

Let's Compost Capitalism

Commentary Session 2 Defying the System

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Welcome and thanks for joining us in this second session of Let's Compost Capitalism

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In this section, you will gain a broad overview of the major oppositional movements and campaigns.

We'll take a look at

how their targets relate to the capitalist system,

how they challenge conventional politics,

and oppose mainstream economic theories and practice.

Whilst many of these campaigns are not explicitly anti-capitalist, they come up against powerful, barriers which block effective action.

These range from the growth-driven nature of capitalist production, misleading disinformation projects, heavy-handed, often lethal policing and, national political leaders and states in bed with the enemy.

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During the course we're setting out to show that...

even if these movements don't recognise capitalism

capitalism recognises them

Slide 4 (capitalism isn't working)

People are angry. Straining against the social bonds of a system careering over the precipice.

Many individuals, groups, and campaigns have had enough of poverty, precarious jobs, un-employment, racism, inequality, climate chaos, privatization, debt, powerlessness and, bad housing.

You name it!

Amongst the most visible campaigns are

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Black Lives Matter .. , Fridays for Future.... , Farmers in Indiaand Extinction Rebellion.

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According to this 2021 survey by the right wing, free market Institute of Economic Affairs ..

Amongst people aged between 16 and 34 in the UK,

67 per cent say they would like to live in a socialist economic system.

75 per cent agree with the assertion that climate change is a specifically capitalist problem.

78 per cent blame capitalism for Britain's housing crisis.

72 per cent support the (re-)nationalisation of various industries such as energy, water and the railways.

72 per cent believe that private sector involvement would put the NHS at risk.

75 per cent agree with the statement that 'socialism is a good idea, but it has failed in the past because it has been badly done'.

Slide 7 Protest around the world

This excellent study of protest around the world from 2006 to 2020 is 'open access'

So it is available to read or download free. It tells us that ...

the number of demonstrations has increased steadily since 2006 ...

protests have become more political.....

By 2020, there were more "omnibus protests" and, ...

the most prevalent demand of protesters around the world in the period was for.....

"real democracy."

It's not just protest, however.

There are many other organisations, movements and forces fighting in different ways to counteract the damaging effects of capitalist society.

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Not least are the scientists gathered under the IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change whose painstaking work has revealed the true extent of the mounting planetary emergency and traced its source to greenhouse gas emissions since the industrial revolution....

And the millions of health workers **on the front line** who've battled with Covid **and too often paid with their lives to help others.** ...

But, beyond offering advice and moral pressure, the World Health Organization is powerless to effect real change.

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Organisations like Oxfam and the People's Vaccine Alliance campaign against the governments of rich countries who conspire with pharmaceutical companies to prevent the production and distribution of Covid vaccines.....

They refuse to waive their ownership of the government-funded intellectual property and the profits that derive from it.

Sharing or not sharing the recipe is a question of life or death for millions.

Let's turn to Climate Action

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350.org was founded by Bill McKibben in 2007 with....

5,200 simultaneous demonstrations in 181 countries.

News channel CNN called it.... ... 'the most widespread day of political action in our planet's history'.

The campaign - aimed at world leaders is for a global treaty to reduce the atmospheric concentration of [carbon dioxide](#) (CO₂) to or below 350 parts per million, which scientists regard as a safe level.

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When the campaign was launched the concentration of CO₂ ...had already surpassed 385ppm.

When Greta Thunberg launched her campaign it was already 410ppm

Despite the slowdown in economic activity due to the Covid pandemic, it hasn't stopped increasing at an accelerating rate. By the end of 2021 it was heading towards 419ppm. The global average temperature rise has continued towards the 1.5 degree danger limit.

Although scientific consensus on the cause of the increasing concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere points directly at the use of fossil fuels, the profit to be gained from extraction and burning ensures that it not only continues, but that governments continue to subsidise it.

The consequences of allowing this to carry on are beyond imagination.

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Fridays for Future

Originating in 2018 with the action of a lone young girl, Greta Thunberg's school protest was rapidly picked up by millions of others and became a global movement for climate justice.

Their exposure of the 'blah,blah,blah' has been accompanied by warnings that young people would take matters into their own hands because world leaders have failed to act.

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One year later

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in September 2019

Over 7.6 million people across 185 countries participated in the 2019 Global Climate Strike making this mass event the largest climate mobilization in history.

Now let's take a look at Extinction Rebellion

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After three years of seeing his crops ruined by adverse weather, organic grower Roger Hallam... launched into a career of non-violent direct action including persuading Kings College London, where he was studying for a PhD, to divest from fossil fuels.

With activist Gail Bradbrook, Hallam became a co-founder of Extinction Rebellion in 2018.

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XR's three original aims – were :

1. Government must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency, working with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change.
2. Government must act now to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2025.
3. Government must create, and be led by the decisions of, a citizens' assembly on climate and ecological justice.

As you can see, all these aims are addressed to – and place faith in 'the government'.

XR is a loosely networked, decentralised, grassroots movement, with largely autonomous local groups. It has gained the support of many academics, health professionals, Christians and young people. Groups have been formed around the world.

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When XR got started in North America they quickly established links with the Black Lives Matter campaign for racial justice, adding a fourth comprehensive demand:

read this for yourself and see just how broad it is. (Wait a bit)

With its tactics of demands on government and non-violent action to raise awareness, XR's activists set out to provoke the state into action, aiming for numbers of arrests that will fill the jails, overwhelming the system.

And their call for a citizens' assembly on climate and ecological justice at least begins to raise the question of who rules?

But the state has responded with an increasingly heavy hand and a broad attack on democratic rights including a tightening of protest laws.

Now let's take a look at BlackLivesMatter itself

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Black Lives Matter was launched in 2013 as a response to the police killing of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his killer.

As social conditions have deteriorated in the United States a series of police killings of black people have triggered this new explosion of anger.

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In July 2020, the *New York Times* [reported](#) that Black Lives Matter may have become the largest movement in U.S. history.

Four polls suggested that between 15 and 26 million people in the United States participated in demonstrations.

There were [similar](#) protests [overseas](#).....

According to Douglas McAdam emeritus professor at Stanford University ...

"It looks, for all the world, like these protests are achieving what very few do: setting in motion a period of significant, sustained, and widespread social, political change,"

"We appear to be experiencing a social change tipping point — that is as rare in society as it is potentially consequential."

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Read this again and let it sink in for a moment

“It looks, for all the world, like these protests are achieving what very few do: setting in motion a period of significant, sustained, and widespread social, political change,”

“We appear to be experiencing a social change tipping point — that is as rare in society as it is potentially consequential.”

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In many countries, most notably the US and the UK, capitalism was founded on the profits of the trade in slaves, and the immense surplus extracted by working enslaved people to the point of exhaustion and death.

With its roots deep in the history of slavery, racism remains a key weapon of exploitation in capitalist society.

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This mural in Belfast shows something of the worldwide response to the killing of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin.

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In the UK several statues associated with slavery were pulled down, like the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol.

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But the Democrats under Biden have rejected BLM’s agenda, refusing the demand to defund the police.

The right wing in the shape of Trump’s racist Republican party leadership has ousted school leaders who teach or *authorise* teaching of the real history of the US.

Let’s now turn to the fight for wages, jobs and working conditions.

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Trades unions developed as the opposite to capitalist employers and the state in Britain during the Industrial Revolution.

Membership grew steadily from the 1930s until the end of the 1970s.

From then to the present day the neoliberal onslaught has greatly diminished the ability of workers to protect let alone improve wages, salaries or working conditions and membership fell away.

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On August 5, 1981, President Ronald Reagan fired 11,345 striking air traffic controllers,declared their union PATCO illegal, and barred them from ever working again for the federal government.

In Britain, in 1984-5 Margaret Thatchermobilised all the state's forces in near civil war conditions to defeat the miners' strike against pit closures.

Manufacturing, and the jobs that go with it, were transferred to low wage countries – China, Mexico and many others.

Membership and along with it the percentage of workers organised in trade unions shrank.

Wages in the rich countries stagnated or declined. Sick and holiday pay and pensions, hard fought for by trade union action over decades, were eliminated for the majority. Conditions for all workers deteriorated to inhumane levels highlighted by fires and factory collapses in the ... --- ---

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...Bangladesh garment industry.

Neoliberal governments and corporations conspired to return employment to the conditions of exploitation prevalent in the early days of capitalist society – child labour, long hours, no contracts, employment by the day, dangerous conditions.

Slide 27 Signs of recovery

2012 saw the founding of IndustriALL, a global union federation representing more than 50 million working people in more than 140 countries. According to their website:

IndustriALL challenges the power of multinational companies and negotiates with them on a global level.

IndustriALL fights for another model of globalization and a new economic and social model that puts people first, based on democracy and social justice.

The organization brings together affiliates of the former global union federations: International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF), International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM) and International Textiles Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF).

IndustriAll's action plan for 2021 -2025 declares

'Another world is possible and necessary. To achieve it, we need global union solidarity and cooperation for peace, democracy and rights.....

Our mission is to secure social justice, equality and equity, with a decent standard of living for all.'

A real weakness, however, is the failure to identify capitalism itself, particularly in its platform-based, globalised corporate form, as an opponent.

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2017 was a big year in Britain and elsewhere for union action on precarious work:

United Voices of the World and Justice for Workers successfully campaigned to bring all cleaners in-house at the LSE and SOAS universities.

A new union: the International Workers of Great Britain won the appeal made by Uber of an employment rights case. Ritzy cinema workers, unionised by BECTU, entered the second year of their strike for a living wage, and McDonalds workers with the Bakers Union went on strike in the UK for the first time in their history.

That autumn, precarious workers in a number of different unions marched across central London. Two marches, in September and November, were organised by the IWGB to highlight struggles against low wages, poor conditions and persistent exploitation of workers.

These conditions had characterised the UK economy for nearly 10 years, and making the decade the worst for pay growth for over two centuries.

But these were small steps in turning the tide of precarious working.

The internal dynamic of capitalist production can't allow it.

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Indian Farmers

In November 2021, after a year of protests, strikes and occupations of city streets, Indian farmers – who make up 60% of India's workforce - were celebrating the climbdown of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

With elections in the offing, Modi was forced to withdraw three laws which would reduce farm subsidies and eliminate regulation of prices for produce. Farmers said the laws would hand government control of the market to corporate interests.

Many have had exposure to that for years, being forced to buy seed, fertiliser and pesticide from giant global agribusiness corporations like Cargill, ADM and Bayer-Monsanto.

Whilst the farmers were celebrating,

they weren't going home. They were staying put until the laws had been repealed in Parliament, and they were continuing to insist on the rest of their demands - including guaranteed prices for certain essential crops, such as wheat and rice. The farmers have been defending a system introduced in the 1960s to help India shore up its food reserves and prevent shortages.

The Financial Times called the farmers' victory a lesson in democracy. Watch this space.

<https://www.ft.com/content/780749be-0873-400c-9a73-31b9720a1528>

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Once again from this freely accessible report ...

‘In recent years the world has been shaken by protests, from the Arab Spring to the “yellow vests,” from the Occupy movement to the social uprising in Chile and Latin America.

There have been periods in history when large numbers of people rebelled against the way things were, demanding change, such as in 1848, 1917, and 1968;

today we are experiencing another period of rising outrage and discontent, and some of the largest protests in world history.,

Round up

When you are living through a particular moment of history it can be difficult to appreciate the scale and significance of the unfolding of events.

We’ve looked at some aspects of the mounting crisis, and the extent of the unprecedented response.

But, as we’ll show more later, ... It’s capitalism that is the problem. ..

In its deepening crisis, it is neither willing nor able to make any concessions.

Quite the opposite. ...

Movement around the world are challenging the status quo – often without too much success or with concessions that cost many lives - as in India.

These movements show an insatiable desire for fundamental change

which the system cannot grant.

In the next session we’ll begin to zoom in and look more closely at the capitalist system itself.