

Solidarity Knows No Borders

An edited version of speech given by John Smith on behalf of Sheffield Left to the **Solidarity Knows No Borders** protest in Sheffield on June 18

Greetings! Sheffield Left was recently born out of the meltdown of the left in this country—you are all welcome to join us, whether you're already a member of a socialist party or not!



At a rally in solidarity with RMT strikers outside Sheffield train station

Solidarity is a beautiful word, but if our solidarity stops at the White Cliffs of Dover this beautiful word becomes hideous—solidarity of British people or 'British workers' against foreigners, against working people of other countries, is a fascist slogan!

Summary: “Global economic depression; wars and rumours of wars; climate catastrophe and ecosystem collapse; repression, fascism and state terror for those daring to resist—*these are the four horsemen of the capitalist apocalypse.*”

“They are already rampaging through the so-called developing world; only a fool could think that the borders surrounding rich countries can protect their inhabitants from these apocalyptic developments...”

“The response of many is denial, despair and fatalism, but across the world, many are becoming aware that revolutionary change is necessary if humanity is to have a future. *Socialism, or barbarism!*”

That's why we say—*Solidarity Knows No Borders!* But these words are easy to say; what do they actually mean in this world? I want to highlight four aspects of this question.

First, what does *Solidarity Knows No Borders* mean in a world facing global depression?

The return of inflation and the end of 40 years of falling interest rates threatens to destabilise gigantic debt mountains [that now equal](#) 3½ times global GDP.™Already, interest payments to moneylenders is more than the income of the poorest half of humanity—4 billion people! Rising interest rates will bankrupt swathes of companies that have only survived to now because interest rates on their debts are so low, and will devastate the economies of scores of indebted poor countries—today, [Lebanon](#), [Ecuador](#) and [Sri Lanka](#) are the first of many.

The coming global depression will hit us hard here in the UK—harder than we can at the moment imagine—but nothing like as hard as it is *already* hitting hundreds of millions, even billions of our brothers and sisters in nations oppressed and exploited by the U.K.'s imperialist banks and transnational corporations.

Second, what does *Solidarity Knows No Borders* mean in a world beset by wars and rumours of wars?

The post-WWII world order is disintegrating and the pre-WWIII world has begun. History teaches us that in times of economic crisis, economic nationalism and trade wars increasingly tend to become shooting wars. NATO's aggressive eastwards expansion, Putin's attempt to rebuild the Russian empire, attempts by the USA, Europe and Japan to contain the rise of China, global arms spending that in 2021 exceeded \$2 trillion for the first time—all point towards the

global conflagration *that is inevitable unless workers, farmers and oppressed peoples unite across borders to put a stop to this madness.*

The new wars that have broken out during the past few years in central Europe, the Horn of Africa and elsewhere have generated tens of millions of refugees, [83% of whom](#) are hosted in other poor countries. Meanwhile, the UK and other rich countries take ever-more extreme measures to deny war refugees a place of refuge—yet brutal UK/US/EU economic sanctions, proxy wars, arms supplies to despots, and direct military interventions *are directly or indirectly responsible for most of these conflicts!*

The distinction between ‘real refugees’ and ‘economic refugees’ is completely spurious. For example, Afghanistan—now suffering from a terrible drought amid its other woes—is sanctioned and blockaded by Britain and other imperialist countries. As a result, the [UN reports](#) that 1.1 million Afghan children under the age of 5 are suffering from ‘severe acute malnutrition’, also known as ‘severe wasting’—in other words, *western sanctions are starving a million kids to death!!!*

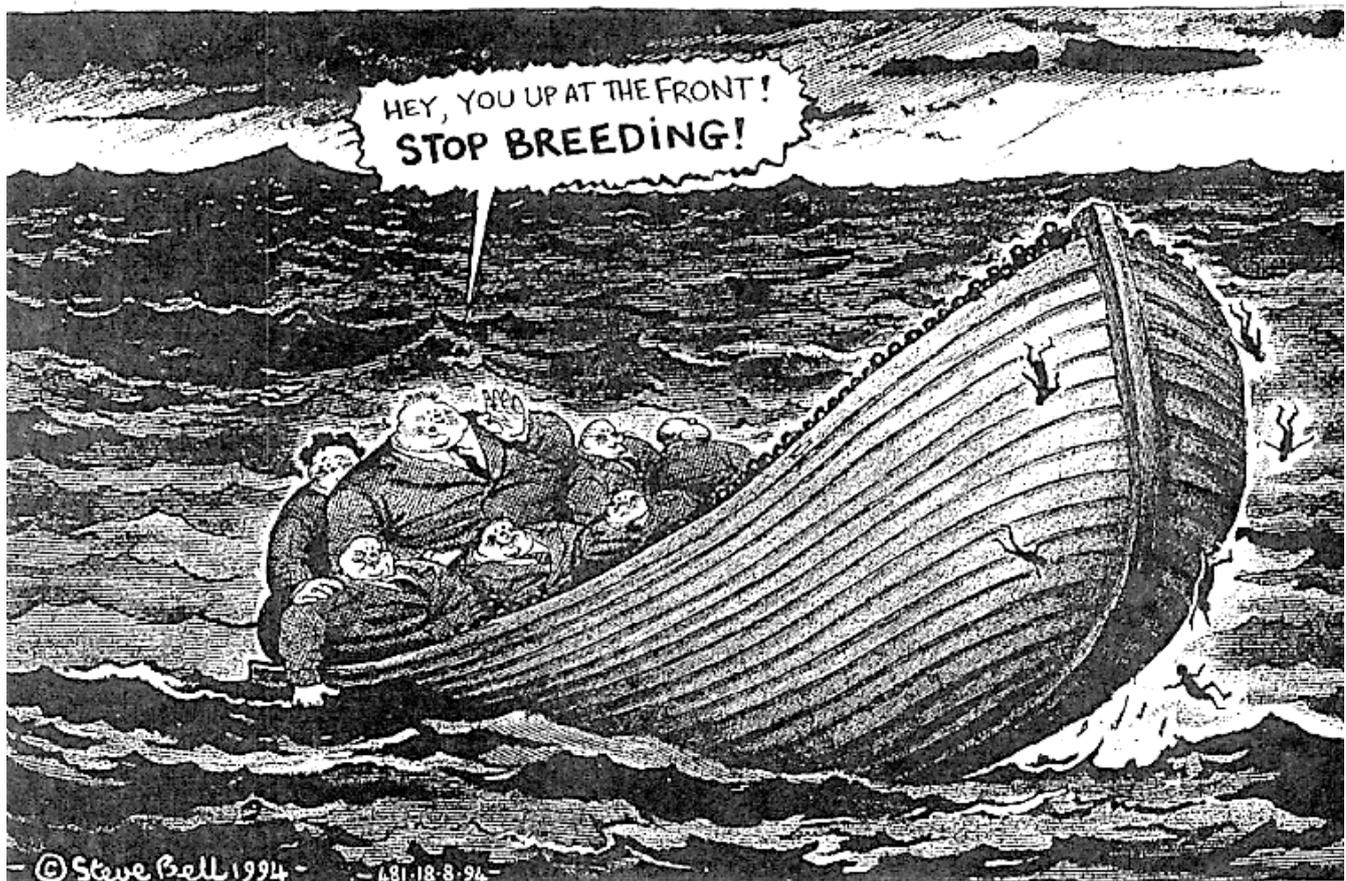
Western economic sanctions—whether against Afghanistan, or Russia, or Iran, or Venezuela, or Cuba—*is economic warfare*, indiscriminate collective punishment, a terrible war crime; they affect workers and poor people most of all, driving many of them to seek refuge in other countries. They aren’t ‘economic refugees’, they are war refugees!

Her Majesty’s government, with the complicity of Her Majesty’s opposition, justify their despicable and murderous policy against Afghanistan *in the name of ‘women’s rights’!!!* The cynicism of this is off the scale: when a popular revolution in Afghanistan in 1978 brought to power an avowedly socialist-led government committed to workers and women’s rights, Britain and the USA [funnelled vast amounts of weapons to extreme-right Islamists](#), including to Osama

bin Laden, who later turned on his master and committed the Twin Towers atrocity!

The mendacity of Britain and the USA—Tory and Labour, Republican and Democrat—epitomised by Afghanistan's history and repeated countless times across the world, is unbounded.

The main conclusion we must draw from this is that Britain's confected 'refugee crisis' is blowback for terrible crimes committed by successive Labour and Conservative governments against the peoples of the rest of the world; crimes which have not been acknowledged, let alone atoned for.



Third, what does *Solidarity Knows No Borders* mean in a world facing climate catastrophe, mass extinction and ecosystem collapse??

The UK and other rich countries [have betrayed](#) their pathetically inadequate promises to help poor countries cope with the devastating effects of the rich countries' past and continuing carbon emissions.

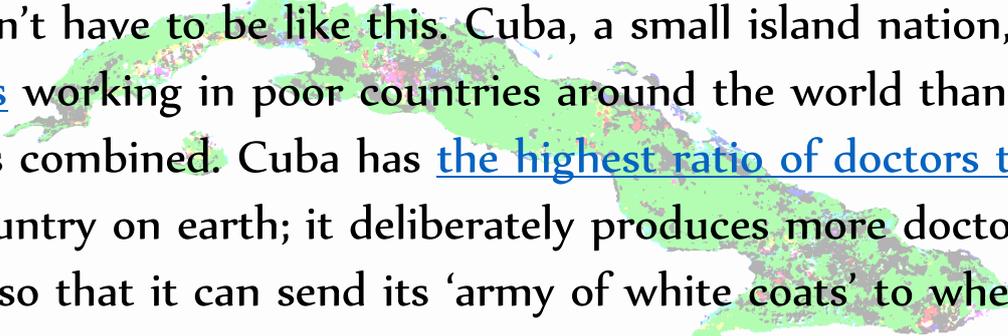
What does *Solidarity Knows No Borders* mean when large parts of the world are becoming uninhabitable due to droughts, extreme heat waves, flooding, rising sea levels? For example, [according to a recent study](#), 52% of 4500 young people interviewed in 15 African countries plan to emigrate in the next three years, citing climate change, along with economic crisis and government corruption as the reasons why they feel they've no future in their own countries.

The climate catastrophe [is the result](#) of capitalist development in the UK and other rich nations—what does *Solidarity Knows No Borders* mean in the face of this indisputable fact? What does *Solidarity Knows No Borders* mean to us here in the UK, home to two of the biggest oil-super-majors, Shell and BP, which are nothing less than [giant planet-destroying machines](#) whose taxes help pay for the NHS and whose dividends help pay for our pensions?

Global heating is just one dimension of what we must call by its true name: *the capitalist destruction of nature*. Its other dimensions include mass extinction, poisoning of the oceans, accelerating deforestation despite all the pledges and platitudes. Covid, Ebola and other recent pandemics [are direct consequences](#) of the [capitalist assault on nature](#), and they won't be the last!

Dr Teodros Ghebreyesus, head of the World Health Organisation, [said](#) unequal international distribution of covid-19 vaccines is “a **catastrophic moral failure.**” What has the Covid pandemic taught us about the meaning of *Solidarity Knows No Borders*?

It doesn't have to be like this. Cuba, a small island nation, [has more doctors](#) working in poor countries around the world than the G7 rich nations combined. Cuba has [the highest ratio of doctors to people](#) of any country on earth; it deliberately produces more doctors than it needs, so that it can send its 'army of white coats' to where they are



most needed. When asked why they put so much of their precious resources—severely limited as they are by the brutal US economic blockade, now in its 61st year—they reply, “we share what we have, not what’s left over.”

This is what solidarity means in a world where human civilisation itself is on the line!

Fourth, what does *Solidarity Knows No Borders* in a world whose rulers increasingly resort to repression, fascism and state terror to suppress resistance to their rule?

The Police and Crime Bill gives the police arbitrary powers to attack peaceful demonstrations and pickets; a courageous journalist, [Julian Assange](#), rots in Belmarsh prison awaiting deportation to the United States for exposing US war crimes in Afghanistan, Iraq and around the world; Britain and the USA supply weapons to Saudi Arabia, Israel and countless other regimes who commit unspeakable crimes against civilians; environmental defenders standing up to Western corporations attempting to chop down forests are killed by death squads—we can all add scores of examples to this list.

Our rulers’ cynicism—and the hypocrisy of their claims to promote democracy—is exemplified by the fact that the COP 27 climate summit will take place later this year in Egypt, ruled by a brutal military dictatorship backed by Britain and the USA, where tens of thousands of peaceful protesters, including climate change activists, are imprisoned without trial and routinely tortured.

Global economic depression; wars and rumours of wars; climate catastrophe and ecosystem collapse; repression, fascism and state terror for those daring to resist—*these are the four horsemen of the capitalist apocalypse*. They are already rampaging through the so-called developing world; only a fool could think that the borders surrounding rich countries can protect their inhabitants from these apocalyptic developments.

The world has reached a real turning point, a crossroads. Each of the four dimensions of the global crisis are amplifying each other; millions, in fact billions of people are becoming aware of the enormous magnitude of challenges we face. The response of many is denial, despair and fatalism, but across the world, many are becoming aware that revolutionary change is necessary if humanity is to have a future. As Rosa Luxemburg, murdered by German social democrats a century ago, said: *Socialism, or barbarism!*

Solidarity and socialism

It is not enough to know what we are against, we must know what we are for. If we say we choose socialism, we must redefine—or [rediscover](#)—what this word means.

Socialism is the name for the *conscious struggle against everything that violates the equality and obstructs the unity of working people*, and the gravest violations of the equality of proletarians, and the greatest obstacles to our unity, result from the legacy of imperialism *and from its continuation in new forms*. This means we are opposed to sexism, patriarchy and racism in all its forms. But the biggest violation of our equality and the biggest obstacle to our unity are those created by capitalism and imperialism, *past and present*. The notion that workers in an imperialist country could achieve socialism before the consequences for the rest of humanity of historical and

contemporary imperialist exploitation have been addressed and redressed isn't socialism, it's an abomination.

The path to socialism goes through, not around, the eradication of the gigantic differences in living standards and life chances that violate the principle of equality within working class. Socialism must be anti-capitalist anti-imperialist to its core, or it is not socialism. And the same is true of *Solidarity Knows No Borders*, which must be anti-imperialist to its core, or it means nothing.

To conclude, *solidarity is the very essence of socialism.*

Capitalism forces us into competition with each other and to war with each other.

Socialism means replacing competition and war with cooperation and peace. To achieve this we must replace the dictatorship of Capital with the organised power of working people.

Socialism means using this power to take the economy into our hands, so that we can use the forces of production...

★ *to overcome the mutilating effects of imperialism, past and present, on the equality and unity of working people on a global scale;*

★ *and to reverse the capitalist destruction of nature that is accelerating, despite all the conferences and the greenwashing.*

Finally, socialism is the name for the transition that humanity must make if it is to have a future—to a world without borders, and a world without classes.

As Malcolm X [said](#), "Freedom for everybody, or freedom for nobody!"

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