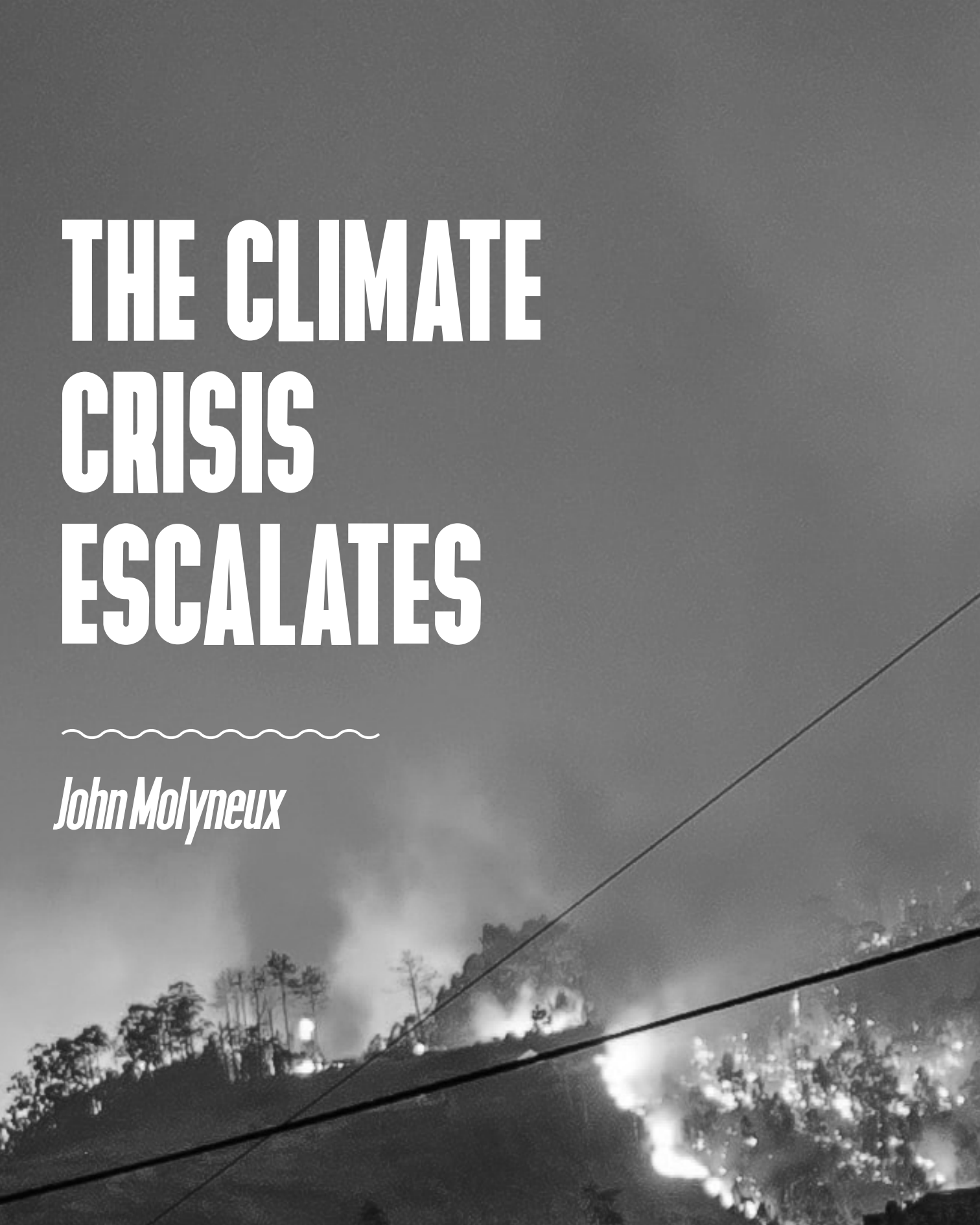


THE CLIMATE CRISIS ESCALATES

John Molyneux



EDITORIAL



The summer of 2021 was the moment climate change got real for hundreds of millions of people. The concentrated accumulation of extreme weather events – the heat dome over Western USA and Canada and the consequent fires, the massive floods in central Europe, the floods in China, the catastrophic fires in Southern Turkey and then Greece and now, literally as I write, massive fires in Algeria and floods in Northern Turkey – the list goes on – has made it abundantly clear that climate change is actual and happening now. This was reinforced by the latest IPCC Report published on 9 August. In reality the Report did not say anything substantial that has not been known by scientists, activists and, indeed, governments for a long time but the presentation and reception of the Report was majorly coloured by the recent events.

But even in the face of global catastrophe the class struggle doesn't stop for the simple reason that the capitalist class do not cease, for one minute, the defence of their interests and thus their war on the working class. It is important to understand why this is the case. The fundamental reason is economic, not ideological. It is that if you are the CEO of ExxonMobile or Google or the manager of Tesco or the owner of a transport company or any other business you still have to turn a profit next week and year, even if Greece is burning and Germany is flooding, unless you want to be out of a job or out of business. Even if you are Jeff Bezos, the world's richest person whose profits have soared during the pandemic and who has money to waste on vanity space flights, you still know that if you were not

raking in those profits your rivals would and you would soon be in trouble. So you still need to keep unions out of Amazon and hold down workers' wages and make sure Amazon isn't paying too much corporation tax.

But if economics is the basic driver this does not mean ideology is unimportant. On the contrary it is vital. The capitalist class, globally and here in Ireland, knows it has to 'manage' perceptions of this crisis in such a way that their vital interests are protected and things don't get out of hand. This means controlling the narrative and the message that goes out in the media. Of course they have lots of practice at doing this. They have an ideology, a systematic interpretation of the world, developed over centuries which they imbibed with their mothers' milk and which they see not as a political view but simply as unbiased common sense. Importantly, much of this ideology, especially its fundamentals, is shared by the people who run the media including the state broadcasters and also by many of the presenters and journalists (who learned early in their careers that progress in their jobs required staying firmly within the parameters of the dominant ideas).

For us on the opposite side of this class struggle it is useful that we understand just how our rulers are framing this issue in order to be able to counter the dominant narrative. So what does this mean concretely?

There have been two major shifts we should note. They have had to abandon the pretence, long artificially nurtured by the fossil fuel industry that the

science was somehow in doubt. The science, they now concede, 'is unequivocal'. They have also been forced, by the sheer escalation of extreme weather, to give up on the formerly ever present weasel words that 'experts say' that we can't link individual disasters to climate change. Now they say (the America heat dome was the turning point on this) that such temperatures are 'almost inconceivable' without climate change.

But other elements of the narrative remain in place. There is still the focus on rising sea levels. Here we need to understand that propaganda and ideology are most effective when they contain an element of truth. It is true that climate change will produce rising sea levels and that these will be disastrous for many millions in coastal communities and that they are already disastrous for people living on low level islands in the Pacific and Indian oceans. But, and this is the point, the large majority of the world's population will not be directly threatened by rising sea levels until the process of climate change is much more advanced. Long before this happens there will have been innumerable extreme weather events – droughts, heat waves, fires, storms, floods etc – which will both claim large numbers of lives immediately and have immense economic and social consequences in terms of food production, famines, food prices and homelessness which together will displace hundreds of millions of people. To put the matter very starkly, long before Clontarf or Dundalk are under water, most of India will be caught between extreme heat and extreme rain and ever larger parts of Africa will be barren and uninhabitable.

The sea level spectre however allows governments a breathing space – wriggle room – for 'plans' and 'targets' for 2050 and the like, which in turn permit business-as-usual i.e. profits as usual, next week.

Another key feature of our rulers', and therefore the media's, agenda will be, as with the COVID pandemic, that 'we are all in this together' turning a blind eye to the fact that 'the same boat' we are all in is, like the Titanic, firmly divided into first class and steerage with life boats for the upper classes. This enables them to attribute responsibility for the crisis to humanity as a whole, while evading their own deep guilt in ignoring umpteen scientific warnings over forty years, and framing the problem, not in terms of confronting the fossil fuel industries but in

terms of 'changing the behaviour' of ordinary people. At which point raising carbon taxes on working people make their inevitable appearance. While the activists are well intentioned in this claim for our rulers it serves the highly political goal of making their narrative seem above debate and challenge. In reality politics is about how society is run and who runs it; no issue, not human rights, not poverty, not homelessness, not even nuclear war and certainly not climate change is 'above politics'; rather all these issues are the very stuff of politics.

All this misdirection will be complemented by massive green washing both by business (all the big corporations have been doing this for a long time now) and by governments. At the centre of this will be the COP 26 jamboree which, in the present situation, will probably have to come up with something that at least looks real. The trouble is that when it comes to stopping climate change a few steps in the right direction, enough to keep the Green Party sweet but not enough to stop the warming are not enough period. They will result only in the train crashing into the canyon at a slightly slower pace than would otherwise have been the case.

In so far as, despite all their efforts to keep system change off the agenda, politicians and their spokespersons find themselves confronted with what is actually required to tackle climate change, namely ending production for profit and establishing planned production i.e. moving from capitalism, they will variously reply, depending on circumstances and audience, a) that system change is an impossible fantasy- the end of the world is more likely than the end of capitalism; b) yes, there is a need for a new economic model but that means just a slightly different version of capitalism with a new 'mindset', not a different mode of production (this would be Eamonn Ryan's answer); c) there's no time available for system change, there's only time for working with the system and the state we have got.

It is the last of these arguments that will have the most influence in environmental and leftist arguments and I have discussed it at length elsewhere (see <http://www.globalecosocialistnetwork.net/2020/08/21/is-there-time-for-system-change/>). Here I will simply say that it rests on the assumption, for which there is no evidence at all, that the 'greening' of capitalism can be a relatively speedy process whereas

overthrowing capitalism would inevitably be a very slow long drawn out process. In reality while revolutions don't happen overnight they proceed rapidly once they break out while at the present rate of progress Dundalk WILL be under water long before capitalism turns green.

Socialists must be ready to take on all these arguments in weeks, months and years ahead, cutting through all the evasions, excuses, and green washing, exposing what the government is actually doing like bringing in Data Centres, licensing LNGs and growing the national herd, as opposed to what it says it is doing. We must advance concrete demands that both point in the right direction where the climate is concerned and improve the lives of working people such as free expanded public transport, retrofitting of homes and the large scale creation of decent climate jobs, while also relentlessly explaining that real system change is the only ultimate answer. But we must also combine the criticism of words with the criticism of feet on the street. We need mass mobilization and wherever possible strike and workplace action in conjunction with the Glasgow COP 26 Conference in November. Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future have called a global school strike for 24 September and the COP 26 Coalition (the main organiser for protests in Glasgow) have designated Saturday 6 November as a global day of demonstrations, combined with a call for global strike and workplace action on Friday 5 November. Hopefully Fridays for Future will also call a school strike for that day. Socialists should be in the forefront of organising for these days of action along with all others who appreciate the extreme gravity of the situation we face.

In this issue

A major feature of all progressive and radical movements in recent years, in Ireland and internationally, has been the dramatically increased participation, visibility and leadership of women. Marnie Holborow revisits Engels to examine the foundations of the Marxist analysis of women's oppression and Camilla Fitzsimons analyses the continuing struggle for abortion access and reproductive rights after Repeal. 2021 has seen the organic crisis of Unionism reach farcical proportions as Arlene Foster fell and Edwin Poots – the dinosaur who doesn't believe in dinosaurs – came and went

in the blink of an eye. Seán Mitchell contributes the first part of a major study of the historical fracturing of Unionism. The dangerous emergence from the shadows of the far right has been on the minds of all socialists in the past year. John Molyneux looks at the development, principally by Clara Zetkin and Leon Trotsky, of the Marxist theory of fascism. Joe Biden first six months has surprised and even drawn praise from some commentators on the left. Eric Fretz offers a critical assessment. The EU retains for many an unmerited halo of progressiveness. Finbar Lynch exposes and dissects its dreadful record on the question of the vaccine. Mark Walsh uses his mathematical knowledge to explain how cryptocurrencies work and his ecosocialist commitment to critique their effect on the environment.

We also publish a number of book reviews of interesting recent books, especially Kieran Allen's essential *32 Counties: The Failure of Partition and the Case of a United Ireland* by Dave O'Farrell and Eoin O'Broin's and Rory Hearne's recent studies of the housing crisis by Stewart Smyth. Owen McCormack gives an enthusiastic welcome to Jonathan Neale's *Fight the Fire* as does Emma Hendrick to Judy Cox's *Rebellious Daughters of History*. Mary Ryder, Willie Cumming, Chris Beausang and Paul O'Brien also contribute reviews of interesting recent books by, respectively, Larissa Reisner, Joseph Andras, Peter Weiss and Peadar O'Donnell.

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