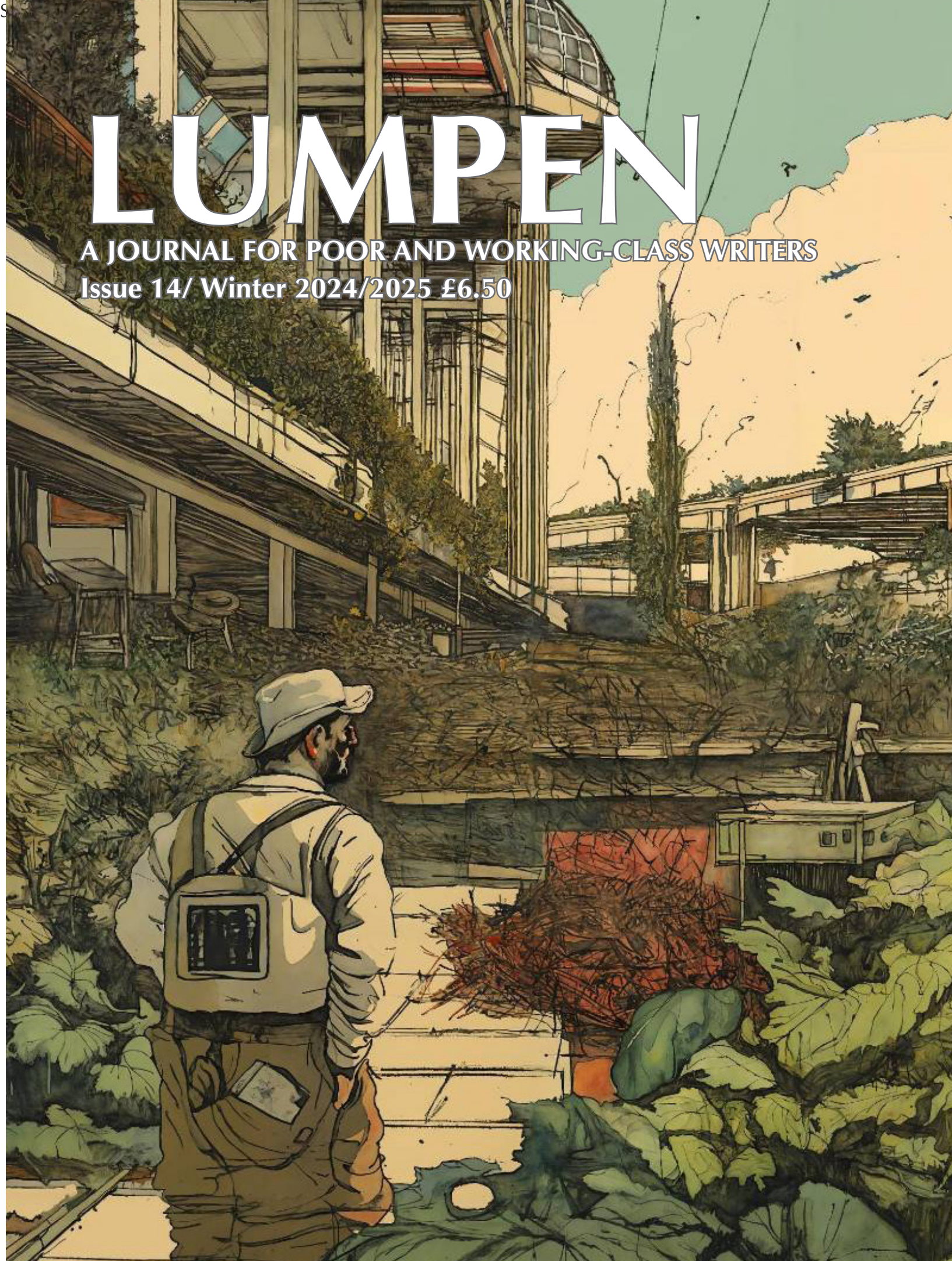

LUMPEN

A JOURNAL FOR POOR AND WORKING-CLASS WRITERS

Issue 14/ Winter 2024/2025 £6.50

LUMPEN: A JOURNAL FOR POOR AND WORKING-CLASS WRITERS
This special edition has been a collaboration between the Class Work Project and The Working Class Climate Alliance

Issue 014

Winter 2024/2025

Published by the Class Work Project

Edited by Emma River-Roberts and Zosia Brom

Designed by Lumpen & Seditionist Distro

Cover by Efe Levent/Mangal Media

We printed this issue using an online print service because printing co-ops aren't affordable to us. All workers still got paid. But sadly, there was at least one boss involved in the process of publishing this journal.

WWW.THECLASSWORKPROJECT.COM
WWW.WCCALLIANCE.ORG

BUY LUMPEN: WWW.TINYURL.COM/SDLUMPEN

Contents

DEMOCRATISING THE (UN)JUST TRANSITION

EDITORIAL

Emma River-Roberts

The just transition – a set of principles, processes and practices that aim to ensure that no people, workers, places, sectors, countries or regions are left behind in the transition from a high-carbon to a low carbon economy[1], has its roots in the North American trade union movement of the 1970s. During this time the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union advocated for a fund to support workers made redundant due to the environmental impact of their industries. The concept of the just transition has since continued to gain traction, evolving into a critical component of mainstream discussions on climate and economic justice.

Yet despite its ethos of empowering the world's working class, their perspectives have been broadly overlooked: the 2023 *Our Power* report, co-published by Friends of the Earth Scotland and Platform, surveyed over 1,000 workers in the United Kingdom's oil and gas sector to find that only 40% of workers had heard of the term just transition.[2] Similarly, interviews with Indian trade unionists found a deep scepticism towards it, viewing it as a Western-defined framework imposed on countries in the Global South, despite their unanimous agreement on the urgency of addressing climate change.[3]

Far from being isolated, these incidents are emblematic of a broader, global crisis of working-class exclusion. How has this come to be? How has our social faction found itself shut out from discussions about their own futures? More importantly, how can we reorient our approach to ensure that working-class voices are not just heard but actively capable of helping to shape the just transition?

We begin by creating working class-led spaces for discussion in the climate movement – platforms where we can speak without fear of judgement or dismissal. For this to be impactful beyond working class circles, it must be treated on par to that which is produced by more privileged members of society. For too long the climate movement has elevated the voices of white, middle-class individuals from the Global North over all others – a structural injustice that we have a collective responsibility to overturn.

This is something that the Class Work Project, the cooperative that has published *Lumpen* since 2019 has proven adept at achieving, and I express my heartfelt thanks for being invited to co-edit this special issue with them.

Several articles in this edition highlight the need to prioritise not only the ecological consequences of production but also the rights and wellbeing of workers, to break the circle of worker exploitation that continues to plague the world's working class. Achieving this requires recognising and valuing workers' unique insights, born from their daily proximity to the workplace and production processes.

At the same time, other articles remind us that discussions must also widen to encompass the just transition's broader impact on communities. This requires a critical examination of how the shift from profit-driven production to one centred on social needs and sustainability will transform community dynamics – what are the specific needs of these communities, and how do we ensure that their voices help to guide this transformation?

A key theme running through this edition is the salience of working-class culture – something which shapes our customs, values and taboos. Cultural norms are intrinsic to who we are, and hold tremendous potential to inspire and reimagine a future that is both equitable and sustainable for all. Yet for far too long, large segments of the climate movement have leaned on outdated and one-dimensional strategies, engaging with the working class only through the promise of material gains.

This reductive approach fails to capture the depth and richness of working-class contributions and, in doing so, perpetuates a constrained understanding of justice. A just transition cannot be framed as a solely economic or solely cultural liberation. It must encompass both, because it demands a synthesis of practical change and cultural recognition.

It has been a privilege to learn from this edition's contributors from across the Global North and Global South. I extend my gratitude to those who have written in English despite it not being their first language. The co-existence of American and British English spelling reflects the choices of each contributor, and serves as a stark reminder that the linguistic imperialism of English is yet to be dismantled.

Words and ideas exist as the initial sparks behind transformative change – may the words and ideas in this edition inspire you as deeply as they have inspired me. •

Emma River-Roberts, FRSA
Director of the Working Class Climate Alliance

1 Van Diemen, G., Matthews, J.B.R, Möller, V., Fuglestvedt, J.S., Masson-Delmotte, V., Méndez, C., Reisinger, A. and Semenov, S. (2022). *IPCC Mitigation of Climate Change. Contribution of Working Group III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*

2 Harris, R., Jeliazkov, G. and Morrison, R. (2023). *Our Power: Offshore Workers' Demands for a Just Energy Transition*

3 Mangang, N.M., Swarnakar, P.and Pai, S. (2024). Transitioning Away From Coal: Perspectives of Indian Coal Unions on Achieving a Just Transition. *Energy Research & Social Science*, (118)

REVOLUTIONARY MESSAGES FOR WORKERS AND ENVIRONMENTALISTS

Vlad Bunea

We feel it in our bones that capitalism is as aggressive as it has even been. Here are some realities that may not seem connected:

- "Sometimes I feel like I'm being pushed around in life" say 58% of Canadians in 2024, up from 45% 5 years ago.[1]
- A record-breaking 733 fires consumed Brazil's Pantanal wetland in June 2024, up from 435 fires 10 years ago.[2]
- In 2024, an estimated 16.7 million people in Syria are assessed to need humanitarian aid.[3]
- In India income inequality is now worse than under British rule.[4]
- The far right is rising throughout Europe and also in North America.
- Fossil fuel use and emissions hit record highs in 2023.
- With all that innovation, technology, AI, and investments, we are emitting more than ever before.

Why is this not enough to start a massive uprising right now? Is flight or fight the only choice? Why do some people choose to fight while others choose to avoid the question?

Then we have the results from the Peoples' Climate Vote from the United Nations, the largest survey of public opinion by sample size on climate change ever conducted. 80% of people globally want their country to do more on climate change, 69% said climate change is impacting their big life decisions, and 53% of people around the world are more worried about climate change than last year.[5]

I see two explanations for the fight or flight choice. People making choices on a personal level in an everyone-for-themselves kind of mindset, and people making choices based on clues from society in a I'm-gonna-join-a-like-minded-group kind of mindset. Roughly speaking, an individualist versus collective mindset.

In any case, no uprising will happen if these five prerequisites aren't met, at least in theory: (1) a deep crisis, (2) an alternative political project, (3) a comprehensive coalition of social forces, (4) broad-based consent, and (5) the will to coerce and rule.[i]

I'm going to come out and say it. We're dealing with the incoming extinction of life on Earth. Capitalism has been found guilty. We must phase it out in spite of the kicking and screaming of the ruling elite, the super wealthy: the enablers. The far right is growing because fear is a much quicker emotional response than anger. This is why many humans

believe it's this group of others that are responsible: immigrants, refugees, folks on welfare benefits, the woke Left, the Jews, the Muslims, the Blacks, the Browns, the Whites (all of them with no discrimination between rich and poor), but never the super wealthy elites, interestingly enough.

And now, a message for the working class. Dear working class, you are disempowered! Asking for a higher minimum wage, more paid vacation days, better working conditions, more sick pay, or hybrid work, all of this is just haggling inside the system. This haggling doesn't take power away from the elites, it only takes some material concessions from them and maintains the rules of the game. You ought to ask for more. You ought to ask for the reform of the system itself.

Even asking 'is this politically realistic, can this be achieved?' assumes that we must play by the rules of the system of electoral democracy, and beg the ruling elites to give us concessions. That time is OVER! When you hear snotty capitalists saying that working hard and merit automatically breeds material wealth, punch back, tell them they are delusional, show them the data, show them the plunder on which they're building that wealth! And most importantly: DISOBEY!

Workers are already fighting back and winning mini battles at the edges of capitalism. Phenomena such as (1) quiet quitting – when employees are chronically disengaged at work, doing the bare minimum of what is required, (2) the great resignation – when employees voluntarily resigned from their jobs en masse, beginning in early 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, (3) the lying flat movement in China, a personal rejection of societal pressures to overwork and over-achieve, (4) the new waves of unionization and strikes, all of that is evidence of workers saying enough is enough.

However, not all these mini battles are about the core of the problem: power. Workers would need to make all of their battles to be about power. Specifically they must challenge the legitimacy of unelected managers and executives, they must demand full economic democracy at the workplace on the principle of one worker = one vote. Workers should have the power to decide what is produced, how it is produced, who gets to be a manager and for how long, how much everyone gets paid, how profits are distributed.
The 'what's in it for me question' is not the right question to ask even in a highly individualistic culture such as

'The ruling super wealthy want us to fear that we might lose that privilege, and in order to keep it we must obey the system and play by its undemocratic rules.'

Canada or the United States. It's self-defeating. The moment you see yourself as one worker competing with another worker for a job, you give up power, you diminish yourself. It's because power is always a social relation that requires the existence of another human, or another group of humans, whether it is for a just cause or for domination. Thinking in terms of 'what's in it for me' is thinking from a position of fear. This is how it is easy for capitalism and the far right to manipulate the masses: with fear of loss and fear of missing out.

Fear of loss – probably the most common fear, is obviously about the little wealth or privilege you might have over those poorer or less fortunate than you. The ruling super wealthy want us to fear that we might lose that privilege, and in order to keep it we must obey the system and play by its undemocratic rules. Coming in close second is the fear of missing out, that is so pervasive, it has made us chase products on sale that we don't need and climb the corporate ladder for self-aggrandizement where narcissism poses as false modesty. A steady-state lifestyle, equilibrium, are not options in a material growth-based society, so you are left to choose between fear and craving. You are not allowed to desire a steady-state life. In order to break the false choice between fear and craving, you need to *degrow your mind* as Hubert Buch-Hansen and Iana Nesterova have shown in their article *Deepgrowth: Self-transformation Towards Harmonious Being*.

And if fear is a quicker response than anger, if we want to defeat the far right and fascism, let us use fear to attack the real target: the class of the super wealthy. Fear that their behavior will obliterate all life on Earth, fear that their behavior will make us poorer, fear that their power will ruin democracy forever. Why not? Has fear not evolved as a defense mechanism? Can fear not be channeled to enhance chances of survival?

Fight or flight may be too simple of a reaction to the complexity of the world we live in. For the working class the just transition must be about challenging the power of the super wealthy, taking it away from them, and redistributing it. This is about fighting.

The just transition would also require the pattern-breaking of quick soundbitey thinking such as *meritocracy is real and is good, technology and green growth will save us, there are infinite undiscovered resources, we live in the best possible world, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice"* (Martin Luther King) - well, the arc may bend towards justice but only if pre-existing conditions of struggle are met, plus the add-

on of the five theoretical prerequisites. This pattern-breaking is about flight, but the right kind of flight, not the defeatist and the cynical flight that is along the lines of 'the cause is lost, we're doomed already' as collapsologists prophesize.

Of course, as working-class people, one must always remember the labor theory of value, which remains true to a very large extent: your employer always, without exception, makes more wealth from your labor than what they pay you, in order to satisfy the core incentive of the system which is capital accumulation for its own sake. The only way to break this system would be to challenge its hegemony. Can you talk back to your boss without losing your job? If yes, then do it. Ask for worktime reduction to 30 hours a week with no loss in pay. If you cannot talk back to your boss, join a union or create a union, then ask for a worktime reduction. Strategize for a legal strike. Then strategize for civil disobedience and an illegal strike.

If the struggles of the working class remain at the level of haggling inside the system, they will not overthrow the system, and they will simply kick the can further down the road. This is why the working class must demand from the ruling class a foundational transformation that puts a very hard limit on the power and the status of the ruling class. Something along the lines of: maximum wealth of ten million dollars, economic democracy (the phasing out of unelected managers and the phasing in of one worker = one vote doctrine), and policies that increase the material wellbeing of the many but not at the expense of the few, policies that reverse the damage to the environment.

This is the moment when the bridge with the climate movement begins.

Time now for a message for the climate activists!

Stop blocking workers on their way to make a living. You are not going to get their support if you attack their livelihood. The struggle has to be about power. The target should always be to take away power from the ruling super wealthy and give it to the people. This is the most direct approach. Raising awareness about the climate crisis through inconveniencing workers does not attack power. It only starts heated debates and takes unnecessary detours. According to the Peoples' Climate Vote, people do not need more awareness. People actually want change, action – the transformation of society.

When action is about disrupting power, then it is worth pursuing. Disrupting an indoors event of a fossil fuel company, an evil bank, or some supremacist group remains a very effective tactic. It does not disrupt the working class; it only disrupts the narrative of the super wealthy which is still dominant in mainstream media.

Dear climate activists, show up at every single labor strike where you live. Show up at anti-colonial struggles. Show up at social justice rallies and events. And to your sign 'THERE IS NO PLANET B' the following 'THEREFORE WE NEED A JUST TRANSITION FOR WORKERS'. All environmental actions should extend their message to include the struggles of the working class.

Is there a difference between spraying cornflower powder on Taylor Swifts' private jet and on Stonehenge? One is private property. One is public property. One has spiritual significance. The other has narcissistic significance. One is the symbol of hard work and wisdom. The other one is Taylor's Swift private jet. Both acts have in common the tactic of raising awareness and stirring emotions of outrage. That may be misguided. As we know, people are already aware and angry. The acts are missing references to the just transition, references

to solutions for the working class. These acts of rebellion are skipping the important role of fear. In this sense, the cornflower on Stonehenge is a more metaphorical gesture than the cornflower on the private jet. There is no obvious connection to fear at Stonehenge, while the private jet case comes with anger antagonizing the passion of the Swifties. The message should be much clearer, and be about redistribution of power from the ruling class to the working class.

Even Greta Thunberg's *The Climate Book* has a bagful of solutions. Naomi Klein, one of the contributors to the book, does talk about a just transition which includes energy democracy, front line workers first, care work is climate work, no worker left behind, and polluter pays. These sound very much as concerns for the working class.

Do we actually think that workers in rich countries want to have a lifestyle that comes with the destruction of Earth? Do we actually think that all workers associate degrowth with austerity? Do all people in shopaholic USA or Canada actually and deeply enjoy this buying frenzy, the big cars, the big mansions? Did we ask all of them if they would prefer a simpler lifestyle with a much smaller material footprint? If we want to meet workers where they are, we should ask them what they actually think the just transition is about, not jump to assumptions. The Peoples' Climate Vote shows that 40% of Americans actually DO care about sustainability. Let us ask all humans if they also care about minimum and maximum just limits for wellbeing for all everyone on Earth. Let's see the answer then.

What is common to labor and the environment? How can the working class and the environmental activists build power together? The answer: they must both adopt a strategy of material limits, from the bottom-up and the top-down.

The bottom-up strategy is advancing policies that benefit the entire class of workers. Haggling within the system for minor concessions, on a workplace-by-workplace basis, as important as that is, benefits only the workers at that specific workplace. The bottom-up strategy must talk about a universal basic income, a universal basic services program that includes free quality public transit, free quality education at all levels, free quality universal health care, a just transition job guarantee - something like the American Climate Corps but in the millions of workers and extending to the needs of sustenance for local communities, rent freezes and subsidies then the nationalization and socialization of the for-profit housing stock, massive net government spending to retrofit dilapidated housing units, extended vacation time that allows for slow travel without airplanes and personal vehicles to foster deep recreation. All these, and more, are about minimum limits of wellbeing.

The top-down strategy must talk about maximum limits to power and lifestyles. It starts with a demand for a maximum wealth limit of ten million dollars or less. Then we add to this; phasing out private jets, SUVs, industrial meat production, consumer plastics, fast fashion, multiple personal properties that are kept for profit or kept empty, etc. And the phase in of economic democracy that would lead to full self-determination of the working class on the principle of one worker = one vote. These are only the tip of the iceberg.

When the working class and environmental activists adopt the language of both bottom-up and top-down limits, only then can the five conditions for a just transition be met, and the revolution could begin.

It will be then, and only then.

The final soundbite message for both workers and environmentalists is this: (1) make your struggle about taking away power from the super wealthy, (2) make your struggle about bottom-up material limits for all humans on Earth, (3) make your struggle about top-down material limits for all humans on Earth. Whatever your demand is, make sure it contains all these three elements.•

[i] See Richard Bärnthaler's paper: *Problematising Degrowth Strategising: On the Role of Compromise, Material Interests, and Coercion*.

1 Wilson, A. and Schieman, S. (2024). "Canadians are feeling increasingly powerless amid economic struggles and rising inequality". *The Conversation*. Available at: https://theconversation.com/canadians-are-feeling-increasingly-powerless-amid-economic-struggles-and-rising-inequality-231562.

2 Alberti, M. (2024). Record-breaking fires consume Brazil's Pantanal wetland. Accuweather.com. Available at: https://www.accuweather.com/en/weather-news/record-breaking-fires-consume-brazils-pantanal-wetland/1660055.

3 Un.org. (2024). Unprecedented 16.7 Million Syrians Need Life-Saving Aid, Secretary-General Tells Brussels Conference, Urging International Community to Supply $9 Billion Needed | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. United Nations. Available at: https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22244.doc.htm.

4 Rajvanshi, A. (2024). "India's Income Inequality Now Worse Than Under British Rule". *TIME*. Available at: https://time.com/6961171/india-british-rule-income-inequality/.

5 www.ox.ac.uk. (2024). "80 percent of people globally want stronger climate action by governments according to new survey". University of Oxford. Available at: https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2024-06-20-80-percent-people-globally-want-stronger-climate-action-governments-according-new.

WHAT IS TO BE WON?

Risk, Reward, and Working Class Participation in Direct Action

Kasmira Kincaid

Have you ever felt the ground fall from beneath your feet?

Have you ever lost your job, and not known how you're going to pay your rent? Have you ever lost your housing? Have you ever been pushed out, priced out, displaced from your community? Have you ever found yourself in free fall, as one thing after another gives way? The tiniest mistake snowballing into something monstrous? Something life-eating? And when this all happened, was there someone there to catch you? Or did you have to catch yourself?

It's hardly news that the left has a class problem. Especially the climate justice movement. The focus on direct action as the main arena for resistance generally has the result of excluding working class people from the movement – as well as people of colour and disabled people, demographics which frequently overlap. While it's a bit of an oversimplification, it's also not inaccurate to say that one of the main factors excluding working class people from our movements is risk. Working class people, people of colour, and disabled people all face greater risks when engaging in direct action. Rarely, however, is this concept of risk unpacked, beyond obvious and often performative acknowledgement that certain demographics are more likely to be targeted for arrest and criminalisation.

The shallowness of this discourse is a bed of the left's own making. By excluding working class people from decision-making structures, little expansion is made on the concept of 'risk'. Instead 'risk-appetite' is often treated as a matter of individual temperament. How does one instinctively react when faced with a volatile or dangerous situation? Do you find these situations scary? Or exciting? But risk is about so much more than the moment of action. For many it begins and ends with the question: how solid is the ground beneath your feet? That is: how safe are our the things that materially sustain our lives – jobs, housing, relationships – from the legal, sociological and psychological consequences of engaging in direct action?

So, what's being risked? Well, if you take action at your university campus you're risking your place at university. Not only because you might get expelled, but because the time, energy and emotional labour expended on taking action may prevent you from completing work to a satisfactory standard – something which may result in losing your place, or may result in a

degree that's not worth the paper it's written on. An easy enough pill to swallow for some. But not if your place at university represents your only route out of poverty. Not if you're estranged from your parents, (or if your parents can't materially support you), and your place at university represents your only source of income or housing.

And of course it's easier to risk what has been less hard to win. For some, University College London (UCL) is just the place you go when, despite daddy paying £15,000 a term for your education, you somehow still didn't get the grades to be accepted into Oxford or Cambridge. For others, it's the culmination of years of mind-melting effort; essays written in cramped rooms with frost-stiff hands, and the echo of half-a-dozen siblings rioting through the house.

The ground may become more solid when you enter the non-academic world. Or it may get shakier. In the twenty-first century, work is increasingly gig-efied and casualised. But the effects of this change are felt differently depending on your background. I have a friend who does the exact same job I used to do: door-to-door fundraising for charities. When you do this job you're misclassified as a 'worker' and can effectively be fired at any moment, for any reason. This has happened to my friend several times over. But he needn't worry. Whenever he loses his job (or takes too much time off), he simply calls his father, and his father covers the shortfall between what he's earned and his monthly rent.

Housing on its own can be a source of precarity. Notwithstanding rent hikes and no-fault evictions, many of us live in housing where even the most basic protections don't apply. If you don't earn enough, or if your job is casualised and no one in your family can serve as a guarantor, you can end up in informal and often exploitative arrangements. Arrangements which can fall apart for the slightest of reasons. And again, your ability to get back up on your feet varies wildly depending on your class background.

But what has any of this got to do with direct action? Well, for all but the most militant, (or perhaps just foolhardy), the solidity of people's lives *really matters* when making these decisions. Being arrested, criminalised, or even just identified at the 'wrong' kind of protest is more likely to result in losing your job or housing when these things are less secure. Either as a direct consequence of your company, boss, or landlord taking issue with your actions, or as a knock-on effect of missing shifts at work, rent payments, or the deterioration of your mental or physical health. And these individual losses are more likely to snowball if you don't have a safety net to catch you. Not just friends and supportive gestures, but *actual money*.

All of this before we even get into the maw of the criminal justice system itself. The very literal costs associated with being prosecuted for a crime. The restrictive pre-charge bail conditions. If you have a job where you can work from home, being banned from a city centre is less consequential than if you're an Uber driver or a courier. At the most extreme end, it's easier to face the prospect of incarceration if you know you'll have somewhere to live upon your release, and that someone will still be willing to offer you a job.

Of course it's important to differentiate between an accurate assessment of risk, and just being a bit chickenshit. And many lily-livered people in white-collar jobs use job security as an excuse to not even do the absolute minimum. However it's also true that, if you've experienced precarity, you may *feel* the ground shift beneath your feet even when it's fairly solid. So when we stand in line at the same picket, march through the same streets, or occupy the

'Inclusivity in our movements is often talked about as though it's an act of charity, with white middle-class activists generously ceding time to hear out the concerns of those less privileged.'

same university campuses, we're not all risking the same things. In many ways, a working class person going on strike is risking far more than a middle-class activist who engages in a 'high-risk' action, safely siloed off from their work and living space. And the working class striker is no less courageous or committed to the cause for needing greater reassurance before taking action.

So what's to be done? Well, I can tell you what's *not* to be done. What's not to be done is for a group of middle class people to get together in a room, decide among themselves what level of risk they *think* working class people are willing to tolerate, and design actions that will accommodate this in the hope of getting buy-in from those excluded from decision-making structures. (See also: a group of white people getting together in a room…). Working class people can and do engage in direct action. In fact, from the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT) defeating the fascists in Barcelona, to the battle of Cable Street, the history of the left is the history of working people undertaking enormous risks to resist oppression and change the face of the world.

Inclusivity in our movements is often talked about as though it's an act of charity, with white middle-class activists generously ceding time to hear out the concerns of those less privileged. There's important work to be done, but don't worry, we'll make time to discuss your concerns! The world's boiling over, but sure, let's talk about class composition! The assumption is always that accommodating the concerns of less privileged activists will result in a commensurate loss in militancy, and therefore effectiveness. That it'll make our movements weaker, and that therefore working-class inclusion is a *sacrifice* to be weighed up against the importance of achieving our goals. This, quite frankly, is bullshit.

Ask not what isn't to be lost, but what's to be won, and a whole new world of possibilities opens up. Working class people don't just have concerns, issues and barriers to participation. We also have ideas and expertise and communities and networks – if only our middle-class comrades would think to ask. A small group of committed activists can inconvenience commuters for a few hours. But a city of striking refuse collectors soon starts to look apocalyptic. A posh activist with a few grand to spare can bus some people out to a proposed fracking site. But a

group of working class activists, who understand local concerns and speak in a relatable accent, can mobilise the community that surrounds the site, and build sustainable links between them and other parts of the movement.

In framing issues around class primarily as concerns that need to be ameliorated, we're missing a big part of the picture. It's not that there's no place in our movements for high-risk low-participation strategies. But in failing to include working class people in decision-making structures – not as representatives or consultants, but as active and equal participants – we're missing out on a wealth of industry and community knowledge; national and international networks; and our single greatest resource, numbers. As the chant goes, whether it's climate justice or opposition to war: *there are many many more of us than you*.

Risk doesn't need to be off the menu either. In many ways risk is perhaps the wrong way to frame it. Most risk assessments are, more accurately, risk-reward assessments. Especially as working class people have a lot to gain from our collective struggles. (And I don't say that only because I live on a flood plain.) The biggest barrier to any organising drive is often not so much the high anticipation of risk, but the low anticipation of reward; the sense that whatever our middle-class self-appointed leaders are proposing is simply not 'worth it'. Including working class people in decision-making structures will not only help sell these ideas, but help us develop ideas that are *actually worth selling*. Visions that outshine fears for our jobs, housing, communities and sense of safety. Visions that show how collective struggle can help secure these basic material needs in the long term, (whatever the short-term risks), and solidify rather than fragment the ground beneath our feet.

Risk isn't the only barrier to working-class participation. But as with risk, identifying and addressing other barriers – from long working hours, to alienating group structures – will involve shelving that copy of Capital you've been reading for the last six years, and showing some *actual interest* in the day-to-day lives of working class people. Not as an act of charity, but because only by activating *all* the knowledge, networks, and capacity that our movements have, will any of this succeed. And as the planet heats up, and extreme weather events become more common, and the extraction of oil fuels war as well as global warming, we need our movements to succeed. We have little to lose and an entire world to win. •

Coltan mine in Rubaya,DRC/MONUSCO Photos

JUST TRANSITION AS GREEN COLONIALISM

Insights from the Global South

Phethani Madzivhandila

We are living in a time of unprecedented capitalist crisis. Political instability is the order of the day. Economic inequality is increasing. Conflict and climate-related disasters are displacing people all over the world. Racism, xenophobia, Fascism and religious intolerance are on the rise. The COVID-19 pandemic shed new light on the inequalities and stupidity of our current economic and social structures.

The current difficulties are social and political, but they go deeper. The earth's life-giving processes are threatened as a result of the production system imposed on the world during the last 250 years. This style of production is fuelled by petrochemicals, driven by profit, and predicated on hyper-exploitation of both labour and natural systems. Whilst the climate change crisis is a global challenge which affects everyone in the globe there has been reluctance from the developed nations to make the same kinds of commitments, they are pushing the less powerful countries to commit to.

The essay explores the prevailing narratives concerning just transition and the involvement of wealthy nations, with particular emphasis on the Global South and its interactions with metropolitan bourgeois governments and previously made climate concessions. The concept of a just transition has been increasingly discussed in the context of shifting towards a more sustainable and low-carbon economy, particularly in how this transition impacts developing countries or the Global South.

These challenges posed by the Global North are well articulated by radical political economy positions through the analytical lenses of dependency scholars, historical materialism, and dialectic materialism, and argues that market economy responses have been the primary response, rather than responses based on building a social safety net for working-class people and ensuring just transition. Historically, the West has profited from the use of fossil fuel energy, promoting national progress, and has used it to meet capitalism's insatiable demands.

The discourse on just transitions as led by Western countries often promotes the idea that developing countries should leapfrog over fossil fuel-based industrialization directly into renewable energy. However, this leapfrogging might still keep these nations dependent on external technology and funding, potentially stifling local innovation and economic sovereignty.

Imperialism and Accumulation on the World Scale

In what manner does Lenin's assertion that capitalism inherently leads to imperialism and global accumulation assist us in understanding our current circumstances within capitalist nations and their dominance amid the worldwide crisis of climate change?

Consequently, capital accumulation directed towards the Global North occurred at the detriment of the Third World, significantly undermining the nations and economies of the latter and effectively reversing prior development. This historical context of imperialism and the contemporary phenomenon of neo-colonialism have significantly influenced our perception of the modern world, aiding our comprehension of the implications of a just transition for the Global South. The Global South which is rich in minerals and resources essential for green technologies, like lithium for batteries, cobalt for electric vehicles, and rare earth metals for wind turbines and solar panels continues to suffer even under the proposed post fossil fuels world. There's a concern that while these resources are extracted from the Global South, the benefits, in terms of technology development, job creation, and economic value, largely accrue to the Global North. These dynamics echoes historical colonialism where raw materials were extracted from colonies for the benefit of the colonizing powers.

Scholars such as Fadhel Kaboub, an economist and advocate for climate justice, have been notably vocal on the issues surrounding climate justice and the concept of a 'just transition.' Kaboub has emphasized the historical and ongoing disparities between the Global North and the Global South in terms of climate change impacts and responsibilities. He argues that the Global North, through colonial and post-colonial policies, has significantly contributed to climate change while the Global South bears the brunt of the environmental and economic consequences. This perspective frames various approaches to climate justice, advocating for reparations and a restructuring of global economic frameworks to favour sustainability and equity.

Green Colonialism & Western Hypocrisy

The phenomenon of 'green colonialism' or 'eco-colonialism' refers to the practice where developed countries, predominantly in the West, impose environmental policies and practices on developing nations in ways that some argue could echo colonialist patterns of exploitation. The push for green transitions often comes with calls for climate finance, where developed nations fund projects in developing countries. While necessary and historically just, there's a critique that this can increase debt or come with stringent conditions that might not align with local needs or governance, resembling colonial strings attached to aid.

In 2021 Germany pledged around €700 million (ZAR13 billion), to the South African government to decommission its coal-based power stations in order to transition to green energy.[1] Those same countries that are spearheading the decarbonization movement are also the ones who restocked coal stockpiles in the wake of the crisis in Ukraine, when Putin cut off natural gas supplies to western Europe. Ironically, Europe gets its coal from South Africa, the same country they are urging to decarbonize, so this tragic comedy just keeps getting worse.

For climate justice to be realized, the playing field of power must be levelled, and the Global South must simply be liberated from carrying the burden for everyone when the developed nations make no such commitments. The climate

crisis is so critical and catastrophic that we require collective effort to identify a resolution, and these nations merit the autonomy to shape their own destinies. In an article titled *"How Deep Is the North-South Divide on Climate Negotiations?"*, Sinan Ülgen argues that the Global South shouldn't be held primarily responsible for the north's pollution, consumption, demands, and fears because these nations are hesitant to be the first to give up fossil fuels even though they're still destroying the planet.[2]

This tragicomic scenario exemplifies the enduring significance of Walter Rodney's arguments in his foundational text, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. He argued that Europe's harsh colonization of Africa, together with its continued exploitation under capitalist imperialism, is the principal reason for the continent's poverty and underdevelopment, rather than any inherent social or biological characteristics of Africans.[3] The West wants the new energy policies to be tested out in smaller economies whilst they continue to develop and power their economies counties through fossil fuels.

The narrative of a just transition often promotes the idea that developing countries should leapfrog over fossil fuel-based industrialization directly into renewable energy. However, this leapfrogging might still keep these nations dependent on external technology and funding, potentially stifling local innovation and economic sovereignty.

These contradictions and reality mirror what we have always known since the dawn of colonialism, that the West has built its wealth and development out of the suppression and exploitation of the Global South. Addressing this global climate crisis requires a drastic reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and a rapid transition towards renewable energies. But there are potential dangers that such a transition would maintain the same practices of dispossession and exploitation that currently prevail, reproducing injustices and deepening socio-economic exclusion.

From Fossils to Renewable Energy

The advancement of the Global North was propelled by affordable, unregulated fossil fuel energy, elucidating the current state of world emissions. The pollution generated by the Global North is not comparable to that of the Global South by an enormous margin. The Global North currently collects $2 trillion annually from the Global South, much exceeding the $100 billion in climate funding that the Global North pledged at the COP in Copenhagen in 2009. Annually, the OECD countries have not fulfilled their minimal funding obligations.[4]

Nonetheless, a transition to renewable energy sources is imperative in the long term; there is an immediate necessity for increased coal production in the Global South to spur development. The shift to alternative energy sources must be a 'just transition' that safeguards the employment of workers in the mining and electricity generation sectors, as well as the communities who have traditionally relied on these industries for their lives. It is essential to tackle significant social concerns such as poverty and inequality, both of which can intensify the energy crisis and promote corruption. If these underlying issues are resolved, the public may exhibit greater receptivity to energy reforms and initiatives that promote sustainability and inclusivity within the energy sector.

International Policies on Climate Crisis

Current international policy calls for cooperation on the climate crisis whilst shackling the majority of the world's brain power and creativity in debt. Leaders warn against industrial development on the other side of the world whilst looking to the market for solutions. Given the evidence of post-colonial strategies deliberately binding the Global South to the Global North's decisions, one can only wonder if, at the heart of Global North policy, is the plan for the world's richest 1% to live like kings at the expense of everyone else.

The frameworks for what constitutes a 'just transition' are often defined in global forums where the Global South does not have equal representation or influence. This has led to policies that prioritize global climate goals over local development or immediate human needs.

According to a recent Oxfam report, the carbon footprints of the richest 1% is set to be 30 times greater than the level compatible with the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement by 2030.[5] That is just 80 million people belching out 16% of the world's total emissions. Surviving the climate crisis demands limiting the world's most privileged. Allowing the Global South to thrive would necessitate dampening our appetite whilst improving the quality of life for 600 million people. Frankly, it is a win-win situation, and it is the only situation in which we create a sustainable future.

Carbon credits have been under scrutiny for their effectiveness in reducing emissions. Critics, including over 60 leading climate scientists, argue that these offsets are 'ineffectual' and might even delay the transition to cleaner energy by allowing corporations to continue polluting while offsetting emissions elsewhere, often without ensuring real, permanent, or additional reductions in greenhouse gases. This practice has been labelled as greenwashing, where companies claim to be carbon neutral without genuinely reducing their emissions.

The COP gatherings, intended as platforms for global climate action, have been criticized for their outcomes not matching the urgency of climate change. For instance, the failure to meet quorum at biodiversity-focused COPs or the general sentiment that these meetings have become more about networking for fossil fuel executives than about decisive climate action, illustrates a perceived lack of commitment. The call for more ambitious climate action by figures like António Guterres underscores the gap between current actions and necessary commitments.

The economic aspect of carbon markets and climate finance touches on issues of justice. There's a growing concern about these markets becoming another avenue for capitalist exploitation, where transactions happen without adequate community participation or respect for ecological justice. This critique extends to the broader financial mechanisms like the Bridgetown Initiative, aimed at reforming global financial systems to better support climate action in developing countries, yet facing slow adoption or insufficient funding, as noted in discussions around COP outcomes.

Debt Colonialism

Debt is an extremely powerful tool of colonialism and an essential driving force of capitalist extractivism. Yet most of the climate movements in the Global North are shying away from this topic due to its designed complexity, and thus remain ignorant of one of the major pillars of global inequalities. It's time to overcome the fear of financial colonialism and organize globally to cancel the debt of Most

Affected People and Areas, which is the Global North's knee on the neck of the Global South and stands in the way of a truly just and self-determined transition. By uniting labour, indigenous rights, and climate justice movements behind a common goal: to turn debt-trap-diplomacy on its head by cancelling the financial debts of the Global South to enable climate action and hold the Global North accountable for its historic climate debt.

Debt colonialism in the context of climate change refers to a scenario where countries, particularly those in the Global South, find themselves trapped in a cycle of debt due to historical and ongoing economic structures that originated from colonial times, affecting their ability to address climate change effectively. Here's how these two issues intersect:

Colonialism left many countries with economic systems designed to extract resources rather than build self-sustaining economies. This legacy includes high levels of debt, often incurred to finance development projects that might not have been in the best interest of the colonized countries but rather served the colonial powers or current global economic structures. Many of these countries, especially island nations and those in the Global South, are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts like rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and shifts in agricultural productivity. Their geographical locations and economic structures make them prone to these impacts, yet they historically contributed the least to global greenhouse gas emissions.

The burden of servicing debt can divert funds away from climate adaptation and mitigation. For instance, countries might need to cut spending on renewable energy projects or infrastructure to protect against climate impacts due to debt repayment obligations. This situation is often exacerbated by the terms of loans, which might come with conditions that limit government spending or favour economic policies that continue environmental degradation.

The international financial system, including institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, has been critiqued for perpetuating this cycle. Loans from these institutions often come with structural adjustment policies that might favour economic liberalization over environmental protection or sustainable development. There's an increasing call for climate reparations or debt cancellation as a form of climate finance. The argument is based on the concept that developed nations, having historically emitted the most greenhouse gases, owe a debt of sorts for the climate change impacts now being felt disproportionately by poorer nations. This could involve direct aid, debt forgiveness, or favourable terms for new loans aimed at climate resilience and sustainable development.

There is a growing discourse around this issue, with activists advocating for debt cancellation or restructuring as a critical step towards climate justice. These discussions highlight the moral and economic arguments for why addressing debt is integral to solving climate change, emphasizing the interconnectedness of global economic justice and environmental sustainability.

Recent discussions and reports suggest policy shifts towards more equitable financial systems. This includes proposals for central banks to guide capital flows away from fossil fuels towards sustainable investments, acknowledging that without addressing the debt crisis, climate goals are unattainable. The intersection of debt colonialism and climate change underscores a broader narrative of global inequality, where historical economic exploitation now compounds the challenges posed by environmental

'The intersection of debt colonialism and climate change underscores a broader narrative of global inequality, where historical economic exploitation now compounds the challenges posed by environmental crises.'

crises. Addressing this requires not just financial aid but a rethinking of global economic structures to ensure they support, rather than hinder, climate resilience and justice.

Global South activists and scholars do however support the idea of a just transition but critique the current models, especially those from developed nations like the European Union (EU), for focusing too heavily on technological and industrial shifts without sufficient emphasis on social justice, decolonization, and reparations. For true transition to be realised it must involve not just moving away from fossil fuels but also addressing historical injustices through mechanisms like debt cancellation for the Global South, technology transfer, and financial compensation.

Towards Climate Justice

The environmental and social consequences of the industrial capitalism system have long been apparent to marginalized people forced to dwell in the waste heaps of production while their resources are pillaged for raw materials. Today, however, the systemic impacts are more evident to everyone. To save humans and complex life on our magnificent planet, we must make a significant shift in strategy. We need a just transition that responds to those existential questions.

In his groundbreaking analysis, Matthew T. Huber argues that the carbon-intensive capitalist class must be confronted with its disproportionate effect on the climate.[6] Yet, at present the climate movement is unpopular and rooted in the professional class, where it remains incapable of meeting this dizzying challenge. As an alternative, Huber proposes a climate politics to appeal to the majority – the working class – and he evaluates the Green New Deal as a first attempt to channel working-class material and ecological interests. He advocates building union power in the very energy system that must be transformed. In the end, winning the climate struggle will require an internationalist approach based on planetary working-class solidarity.

From these insights, the critique of just transition as green colonialism stems from the fear that while the transition to green technologies is necessary for global sustainability, the current framework might perpetuate or even worsen existing global inequalities.

Advocates for a genuinely just transition argue for fair Trade and Resource Nationalization that ensures countries benefit directly from their resources through fair trade or nationalization efforts and Technological transfer on Fair Terms which encourages technology transfer that doesn't just benefit corporations but also allows for local adaptation and improvement. Furthermore, by encouraging inclusive governance by ensuring that decision-making processes include voices from the Global South, reflecting their needs and priorities. Projects should directly benefit local communities, not just in terms of jobs but in community ownership, environmental protection, and social upliftment.

The discourse around 'just transition' thus needs to navigate these complexities, ensuring that the path to sustainability doesn't inadvertently become another form of exploitation or dominance. Simply put, a just transition is a systematic shift away from exploitation, extraction, and alienation and toward production and reproduction systems that prioritize human well-being and environmental regeneration through truly democratic means. Just transition, as we view it, is much more than a move from fossil fuels to renewable or green. By doing so, we will establish the requisite circumstances for the workers' pursuit of total emancipation and socialism, while also promoting the worldwide socialist revolution.

In order to accomplish climate justice and a revolutionary just transition, we must completely destroy the bourgeois classes in both developed and developing countries who continue to perpetuate the unjust system of imperialism and climate colonialism. The needs of the most impacted populations, who reside in the Global South, must be prioritized and included. All people should be able to access clean energy and a safe environment in the future. The Global South's working class should embrace the eco-socialist principles of social justice, freedom, food security, and popular sovereignty in this future.

Activism and pushbacks from the Global South highlight a critical perspective that intertwines climate change with economic justice, advocating for policies that not only aim to mitigate climate change but also rectify historical and economic injustices. This approach calls for a rethinking of how climate policies are framed and implemented, with a strong emphasis on decolonizing economic structures for a truly just transition. •

1 *Anon. (2021),* Germany to give South Africa R12.5 billion to get away from coal and Eskom's broken grid: repor*t. Business Tech.* Available at: *https://businesstech.co.za/news/energy/533958/germany-to-give-south-africa-r12-5-billion-to-get-away-from-coal-and-eskoms-broken-grid-report/*

2 Ülgen, S. (2021). How Deep Is the North-South Divide on Climate Negotiations? *Carnegie Europe*. Available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/10/how-deep-is-the-north-south-divide-on-climate-negotiations?lang=en&center=europe.

3 Rodney, W. (2018). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Verso.

4 Timperley, J. (2021). The broken $100-billion promise of climate finance — and how to fix it. *Nature*, 598(7881), pp.400–402.

5 Oxfam (2021). Carbon emissions of richest 1% set to be 30 times the 1.5°C limit in 2030. *Oxfam International*. Available at: https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/carbon-emissions-richest-1-set-be-30-times-15degc-limit-2030.

6 Huber, M.T. (2022) *Climate Change as Class War*. London: Verso.

EASIER SAID THAN DONE

Graeme Fraser & Veldra Fraser

My name is Siyabuhle. In the Xhosa language my name means *she's beautiful*, and in former times it would have been common for me to have been called 'Beauty' in English.

I am 15 years old and live in small government subsidized house in what is referred to as a 'location' or 'township' just outside Gqeberha in South Africa (it was formerly known as Port Elizabeth, but later named after the wife of a British Governor of the Eastern Cape Colony in the early 1800s; Sir Rufane Donkin – and not as you might have immediately thought, the late Queen Elizabeth II).

My mother Selinah is busy preparing supper for our family on a small two plate electric stove, which sits on top of the cupboard where we store our supplies. My brother and my *Goggo* (grandmother) are the other members of the family.

I am writing this from our 'kitchen' table – the only table in the house. It is located in the room measuring about 5m x 5m that serves as our kitchen, dining-room and living room. The ultimate form of open-plan living except for its minute dimensions!

There are three other rooms in the house – two bedrooms and one small bathroom where there is a shower, flushing toilet, and wash-basin. I share the one bedroom with my brother, and my Mom and Goggo share the other.

The meal tonight is the usual fare of mielie pap, a type of maize meal which Americans would find similar to corn grits (although mielie pap has a finer texture) or Europeans would find similar to polenta. Tonight we have been blessed because one of the residents at a nearby farm where my mother works as a house maid three times a week has donated us some tomatoes and onions, which Mom will skillfully convert with some basic spices into a delicious gravy to accompany the mielie pap. We only have meat (most likely some chicken) with our meal once a week – usually after Mom has been paid!

My mother is fortunate to have work for three days a week.

Many of our neighbours, 99% of which are black families, [i] are unemployed. Like them, we also depend heavily on a meagre government grant to supplement Mom's wages.

To put things into perspective, Mom's total earnings per month when she includes the government subsidy is around R7,000 per month – or just around £300 as the exchange rate fluctuates around £1 = R24 at the present time. The finance payment Mom pays

for our house is our biggest monthly expense. Mom is repaying a loan of R150,000 off at the rate of R1,200 per month. So she will still be paying for many years to come!

Our next biggest single expense item is our payment for electricity. We have a pre-paid meter in our house. The basic charge for this is R790 per month for which we receive 200 kWh, which means we have to use this resource very sparingly such as switching off the small geyser we have for hot water during most of the day, and only using it for two to three hours before everyone has an opportunity to have a shower. In the warmer summer months one of our neighbours comes and helps Mom by turning the thermostat of the geyser down to 45°C from the usual temperature of 65°C.

So that leaves only around R5,000 (or just over £200) to meet all the needs of the four members to survive for the month!

Though far from perfect, and by most standards ours is a poor household, our living conditions are much better than those experienced by many families living in South Africa today.

Our house was built by the South African government as part of its ongoing mission to fulfil the promise contained in the Constitution, famously negotiated in the process of ending the apartheid regime, which stipulates that:

1. Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing.

2. The State must take reasonable legislative and other measures within the available resources to achieve the progressive realisation of this right.

The government is justifiably proud of its record of having built over three million houses in the 30 years since the inauguration of the new democratic regime. It is estimated that over 20 million people have benefited directly or indirectly from this government programme.

There are stringent criteria for an applicant to qualify for housing assistance, the most important being that the income earned by a household must be less than R3,500 per month in total.

But even if you do qualify for assistance, there is a waiting list of many thousands whose needs still have to be met. The annual budget allocation for housing in the most recent government budget was R33 billion. In her speech to parliament on the Budget Vote for 2024/2025, the Minister of Human Settlements Mmamoloko Kubayi emphasised the enormity of the task when she pointed out:

“Building communities in which families thrive economically, enjoy safety and comfort and can create social bonds that enable them to raise children, is central to the work that we do in human settlements. It is for this reason that our policy, with the benefit of practice and experience, shifted away from the provision of houses, to creating sustainable human settlements.”

In this regard, we echo the words of one of the African continental liberation giants, President Julius Mwalimu Nyerere of Tanzania who said:

“A house should not be built so close to another that a chicken from one can lay an egg in the neighbor’s yard, nor so far away that a child cannot shout to the yard of his neighbor.”

The past 30 years have taught our sector several lessons about what should and should not be done in creating sustainable human settlements. For example, we have learned that uprooting people from a place where they have lived for a long period of time to a new settlement does not work in most cases.

Human beings are social beings, and it is only in a place where they have social bonds with people they know and trust that they can settle in peace. I say this to make the point that we will utilise the lessons we have learned in the past 30 years to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the human settlement delivery system.

However, later in the same speech Mmamoloko Kubayi emphasised a very sobering point when she stated:

"Due to the sluggish economic performance our fiscus is constrained, leading to budget cuts in the sector which will come to R14 billion in the next three years. This means we must quickly learn to do more with less and find partners to help us deliver on our mandate."

So despite the valiant efforts on the part of the government, the unfortunate truth is that there is still a mammoth housing backlog in the provision of basic housing, and millions of South African residents live in shacks which are a basic wooden shape covered with corrugated iron which were recovered by builders, mainly from construction sites where an older house in the more affluent areas has its tin roof replaced with a more modern tiled one. These tin sheets have a price worth much more than gold to many South African residents

However, some of the problems with accommodation in these shacks are that:

1. Many of them are located in informal settlements, which start with one or two families illegally erecting the shack on a remote part of a property (usually a farm) owned by someone else. From such small beginnings the settlement can expand to contain several hundred shacks in close proximity.

2. The lack of running water (except when it rains heavily and these houses are invariably flooded – but of course one cannot use this water for personal consumption), which means the occupants have to fetch and carry small quantities of water from a tap shared by many others. The lack of running water also means there are no water-borne sewerage systems leading to very poor sanitary conditions. Outbreaks of diarrhoea and dysentery are regular.
3. The lack of proper electrical connections.

There are essentially two solutions to this problem, neither of which are satisfactory from a safety point of view:

The first is the illegal redirection of a power line to the house. This is fraught with danger, and many people die each year from electric shocks in these settlements in the process of making the illegal connection, or in using the electricity in their shack. The local power authorities make regular sweeps through the informal settlements to dismantle these 'pirates' at a huge cost to them.

Eskom, the State-owned power utility in South Africa, estimated in February 2024 that it lost over R5,6 billion to illegal connections during the 2022/2023 financial year, which works out to roughly R15 million or 37GWh per day.

The second remedy is to provide heating and lighting by means of open fires fuelled by burning wood scrounged for every available source (or candles). This too poses a great threat of personal injury, especially to children who may trip and fall into an open fire or knock over a lighting source. Fires frequently occur in these shacks, often spreading rapidly from one shack to another – causing loss of lives and the destruction of the meagre possessions of the owners.

So why am I telling you this?

Today, our science teacher Mr. Jimmy Nxumalo was discussing with us the issue of climate change and responses

being implemented by the South African government and other countries, to transition from the use of fossil fuels in the generation of electricity to more sustainable methods of energy supply such as wind and solar power, and green hydrogen – the new kid on the block. Our homework assignment, due in a few days time, is to consider the challenges ahead.

As I see it, the biggest problem is that fossil fuel production of energy is still by far the most economical for South Africa's economy. Even taking into account the aged and fragile status of our existing power stations (which due to their age and neglected state of maintenance are prone to breakdowns leading to an interruption of service [ii]), we have a significant advantage in South Africa. And that is vast resources of coal in very accessible deposits, which permits open-pit excavation methods instead of 'deep-level mining' (although this does still occur in respect of some coal mines, the really deep mines for which South Africa is renowned are mainly involved in the mining of gold, platinum and other such metal resources).

We also have vast tracts of land which could be suitable solar powered energy farms. Not only is the land available, but where it is available gets limited cloud cover and even less rain annually, making it ideal for solar power.

South Africa's largest solar power plant is the Solar Capital De Aar Project in the Northern Cape. The photovoltaic (PV) facility has an installed generating capacity of 175 MW, enough to provide electricity to roughly 75,000 homes per year. It consists of more than half a million PV modules covering 473 hectares. It took 28 months to construct the entire facility at a cost of R4,8 billion. The advantage is that this is a renewable energy supply, the downside is that 175 MW is hardly a blip on our national energy supply requirement. Just today for example, at a time when Eskom has not considered it necessary to implement load-shedding for nearly 220 days, the shortfall in capacity attributable to unplanned outages (i.e. those not forming part of the scheduled maintenance programme on which Eskom is routinely engaged) is around 10,000 MW. So the entire production capacity of the De Aar plant is about 1.75% of the 'unplanned' outages experienced today. To make up the difference in solar energy will therefore cost around 50 x R4,8 billion (at least) – which is a significant amount of money when we consider that Mmamoloko Kubayi's entire budget allocation is only R33 billion.

That is a hard choice – housing or energy!

Of course, South Africa has also commenced many wind farm projects. These likewise have an enormous upfront capital cost.

And so far we are only contemplating addressing the daily shortfall due to unplanned outages. If we have to consider the cost of replacing the entire system, the cost is astronomical.

So, Mr Nxumalo, the short answer is that it is easier said than done. •

[i] Despite South Africa having transitioned to a democracy thirty years ago, virtually no 'Whites' live in the townships, and only a few elite blacks have managed to buy houses in the more affluent suburban areas of the cities in South Africa.

[ii] For 15 years now South Africans have become used to what is now called 'load-shedding' – a form of rotational power interruptions usually in two to four hour sessions across the country. The term load-shedding avoids the politically sensitive terms 'blackout', 'power failure' (which indicates someone is to blame) or 'power outage' (which signifies a lack of a capacity to produce, again with the implication that someone hasn't prepared well enough). 'Load-shedding' makes us all feel as if we are doing our bit so that others can benefit.

THIS IS WHERE THE RUBBISH LIVES

Si Egan

I'm on a prepayment meter for my electric. This means I pay more for my power than someone wealthier, who can pay by direct debit. It's a metaphor, of sorts, for the distribution of political power. The poor have their power rationed, a vote every five years, but only if you can afford to appear on the electoral register. Many people, fearing detection by bailiffs tracking them for debts they cannot afford to pay, stay off the electoral register, as bailiffs and credit companies have access to everyone's details once they register to vote. Stopping the sharing of this electoral data would be one part of a just transition. The information generated by the democratic process should not be for sale. And those on prepayment meters should not be charged a premium for their energy.

To put credit on my meter, I take out the plastic and metal key and make my way to the Co-op. Locking my front door, I notice the damage caused to the frame by the multiple attempts of someone trying to break in. Sometimes this happens when I am home. Terrifying for someone with PTSD. Another part of a just transition; safe places to live. Poorer people, like me, can only afford to live in low quality rented housing. I'm lucky to be with a housing association. At least my tenancy is secure, even if my front door isn't. Walking down the stairs I notice patches of peeling paint, the odd, dark, maps of mould, and the broken mailboxes.

This is where the rubbish lives, I always think, as I pass the bin store and the bins that live permanently outside it, excluded from their shelter by the extended bickering of my housing association's lawyers. We must be the rubbish, I always think, as I watch the rats fight in broad daylight and step over the smack-head's shit in the middle of the narrow path, the size and texture of a cricket ball of Moroccan Black*. I wonder how painful it must've been, to give birth to that? Around the corner the community centre is closed, and the weather-worn graves are littered by the detritus of yesterday's 'street-attached' partying. Everyone has given up on them now. The police wait for the inevitable call to the daily street brawl, the ambulance crews know them on first name terms. Sometimes I find one of the homeless crashed out in the communal hallway, and I check to see if they're breathing, then leave the poor fucker alone. A just transition would give some hope of a better life to those so excluded, that they have completely given up on any attempt to participate in society.

'A just transition would give some hope of a better life to those so excluded, that they have completely given up on any attempt to participate in society.'

I recently went to a free nature poetry workshop and this is what I wrote, based on my daily experience of nature where I live;

The poisonous yew,
This cemetery's solitary sentinel
Is now a shield from CCTV.
And amongst the graves
The junkie's needles grow
Where sterile spoons shed white plastic petals
Broken vodka bottles seed the earth
With a glass grain
And empty beer cans blossom into crack pipes
Stained with a dark and deadly nectar.
Abandoned by the drones
Who swarm around Tescos
Shoplifting again

Such is their nature.

In a just world, everyone would have walkable access to unspoilt nature.

I continue on my way to the Co-op, careful not to trip on the enormous potholes in Sidwell Street and dodging the illegal electric bikes of the delivery riders. Some of them I know from an English as a Second Language class that I volunteer at. A just transition would give refugees the chance to work legally, and not be so unfairly exploited.

I pass the new bus station that's too small for the number of people that need to queue there, and too small for coaches that now pick up from a nearby side street. And next to the bus station, the new leisure centre; too expensive for me to use, and too hot in the summer, with patches of mould already appearing on the bottom of the pool. A just transition would mean access to regular, affordable public transport, and access to leisure facilities. I've always used public transport. It's a great way to get to know people in your local community, and better for the environment.

At the Co-op, I have a quick look at the reduced price section. These days, even this can be too expensive, and I'm often reliant on free food handouts from local charities. A just transition would mean healthy, affordable food. Three teenagers, dressed in black and with their faces covered come in. I notice that the staff immediately retreat behind the security glass protected till area. The teenagers lark about, knock some things over, grab some chocolate and run out, completely ignoring me. They know that they can get away

with it, and there's nothing else to do, so why not? A just transition needs to provide youth services, and a sense of belonging to a wider community.

Outside, I meet a friend. They're from another class and the beneficiary of a trust fund. Over the years that I've known them, I've come to realise that they're as controlled and trapped by their wealth, as I am by my poverty. They may not go hungry or have ever been homeless, but they, and a few others I know in similar circumstances feel infantilised, disempowered, and isolated from their community. They all have mental health issues, which is how I got to know them. Wealth inequality hurts us all.

I take the longer route back past the job centre, and the towering blocks of student accommodation, where the Chinese students are, and I stop to pick up some free food from a box outside the Oriental Supermarket. It's all out of date but I really appreciate it. Turning back into Sidwell Street I pass the long-closed Kenjo Launderette. I often fantasise about taking it over as a not-for-profit workers' cooperative, but my mental illness limits my capabilities. So now when I need clean clothes, it's another ten minute walk to older machines. I'd like to see a future of community launderettes where people can get to know each other, and there's less environmental impact from the individual ownership of white goods. Further along are the charity shops and bookies, and a growing number of takeaways. Sidwell Street seems to be at war with chickens, dedicated to eating as many as possible. In bad weather, the bus stops along here are popular with the street drinkers, who are priced out of pubs to socialise in. All the dive bars have been closed; The King Billy, The Locomotive, anywhere they could feel comfortable. Though future working-class generations may be healthier because of this, the current generation suffers from exclusion.

Finally, I reach the entrance to St Sidwells. The familiar blue plaque informs me of the final resting place of Dr Hennis who was killed in a duel, and the aerated Heavitree stone reminds me of the ancient volcano that Exeter is built upon.

Fenced off by the path through the graveyard is a sinkhole. This is a recent development. A symbolic disposal facility, I think to myself. Wait long enough, and the whole place could be swallowed up by the earth, a landfill of the dispossessed. Old bones churned up with new arrivals, a place and people, ignored to death. This is where the rubbish lives.

** Morrocan Black is a high-alkaline soap with a characteristic dark greenish-black colour made from olive oil and macerated olives. (ed)*

MEAT, IDENTITY AND CLIMATE

Why Veganism Isn't A Universal Solution

Robert Căzăcuțu

Veganism is a loaded and heavily contested term, and it's become widely popular in the mainstream culture in the last decade more so than ever before. In claiming, however, that it's become popular in some pockets of the Western world is not the same as saying it is in any way revolutionary. Yet corporate veganism and its most fervent supporters insist that if we stop consuming animal-based ingredients and buy vegan products, we can protect animal welfare and at the same time reduce our enormous greenhouse gas emissions to save the earth. This is capitalist ideological blackmail in its purest form, demanding solutions in products instead of political processes.[1] The movement deserves some praise for raising public awareness about environmental catastrophe and the appalling conditions in which animals are bred and raised. But we shouldn't be blindsided by veganism and all its separate branches and assume they have not also been totally subsumed by Capital.

The weekly news cycle is now often dominated by headlines of natural disasters from across the globe that beg for climate action. Catastrophic floods in parts of central and eastern Europe killed scores of people and submerged cities underwater just in the month of September of this year alone. The month before, gruelling large-scale wildfires across the Atlantic swept numerous states in North America[2] and burned millions of acres of land, while several islands in the Aegean Sea as well as mainland Greece[3] were met with the same fate and were destroyed entirely by fire, in what evacuated holidaymakers described as apocalyptic scenes.[4]

Yet these unprecedented freak natural disasters that threaten to displace and wipe out entire populations aren't the only signs that human activities drive global climate change. Every year, hotspot tourist destinations in the Mediterranean basin are inundated by hordes of visitors, even after legislation was introduced to curb overtourism.[5] Year after year, the city of Venice in Italy and the island of Santorini in Greece are visited by millions of tourists and turned into overcrowded, unliveable waste dumps for the small number of permanent residents who live there all year round.[6] This news, however, doesn't cover the many disasters that disproportionately affect the poorest countries and people in the global south as a result of climate inequality.

The verdict these news outlets give is that what we're seeing happening across the world is the result of hundreds of years of fossil fuel burning, the clearing of land for agriculture and the felling of trees, and of intensive animal farming. In other words, the root causes of climate

'There are strategies out there for systemic reorganization that could antagonize Big Meat without capitulating to capitalism's imperative towards infinite growth.'

change aren't one-dimensional. For the world to reach its collective climate goals we're told we need to change our consumption habits, stop exploiting the planet and its limited resources and find pragmatic solutions that will benefit us and all future generations. This advice is antithetical to the deeply ingrained neo-liberal fantasy that says we can save the earth if we buy the right products. Yet it's unclear which countries or groups of people should take urgent action and act now as the climate crisis accelerates.

Insistence on eating less meat and dairy isn't without merit. It's beyond any reasonable doubt that adopting a plant-based diet as a lifestyle choice can be tremendously beneficial for the planet, domesticated animals used for food and for humans. The evidence available overwhelmingly suggests time and again that a diet which consists mainly of vegetables, grains and nuts is paramount to saving the planet and our species.[7] But this general dietary advice from ideal environmentalists doesn't make a distinction between different types of consumers, leading us to believe that everyone should follow it wholesale. It also doesn't take into account the carbon footprint of the richest 1% who emit as much planet-heating pollution as two-thirds of humanity.[8] The debate about who must be held accountable for the destruction of our planet, and who should do better by changing their consumption habits to save it, is the reason why 'progressive' neo-liberalism ultimately fails to posit a coherent alternative and convince people to consume less animal products to help stop climate change.

The practice of abstaining from eating animal products doesn't even begin to cover the extent to which global meat consumption is inextricably linked with different food cultures, minority groups, first- and second-generation immigrants as well as third culture kids[9] who use food to bond with their families and reconnect with their countries of origin. Food from my home country is heavily based on meat and dairy, and the gathering to prepare and eat it has become one of the only ways in which me and my family stay in touch with our culture. During my three-year stint as a vegan, my parents confessed they felt disconnected from me. They couldn't comprehend the decision I'd taken to turn vegan, and repeatedly turning down food, especially during the holiday period, suggested to them that I was drifting away from my cultural roots. To understand, then, the significance of traditional food for immigrants, it's imperative to draw a distinction between recipes passed down generations and the excessive

amounts of meat other groups of the population consume.

The one-size-fits all solution propagated by vegans as a way of tackling the climate crisis conveniently ignores this and the following two problems. Firstly, animal rights can't take priority over workers' rights. It's vain to promote the welfare of animals and tout the benefits of a plant-based diet when essential and frontline workers in 2024 work under gruelling conditions for ten to twelve hours a day for around £11 to £12 per hour.[i] Secondly, the shift to an environmentally sustainable post-carbon economy can be attainable if first and foremost we stop placing the burden of preserving our planet for future generations on the consumers. We simply can't wager on the future of our planet by assuming consumers will self-regulate, when aggressive advertising is the norm and teens are exposed to junk food ads on social media twenty-four hours a day.[10]

There are strategies out there for systemic reorganization that could antagonize Big Meat without capitulating to capitalism's imperative towards infinite growth. Trying to undermine the long arm of the meat industry and mitigate its worst excesses by developing new products is not going to work. Instead, we need to find ways to replace it. For this to happen, vegan bullies can't be guilt-tripping those with legitimate reasons they don't want to give up eating meat and dairy, namely immigrants and those who eat animal products for religious purposes. We must begin with pressuring meat and dairy industry tycoons, as well as pesticide companies, to lead the green transition and relinquish control of their agribusiness companies.[11] The government must take the reins of the market and penalize with financial sanctions manufacturers who don't meet government-imposed climate targets. The leisure and chattering classes must cease participating in the devout consumption of unessential goods and services,[13] and the middle-class consumer who lives in the western hemisphere must stop stuffing his face daily with meat, dairy and other heavily processed foods.[ii]

For my family and for all displaced people across the globe, who for a welter of reasons were unable to remain in their home countries, preserving our cultural identity by way of cooking food that tie us to our past will always come first. It's unconscionable for vegans to arbitrarily demand from immigrants to neglect our cultural heritage when the richest people in society and the middle classes refuse to keep their side of the bargain. And if the government doesn't start heavily regulating the food market, a green transition will never truly be just. Before we address this widening gulf between immigrants who take comfort in food from their homeland and those who're truly responsible for the climate catastrophe, the unequal division of labour means we will continue to cook traditional food that western people can't even pronounce. •

[i] These figures fluctuate wildly, but searching any jobs website will reveal the average salary for, say, factory workers to be around £11 to £12 per hour, with some exceptions. (See: www.totaljobs.com/jobs/factory-worker/in-london).

[ii] Multiple studies have shown that men eat meat in higher quantities and more often than women. (See: www.independent.co.uk/news/science/men-china-switzerland-spain-india-b2562162.html).

1 Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester: Zero Books.

2 Center for Disaster Philanthropy. (2024). *2024 North American Wildfires*. Available at: https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disasters/2024-north-american-wildfires/.

3 Paddison, L. (2024). Photos from space show just how close Greece wildfires got to burning whole towns. CNN. Available at: https://www.cnn.com/2024/08/16/climate/greece-wildfires-athens-photos-climate-intl/index.html.

4 Booth, R. (2024). The eastern Aegean islands Chios and Kos have seen wildfires breaking out. *The Independent*. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/greece-wildfire-locations-chios-kos-b2572423.html

5 Giuffrida, A. (2024). 'It has had no impact': Venice's effort to curb overtourism fails to thin crowds. *The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/09/venice-effort-curb-overtourism-fails-thin-crowds.

6 Hardy, P. (2019). Sinking city: how Venice is managing Europe's worst tourism crisis. *The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/apr/30/sinking-city-how-venice-is-managing-europes-worst-tourism-crisis.

7 Barclay, E. (2019). The way we eat could doom us as a species. Here's a new diet designed to save us. *Vox*. Available at: https://www.vox.com/2019/1/23/18185446/climate-change-planet-based-diet-lancet-eat-commission.

8 Oxfam (2023). Oxfam GB | Richest 1% emit as much planet-heating pollution as two-thirds of humanity – Oxfam. Oxfam GB. Available at: https://www.oxfam.org.uk/media/press-releases/richest-1-emit-as-much-planet-heating-pollution-as-two-thirds-of-humanity-oxfam/.

9 Mayberry, K. (2016). Third Culture Kids: Citizens of everywhere and nowhere. *BBC*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20161117-third-culture-kids-citizens-of-everywhere-and-nowhere.

10 Cancer Research UK (2020). 86% of Teens Exposed to Junk Food Ads on Social Media. *Cancer Research UK Science Blog*. Available at: https://news.cancerresearchuk.org/2020/12/18/86-of-teens-exposed-to-junk-food-ads-on-social-media/.

11 Sherrington, R., Carlile, C. and Healy, H. (2023). Big meat and dairy lobbyists turn out in record numbers at Cop28. *The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/09/big-meat-dairy-lobbyists-turn-out-record-numbers-cop28.

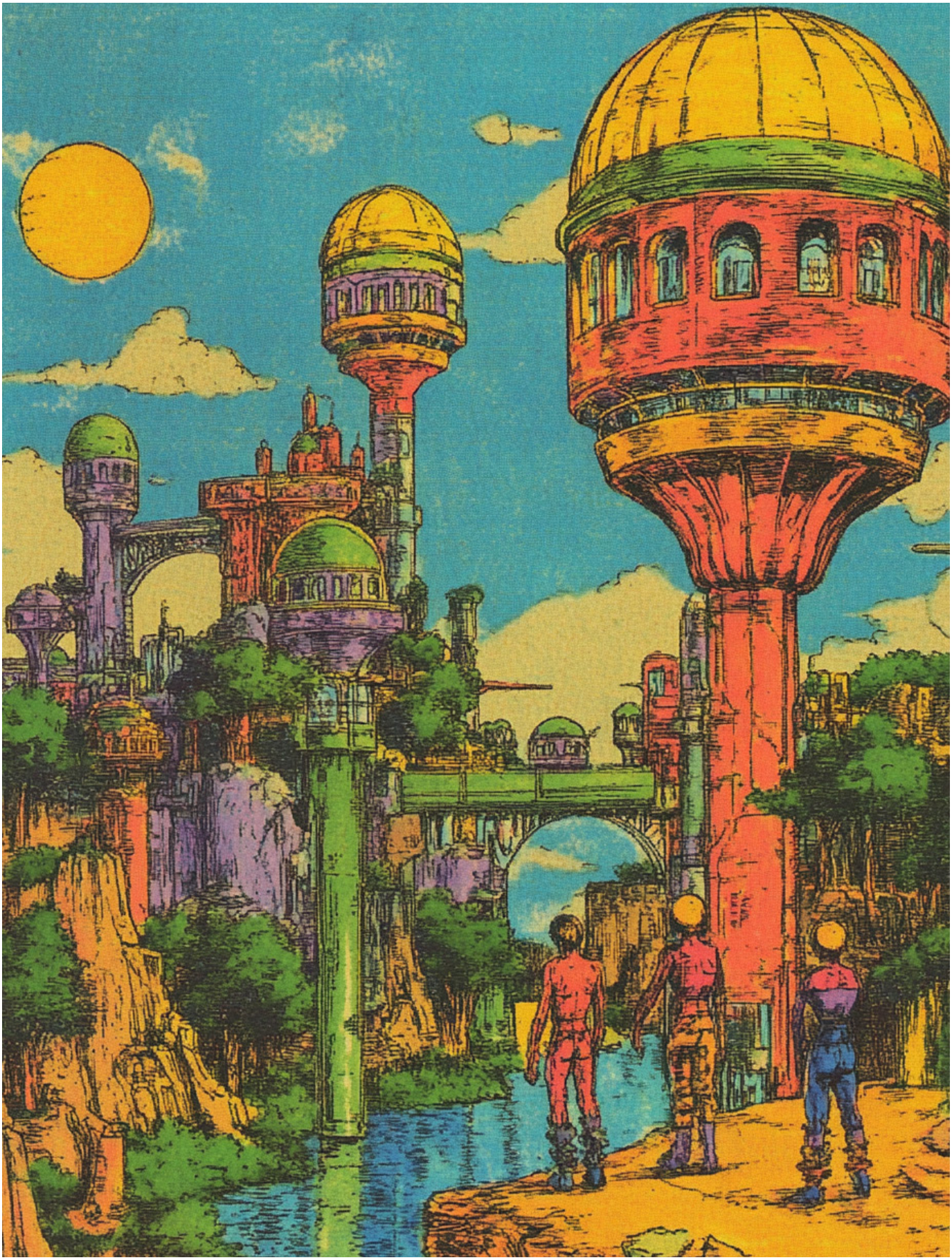

Image: Efe Levent/Mangal Media

LOVE IS A FORCE THAT GIVES US MEANING

Tánaiste EC

A recent article in Prometheus magazine ended with a stirring line on the importance of revolutionary democracy:

"This requires an almost messianic trust in the possibility of the oppressed and exploited to become the collective masters of their own destiny."[1]

The call to faith in the most oppressed as opposed to the 'networked left' of professional activists resonated with me deeply as I reflect on the weaknesses of the current climate movement and its class character.

The radical climate movement fails because it cannot bring itself to take class politics seriously because the middle-class – well-connected people who tend to run these movements don't obtain or advance their position through faith in the oppressed. The movement would sooner invite an Ecuadorian indigenous leader than they would chap doors on an estate. This is a function of the lack of democratic movements that are able to harness the time, resources and skills of middle-class people and bind them to the time, resources and skills of working-class communities and movements. Bluntly, for those who are running 'the left', there isn't much social credit amongst peers in working to help povvos self-organise. Putting 'I ran a climate camp' on your CV compared to 'I forced middle-class activists to self-reflect by organising their working-class colleagues' is more likely to get you that dream job with an NGO. They are, inevitably, movements led by those with the 'capacity' to do so. Unfortunately, these movements don't have the 'capacity' to prioritise building relationships with working-class communities. The concept that this may be an investment with a high rate of return (ROR) is often lost.

One subclass on the radical left is my fellow neurospicy people. As a group, neurodivergent people, especially those of us who are multiply marginalised, show up in all the best statistics: staggeringly high amounts of anxiety, depression, trauma, underemployment, unemployment, suicidal ideation, attempts, suicides, life expectancy, prison populations, school exclusions, etc. We're often the proverbial canary[2] that suffers early and most dramatically from situations that harm everyone, whether that's DWP[i] shitfuckery or having a society fundamental built on bullying and coercion.[i] As disabled children we were among the first victims of Nazi mass murder, killed by doctors including Hans Asperger, providing logistical inspiration for the architects of the Holocaust.[3]

'Despite the fact there are a lot of queer, neurospicy people in the movements, often the radical politics is not matched with a radical praxis around fighting neuro-chauvinism. Apart from simply ableism, this is a function primarily of class.'

A movement that consciously includes neurodivergent people is more likely to be regenerative and sustainable not just for us but for everyone, and is thus more likely to succeed. This is a staggeringly obvious point and one that, like with class, needs to be repeated and hammered into these movements. Unfortunately the movements often operate with the logic best expressed in the satire Brass Eye:

"But what about other people less stable, less educated, less middle-class than me? Builders or blacks for example. If you're one of those, my advice is leave well alone. Good luck."[4]

Many neurodivergent people have extensive and chronic experience of (often unprocessed) grief. For example, the very common friendlessness and rejection that autistic people have comprises a grief for the self that cannot be grown into without the normal healthy social relationships that many neurotypicals take for granted. We grieve for the lost years, the lost self. In a sense, this is an extreme form of the tendency of atomisation that we all experience under capitalism.

Hannah Arendt used the word *Verlassenheit* – meaning loneliness, forsakenness, desolation – to describe the enforced disconnection that fascism enforces. In that respect, many autistic canaries already have first-hand experience of fascist life that she outlined in *Origins of Totalitarianism*:

"It bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man."

For me, eco-grief is an extra catastrophe on top of the mundane experience of existing in a world that, in a fairly impersonal way, wants you dead. Despite the fact there are a lot of queer, neurospicy people in the movements, often the radical politics is not matched with a radical praxis around fighting neuro-chauvinism. Apart from simply ableism, this is a function primarily of class.

Partly this is due to the self-image of left activists as Good People™. Good People™ aren't problematic, so when they engage with a sperg who sits in that uncanny valley of not-quite-human-passing, it must be a result not of the ableism of Good People™ but of the problematic other. This is obviously true because we read a Safe Space commitment

at meetings which proves we are Good People™, unlike *those people*. Listening to Charlie Hertzog Young I was struck by his point about colonised communities having centuries of experience of climate grief.[5] That same process of external colonisation is continued now in many forms, including the Empire of Normality.[6] To the extent we represent a subclass of victims of colonisation, we also tend to both be over-represented and excluded from radical movements. We are, along with other freaks, predominantly working-class and surplus-class. The need for a neurodivergent class consciousness is important not just for neurodivergent people in respect of ourselves but also for our radical movements.

The 'autism spectrum' is a spectrum which also includes extremely divorced emerald mine-inheriting space cunts. More inspiring is our Greta Thunberg, who ranks alongside Vasily Zaitsev and Lyudmila Pavlichenko as most unswervingly accurate exploder of fascoid minds. She is a beneficiary of an upper-middle class background and is exemplary in her commitment to the globally oppressed. A climate movement that is open to her leadership but not the leadership of plebian spergs is hampered. Again, if we include the poor neurodivergents in our movements we are more likely to win.

"Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless,"[7] Judith Herman simply observed. Part of the healing of undoing that trauma is acquiring a (healthy) sense of power. Movements at their best are a kind of resurrection, a healing of the reality of daily dread through the connection and power of ourselves through others. This is I suspect lost on those who had nice upbringings, who are used to speaking and being heard. It's not openly said in these terms, but the more 'difficult' plebs in these movements are most likely to be excluded from movements. The stats on school exclusions, prisoner demographics and so on show similar patterns – if there were stats on radical movements I suspect they would not be wildly different.

What happens if you bring yourself fully, raw, totally vulnerable, to an activist community? Do you get accepted and understood for who you are, do you get to demonstrate your best qualities and have your suffering acknowledged, respected and transformed? Or will you be rejected, regarded as too difficult, as too weird, too troubled to engage with? For some, including those with the most to offer, that is an intense risk. One climate activist told me they found an openly autistic working-class activist 'too intense', as if the trauma of survival and engaging with the end of the species require a less intense approach. "Please be upset, but not too upset."

What's missing here is love. We often talk more about, to speak frankly, what spring is like on Jupiter or Mars rather than demonstrate our love for each other. That lovelessness in our movements is a fatal flaw. When has the climate movement said it loves you? Less often than Donald Trump has said he loves you. At the level of rhetoric, we are beaten by the tangerine fascist. To adapt Chris Hedges, "love is a force that gives us meaning".

One process that movements will engage with, if they want to win, is the healing of the trauma of powerlessness, not just as an ancillary bonus but as a core part of educating the untraumatised and supporting the survivors. A practical example is wealth redistribution. I recall one upper-middle class climate activist recommending that, unless I had wealth to fall back on, not to try being a full-time activist. Perhaps sensible advice, but no reflection occurred about the nature of class in the movement. No-one seems to think we need to work on the class question in order to win.

I recall another discussion in a gathering about the merits of picking one area or another for an action. One visibly working-class person made a case for his area, suffering generations of deprivation and corporate abuse; the next person

suggested another place because it was better. The room erupted in laughter, the facilitator did not interrupt. The great progress on gender, sexuality, trans rights has not been matched with a genuine sensitivity and political appreciation for the importance of class.

It's worth saying that for all the problems of the movements, they remain far more sources of hope than political parties. Green parties in particular vary from pro-genocide, pro-war, pro-ecocide to not German. For all the radical pretensions and self-image of Green parties, they militantly lack a radical praxis. Apparently the anti-racist policies haven't led to engaging with minority communities, like the working-class. Ethnic diversity at a Green party meeting means having baklava and dates for white people to eat.

There's a joke about someone looking for something under a streetlight not because the object sought can be found there but because the light is better than where the object actually is. The 'streetlight effect' comes to mind when I think about climate activism; it's doomed to fail, but it's where the hope is. To quote revolutionary eco-terrorist and bullier of delusional twinks Barrett Wallace:

"I know you got problems... hell, we all do. But you gotta understand that there ain't no gettin' off this train we're on, till we get to the end of the line." •

[i] In the United Kingdom, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is a public service department that is responsible for welfare, pensions, and child maintenance policy.

1 Holmes, H. (2024). Revenge of the Network Left. *Prometheus*. Available at: https://prometheusjournal.org/2024/09/19/revenge-of-the-network-left/.

2 Stimpunks Foundation. (2024). *Canary*. Available at: https://stimpunks.org/glossary/canary/.

3 Sheffer, E. (2018). *Asperger's Children: The Origins of Autism in Nazi Vienna*. W. W. Norton & Company.

4 Brass Eye, Episode 2, Available at: https://youtu.be/MIAJemmO-bg?t=1352

5 Hertzog Young, C. (2024). *Proudly Mad: exploring mental health and the climate emergency*. Available at: https://open.spotify.com/episode/6V12EoxY5DdO0ifHRJsiYG

6 Chapman, R. (2023). *Empire of Normality*. Pluto Press (UK)

7 Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery*. Pandora.

GROWING UP IN THE SHADOW OF DEINDUSTRIALISATION

The Unseen Leaders of the Just Transition

Tanya Rideout

I still remember the day my dad was made redundant. It was 1982, I was 11. The closure of the iron foundry kicked off a spiral of poverty that my family - and many others in my community - never recovered from.

Already precarious, my parents were raising a severely disabled child and were only just coping with the tiredness and stress. A few years after the closure, my dad suffered a stroke in his mid-forties and couldn't work properly again. My mum, doing mostly unpaid care for over a decade, began to suffer with severe chronic fatigue and depression. The poverty caused during that time affects my wider family two generations later, in complex ways.

We became part of the statistics of what is now familiarly known as 'deindustrialisation', and I witnessed first-hand the devastation caused by abrupt economic changes to an industry with no compassion for the affected people and communities. My mum's family were from the South Wales Valleys and her cousins were also losing their jobs in the mines. At the same time as my dad was struggling to find work, we were raising money for the striking miners on my mum's side.
After my dad's foundry closed, he took a part time job as a carer. My mum was already a full-time unpaid carer, and I too worked in the care services for ten years. Low carbon jobs are in renewables, agriculture, forestry and transport - as is often pointed out. But they are also in elderly and disability care, health and teaching. Solving climate change in the framework of a just transition offers us the chance to expand the definition of what counts as a 'low carbon' job and the chance to invest in people and create a better society – with work that is meaningful, useful to society, and leisure that is plentiful for everyone.

Grassroots Renewal: Reclaiming The Valleys

I talked to a woman in Treherbert who was planting up an area of wasteland near the edge of an old coal tip. With a group of volunteers, she was trying to reclaim a corner of polluted and abandoned land in the South Wales Valleys. On weekends and evenings, they would dig through rubble and scrub, transforming it into a growing area. She'd witnessed the end of the coal industry. She'd also witnessed four decades of regeneration projects that had tried - and mostly failed - to

transition and rejuvenate the Valleys. Like me, she'd worked in the mental health services. The impacts of deindustrialisation manifest in her community's psyche. Now - with her volunteers - she's physically reclaiming a patch of the coal-scarred landscape and providing much needed social connection.

For many of us working-class people who are also working in the field of just transitions, our motivations are personal, as well as academic and practical. As well as growing up as part of the industrial working-class I now research the environmentalism of poor and working-class people in the past and the present. I am the subject and object.

This journey led me to the South Wales Valleys to talk to members of the wonderful Skyline forestry project and to sift through the archives of working-class autobiographies of miners and gas workers in the nineteenth century. One of the workshops at the Skyline project has a strapline that reads 'Your history can fuel your future,' and the working class people I interviewed there were clear and knowledgeable about the need for just environmental transitions that are led by working class people who know from experience how communities are organised to support the most vulnerable - or left damaged by poverty and cuts to services.

The people I research for my PhD in coal gas history, who lived in the 19th century showed similar knowledge. Harold Heslop, a Durham miner born in 1898, observed the mine waste near his home, saying: *"One day, perhaps, the river will recover most of its lost joys. Perhaps, the birds will not fear to drink at the edges of the deep pools."* He also said prophetically: *"How we gloated over the possibility of the mines becoming nationalised. How we dreamed. How we stretched out our hands towards the towering pit head gearing to take it, and all it signified, into our own dear keeping."* Collective ownership of the means of production and collective protection of the natural world overlaps, and for working-class environmentalists the clashes between industry and nature are often more visible.

The Reality of Working-Class Life in Green NGOs

During my first week working at an environmental NGO another staff member stopped me in the lunch queue and asked me if I'd been to private school. I almost laughed. I didn't even know anyone who had been to private school at that point. Private schooling was so alien to my experience It seemed like a bizarre question to ask. I assumed they were from a wealthy background themselves and were trying to work out whether I was too. It transpired that they were from a background more like mine but found themself surrounded by privately educated people. They were in fact seeking out allies.

I was relatively older when I became an environmentalist. Aged thirty, with a new baby, I found myself applying for a job at a workers' cooperative and environmental organisation in Mid Wales - the Centre for Alternative Technology. CAT - as it was known - was a mix of practical solutions to climate change and radical organising. It was full of engineers, builders, gardeners and biologists creating green sewage systems, straw bale and earth buildings, wind and solar systems. Over one hundred staff made decisions by consensus and experimented with a flat structure. It's a more hierarchical organisation now, but still runs one of the most radical Masters' programmes for sustainability in the United Kingdom (UK).

Poor and working-class people have more useful solutions for a just transition because they live and work closely with the systems that make society function on a daily basis, from unpaid care work to energy supply. We

The author's Dad and sister in the late 1970s

have up-close and personal knowledge of disabilities, of food supply chains, of transport systems, of health services. The solutions become about how society should be reorganised collectively to add things, build on and improve lives. The higher up the class system, the more individualised life becomes and the less connected to the functions of society, in my experience.

Lessons from History: Working-Class Environmental Justice

In 1823 the Mechanics Institute of Glasgow ran a competition. A gold medal (worth £5) for the best proposal for protecting the local population from the noxious air pollution that came from the process of turning coal into gas.[1] In the 1820s the UK's coal gas network was rapidly expanding. Demand for gas - for lighting and cooking - meant vast, polluting coal gasification plants sprang up in the UK's cities. The coal gas plants provided work for working class communities where they were built. But they were also a source of toxic pollution.

The UK's Mechanics Institutes were a huge part of industrial working-class life in the 1800s. They are now a sadly neglected part of our history with incredible relevance to the energy transition we are about to go through. They were interested in the education of working-class people in polluted, industrial communities. But their mostly working-class members were also interested in finding solutions to many of the social and environmental problems that industrialization was creating. The Mechanics' Institute was part of a larger movement of worker-led education in industrial Britain. The first Mechanics' Institute was attended by 452 working men in its first month and within ten years had spread from Scotland to all over the world.[2] The Welsh Miners' Libraries were filled with adult education classes where workers read Marx alongside Jane Eyre. The Tredegar Workmen's Institute circulated 100,000 books a year. According to Jonathan Rose, author of *The Intellectual Life of the Working Classes*, the historic Libraries in South Wales are rivalled only by the Social Democratic Libraries of Wilhelmine Germany or the Jewish workers' libraries of interwar Poland.[3]

I've heard middle class environmentalists often talk about working-class people as if they're outside of the just transition movement - but history shows that working class people have always been at the forefront of justice movements that combine health, social care and environmental concerns, as a collective response. The framework of the National Health Service (NHS) was born from the mutual aid societies in the Valleys. Chartist uprisings and labour organising all paved the way to collective methods of social care. When I talked to working-class environmentalists in the Valleys today, they can clearly see the direct links between preservation of nature, food provision, clean air, climate change, health and social care and - importantly - the links between the industrialised landscapes around them and the conundrums that fossil fuels have created for working-class communities. None of this is new. In the working-class communities I grew up in, autodidact (self-taught) education and knowledge has a strong tradition and history, especially in the unionised, industrial and Irish diaspora settings that I'm part of.

Poster from Gloucester Iron Foundry, Emlyn Works, where the author's dad worked/Grace's guide to British Industrial History

Misguided Compliments: Navigating Class in the Climate Movement

For reasons too complex to explain, I once explained my childhood, background and class history to the chief executive of an environmental charity which we'll leave unnamed. I explained how aspects of poverty in my childhood had left lasting scars across the next generation - financially, socially and health wise. I should add that he requested this. I didn't foist it upon him. When I finished, he pondered for a second and told me: "But I'd never have guessed - you've assimilated so well!". I wasn't offended. It was funny and we had a good conversation about class stereotypes and how hard it is for middle class people to recognise the working-class people who already work alongside them.

A big problem is that wealthier and middle class people in NGOs can't recognise the working-class people around them. I've had many conversations with middle class people who can't quite grasp that people they work alongside might also be the people who understand how intergenerational poverty lingers, traps people and harms communities - that they could learn from these colleagues. They miss the parts of a just transition that includes the web of dependencies on certain industries, or the connections between social care and unpaid labour that hold communities together. Their working-class colleagues could help make those connections.

While the miner or foundry worker - like my dad - are obvious examples of 'workers' in need of a just transition, other members of the working class in and around industrialised communities tend to be overlooked: disabled people, unpaid carers, single parents claiming benefits, unemployed people - who are all part of the working class, are often sidelined or ignored in discussions around just transitions. The difficult lives, the contradictory working-class lives, are often overlooked in the just transition discourse, but these are the roles that are integral to how we organise a society that transitions from a capitalist model of work and leisure.

The poorer sections of the working class are usually spending a disproportionate amount of their lives picking up the pieces where health, social and housing services have failed. Working-class people have more frequent difficulties

to deal with and have to solve them on a shoestring - or worse, just can't solve them at all resulting in devastating outcomes. When you've experienced this, it becomes much clearer how to adjust workplaces, educational spaces, communities and institutions to support people. This is why taking the lead from working-class people on these issues is an essential exercise, not just social justice window dressing. It's why the work on just transitions should start from within environmental NGOs by utilising the hidden class knowledge that already exists. And as with all justice movements, once we create spaces that support the poorest, the lower classes, the people with disabilities, we will have created a society that ultimately benefits everyone.•

Tanya Rideout (Formerly Tanya Hawkes) is a historian and writer who grew up in a working-class family profoundly affected by disability and deindustrialisation in the 1980s. Witnessing firsthand the lasting impacts of foundry closures on her community, she spent a decade working in care services before focusing on the environmentalism of poor and working-class people. Tanya advocates for a just transition led by these communities, emphasising collective organising and mutual aid as essential tools for addressing climate change and social justice.

Writing: https://tanyahawkes.substack.com/

1 Gardner, John (2021) Gaslight. In: *Mechanics' Institutes Worldwide* 2021, Edinburgh, UK.

2 Anon, (n.d.). *Mechanics Institutes*. Available at: https://mechanicsinstitutes.org/.

3 Rose, J. (2010). *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*. New Haven ; London: Yale University Press.

Image: Patrn

THE BITTER FRUIT OF EXPLOITATION

Kevin Picado

The placid and tranquil valley of Talamanca trembled at the passage of the hounds spurred on by the Yankees, who did not come in search of the legendary Tisingal. No. They wanted land and beast-men to work it [...] Were they looking for fantastic emeralds? No. They aimed to transform the juice of the land into bananas and cocoa, which they would then exchange for legitimate gold in foreign markets [...] Defeated at last, [the Indigenous population] retreated up the river and went to hide their sorrow in the heart of the mountains. And there, the hounds pursued them, managing to drag many wretched souls back by force or with the bait of liquor. The Fruit Company needed slaves for its new plantations!

The locomotive arrived and took out millions upon millions of fruits for the gringos. And while in the capital of the Republic the idiotic creoles applauded the "civilizing" work of the United, in Talamanca, the liquor flowed, as did the sweat and blood.

-Mamita Yunai, Carlos Luis Fallas.

On May 4th, 2023 Santos Francisco, a worker on a banana plantation owned by the American food production and distribution company Del Monte, collapsed and died after hours of pleading with his supervisors for medical attention. His lifeless body lay sprawled on the ground for hours, covered with a blanket by the bosses who then ordered the remaining workers to resume their tasks. A few months earlier, in March, another worker had collapsed and died of cardiac arrest.

In the same year, dozens of workers accused the Standard Fruit Company of harming around 30 workers and their families through the negligent use of the toxic chemical Movento OD 15. Later, in November, the Indigenous Ngäbe people reported their complete lack of access to potable water due to contamination from nearby banana plantations. They noted the deaths of 23-years-old Abdiel Ábrego from cancer caused by exposure to dangerous agrochemicals, and of 54-years-old Ignacio Medina, whose body was found on the plantation but whose exact cause of death was not disclosed to his family. No one was held accountable for these and many other crimes.

Costa Rica is often hailed for its eco-friendly reputation and the laid-back "pura vida" lifestyle it embodies. However, lurking beneath this picturesque façade is a long history of labor exploitation and environmental destruction. Despite their claims of upholding human rights, labor regulations, and environmental

protection, multinational companies have been repeatedly exposed for their involvement in forced labor, exploitation, and unsafe working conditions. These practices have led to severe health problems for the workers and nearby communities, as well as significant environmental damage.

This gap between the country's professed values and the harsh realities experienced by workers and the environment underscores the limitations of current sustainability approaches. The banana and pineapple industries stand out as glaring examples of this.

The banana industry's origins trace back to Minor C. Keith's introduction of the Gros Michel variety in the late 19th century. This move attracted numerous national producers and American investors to engage in plantations along the Atlantic coast, which quickly became the stage for Costa Rica's first banana industry. The first exports to the USA occurred in February 1880 from the port of Limón. At the time, the government believed bananas could generate wealth in Costa Rica, leading to favorable tax advantages for the sector.

The United Fruit Company (UFCO), known to locals at the time as *La Yunai* and later rebranded as Chiquita Brands International, played a dominant role, controlling the majority of banana exports to the United States and Europe. This growth relied heavily on exploiting a migrant and Indigenous workforce subjected to harsh conditions, low pay, and harmful chemicals, often met with violent suppression when attempting to unionize.

Due to the inhumane treatment of workers, the atrocities committed by the American company, the relentless weather conditions and diseases—many of them fatal, the banana sector was shaken by several strikes.The first to rise up against labor exploitation and dismal living conditions were Italian workers building a railway intended to transport future banana production to the Atlantic coast for export.

In 1921 it was the Limón Workers Federation that led the first banana strike, but it was not until 1934 that thousands of workers from UFCO plantations decided to halt production. Thousands of workers rose up, demanding, among other things, eight-hour workdays, overtime pay, and payment in cash instead of coupons (it is worth noting that a similar set of demands was presented to the UFCO in Colombia six years earlier; during that strike, the National Army killed 2,000 workers). After nearly a month of striking, the plantation owners accepted the workers' demands. However, once the workers returned to their jobs, the American company reneged on the agreement and launched a repressive offensive.

Faced with the company's backlash, many workers had to go into hiding, foreigners were expelled from the country, and a large group declared another strike. Eventually, both sides reached agreements. Workers achieved some key improvements, such as a cash minimum wage, employer-funded housing sanitation, and first-aid stations with antivenom on each estate. However, they had to compromise on several major demands, including an eight-hour workday, overtime pay, and adequate health services.

Ninety years have passed, yet the exploitation and disregard for fundamental rights remain largely unchanged. Though some progress has been made, workers still suffer from exploitation, rights violations, and repression. Today's agribusinesses in Costa Rica are merely the metamorphosis of a leech, the United Fruit Company, now in a different-colored cocoon but with the same practices.

In the pineapple industry, which gained momentum in the late 20th century, similar patterns of labor exploitation emerged. As multinational companies established vast plantations to meet global demand, especially from the United States, conditions for workers started mirroring those in the banana industry. Pineapple workers often endure long

'A just transition requires a systemic change that prioritizes the rights, health, and livelihoods of workers, ensuring the benefits of sustainability reach everyone.'

hours with minimal breaks, performing physically demanding tasks under the tropical sun. Exposure to toxic agrochemicals remains a significant issue, with many workers handling pesticides and herbicides without adequate protective gear, leading to serious health problems including chemical burns, respiratory issues, and long-term illnesses. The housing provided to pineapple workers is typically inadequate, characterized by overcrowding and poor sanitation, which exacerbates health risks.

Efforts to unionize and improve working conditions in the pineapple industry face significant resistance from the powerful companies. Anyone attempting to organize will often encounter threats, discrimination, and job insecurity. Investigations into the pineapple industry such as those conducted by Oxfam Germany[1], have highlighted numerous labor violations, including unpaid overtime, lack of access to social security benefits, poor working conditions and exploitation of migrant labor. The interviewed workers reveal as much:

"I spent one month at a hospital due to poisoning. When I returned back to work, I had to work again with pesticides and without protective clothing."
- Former worker at Agrícola Agromonte

"We are the slaves of the pineapple industry. They do whatever they want with us. They fire us just to hire us again under much worse conditions."
- Worker at Finca Once

"We cannot scientifically prove that the problems are caused by agrochemicals. We do know, however, that people have been diagnosed with cancer, that they have skin problems, that children have impaired eyesight, that children under ten have stomach problems."
- Resident near a Del Monte plantation

The environmental toll of these industries is also palpable, with widespread soil degradation, water contamination, and deforestation caused by agrochemical use. Both banana and pineapple cultivation — collectively covering more than 90,000 hectares of land, have led to the loss of local ecosystems and damaged surrounding populations, with more than 6800 hectares of forest lost just to pineapple expansion from 2000 to 2019.

Despite these issues both industries continue to have strong ties to the American market, with most of their produce exported there. The UFCO's historical dominance in the banana trade catered to American demand, while modern pineapple and banana production primarily serves North American and European markets, with Costa Rican pineapples accounting for 86% and 85% of the market share, respectively.

Labor exploitation in these and related industries is not just a human rights and social justice issue; it also intersects significantly with the challenges of a just transition. As these industries strive to align with more sustainable practices, exploitation persists, posing critical barriers to a truly sustainable and equitable transition. A just transition involves not only shifting to environmentally sustainable agricultural practices, but also ensuring that workers are treated fairly and receive an equitable share of economic benefits. However, current green initiatives often overlook workers' rights, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation.

For instance, although the Payment for Environmental Services (PES) program in Costa Rica — a national payment scheme for carbon storage, hydrological services, and the protection of biodiversity and landscapes, has promoted reforestation and conservation, it has not significantly improved the socioeconomic conditions of the workers, who often remain in the same precarious position.

Moreover, the Global North's demand for cheap products puts constant pressure on producers to keep costs low. Supermarket chains in Europe and the United States wield significant market power, allowing them to dictate prices and terms to suppliers. This includes lowering import prices, rejecting goods without reason, and making retrospective demands for discounts. These price reductions often do not correspond with decreased retailer margins, indicating that the cost-cutting pressure is passed down the supply chain at the expense of workers' wages and working conditions.

These same chains will then claim to support sustainable practices, often through certifications like the Rainforest Alliance. But as research done by organizations like Oxfam[2], Corporate Accountability Lab[3], Repórter Brasil[4], and the Thomson Reuters Foundation[5] has found time and time again, these certifications fall short of addressing critical labor and environmental issues. While these labels suggest compliance with environmental and social standards, the reality is anything but. In Costa Rica workers often do not participate in the audits, and the certifications do not effectively prevent pesticide contamination or enforce fair labor practices.

These issues are often intentionally ignored because of the agribusiness sector's widely promoted contributions to the national economy. However, these contributions are frequently exaggerated. While these industries do add to GDP and export revenues, the local economic benefits are minimal. Transnational corporations repatriate the majority of profits to their home countries, leaving local economies with little gain. This situation is exacerbated by the collaboration between the Costa Rican government and the private sector, which work together to sustain an environment conducive to foreign investment at the expense of local workers and communities, a situation reminiscent of the early days of the banana industry.

This dynamic is emblematic of Global North-South relations of domination. Wealthy countries and their corporations exploit the labor and resources of developing countries, maintaining economic structures that favor the Global North. In Costa Rica, this translates into a reliance on monoculture exports like pineapples and bananas, which are subject to the volatile demands of international markets. The environmental degradation and social inequities resulting from this model are then ignored in favor of economic indicators that do not capture the full cost borne by local populations.

A just transition requires a systemic change that prioritizes the rights, health, and livelihoods of workers, ensuring the benefits of sustainability reach everyone. This shift must be actively managed by governments, international institutions, businesses, and workers — not left solely to market forces, which often prioritize profits over people. Together, these groups must collaborate to provide the necessary financial, technological, and policy support to achieve climate goals while advancing

social inclusion and economic justice. For industries deeply embedded in exploitative practices, such as agribusinesses, this transformation is critical. Success will be measured not only by environmental outcomes but also by the creation of decent work, the eradication of poverty, and the protection of people and the planet.•

1 Oxfam Germany. (2016). *Sweet Fruit, Bitter Truth*.

2 Oxfam. (2018). T*he Plight of Pineapple and Banana Workers in Retail Supply Chains: Continuing evidence of rights violations in Costa Rica and Ecuador.*

3 Brudney, A. (2021). *CAL finds evidence of child labor on Rainforest Alliance certified farms. Corporate Accountability Lab*. Available at: https://corpaccountabilitylab.org/calblog/2021/10/25/cal-finds-evidence-of-child-labor-on-rainforest-alliance-certified-farms

4 Campos, A., & Hofmeister, N. (2023). "Slave labour risk leads certifier to impose more rigour on Brazilian farms". *Repórter Brasil*. Available at: https://reporterbrasil.org.br/2023/08/slave-labour-risk-leads-certifier-to-impose-more-rigour-on-brazilian-farms/

5 Fuller, L. (2019). Tea label giants vow probe after Sri Lanka labour abuse expose. Thomson Reuters Foundation. Available at: https://news.trust.org/item/20190327004859-frjnm

THE FILM OF OUR TIMES

Working-Class Cinema for a Just Transition Worldwide

Vogysta & Fabian

Climate breakdown has always been in a global state of emergency since the 1980s[1], so it is not surprising – but still kind of is – that there is a global reminder of the climate crisis, highlighting we have entered the 'less than 5 years left' phase, to avert the irreversible damages of earth temperature rising past 1.5°C as displayed by the Climate Clock on the last week of July 2024.

Climate Political Communication

In order for the majority to support and/or push a just transition, one of the key challenges of this crisis is conveying the complex issue of climate and ecological breakdown to the masses, particularly based on the contexts of each country – all over the world. Balancing knowledge between natural and social sciences, various methods to communicate it have been designed. One notable method is storytelling, as humans have a story bias,[i] and neuroscience disciplines have numerous studies of the impactful effects of stories.[ii]

A literature scholar who is also an expert in climate communication, Dr. Genevieve Guenther, has developed an effective yet super simple method to talk to anyone who is unaware and uninformed about these crises. Her storytelling method is directed to human behavioural measures. In her chapter from *Standing up for a Sustainable World*, she wrote the main formula:

"Communicators should help voters feel a complex of three specific emotions: fear of climate breakdown, outrage that powerful actors are blocking the passage of effective climate policy, and desire for a transformed global economy. Fear motivates us to protect ourselves and the people we love; outrage empowers us to experience the climate crisis as a political problem with clear antagonists; and desire enables us to accept the costs of decarbonisation as greatly outweighed by the benefits of preserving the living world."[2]

Her method is political, as the climate and ecological crisis is a political crisis. If you are part of a political organisation, or an organised movement and you organise people, you are recommended to further Guenther's climate communication method with Fidel Castro's brief political education method: When people spoke to Castro there was invariably a process of political education. He would listen, talk, explain, and historicize to people.

You could use the methods when you are having a climate conversation with anyone, and it is still efficiently applicable even if you and the person, or the people you're speaking to have only

a short amount of time for discussion. Because talking about the state of climate and ecology could easily be forgotten and taxing, you also are recommended to have a resolute commitment to initiate the climate conversation in every chance you have, and to insert it lightly with what has been changing environmentally in your neighborhood and surrounding areas, such as with the district/county weather.

Cinema with a Clear Political Commitment

As we all understand, the climate crisis is a space of class struggle.[3] Global systemic change with a just transition framework is expected as a unison way of upholding equality and equity for the working-class (labourers and peasants), in times of the unfolding climate and ecological catastrophe. As we race against time, we still have a task to raise and organise the class struggle of our times.

We propose an updated tactic for those who plan to produce a just transition or a revolutionary film: mass climate communication tool for class struggle through the film language of storytelling, harnessing today's advanced and easily accessible audio-visual medium.[iii] This tactic draws heavily from the Third Cinema Manifesto of the revolutionary cinema movement in the 1960s–70s:

"This importance is to be found in the specific meaning of films as a form of communication and because of their particular characteristics, characteristics that allow them to draw audiences of different origins, many of them people who might not respond favourably to the announcement of a political speech. Films offer an effective pretext for gathering an audience, in addition to the ideological message they contain.

"The capacity for synthesis and the penetration of the film image, the possibilities offered by the living document, and naked reality, and the power of enlightenment of audiovisual means make the film far more effective than any other tool of communication. It is hardly necessary to point out that those films which achieve an intelligent use of the possibilities of the image, adequate dosage of concepts, language and structure that flow naturally from each theme, and counterpoints of audiovisual narration achieve effective results in the politicisation and mobilisation of cadres and even in work with the masses, where this is possible".[iv]

Filmmaker Hito Steyerl had given notable summaries of reasoning for working-class filmmakers to produce our own films: that it is absolutely fine if the audio-visual is 'poor' or not great as stated in Juan García Espinosa's Imperfect Cinema – cinema that strives to overcome the divisions of labour within class society; that it is absolutely a must if the audio-visual is 'didactic' as imparted in Dziga Vertov's Visual Bond – cinema that supposed to link the workers of the world with each other, that could not only inform or entertain, but also organise its viewers.[4]

As with collaboration between trade unions, revolutionaries, activists, and filmmakers to produce purposeful grassroots, revolutionary, and social justice films in the 20th century, we have to work to continue it with today's specific objective: working-class cinema for a just transition worldwide.

Planetary Crisis and Emergency as Our Visual Bonds of the 21st Century

For most Millennial and Gen Z climate activists, the 2022 film *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* has seemed to mirror and vision our fervour of current climate action. It portrays youth and working-class climate activists. Unfortunately, the recent popularity of the mainstream disaster movie *Twisters*, produced in 2024, failed to address the science of climate breakdown as the reason for the increased frequency of disastrous levels of tornadoes and hurricanes hitting the United States.

Sam Knights's essay about Solastalgia mentions David Wallace-Wells prediction of climate crisis in popular culture:

"David Wallace-Wells in his book The Uninhabitable Earth predicted that climate change would be entirely absent from popular culture until, suddenly, it could not be ignored any longer. He speculated that climate change would then turn into a 'meta-narrative', the background story to every film, every novel, every piece of art. It would, in other words, be normalised. A backdrop of disaster to everything we do."[v]

It has been starting to prevail on screens and gain popularity in movies such as *Beetlejuice Beetlejuice* (2024), *Les Femmes au balcon* (2024), *Flow* (2024), *Can I Get A Witness?* (2024) and *Rumours* (2024), in miniseries such as *Families Like Ours* (2024), and even – this one still counting – recieved mention in award-winning TV show such as *Succession* (2018–2023).

A (Rather) Prescriptive Lines of the Working-Class Cinema for a Just Transition Worldwide

We have to become wildly creative within greatly limited resources, yet there are still a number of particular lines we have to subscribe to, in order to realise our objectives. The following are:

1. Working-class cinema for a just transition worldwide has to respect the majority of the people, that is the working-class worldwide.

2. It has to have in mind the quality or the artistic of the story which strives to class consciousness and class struggle.

3. It has to put the working-class stories as the foundational subject.

4. It has to incorporate climate and ecological crises in the main narrative.

5. It has to be repeatedly scientific fact-checked and pay attention rigorously if the film contains climate, ecological, and other earth sciences. It is understandable and acceptable if you could only do research on your own. Another reliable way is to ask scientists to collaborate voluntarily in your films. As of 2024, there are more than 15,600 signatories from 165 countries for The World Scientists' Warning of a Climate Emergency paper. Contact some of them.

6. It can be fiction and nonfiction narrative films, it can be short-film and feature-film. It is encouraged in a fiction narrative because nonfiction narrative is susceptible to giving rise to tediousness. Pay attention and adjust cautiously to the prescriptive number 5, so it will not mislead or misinform when it comes to the knowledge of the sciences.

7. It cannot be an exploitative film, such as showing 'poverty porn' as like 'poverty tourism'.

8. For an effective just transition cinema that transforms people, it should incorporate climate political communication in the film structure, such as one that is written in this article.

9. Advanced audio-visual technology today such as smartphones, digital filmmaking equipment, free film courses, and the film/video software has democratised the production of films, therefore the working-class filmmakers could represent their own stories in the film language.

10. Popular mediums of audio-visual today, such as YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, and plenty of independent film websites have democratised the accessibility of audio-visual format for everyone.

11. Working class cinema for a just transition worldwide has to slough off the exclusivity and the elitism of filmmaking and the snobbiness of the film itself.

12. The films that are produced couldn't be put under capitalism rules, such as the privatisation and the profitability of the just transition cinema. It is cinema for the majority of the people worldwide who are running towards systemic change!•

[i] See: Dobelli, R. (2014). The Art of Thinking Clearly. London: Sceptre.

[ii] See: Zak, P.J. (2015). Why Inspiring Stories Make Us React: The Neuroscience of Narrative. Cerebrum: the Dana Forum on Brain Science.

[iii] We encourage you to read first, read alongside or after this article, Towards a Third Cinema—initiated and written by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, so you get the full grasp of the film movement.

[iv] See: Solanas, F. and Getino, G. (2021). Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World. Black Camera, 13(1).

[v] See: Sam Knights's essays on his A Fortnightly Thought at samknights@substack.com

1 Pester, P. (2021). "When did scientists first warn humanity about climate change?" *Live Science*. Available at: https://www.livescience.com/humans-first-warned-about-climate-change.

2 Guenther, G. (2020). 'Communicating the climate emergency: imagination, emotion, action', in Henry, C., Rockström, J. and Stern, N. (eds.) *Standing up for a Sustainable World: Voices of Change*. Edward Elgar Publishing

3 Heron, K. and Dean, J. (2020) Revolution or Ruin. *E-flux Journal*

4 Steyerl, H. (2009). In Defense of the Poor Image. *e-flux Journal*

Image: Pip Wilson

THE LAND OF MY MOTHERS

Towards a Truly Green Economy

Heledd Williams

For some years now, ethical and green consumerism has been the privilege of those who can afford it. From electric cars to insulating and putting solar panels on your home, sustainability costs a lot of money. Even growing your own fruit and vegetables often seems to be the preserve of those who live in stable, long-term accommodation with a decent sized garden. Organic and locally grown produce is also expensive.

Technology advances aimed at preserving our consumerist lifestyles come with equally questionable impacts. Minerals that are essential for solar panels and electric cars have a hefty human and environmental cost. We only need to look at the cobalt mines in Congo and lithium mines in South America to see that these technical 'solutions' may not be as green or ethical as we would like to think. Children as young as three are working down the mines in Congo and beaten, sexually abused and killed as part of the cobalt economy. Mining destroys the possibility of subsistence farming. Lithium mines pollute local ecosystems, disrupt and kill wildlife, and destroy indigenous communities' land and ways of life.

A green economy designed to satisfy Western convenience is simply a form of neo-colonialism. Instead of reducing consumption, we are following an extractive logic and using finite minerals in technology to avoid having to change the car-centric and media-saturated lifestyles we have grown accustomed to.

This is of course very profitable for those who gain power over the market economy that fuels this lifestyle. Furthermore, it feeds the narrative that those who cannot afford to change their consumption patterns are not doing their bit for the environment. In the perverse logic of green – or ethical consumerism, those on the lowest incomes are the scapegoats.

"The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house", said the activist and poet Audre Lorde. The paradox of green consumerism is that it tries to do just this. In Wales, where a third of children live in poverty, this model of a green economy is senseless.

What would a truly green economy for Welsh communities look like? On the surface, perhaps it would feel like we have gone back in time. My grandmother lived on a farm near the small village of Rhosygwalia. She grew vegetables and made butter and cheese from milk taken from cows on the farm. Nothing was wasted – foil was reused and cereal packets were cut up and used as note paper or cards.

Today my daughter, partner and I live in Cardiff, a far cry from this old way of life. However my partner's family are Kurdish,

'When communities are alive, the line between the home and the rest of the community becomes blurred. People share the things they need to live, spend more time communally and have the infrastructure to do so.'

and their home life presents parallels with my late grandparents'. When we visit their house there is usually homemade cheese, yogurt, butter, jam, food growing in the garden or window ledge and the most amazing dishes made from scratch; what feels like a rural way of life, in the middle of the city.

This is quite different from the home life of my friends with young families. Like most women in Wales they work outside the home. While accessing the workplace was once seen as liberation, it certainly does not feel that way when you consider that women get paid less, end up in thankless caretaking roles in the workforce and on top of this, still have to hold down the running the home and the carrying the mental load of the family in most cases. This imbalance is made clear by feminists such as bell hooks, who pointed to the limits of liberal feminism's focus on women's access to the worksphere, often at the cost of exploiting black and poorer women in domestic spaces. There is no time to make a meal from scratch, never mind growing food or making cheese. We are doing an unpaid 'second shift'.

For those without time or capacity to cook and clean, women who can afford it outsource this work to cleaners and takeaway workers – usually working class, poor and migrant people. Women who cannot afford this outsourcing end up needing to buy processed food or ready-made meals and are chronically stressed and tired, because poverty usually means being time-poor too.

I am not saying my partner's relatives or my friends have a more or less difficult life than one another. Both experience patriarchy in their everyday lives, as well as isolation and rigid gender roles from the pressures of working inside and outside the home. However, the work women do within the home to provide sustenance for their families and communities has been severely undervalued. This is not to say women should stop working and become housewives, but that everyone should see the value in 'housework' and this work should stop being gendered.

Feminist and ecofeminist thinkers such as Maria Mies, Vanadana Shiva, Silvia Federici and Abdullah Ocalan have explored the patriarchal devaluation and invisibilizing of the gendered labour of housework and care work in detail. As early as the 1970's, Silvia Federici suggested that if women's work in the home was remunerated, it would become more visible and give women a method to fight for their rights as workers.

Influenced by ecofeminist thinker Maria Mies, Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan praises a precapitalist home economy led by women and argues turning back to this might have a lesser detrimental environmental impact.

When communities are alive, the line between the home and the rest of the community becomes blurred. People share the things they need to live, spend more time communally and have the infrastructure to do so.

From austerity policies shutting down community centres and libraries, to institutions like chapels that were used for community activity being sold off, the infrastructure that we have to sustain collective ways of organising ourselves has greatly diminished since the economic crash of 2008, though this was just an acceleration of a trend already well underway.

Yet we see attempts to rekindle collective social life in the homes and communities of new migrant populations, like my partner's family and, in a different way, in community gardens. In Cardiff alone, I am aware of projects such as Railway Gardens in Splott and Global Gardens on Whitchurch Road. The Railway Gardens have a lending library of 'things'; both gardens host outdoor play sessions for families; there are numerous skill-shares on growing food and sustainability. These projects do not create dozens of jobs or produce wealth but they build community, in the sense that they help make the invisible economy of maintaining day to day life easier and more pleasant. Historically in the United Kingdom, squatters and established social centres run by anarchists and radicals have attempted similar sorts of community building projects with free shops, gardens and libraries.

There have been many such projects in Cardiff, Swansea and Newport over the years, from Cwtsh in Swansea to the Guilford Peasants in Cardiff and the Newport Action Centre in Newport. I am most familiar with the squats in Cardiff, where I have lived. There have been squats in Splott, Adamsdown, the City Centre, Canton and several in Roath, one of them hosting an Anarchist Bookfair, all of which focused on creating community spaces.

These are not without their pitfalls: I have known of land projects in areas where the vast majority of people speak Welsh, but the projects are managed by people that fail to see the importance of the Welsh language and thus alienate the local communities. In one example I encountered, the only Welsh speaking local person to engage with the project was a friend that had to do manual labour for the land project as part of their court-ordered community service, with a stark class and language divide not conducive to building community. Those coming into the area seeking a rural idyll were the ones that predominantly benefited. Reducing consumption is not just about changing how we consume, but using our imagination to revitalise our communities. This is the key to a green economy.

Federici summarises the power of shifting our economy by focusing on the way in which we live and maintain everyday social relationships in her essay on community gardens:

"By pooling our resources, by reclaiming land and waters, and turning them into a common, we could begin to de-link our reproduction from the commodity flows that through the world market are responsible for the dispossession of so many people in other parts of the world."

Projects like community gardens are not a silver bullet, but initiatives to address climate change need to be rooted in communities. They need to be led and informed by the principles of a home economy I have described, and animated by a wish to rekindle a more green and communal way of life. Women, and women of colour in particular, have historically been at the centre of this home economy, but this work needs to be de-gendered and cut through oppressive racial and class inequalities.

A lot more needs to happen than the formation of community gardens to combat climate change. Yet projects like that of democratic confederalism – a form of democratic, self organisation addressing structural oppression that is being practised right now in parts of Kurdistan, offer a blueprint for creating the change we want to see in the world, even while these destructive systems operate around us.

We are facing the crisis of our generation that will define how life will be on this planet for all that come after us. Radical alternatives such as anarchism, eco-feminist thought and democratic confederalism demand of us to reconsider everything that we take for granted. Technological fixes will only temporarily duct-tape our problems and widen inequality. Transforming social relationships and care has the potential to build community and give us the collective power to reshape our lives and environment. In this monumental effort to create green economies, the revolution starts at home.•

This article was first published by the Institute of Welsh Affairs (https://www.iwa.wales/agenda/2023/05/green-economy-land-of-my-mothers-bell-hooks-feminist-welsh-agenda/)

BUILDING A FUTURE

Isaac Bell Holmström

Transition is loss, leaving behind the old world, or at least parts of it. When it comes to plastic or paper straws, disposable or metal water bottles, the change is simple, the break between past and future is easy to jump. But real transition, addressing climate change and freeing ourselves from capitalist exploitation, means dealing with the very terrain we live within; the built environment, our own homes.

Anyone will tell you the future is in construction, the centralised production of houses, in the fields of new builds. But with only six private companies - Taylor Wimpey, Persimmon, Barratt Redrow, Vistry, Bellway, and Berkeley – dominating the construction of the new Britain, the future they are building looks scarily familiar. Mortgages, debt, car-oriented suburbs dependent on chain supermarkets. What transition are we seeing other than a middle-class lifestyle stamped onto our cities for us to fit into?

Capitalism with an environmental face – demolishing the old world to build a carbon-neutral one in its place. How much of our cities would be found in an environmentally sustainable future? Historic pre-war houses fitted with solar panels are already commonplace in some areas, but will the housing estate survive? Demolition and construction are not neutral processes - the tearing up of a family home and the destruction of childhood memories cannot be talked about without a consideration of the human impact, and it is this impact that is so rarely discussed in the case of housing transition.

The narrative of moving home – finally getting that first apartment and mortgage, is dominated by success, with victory. For a lucky few this is a matter of upgrading; of climbing the ladder. But when the energy performance of a high-rise block calls for the bulldozer, when council estates are left to rot until a developer proposes an eco-friendly office block in its place, the housing crisis reveals itself as a selective process, targeted to maximise the profits of construction and land speculation. In an industry dominated by these monopolies, the quality of new builds is dropping while profits rise. But how else can the demands of the housing market be met alongside the increasingly unlikely goal of meeting net zero by 2030?

Faced with a climate crisis, horrendous inequalities in living conditions and life opportunities, social distrust and disillusionment with politics, the dream of new fresh homes for all is a tempting one. But high construction and land costs mean high rents and mortgages,

and private companies are rarely the most generous distributors of social housing. National construction statistics are misleading – while the opening of new estates can be celebrated by the media, mass demolitions of homes often go unreported. In 2023 alone, the gap between demolition and construction in Britain reflected a net loss of 12,000 social housing units, with an ever-expanding supply of luxury apartments ready to step into the spaces left behind.

The government is putting all its eggs in the construction basket, imagining that the private market will solve the problems of overinvestment in luxury apartments and the neglect of social housing. Reform of the current green belt/ brownfield division of suitable land with a new 'grey belt' strategy, and even the removal of environmental protection laws are on the table to maximise short-term construction. Since the 1970's no government has managed to construct 300,000 homes a year, but what would that look like? Is it what we need? Increasing supply of housing will not bring prices down as long as British housing is seen across the world (of the elite) as an investment for speculation, a tradeable commodity to never set foot in. We are building assets for a corporate portfolio, not liveable homes for the most vulnerable.

Breaking new ground in construction is far from the only way to bring sustainable homes into use. Renovation and retrofitting of existing spaces, upgrading thermal insulation and heating systems, modifying buildings and re-opening the abandoned buildings of Britain's streets, is a growing movement that costs far less, and offers far more, than construction does. Significantly lower costs offer the most viable route to genuinely affordable homes for working class people, and the revival of otherwise abandoned neighbourhoods and buildings with rich social histories has significant implications for urban development and public space. Architect's Journal estimates that around 30-50% of carbon emissions in the lifetime of a building are from its

initial construction, emphasising that "the greenest building is the one already built." Moving away from capital-intensive construction and towards more sensitive and humane forms of renovation, especially those that do not require rehousing of the current residents, shows serious potential for a just future.

Powerful work is being undertaken in this field: community-led retrofit by Action on Empty Homes, combatting the demolition of council estates by Architects for Social Housing, and renovating derelict apartments as social homes by Habitat for Humanity Great Britain. But despite these examples, the dominance of the private sector in Britain's housing market, and its stubbornness to extract all that it can, result in resisting the more radical approaches to housing that renovation and retrofit presents. Tax breaks for new build construction, but not for renovation and retrofit show the clear preference for high-capital turnover of material. Even when private developers make use of the approach, a grim and persistent demand for profit can be found, most notably in Permitted Development Rights (PDR), a recent development in planning regulations that reflects the inhumanity in the system. Following deregulation of specific processes, PDR states that minor modifications to buildings that do not affect the external space, and the relationship between the building and its environment, can be carried out without planning permission, oversight or regulation. This dangerous development has led to private developers seizing cheap abandoned office blocks, often in the middle of industrial estates, surrounded by carparks, isolated and unfriendly, only to pressure vulnerable demographics into accepting them as their only chance for council housing.

Low quality homes – both old and new, weigh on their inhabitants for a lifetime. Damp, mould, dust, infestations, and the stress and trauma that come from such precarity so close to home cannot be seriously managed without coherent and sensitive planning. The public health angle is the typical approach to justify housing renovation, from the overcrowding of the pre-war slums, to modern retrofit projects across the North of England. But endless evictions, demolitions, regeneration developments and poor-quality construction continues, and the working class is always suffering from this. Construction is not the answer, PDR is not the answer – the dependence on the private sector is not the solution to the housing crisis.

For a future with guaranteed support for social housing, low carbon emissions and sustainable spaces without the bulldozing of working-class cultural heritage (those spaces rarely valued by civic planners, but so important to low-income communities), a just transition must come in the form of long-term urban design, the re-use of spaces under public control. Community asset transferi and community ownership are rarely made use of in residential buildings, but the potential for residents to take control of their tower block, their street, to pool resources and collectively retrofit their spaces, represent a decentralised and community-driven transition that is desperately missing from discussions of the future. When ownership, governance, and planning are kept within the community, and residents come trained in practical skills building local wealth and capacity, a real community resilience can be found.

Demolition and mass construction must be critically examined on a case-by-case basis, prioritising long-term wellbeing and costs to the community. A deregulated planning system dominated by private speculation will not provide for the most vulnerable in our society. We can do it ourselves. •

[i] A community asset transfer is a procedure that allows a community to take on the ownership or management of publicly owned buildings or land, for the purposes of promoting environmental, social and economic wellbeing.

FOUR KEY POINTS OF CONSIDERATION FOR (ACTUALLY) JUST TRANSITIONS

Adam Cogan

The concept of a "just transition" is somewhat hazy. Open to very different interpretations, to capture and co-optation. Realistically, the term is just a euphemism for revolution, as nothing short of the complete overhaul of the present system could result in any lasting form of real justice. Of course, the term "revolution" is also fraught—unpalatable (to some), equally unclear (to many), often invoked in jest as a telos, an end-stage like Armageddon, never to arrive in one's life, rather than describing the real, immediate movement that must ensue. In fairness, many "milder" articulations of a just transition, particularly in the original sense, offer serious programmes for achieving some semblance of worker justice. It's not my aim to discuss those programmes here, nor is it to formulate my own programme (I will spare you that, at least). Rather, I am interested in what I believe to be fundamental considerations that any articulation of a just transition, reformist or (preferably) revolutionary, must account for to be worthy of the name. I begin here with the thorniest topic:

1. The Question of Desire

Everything flows outward from desire. It permeates our every action; it is the motional force that directs our decisions to act in the world. A twisted conceptualisation of desire is everywhere in our dilapidated capitalist society, all but forcing our engagement: most obviously in advertising, in gamified online dating, in social media (which is increasingly just advertising disguised as the social), in "self-improvement" narratives, "hustle culture", and the various weird, wacky, or downright dangerous phenomena of the day, from trad wives to QAnon and incels. Desire is no less present in the political. The far right and alt-right in particular (whether consciously or not) have a particularly effective understanding of the role of desire in politics compared to the left, broadly speaking. Though their appeals to desire normally hinge on its (spectral) fulfilment or liberation for one group (e.g., white nationalists) and its corresponding suppression or negation in other groups (usually immigrants, non-whites, LGBTQ people).

Historically, the radical left mounted far more effective challenges to the fascist libido. However, in recent times our record (and here I speak only of the Western left) is not so good, and I believe this is in large part due to serious class analyses falling out of fashion and the concomitant atrophication of instrumental working class consciousness (and its replacement with class as mere identity; more on this later). As a result, contemporary left approaches to desire often see it ignored in favour of normative

or ethical principles that are offered up with an idealistic and righteous self-belief, partnered with well-intentioned appeals to more facts and evidence (as if eventually we will reach critical truth-mass and everyone will spontaneously change their ways).

I think any working class people who have engaged in the environmental movement will have an instinctual understanding of this. Moralising narratives of essential lifestyle changes and limitations abound, coming from people who have the time and resources to make those choices without them really being a sacrifice. Meanwhile, the true burden of these appeals, and the finger-wagging, falls on the embattled back of the world's working class, particularly that part of it situated in the Global South, who is told to make quantitative sacrifices without the hope of any qualitative change in conditions.

Herein lies the problem. Many members of the contemporary Western left, saturated as it is with the privileged, property-inheriting scions of executives, bankers, rentiers, and other miscellaneous beneficiaries of the present state of things, have an instinctive fear of working class desire that they are perhaps not even consciously aware of, but which is laid bare in their every action. This is why the general thrust of the politics sprouting from this bounteous soil relies so heavily on individual morality and self-discipline (or lack of, depending). It is the natural product of a bourgeois sensibility that walks hand in hand with the material conditions that gave life to it. And somewhere below the surface is the understanding that, were the global working classes to once again come together and articulate and liberate their desires, the system that privileges these people, reliant as it is on murder and plunder across much of the world, would be abolished.

It is imperative, therefore, to place desire at the heart of our politics. To contest and reclaim this terrain both from the right (whose success is in large part due to filling the vacuum left by an anti-libidinal leftism, hence their glee at subverting often hypocritical left-liberal conventions— see, e.g., the obsession with "wokeness" and the popularity of "anti-woke" gasbags) and from a rudderless, reactionary liberal left. A task not easily achieved precisely because this battle plays out on partisan turf—capitalist society. Mark Fisher was one of the most acute commentators on how capitalism, particularly post neoliberalism, is a giant machine for "libidinal engineering", a system that enables the large-scale formatting of desires, constraining them and feeding them back into the machine itself, fuelling accumulation while at the same time attacking the conditions for liberatory desires to break free.

All that is to say: when thinking about just transitions, it is imperative to develop an understanding of, and strategic approach to, the question of desire. Desires cannot be indefinitely controlled or repressed without authoritarian means (and even not then). Neither can we lean on vulgar/idealised notions of a working class that wants the same as now, just lots more of it. A hyper-(hypo-)fulfilment of desire as seen in "fully automated luxury communism" and other misguided techno-optimisms—the sci-fi promise of unlimited satisfaction; still reliant on the same old forms of production that got us into this mess in the first place.

Finally, crucially, desires should not be confused with interests. As Deleuze and Guattari argued, the failure of many revolutionary movements lies in this exact confusion. For them, "one makes revolution out of desire, not duty". Whether revolutionary or reformist transition, the point stands—box ticking exercises backed by data and moralism or the formation of robust, technocratic umbrella programmes (GND, anyone?) will not alone suffice. The excavation and development of the latent desires for the new and the different—the post-capitalist—is key.

These desires are, and must be, qualitatively different—after all, they desire and can ultimately only flourish in a qualitatively different society. Neither more nor less, but—and here a version of the old adage repurposed by the degrowth

economist Jason Hickel works well—less as more. It's not about having less, i.e., another academic telling us to be austere and disciplined. It's about transforming the way we organise production, i.e. producing less yet having more, which is the way to land in the gap between real physical limits and the artificial scarcity on which capitalism relies, and to finally realise the real (but not merely material) abundance available to us.

The question of desire, however, is moot when not considered in relation to some other (more briefly iterated) key aspects.

2. Changing Work

Work, particularly work as production, is usually one of the central points of address in just transition frameworks—naturally, being originally an outgrowth of the trade union movement. Again, the aim here is not to prescribe ideas for more solar panels and worker co-ops and so on. I am more interested in the organisation of work itself. Jason Read puts it in simple terms in his book *The Double Shift: Spinoza and Marx on the Politics of Work*: "Not only does work shape the world, it ultimately shapes us as well".

Clearly, the way we organise work has economic, social, and political implications. We spend much of our lives in the workplace—often miserable in our job when we have one, desperately needing one when we don't. To many of us, work appears as a painful fact of life, something to be endured, rather than the natural expression of our creative capacities as human beings. Work becomes an ideology unto itself, with an ethics that, to borrow again from Read, defines "individuals as worthy of recognition insofar as they participate in the productive process". Nonetheless, as workers in the present system, we are completely interchangeable, largely expendable (particularly in the Global South). We have virtually no say in the organisation of the work process, subjected only to simple exhortations to be "productive", to create value for another, the fruits of our labour not our own.

The difficult contradiction is that work both provides us with a semblance of liberation—the means to live, to care for our loved ones, to occasionally buy nice things or go on holidays (though less and less these days), and is the source of our subjugation, the sale of a part of ourselves each day, a submission to a life spent hitting targets set by someone else. The ideology of work structures our reality and our imagination, and therefore our desires, which become relegated to desires for more pay, a promotion, recognition, or simply the chance to clock off early on a Friday. We struggle to imagine truly different ways of working, of organising work. This is all a result of how, under capitalism, social relations and modes of labour have over time been set up in ways that reflect the demands of capital—namely, the accumulation of profit.

As the way we organise work structures so much of our lives—including our thoughts, dreams, and desires—it becomes apparent that any successful just transition must work through these tensions. Simply creating green jobs, or jobs-for-all schemes, or universal basic incomes, will ultimately amount to very little if we continue organising work in the same way. Without re-directing work, particularly production, away from the goal of capital accumulation, how can we overcome the destruction and exploitation played out every day across the world? And if, by some miracle, we do manage that, how can we sustain these changes that lie firmly on old foundations, old ways of thinking, imagining, and desiring?

3. Social Reproduction

Here, a brief but vital point is necessary. The above account addressed work, but admittedly mainly through the lens of production. Of course, there is another kind of work, that which basically upholds the entire shuddering edifice of our society by ensuring that workers continue to be reproduced—namely, social reproduction. This kind of work

'Right-wing populist politicians (though by no means only they do this) have mastered the art of manipulating and weaponising cultural conceptions of class.'

has been, and continues to be, primarily carried out by working class women, particularly women of colour. Here oppression has a dual character, as Lise Vogel writes: "In subordinate classes… female oppression… derives from women's involvement in processes that renew direct producers, as well as their involvement in production".

This is the necessary feature of a society in which the majority of people are divorced from their own means of subsistence and are forced instead to sell their labour for a living. There is a corresponding need for a yet more subordinated class of people who can do the largely un- or ill-paid work of producing and caring for workers. Capitalism integrates these two spheres, and so changes in one "side" will inevitably affect the other. Indeed, there is a tension here in that (particularly neoliberal) capitalism both requires the reproduction of workers to perpetuate accumulation but nevertheless must undercut and oppress those organic systems of worker solidarity and care to ensure our vulnerability, to ensure we actually need to sell our labour. It is, therefore, ultimately the capitalist mode of production that turns this form of oppression into an institutional necessity.

In light of the previous section, this bears important implications for a just transition. In fact, it reinforces the point already made—that ultimately there can be no justice without re-organising work and production. Superficial changes will still result in gendered divisions of labour, in the oppression of women and other subordinate groups, and in the exploitation of innumerable hours of free labour, precisely because that will still be required to maintain the integrity of the economy and society. In effect, considering just transitions through the lens of production without considering social reproduction is a dead end. Likewise, speaking of feminist just transitions without considering production is unlikely to yield truly liberatory results. Of course, it goes without saying that desire underpins this—in our present society, whose desires usually take priority and why?

4. Class Consciousness and the Agent of Transition

When speaking of a just transition, implicit is the notion that there must be some group of people who will enact that transition. I would assume that the majority of Lumpen readers share the same conclusion on this matter—that this group of people is the working class. That the working class, rather than the rich and their legions of well-paid stooges, must be the agent of change, the architect and driving force of a meaningfully just transition. So far,

(hopefully) so good. A problem arises when speaking of exactly how to articulate this agent.

Class is not an identity. It can be tempting to fall into the trap of identifying certain behaviours, mannerisms, ways of thinking, etc., as elements of a "working class culture", cultural signifiers often relied on to map out social relations in the everyday. Such a culture does exist, broadly speaking. And this culture does manifest in certain recognisable ways in the real world. However, this is the product of a very specific material relationship we have as working class people with the world we live in. Viewing class as a static cultural–identitarian expression, as a collection of accents, mannerisms, dispositions, and so on, has incredibly sinister implications. It too-easily leads to idealised constructions, the formation of arbitrarily defined insiders and outsiders.

And indeed, this is exactly what happens. Right-wing populist politicians (though by no means only they do this) have mastered the art of manipulating and weaponising cultural conceptions of class. They hoist up notions of traditional national values held by the working people of "our" country, values that are allegedly under threat by other working class people who look different, act different, talk different. Privately educated blusterers like Farage post videos drinking stout, prattling on about British values. Do I have more in common with someone like Farage because he is white and drinks beer down the pub just like me, or with the migrant who shares in my daily struggle for livelihood? Who do my desires for joy and abundance most align with? By foregrounding culture when talking about class and viewing it as an identity, we open the door to forces that would use class as a divider rather than the unifier it should be—as my friend and collaborator Sencer Odabaşı notes, it becomes very easy for that working class identity to be further qualified ("white", "British", etc.). Not to mention that, on a milder note, it reduces us, as working class people, to a set of stale stereotypes.

Having said this, it would be remiss to not acknowledge that class-based discrimination does manifest itself at the sociocultural level—although, naturally, this is the product of the material realities that generate class differences. Nevertheless, mannerisms, behaviours, etc., traditionally associated with working class people or communities continue to be used as markers to exclude working class people from places where they are perceived as not belonging (e.g., from many elite industries, such as the media). As such, it is completely understandable why many of us lean into what we perceive as vital parts of our identities, and justifiably seek to valorise (perhaps even weaponise) them as a form of resistance against oppression.

My point is simply that this cannot be the primary driver or sustaining factor of a working class politics. Not least because a collective class consciousness built on sociocultural factors rather than the material realities that underpin it makes it too easily co-optable by people who are not working class at all. People who affect a cultural "working classness" for political gain—a phenomenon Jay Firestone observed when he infiltrated the American far right, only to discover primarily well-off business owners and suburban professionals masquerading as fetishised, caricatured images of workers propagating racist narratives of a white working class.

This last section raises a critical line of thinking for just transitions, and it underpins all the preceding points on desire and work. Building our class as the agent of change requires a consciously materialist conception of class, one that is capable of seeing past all superficial lines of cultural–identitarian differentiation to build networks of combined struggle across the world, from North to South and South to North. Our class consciousness lies in "the primacy of the material over the idea" (Mark Fisher again). It is through recognising this that working class desires for a just transition can truly align. It is also in recognising this that we can transform work in ways that do not play into insular, nativist rhetorics. And it is also in recognising this that we can cut through the gendered and racialised lines of care work in the global economy to achieve universal liberation. •