

Context of Food System(s) worker solidarities

**(proposing a background which
shapes the quest for justice and
solidarity)**

We have a History: it appears as a system divided against itself: (not necessarily in chronological)order

- **There is specialisation in land based production systems – agriculture – which uses human labour to obtain a product**
- **The interventions of science, coupled with the cost of labour, leads to scientists/technologists finding ever more ‘efficient’ ways of production by intensifying the use of machines, chemicals or systems to a greater extent than human labour, to obtain bigger, more reliable yields**
- **More and more land is brought under production, including land that is enclosed and colonised, both over here and over there**
- **‘Exotic’ foods are introduced and become part of the food systems of the UK. Overseas territories become established parts of the empire, including their labour**
- **Machines first and then Agrochemicals replace human labour in agriculture and at the same time imported agricultural products (cotton, sugar, potatoes, tea, coffee, chocolate, silk, tobacco, rum, etc.) form the basis of industrialisation in urban areas of the UK which begins in a very labour intensive way. Later, technology enters the production arena and many are laid off as industrialisation ‘becomes more efficient’.**

- **Gender relations are reshaped in different ways across Britain and her overseas territories and are reinforced by ideas of class, religion and politics, as more women enter the ‘workspace’, technology begins to turn its attention to ‘household labour-saving devices, but who is really being saved ?**
- **Meanwhile more and more people are living in cities and need ‘feeding’, pushing agriculture to be more productive and the notion of ‘cheap food’ is born. Few people know that cheap foods cheapen everything involved in all parts of the food systems they are derived from.**
- **Social mobility comes more into its own, it is linked with what one consumes: its perceived quality, rarity and relationship to the type of agriculture that produces it.**
- **Mass food marketing overtakes everything. ‘If it moves, market it’ is the catch phrase. Food is sold everywhere and there is more and more market concentration and massive mergers. Food quality suffers and there is a rise in non-communicable diseases brought on by poor diets.**
- **A consciousness that we are consuming more than the carrying capacity of the Earth is born. Sustainability and Climate Change take centre stage alongside localism and food miles**

- **Fair trade, Healthy Eating and ethical consumerism become topical but mainly amongst those who are NOT servicing the increasing urbanisation of a widening range and diversity of foods: raw, pre-prepared, cooked and thrown away**
- **Food Waste Statistics crashes all our complacencies but then it becomes an everyday part of our language, like sustainability and locavore, and the jargon shows up the gulf between the worlds that exist within Britain and a new/old term revisits us like the ghost of Christmas past: Food Poverty. Those who are food poor are not invested in by Food Banks.**
- **Recognition is given to the brokenness of a food system that was never really assembled intentionally, so may only have been held together with gum and tape (Adam Smith turns in his grave). It is understood that there is a misfit between our desire to continue to live richly off the global banqueting table based upon historical opportunism and the stark contrast between this and the great unwashed of the growing cities and former colonised territories and those who are neighbours in regional unions, all of whom in imitation of their betters, are seeking out, climbing onto and tipping up this great banqueting table. Upsetting everyone.**
- **Crisis means we have to have a system rethink or reset. One of the elements of this is to reset the button on labour as a key factor of production: the alternatives to this are to:**
 - **Produce food more cheaply using machines (on the farm and in the factory)**
 - **Extend the range of food production by claiming and reclaiming new territories (new commonwealth)**
 - **Introduce novel foods by extending the range of what is eaten (entomophagy etc.) and genetic modifications**
 - **Get the majority poor to waste less and eat less (without necessarily fully considering the circumstances of their dietary, cultural or social needs or circumstances)**

- **The urban seems pitted against the rural, the rich against the poor and the poor against themselves.**
- **Collective bargaining as a way to support the rights of labour appears to be undergoing a forced diet. Employment law which replaces it is focussed on the individual and their rights, but mostly it facilitates the called for responsibility of labour to ensure continued economic growth.**
- **Great infringements upon human rights within the workplace make news and excesses are occasionally curbed through Unionised action, but how long can this last? How fragile is the state of urban food system's labour in the UK? We learn about the term Precarious, applied to labour, rather than to cliff edges.**
- **Labour rights infringements occur at every level of the workplace and in rural and urban spaces. It affects those with or without documentation and all immigration statuses, all genders. However it affects some groups more than others.**
- **As a way of addressing the contradictory and conflicting nature of the 'broken' food system, coalitions of academics, small farmers, small scale land owners and renters, activists and organisers have come together to demand food sovereignty and agroecology now. Some are calling for justice, or even solidarity but what does this mean in a topsy-turvy world where there is little basis for trust across perceived difference, longstanding misunderstandings and persistent greed?**

- **Maybe this is just an unnecessarily gloomy account. There are perhaps vistas of joy and glory not mentioned, but which can be named without a sordid underside also emerging? I encourage both our speakers and participants to broaden the context as we proceed.**

We are asking the LANDWORKERS ALLIANCE, who represent smallholder farmers who form a UK chapter of the internationalised movement of small farmers, known as La Via Campesina, which is a millennial movement and the Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union, who have been organising on behalf of food manufacturing workers and who have been in operation since 1847, to speak to us and to hear each other and within the context of the threats and challenges, opportunities and strengths of the situation to imagine, between themselves what are the meeting places where trust can be built and thus solidarities established.

Not just any declaration of solidarity but the kind that can reshape the basis of a fair economy where everyone, not just those already privileged can benefit. We want to experience a non-partisan politics solidarity, where rich and poor, black and white, male and female, any category or creed for person, household or group can attest to the sense of fairness and justice that can establish a system of food use, production, distribution and consumption which does what it says on the can: feeds us, nourishes us and nurtures not only us but the entire planet and all its peoples and does so in a way in which finally, sustainability can have a meaning again which all of us can understand.