



# UNITY

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## Extinction Rebellion! Support the Climate Strike

By Mel Corry

It seems that the entire focus of political discourse for the last number of years has been Brexit and its fallout or perhaps the lack of a functioning Assembly at Stormont or the continuing malaise that infects Dail Eireann. A real breath of fresh air (excuse the pun) has been the growing climate strike movement taking root across the world. Young people fed up with being patronised and controlled are walking out of their schools and demanding action on the issue of climate breakdown.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of September another global walkout will take place and the action is being supported by Trade unions who are encouraging their members to take part in the rallies being organised.

In a statement the leading voice in this young person's movement Greta Thunberg along with 46 other activists said *"This is not a single-generation job. It's humanity's job... Let's all join together, with your neighbours, co-workers, friends, family and go out on to the streets to make your voices heard and make this a turning point in our history."*

This movement which emanated from the actions of this Swedish schoolgirl and other students has captured the imagination of the youth and spurred many others to action. In a speech at the recent TUC conference in Brighton Unite Assistant General Secretary, Steve Turner called for

support for the strike. He went on to outline the challenge facing trade unions in the manufacturing sector in today's working environment. He said, *"As trade unionists we're at the centre of the debate on just transitioning energy generation, our auto industry from the combustion engine to hybrid, full battery and hydrogen, and our ceramics, steel and construction industries from heavy pollutants to sustainable long-term low carbon producers. And in that debate we'll ensure our members are up-skilled or re-skilled and transitioned to new, sustainable, local jobs with no loss of pay or undermining of terms and conditions. Supporting them, their families and wider communities"*.

Unite's Irish Regional secretary Jackie Pollock has also expressed pride in the young peoples action and called for a concerted effort to a transition involving a green new deal for workers

As you can imagine the reaction of the climate change deniers and gutter press has been to denigrate this movement as just young people being mischievous.

Former British Prime Minister Theresa May remarked that young people were missing "valuable lesson time". Greta Thunberg has been subjected to a torrent of abuse with people



pointing to her affluent background or the fact that she lives with Asperger's syndrome as a means to discredit the action.

It is clear that our planet faces increasing instability as a direct result of climate change. Already thousands of lives have been lost and many face imminent disruption to their lives and well-being.

It is our responsibility to ensure that we encourage this movement and ensure that we name and identify the driving force behind these conditions, Capitalism. It is clear that continued support for the capitalist system is incompatible with saving the planet.

The current green wave will only ensure that capitalism gets a coat of green-wash turning environmental change into a business opportunity. Trade Unions need to lead on this issue by accepting that we need to have difficult conversations with workers who find themselves in jobs that are unsustainable or ethically compromised. The motive for this action must be future generations.

As David Harvey once remarked, *"Why is it we can foresee the end of the planet before the end of capitalism?"*.



## *EU fascist rhetoric (and other things)*

*THE incoming European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen has caused a stir with her creation of a new post under the title of “protecting our European way of life,” which replaces the former migration, home affair and citizenship office. Outlining the new portfolio, not surprisingly given to member of the right-wing Greek New Democratic Party, von der Leyen said, “We must address and allay legitimate fears and concerns about the impact of irregular migration on our economy and society.” Her comments were quite rightly condemned across the board as echoing fascist rhetoric.*

*Giorgos Georgiou of the Cypriot AKEL condemned her for “pushing the framework of the far-right narrative against immigration into the political mainstream.”*

*Should we be surprised though when we remember that during the uprising in Ukraine in 2014 we had the sight of Labour peer Baroness Ashton in her capacity as Foreign affairs Representative of the EU Commission cavorting in Maidan Square in Kiev with the insurgents and seemingly being happy to be there. In recent times this crowd have been parading through the streets of Kiev revering the wartime fascist murderer of Jews and Poles, Stepan Bandera. Is that the “European way of life” they want to protect ?*

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*Last week saw former Labour MP Luciana Berger following one time Labour leader aspirant Chuka Ummuna joining the Liberal Democrats. This despite the fact that three months ago she had “no intention of doing so.” She claimed that under the leadership of Jo Swinson the party was “committed to securing Britain’s future tolerant, open and inclusive society,” as part of the EU. Is this the same party who, when in coalition with the Tories, pushed through some of the most stringent austerity measures for which Swinson consistently voted and then got smashed at the polls for doing so. In 2017 Ummuna said he “could never countenance suggesting voters support Liberal Democrat or Conservative candidates on account of their Remain credentials. This would require turning a blind eye to the cuts to our local schools, the NHS and other public services instigated by both parties.”*

*Whilst nowhere near being in the same category as the above two, John McDonnell, whose Road to Damascus commitment to Remain disappointed many of the left Leave side, now says that a general election will be a choice between “a transformative socialist change” and the “barbaric undermining of essential services” by the Tories.*

*Somebody should tell John that “transformative socialist change” and membership of the EU is incompatible.*

Belfast Central  
Branch  
Meeting  
Wednesday  
5.30pm  
CPJ Premises  
2nd October

### Unity Appeal Fund

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## MEDIA REVIEW

# Problems of unionism

IN a follow up to Alex Kane's piece on Loyalism reviewed in *Unity*, September 7th, his *Irish News* colleague Newton Emerson wrote a similar piece under the heading "Hard to say who speaks for unionists."

He started off by writing that state papers recently declassified from the 1994 peace talks show loyalist leaders were "very disappointed at the continual references to the smallness of their mandate," a theme touched on by Kane.

Emerson in a similar vein to Kane's piece, writes that this sense of entitlement continues today, with blogger Jamie Bryson waving his even tinier mandate around and complaining loyalist voices are not heard.

However, Emerson points out that in truth, we hear a great deal from and about loyalist organisations, and spend a great deal of time and money trying to manage them and their relationship to the working-class Protestant population, which is how they would like "loyalism" to be defined.

The quality of this listening effort, he adds, could certainly be improved but in terms of quantity it is already generous to loyalism's numbers.

However he goes on to state that the voice that is missing from public life, strikingly so, is of mainstream unionism which has fallen almost completely silent in the 15 years since the DUP became Northern Ireland's largest party.

The DUP though, he writes, does not reflect that mainstream

unionist opinion. He quotes the latest survey by *Northern Ireland Life and Times* conducted between last October and February which found that 62 per cent of people are unionists in the sense they support a long-term link with Britain.

He accepts that the DUP represents that view but also believes that they have left most of these people "politically and intellectually orphaned."

The survey was broken down by religious background where "Protestant" can be taken as a proxy for unionist.

On abortion 88 per cent of Protestants think it should definitely or probably be legal, slightly higher than the Catholic percentage.

On same-sex marriage, 53 per cent think it should be legal, which is much lower than the Catholic figure.

On attitudes towards different political and religious views, minorities and immigrants, the level of tolerance was reported being around 90 per cent, the same as Catholics.

Emerson thinks that the "Conservative and religious" DUP has always been an objectively strange vehicle in which to place the hopes of an entire community.

He cites the "competitive dynamic of Stormont politics" that drove voters into its arms, however he adds, "the elastic between the party and its supporters has stretched."

He states that "strains were masked for a decade by the managerialism of Peter Robinson and unionists also had a more liberal alternative, at least in theory, via the UUP under Reg Empey and Mike Nesbitt.

What finally snapped the elastic, he believes, was Brexit with unionist voters dividing roughly 40/60 Remain/Leave in the 2016 referendum with the UUP and DUP representing each.

Within a year the issue had become so fraught the UUP fell in behind the DUP, with the unionist voters being dragged along by the mounting constitutional stakes.

Emerson then quotes another survey this month showing three quarters of people who describe themselves as British opposing the backstop or Northern Ireland leaving the EU on different terms to Britain.

To this he adds that whilst internet surveys may produce polarised results opposing the backstop does not necessarily make someone a Leaver.

However, he believes "ethnic solidarity" has clearly come into play and that this solidarity obscures the DUP's loss of connection to the bulk of its target electorate, with the UUP now providing no alternative on Brexit or anything else.

He refers to another *Life and Times* question where only 26 per cent described themselves as unionist whilst 50 per cent described themselves as "other."

They support the union but refrain from calling themselves unionist presumably, according to Emerson, because "unionist" means "DUP."

No wonder then he concludes that such voices are under-represented, they have nothing left to say, as unionists, beyond waving the flag, the very type of unionism they are rejecting.

In conclusion he writes that it appears they are retreating to the garden centre to stick their heads in a plant pot waiting for things to happen, but if they do not devise a wider idea of unionism beyond mere support for the union, change will happen without them.

*W. Ows*