop in the ocean, however, compared to the \$580 billion in damage that vulnerable countries will face by [2030](#).

A stocktake of the “Nationally Determined Contributions” was also conducted as a part of the “ratcheting up process” adopted in Paris in 2015, after which it was reported that there had been a collective effort to meet the \$100 billion target set in Paris and that new pledges would be sought to make up the shortfall. There were also policy discussions on a wide range of important issues, including the following:

- *Renewable energy.* The conference agreed to triple [renewable energy](#) globally, double its energy efficiency by 2030, and accelerate emissions reductions from road transport. It was also agreed to [cut methane](#) by at least 30 percent by 2030.
- *The internal combustion engine.* It was agreed that the [internal combustion engine](#) would be phased out by 2030. Electric vehicles powered by renewable energy, it said, are the future, and we can’t achieve global decarbonisation of transport without them.
- *Low-carbon cities.* There was a report from the Local [Climate Action Summit](#) regarding energy consumption in cities. It was noted that cities are responsible for more than [three-quarters](#) of global energy consumption and more than [half](#) of global greenhouse gas emissions. Navigating this within a low-carbon and resilient framework can foster a more equitable and just future. Cities need to start building much more eco-friendly

infrastructure at a much faster pace.

- *Public transport.* It was agreed that global public transport capacity should be [doubled](#) by 2030.
- *Food and agriculture.* The [World Resources Institute](#) reported that there were six major food and agriculture breakthroughs made in Dubai. Food and land, they say, drive one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, food systems around the world are vulnerable to droughts, flooding, extreme heat, and other impacts of climate change. The issue is particularly critical in many developing countries—for example, in Brazil, where food and land use drive [70% of emissions](#) while over half the population remains food insecure.
- *Deforestation.* The Brazilian delegation successfully proposed [a new global fund](#) to pay countries to keep their tropical forests intact. The proposal called for the creation of a massive global scheme to help preserve rainforests in scores of countries, called the “Tropical Forests Forever” fund. The concept would pay residents and landowners who help preserve forested areas like the Amazon. Finance would initially be raised from sovereign wealth funds as well as from other investors, such as the oil industry.
- *The biodiversity crisis.* There was strong support for the landmark agreement for nature recovery that was signed last year at the UN COP51 conference on biodiversity, which included protecting 30% of nature by 2030.

## **Carbon taxes**

There was a remarkable intervention by IMF chief [Kristalina Georgieva](#) (no less) on carbon pricing and carbon taxes. In what was the first time the subject had been discussed at a COP conference, she made a two-part proposal on behalf of the IMF:

- First, the abolition of all subsidies for fossil fuel production
- Second, put an explicit charge (or tax) on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at the point of production. This, she said, would raise the trillions of dollars that are needed to tackle the climate crisis.

She claimed that because right-wing climate denial politicians and parties all over the world have targeted them, governments have delayed implementing such taxes. However, she said, "When you put a price on carbon, decarbonisation accelerates." The IMF, World Bank, OECD, and World Trade Organisation, she said, have set up a taskforce to examine carbon pricing policies and their application around the world.

As someone who has been arguing for exactly this many years, I found this intervention staggering. It appears that a large section of the ruling elites have adopted one of the key elements of an exit policy from fossil energy. The IMF is not only a capitalist institution but one that was founded precisely in order to oversee the international market on behalf of global capitalism.

COP conferences have traditionally resisted discussing this kind of specific emissions reduction demand in favour of general principles. It is important that they are now discussing both.

### **The harsh reality**

This positive outcome in Dubai reinforces what has long been clear: i.e., that at this stage of the climate crisis, with global temperatures rising at an ever faster rate and time running out, the only way to avoid catastrophic damage to the planet is by making the COP process work.

Any other proposition is leftist posturing. The science is irrefutable. The global temperature is rising at an ever-increasing rate. Dangerous tipping points are starting to



trigger. Time is running out. The 1.5°C limit hangs by a thread, climate chaos could be irreversible within a decade, and in the end, nothing can be built on a dead planet.

At this stage, moreover, only governmental action—and action taken by governments prepared to go on a war footing—can make the changes necessary to stop climate change in the limited time we have left, and only the UN COP process has a chance of achieving it.

Not that it will be easy, of course. The implementation of COP policies has been a battle from the outset. Member states are quick to exploit any loopholes on offer, including, for example, carbon capture and storage and the notion of transitional fuels, both of which provide the opportunity to hang on to fossil fuels for a bit longer.

Others simply ignore their previous commitments—flagrantly, if necessary—if they cut across their domestic political interests. A prime current example is the UK Tory government, which has dumped a raft of previous ecological commitments in order to exploit a backlash from car drivers against measures to improve air quality in London, which it thinks it can use against Labour in the general election later this year.

These include delaying the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030 to 2035; delaying the ban on the sale of fossil-fuel heating boilers from 2035 to 2040; deprioritizing the transition to electric vehicles; issuing over a hundred new licences for oil and gas exploration; and a completely new oil field in the North Sea.

Such governments, however, have to be faced down if there is to be a solution, and that can best be done within the COP process.

## **The role of the left**

Most of the left denounce the UN COP process at every

opportunity, in the most vitriolic terms they can find, with no regard to factual or historical accuracy, while having no viable alternative to offer itself. This is a big problem, in my view.

George Monbiot, for example, whom I greatly respect and who should know better in my view, declared in the [Guardian](#) of December 9 that the whole COP process had broken down, had “achieved absolutely nothing since it started in 1992, and are now they are talking us into oblivion.” “Let’s face it,” he goes on: “climate summits are broken. The delegates talk and talk, while Earth systems slide towards deadly tipping points”. In other words, it is a roadblock to doing anything positive about climate change, and the sooner it gets out of the way, the better.

The Swedish writer and climate campaigner Andreas Malm, author of *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, told the [Guardian](#) on April 21, 2023, that “climate diplomacy is hopeless” and that he does not have “a shred of hope that the elites are prepared to take the urgent action needed to avert catastrophic climate change.”.

The COP conferences, he tells us, “have degenerated into kind of an annual theatre for pretending that we’re doing something about global warming while, in fact, we’re just letting fuel be poured on the fire. “If we let the dominant classes take care of this problem,” he said, “they’re going to drive at top speed into absolute inferno. Nothing suggests that they have any capacity to do anything else of their own accord because they are totally enmeshed with the process of capital accumulation.”.

They reflect Greta Thunberg’s Glasgow “blah, blah, blah, blah” speech when, in fact, crucial debates were taking place into which she should have been intervening.

George Monbiot says that he had considered proposing changes

to the decision-making procedure at COP summits but had decided against it. Andreas Malm proposes that the climate movement should have some kind of military wing, which would get us nowhere when it comes to building the kind of broad global mass movement that is going to be necessary.

## **The revolutionary left**

The revolutionary overthrow of global capitalism, which they imply is imminent, is the solution that the revolutionary left advocates, whether explicitly or implicitly. The fact that the far-right is growing dangerously across Europe, and Trump stands a very good chance of winning the US Presidency in November (for example), does nothing to deter them in this.

This kind of maximalism, however, has many consequences beyond wishful thinking. It implies that anything short of a global revolution is a reformist diversion and that victories are not victories but defeats if a reformist institution like the UN COP process is involved.

It implies that the collapse of the COP process, which is entirely possible as the crisis sharpens, would be good for the future of the planet, when in reality it would let global warming rip and leave us facing a catastrophe situation without a global project by which to confront it and with the right-wing waiting in the wings.

It also leads many on the radical left to oppose the placing of environmental demands on the COP process because, they say, it is a capitalist institution. This is not only wrong and ultra-left, but strange, since the left demands such institutions in other arenas of struggle all the time. We put demands on the employers, who are capitalists, and on governments that are also capitalist institutions. The fire service is a capitalist institution designed first and foremost to protect private property, but we would not refuse its help if our house was burning down.

## **A transitional approach**

The task we face today is not whether global capitalism can be overthrown by revolutionary means in the next few years, but whether it can be forced to take the measures necessary to save the planet from global warming today as a part of a longer-term struggle to eventually replace capitalism with an ecosocialist society. If we are unable to build a movement capable of forcing change under capitalism, how are we going to build a movement capable of its revolutionary overthrow?

It is not true—as many on the left insist—that capitalism cannot be forced to make structural changes that are contrary to the logic of its existence. In fact, it made concessions when it agreed under pressure to support a maximum global temperature increase of 1.5°C in Paris and when it agreed under similar pressure to transition away from fossil fuels in Dubai.

We need a transitional approach, built around a set of transitional demands, that, as well as addressing the immediate needs of the struggle today, also has a strategic logic towards a post-capitalist solution. Reforms are not necessarily reformist. The road to revolutionary change is forged in the struggle for reform. In fact, the struggle for reform is often the only real road to revolutionary change. Depending on the dynamics of struggle they generate, in fact, both the 1.5°C limit and the temperature increase and reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 are transitional demands.

The ruling elites, in any case, are deeply divided on the future of the planet. While its more enlightened wing recognises the approaching climate catastrophe and supports the COP process as the only way to save the planet—and within the capitalist order, of course—its dystopian, anti-woke, climate-denying wing, such as Trump, Bolsonaro, and Orbán, are prepared to gamble on the future of the planet against their climate denial, fight it out on the streets, and impose an

authoritarian regime if they get the chance.

These people are deeply hostile to the progressive agenda required to save the planet, i.e., humanitarianism, collectivism, environmentalism, and the defence of nature and the natural environment, that are involved in saving the planet on a sustainable basis.

The role of the left and progressive forces in the climate struggle must be to exploit this division on behalf of the future of the planet.

### **The role of the UN**

I am not a natural defender of the UN—the “thieves kitchen,” as Lenin called its predecessor, the League of Nations—or even of its environmental work.

It is important, however, to recognise the positive role that the UN has played in global warming over the last 35 years, decades before the socialist left showed any interest. In fact, it is difficult to play a useful role in the climate struggle today without an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of that contribution and what it represents as a focus for international campaigning and mobilisation.

The idea that the UN could have resolved the climate crisis many years ago if only it had been prepared to snap its fingers hard enough—which is implicit in the left critique—is nonsense. As is the notion that it has “achieved absolutely nothing since it was launched in 1992” or that its conferences are “a kind of annual theatre for pretending that we’re doing something about global warming.” Such caricatures contribute nothing to the struggle.

The UN’s engagement with the ecological crisis began in 1972 with the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

The [International Panel on Climate Change](#) (IPCC), a scientific body comprising 2,500 scientists from 130 countries, was launched in 1989. It's mandated to "prepare a comprehensive review and recommendations with respect to the state of knowledge of the science of climate change, the social and economic impact of climate change, and potential response strategies and elements for inclusion in a possible future international convention on climate."

It coincided with James Hansen's [historic address](#) to the US Senate on global warming and climate change.

The [Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) was launched in 1993 at the Earth Summit in Rio. Its mandate was to establish an international agreement in order to "stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere and prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate systems." What it did in practice was establish the COP process.

The Convention, in particular, was a frontal challenge to the petrochemical industry and what it produced, which had dominated planet Earth for almost a century and had shaped it in its image. Abolishing fossil fuels and replacing them with renewable energy was always going to mean uniting every country in the world in a monumental confrontation.

The fossil fuel industry responded with extreme hostility to all this and went on over the next 30 years to spend billions of dollars on the next opposing COP process, including the mobilisation of an army of climate deniers around the world to discredit the science, and they were initially very successful.

## **Legally binding votes**

The most contentious issue in the COP process faced from the outset was the issue of legally binding (or non-legally binding) votes at conferences. While the Framework Convention did not provide for binding votes, it had the authority to

require them on carbon reduction pledges by way of a protocol to the Convention. Such a protocol, called the Kyoto Protocol, was agreed upon at COP3 in Kyoto in 1997. It was, however, highly contentious and difficult to implement.

This came to a head at COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009, when 25 countries, including some of the world's biggest polluters—the USA, China, Canada, and Australia—refused to accept a legally binding vote over a proposal to restrict the global temperature increase to no more than 2°C above the preindustrial level. They all walked out, and the conference broke up in disarray.

The split effectively paralysed the COP process until COP21 in Paris in 2015, where legally binding votes on carbon reduction pledges were replaced by a consensus system, i.e., by unanimous, non-binding votes. Member states failing to meet their pledges would have to face the political and reputational consequences involved at the next COP, and under conditions where the crisis itself would inevitably be even worse.

This was correct, in my view. This has certainly been more effective, both in holding the whole thing together and in implementing decisions. Although getting 198 diverse and complete countries to act together to save the planet is always a formidable task, it is better than endless splits with no dialogue and no progress.

Meanwhile, the COP process, we should recognise, has been instrumental in defeating the climate deniers and winning the overwhelming majority of the scientific community over on the science of climate change—without which we get nowhere. Additionally, the COP process, without which the fight against climate change would be ineffective, has significantly contributed to a seismic shift in the public's awareness of the climate crisis in recent years.

## **An exit strategy from fossil fuels**

Any campaign against climate change, if it is to be successful, must have a viable existing strategy for fossil fuels based on a socially just transition to renewables, whether it is the UN or the left. While the exit strategy being pursued by the COP process until now has been net-zero emissions by 2050, it does not propose by what mechanism this should be achieved.

I have long argued that the most effective way to cut carbon emissions quickly and in a way compatible with social justice is by making fossil fuels far more expensive than renewables by means of carbon taxes, as argued (remarkably) by the IMF in Dubai. When properly managed and carried out as a part of the significant transfer of wealth from the rich to the poor, this can both provide a socially just transition for the most vulnerable members of society and shield it from right-wing forces like the far right in Britain or the yellow vests in France.

The best way of doing this, in my view, is through a fee-and-dividend project along the lines proposed by climate scientist James Hansen in his 2012 book *Storms of My Grandchildren*. He set out the main points as follows:

- Fossil-fuel companies would be charged an easily implemented carbon fee imposed at the well head, mine shaft, or point of entry.
- 100% of the revenue collected would be distributed monthly to the population on a per capita basis as dividends, with up to two-half shares for children per family.
- Dividends would be sent directly via electronic transfers to bank accounts or debit cards.
- The carbon fee would be a single, uniform amount in the



form of dollars per tonne of carbon dioxide emitted from the fuel.

- The carbon fee would then gradually and predictably be ramped up so as to achieve the necessary carbon reductions.
- At the same time, current subsidies to the fossil fuel industry would be eliminated.

When applied to the USA, he argued that 60% of the population would receive net economic benefits, i.e., the dividends they received back would exceed the increased prices paid. As the IMF speaker concluded in Dubai, as mentioned above, “when you put a price on carbon, decarbonisation accelerates.”.

The best exposition of Hansen’s proposal can be found in *The Case for a Carbon Tax* by Shi-Ling-Hsu, published by Island Press in 2011.

Cutting emissions from the demand side in this way is the only socially just way of doing it since it can be carried out within the framework of an overall taxation system that is heavily progressive and brings about a major transfer of wealth from the rich to the poor. Other alternatives, often advanced by the left, such as production cuts by government decision or the rationing of energy, not only do not work but can generate popular backlashes along the lines of the yellow vests, and rationing would create a black market.

It might be expected that the left would support such taxes since it supports taxing the rich, but this is not the case. Most on the radical left oppose carbon taxes, I presume, because they do not involve the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism.

## **Mass movements**

It is unlikely that the climate struggle will be resolved without big confrontations and mass movements, for which ecosocialists have a responsibility to make preparations.

The best scenario, of course, is that a mass movement is built out of the existing global justice movement and includes everyone who is prepared to fight to save the planet on a progressive basis.

There is another scenario, however, which is that a mass movement or movements arise spontaneously following ecological or societal breakdown as a result of the failure of humanity to stop runaway global warming, resulting in catastrophic impacts on the planet, and with ultra-right and fascist forces waiting in the wings.

While any movement capable of saving the planet will initially be (hopefully) progressive rather than ecosocialist in character, it will be crucial that there are ecosocialists inside it able to fight not just for a sustainable energy transition but one based on social and economic justice and in an anti-capitalist direction.

It is the need to address these eventualities that makes the strategic discussions we have today around the climate and ecological struggle so important. The challenge for ecosocialists in such a situation is not just to be on the right side but to be able to make a contribution to the line of march and the principals involved.

*Alan Thornett January 24th 2024*

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# 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.

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