

**CAPITALISM WILL NOT
SOLVE CLIMATE CRISIS**



Communist Party

It is a measure of the pressure on Western governments - not only from their own peoples but from the overwhelming majority of developing countries, and even from certain sectors of finance capital - that the COP26 summit has resulted in some international agreements so far.

In 2015, the Paris COP21 summit agreed the goal of keeping the global temperature rise to within 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. However, since then greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have grown steadily, with the main component, CO₂, now at about 40 billion tonnes annually and the global temperature rise currently around 1.2 degrees C. To stay under the 1.5°C limit, GHG emissions in 2030 will need to have fallen by 45% globally compared with 2010. However, a recent UN climate change report predicts a 16% rise instead, which would put the world on course to be 2.7 degrees C hotter by 2100, conditions which would accelerate extreme weather situations, hit food production and destroy unique eco-systems.

Global warming is also leading to a rise in sea levels, due to melting glaciers and polar ice-caps. Even with a 1.5 degrees C temperature increase, the sea level will be at least a further 30 cm higher on average by the end of this century, compared with the 20 cm rise from 1880 to 2120. This will not only affect low-lying island nations, but also industrialised countries such as Britain and the USA, where a high proportion of the population lives in low-lying coastal areas.

Inevitably, it will be workers and their families throughout the world who will suffer most from such outcomes. Some sectors of finance capital in the advanced capitalist countries have woken up to the financial risks of carrying on as normal, but they want to limit their own contribution to the solution.

Against this background, such COP26 agreements as those on methane emission limitation, stopping deforestation and supporting South Africa in a transition from reliance on coal as an energy source are welcome but tiny steps forward. In fact, the first two are set to be achieved only by 2030, without any interim targets or penalties for failing to hit them, allowing plenty of scope for built-in failure. Likewise, in Britain, Chancellor Sunak's plan to require big firms and financial institutions to submit plans for hitting climate change targets lacks any teeth to make the commitments mandatory.

Behind all the grandstanding from Western leaders at COP26, it remains a fact that developed countries are responsible for 79% of historical CO₂ emissions. Therefore, they should be making the biggest cuts now, while contributing massive resources to climate change mitigation in underdeveloped countries, and accelerating technology transfer to enable such countries to industrialise without contributing significantly to global warming.

Attacks at COP26 on China by US president Joe Biden and others ignore the fact that China is a developing country, whose CO₂ emissions per head are half those of the USA, and whose solar and wind power generations have over the last seven years outstripped those of the whole European Union.

Britain alone cannot solve the climate crisis. But it could set the pace – although that would involve massive changes. A 2020 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that keeping within the 1.5 degrees C limit means no more than 400 bn tonnes of CO₂ being added to the atmosphere from that point onwards. That is about 50 tonnes per person on the planet as a lifetime limit. In those terms, Britain's fair share will be used up by 2025. Steps need to be taken now for a massive reduction in emissions.

In November 2020, Boris Johnson outlined a 'Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution for 250,000 jobs'. It aimed to mobilise £12bn of government investment, and to stimulate over three times as much private-sector investment by 2030. The Ten Points included: offshore wind-power; 'low-carbon' hydrogen production; new large-scale nuclear reactors and a generation of small modular reactors; accelerating the transition to electric vehicles; making buildings more energy-efficient; and becoming a leader in carbon-capture technology.

It was a plan intended to provide opportunities for big business to make profits, including making the City of London the 'global centre of green finance'. There was no commitment, for example, to the domestic production of wind turbines, nor to elimination of fuel poverty. There was nothing about public transport except to invest in making it zero-emissions 'in the future'. There were no real steps to move aviation and maritime to reduced emissions, nor to move freight from road to rail. And the hydrogen production is to be 'low carbon' ('blue') - which means producing it from reacting natural gas or petroleum with steam and incompletely capturing the resulting carbon dioxide - instead of zero-carbon ('green') through the electrolysis of water with renewable electricity. It is no accident that the sponsors of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hydrogen include Shell, international energy company Equinor and gas network companies Cadent, SGN and NGN.

Nuclear power generation based on uranium is by no means carbon-neutral across the whole cycle of extraction, power station construction and operation, and waste storage and disposal. The British government's support for nuclear is largely about underpinning the supply chains and skills of firms that work on nuclear submarines. Meanwhile, Johnson's £12bn 'Green Industrial Revolution' budget over four years is dwarfed by extra spending of £24bn over the same period by the Ministry of Defence.

According to Scientists for Global Responsibility, Britain's annual military carbon footprint, including the arms industry and domestic and international supply chains, is 11 million tonnes CO₂ equivalent. For the US, it is 205 million tonnes. The world needs peace and investment to tackle the climate emergency rather than military expenditure and war. Workers in the energy-intensive and arms industries in Britain need a 'Just Transition' and the Green New Deal.

We salute those taking part in the many COP26 demonstrations throughout Britain this weekend. It is the Communist Party's view that Britain's contribution to solving the climate crisis has to start with energy saving. The most cost-effective measure by far would be massive government investment to reduce energy losses in domestic and industrial heating, insulating existing housing stock and requiring better designed new buildings.

Road transport's use of fossil fuels - and likely electricity in future - is inherently wasteful. Currently, we have the 'just in time' method in industry whereby components are manufactured remotely and transported as needed; and food for retail consumption is shipped long distances, so that the energy consumed exceeds by many times the energy content of the food itself. We need local production in industry and agriculture, planned coordination of deliveries to supermarkets and a major shift of freight from road to rail. Local component manufacture would also help us gain a more transparent view of our energy consumption, so that we can reduce our overall carbon footprint.

We also need to reduce the use of personal transport. Car ownership gives freedom but job insecurity has made it a necessity for many. We need massive investment in high-quality and frequent, public transport and we also need to move jobs to where people are, not the other way round. We also need greater social equality and a redistribution of wealth. The poorest in our society are the least able to afford energy conservation – they suffer the worst housing and the oldest and least efficient motor cars.

None of these changes can be achieved without planning, and in turn without public ownership, which must also extend to energy production.

A planned and balanced energy strategy also means energy justice for developing nations: access to adequate supplies at reasonable prices and technology transfer so that they are able to maximise their use of renewable energies. Thus, we need a change in international relations so that control over energy resources and minerals, such as lithium for batteries – essential for the electrical transition – is not dominated by powerful imperialist nations.

We campaign for such changes under capitalism, but also as part of a broader programme of left-wing policies as our programme Britain's Road to Socialism points out. Some changes can be achieved as a result of mass pressure, but monopoly capitalists will resist the most decisive measures as they will affect their ability to extract profits. Ultimately, that means that capitalism has to be challenged and overthrown.

Capitalism advances by increasing what Karl Marx called the metabolic rift with the environment. Socialism is essential for that rift to be overcome.



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