

What Does COP26 Mean for Artists, Trade Union Members and Workers?

By now you will have heard that COP 26 is taking place in Glasgow right now. The COP is the 26th UN climate change Conference of the Parties; it is the episodic climate summit where world leaders and invited others meet to set and discuss targets in an attempt to reverse climate change and hopefully try to save the planet. It is the largest ever gathering of world leaders in the UK and the world will be watching to see how we perform as hosts. Unfortunately, our government is showing poor leadership in the effort to reduce carbon emissions, for example by outsourcing a significant proportion of its carbon emissions to poorer countries. It is also proposing to open a new coal mine in Cumbria and continuing to subsidise fossil fuel extraction in the North Sea. That is why we need to unite and protest against short term greed at the expense of positive action on climate change. This is an abuse of power at the expense of people who globally and within the UK overwhelmingly say that they want more wide-reaching action to tackle climate change (UNDP Peoples Climate Vote 2021)

I have been representing Artists' Union England at National and regional meetings concerning COP26, with environmentalists, trade unionists and other creative workers. I was particularly excited about the formation of COP26 Coalition which has brought together international, national and local organisations concerned with climate justice and social justice, realising that exploitation of people and exploitation of the planet are part of the same problem and need to be addressed together. COP26 Coalition meetings have foregrounded voices from the global south, indigenous peoples and people experiencing poverty and discrimination in the UK. This has included for example Black Lives Matter groups and broad trade union involvement. COP26 Coalition aims to,

*“Use the COP as a moment to **strengthen regional, national and International climate justice movements and build power from below for system change** –“*

Join the Massive Mobilisations in Glasgow, UK and Globally calling for Climate Justice, November 6th

COP26 Coalition, together with its numerous affiliated civil and grassroots organisations, has been instrumental in organising huge protests in Glasgow, London and more than 50 other locations across the country November 6th. They have been also working closely with organisers of mobilisations taking place worldwide.

<https://cop26coalition.org/gda/> Use this link to be part of this massive movement for climate justice and find your nearest protest. If you are unable to join a physical demonstration, there is also a digital rally.

Trade unionists from across the UK and internationally have been working to address the need for a 'just transition'. This means that no workers should lose jobs, suffer a loss of pay or experience worse working conditions as a result of the changes necessary to tackle climate change. This was part of the Paris agreement at Cop21 and will be part of the talks at this COP. Trade unions have also been at the forefront of planning a form of green new deal, to get a better deal for workers and transform national and global economic systems. Artists and other creative workers are crucial to achieving these positive changes. We can help people to think in different ways and imagine the world that we hope to create. Art jobs, like those of carers and teachers are green jobs essential to our society and a positive future and artists will be very active in Glasgow, the UK and worldwide during COP26. Here is a link to the Scottish Artists Union with a list of some of the artistic interventions planned in Glasgow,

https://www.artistsunion.scot/cop26_information

Artists' Union England members and organisers will be taking part in the activities and protests for justice in Glasgow. I have also been collaborating with textiles artist, Cathy Dunbar and with groups of mostly women and non-binary people from all walks of life, including women who have been homeless and women who have experienced abuse. We have created a miles long umbilical cord as a metaphor for our connections to each other and the planet. It is an exercise in solidarity and is being created from reused art, rags, yarn, found objects and everyday detritus. We have stitched together hundreds of pieces made by different people to create the cord. We believe that the relational and nurturing spirit that has become predominantly the domain of women because of the binary and stereotypical ideological opposition of male and female must include everyone and be prioritised, in order for us to address the twin problems of climate and social justice.

We are all connected.... We are threads of the same ecosystem. The fibres that connect us all to each other and to the natural world are fragile, delicate, strong, powerful, complex, intertwined, monstrous and mythical. We are all connected.... We are individual and unique but a part of the same cloth, each intrinsic to the integrity and existence of the whole. Our connections are complex in nature and varied in sensation, some stand close and whisper in our ears and others shout to us from a distance. Now we are intertwined in a grand collaborative project, to save our planet and our existence...

