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

Andreas Malm is a Swedish ecosocialist activist and author of several books on fossil capital, global warming and the need to change the course of events initiated by the burning of fossil fuels over the last two centuries of capitalist development. The Jeunes Anticapitalistes (the youth branch of the Gauche Anticapitaliste, the Belgian section of the Fourth International) met him at the 37th Revolutionary Youth Camp organized in solidarity with the Fourth International in France this summer, where he was invited as a speaker.
As left-wing activists in the climate movement, we sometimes feel stuck by what can be seen as a lack of strategic perspectives within the movement. How can we radicalize the climate movement and why does the movement need a strategic debate in your opinion?

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

One way is to try to organize this kind of big mass actions of the *Ende Gelände* type, and I think that’s perhaps the most useful thing we can do. But of course, there are also sometimes opportunities for working within movements like Fridays for Future or Extinction Rebellion for that matter and try to pull them in a progressive direction as well as to make

them avoid making tactical mistakes and having an apolitical discourse. In some places, I think that this strategy can be successful. Of course, one can also consider forming new more radical climate groups that might initially be pretty small, but that can be more radical in terms of tactics and analysis, and sort of pull others along, or have a "radical flank" effect. So, I don't have one model for how to do this – it really depends on the state of the movement in the community where you live and obviously the movement has ups and downs (it went quite a lot down recently after the outbreak of the pandemic, but hopefully we'll see it move back up).

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

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

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

I think that this strategic turn will have to be reinforced, particularly given the fact that this year's COP will be held

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

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

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

I think I phrased this a bit unfortunately the other day and I came across as too dismissive of trade unions. That wasn't really my intention. My concrete experience over the past few years in relation to trade unions has been pretty limited, but

my sort of horizon is northern European and in Sweden the trade unions are completely indifferent to the climate issue probably more so than in even in Norway and Denmark. Swedish unions are totally ignorant and uninterested and also totally incapable of putting up a fight for their members interests. We have no strikes in Sweden any longer. This is probably an exception rather than the rule, but the level of class struggle in Sweden is so low that from my point of view it's extremely hard to imagine that all of a sudden organized labor in Sweden would rise to the occasion and become an important player in climate politics.

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

Out of this experience a position has emerged that has been articulated by my dear friend and comrade Tadzio Müller, who has been sort of a key organizer, strategist and thinker of Ende Gelände. He now almost says that he considers the working class in the global North to be more or less part of the enemy – he thinks that the organized working class is so invested in the existing economy that it will just defend coal and similar things like it has in general. Then there is an opposite position which is very forcefully articulated by another friend in common, Matt Huber, in his recent book Climate Change as Class War. Building Socialism on a Warming Planet:

he says that the only hope for climate politics is to activate the forces of organized labor and that it's only by turning towards the working class – including by taking jobs in the industry, something like the old industrial turn that we had in the 80s – that we can make any progress on the climate front. So the organized working class is the only conceivable subject of a climate revolution. So these are like polar opposites and here I find myself advocating a kind of centrist position between these two. I cannot accept the idea that the working class is part of the enemy – not even coal workers – but on the other hand I don't really believe in the idea that organized labor will be the prime mover of the climate front. I think the prime mover of the climate struggle will be and is a climate movement that isn't defined around class. I think there are three routes for someone to be interested in the question of climate: 1) having some kind of personal experience of adverse weather which is becoming more and more common; 2) having knowledge of the severity of the crisis without having personally experienced it, which isn't very hard to get by and doesn't require a PhD or any university degree; 3) being animated by solidarity with people who suffer from climate disasters around the world. I would think that these are the three main routes into the commitment to climate struggle and none of these routes necessarily pass through the point of production. So it's potentially a funnel that draws people into the climate movement from various points along the landscape of class society.

The movement that emerged in 2019 was largely defined not along the lines of class or race or gender, but rather of age. It was primarily a youth phenomenon – with Fridays for Future in particular – and there is a logic to that because the climate crisis has a very distinct temporal aspect: it's young people who will have to deal with this through the rest of their lives while old people have perhaps benefited from the fossil economy and won't see as much of the damage. I think this needs to be theorized and to an extent accepted and

understood that the age component of the climate struggle will be significant in the coming mobilizations. I think that Matt Huber and others who argue along similar lines as he does are correct insofar as the climate movement needs an alliance with the working class and with segments of organized labor to amass sufficient strength to turn these things around. The climate movement has to make sure that its politics are compatible with working class interests and can converge with those interests. But that's something else than putting all eggs in the basket of an industrial turn or proletarianization of the climate movement, which I think would be a strategic dead-end. Now the promise of the Green New Deal and of all these kinds of initiatives that we've seen in recent years – which haven't come to fruition unfortunately, but that doesn't mean that they're useless or doomed – that the climate transition goes hand in hand with improving the standards of living for workers and strengthening the bargaining power in the political position of the working class is something that needs to be pursued further.

When it comes to the concrete tactical questions about relating to workers when you are having a blockade, again, from the German experience I think it would be a massive mistake – a workerist error if you like – to prioritize good relations with the coal workers over having an effective blockade that temporarily damages the interests of these workers because you close their mines for a few days or something like that. There have been numerous initiatives to try to establish contact and dialogue with coal workers in Germany and it's been very unsuccessful, particularly in the east where the coal workers rather tend to move towards the far right – the Alternative für Deutschland, AfD – as a defense of their interests because the AfD wants to continue with coal forever and doesn't believe in the existence of the climate crisis. Then again, we definitely shouldn't give up on the idea that the type of transition we want to see has to ensure that workers in sectors that have to be dismantled

completely get equivalent or better jobs, preferably in the places where they live so they don't have to move. This should be a key component of the transition. But eventually you can't expect workers in the fossil fuel industry itself to take the initiative for closing down that industry – it's a basic Marxist insight that their immediate day-to-day class interest is of course to keep their jobs. So the initiative to close that industry down has to come from the outside and the blockade is a manifestation of this: we're coming from the outside and we want to shut this sector down because it's necessary. But you don't want to make these workers your enemies and you don't want to consider them the enemy – you want to tell them that unfortunately they are employed in a sector that has to be shut down but that we are demanding that the transition ensures that they get equivalent or better jobs where they live.

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

the spreading of these kinds of examples of workers in factories having ideas about the transition.

A glimpse of hope from Belgium then. It's not like the trade unions are very green and climate friendly – well, they say they are but in reality they're not, as demonstrated for instance by their position in favor of the extension of the airport in Liège to build a hub for Alibaba's activities in Europe – but still, in the 2019 Youth for Future movement, we saw a new group called Workers for Climate that was created by grassroots and left-wing unionists. What's more, the main unions – including the bureaucracies – sent delegations to the demonstrations, and the most progressive wings of the CSC union, organizing for instance the retail workers but also the aviation branch, officially covered the workers who would strike. It's very symbolic, but still it was made public and the workers received the information that they could go on strike and be covered by the union.

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

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

My limited understanding of Belgium is that you still have a fairly significant industrial manufacturing sector and a working class that every now and then engages in some serious battle for its interests. So you have some class struggle happening in Belgium – we have nothing in Sweden, absolutely nothing! But where there is class struggle happening, of course the potential exists for workers themselves taking initiatives or for the climate movement drawing them in or for convergence or productive interaction, and this should be

taken up. It’s exclusively a question of the level of intensity of the class struggle. At the COP 26 for instance, there was this strike happening in Glasgow by garbage collectors, and Greta Thunberg approached them and expressed her support for their strike, and they joined the big march. That’s just one example of how these things can play out. Sweden is perhaps an extreme case, but the problem is that generally I think that the intensity of working class struggles is very low compared to what it was in the 80s, 70s, 60s – not to mention of course the 1920s. If the climate issue had exploded in the 1950s and 60s, it could have played out completely differently. Now it has exploded in a moment of doldrums where the working class is historically quite weak.

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

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

swimming in these insane superprofits and you should be able to whip up some kind of public anger about these.

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

One of them is the demand for not a single additional fossil fuel installation or infrastructure. This can apply to an airport, a highway or a gas terminal or oil pipeline among other things. Another transitional demand – and obviously none of this is my invention, it's something that is being discussed more and more – is nationalizing the private energy companies and taking over oil and gas and coal companies and forcing them to do something different, to stop their extraction of fossil fuels as fast as humanly possible and perhaps instead roll out renewable energy or even engage in carbon dioxide removal – that means taking down CO2 from the atmosphere in one way or another. But these are only two dimensions, they are not the only ones and again, it depends on where you find yourself. In some countries, the oil and gas and coal sectors are already nationalized – there, you would have to formulate this differently.

You mentioned carbon dioxide removal (CDR), which is a great opportunity to discuss geoengineering. You warn a lot about solar geoengineering and Naomi Klein also does, and we can fully understand why when we see the nightmare it could be when we read or hear about that. Yet in the media in general there is not much writing about that – then again, you say you fear that it might come out all at once – and we seem to hear

much more about carbon dioxide removal. Why is that? What's your take on solar geoengineering? And what's your take on carbon dioxide removal – given the state of things now, is it becoming unavoidable as a necessary yet insufficient part of the solution, to be deployed next to massive reductions of emissions?

This is a massive field which we can talk about for hours. I have a research project on this topic with a Belgian colleague from Lund university, who is also a friend and comrade, Wim Carton. We have a research grant and this coming autumn we will do research with a whole team of interns – made up of students from my Master's program in human ecology – on various aspects of carbon dioxide removal. We will write a book with Verso in the spring, which would be about both carbon dioxide removal and solar geoengineering and whose working title right now is Overshoot. Climate Politics When It's Too Late. I spent the past couple of months writing about solar geoengineering and trying to understand it. This might sound bizarre but I'm trying to use psychoanalysis to understand solar geoengineering because it has the component of repressing a problem as in the Freudian model of repression, where you push something out of the conscious so that it appears not to exist, but under the surface it's bubbling and sooner or later it explodes.

CDR and solar geoengineering need to be distinguished as they work in different ways. You're absolutely right that solar geoengineering isn't much talked about. Some vulgar Marxists have sort of anticipated that big fossil fuel companies would promote solar geoengineering as a way continuing with business-as-usual. That has not happened: neither ExxonMobil nor any other big fossil company say anything about solar geoengineering, nor is there any government that's advocating it and there's no far right party advocating it – although during the Trump era there was this expectation that he would soon flip over into advocating solar geoengineering, none of

that has happened. On the contrary, carbon dioxide removal, which works very differently, is something that all the big oil and gas companies say that they are planning on doing as part of their net zero propaganda, and you can see far right parties – someone here on this camp mentioned Berlusconi the other day – advocating in favor of planting trees and things like that, and there are also a lot of startups and capitalist companies who see carbon dioxide removal – perhaps particularly direct air capture – as a new line of business where you can produce commodities and make profit from them. So you have this sort of the burgeoning field of business opportunities in CDR that doesn't exist in solar geoengineering because that doesn't produce any new commodities that you can sell.

There are many differences between them but another one is that CDR, just as you suggested, is going to be necessary because the concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere is already too high. We need to get CO2 down from the atmosphere, back under the ground, locked into subsurface storage – where it was originally before it was taken out in the form of fossil fuels and set on fire. The only way to do that on a massive scale seems to be to use some kind of advanced technology – planting trees is not going to be enough because you can't return carbon to the passive part of the carbon cycle, under the ground, just by planting trees. Planting trees affects the active carbon cycle, but to get it back sequestered under the ground, where it's locked out geologically from the active carbon cycle, you need something else. A technology like direct air capture has promise in this respect because it can actually capture CO2 and mineralize it, so you turn it into stone under the ground.

There are now plants on Iceland doing that and it's essentially a proven technology, but the problem there in our analysis – Wim and I wrote an article about this in Historical Materialism – is that this technology is being captured by

private interests who don’t see any profits potential in taking the carbon and burying it underground, because that means that you essentially put a resource out of the business cycle. What they can do instead to make profit is to capture the CO2 and turn it into a product such as synthetic jet fuel or they can use it in fertilizers or capture CO2 and sell it as fizz to Coca-Cola – this is what Climeworks, one of the big direct air capture companies, does. When you use it as a commodity, then you can make a profit, but that’s just recycling the carbon because it doesn’t actually put it under the ground. So if you want to put it under the ground you need to sort of liberate this technology from the compulsion to make profit – that’s our view.

Solar geoengineering on the other hand is a very different story because it comes with so many dangers of messing with the climate system. The biggest risk, of course, is what is known as the termination shock: if you do solar geoengineering, you have this sunscreen but you continue to build up CO2 in the atmosphere; what happens is that all of this CO2 in the atmosphere is just waiting to exercise its radiative forcing – its impact on the climate; – so if the sunscreen is taken down for some reason, boom, all of a sudden this accumulated CO2 creates an enormous rise in temperatures. (Picture boiling water on which you put a lid and it continues to boil, it burns hotter and hotter, and then you take away the lid and the whole boiling water comes out of the pot.) That could lead to the most unimaginably disastrous spike in temperatures and there are all sorts of other dangers with geoengineering. Therefore, solar geoengineering isn’t something that people on the left should advocate for, and here I part company with someone like Kim Stanley Robinson for instance. He’s a novelist who wrote a great novel called The Ministry for the Future, probably the best climate fiction so far, but he advocates in favor of solar geoengineering – which forms a big part of that book – from sort of a left-wing perspective. A colleague of mine, Holly Jean Buck, does the

same thing in the US: she's written about solar geoengineering, and she says that this is something that the left should look upon as a potentially useful technology.

I don't think it is useful, I don't think we should ever advocate it, but we should prepare for it because it's so likely that it will start; the likeliness does not come from any aggressive sponsorship, so far like we said it's almost never talked about, but there is a logic to it which is that there is only one known technology that has a potential to immediately reduce temperatures on earth. Carbon dioxide removal would have effect over decades, and likewise, if we were to stop emissions now you wouldn't see a drop in temperatures – you would see the temperatures rising more slowly and then perhaps flattening out. If you are in a situation where you feel we are in a total emergency and we have to do something and reduce temperatures, the only thing you can do to accomplish that is to shoot sulfate clouds into the atmosphere. It's the only known technological option for doing this. With every summer, with every new season of disasters, my feeling is OK, when will the order be given to implement geoengineering? When will things break, when will the system snap and when will there be a sudden real sense of emergency that – as in during the pandemic – we have to do something and when will there be this moment where governments start looking around: "what can we do? The American West is on fire", or becoming a desert, or the entire Europe is burning or whatever? And then there is only one thing you can do.

If we are in such a moment and the planes take off, I'm not saying we should for instance shoot down those planes or sabotage them or something like that. But we should think about what a left strategy in such a moment would be because it looks increasingly likely for strictly logical structural reasons. There are more and more signs that part of the sort of bourgeois intelligentsia is moving towards this. For instance, there is a think tank called the Paris Peace Forum

which aspires to be like the World Economic Forum in geopolitics – they have put together a commission on overshoot which is chaired by Pascal Lamy who was previously chairing the WTO, and he said a few months back that we need to look into geoengineering, that there is no other way… You know this guy?

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

Right. Another sign is that about a year ago the US National Academy of Sciences put out a long report advocating a national research program into geoengineering, and I think that it's far more likely that Biden and the Democrats initiate moves towards this than Trump and the Republicans. So this is something to closely monitor and prepare for.

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

Fundamentally, I think that the observation is correct that this crisis, however it's dealt with, is going to be dealt with by the state. Solar geoengineering would be an incredibly extreme intervention into the whole planetary system and it would be carried out by some states. Carbon dioxide removal on a large scale obviously requires massive involvement from the state. Emissions reductions also require the state because the reductions will have to be so big and quick and comprehensive

that no other agent than the state can conceivably do it. Here we should point out that all scientists who advocate carbon dioxide removal and/or solar geoengineering are perfectly clear that none of this will work without massive emissions reductions. Those who advocate solar geoengineering nowadays never say that we can do this instead of emissions reductions, they say that we have to do both at the same time; the question is "is it really likely that both happen at the same time?" They think so, I think that's an optimistic illusion. What I mean here is that there is no serious way out of the climate crisis without massive emissions reductions, and they have to be extraordinarily fast and deep and radical.

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

Now a state that undertakes massive emissions reductions could also change character. it might be authoritarian because it needs very forceful steering of the economy and of society if you're going to have these rapid emissions reductions. But there could also of course be a deepening of the democratic substance of that state: for instance if you nationalize private fossil fuel companies, what you do is that you essentially extend the democracy to the sphere of energy production. In other words, you put it under public control and take one sector of the economy into the hands of the

democratic polity, which in a way pushes against the limits of bourgeois democracy which says that democracy is this strictly political sphere and that the economy is a sphere that runs itself and should not be intruded. If you take over the energy sector and put it inside the political sphere then you sort of extend democracy into the economy. I think that a real transition requires this kind of deepening of democracy and that it can take on potentially something like a rupture, a revolutionary change in the sense that if you are ever going to accomplish this you probably have to defeat a very important part of the class enemy because it's not like Total or BP or Shell will voluntarily give up and say "OK, take our companies and we will never again have any profits and we're just going out of business and dying voluntarily". That's not how it works usually in history. So if we are going to accomplish that, we need to become stronger than them which is a very tall order because they are so much stronger than us right now. So we need to become stronger than them and if we were to defeat them, then that doesn't necessarily mean total social revolution but it's a change in property relations that could perhaps set in motion a process that goes beyond the current order of things.

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

It is a question that always pops up and that we struggle with all the time. Generally, I think it's important to point out that individual lifestyle changes will never be the solution

and that what you can do as an individual has extremely limited effect. Buying into this whole narrative that I as a consumer can change things by shopping differently is to capitulate to a bourgeois narrative about society that is fundamentally false. First of all, you as a consumer can affect extremely limited change on your own. And you acting as a consumer is fundamentally unequal in the sense that it's the richest consumer that has the most influence: you don't want to base your politics on your affluence. A working-class consumer might have no capacity – or no time – to buy the more expensive, more ecologically sustainable alternative. Bill McKibben was at my university once and he was asked the question "what's the most important thing I can do as an individual?" and he said "stop being an individual, join with others and do things together, that's the only way to change things", and that's correct.

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

Now there is this saying by Adorno which you might have heard: "there is no good life in a bad one", which is sometimes translated as "there is no right life in a wrong one". To me, this means that if you're stuck inside in a system that is fundamentally rotten it's extremely difficult for you to purify or purge yourself and live in a completely sustainable fashion. That's virtually impossible, unless you go out and live on your own as a hunter-gatherer in the forest to escape

from the dirt of capitalist industrial civilization. We cannot strive for complete purity, it’s impossible because you want to be part of society and you want to affect change in that society – you don’t want to stand isolated outside of it. And as long as you’re inside of it, which again is a prerequisite for changing it, then you have to make concessions to the society in which you live. This has always been the situation with our struggles: the workers have a relation of dependence to their employers and receive wages from their employers; they fight against their employers but they’re still in a relation of dependence and can’t just escape that dependence. In the same way, we are locked into a system that makes us consumers of fossil fuels and we can’t just parachute out of it completely.

This means for each and one of us that we need to negotiate this in our own lives and make decisions balancing what’s the right thing to do. And here the thing that most often comes up is flying because that’s the worst thing you can do as a private consumer in terms of emissions, and it’s also an act that is hard to resist sometimes because for instance if you want to go to North America for some reason – there might be a political reason for you to go there – then there is no other option than flying. Last December I needed to go to Egypt because that’s a country I have connections to. And for the first time in human history you can’t get on a boat on the northern Mediterranean and cross to the southern Mediterranean – there are no boats to Egypt! That’s bizarre because that’s how people have traveled for millennia for instance between Egypt and Italy – but it’s not there any longer because an entire capitalist society has enforced aviation is the only mode of transportation that is available. What do I do then? Do I sit home and say I can’t go to Egypt because there are only flights? No, that’s not what I did, I took a flight to go there. On the contrary, when I discussed about how I were to come here to this camp [in central France], I was first told that speakers are asked to take the cheapest transportation to

the camp, which in my case would have meant flying here but that wouldn't have felt right – I try to avoid flying within Europe. And then I was alerted to the bus of the Danish delegation leaving from Copenhagen, so of course I took the Danish bus because that's a much better thing to do. But I think that there is no general rule for how to deal with these things in individual lives other than try to avoid excessive emissions and try to avoid emissions-intensive choices when possible. Of course you have to weigh this against other factors – the political projects you're involved in or family affiliations and so on. In any case, we need to abandon first the idea that my individual actions are what's going to change society and secondly the idea that you can become pure and free of sin and guilt in this society.

In your interview with Stathis Kouvélakis for Hors-Série, you added another argument about how consumers don't have control about how things are produced, about the global chains of production and so on, and that's another important issue for us as Marxists.

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

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

Well, Greta is an anomaly because the climate movement in Sweden is extremely weak. Sweden is generally a graveyard for social movements and Greta became famous in Sweden because she first became famous in Europe. She was kind of discovered by the Swedish media all of a sudden – "so there's this Swedish

girl who's becoming very famous in Europe so we need to cover her here as well". But Fridays for Future as a movement was always weaker in Sweden than in Denmark, not to mention Germany or even Belgium. We never reached the stage where you were – at some point in late 2019 there were a couple of fairly big demonstrations in Stockholm but still far from the influence and the magnitude seen in other countries. There are initiatives here and there. At the time this interview is published there will have been a small scale Ende Gelände type of thing in late August against a cement company on Gotland, an island to the east of Sweden. There was a massive flop in early June: an attempt by activists in Stockholm – I was part of it in the beginning – to establish a campaign called "Pull the Plug" during a summit which took place in early June and didn't receive any media attention. The summit was called "Stockholm+50" because in 1972 there was an important UNEP summit there that was sort of a milestone in the development of international environmental politics – so the idea was that 50 years later, the Swedish government and UN would have a 50 year anniversary summit. We wanted to make actions at the same time, but the only thing that eventually happened was a march between various apartments where CEOs of oil and gas companies and banks in Sweden were living. We were going their outside of their apartments, burning some Bengal fires, chanting and so on – a great idea, but there were only 100 people. 100 people after half a year of attempts at mobilizing: a complete failure. Embarrassing even.

And then there is the question of the Left. There is the Left Party, which is the former Communist Party, and our FI section dissolved itself as a party – we used to be the Socialist Party and now we are called Socialist Politics – largely to be able to work inside the Left Party. Now the Left Party has a new chairwoman since a couple of years, Mehrnoosh Dadgostar, who goes by the name Nooshi. She has abandoned the climate politics of her predecessor Jonas Sjöstedt. He was an auto worker who used to work at the Volvo plant in Umeå in northern

Sweden and was very close to some of our FI comrades because the largest metal workers union in northern Sweden is led by members of the Swedish section. He sort of started the process of inviting us into the Left Party in the years when Podemos and Syriza were interesting left-wing forces. He wanted to open up the Left Party and make it more that kind of party and suggested that we work together. He had a personal commitment to climate politics and he made it a profile issue of the Left Party. But Nooshi's strategic project is to win over working class voters from the Sweden Democrats – the far right – back to the Left Party. Now I'm simplifying a bit but she kind of has the idea that the working class is essentially the white working class in old industrial or postindustrial towns in rural areas, and that in order to win back these voters from the Sweden Democrats we have to tone down our climate politics and our anti-racism. Our current – Socialist Politics – and quite a few others within the Left Party are of course dissatisfied with this turn – this is a controversial line that she has taken. She's styling herself as an old-fashioned Social Democrat, very pro-industry – she likes to go to construction sites and put a helmet on and take photographs of herself posing as a worker, this kind of workerist attitude…

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

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

One last word about Code Rouge, the action we've already mentioned at the beginning of the interview. As Gauche Anticapitaliste, we are members of a quite large coalition – with organizations such as Greenpeace for instance – which is planning an important action of civil disobedience in the

beginning of October. The goal is to block a big infrastructure from Total…

Oh, wonderful!

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

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

Yes, it will take place during the weekend of 8-9 October. There is a website which is https://code-rouge.be/ (in French and Dutch). The place has not been disclosed yet – we'll disclose it at the last moment to have more chances of success in this confrontational action.

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

July 2022

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The Island and the River

COP26 brought all the world and its political issues to the Clyde for a few weeks in November. Catching a quiet moment away from the demos and kettles, Paul Inglis [of ecosocialist.scot] spoke to Paul Figueroa, a prominent member of the Puerto Rican Independence Party visiting Scotland

during the conference. Ranging across the history of the island and its politics, particularly the issues of climate change and imperialism, this interview presents the cause of Puerto Rican independence to a Scottish audience.

Puerto Rico is not usually an island that occurs to the Scottish political imagination. Our international awareness, at least within the independence movement, is mostly centred on places like Catalunya and Wales, with an occasional (but rather reserved) glance at the Basques now and then. We draw lesson and inspiration, if at all, from a fairly small pool of contemporary national movements, and barely look beyond Europe in the process. Apart from fairly predictable Euro-centrism, this narrowness of outlook speaks to the fact that our most ready analogues are afforded by countries in similar social and economic situations.

Not just the enthusiasts of the left but most indymarchers would point out that Scotland has little in common with the historical experience of colonised nations like Egypt or Angola, never mind ongoing anticolonial struggles like those in Puerto Rico or the Mapuche lands. Scotland is simply not a colonised country (though of course one could speak of a form of internal colonialism practiced by both Scots and English against the Gaels) and only in the wildest dreams/tweets of certain sectors of the indy movement do the problems imposed on us by Westminster bear even slight resemblance to anything visited upon the Kurds by the Turkish government.



As such, it is either by an unconscious or a tactful choice that we generally keep our eyes on European matters. This certainly avoids falling into ridiculous and insulting direct comparisons between ourselves and peoples who are currently experiencing brutal, life-or-death struggles for freedom, but I also believe it can accidentally result in a different, and distinctly limiting, kind of euro-centrism, one that assumes offhand that little of the previous or current history of national liberation in Africa, Asia and Latin America can teach us anything.

So keen are we to not seem appropriative or offensive that we can risk ignoring great and helpful lessons. Just think about the challenges that the national question sets before Scottish socialists on a daily basis: What sort of classes (or fractions of classes) take part in the national movement? Where do the goals of the working class and the nationalist bourgeoisie/middle class diverge? How does imperialism constrict and hinder self-determination? How does the socialist movement orientate itself amidst all this? We should realise that these exact questions have troubled national movements past and present all over the globe, and that the ways in which they attempted to give answers yield a vast storehouse of reference material for us to consult. As long as we do not pretend that we can simple harvest direct or ready-made lessons, there is a lot that we can gain by looking beyond Europe, and we should not be afraid to do so.

It was for this reason that I was excited to sit down and speak to Paul Figueroa, a member of the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), amid all the rush and activity of COP26. Paul, who stood as the PIP's candidate for council in San Juan during the 2020 elections, had come here during the conference on the invitation of Scotland's Radical Independence Campaign to speak at a meeting of the COP26 protest coalition's "Peoples' Summit", and to make international links and connections. Naturally then, it was

the perfect opportunity to find out what the fight for Puerto Rican freedom can teach us here in Scotland.

My first question dealt with the topic that was on everyone's lips during those November weeks: Climate change. I asked Paul a question with two parts: What does climate change, and what would climate justice mean for Puerto Rico? Climate change is a bleak prospect in general, obviously, but for an island nation it is especially pressing. Paul said that "if austerity and privatisation don't kill off the Puerto Rican people, climate change will," pointing to the fact that for every one centimetre rise of the sea, the island loses a yard of coast. Not only this, but there is the impending threat of consistent drought and the danger that an increase in landslides means for a mostly mountainous country like Puerto Rico.

The problem with getting climate justice, Paul explained, is that the kinds of steps Puerto Rico must take to help tackle climate change are essentially blocked off by the economic interests of the United States of America. In the last year, the entirety of the island's energy grid was privatised, falling into the hands of an American company, Luma Energy, which has stated that it has no interest in pursuing green energy. Indeed, American interests have even pushed the Puerto Rican government to enact what Paul termed a "tax on the sun"- that is, a tax on anyone going off the fossil fuel-based grid to use solar power. As a Caribbean country, the green alternative for Puerto Rico is naturally solar energy, but Luma is standing in the way of this in favour of fossil fuels. Just as the grid is controlled by an American company, so too is the supply of coal and gas, most of which comes from the firm Applied Energy Systems. This leaves Puerto Rico dependent on the USA for energy when a safer, cleaner alternative is right at hand. And the fruits of this toxic, dirty dependency are dearly bought. Paul was stark on this point: "For island nations, climate change is a matter of life and death." To

underline this, he gave the example of the town of Peñuelas, where the coal ash from the power plants is dumped. It has the highest rate of cancer and birth defects in Puerto Rico.

All of this for the profit margins of the Yankee coal industry, and the stuffed pockets of West Virginian members of congress. And they too, like Luma Energy, lobby the Puerto Rican government to keep their vested interests secure. In contrast to this, climate justice would mean an opportunity for Puerto Rico, and Puerto Ricans, to make their own climate policy, not lobbyists from Wall Street or Washington. This is a freedom that has long been denied the Puerto Rican people, held down as they are by the United States' political and economic imperatives. Considering a situation like that, Paul was not enthusiastic about COP26's significance for the island. Discussing Puerto Rico's lack of representation on international bodies like the United Nations, CARICOM (Caribbean Community), CELAC (Community of Caribbean and Latin American States) and the OAS (Organisation of American States), Paul argued that the island therefore lacks a seat at the table for global discussions and decisions which will be crucial for its future. Frustrated by "the posturing of the larger countries and leaders like Biden and Johnson", Paul felt that "they need to decide if they lead, follow or get out of the way" and let the countries with the most at stake have the deciding say.



Unavoidably, this talk of freedom to make choices, and the obstacles to that freedom, led into a discussion of the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. How did this state of affairs, where the USA, and American businesses, can do what they like with Puerto Rico, come to be? In order to get an idea of why, I next asked for some historical background. Of course, the history of any land is a rich and varied ocean, and the story of Puerto Rico is no exception. Therefore, Paul aimed at giving me a quick gloss, one that covered the key points.

He started at the beginning of Puerto Rico's time as a colony, with the Spanish invasion of Borinquen, as the island is known in the indigenous Taino language, in 1493. From there stemmed three hundred years of indigenous and enslaved African rebellions, centuries of continuing struggle against imperial Spanish rule. One of the most important uprisings of this Spanish colonial period was el Grito de Lares (the Cry of Lares) in 1868. This was an insurrection, beginning in the town of Lares, which aimed at independence and a Puerto Rican republic- The first such national rebellion in the island's history. And while it may have been defeated, Lares was the birth of the Puerto Rican national consciousness, identity and flag. Thirty years later, the Spanish-American War saw Puerto Rico, as well as Cuba and the Philippines, wrenched from the

grip of Spain by a new colonial overlord, the United States of America,

Any hopes that Puerto Ricans might have had for a better future without Spanish control were quickly dashed, as the American takeover precipitated a dramatic, costly change in the island's fortunes. Immediately following their victory, the United States devalued the currency by 40%, stopped Puerto Rico from controlling its own trade with other countries, and began breaking up the networks of small farmers that underpinned Puerto Rico's economy in favour of large scale, industrial sugar farming run by a handful of absentee American businesses. The result was a strengthening of the sort of export-crop monoculture that has thus far played such a limiting, exploitative and destructive role in the history and ecology of the Caribbean. While the United States profited from its new colony, Puerto Rico came to be known during the Twentieth Century as "the Poorhouse of the Caribbean."

Not just economic damage, but cultural oppression came with the Americans. Most blatantly, there was the attempt to make the Spanish language illegal, to anglicise the country. In a particularly crass move, the island's name was even officially changed to the more Anglo-sounding "Porto Rico" from 1899 to 1932. Students of Russian history might here be reminded of the old empire's attempts at forcibly "Russifying" its national minorities, or perhaps the long campaign against Gaelic by first the Scottish and then the British state has sprung to your mind. The Americans also attempted to clamp down on Puerto Rican holidays and foist their experiment with booze prohibition onto the island too.

These simultaneous cultural and economic troubles, and their joint link to the effects of American imperialism, meant that the independence movement and the workers' movement became easily and naturally connected. Paul gave the example of how, from the 1930's to the 1950's, there were more than two hundred workers' strikes, and almost all of them were led by

the nationalist party. In 1950, the nationalists would take the fight for independence even further, renouncing pacifism and launching a war for independence that, like el Grito de Lares almost a century prior, was defeated. The years following this setback marked the most intense period of persecution for independence supporters, with the Americans bringing in a gag law which made the Puerto Rican national anthem illegal and banned meetings or discussion of both independence and socialism. This, coupled with the “Carpeteo”, the constant FBI and police spying on independence supporters, spurred the emergence of clandestine militant groups on the lines of the Guevarist guerrilla strategy popular across Latin America in that era.

These days did not yield a favourable environment for the PIP. Unlike the nationalist party and the guerrilla groups, the PIP does not uphold armed struggle as a strategy or tactic. But with the repressive Carpeteo making open organising for independence and socialism difficult, the PIP quickly went from being the main opposition party to a minority party, holding just two percent of the vote right up to the present day. As for the armed conflict, it would continue into the early 2000’s, with the 2005 assassination of guerrilla leader Filiberto Ojeda Rios by the FBI marking something of a turning point for the independence movement- People who wouldn’t necessarily have agreed with Ojeda Rios’ methods or politics were incensed by his murder, and took to the streets protesting against U.S. intervention in Puerto Rican politics.

Paul saw this as one of the chief causes of a renewed inerest in Puerto Rican independence since the millennium. Another lies in the concurrent dispute taking place over the island of Vieques, one which had a similar galvanising consequence for the movement. Vieques is an island of the Puerto Rican archipelago which the U.S. military used as a testing ground for above-ground and underwater bombs from 1941 onwards. After an American bomb accidentally killed David Sanes, a Vieques

citizen, the PIP launched a campaign against bomb testing which saw activists sailing from the main island to Vieques on fishing boats to camp out on the beaches and occupy U.S. military property. Even with arrests and repression, the sustained militancy of the campaign led to a success, with the U.S. military withdrawing from Vieques in 2003. In a speech celebrating this victory, the president of the PIP, Rubén Berríos Martínez, said: “Yesterday Lares, today Vieques, tomorrow Puerto Rico!”

This recent history brought us up neatly to the matter of my next question, which turned on contemporary events and their significance for the Puerto Rican independence movement. Paul emphasised the importance of the Puerto Rican economic crisis, which has been ongoing since 2006. To prop up the economy, the island’s government has taken on a great deal of debt since the crisis- fifty billion dollars from 2006 to 2016, which dwarfs the twenty billion dollars of debt accumulated between *1952* and 2006. By 2016, the former governor Alejandro García Padilla had declared the debt unpayable, calling on the U.S. government to address the debt crisis.

At the level of normal peoples’ lives, the figures Paul had for me were grim ones- From the beginning of the crisis in 2006, around a quarter of Puerto Rico’s population has migrated away to the United States. There is a poverty rate of sixty percent, and the island is one of the top five countries of the world for income inequality. In a typical austerity response by the government, huge swathes of Puerto Rican society have been privatised- Healthcare, the highways, public transport, energy and sections of the education system. In particular, the marketisation of education can be seen in how university tuition fees have more than quadrupled since 2006.

The youth of Puerto Rico, the first-time voters of today, Paul continued, “are people who have never had a memory of Puerto Rico in prosperity, of Puerto Rico not in a time of crisis. They see no opportunity or future in their own country.” A

result of this is that the fear people have traditionally had that independence and socialism would cause massive poverty has tended to fall away. After all, Paul pointed out, Puerto Rican people “are living those conditions right now under a U.S. flag.”

This growing discontent manifested in 2019 with the “Ricky Renuncia” protests against governor Ricardo Rosselló over the government’s response to Hurricane Maria and his overall apathy to the problems of the people. From that movement, Paul traces a new openness to Puerto Rican independence and new youth participation in the electoral process, this from a youth that tends to be overwhelmingly pro-independence. An illustration of this is the PIP’s recent electoral fortunes, with an increase from two percent of the vote in 2016 to almost fifteen percent in 2020 during a five-way race. Paul was understandably very, very hopeful about these new developments among the youth.

Of course, the problems of austerity have continued to make life tough, especially because they are imposed from outside with little Puerto Rican say in the matter. There is the continuing issue of the Control Board, an unelected body of seven people chosen by the U.S. president and salaried with Puerto Rican tax money who are in charge of overseeing Puerto Rican finances and repayment of the debt. The board have proven voracious, bringing in a forty year long hike on sales tax and a forty year tax on electricity to make up for the period when energy was nationalised. PROMESA, the law that inaugurated the board, states that the Control Board will exist until Puerto Rico has had five consecutive years of balanced budget. However, the Board recently marked its fifth anniversary without a single year of balanced budget. Paul pointed out that like any austerity program, the point is not to save the economy but simply to perpetuate the problem, to asset strip and transfer whatever wealth isn’t nailed down into rich pockets. In contrast to this, the PIP’s position is

that the Board should be abolished, PROMESA repealed, and Puerto Rico's debt should be forgiven. As ever, an essential part of any meaningful self determination is economic sovereignty.

Bringing things to a close, I asked Paul what importance the solidarity of other independence movements, like ours in Scotland, has for the Puerto Rican struggle. "No country exists in a vacuum," Paul began. Discussing world politics today, he was struck by the way in which independence movements are on the rise across a variety of nations, like Scotland, Wales and Catalunya. He was also very impressed by Barbados' recent steps towards becoming a republic. He explained that local actions and developments like the ones already mentioned have repercussions on a global scale, so that what might seem on first glance to be isolated fights for self determination end up taking on a significance that leaps borders and crosses oceans to inspire and teach others. It is well to remember, even if we never learn of them, that we in Scotland have sympathisers and admirers all across the world, and our struggles, and, I hope, our victories, will cheer and excite the passions of a great multitude of fellow fighters.

Secondly, solidarity matters to Paul because part of the essential groundwork for Puerto Rican independence is establishing relationships with other countries and movements. After all, Paul argued, "independence is not to separate us from the United States but to unite us with the rest of the world." And this unity is to be a different kind of unity from the one-sided, opportunistic unity Puerto Rico has thus far experienced with the United States. The PIP looks for relationships of reciprocity, solidarity, camaraderie and respect with other countries- International co-operation, not exploitation. That wish, to be an active and progressive player in the wider world, not just one part in a stifling union with an imperialist power, is something I'm sure Scottish readers with readily sympathise with. It is a fine

sentiment, and Paul summed it up wonderfully by once more quoting Rubén: “One day we’ll be able to hug our brethren from across the world and say to them: Comrades, we have arrived late to freedom, but because of that we love it even more.” May the day arrive swiftly!

If you want to keep up with Paul Figueroa and the PIP, you can follow them on social media:

Paul’s Twitter: @paul_delpip
Paul’s Facebook Page: @paulfigueroapip
The PIP’s Twitter accounts: @PIPTwitteando @PIPSanJuan
The PIP’s websites: independencia.net and juandalmau.com

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Beyond Glasgow – what

happened at COP26 and where we go next

It is a month since Alok Sharma as president, fighting back some tears, brought down the gavel on the 26th Conference of the Parties – the United Nations climate summit in Glasgow. The initial flurry of reactions and comments has subsided. Here in Scotland we have already seen some early signs of the impact – with the beginnings of a victory against the development of a new offshore oil field at Cambo. On Saturday, 4 December, activists in Glasgow held a first gathering to take stock and plan future steps.

So this is intended as a contribution to that process of weighing up what happened, both inside the official talks, and outside in the struggle for climate justice. We need to do this as fully and accurately as we can, to provide a guide for what we do next.

This is perhaps most urgent in Scotland, where the huge protests on the streets of Glasgow on the 5 and 6 November have had a major impact on the political and ideological landscape, and could have a lot more in the years to come if we are able to learn the most useful lessons, and build on them. But it is also important for the climate movement in England and the rest of the UK, which faces a possible moment of refoundation.

And it is not without significance at a global level, where, as a representative of one Indigenous organisation who made it to Glasgow argued, it is time to be thinking about a new kind and scale of international coordination.

Three outcomes

We can divide the main conclusions from COP26 into three. The most important has to do with the success of those mobilisations outside the official talks, and we'll come back to that.

The second was also immediately obvious to many, and relates to the spectacular failure of the official summit, when measured against its own stated objectives. World leaders definitively did not "embrace their responsibilities" to "act now", as the UK presidency had asked them to six months earlier, when Alok Sharma stood in front of the huge, commercial Whitelee wind farm, 15 kilometres south of the COP26 venue on the Clyde, and called on them to "pick the planet".

They did not bring to Glasgow the commitments that would keep global warming at less than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century. Those were not tears of joy on Alok Sharma's face as he had to close the summit ~~summit~~ with a watered-down target on "phasing down" coal power. The concluding statement by the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, used diplomatic language but left little room for doubt: "unfortunately the collective political will was not enough to overcome some deep contradictions. …We are still knocking on the door of climate catastrophe. …We did not achieve these *(ie. the main)* goals at this conference."

The third kind of conclusion is less obvious. It got little mention in the mainstream media coverage, and for the most part lies buried in the detail of the deliberately opaque discussions on wrapping up the rulebook for the Paris Agreement and related "technical" aspects. Here we find the moves made by governments and the private sector, including fossil fuel companies and big banks, to put in place the procedures and organisational infrastructure to secure the

still evolving, and still contradictory, ruling class response to the climate emergency.

It was not an accident that the largest single delegation at COP26, bigger than any single government, was constituted by lobbyists from the fossil fuel industry. There were at least 503 of them and there have been no reports of tears on their faces.

The second biggest delegation was the Brazilian one. It had 480 members, including many lobbyists from the agribusiness, mining and forestry sectors, all with a special interest in resolving the rules around carbon markets, for example. Their moves made significant progress in Glasgow. But they did not have it all their own way.

They were thwarted, or maybe just delayed, on several key questions by the pressure of civil society on the inside of COP26 – for example the inclusion of forests as tradable carbon credits under Article 6, or the use of nature based solutions as offsets (see below).

It is at the intersection between these three levels that the future of the climate movement, and indeed of humanity, will be decided. So let us look more closely at the last two, before returning to the movement itself.

The Glasgow Get-out

The final “agreement”, officially called the Glasgow Climate Pact, but dubbed by some in the climate movement as the Glasgow Get-out, is a laboriously constructed work of smoke and mirrors. In some ways, it is ambitious. It is certainly longer and more wide-ranging than such “cover decisions” (the technical term for these interim negotiated texts) usually are. In line with the latest scientific reports from the IPCC, it focuses much more sharply than the 2015 Paris Agreement itself on 1.5 degrees maximum warming as the key goal. It

stresses the need for “accelerated action in this critical decade”. It even has a few seemingly specific promises, like developed countries doubling by 2025 their financial contributions to the Adaptation Fund, to help countries in the global south adjust to the climate change that is already on the way [[This was seen as a gain for developing countries made during the talks. No such provision had been on the formal agenda, and when it first appeared in the draft texts the language had been much vaguer. The final text takes 2019 as the baseline, meaning that developed countries are *urged* to come up with an additional US$40 billion a year for adaptation by 2025. However, this is still well short of what is needed. The UN Environment Programme estimates the current annual need at US$70 billion, and suggests this is likely to quadruple by 2030. It also remains unclear that developing countries accept this is not part of the US$100 billion a year that they promised back in 2009 and have still failed to deliver.]]

Some of this sharper language is the result of hard-fought battles by poorer countries and civil society delegates, over the position of commas and this or that adjective. But more than anything it reflects the understanding by most imperialist governments that, at the very least, they have to be seen to be taking the climate crisis seriously. They know that the level of concern among their citizens has increased very significantly in just the last few years, even the last few months, as floods and fires have ravaged Europe and North America as well as India, China or Bolivia. People expect their governments to act. And these governments in turn fear that public concern will deepen. When their discourse of vandalism or even terrorism leveled at direct action groups largely falls flat; when very large numbers of people actually sympathise with people gluing themselves to motorways, or Indigenous communities occupying oil wells and blocking mines, the authorities know the situation is serious.

The gaping hole in the Glasgow Climate Pact is the almost

total absence of detail. There is virtually nothing specified about who will do exactly what by when, and how anyone will be able to verify it, much less enforce it. In the English language, a pact usually means an agreement to do something. In that sense, this is not a pact at all – more of a political statement about a series of things the parties agree (more or less) that they would like to see happen.

The two main, overlapping, texts of the Glasgow Climate Pact have 71 and 97 points respectively. [[In characteristically confusing fashion, there are three versions of the main cover decision text, one for each of the three meetings that officially took place in parallel under the ~~the~~ umbrella of COP – firstly the COP26 itself, that is the 26th Conference of the Parties of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; secondly the CMP16, the 16th Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, which is largely irrelevant and whose texts say very little: and the CMA3, or the 3rd Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement, which actually has most detail in relation to the implementation of the Paris Agreement.]] Almost all of them begin with words like *recognizes*, *expresses*, *notes*, *stresses*, *emphasizes*, *urges*, *invites*, *calls upon*. Only one point in the COP.26 version of the Pact begins with *resolves*, while the longer, CMA.3 text has 6 points that begin with *decides* and 3 with *resolves*. These very few "decisions" all refer to organisational questions of arranging future meetings and work processes and mechanisms. None of them refer directly to the substantive issues of emissions cuts or climate finance.

From Binding to Voluntary to Proclamation

This illustrates one of the two overarching developments in

the UN climate negotiations that we need to note if we are to make sense of what happened in Glasgow. This is how the process has moved away from any kind of binding commitments, of the sort contained in the Kyoto Protocol that came into force in 2005. During and after COP15 in Copenhagen in 2009, the U.S. and the EU systematically assaulted this approach. This meant that the Paris Agreement in 2015, while achieving advances in some respects, contained only voluntary commitments to cutting greenhouse gas emissions. These were the core of the famous NDCs, or nationally determined contributions. The whole point of COP26 – the reason it was hailed as a make or break moment – was that this was the time, five years on from the Paris Agreement, by which the 193 signatories were meant to have come up with their enhanced NDCs, their plans to make the bigger cuts and provide the greater finance, that would allow global warming to be kept below 2 degrees Celsius, and preferably below 1.5 degrees. But it was entirely up to each party to announce whatever it wanted, whenever it wanted. There was never going to be, and never could be, given the nature of the Paris Agreement, a deal negotiated in Glasgow to ensure this outcome.

The scale of the shortfall left by these voluntary contributions on the core issue of emissions cuts, or mitigation as it is called in the language of the UNFCCC, is tucked away in paragraphs 22 and 25 of the CMA.3 version of the final text. The first *recognises*, what the IPCC Report on 1.5 Degrees had brought to the fore of the climate change agenda in 2018, that "limiting global warming to 1.5 °C requires rapid, deep and sustained reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions, including reducing global carbon dioxide emissions by 45 per cent by 2030 relative to the 2010 level and to net zero around midcentury, as well as deep reductions in other greenhouse gases". Now the climate justice movement centred around the COP26 Coalition has questioned, at length and in depth, the scale, timing and distribution of these IPCC targets, including especially the new and very

unscientific mantra of net zero by 2050. And not of course because they are too ambitious.

However, even against these inadequate targets, paragraph 25 "*Notes with serious concern* the findings of the synthesis report on nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement, according to which the aggregate greenhouse gas emission level, taking into account implementation of all submitted nationally determined contributions, is estimated to be 13.7 per cent above the 2010 level in 2030". The failure of COP26 to achieve its main objective could hardly be clearer. If you add up all the new, more ambitious plans (enhanced NDCs) submitted by 151 parties up to day 3 of the COP (2 November, 2021), they project not a cut of 45% in CO2 emissions by 2030, but an increase of 13.7%.

This is not a small discrepancy that we can make up later. It is a colossal move in the wrong direction.

Carbon Action Tracker, a well-respected research body, calculated that these pledges would, at best, keep warming to 2.4 degrees Celsius by 2100. More probably, given the recurring failure to meet even inadequate promises, we would end up with 2.7 degrees. Others regard even this as over optimistic.

The fact that the Glasgow Pact does call on countries to submit new, more ambitious NDCs by COP27, in Egypt next year, and on a yearly basis after that, was held up as evidence of greater ambition. It is certainly an improvement on the 5-year cycle agreed in Paris. But the fact this call was made at all only highlights the spectacular failure to meet the targets needed by COP26.

The UK presidency knew well in advance the dimension of this failure. Its strategy was to seek to bury it in a welter of rhetoric about keeping 1.5 alive. That is the function of the more ambitious language in the final text. The same concern,

to be seen to be taking action, characterised the flurry of announcements made during the World Leaders Summit, which took up the Monday and Tuesday of the first week of the COP.

First there was the pledge by 130 countries to “halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030”. Then it was 109 countries promising to cut 30% of methane emissions by 2030, 190 countries announcing commitments to phase out coal power, and 30 countries and financial institutions to stop financing fossil fuel development overseas. Beyond the headlines, it was never perfectly clear who had agreed to do quite what.

And some of the announcements began to unravel as soon as they were made. For example, critics immediately pointed out that most of the deforestation pledge was the same as the 2014 New York Declaration on Forests, which had produced no results at all. The environment minister of Indonesia, which had been touted as one of the key signatories, took to twitter to call the pledge “clearly inappropriate and unfair”. Bolivia, one of very few countries taking a firm climate justice stance inside the COP26, was also listed as a signatory; but when we interviewed the Bolivian president, Luis Arce, on the day of the announcement, he told us his country had not signed and was still evaluating the pledge.

As Alex Rafalowizc from Colombia told one of the daily Movement Assemblies in Glasgow that week, the COP process has moved from binding agreements through voluntary targets to the rhetoric of grandiose but unverifiable announcements.

Forget Equity

This shift in the shape of the UN climate talks – to abandon binding agreements – goes hand in hand with another – the shift away from the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. (CBDR) This principle of CBDR was enshrined in the UNFCCC by the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. It means that

those countries who historically have been most responsible for putting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere since the beginning of the industrial revolution, the industrialised countries of the global north, the Annexe 1 countries, in the terminology of the Convention, should take the major responsibility to address the climate change that has resulted. It became an important part of the movement to demand climate justice.

During the discussions on a new treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol, at Copenhagen and the COPs that followed, the U.S. and its allies attacked the principle of CBDR on the grounds that *all* countries needed to do their bit, just as it sought to overturn the practice of binding agreements. In part this opposition was due to the predictable reluctance of imperialist countries to pay for the harm they have done. But it also had to do with the growing obsession in Washington, under Obama and since, with the threat posed to U.S. hegemony by China.

The Paris Agreement retained some of the language about CBDR. But the practice had already moved on. And without any mechanism to enforce commitments, any differentiation between the amount done by rich countries and poor countries would also be entirely voluntary.

This accentuated move away from equity was a hallmark of the Glasgow COP, in every area and at every step, even if developing country delegations did manage to get a few references to CBDR re-inserted into the Glasgow Climate Pact. It is inscribed in the dominant narrative of “net zero by 2050”, which the UK presidency tried so hard to impose. Many global south delegates described this as carbon colonialism. That is because it completely contradicts any idea that there is a finite carbon budget, an amount of carbon dioxide and equivalent gases that the human race can still afford to emit while keeping warming to 1.5 degrees, and that the rich countries *have already spent all of their share* of that

budget. What is left, about 600Gt of CO2 equivalent, should therefore be reserved, as far as possible, for countries of the south so that they can combat extreme poverty.

Net zero is centred on the notion that rich countries and major corporations can continue to emit greenhouse gases, either because they will pay someone else not to (offsets), or because they will use some untried or non-existent technology to remove those gases from the atmosphere in the future. So in addition to these two bogus premises (that offsets can lead to real cuts in emissions, and that we will eventually be able to count on negative emissions technology), the net zero narrative depends on jettisoning any pretence of justice for those in the global south who are the main victims of climate change. It calls on all countries to pursue this common goal of net zero by the middle of the century, while glossing over the fact that the route envisaged to get there is conceived entirely with the financial and technological capacities of rich countries in mind.

It was this sleight of hand that allowed the UK presidency, and the mainstream, northern media to blame India, and indirectly China, for that last minute watering down of the wording on “phasing down” instead of “phasing out” unabated coal power. Of course, India, like China, does want to get off the hook of its own dependence on coal. But the point it was making was that it is not fair – and it is not in line with the CBDR principles of the UNFCCC – to expect developing countries with high levels of poverty to implement the same scale of mitigation at the same speed as rich countries. In fact earlier in the week, India had proposed language suggesting that all fossil fuels should be phased down, not just coal. But the ~~the~~ U.S. and Europe were having none of that.

The other side of this shift away from equity was clear in the attitude displayed by rich countries in Glasgow to climate finance. After shuffling numbers and dates backwards and

forwards, they still ended up with ~~still~~ no commitment on when they would come up with the US$100 billion a year they had promised back in 2009 to provide by 2020 to help developing countries transition to clean energy and green technologies – a figure that had been pulled out of a hat at Copenhagen to placate governments in the South incensed by the assault on CBDR, and which had been woefully adequate even then. Another UN report recently suggested the amount needed would be more like US$6 trillion. The important thing to understand here is that such significant sums of climate finance are an absolute prerequisite for a just transition at a global level. Without such support, most countries in the South would have no way of moving towards zero carbon by investing in renewable energy, recycling, clean public transport, electric vehicles and so on.

Even worse, rich countries steadfastly resisted the attempts by developing countries to agree a common definition of climate finance. That may sound bureaucratic, but governments in the South wanted to make it clear that to qualify as climate finance it should be new money, given in the form of grants or other kinds of concessional finance (eg. loans at below market level interest rates). By rejecting a common definition, rich countries signaled their intention to continue fudging their already paltry commitments, by re-labelling existing development aid as climate finance and including commercial loans that will only increase the debt burden of the south and the profits of northern banks.

Led by the U.S. and the EU, they also refused to apply a 5% levy on the buying and selling of carbon credits between governments, which developing countries wanted as a reliable source of finance for the Adaptation Fund.

Perhaps most tellingly, the U.S. flatly refused to countenance a separate stream of funding to pay for Loss and Damage, which has been one of the most pressing demands of many southern countries for the last several COPs. This means money to pay

for the damage already caused by climate change, including extreme weather events like hurricanes and floods. The prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Gaston Browne, told leaders on the second day of the COP that countries like his may be forced to seek redress in the international courts, if no loss and damage funding were agreed. The country's second island of Barbuda was rendered uninhabitable by Hurricane Irma in 2017. The U.S., however, terrified of admitting liability for such costs, would only accept a minimal move of funding the operations of the Santiago Network, set up at COP25 but not activated, to advise and give technical support to nations facing such losses. As another southern delegate wryly commented, what we don't need is more consultants flying around the world to tell us what loss and damage is.

Article 6 – the architecture of climate capital

These apparently obscure details all feed into that third kind of conclusion we mentioned above. Somewhere just below the radar of the mainstream media, COP26 made significant advances towards putting in place the structures and procedures by which a significant section of international capital is seeking to put the climate crisis at the centre of its business model for the decades to come. The centrepiece of this project is Article 6 of the Paris Agreement.

Article 6 deals with three kinds of what is called, euphemistically and misleadingly, "voluntary cooperation" between countries aimed at allowing "higher ambition in their mitigation and adaptation actions". Essentially, this means offsets and carbon markets. In other words, Article 6 establishes the mechanisms by which high-emitting countries (mainly in the global north) can massage their promises to cut emissions (their NDCs), by continuing with some of those emissions (or even most of them), if they pay someone else

(mainly countries in the global south) *not* to emit (or to absorb) an equivalent amount. Paragraph 6.2 refers to such "cooperation", or trade in carbon credits, bilaterally between parties or countries. Paragraph 6.4 refers to such carbon trades on a wider basis between public and private entities, in other words to carbon markets as such. Paragraph 6.8 refers to "non-market" approaches to such exchanges, mainly involving the aid programmes of rich countries.

These mechanisms are absolutely central to how imperialist countries have approached the climate crisis and the need to cut greenhouse gas emissions. They are what makes it possible for them to "commit to" the goals of "net zero by 2050" and the like, because they make it possible, in theory, for capitalism to look like it is taking bold steps to confront the crisis, while in fact only making comparatively modest changes to how it operates in the foreseeable future. That is, they seem to offer the possibility of pushing off into the future the existential contradiction that confronts capitalism, between its inherent obligation to grow and the environmental imperative that we consume less.

In the mean time, they also hold out the offer of a major new area of accumulation to a sector of global capital, especially finance capital. This is what David Harvey would call accumulation by dispossession – in this case the dispossession is of vast swathes of "nature" in the global south, bought up (or seized) from local, sometimes Indigenous communities, by northern governments and companies to offset their failure to cut emissions at home.

Not surprisingly, discussion of the precise rules that would govern how this vital piece of the jigsaw operates have been complicated and fractious. The battles have been shrouded by impenetrable jargon, but mostly they had to do with accountancy – with who would be able to include what, and when, as part of these carbon trades, and consequently who would benefit most. Successive COPs following Paris failed to

reach an agreement. Civil society groups argued that no agreement would be better than a bad one, and almost any agreement on these terms would be a bad one. At Madrid they staged a last-minute protest that helped to block a deal. The problem was kicked down the road to Glasgow.

In Glasgow, there was an agreement on the rules for Article 6. The logjam seems to have been broken by a clever accounting suggestion from Japan. This is undoubtedly a significant victory for those banking on the future of offsets and carbon markets. Alongside the agreements reached on the timeframes for reporting emission cuts and standards of transparency, it means the rule book governing the Paris Agreement is now, in general terms, complete. However, not all the details are resolved. The example of forests illustrates how battles will continue to be fought over this market-driven agenda for the climate crisis.

Contrary to what some climate activists assume, forests have not so far been part of the UNFCCC's carbon trading regime. In the Paris Agreement they come under Article 5, not Article 6. So there have indeed been programmes like REDD+, which provide for what are called "results-based payments" to countries that reduce their emissions from deforestation and conserve forests as carbon sinks. But such forest protection has not been able to generate carbon credits that could be traded on carbon markets, and which could therefore be bought by other governments or companies to offset their continued emissions and therefore help those countries meet their NDCs. Of course, many forest communities and others in the global south thought this was clearly the direction of travel, and feared the aim of many northern delegations was to turn the world's forests into one more thing that could be bought and sold so that they could avoid making the emissions cuts that are needed.

In the run-up to Glasgow, a concerted campaign in this direction was mounted by the ill-named Coalition for Rainforest Nations (CfRN), supposedly represented at COP26 by

Papua New Guinea. The CfRN claims to include 50 rainforest nations. However, the give-away is in the preposition. Because this is not an alliance *of* countries, but a "not-for-profit", set up "*for* rainforest" nations by two graduates of Columbia Business School, from the U.S. and Italy, one of whom was brought up in Papua New Guinea. Its offices are in Manhattan, its board and staff are almost all investment bankers, and since 2005 it has been *the* main proponent of putting a price on the world's rainforests, in theory as a way of compensating countries for conserving them. Since then it has led the promotion of RED, REDD and REDD+, each of which took a step closer to making forests one of the most important offsets on sale in the world's carbon markets.

The CfRN, supported by several northern country delegations, pushed hard for COP26 to include emissions reductions from REDD+ to be included as carbon credits under Paragraph 6.2. This would cover both past REDD+ reductions, from 2015 to 2021, and a fast track for such reductions in the future from 2021, thus for the first time allowing the governments of high-emitting countries to buy up such "forest credits" as a way of achieving their NDCs. They also supported draft wording for Para 6.4 that would define carbon "removals" as relating specifically to the agriculture, forestry and land-use sector, thus putting forests directly into the carbon markets for the first time. Environmental campaigners from Brazil and elsewhere argued strongly that these moves would be disastrous for forest communities in Amazonia and elsewhere, and for the forests themselves, because they would unleash an even more intense wave of land grabs and commercial pressure on their territories, as rich countries and big corporations scrambled to buy up the rights to keep on polluting.

In the end, these campaigners won a small victory. REDD+ reductions were not mentioned in relation to 6.2, and the reference to forestry in 6.4 was replaced by a more generic definition of removals. However, these may be temporary stays

of execution. Forests are not excluded under either mechanism, and there will surely be new attempts to include them explicitly when some of the further definitions come up for discussion.

Some initial conclusions for the movement

These three kinds of outcome from COP26 point to three kinds of conclusion that may help to orient our future action.

1. It is increasingly unlikely – one could say it is increasingly close to excluded – that the 197 parties to the UNFCCC will ~~not~~ take the action needed in the current decade – either ~~neithe~~r in terms of emissions cuts or ~~nor~~ in terms of climate finance for the global south – to ensure that global warming will remain below 1.5 degrees Celsius. At least not unless there is a dramatic shift in the political balance of power that forces their hand.

2. There will continue to be mass pressure, from public opinion and from protests on the streets and in communities, to demand that those governments do take such action.

This is not because most of these people trust their governments to do what is needed. Most of the 100 or 150 thousand on the streets of Glasgow certainly don't. The same goes for many of the millions more who watched with sympathy. Almost certainly, most of those protesters already think "system change" is needed, although they may not be clear what that might involve.

But for the moment, they still see putting pressure on governments as the best available option. The more those governments don't take such action, and the more the impact of

extreme weather events is felt in major population centres, the more the movement may radicalise.

There is already widespread sympathy for others taking direct action. That sympathy may increase. In some specific circumstances, the mass movement itself may resort more to direct action to block mines, power plants or whatever.

But overall, and unless there is a dramatic shift in the political balance of power, the mass movement will not take upon itself the task of shutting down the fossil fuel industry, as some are suggesting it should.

3. While governments in the global north will continue to claim they are working to keep 1.5 alive, the most coherent sectors of the capitalist class, especially in the financial sector, will be working hard and fast to put in place the mechanisms that can turn the climate and biodiversity crises into a new, core domain for capital accumulation. Of course, much of the ruling class in the global south is already well integrated into this project. Governments and civil society organisations that are not will continue to fight their corner within the framework of the UN climate talks. They don’t have much choice. There may be increasingly sharp contradictions between some of them and the way the governments of the global north are driving the process forward at their expense. But there will also be many occasions where these representatives of the global south, both governments and sometimes movements, buy into the short term benefits apparently on offer from global capital and its market mechanisms for addressing the climate crisis. One example of this is how even some radical sections of the Indigenous movement in Brazil have been tempted to sign up to aspects of the commodification of forests, as a way of getting much-needed cash to their communities.

It is understandable that point one above will lead to, indeed has already produced, calls to radicalise the movement. In part those calls are right. But it would be a bad mistake to misinterpret this. The temptation to "disengage from the COP" altogether and "set our own agenda" risks driving a wedge between some of the more radical sections of the climate justice movement, still a relatively small minority, and those much bigger forces that were both on the streets in Glasgow and were represented, in a mediated form, by some of the governments of the global south and many of the civil society groups that operate and fight within the UNFCCC process. Many Latin American Indigenous organisations, to take that prominent example again, were very active both on the streets of Glasgow, and inside the Blue Zone.

When 1000 delegates walked out of the Blue Zone on the final Friday, it was the biggest such revolt in the history of the COPs, at least since the Alba countries banged the table and rejected Obama's stitch-up in Copenhagen. 750 civil society delegates packed out one of the main halls for an impromptu People's Plenary, which ended with them singing "power to the people". Then they were joined by several hundred more who couldn't get in, to march through the Scottish Events Campus venue singing "the people are going to rise like the water… I hear the voice of my great grand daughter, calling climate justice now", and finally to exit the blue zone and link up with the movements protesting outside the gates. It was a powerful and moving illustration of the kind of links that are possible, and necessary.

What we need to find, in Scotland as in other parts of the UK and around the world, are the particular organisational forms that can bring these different component parts together – into a more lasting, consistent and potent force – not to drive them apart.

Climate Justice, Social Justice and Independence in Scotland

Here in Scotland, the aftermath of COP26 presents us with a special opportunity. This can be illustrated with one short story, told backwards.

At the time of writing, the private equity-backed oil exploration company, Siccar Point Energy, has just announced it is "pausing" its project to develop the Cambo oil field, located 1,000 metres below the North Sea to the west of the Shetland Islands. Although not a big field, and economically a marginal one, for campaigners and the UK government alike, Cambo had become symbolic of the confrontation between an official strategy of maximum fossil fuel extraction on the road to a low carbon future, and the demand to leave it in the ground, now. For the campaigners, Siccar's announcement feels like a big victory.

Siccar's decision came 8 days after Shell pulled out of its 30 percent stake in the project, saying "the economic case… is not strong enough at this time".

Just over two weeks earlier, on 16 November, Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, for the first time expressed open opposition to the new oil field, saying it should not get the green light and was incompatible with targets for "net zero". Previously she had only called for a reassessment of the project by the UK government, which has the power to approve oil exploration licenses.

Ten days before that, Glasgow hosted the biggest climate demonstration ever seen in the UK, and one of the biggest protests of any kind ever held in Scotland.

When Shell announced its decision to pull out, Friends of the Earth Scotland quite rightly commented that "People power has made the climate-wrecking Cambo development so toxic that even

oil giant Shell doesn’t want to be associated with it any more.” That was true. But there was a step in between as well. Two steps in fact: government, and the national question.

The fact that so many people demonstrated in Glasgow, and that “Stop Cambo” was one of their most visible demands, no doubt had an impact on Shell. The oil giant can do without this or that new oil field the size of Cambo (170 million barrels over 25 years, about the same as Saudi Arabia produces in three and a half weeks). And it is concerned about its image, especially that it is now publicly committed to becoming “net zero” by mid century. But those demonstrations were probably not the decisive factor in its decision. The threat of climate campaigners waging legal warfare and dragging the project through endless appeals and court delays probably weighed heavier.

However, that huge protest in Glasgow surely did weigh large in Nicola Sturgeon’s shift to opposing Cambo. And Nicola Sturgeon’s change of heart probably had an even greater bearing on Shell’s economic calculations. The Scottish government may not have the power to say yes or no to new oil fields, but it could make the practicalities of access and operations a lot more difficult. And even Shell can probably see that well before the end of the 25-year life span of the oil field and its economic viability, there is a realistic possibility of Scotland becoming an independent country, with a government that may now want to get rid of all such oil fields.

This is one concrete example of how the national question is sharpening the climate question in Scotland, and vice versa.

The combination between the insulting exclusion of Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP government by the Johnson-Sharma UK unionist presidency of COP26, and the historic scale of the mobilisation on Scottish streets, has increased the pressure on an ambiguous SNP government, and already brought some

modest results, like that over Cambo. The Scottish government budget, revealed last week, also makes some partial steps in a positive direction, with addressing the climate crisis made one of its three top priorities. This of course has coincided with the incorporation into government of the Scottish Green Party – significantly to the left of the Greens in England, Germany, or probably anywhere else in the EU. The Scottish government took another very small but symbolic step in the first week of COP26, when it became the first administration in the global north to make a concrete offer, of just £1 million, later increased to £2 million, to a fund for loss and damage in the Global South – an initiative which was promptly trashed by the Biden administration.

In the other direction, the climate question is itself beginning to bisect, and polarise, the national struggle. It may be little more than a footnote, of some interest in Scotland but not much elsewhere, but this has become clear in the attitude of the former First Minister, Alex Salmond. Salmond broke with Sturgeon and formed last year **Alba**, a supposedly more radical nationalist party, backed by a strange amalgam of anti-trans "feminists" and misogynist leftists. After Sturgeon came out against Cambo, he promptly attacked her for selling out Scotland's right to its own oil and putting jobs at risk.

In other words, the issues of climate justice and climate action now traverse the national struggle in Scotland, just as the issue of closing down North Sea oil and the need for a just transition led by workers in the sector cuts across and polarises the trade union movement in Scotland.

These are potentially explosive combinations. Climate struggles are already stoking national demands, and they could add a whole new dimension to the struggle for independence. At the same time, any advance towards an independent Scotland is necessarily going to pose the issues of climate justice much more sharply. The SNP government has taken some modest,

positive steps, just as it has in various areas of social policy. But its overall "social liberal" orientation and its attachment to market-led policies means it is still wedded to the vision of net zero (by 2045) and illusions about carbon capture and storage, about Scotland as a powerhouse and exporter of renewable energy and so on. Dismantling the net zero narrative and its attendant false solutions therefore takes on a particular importance here in Scotland, both for the climate movement and for the radical wing of the pro-independence movement.

The big challenge in the coming months – and it is a challenge that needs to be embraced swiftly, or the moment will have passed – is to find the organisational forms and the political initiatives that can capture, consolidate and develop the energy, the diversity and the political radicalisation that burst onto the streets of Glasgow in November. This will need some sort of specific initiative here in Scotland, but an initiative that is articulated with similar, appropriate moves in other parts of the UK and internationally.

Iain Bruce, 11 December 2021

Iain Bruce is a member of ecosocialist.scot living in Glasgow.

Victory over Cambo Shows the Way

by Iain Bruce

The announcement that private equity-backed Siccar Point Energy has "paused" its plans for the Cambo oilfield is great news for all of us in Scotland.

It gives hope to everyone concerned about the climate crisis and the future of the planet.

As Friends of the Earth Scotland said when Shell pulled out of the project a week earlier: "People power has made the climate-wrecking Cambo development so toxic that even oil giant Shell doesn't want to be associated with it any more".

This is a victory for the huge demos in Glasgow during the COP in November. They may not have swayed Shell on their own, but they obviously helped to change Nicola Sturgeon's mind. Three days after the end of the UN climate summit, the First Minister finally came out against Cambo. Days later Shell withdrew from its 30 percent stake in the planned oilfield, 1000 metres below the surface in the North Sea west of Shetland.

COP26 may have been an abject failure, in terms of what the governments inside the Blue Zone decided. But over 100,000 people on the streets outside can have an impact. The suspension of Cambo shows that.

Now we have to build on that. We need to push not just for a halt to all new fossil fuel projects. We need a complete decommissioning of the North Sea oil and gas industry within this decade. And that needs to be led by the workers and the communities most affected, with serious investment in good, green, unionised jobs for all.

For that we certainly need to bend the ears of the SNP government, which remains wedded to the false narrative of "net zero", in their case by 2045.

But above all we need independence, with socialist values.

As the banner at the head of the Independence Bloc on 6 November said, **"It's Scotland's Oil, Leave It in the Soil"**.

COP26 Coalition – Final Press Statement

Responding to the Glasgow Agreement, the COP26 Coalition said:

> *"This agreement is an utter betrayal of the people. It is hollow words on the climate emergency from the richest countries, with an utter disregard of science and justice. The UK Government greenwash and PR have spun us off course.*
>
> *The rich refused to do their fair share, with more empty words on climate finance and turning their back on the poorest who are facing a crisis of covid coupled with economic and climate apartheid – all caused by the actions of the richest.*
>
> *It's immoral for the rich to sit there talking about their future children and grandchildren, when the children of the South are suffering now.*
>
> *This COP has failed to keep 1.5c alive, and set us on a pathway to 2.5c. All while claiming to act as they set the planet on fire.*
>
> *At COP26, the richest got what they came here for, and the poorest leave with nothing.*
>
> *The people are rising up across the globe to hold our governments and corporations to account – and make them act."*

14.11.12

Glasgow COP26: Independence bloc on the 6 Nov March for Climate Justice

The Independence bloc on Glasgow's March for Climate Justice on Saturday 6 November will be marching for Climate Justice and for a Scottish Independence that takes effective action on climate, ends Scotland's role in fossil fuels and a new Scotland in solidarity with the Global South.

The slogan of the bloc is

It's Scotland's Oil – Keep It In The Soil

and the immediate demand will be for the Cambo oil field off the coast of Shetland to be stopped.

The slogan combines the demand popularised by the Scottish National Party in the 1970s with the demands of the climate movement and the COP26 Coalition calling the march for no new extraction of fossil fuels and a phasing out of existing extractions with a just transition for workers.

The bloc has been convened by the Radical Independence Campaign and will assemble at the Lord Roberts Statue in Kelvingrove Park from 11.30am. Lord Roberts was a British imperialist military figure who was integral to the suppression of India, Afghanistan, South Africa and Ireland during the British Empire. Campaigners will also call for recognition of Britain and Scotland's role in the imperialist domination of so many countries, a domination that has

underdeveloped them economically. Financial reparations and the cancellation of debts are essential if these countries are to survive.

The bloc has been built by a Crowdfunder that can still be donated to.

Other Blocs on the march

The Independence bloc is one of around twenty on the demonstration. Full details of all the blocs and their assembly points are here:

You can find an overview of all the blocs and lead contacts here.

Facebook event page here: https://tinyurl.com/cud3j5be

List of blocs:

Indigenous bloc

Anti-Racist / Migrant Justice bloc (FB event – https://tinyurl.com/857k7bmd)

Youth bloc

Trade Unions bloc (FB event – https://tinyurl.com/jcbx5pup)

Communities bloc (FB event – https://tinyurl.com/jvj5hvk8)

Extinction Rebellion bloc (FB event – https://tinyurl.com/kf8mk8wv)

Faith and belief bloc

Independence bloc (FB event – https://tinyurl.com/4jp2u5dr)

Climate Justice bloc (FB event – https://tinyurl.com/487htbxs)

Health bloc

Farmers and Land Workers bloc (FB event – https://tinyurl.com/ddh78hc)

Biodiversity & Nature bloc

Housing bloc

Cycling Bloc & Sustainable Transport bloc (FB event – https://tinyurl.com/fbvxzjz4)

See here for site maps of Kelvingrove Park and Glasgow Green, and the full Action Plan here.
There will also be a Southside feeder march which will assemble at 12noon at Queen's Park and join the main demo at George Square. Please see FB event: https://tinyurl.com/2au7djjz



Radical Independence Campaign on the march for Scottish Independence January 2020 (photo C Beaton)

Glasgow COP26: Join Fridays for the Future march Friday 5 November 11.00 Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow

Fridays for the Future have called a school strike for Glasgow on Friday 5 November to protest against climate change. There will be a march from Kelvingrove Park (Prince of Wales Bridge) to Glasgow City Centre starting at 11.00. Speakers include Greta Thunberg.

Details here: https://climatestrike.scot/strike/

@fff_scotland

 #COP26 #UprootTheSystem#UprootTheCOP

Glasgow COP 26: INSIDE OUTSIDE – daily reports from the COP26 Coalition

INSIDE OUTSIDE brings you daily reports of developments at the Glasgow COP26. Brought to you by the COP26 Coalition and presented by Sabrina Fernandes and Iain Bruce, the programme will cover what is happening both inside the COP26 conference and outside in the streets and protests in Glasgow.

You can access the programme daily on You Tube at the COP26 Coalition channel: COP26 Coalition – YouTube

Glasgow COP26: Zero Carbon by 2050 is far too late!!

If dire warnings resolved the environmental crisis we would be heading for victory *writes Alan Thornett*.

Boris Johnson tells us that we are heading for a new dark ages, which indeed we probably are. The UN Secretary-General has called it a "code red for humanity". A report from the IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change), just before the Glasgow COP concluded that changes to the Earth's climate are now "widespread, rapid, and intensifying".

Such warnings are important, of course, but the gap between such words and action is enormous. At the moment we are heading for a 2.7 degC increase by the end of the century – which would be catastrophic – and that is only if countries meet all of the pledges they made in Paris.

The problem in Glasgow is not just whether an agreement is reached, or even whether it will be implemented, it is that the target that has been set by the elites – 'a 50 per cent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 and then 'net' zero by 2050' – was entirely inadequate before the conference opened.

The 1.5degC limit was a last-minute breakthrough at the Paris COP in 2015, and was agreed only as an aspiration and not a policy. Two years later (in October 2018) it was officially adopted in a Special Report on Global Warming published by the IPCC. The Report concluded that the 1.5degC limit was entirely possible within the laws of chemistry and physics but would require unprecedented effort in all aspects of society to implement. The IPCC also warned that we have just 12 years to do something about it, since a 1.5degC increase could be

reached as soon as 2030.

After this the climate movement then adopted the slogan net zero by 2030 – which was adopted by the 2019 LP conference, for example, with the 'net' part hotly disputed. The resolution was supported by the UNITE union. Extinction Rebellion (XR) adopted it with a date of 2025.

Zero carbon by 2030, however, has been replaced in Glasgow by a demand for a '50 per cent carbon reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2050'. The British government has adopted this position and according to Ed Miliband Labour has also, with 2040 instead of 2050.

We should reject the notion that that zero carbon by 2030 can't be done – from whoever it comes. It would, of course, need a dramatically new approach and degree of political will commensurate with an existential threat. And it would have to be led by governments, who alone have the resources to do it. It means putting their economies on a war footing – a point made strongly (and bizarrely) by the heir to the British throne.

During the Second World War the British economy was taken over by the government and completely turned over to war production within months.

The USA acted in the same way once it entered the war. The US War Museum puts it this way: "Meeting these (wartime) challenges would require massive government spending, conversion of existing industries to wartime production, construction of huge new factories, changes in consumption, and restrictions on many aspects of American life. Government, industry, and labour would need to cooperate. Contributions from all Americans, young and old, men and women, would be necessary to build up what President Roosevelt called the "Arsenal of Democracy."

Leaving aside the jingoism, the scale of the ecological

emergency also requires mobilisations of this kind which go way beyond anything that the free market can achieve – despite the profile it has been given in Glasgow.

It means forcing major structural changes at every level of society very quickly. It means a major transfer of wealth to the impoverished countries to facilitate their transition and lift them towards western levels of development. It also means major reductions in energy usage and wastage alongside renewable energy. It also means recognising that this decade – the 2020s – is crucial in all this. Once we go beyond this decade the problems escalate and the task becomes more difficult.

As Greta Thunberg insisted in the Guardian last month: "Science doesn't lie. If we are to stay below the targets set in the 2015 Paris agreement – and thereby minimise the risks of setting off irreversible chain reactions beyond human control – we need immediate, drastic, annual emission reductions unlike anything the world has ever seen. And since we don't have the technological solutions which alone will do anything close to that in the foreseeable future, it means we have to make fundamental changes to our society."

Increasing public support

Last month a poll of 22,000 people, conducted by Demos, found that up to 94% public supported radical action to stop climate change including a carbon tax on industry, a levy on flying, a speed limit of 60mph on motorways, and a campaign to reduce meat eating by 10%. Last week another poll of 35,000 people, this time by GlobeScan, found that a big majority want their governments to take tough action against climate change.

Protest actions have also greatly increased. Not only those around the Greta Thunburg, the remarkable school strikes, and the Fridays for Futures movement, but around XR and Insulate Britain who have played a major role in the run-up to Glasgow.

Last week 49 members of Insulate Britain were arrested after the group blocked three major junctions in London as part of an ongoing campaign in defiance of injunctions banning them from protesting anywhere on England's strategic road network. The group, is calling on the government to commit to insulate all British homes by 2030 as a key step to tackling the climate crisis. Along with XR in particular they have played a major role in mobilising public opinion in the run-up to Glasgow.

Alongside this science is telling us that we have 10 years to hold the global temperature increase to a maximum of 1.5degC. After that a dangerous and irreversible feedback process could take un-challengeable control.

How all this will affect the outcome in Glasgow, however, remains to be seen over the next two weeks. Many world leaders, heading for summit, were already more concerned with how they can get away with pledging as little as possible and how many loopholes and excuses they can deploy to avoid serious action.

Johnson – a dangerous liability

Any gains that might come out of this conference will be in spite of Boris Johnson, who was deeply discredited on environmental issues well before he got there – even in capitalist terms.

He acts as if he is a lifelong environmentalist dedicated to the defence of the planet when most of the time he acts as a climate sceptic and runs a party that is stacked out with climate sceptics. Other than supporting electric cars – though in a totally under resourced way – his domestic record on environmental issues is appallingly

In the UK budget last week – you couldn't make it up – he actually reduces the tax on domestic air travel– a more direct

snub to COP26 it is hard to imagine. He is also supporting the development of a major new oil field in the North Sea off Shetland [Cambo] with an estimated capacity of more than 1,000-bn barrels. He continues to defend the opening of a new deep coal mine in Cumbria – which he claims is nothing to do with him. (Britain is currently producing 570m barrels of oil and gas a year and has a further 4.4bn barrels of oil and gas reserves to be extracted from its continental shelf.)

His huge road building programmes, alongside airport expansions, are still on his government's agenda. He cut Britain's foreign aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of GDP in advance of this COP26. His government has refused to prevent the water companies dumping millions of tonnes of raw sewage a year into UK rivers making them amongst the most polluted in Europe.

His biggest lie, however, is his oft repeated claim that Britain has reduced its carbon emissions by 44 per cent since 1990.

This is only true if you exclude the embedded emissions that Britain has exported to China and India and other developing countries as a result of massive de-industrialisation. The emissions from which now appear in the carbon budgets on those countries not the UK. Britain also excludes from its figure carbon emissions from to major emitters, aviation and shipping. These exclusions have a huge effect, amounting to around 50 per cent of Britain's carbon budget.

(Johnson also arrived at the G20 in Rome banging his little Englander drum after flouting the agreement he signed with the EU in terms of the access of goods into the north of Ireland and French fishing rights around the Channel Islands, in order to boost his support amongst UK Brexiteers.)

Conclusion

Despite it self-evident weakness, and its inability to reach conclusions and take actions commensurate to the problem the COP conferences are important in raising global awareness of the problems and as a focal point of struggle for real and decisive action. The climate movement is right to take these conference seriously and to place demands on them that would begin to have positive results. Those who argue that we (the movement) should have nothing to do with the process should think again.

Stopping climate change and environmental destruction, however, will not be resolved by COP conferences but will require the broadest possible coalition of forces ever built – and the struggle around the COP conferences is important in building such a movement.

Such a movement must include vast range of activists from those defending the forests and the fresh water resources to those that are resisting the damming of rivers that destroy the existing ecosystems. It must include the indigenous peoples who have been the backbone of so many of these struggles along with the young school strikers, and those supporting them who have been so inspirational over the past two years. And it should include the activists of XR who have brought new energy into the movement over the same period of time.

It will also need to embrace the more radical Green Parties alongside the big NGOs such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, WWF, the RSPB, which have grown and radicalised in recent years alongside the newer groupings that have come on the scene such as Avaaz and 38 Degrees. These organisations have radicalised, particularly in the run up to Paris, and have an impressive mobilising ability. Such a movement has to look wider, to embrace the trade union movement, and also the

indigenous peoples around the world along with major social movements, such as La Via Campesina and the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST).

The involvement of the trade unions is also crucial, though it remains difficult in such a defensive period. Progress has been made, however, via initiatives such as the campaign for a Million Green Jobs in Britain, which has the support of most major trade unions and the TUC, and the 'just transition' campaign (i.e. a socially just transition from fossil fuel to green jobs) which has the support of the ITUC at the international level, and addresses the issue of job protection in the course of the changeover to renewable energy. This opens the door for a deeper involvement of the trade unions in the ecological struggle.

The real test, however, will be whether it can embrace a much wider movement as the crisis develops drawing in the many millions who have not been climate activists but are driven to resist by the impact of the crisis on their lives and their chances of survival.

Just Transition events at COP26 in Glasgow

The Just Transition Partnership was launched by the Scottish Trades Union Congress and Friends of the Earth Scotland in 2016 in a joint statement also signed by various trade unions and environment campaigns. It highlights the need for action by governments to secure a just transition for workers in the decarbonisation of employment. The Partnership is helping organise a series of events aimed at trade union and worker

organisations at the **Glasgow COP26**. These are detailed in a JTP mailing from which we have extracted the following list of events below. You can contact the Just Transition Partnership here.

JUST TRANSITION HUB

9.30 – 19.30 Monday 8 November, Govan Parish Church, 796 Govan Road G51 2YL

Hosted by STUC, Friends of the Earth Scotland, War on Want, Platform, TUC & the Just Transition Partnership – this will be one of the most comprehensive events yet on what just transition really means. It's part of the People's Summit. There will be loads of top speakers bringing great depth of experience from Scotland and around the world. Read about all the sessions here:

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/just-transition-hub-at-the-peoples-summit-tickets-189587420077

PEOPLE'S SUMMIT – OTHER RELEVANT EVENTS

Sunday 7 – Wednesday 10 November

Among the other enormous number of other events there are many which are about specific aspects of the just transition. A few are listed below but you can do your own search of the programme by checking the just transition box on the left. You might also do a search using topics like 'climate jobs' or 'green new deal'.

See and search all events Events – COP26 Coalition

GLOBAL DAY OF ACTION FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE 6 NOVEMBER:

TRADE UNION BLOC ON THE GLASGOW MARCH – CLIMATE, JOBS JUSTICE

Assemble Kelvingrove Park: 11.30 pm March off: 12.45 pm Rally at Glasgow Green: 3 – 4 pm Saturday 6 November

The trade union and workers bloc of the march will be headed by an STUC banner: ***Climate:Jobs:Justice*** *(you'll have seen that headline before!). To see where is the assembly point for trade unions, go to Global Day of Action – STUC*

OTHER EVENTS RELATING TO JUST TRANSITION

- *Events supported by Scottish Trade Union Congress: Public Events & Conferences – STUC*
- *Trade Unions for Energy Democracy: TUED Events at COP26 – Google Docs*
- *Just Transition events at COP26 mapped by WWF 1 – 6 November: Just Transition events at COP mapping – Google Shee*

Monday 1 November

13.30 Glasgow Climate Dialogues: Elevating the Voice of the Global South (with section on just transition).

Wednesday 3 November

13.30 The imperative of a Just Transition for the workforce to save our climate International Trade Union Confederation

18.30 Just Transition: Transforming public transport to fight climate change

Thursday 4 November

12.30 ***Beyond Energy: A Just transition for all*** *– WWF*

17.00 *Work and Unions Movement Assembly – COP26 Coalition*

Friday 5 November

17.00 *Climate Action – Strike Action-* ***People's Assembly COP26 Rally***

LINK TO THE RECORDING OF THE JUST TRANSITION ONLINE CONFERENCE IN SEPTEMBER 2021 – Climate, Jobs, Justice: Making the Just Transition Happen (jtp.scot)

JUST TRANSITION PARTNERSHIP

Scottish council strikes suspended as government and councils make new offer

The Scottish council strikes due to take place during COP26 have been suspended due to the Scottish government and Scottish councils' umbrella body COSLA, making a new pay offer, *reports Mike Picken for ecosocialist.scot*.

The new offer came at the eleventh hour as council workers in Glasgow were preparing to strike from Monday 1 November, with members of the GMB union threatening to cease all refuse

collection and severely disrupt schools in the City as it hosts the world leaders attending COP26.

The revised pay offer came after months of stalling by the employers and government saying there was no further money to afford a better offer than that rejected by the three unions representing the 120,000 council workers affected by the pay award. Negotiations have stalled for 18 months as essential workers continued to work throughout the pandemic without any pay increase.

According to unions and media reports, the new money came in the form of an additional last minute £30 million funding from the Scottish government and £18.5 million from within existing council budgets. The new offer amounts to a flat rate rise of £1,062 for those earning below £25,000 per year (the majority of workers), representing a 5.89% percent pay rise for those on the lowest pay. The pay award is backdated to April 2021 and runs for 12 months.

The unions have suspended the threatened strikes, including those in Glasgow due to start on Monday 1 November, and will now consult members about whether to accept the pay award over the next fortnight. Unions will also almost immediately begin negotiations over a new pay award from April 2022 at a time when the cost-of-living is spiralling upwards across Britain, particularly energy costs which are a higher burden in Scotland due to the colder climate. Official UK inflation is already over 4% and set to rise in coming months.

The offer falls well short of the joint demand by the unions for a £2,000/£10 per hour minimum pay award, but by winning a mandate for industrial action, despite the legal obstacles, and effective public campaigning the unions have shown how employers can be challenged on pay by the threat of strike action. The funding of the revised offer also indicates that despite trying to wash its hands of the dispute the Scottish government of the SNP, in alliance with the Scottish Green

Party, is a key player in council finances and pressure needs to be kept up on them for decent public services at council level and a reversal of all cuts.

#RisingClyde – Action at COP26 in Glasgow

*Two of the most vibrant and active components of the environmental movement in Scotland – Glasgow Calls Out Polluters and Climate Camp Scotland – have teamed up to launch **#RisingClyde**, a compendium of public actions happening in Glasgow during the COP26. Below ecosocialist.scot is publishing the first of their newsletters. We urge our readers to give support and solidarity.*



Hello friends,
Climate Camp Scotland has teamed up with Glasgow Calls Out Polluters to bring you **#RisingClyde** – a roundup of public actions happening at the COP26 climate conference in and around Glasgow over the next two weeks. We will be providing:
>> Action call-outs on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.
>> Regularly updated **Glasgow actions calendar**
>> Press office for radical actions, call us for help!
>> Tonnes of cool videos, comics, explainers, zines and fun on our socials.
>> 'Town Crier' to attend actions on request to announce useful info.
[There is a] Signal Group as an open, non-secure notice board for action call outs – [Contact GCOP or CCS for further info on how to join].
In solidarity,
GCOP and CCS Comms Team #RisingClyde

Public Actions at COP26

29th Oct

• **#DefundClimateChaos Climate Memorial** 10am, Clydeside Amphitheatre, Glasgow [details]

31st Oct

• **The Era of Injustice is Over: Opening Event** 2pm, Landing Hub – Entrances on McAlpine Street x Broomielaw & Carrick Street, Glasgow [details]
• **Stop Climate Horror – march through Edinburgh before COP26** 11am, Middle Meadow Walk, Edinburgh [details]

1st Nov

• **Raise the Banners for Climate Justice** All day, Glasgow-wide [details]

3rd Nov

• **Divest Discobedience** 3pm, Donald Dewar Statue, Glasgow [details]

4th Nov

• **Toxic Tour of Glasgow** 10.30am, George Sq., Glasgow [eventbrite]
• **Green State Vision: West Papua's Struggle for Climate Justice** 12pm, 220 Broomielaw [details]
• **Day of Action against Militarism and the Climate** Global [details]

5th Nov

• **Youth Climate Strike + rally** 11am, Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow [details] [facebook event]

6th Nov

• **Global Day of Action for Climate Justice – Glasgow March** 11am @ Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow [facebook event] [action network] [coach tickets from Edinburgh]
• **Global Day of Action for Climate Justice – digital rally** 6pm, online [details]

7th Nov

• **Living Rent Tour** Glasgow [details]

8th Nov

• **Toxic Tour of Glasgow** 1pm, George Sq., Glasgow [eventbrite]
• **Introduction to Direct Action** 6.30pm, CCA Glasgow [details]

11th Nov

• **Migrant Justice March** 10am, Kenmure St, Glasgow



CLIMATE JUSTICE = MIGRANT JUSTICE MARCH

JOIN US DURING THE UN CLIMATE SUMMIT TO CHALLENGE THE UK'S RACIST IMMIGRATION SYSTEM AND FOR A BORDERLESS TOMORROW

11TH NOV
MEET ON KENMURE STREET BOWLING GREEN 10AM
MARCH TO THE HOME OFFICE
WORKSHOPS, FOOD, SPEECHES AND MUSIC
BUS TRAVEL PROVIDED FOR PEOPLE IN THE IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

NO EVICTIONS
MORE
The UNITY Centre

Scottish rail workers win

victory as council strikes go ahead

On almost the eve of COP26 in Glasgow, Scottish rail workers have won a stunning victory on pay while council workers still plan to strike. *Mike Picken reports for ecosocialist.scot*

Late on Wednesday 27 October, after an arbitrary deadline set by the employers had passed, the RMT trade union **accepted a new pay offer** forced out of ScotRail by the threat of a total two week closure of the network during COP26.

The RMT won a 2.5% twelve month pay award backdated to last April, an extra £300 for all ScotRail workers due to the pressures of hosting COP26, and an improvement in terms on working rest days. Following the decisive vote for all out strike action by RMT members and months of action on Sundays that shut most of the network, the employers offered a 4.7% increase over two years coupled with a worsening of terms and conditions. While other rail unions accepted the RMT stuck out and forced a new offer.

> *RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch in hailing the victory has also called on SERCO to resolve the parallel dispute on the Caledonian Sleeper service. Linking the rail workers claims for investment in rail in the light of the COP, Lynch stated: "There can be no climate justice without workplace justice".*

On the same day that the RMT called for the Caledonian Sleeper service between Scotland and London to be transformed into an alternative to air travel, the UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced that he would be cutting air passenger taxes on

domestic flights and freezing fuel duty, promoting air and road travel at the expense of rail and the climate.



Demonstration 6 November

The victory and calling off of the industrial action means that thousands of environmental activists attending the COP26 and the big demonstration on 6 November will now be able to use the train network to get to Glasgow. It's a victory for all workers in Scotland and shows that strong trade union action can force concessions from reluctant employers, despite the UK government's draconian anti-trade union that make it exceptionally difficult to win a legal postal ballot. Rail workers will now be set to demand further improvements in workers conditions and reinstate rail service cuts when the ScotRail service is transferred from the private Abellio company to a publicly owned service run by the Scottish government in March 2022.

Council Strikes

Despite the victory on rail, the strikes over pay planned by Glasgow City Council workers are still going ahead and will escalate across other parts of Scotland during the COP26, as unions stepped up joint action over local government pay.

A series of ballots have been held in Scotland's 32 councils

to reject the miserly pay offer affecting around 120,000 workers offered by the employers' body, COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities). GMB union members in Glasgow's cleansing and schools departments have already voted for strike action from 1 November that would stop rubbish collection and severely disrupt schools across the City. Further ballots among selected workers for strike action have been successful in a large number of councils. On 25 October the joint union committee for the pay negotiations, comprising the Unite, Unison and GMB unions, wrote to the employers and announced that they were calling further action across the country from 8 November. The workers coming out on strike cover school cleaning, school catering, school janitorial, waste, recycling and fleet maintenance services, and will have a severe effect on the operations of a majority of Scottish councils.

The joint union pay demand is for a paying increase of at least £2,000 or 6% and a minimum of at least £10.50 per hour. The employers offer of only £850 or 2%, with a minimum pay rate of £9.78 per hour has been decisively rejected by unions.

Council workers in vital public services such as cleansing are demanding to be treated as essential worker, like NHS and care workers during the pandemic. The SNP-led council in Glasgow has been under constant attack in recent weeks for the state of the city's refuse and vermin infestations. While the Council leaders are desperately trying to present the best possible image of a 'clean city' during COP26 when the eyes of the world will be on Glasgow, only a proper investment in council services and workers can produce such an outcome. As if a reminder of the effect of climate change, the City was deluged with torrential rainfall on the evening of 27 October causing floods and mess that had to be sorted by the very same council workers taking strike action the following week.

Workers across Britain face a huge cost-of-living crisis emerging from the pandemic, with spiralling energy costs and

price increases due to the road haulage driver shortage exacerbated by the Tories ‘hard’ Brexit, increases in national insurance and income tax, and cuts in benefits including for those in low paid jobs, while the wealthy avoid paying their fair share through selective tax cuts that benefit them like the reduction in taxes on internal flights. The Tory UK government’s Budget and Public Expenditure announcements from the Chancellor on 27 October do little to address the crisis in living standards of working class people. The Tories say they want a high wage economy – but they only raised the minimum wage to £9.50 for those over 23 while private sector employers squeal about the impact of raising wages on their profits and many public sector budgets face real terms cuts in government funding. The only way to deal with the cost of living crisis is by workers joining unions and demanding pay rises through the threat of industrial action.

SNP, Greens and Labour need to take action

Scottish councils are primarily funded by the Scottish government – now comprising the Scottish Greens in an agreement with the SNP administration. Labour is also making noises in support of increased pay and between them the SNP, Labour and Scottish Greens, all ‘left-of-centre’ political parties, have over half of all Scottish Councillors influencing the COSLA employers. Both Labour and the SNP lead various administrations in the councils, though Labour to their shame are in coalition with Tories in several councils and a Labour councillor in West Lothian defected to the Tory party earlier this week.

Both the Scottish government and councillors in the three parties (and independents) should put pressure on COSLA to make an immediate improvement in the pay offer and urgently re-open negotiations with the unions.

If there are council worker strikes from 1 November, other workers should join picket lines and show solidarity so that the council workers are not isolated.

Thunberg offers solidarity

In an excellent initiative, environmental activist Greta Thunberg has agreed to come to Glasgow for COP26 during the strikes to address the Fridays for the Future school strike and demonstration on Friday 5 November, and has called for support for striking workers. That this solidarity has been welcomed by GMB Scotland , a union that traditionally has had a defensive attitude towards fossil fuel industries, is a step forward in further linking the environmental and workers movement.





Scottish workers vote to strike during COP26

Scottish trade union members in two unions – RMT members on ScotRail and the Caledonian Sleeper, and GMB members in Glasgow City Council – have voted overwhelmingly to strike during COP26 in November. Industrial action is also likely at the Stagecoach bus company by Unite the Union members. *Mike Picken* reports for *ecosocialist.scot* on what could be a forthcoming 'Scottish Winter of Discontent'.

Further strikes threatened on ScotRail network

84% of the 2,000 members of the RMT working on ScotRail voted to hold strike action across Scotland over a pay claim. The strikes could be held during the COP26 in Glasgow from 1-11 November when transport systems will already be under severe pressure.

The dispute has provoked the SNP government transport minister, Graeme Dey, into trying to challenge the RMT union and the legitimacy of the ballot vote. In an interview on BBC Radio Scotland, Dey claimed the dispute was 'no longer valid' as a new pay offer had been made. ScotRail had announced after the ballot had commenced that they would make a miserly two year 4.7% pay offer. This is likely to be well below inflation rates, given the current Tory cost-of-living crisis across Britain with soaring energy costs and road haulage distribution problems, caused in part by skilled labour shortages because of the Tory pursuit of Brexit at all costs. The Tories are desperately trying to apply sticking plaster to the damage done to the road haulage industriy by the exclusion of EU workers from the Labour force – it doesn't seem to have occured to them to expand rail freight as an alternative to diesel lorries clogging up the roads. The below inflation pay offer from ScotRail was also coupled with major reductions in working conditions and standards. The RMT has responded by ridiculing the offer and demanding that the Scottish government get round the table with ScotRail and the RMT to put forward a reasonable offer.

> *RMT Scotland organiser Michael Hogg, a former miner, said it was a* ***"lousy, rotten offer"*** *of a 4.7% increase [over two years] which was not worthy of consideration because it required* ***"members to sell hard-earned terms and conditions in order to get a pay rise"***



RMT Organiser Michael Hogg

ScotRail has been in dispute with the RMT for many months over conductor and ticket examiner conditions and pay and the RMT have recently been holding strikes on Sundays which has shut much of the network down. Senior figures in the SNP government have already disgraced themselves by trying to claim that the dispute is being manipulated by the RMT leadership in London, despite the fact that the disputes are led by the Scottish leadership of the union and repeatedly supported by rank and file membership in legal ballots. In fact the RMT is one of the few unions in Britain that actually supports the core SNP policy of Scottish Independence and the union called for a vote 'Yes' in the 2014 referendum. The RMT was also disaffiliated by the Labour Party in 2004 after its Scottish section agreed to support and affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party, a pro independence party standing against Scottish Labour.

A key issue in the framing of the Scottish government's anti-union response to the current dispute will be the attitude taken by the SNP's recent junior governmental partner, the Scottish Green Party. The Scottish Green Party currently support the SNP government in parliament and have two junior governmental ministers including part of the Transport brief.

The Scottish Green Party Trade Union Group immediately issued a statement saying:

> *"Abellio and Serco have let the railways down. Their intransigence has cost Scotland most Sunday services and now*

> *travel during COP26. As lay members and trade unionists we support the RMT, a shining example of leverage, and urge the employers to make a genuine worthy offer.” Scottish Green Party Trade Union Group*

This statement has been retweeted by ecosocialist Scottish Green MSP Maggie Chapman, who had also issued a statement after the SNP attacked the ‘London-based’ RMT with the single word “Solidarity!” in support of the RMT action.

Friends of the Earth Scotland, one of the main environment organisations backing the COP26 Coalition demonstrations and events in Glasgow during the COP also tweeted solidarity with the latest workers’ actions, demonstrating the importance of solidarity between the union and environmental movements built in the recent period.

> *Solidarity with workers who are taking action to defend their jobs & conditions @GMBGlasgowCC @RMTunion @UniteScotland*
>
> *Responding to the climate crisis means we must create decent green jobs but we must also stand alongside those already doing these vital roles.*
> *#COP26*
>
> *— Friends of the Earth Scotland (@FoEScot) October 14, 2021*

ScotRail is the main rail service across Scotland and is currently run by a private company, Abellio. Under Britain’s privatised and fragmented rail system, private train operators are awarded contracts, called ‘franchises’, under rules enacted by the Tory UK government – 13 years of UK Labour government 1997-2010 under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown failed to change the privatised system however. The Scottish government, led by the SNP with an agreement with the Scottish Green Party, subsidises the costs of the franchise. The Scottish government has some legal powers over the franchise

and after much prevarication over poor performance from Abellio finally called time on the franchise by announcing that the government would take over the running of the network from March 2022. This was a big climbdown by the SNP who claim to be social democratic and who repeatedly claimed in the face of demands from the left wing RMT that they did not have the power to nationalise the network. But this hollow claim was exposed when the Welsh Labour-led devolved government nationalised and took over part of the network in Wales last year. However since the announcement that the Scottish government would take over, Abellio announced big cuts to the network services from December leading to protests from all the rail unions and passenger campaign groups.

Caledonian Sleeper dispute

RMT members on the Caledonian Sleeper service have also voted overwhelmingly to strike over pay during COP26. The Caledonian Sleeper is a separate privatised rail franchise for an overnight service between Scotland and London and is currently operated by the SERCO group. SERCO is a private sector outsourcing company run by a Tory grandee with strong links with the UK Tory party and government. It is notorious for getting contracts underhand from the Tory government at Westminster, most notably for the lamentable 'Test and Trace' privatised testing system set up in response to the Covid pandemic and ridiculously given 'NHS' branding by the Tory UK government when it has nothing to do with the state-run NHS systems. RMT has previously held strikes and been in dispute with SERCO over their failure to create safe workplace conditions during the pandemic, ironic given the parent companies propensity to seek billions in contracts from the UK government for public health functions that should have been undertaken by the state.

Glasgow bin and school workers vote to strike – Council heads for crisis

In addition to the likely RMT strikes, Glasgow City Council bin and school workers in the GMB trade union have also voted overwhelmingly to strike over a pay claim during the COP26.

The pay offer had been put forward by the umbrella body representing Scotland's 32 councils – COSLA, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities – and there are a number of ongoing strike ballots among various unions in council workforces across the country.

GMB members in Glasgow City Council represent 900 bin workers and 600 school support staff. They voted by a magnificent 96.9% to reject the pay offer and support strike action during the COP26. This could mean widespread school closures and bins unemptied across the city as it welcomes tens of thousands to the city.



GMB members protest outside Glasgow City Chambers (photo: GMB)

COSLA say their hands are tied by the lack of funding from the Scottish government, which has found money to pay NHS key

workers more. The GMB rightly argue that their members were also key workers during the pandemic and deserve better pay.

There will be severe pressure on the minority SNP leadership of Glasgow City Council to demand more money is put on the table by COSLA. The seven Scottish Green Party councillors can take the lead in demanding support for council workers and unions. Scottish Labour are also likely to challenge, cynically, the SNP government to solve the crisis. But Scottish Labour have long been part of the problem. Glasgow City Council is Scotland's largest council by far and was under Labour control for over 40 years until 2017, overseeing cuts in services and discriminatory pay systems that eventually resulted in a massive equal pay payout after the Council was found guilty in the courts. The court decision and the subsequent payout costs in the equal pay case against the previous Labour council was a massive victory for women workers, who had been discriminated against by Labour for decades. But the one billion pound cost of the settlement is costing the council dearly, particularly in the faltering system of grant funding coming from the Scottish government and the failings of the 30 year old Council Tax system leading to cuts in services.

> *In Glasgow we have reached the legal threshold in our Industrial Action Ballot.*
>
> *96.9% voted in favour of Industrial Action in response to the latest pay offer from @COSLA*
>
> *Unless there is an improved offer on Monday we will be taking action in Glasgow during COP 26 pic.twitter.com/rEXapaGYHL*
>
> *— Glasgow GMB (@GMBGlasgowCC) October 14, 2021*

Proposed cuts in Glasgow City Council services are threatening the closure of community centres and local libraries. They have been challenged by a new community and trade union campaign – 'Glasgow Against Closures' which has held marches and protests across the city, the next taking place on Saturday 16th October (12.30 Buchanan Galleries). Local council elections take place across Scotland in May 2022 and there is already talk about anti-cuts and socialist candidates challenging the SNP government and local administrations.

It's not good enough for the SNP government to blame UK government funding to Scotland. The SNP at local and national level need to get behind the council and other public workers, and offer solidarity in challenging the UK government to prioritise public services. However, the signs are that the UK Chancellor's public expenditure Budget and Spending Review statement on 27 October is set to unleash massive cuts. Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and others shows that given the costs of the privatised response to the pandemic, increased Defence, NHS and school spending, all other public services in all parts of the UK are likely to see budgets slashed as the millionaire Tory government unleashes another wave of austerity cuts. It will take a massive defence campaign across the labour movement and communities to resist these cuts in Scotland, and elsewhere in the UK.

The Scottish Socialist Party National Workplace Organiser has offered the solidarity of his party to the workers in dispute.



Scottish Socialist Party National Workplace Organiser Richie Venton gives solidarity to RMT and GMB members