

workplace, but that “seeks to dominate as many aspects of our lives as possible.” Yates shows that “working people are exploited and expropriated, making it impossible for them to achieve real freedom, autonomy, and unalienated lives in a capitalist society.”

Chapter Three looks at exploitation and oppression concretely, explaining why Marxists see workers as the agents of social change. It considers not only the forces that unite workers against the system, but the barriers – skill levels, nationality, race and gender, in particular – that pit them against each other and weaken the struggle.

Chapter Four addresses a subject that even experienced socialists often neglect, the victories and changes that working class struggles have already won, over the determined opposition of bosses and capitalist governments. In that important sense, workers not only can change the world, but have already done so.

Chapter Five demonstrates that despite those gains, the power of capital is still intact, and some important advances, including the successful revolutions in Russia and China, have been reversed. So long as capitalism remains globally dominant, no win for democracy and justice is permanent.

Like the book as a whole, Chapter Six is titled *Can the working class change the world?* The first word of that question is important – it is clear that working people can change the world, but *will* they? Getting from *can* to *will* isn't going to be easy or quick.

“Only radical thinking and acting have any chance of staving off accelerating levels of barbarism. Newer instruments must be forged: radically democratic labour unions and political parties, a scaling-up of collective self-help activities, massive levels of ‘occupy, resist, produce.’ ... It will take time for a class riven with so many fundamental cleavages, by race, ethnicity, gender, and imperialism most importantly, to unify itself and destroy its class enemy.”

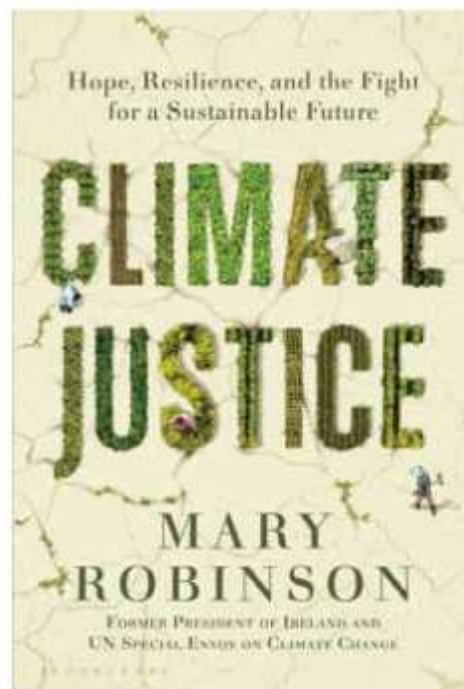
In this chapter, Yates discusses “multiple terrains of struggle” that will be central to building new organisations built on democracy and solidarity, that fight for immediate gains while never losing sight of the central objective.

“There is no reason for a working-class political project to exist unless its aim is the defeat of capital. Demands should be radical and principled, and they should be adhered to. Tactical compromise might sometimes be necessary, but this can never be a strategy.”

Michael Yates worked for many years as a labour educator, teaching working people in classrooms and union meetings across the US. Those years taught him something very important – how to express Marxist ideas in everyday English, without condescension, without false

bravado or illusions, and without any hint of dogmatism. The result is a superb popular account of what's wrong with capitalism and what working people must do to get rid of it. Even if you think you know all this, you should read it to learn, by shining example, how to explain socialist ideas in clear, concise and convincing terms.

Can the Working Class Change the World? should be on every ecosocialist's bookshelf. More than that, it should be in every radical worker's hands. It's a book to be read and discussed and argued over and acted on. Michael Yates has made an important contribution to building movements that not only can change the world, but *must*.



Mary Robinson **CLIMATE JUSTICE:** Hope, Resilience, and the Fight for a Sustainable Future by Mary Robinson

Reviewed by **Jeremy Williams**

This review was first published on the "Make Wealth History" website <https://makewealthhistory.org/>.

MARY ROBINSON DOES WHAT SHE has done repeatedly at international climate talks: gives the floor to grassroots activists. She steps into the background and lets other people tell their stories, often in their own words.

People like Constance Okollet, a Ugandan “climate witness”. She saw her farm washed away, and once she had

made the connection with climate change, she became an activist. She mobilised local people to help rebuild, and then to plant trees and try to mitigate the effects locally. She has spoken at climate talks, bringing a boots-on-the-ground rebuke to Western negotiators, but refusing to be a powerless victim. “Every Sunday, I travel to different parishes and speak after Mass” she says. “I stand up and tell the people that climate change has come to stay, but that we can overcome it by planting trees.”

When we think about climate change, a recurring phrase is that we should “do our bit” to reduce our footprint. Others harangue environmentalists for peddling “green guilt”. Both of those, a positive and a negative, imply complicity: climate change is something we're all causing through our lifestyles. Things look very different from the perspective of a Ugandan farmer. They don't have a car, or eat meat every day, or run a house full of appliances. For Constance, climate change is something that is done to her and her community. “It was not until I went to a meeting about climate change that I heard it was not from God, but the rich people in the West who are doing this to us.”

Each chapter in *Climate Justice* shares a personal story, most of them women. There's a salon owner who lost her business to Hurricane Katrina, activists from Chad, Alaska, and a woman from the EU's last nomadic tribe, the Saami. Each story highlights a particular aspect of climate change, such as the effects on the Arctic, small island states, or the intersection with American race politics. A union rep in Canada opens up the question of a just transition and how fossil fuel workers can be victims of climate change too. And for those wondering how they can respond, one chapter tells the story of a suburban mother reducing her ecological footprint and encouraging others to do the same.

It's not a long book (I read the whole thing last night while babysitting) so you'll be able to make time for it. It's powerful, compassionate, generous and hopeful. I found it very moving in places, which is not something I can usually report from books about climate change, and I'd recommend it.

Film review: **Everything Must Fall** Directed by **Rehad Desai**

Review by **Amandla!** correspondent

EVERYTHING MUST FALL documents the #FeesMustFall student movement. It begins with its rapid emergence onto the political scene in 2015 as a protest over the cost of higher education and follows it through its ups and downs and twists and turns. The



film presents the #FMF movement without being overly critical or complimentary of it. This is not to say that the story is presented dispassionately, without any political undertones, but it leaves viewers to draw their own conclusions, while still managing to present the story in a manner that is both gripping and informative.

The format, style and techniques chosen to tell the story mean that the #FMF movement is presented as a series of highly energetic mobilisations, while focus is limited to the movement's manifestation at one campus: the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). Even with this focal point, the film does well to link it with the broader movement that swept across 16 campuses nationwide, and (although only momentarily) it does make the viewer aware of the lulls in energy and periods of demobilisation. One major achievement of the film lies in its portrayal and presentation of the complexity and contradictions of the movement. It does so without getting lost in them but also without being too prescriptive.

Everything Must Fall is told through the stories of activists directly involved in the movement at Wits, in particular those of four student leaders who rose to prominence, as well as their Vice Chancellor, Adam Habib. There is no (or very limited) narration, and commentary and analysis of events is also left to those directly involved, giving us insight into their conceptions of the movement. In-depth interviews with two of the prominent student leaders (Shaeera Kalla and Vuyani Pambo) as well as Habib, other student activists, and progressive academics set the scene and offer explanations to viewers. There is

a profound absence of the voice of state officials (in particular the then Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande, who declined to be interviewed).

Through the interviews, the film weaves together different perspectives and themes as they emerge and gives them space to develop in their complexity – amongst others, these include intergenerational conflict, the conceptualisation of higher education as a public good, confrontation with state power, the weight of leadership on individuals, and internal struggles within the movement.

Particularly interesting is how *Everything Must Fall* documents the politics of the movement and its “focus” on various identities, and, associated with this, the (self) perceived power of university students. It captures identity politics in its many manifestations as it latches onto issues such as race, religion, gender, and sexuality, and draws out the conflicts, tensions and divisions that emerge on the basis of such a politics. In one example the patriarchal tendencies of the black consciousness current comes up against the Imbodoko (women-led) current, challenging the former's views on gender and sexuality. In another example, Pambo, an EFF leader, in the context of attempting to downplay the role and divisions created by the politics of different parties, indicates that “we could not fully play party line, we had to always speak first and foremost as students, that was our first identity”, and proceeds to state that “fallism is about all forms or symbols of oppression, all of them must fall”. This latter example is indicative of not just the breadth of identity politics’

reach, but also its depth, challenging even party politics.

The alliance with workers in their struggle against outsourcing is touched on in the film, and the dynamics of this relationship are – whether consciously or not – brought to the fore. At one point, student leaders and progressive academics stand on a podium and address workers in a manner that is more akin to a lecture than a mass democratic meeting. At another, workers are “educated” about wage demands. In another quite telling scene, two students are shown placing themselves in front of a line of security workers with a banner declaring on behalf of workers that “campus control [workers] stands in solidarity with students”. One commentator even ventures to pronounce that “workers have even less agency than students do ... as workers can be more easily replaced” – overlooking the fact that it is students who come and go, while workers remain, not to mention the structural power workers possess in the everyday functioning of the university.

For the most part, therefore, the film portrays students as seeing themselves as the most important agents in taking forward not only their struggle, but the struggle of workers as well. Students and activists tend to see workers as powerless, and as needing leadership and political education.

Overall, *Everything Must Fall* brings to the fore some of the more pertinent political questions of our time. ●