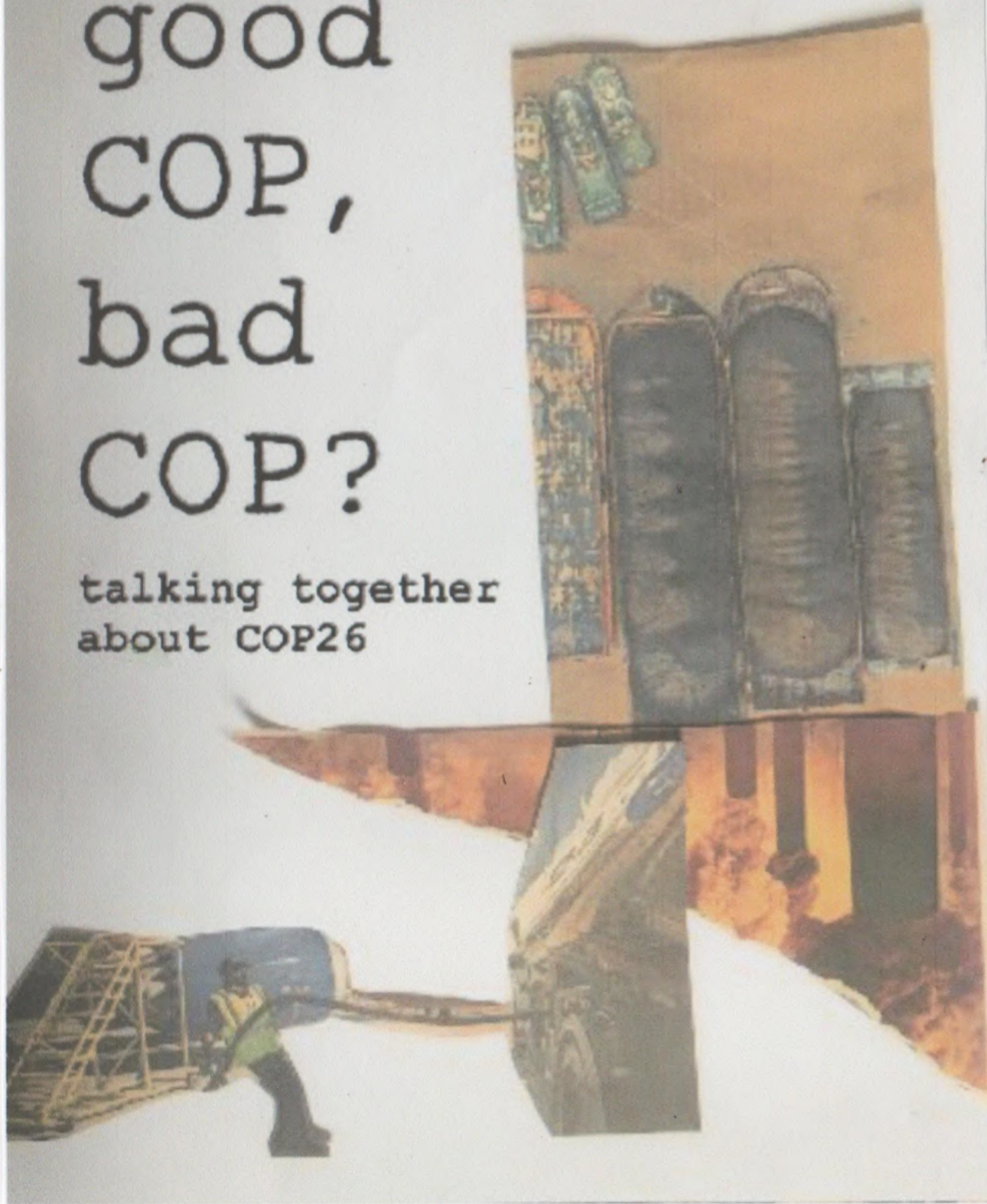
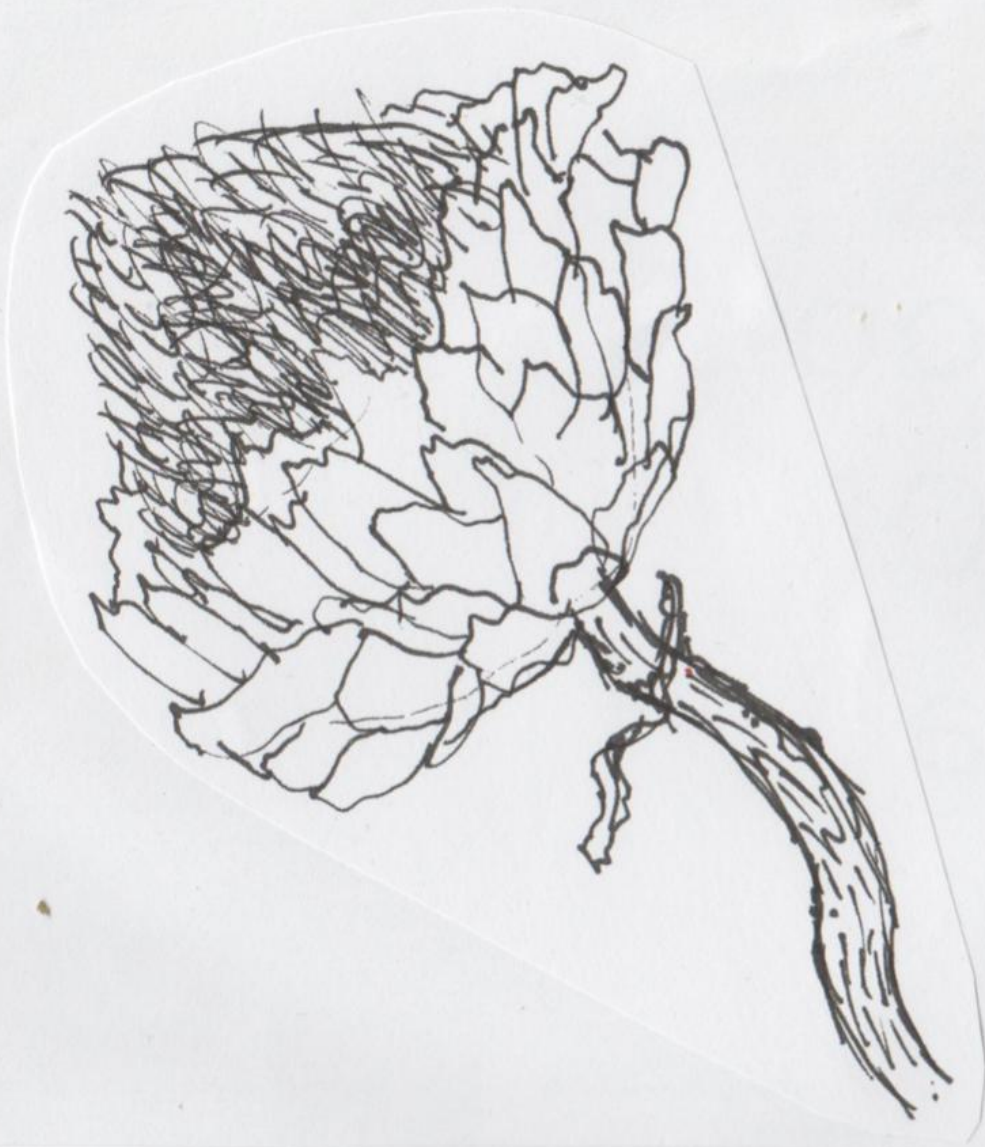


good
COP,
bad
COP?

talking together
about COP26





Intro

Welcome to the first ever XR Youth Cambridge zine! There's a few things we want you to know before you read:

Our aim in writing this was to reflect on and share some of what we've learned and discussed about international climate action, particularly COP26. In particular we wanted to express our worries: about the role of capitalism, climate inaction, and the marginalisation of those most affected by climate crisis. We hope that people who read it will come away with more opinions on these issues, and maybe a bit more information.

We are a group of activists who are either students, under 30, or both. Most of us are younger than COP. We're frustrated by the inaction which has left young people facing severe climate breakdown within our lifetimes. We are not experts and this isn't intended to be a comprehensive, static or authoritative document. In fact, we're not keen on the idea of comprehensive, authoritative, static documents in general. If you see something here you'd like to discuss, chat in person or message us at xryouthcambridge@protonmail.com

Defining terms

- COP 26

Way back in 1994, a group of countries signed a UN agreement about climate change. COP 26 is the 26th meeting of those countries. COP takes place somewhere different each year – this year, it's the UK's turn. COP involves negotiations about meeting the aims of international climate agreements. The participants also discuss science and politics around the climate crisis.

The big decision-makers at COP are the representatives of the countries that signed the UN agreement. There are also other attendees, like corporations. This is the first year that oil companies like BP won't have a formal say in negotiations. There are also sponsors involved (like NatWest) and official observers. These official observers range from aviation (flying) lobby groups to frontline activist organisations.

Some activists (like Greta Thunberg) speak at COP. Some are supportive, and others are very critical. Some people go along to protest what they see as COP's failure to make a difference. For a lot of people, COP brings a mix of hope, fear, and frustration.



- Green Capitalism

Green capitalism is the idea that we can address the climate crisis without changing our economic system. It is connected with research of technologies to allow people to carry on as usual. One example is 'carbon capture' technology that some people hope will let us carry on burning fossil fuels.

Some people have a lot of hope for Green Capitalism. Others aren't sure it's a good idea but think that Green Capitalism is necessary to get the solutions we need in time. Some people worry that we can't move to a different system in time or that the transition would be scary or disruptive.

We don't buy the Green Capitalist argument. Our problem is that capitalism depends on infinite growth, which means it needs many resources. We're running out of those resources. Often, our use of resources has harmed people and the planet. Capitalism is also unfair - it means that poor people suffer while rich people make money. The climate crisis is likely to make things less fair. So we believe that we need to move to a different system as part of our response to the climate crisis.



Read more
about Green Capitalism
here

- Greenwashing

Greenwashing is tied to Green Capitalism. It means making something harmful to the environment seem 'green' or environmentally friendly. NatWest is greenwashing themselves by sponsoring COP. It makes them seem like they care about climate action. Meanwhile, they are still funding fossil fuel extraction and other harmful industries.

- Colonial Conservation

Colonial Conservation is another thing that is tied to Green Capitalism. It is one of the ways that environmental action in our current system causes harm to people and the planet. It is the practice of creating 'national parks' and 'wildlife reserves' by pushing out indigenous and local peoples. For example, WWF has been complicit in evictions, including of the Baka people in Messok Dja. Colonial conservation is based on harmful and incorrect ideas about the relationships between humans and nature. For example, thinking that the two are separate and humans are inherently harmful to other living things. It's also counterproductive. Indigenous people, who make up only 5% of the human population, protect 80% of global biodiversity. The example of colonial conservation shows how climate action without system change can be unjust and unsuccessful.



WTFWWF



Survival
International

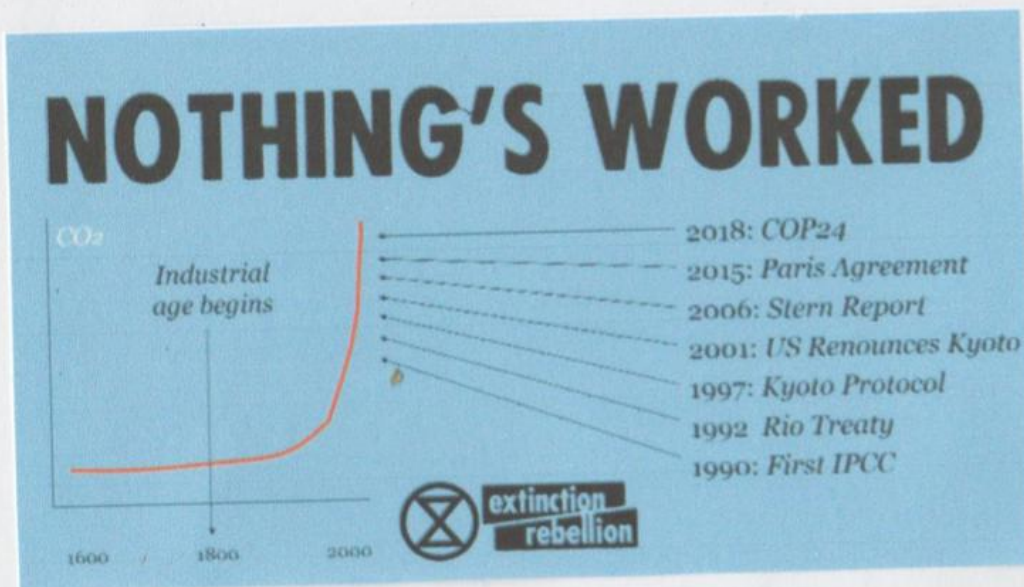



- Ecofascism

Ecofascism is one possible outcome of the climate crisis. Ecofascism is a system in which states and corporations work together to shore up their power in response to the climate crisis. Ecofascism is an attempt to keep people with power and wealth safe in the climate crisis. Meanwhile, people in the most affected areas and people who are in poverty will suffer. Ecofascism might creep into climate policy if we don't listen to indigenous, peasant and frontline communities.

COP: A history of failure

COP 26 will be the latest in a long line of failed attempts by world governments to negotiate a way out of the climate crisis. As the graph below demonstrates, state and corporate interests have been well aware of the crisis for decades. Yet when the world's most powerful people gather to discuss cutting greenhouse gas emissions, these same emissions continue to shoot up. Let's take a moment to appreciate how absurd this situation is.



Source 



The Paris Agreement in 2015 was celebrated as a turning point. Nation states collectively agreed to limit warming to below 2°C and ideally to below 1.5°C. What is strange is that when added together, world government's commitments to reduce emissions set us up for 2.4°C of warming by the end of the century. But this is just the commitments. If we look instead at the actual policies that are in place, it turns out that we are on track for a terrifying 2.9°C of warming. Are you feeling sceptical of empty promises yet?

Given this creepy history of saying one thing and doing precisely the opposite, should we really expect the 26th meeting to be meaningfully different to the previous 25?

COP: Co-opted by capitalism

It is tempting to view the failure to address the climate and ecological emergencies as the moral failure of individual politicians. We agree that those who are currently depriving much of the majority world of the necessities of life and steering young people everywhere toward an intolerable future are guilty of crimes against humanity. However, the truth is that the problem runs much deeper than individual misbehaviour.

In order to talk about the climate crisis honestly, we must not be afraid to use the C word. Capitalism is an economic system that has spread to every corner of the globe, meaning virtually all the parties at COP are committed to it. One interesting thing about capitalism is that it needs economic growth to survive. You may have noticed the political implications of this. Politicians present high rates of growth as some kind of national victory. But the pursuit of economic growth is more than a political choice. It is an written into the very structure of capitalism.



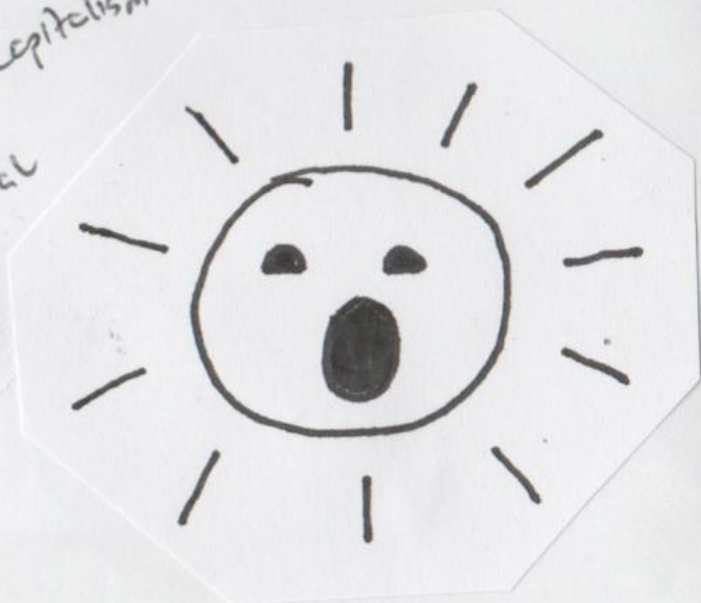
Much of the global economy, is funded by investors, including banks, billionaires and pension funds. When an investor is deciding where to pump their money, they are always searching for the highest return they can find. It is never enough for an investment to remain stable. They want profit. This means that unless a company or a government wants their supply of funds to dry up, they must relentlessly pursue economic growth. In fact, economists suggest that a compound growth rate of 3% per year is necessary for a well functioning economy.

This may not sound like much until we remember what we learned about compound growth rates from the Covid-19 pandemic. 3% this year becomes 3% of 103% next year and on and on and on... This means that the global economy will double every twenty years and is set to quadruple by the middle of the century. Just imagine all of the natural resources, energy and land that an economy four times bigger than what exists today would demand.

Given the fact that the capitalist economy is undermining the ecological basis of its (and our) continued existence, we might expect the parties at COP to be trying hard to figure out a way to escape the need for growth. Instead, Boris Johnson has proclaimed a "Green Industrial Revolution", mirroring the process that got us into this mess. This is one of the many faces of the ideology of Green Capitalism. When you see powerful people talking like this it is important to look beyond the big promises. What they are really saying is that they might take climate action, as long as it does not interfere with economic growth.



Read about
why
and Green Capitalism
Green
Industrial
Revolution
are not
what they
seem



Natwest

COP is almost entirely captured by the ideology of Green Capitalism. This is indicated by the fact that it is sponsored by NatWest, a major UK bank. NatWest pumped \$13.39 billion into the fossil fuel industry in recent years. But they have stepped up the green rhetoric with an "ambition to be a leading bank in the UK and ROI in helping to address the climate challenge." This is surprisingly not just talk. While NatWest continues to invest billions in the fossil fuel industry, its level of investment has declined. Its sponsorship of COP is one way to brandish its new sustainable credentials. While we welcome moves away from fossil fuels, there is reason to be sceptical of NatWest's conversion. A major part of their plan is to facilitate carbon trading, which allows the rich to buy a license to continue polluting. Also, as a capitalist bank, Natwest needs economic growth to receive a return on its investments. This means we can be pretty sure that they wouldn't sponsor COP unless confident that the parties won't questions economic growth. If NatWest is sure that COP won't be anything more than another Green Capitalist endeavour, we should probably believe them.



NatWest

Read more about
Natwest's involvement
in polluting industries

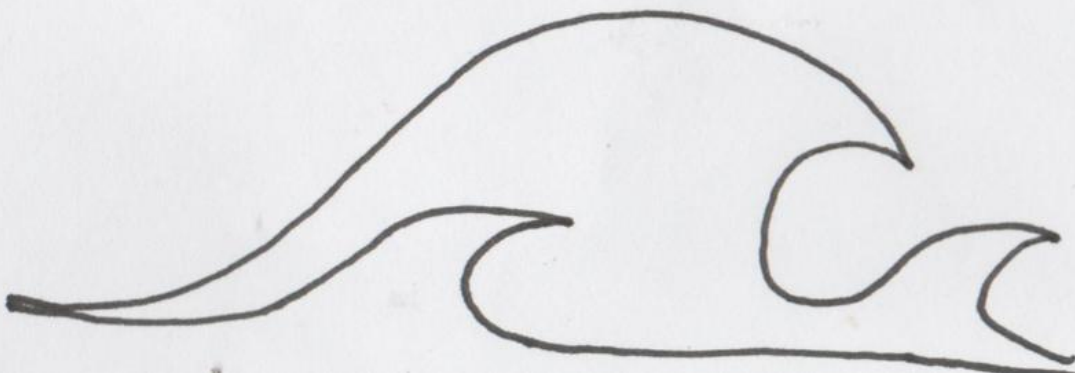




Beyond Act Now

In 2018, Extinction Rebellion burst onto the political stage, demanding that governments 'Act Now' to halt the climate crisis. The success of this movement is demonstrated by the fact that there is now a transition occurring. But ordinary people and frontline communities continue to be marginalised while the ability of the rich to continue accumulating wealth is safeguarded. To think our way through this crises, we must look beyond 'Act Now', towards 'Act How'.

Green Capitalism is incapable of addressing the climate and ecological crises. But its problems run much deeper than this. Following unGreen Capitalism, it will sow injustice and brutality around the world. This is happening already. Colonial conservation is touted as a solution to the biodiversity crisis. Elsewhere, forests are consumed in bio-fuel production to power growth in rich countries. Vast quantities of rare earth metals will be necessary to construct the solar panels, wind turbines and batteries needed to chase green capitalism's ever-increasing demand for energy. This will lead to further ecological devastation and displacement of vulnerable communities. Without a revolutionary rebalancing of political and economic power, the poorest countries and the poorest people in rich countries will continue to face the brunt of extreme weather, food shortages and ecological breakdown. Meanwhile the rich will have the resources to insulate themselves from the worst effects of the crises that they have disproportionately caused. By maintaining existing power relations in a rapidly changing world, Green Capitalism sets the stage for Eco-Fascism.





DECARBONISE
DECOLONISE
DECARCERATE

SOLIDARITY
ACROSS &
AGAINST
BORDERS

PEOPLE
HAVE THE
POWER



COP: For who? By who?

“Never before has a responsibility so great been in the hands of so few.” -
Christina Figueres (then head of UN Framework on Climate Change)

Spoken at the outset of the 2015 iteration of COP, these words were meant to motivate the powerful participants to take decisive action. When read in a different light, Figueres' words expose the problem at the core of the COP process.

Those who suffer the most from climate and ecological breakdown are those who have the least power to influence the decision making process at COP. Indigenous peoples, frontline communities and young people are best placed to understand how to address these crises. Of course, COP's designers know that lip service to these communities is necessary to maintain legitimacy. Hence the pre-COP summit of young people held in Italy and the range of Indigenous led events scheduled to take place in Glasgow during COP. While these events may be powerful sites of connection and knowledge sharing, the actual decisions will be made elsewhere. Parties are under no obligation to consider the voices of the most affected.

One example exposes the absurdity of the COP process. The Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is notorious for supporting Amazon deforestation. He will play a crucial role in determining the outcome of COP. Meanwhile, the Indigenous land defenders who are regularly murdered for trying to protect the rainforest will not. It seems that those who got us into this mess hold all the power, while those who might hold the solutions are marginalised.

Of course we should not necessarily overestimate the agency of even the politicians who seemingly call the shots at COP. Globalised capitalism forces states to squabble over investment from highly mobile multi-national corporations. Expect 'national economic interests', to take centre stage at COP. This is code for the interest of the corporations invested in any given state. This is why calls for politicians to take action do not capture the depth of the crisis. There is no path out of climate catastrophe within this out-of-control economic system.

Alternatives

It doesn't have to be like this! There are alternatives, and there are ways we can fight for them.

- Reform COP?

Farhana Yamin, an environmental lawyer, has called for a 'justice reset' at COP. This would mean changing COP so it centres fairness - something Yamin says has often been considered a 'distraction' from the climate focus of COP. Yamin says that one key way to do that would be to centre the voices of 'outsiders'. 'Outsiders' in COP are people who work within their communities rather than in the major global power structures. She suggests giving equal representation to smaller, less powerful countries. She wants us to create ways to advocate for the rights of non-human things such as rivers, trees and land.



A Manifesto for
justice for COP26
and beyond 2



- Replace COP?

Some people think that Yamin's suggestions don't go far enough. They argue that the structure of COP itself is harmful in a way we can't reform. Some of those people propose alternative systems.

One alternative is to bring together the grassroots, local, frontline and indigenous communities without the nation-state representative systems. This is what UbuntuPachaVidya are doing. They are supporting and linking local assemblies and festivals of resistance. XR Internationalist Solidarity Network has been working with communities of resistance around the world - from Ghana to Colombia - to facilitate discussions about and action on climate and ecological breakdown. Assemblies of ordinary people and communities are particularly important in places like Colombia, where the nation-state is violently suppressing environmental activism.

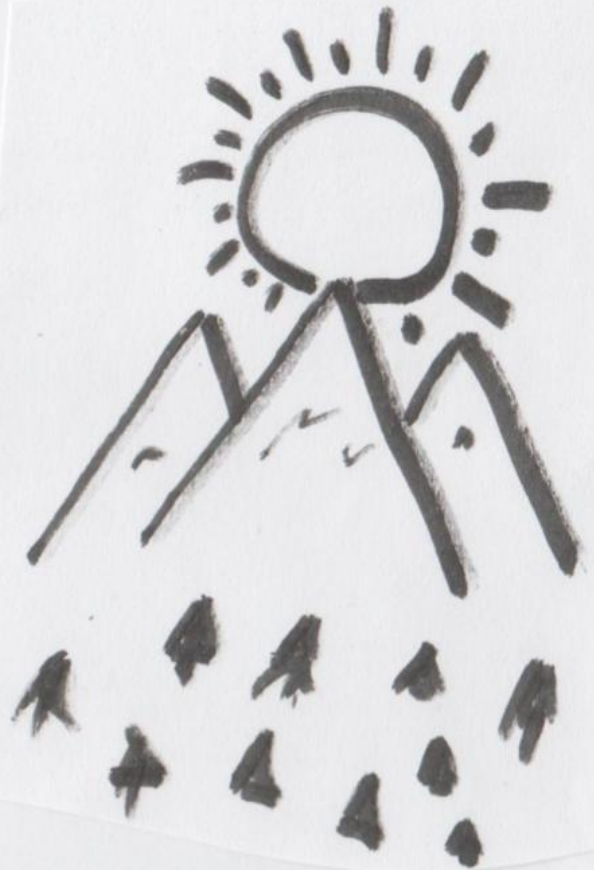
Indigenous
Land defenders
in Colombia →



Affinity Youth Networks



Phulbari Solidarity
Blog



What can we do?

- Learn - spend time learning about environmental action around the world. The Global Majority aren't passive victims of climate and ecological breakdown - they are at the forefront of change and resistance. Some good places to start learning are:

1. Colombian environmental activism. Despite Colombia being the most dangerous place on earth for environmental activists, people continue to resist.

2. The Phulbari Solidarity Campaign. This is an international solidarity campaign against mining in Phulbari, Bangladesh.

3. The Baka people, who are resisting colonial conservation in Africa

- Build community - we need to create sustainable alternatives in our communities. That can involve climate activism, but we also need to think about sharing resources and building support networks. This will make us all less vulnerable to climate collapse. When we work on larger scales, we need to try and develop ways of communicating that breakdown hierarchies. For example, the Affinity Youth Network is structured around Global South and diaspora leadership.

- Resist/Revolt - We can make sure greenwashing is unsuccessful by exposing the harm that polluting companies and exploitative banks are doing. We can take the streets to force governments to centre the voices of 'outsiders' like indigenous and frontline communities. We can co-create solutions in our communities and make sure our demands align with those in the Global South and the most affected areas.

Get involved

This conversation is important. Education, connection and solidarity must guide us toward a liveable future. But this can only be the beginning. What is needed is a mass movement of our global family, to take back the power from those who will recklessly endanger our future at COP 26, in order to preserve an unjust economic system. This movement needs everybody and everybody includes you.

- If you are aged between 18 and 30 or are a student, you can join XR Youth Cambridge.



- Everybody can join XR Cambridge.



Some ideas to talk about

1. What did you know about COP 26 before you started reading? What's new?
2. Did you really agree with anything you read here? Or really disagree?
3. Did anything you read here make you feel uncomfortable? Angry? Hopeful? Confused?
4. Who do you trust to make good decisions about the climate crisis?
5. What does a better world look like to you?

