The Plebs News

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The Cost of Living Crisis

Capitalism never to seems to let a serious crisis go to waste- why can't our representatives be as bold.

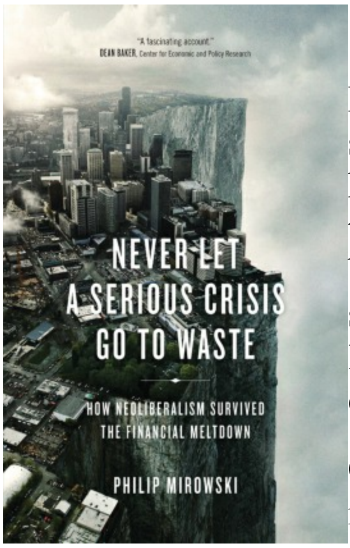
In 1979 James Callaghan was slammed for the comment "Crisis, what crisis?" after arriving back at Heathrow at the beginning of the so called "winter of discontent". The country is now probably entering its third crisis in the last fifteen years and the answer from this Government is to go missing pleading for the country to wait until it elects a successor to the serial failure Boris Johnson. Although the Government has gone missing big business and the corporations have siezed the opportunity to attack workers and consumers and to attempt to cement their dominance in the market and the workplace.

In 2008 a Labour Government saved the financial system from collapse by bailing out the banking system with public money but failed to take them into public ownership leaving them on course to repeat the same mistakes. Their return to private ownership sees the return of excessive mortgage lending driving up property prices, the markets pushing for a return to "normal" higher interest rates and the inevitable rise in unemployment and calls for more austerity.

The pandemic presented an equal opportunity for Governments to protect their people and to take proactive measures to protect the population, both in health terms and in economic terms. The subsequent measures handed billions to private companies in PPE and vaccine contracts, over 200,000 deaths through "too little, too late" lockdowns and billions lost in fraud to fictitious companies whilst many workers were left with little income to weather the storm.

The existing energy and cost of living crisis is being handled in the same way with over £150 billion of taxpayers money being handed to energy producers with the money being recouped through higher energy prices in the future, in effect an energy tax. Despite these measures many will see their energy costs doubled. New freedoms for fracking and oil and gas drilling with further exacerbate the climate crisis and hinder development of renewable energy measures. Despite the public crisis the companies themselves in rude health with both BP and Shell seeing their share price almost double over the last two years and resumption of higher dividend payments.

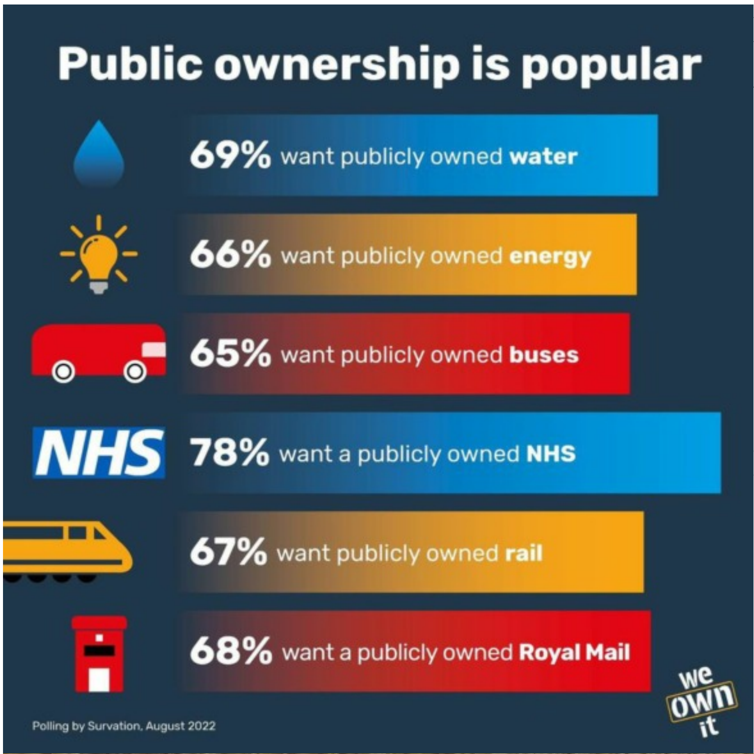
Despite these litany of failures and the popularity of public ownership among the electorate Labour still cannot pluck up the courage to defend the record of public ownership or to propose extending democratic control to the items that many of us depend on for our very existence.



Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste-by Philip Mirowski

Philip Mirowski finds an apt comparison to this situation in classic studies of cognitive dissonance. He concludes that neoliberal thought has become so pervasive that any countervailing evidence serves only to further convince disciples of its ultimate truth. Once neoliberalism became a Theory of Everything, providing a revolutionary account of self, knowledge, information, markets, and government, it could no longer be falsified by anything as trifling as data from the "real" economy.

Other articles : Philip Mirowski on why the Covid-19 pandemic is more opportunity than threat to neoliberalism



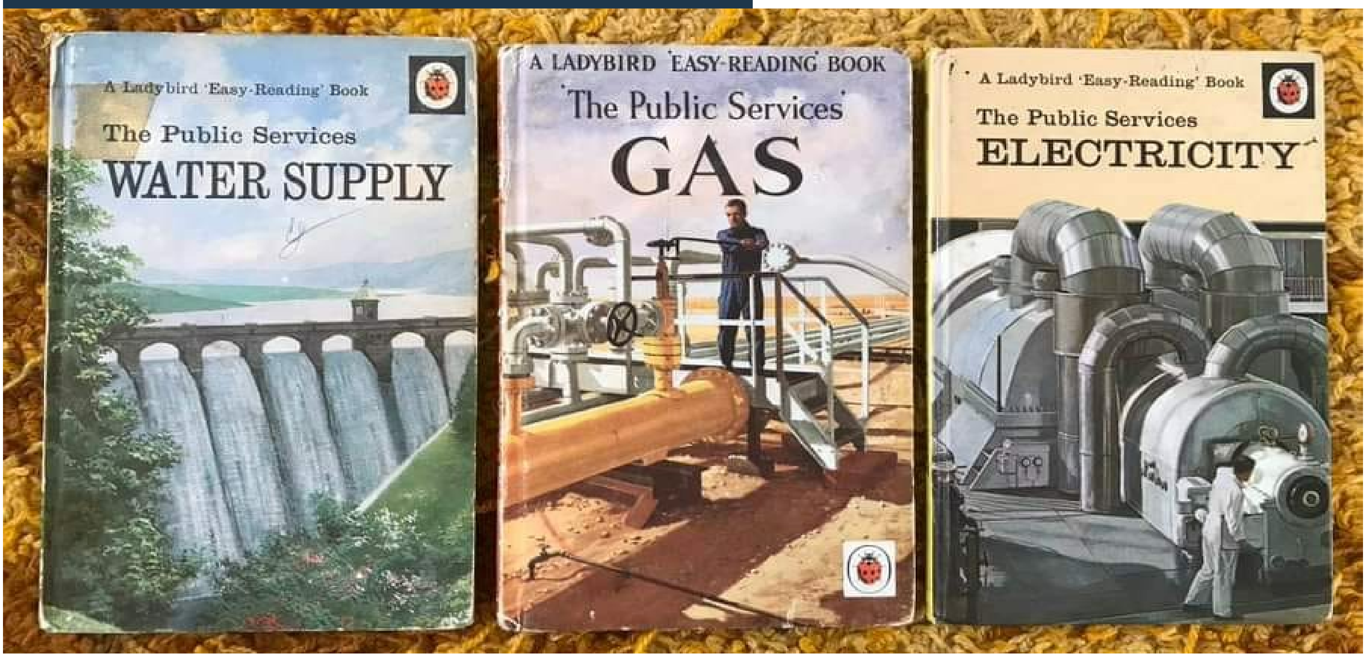
Reports by We Own It

When We Own It - a blueprint for 21st century public ownership

Privatised and Unprepared: The NHS Supply Chain

Local contact tracing schemes tracker

People's plan for water



The Elite's Answer to the Cost of Living Crisis: More Unemployment

By Grace Blakeley

Faced with demands for wage rises amid a cost of living crisis, Britain's economic establishment has set out to protect the wealthy – by driving up unemployment and starting a recession.

There are over 1,400 Trussell Trust food banks in the UK, in addition to at least 1,172 independent food banks.

The news from the Bank of England this week was not cheery. The Bank predicted that inflation would reach thirteen percent by October this year and that the shock caused by this increase in prices would lead to a recession lasting until at least mid-2023.

This is a particularly stark warning from the Bank of England, which will no doubt have many millions of people and businesses worried about the future. In fact, this is precisely the point.

Ever since central banks like the Bank of England were granted independence from government in the 1990s, one of the main ways in which they have sought to control inflation has been through 'forward guidance'—in other words, influencing the economy through statements like the one we heard the other day.

When the economy is overheating—i.e., when businesses are investing and people are spending so much that we run up against the limits on economic growth imposed by the supply of resources available—central bankers can slow economic activity down by indicating that an interest rate hike is coming down the line.

When this interest rate hike does hit, business and consumer borrowing will become more expensive, making businesses less likely to spend and households less likely to invest. But if businesses and households expect borrowing costs to rise in the future, then they're less likely to take out new debt even now—especially when that credit is only available at variable interest rates.

Central bankers can, of course, only rely on this trick so many times. If they signal that an interest rate rise is coming only to hold off when the time comes, people will be less likely to trust them in the future.

This problem of trust has become particularly significant during the post-2008 period as central bankers have continuously predicted big increases in economic growth and productivity that have never materialised.

Given that central bankers are clearly very aware of the importance of their words, and the huge impacts that these statements can have on financial markets, why have they shifted from providing overly sunny predictions to providing utterly dire ones?

The answer is that central bank officials believe that the only way to counter rising prices is to engineer a recession. This is precisely the tactic that was used by Thatcher in the 1980s, not only to bring down prices but also to curtail the power of the labour movement by generating massive unemployment.

When Thatcher went to war with the miners, she also hiked interest rates to a whopping seventeen percent—and ultimately, she won. But the effects on ordinary people were disastrous.

Within a few years, unemployment had reached three million and whole swathes of the country were afflicted by massive and rapid deindustrialisation, the consequences of which are still being felt to this day. The housing boom that set in towards the end of the 1980s helped to displace the impact of the recession for those families who could afford to purchase their houses, but it also laid the foundations for the financial crisis of 2008—as well as entrenching wealth and regional inequality.

Just like Thatcher in the 1980s, government and central bank officials are trying to engineer a recession that could leave millions of people in poverty, thousands homeless, and some dead.

These technocrats are hoping that the reward for inflicting such intense levels of suffering on the British population will be a quicker end to the cost of living crisis, and a shorter than anticipated recession. This outcome will, of course, fail to materialise for as long as prices are being driven up by cost pressures, supply chain issues, and climate breakdown.

The other outcome for which policymakers are hoping is the breaking of the spirit of the labour movement.

With staff shortages rampant in the wake of the pandemic, workers knew that they could organise without worrying too much about the threat of unemployment. Engineering a recession will, policymakers hope, push this fear much higher in workers' minds and discourage them from taking collective action.

But our political class is so out of touch with the rest of the population that they can't see that many people feel as though they haven't got much left to lose. Within a few months, many millions of people will find themselves unable simultaneously to pay their rent and their bills and feed their families.

During such desperate times, particularly coming in the wake of so many years of crisis, the power of fear as a tool of oppression becomes weaker. Campaigns like 'Enough is Enough' have captured the feelings of millions who cannot bear any more of the costs of crises caused by the top one percent.

Rather than giving in to the wishes of politicians and technocrats who hope that workers will take yet another hit to protect the profits of the powerful, workers up and down the country are going to organise to demand not just wage increase, but a fundamental change in our economic model.

If you want to join them, go to wesayenough.co.uk.

It doesn't have to be this way- Government fiscal policy can redistribute wealth as well as drive growth for the future.

	Monetary Policy	Fiscal Policy
Tool	Interest rates	Tax and government spending
Effect	Cost of borrowing/mortgages	Budget deficit
Distribution	Higher interest rates hit homeowners but benefit savers	Depends which taxes you raise.
Exchange rate	Higher interest rates cause appreciation	No effect on exchange rate
Supply-side	Limited impact	Higher taxes may affect incentives to work
Politics	Monetary policy set by independent Central Bank	Changing tax and government spending highly political.
Liquidity trap	Cuts in interest rates may not work in liquidity trap	Fiscal policy advised in very deep recessions

Left-wing austerity during international crises—it's the financial markets, stupid!

Damian Raess is an SNSF assistant professor at the World Trade Institute of the University of Bern, leading a research project on BRICS globalisation and labour protections in advanced industrial and emerging economies.

Surprisingly, left governments adopted more conservative fiscal policies than right governments in recent economic crises. These appear to have dire electoral consequences.

Left and right governments used to pursue distinct macroeconomic policies, with left governments associated with fiscal profligacy (and redistributive policies). Over the past few decades, however, left and right have converged, with no notable differences in their fiscal policies.

Even in times of crisis, when we might expect divergence, left and right fiscal policies appear indistinguishable. For instance, in reaction to the global financial crisis of 2007-08, both left and right governments endorsed austerity policies. While the news is already bad for the core constituencies of left parties, the reality is even worse.

My recent study scrutinises this convergence. It focuses on the role of government partisanship in fiscal-policy responses to international economic crises in advanced democracies. I find that, over the course of the business cycle in the two last crises, left governments pursued more restrictive fiscal policies than their right-wing counterparts. This amounts to no less than a reversal of traditional partisan effects.

Financial-market constraints

The switch in partisan effects is caused by constraints imposed by financial markets. My analysis shows that market actors were concerned about deficits in 1990-94 and about deficits and spending in 2008-13. Specifically, statistical analysis suggests that (indebted) left governments were less likely to engage in fiscal stimulus than right governments during the protracted early-1990s recession.

During the subsequent crisis, bond-market investors compelled indebted left governments, by comparison with their right-wing counterparts, to stimulate less forcefully by way of spending increases in 2008-09 and consolidate more forcefully by way of cuts during 2011-12. Meanwhile, investors more strongly constrained left governments to consolidate by reining in spending than did right governments in the (fragile) recovery of 2010.

Fiscal policy outputs under different constellations of partisanship and debt in 2011-12

	Left Cabinet Share (CS) Average 2010–2012		
	Left Majority CS>50%	Left Minority 20%<CS≤50%	No Left CS≤20%
Low Public Debt ≤60%	AUS **-1.55** (-0.02) NOR **-0.50** (-0.99)	CHE **0.26** (0.46) DNK **0.00** (0.49) FIN **-0.27** (1.70) LUX **-1.12** (-1.50)	NZL **-2.23** (-1.41) SWE **0.90** (0.03)
Averages	**-1.03** (-0.51)	**-0.28** (0.29)	**-0.66** (-0.69)
Medium Public Debt >60%; ≤90%	ESP* **-4.32** (-4.36)	IRE* **-2.77** (-2.76)	CAN **-1.34** (-1.49) DEU **-1.67** (-0.84) GBR **-1.10** (-1.53) NLD **-0.84** (-0.87)
Averages			**-1.24** (-1.18)
High Public Debt >90%	GRE* **-8.80** (-5.19) ISL* **-3.63** (-0.32) USA **-2.75** (-2.06)	AUT **-1.60** (-1.09) BEL **-0.67** (1.47) FRA **-1.77** (0.24) PRT* **-5.54** (-5.02)	ITA **-3.03** (-1.24) JPN **-0.07** (1.24)
Averages	**-2.75** (-2.06)	**-1.34** (0.21)	**-1.55** (0.00)

Size of fiscal stimulus (as % GDP) in bold; positive numbers indicate movement towards deficits. Size of spending increases (as % GDP) in parenthesis. US Democrats coded as left parties. Public debt measured in 2010. Averages (per quadrant) exclude Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Portugal and Spain under IMF/EU bailout (*).

Government reactions in the early 1990s and late 2000s / early 2010s set them apart from responses to earlier crises. If anything, fiscal-policy responses in the early 1980s were reminiscent of traditional partisan patterns.

Left governments stimulated more during downturns, although the models are statistically insignificant. They also consolidated less during the early recovery of 1984, irrespective of a country's exposure to financial markets. Low levels of indebtedness and limited capital-market openness in the early 1980s explain the absence of reversed partisan effects.Financial-market constraints are stronger for left than right governments at high debt level. This is because left governments have lower credibility as sovereign debtors. Bond-market actors are concerned about debt financing, defaults or incentives to inflate away public debt. In the view of market participants, these are the trademark of left governments. To maintain access to borrowing at similar rates to right governments during debt crises, left governments are compelled to impose more austerity. It's the price left-wing governments must pay for the 'credibility gap'

Fiscal policy central

Fiscal policy is not only crucial for economic stability; it also reflects a government's objectives, as enshrined in the national budget. With the advent of democratic capitalism, the economic dimension has been the main axis along which the political space is structured. It has defined distinguished party positions, with left parties more in favour of state intervention.

The core constituencies of left parties are more supportive of government redistribution. Conversely, individuals believe that left parties champion such policies more than right parties. The legitimacy of the party system and the democratic order itself still hinge on traditional partisan effects. The ideological mix with political partisanship during hard times is certainly confusing to ordinary citizens.

Voting with their feet

It is tempting to see the switching of partisan effects during major crises as one of the origins of our contemporary political crisis. Western democracies have been battling with extraordinary political discontent in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.

The most visible manifestation is the changing party-political landscape across advanced democracies. The clearest symptoms are the sharp drop in support for mainstream parties from the left and the right, the surge in support for established far-right parties, the eruption of challenger parties and the emergence of fault lines within mainstream parties which pose an existential threat to them. Populist far-right parties such as the AfD in Germany have made particularly pronounced electoral gains across northern Europe. In southern Europe, while the challenger Five Star Movement in Italy has enjoyed success, the picture is different in Spain, where the radical-left-populist party Podemos has risen to prominence alongside the radical-right populists of Vox.

In the UK, the traditional left led by Jeremy Corbyn took control of a divided Labour Party. Infighting pushed the party to the brink of implosion during a bitter leadership contest in the wake of the Brexit decision. In France, the creation of splinter groups within or around the Socialist Party, such as Arnaud Montebourg's Projet France to the left and Emmanuel Macron's En marche! to the centre-right, has undermined party cohesion.

Left and right parties have experienced dwindling support in recent years. But the electoral gains made by anti-establishment parties have come mostly at the expense of left parties. This is surprising, because observers initially thought the left would be able to capitalise on the global financial crisis and its dire economic consequences.

Left parties are caught between the (radicalised) demands of erstwhile constituents and the fiscal (and monetary) policy realities of a global economy fully in tune with the neoliberal policy paradigm. A critical rethink towards globalised capital markets is on the agenda for the left if it wishes to regain room to manoeuvre in formulating domestic policies and to remain a significant progressive movement.

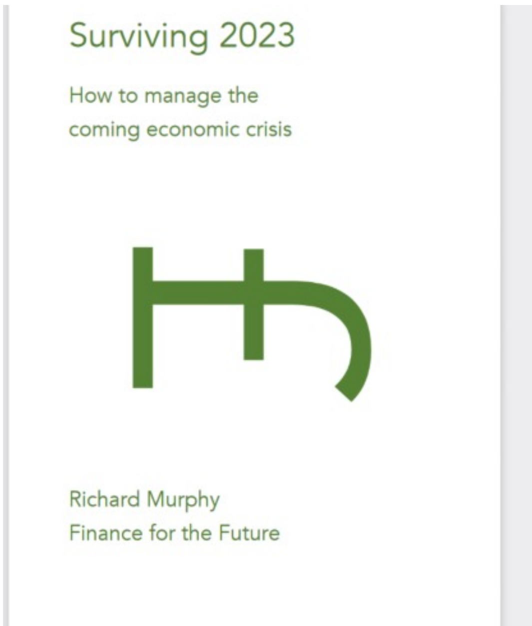
Two pieces of work to help us understand the Cost of Living Crisis

Download a copy

The "cost of living crisis" in the UK can be simply summed up: prices, especially of essentials, are too high, and wages, and other working-class incomes are too low.

The basic steps to resolving the crisis are simple: prices, especially of essentials, must be brought down, and wages, salaries, benefits, and pensions must be increased.

This pamphlet shows that the big businesses dominating production and distribution make huge profits out of high inflation, while working people lose out. It sets out factual evidence to illustrate that the source of record profits is the fall in real wages as inflation rises. A large part of the income of working people is transferred directly into the profits of big business.



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The crisis that we are facing is being caused by inflation. This started as a flurry after Covid reopening caused supply chain disruptions, but it is Putin's war and resulting gas price hikes by profiteering energy companies that are making this such a problem.

The problem is that inflation might reach 15%. Worse, for households on low incomes domestic price hikes might mean these households paying 24% or more of their after-tax income in energy costs. Staggeringly, all but the top 20% of households could be in fuel poverty.

Clearly, this issue needs to be addressed. But this is not the only problem. The Bank of England is currently seeking to ruin the economy by imposing interest rate rises that cannot work. This is going to deliver recession in the UK. The impact will be widespread.

In particular, schools, hospitals and care homes are all going to be unable to pay their energy bills this winter, creating massive new crises. And hundreds of thousands of companies are going to fail too, with millions unemployed. This is the bigger issue we must face.

multipolarista.com

China forgives 23 loans for 17 African countries, expands ‘win-win’ trade and infrastructure projects

Benjamin Norton

The Chinese government has announced that it is forgiving 23 interest-free loans for 17 African nations, while pledging to deepen its collaboration with the continent.

This is in addition to China’s cancellation of more than $3.4 billion in debt and restructuring of around $15 billion of debt in Africa between 2000 and 2019.

While Beijing has a repeated history of forgiving loans like this, Western governments have made baseless, politically motivated accusations that China uses “debt-trap diplomacy” in the Global South.

The United States has turned Africa into a battleground in its new cold war on China and Russia. And Washington has weaponized dubious claims of Chinese “debt traps” to try to demonize Beijing for its substantial infrastructure projects on the continent.

For its part, China has pushed back against the US new cold war.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held a meeting with leaders from various African countries and the African Union on August 18.

In the conference, Wang condemned the West’s “zero-sum Cold War mentality.” He instead proposed a model based on “multi-party cooperation” with Africa that brings “win-win results” for all sides.

“What Africa would welcome is mutually beneficial cooperation for the greater well-being of the people, not major-country rivalry for geopolitical gains,” he said.

Wang revealed that Beijing will support the African Union in its efforts to join the G20.

The foreign minister also announced that “China will waive the 23 interest-free loans for 17 African countries that had matured by the end of 2021.”

Beijing pledged to strengthen trade with Africa, and has made agreements with 12 countries on the continent to remove tariffs for 98% of the products they export to China, increasing the competitiveness of African goods.

Wang said Beijing will continue to provide food, economic, and military aid to Africa, while offering assistance in the fight against covid-19.

Emphasizing the importance of “development cooperation,” China offered billions of dollars of investment in infrastructure projects as “a strong boost to Africa’s industrialization process.”

Africa plays an important role in Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, a global infrastructure project aimed at interconnecting the Global South and moving the center of the world economy back east.

"In the face of the various forms of hegemonic and bullying practices, China and Africa have stood with each other shoulder to shoulder," Wang stressed, calling to "safeguard international fairness and justice."

US diplomats visit Africa, pressure it to cut ties with China and Russia

China's comments and promises to deepen "mutually beneficial cooperation" with Africa could hardly have been any more different from those made by top US diplomats.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, visited Uganda and Ghana in the first week of August. There, she threatened the continent, telling African nations they cannot do trade with Russia, or they will be violating Western sanctions.

Thomas-Greenfield warned in Uganda, "As for sanctions that we have on Russia – for example, oil sanctions – if a country decides to engage with Russia where there are sanctions, then they are breaking those sanctions; they're breaking our sanctions and in some cases they're breaking UN sanctions with other countries, and we caution countries not to break those sanctions because then, if they do, they stand the chance of having actions taken against them for breaking those sanctions."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken subsequently visited South Africa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Rwanda from August 7 to 11, as part of a trip aimed at weakening Africa's relations with China and Russia.

'The Chinese "debt trap" is a myth'

One of Washington's most powerful weapons in its information war on China is its evidence-free accusations that Beijing is supposedly trapping African nations in debt.

Yet as Multipolarista previously reported in an analysis of Sri Lanka's economic crisis, Western governments, financial institutions, banks, and vulture funds are responsible for the vast majority of debt that Global South countries are trapped in.

The UK government's own state media outlet BBC investigated allegations of "debt trap diplomacy" in Sri Lanka and reluctantly concluded that they are false.

"The truth is that many independent experts say that we should be wary of the Chinese debt trap narrative, and we've found quite a lot of evidence here in Sri Lanka which contradicts it," BBC reporter Ben Chu said in a dispatch.

Similarly, mainstream academics at Johns Hopkins University and Harvard Business School acknowledged in Washington's establishment magazine The Atlantic that "the Chinese 'debt trap' is a myth."

Scholar Deborah Brautigam wrote that the US government-sponsored narrative is "a lie, and a powerful one."

"Our research shows that Chinese banks are willing to restructure the terms of existing loans and have never actually seized an asset from any country," she added.

Brautigam found that, between 2000 and 2019, China cancelled more than $3.4 billion and restructured or refinanced around $15 billion of debt in Africa, renegotiating at least 26 individual loans.

This past debt forgiveness is in addition to the 23 interest-free loans for 17 African countries that Beijing has announced it will pardon.

Counterpunch.org

US Politics

The Progressive Industrial Complex and Our Fascist Future

David Rovics

Nancy Pelosi in Taipei . Imperial sabre rattling at a time of world crisis.

The Democratic Party leadership, along with the Liz Cheney wing of the Republican Party, seems intent on provoking a war with both Russia and China at the same time, all supposedly out of love for democracy and opposition to tyranny. The sidewalks of cities across the US are increasingly filled with the stench of the dead, who have passed away inside the tents in which they spent their last days. And you can still hear liberals wondering aloud why anyone would possibly vote for Trump again.

“I just don’t understand it,” they’ll say. “How can people be so stupid that they’ll vote against their own class interests?”

Don’t tell the liberals that the average Democrat in the Congress is worth a bit more than the average Republican. They don’t want to be confused by reality. In their minds, the Democrats are still the party of the working class. You know, the party that it almost maybe was, for a few years in the 1930’s, when it had to be.

“Have you ever listened to one of Trump’s speeches, from beginning to end?”

It’s my favorite question to ask anyone on the liberal-left spectrum. The vast majority of the time, after a bit of hedging, the answer is “no.”

If the average liberal used 1% of the time they spend asking other liberals why Trump is so popular just listening to how Trump and his supporters look at things, a lot more people could start developing some useful perspective here. But the liberals are as siloed into their propaganda sources as the rightwingers are stuck into theirs.

In the liberal’s digested version of MAGA, it’s all about scapegoating marginalized people for society’s problems. To the extent that there are real problems the MAGA crowd is upset about, such as constantly declining standards of living for most people in this country since the 1970’s or so, this is to be blamed on white people resenting their “loss of privilege.”

That is, the Forgotten Man that Trump and his supporters have been going on about for years day in and day out, is to remain forgotten.

But what if these Forgotten People, however they define themselves, don’t want to be Forgotten? What if this massive, intersectional base of MAGA support that the liberals dismiss as “privileged” think there might be more to life than continual decline? What is the solution offered by the liberals to all of this?

Here in Oregon, if we look to the gubernatorial race currently underway in this state completely controlled by the Democratic Party’s supermajority, the three main candidates being mentioned in the press agree that homelessness is a big problem, and the most visionary solution any of them seem to be able to offer is that the state government should find the resources to at least house the homeless veterans. Which, after all the time they’ve been running this state, they haven’t managed to do yet.

In contrast with the politicians of the more "populist" right and their media outlets, who vilify the marginalized groups they scapegoat for the decline in fortunes of the working class, the line of the elements of the corporate press and politicians who position themselves as progressives, for the most part, is to ignore class, unless it's related to race, gender, sexuality, immigration status, physical disability, mental illness, being an abuse survivor, or otherwise being part of some kind of marginalized group other than the biggest one of them all, that the vast majority of all of the marginalized groups are a member of (the working class).

For those of us who are participating in the creation of or the consumption of news stories, songs, and whatever else seeking to humanize marginalized elements of society that are constantly being vilified, lied about, and scapegoated by the right, what we do we do with positive intentions. Which, on the face of it, is obvious. But when all the tales of marginalization come in combination with the clear absence of stories that tie the right's divide-and-conquer scapegoating propaganda in with any kind of explanation for why most of US society — that is, white people — are in the impoverished and struggling state that most of us are in, we're left coming up empty.

The ingenuity of the liberal media and liberal academia in terms of finding well-intended journalists and academics to go along with the program and work neatly with the agenda of the liberal elite is it's an easy policy to engage in, with little brainwashing required. For those who have had experience with corporate or "public" media outlets, or with careers in academia, much less explanation is necessary. Anyone who has been close to these circles quickly discovers that it is generally not the journalists or the academics who decide what they're doing stories or research about, so much as which stories, documentaries, research proposals, departments, etc., are funded, and which aren't.

Especially if you're not dealing with the one-minute digested version of realities exposed by good journalism or academic research, an investigation into how the housing crisis has affected the Black population of Portland, for example, will undoubtedly also highlight how gentrification has similarly impacted the working class generally. And there are lots of good reasons to focus research on how the housing crisis affects the Black population specifically. But when any story or paper related to poverty always has to have a particular connection to forms of marginalization other than the most significant one, in a country where the overall standard of living of the working class has been declining for the past fifty years, an impression is developed.

How and why this impression is developed will vary depending on who's involved. For the journalist or the academic, the information being provided may be real enough, and also even very important. For those pulling the strings, and for those consuming the digested results of the research and reportage coming out of what we might call the Nonprofit Industrial Complex, it's fairly clear what they think the takeaway here is:

Ignore the wizard behind the curtain. This is more or less a classless society is the message. Anyone inferring otherwise is some kind of conspiracy theorist talking about the Forgotten Man and scapegoating the very groups we are constantly seeking to humanize. And we're humanizing them all so well, aren't we? Listen to how well we humanize the scapegoated, and ignore the wizard who isn't really there. The loss of your privilege is to be expected. It's not really part of an overall decline under late-stage monopoly capitalism run by a corrupt system led by old, rich, white people, half of whom call themselves Democrats. Blame those who are blaming the scapegoated groups that we're humanizing. Once we have a society free of prejudice, everyone will be happy and prosperous, by some magic process that shall not be defined.

And if that's not enough, and we still want to figure out why most of us are so poor, even though we're white?

Good luck.

This is where the Progressive Industrial Complex comes in. I may be the first anarchist to use this term, so I'll explain what I mean by that.

If we're defining the Nonprofit Industrial Complex as that complex of entities that together create much of the output of journalistic and academic endeavors coming out of much of the left-liberal spectrum, which tends to define the spectrum's orientation generally, then the Progressive Industrial Complex is what happens with these articles, books, documentaries, and research papers after they're out there in the world. It is what a Subreddit or a Facebook Group is to the New York Times.

This is the arena in which the ideas that are being continually implied by the Nonprofit Industrial Complex come home to roost, in the form of identitarian psychobabble. It doesn't seem to be much of a stretch in many social circles, once you've heard enough stories about the suffering of so many different groups marginalized on account of race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, or disability, to draw the conclusion that the only suffering that goes on in society happens to these particular marginalized groups.

Thus, if nonmarginalized (read white male) people are suffering, and it is not because of the scapegoated groups, nor is it because of a broken, rigged, and declining capitalist system, then it is our fault. The suicide and drug overdose rate among this group of people would suggest a lot of us have internalized this message very well.

Those who are looking for explanations to society's ills that are based in understanding the problems created by the division of society into classes, and the relations between these classes in the context of a capitalist economic system with an extreme, "pro-business" legal framework, will be denounced as class reductionists, closet racists, or maybe even just plain racists, and for good measure, probably sexists and transphobes, too. For pointing out that the general decline of the working class over the past fifty years in this society is the most central factor in the rise of the far right, which is daily capitalizing on this dire situation, you will be called many names by many people, if anyone's paying attention to what you say at all.

Perhaps the most laughable part about the intellectual infrastructure of the US identitarian, new new left's "loss of privilege" line of reasoning about the rise of the right is how much it requires that you have national blinders on in order to believe a word of it. Because all it takes is a cursory glance at just about any other country on the planet to see that the decline in living standards for the working class majority in this country is something that is happening in so many other places at the same time, including in countries with very different demographics and histories from ours, such as India or Brazil, where the idea of calling any large segment of the population "privileged" or at risk of a "loss of privilege" is patently ridiculous.

Of course, we could draw the conclusion that the rise of the far right in India is all about privileged Hindus not wanting to share their country with Muslims. We could draw the conclusion from the rise of the right in Brazil that the more privileged elements of society just want to steal more indigenous land. We could also understand the Brexit vote in England as nativist Britons wanting to keep their fancy country for themselves, and kick out all the foreigners. We could interpret the Yellow Vest movement in France as somehow antisemitic, rather than anti-elitist.

Or we could see how the right is defining the situation for people in these and other countries, and how the visible elements of the left are generally talking about everything other than the central problem all of these societies face. Because those visible elements of the left, or what people see when they're looking for the left's perspective on the situation, are represented by the leadership of entities such as the British Labor Party, the Socialist Party in France, the Democrats in the US, and the equivalents of these parties in India (the Congress Party) and Brazil (the Workers Party), etc. And all of these parties, perhaps with the exception of the Brazilian example, have long ago embraced all of the excesses of capitalism, and the global model of "development" — producing ever-growing chasms of inequality — put forward by the World Bank and the neoliberal economists from the Chicago School.

Why don't we hear from these Democratic leaders — since the DNC rigged the primaries and made sure Bernie wouldn't get the nomination — about the division of wealth in this country, or how it keeps getting worse under capitalism, and how we need to radically redistribute it in order to even think about getting anywhere towards a decent, fair society? For the same reasons you won't hear the Republican leadership talk about this. Because both parties are led by the rich, in the service of the rich, and the system of capitalism that keeps them rich.

For the right, the logic is pretty consistent for the past century or more. Harness prejudice of all kinds, weaponize the suffering of the working class to serve your ends, which generally have to do with serving the interests of the corporate elite. A long time ago, the left sought to address the suffering of the working class by organizing against the corporate elite, and challenging racism and xenophobia as tools of the plutocrats, used to keep the working class divided.

To the extent that there is anything left involved with the Democratic Party or the class-blind identitarianism it wholeheartedly embraces, the visible left's contemporary answer to working class suffering is to say that the white workers just need to "check our privilege" and get on with the belt-tightening, because now we have to lose our privilege, and make room for the marginalized groups that are now going to share the little tiny slice of the pie we've all been scrapping for for the past 500 years. As far as I can tell, the message from the liberals to the white working class was summed up by the Sex Pistols forty years ago: "there's no future for you."

Back in the 1930's, the US had a sufficiently class-oriented progressive government to keep the Great Depression from turning the general population in a more radical direction than it was already going in. The federal government recognized the importance of a strong labor movement, and for the government to take a central role in housing and feeding the population, and putting people to work building infrastructure, taking care of each other, and making art and music. In the 1930's, many people naturally began to conflate ideas like socialism and equality with patriotic Americanism.

In Germany, the forces of liberal democracy weren't able to — or, depending on which ones, didn't want to — hold the radicals at bay by finding a way to keep the population fed, and the radicals that came out on top were the Nazis. The National Socialists, as they called themselves. The ones who talked about the Forgotten Man, scapegoated marginalized groups, and united around a bombastic, charismatic leader, at a time when so many normally non-marginalized members of the population in Germany were destitute. An overall situation that is almost shockingly familiar — except from my vantage point, the US today looks far more like Weimar Germany than like FDR's America.

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"Santiago"

On September 11th, 1973, a military coup was launched in Chile. The leader of the coup, General Augusto Pinochet, was a proud fascist with CIA training, like most of his officers. The coup followed a CIA-facilitated campaign of destabilization of the popularly-elected socialist government of Salvador Allende. (The same sort of destabilization campaign that would see the ouster of the popularly-elected Australian government of Gough Whitlam two years later.) In the years following the coup in Chile, thousands would be killed, thousands more tortured.

Climate

Can We Save the Planet and Still Eat Meat?

Bob Holmes

As governments drag their feet in responding to climate change, many concerned people are looking for actions they can take as individuals—and eating less meat is an obvious place to start. Livestock today account for about 14.5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, more than all the world's cars and trucks combined.

Those numbers are daunting already, but the situation could grow worse: Our appetite for meat is increasing. The United Nations forecasts that the world will be eating 14 percent more of it by 2030, especially as middle-income countries get wealthier. That means more demand for pasture and feed crops, more deforestation, and more climate problems. For people alarmed about climate change, giving up meat altogether can seem like the only option.

But is it? A growing body of research suggests that the world could, in fact, raise a modest amount of beef, pork, chicken, and other meat, so that anyone who wants could eat a modest portion of meat a few times a week—and do so sustainably. Indeed, it turns out that a world with some animal agriculture in it likely would have a smaller environmental footprint than an entirely vegan world. The catch is that hitting the environmental sweet spot would require big changes in the way we raise livestock—and, for most of us in the wealthy West, a diet with considerably less meat than we eat today.

"The future that sounds sustainable to me is one where we have livestock, but it's a very different scale," says Nicole Tichenor Blackstone, a food systems sustainability researcher at Tufts University in Boston. "I think the livestock industry's going to have to look different."

One big reason for meat's outsized environmental impact is that it's more efficient for people to eat plants directly than to feed them to livestock. Chickens need almost 2 pounds of feed to produce each pound of weight gain, pigs need 3 to 5 pounds, and cattle need 6 to 10—and a lot of that weight gain is bones, skin, and guts, not meat. As a result, about 40 percent of the world's arable land is now used to grow animal feed, with all the attendant environmental costs related to factors such as deforestation, water use, fertilizer runoff, pesticides, and fossil fuel use.But it's not inevitable that livestock compete with people for crops. Ruminants—that is, grazing animals with multiple stomachs, like cattle, sheep, and goats—can digest the cellulose in grass, straw, and other fibrous plant material that humans can't eat, converting it into animal protein that we can. And two-thirds of the world's agricultural lands are grazing lands, many of which are too steep, arid, or marginal to be suitable for crops. "That land cannot be used for any other food-growing purpose other than the use of ruminant livestock," says Frank Mitloehner, an animal scientist at the University of California, Davis.

Of course, those grazing lands could revert to natural forest or grassland vegetation, taking up atmospheric carbon in the process. This carbon-capturing regrowth could be a major contributor to global climate-mitigation strategies aimed at net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, researchers say. But that's not necessarily incompatible with moderate levels of grazing. For example, some research suggests that replacing croplands with well-managed grazing lands in the southeastern U.S. captures far more carbon from the atmosphere.

Livestock can also use crop wastes such as the bran and germ left over when wheat is milled to white flour, or the soy meal left over after pressing the beans for oil. That's a big reason why 20 percent of the U.S. dairy herd is in California's Central Valley, where cows feed partly on wastes from fruits, nuts, and other specialty crops, Mitloehner says. Even pigs and chickens, which can't digest cellulose, could be fed on other wastes such as fallen fruit, discarded food scraps, and insects, which most people wouldn't eat.

The upshot is that a world entirely without meat would require about one-third more cropland—and therefore, more energy-intensive fertilizer, pesticides, and tractor fuel—to feed everyone, says Hannah van

Zanten, a sustainable food systems researcher at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. But only if we're talking about meat raised the right way, in the right amounts.

Livestock also bring other benefits. Meat provides balanced protein and other nutrients such as iron and vitamin B12 that are more difficult to get from a vegan diet, especially for poorer people who can't always afford a variety of fresh vegetables and other nutritious foods, says Matin Qaim, an agricultural economist at the University of Bonn, Germany, who co-authored a look at the sustainability of meat consumption in the 2022 Annual Review of Resource Economics. Livestock, he notes, are the main source of wealth for many otherwise poor people in traditional pastoral cultures. And on small, mixed farms, animals that graze widely and then deposit their manure in the farmyard can help to concentrate nutrients for use as fertilizer in the family's garden.

Moreover, many of the world's natural grasslands have evolved in the presence of grazers, which play a key role in ecosystem function. Where those native grazers no longer dominate—think of the vanished bison from the American prairies, for example—domestic livestock can fill the same role. "Grasslands are disturbance-dependent," says Sasha Gennet, who heads the sustainable grazing lands program for the Nature Conservancy. "Most of these systems evolved and adapted with grazing animals and fire. They can benefit from good livestock management practices. If you're doing it right, and you're doing it in the right places, you can have good outcomes for conservation."

For all these reasons, some experts say, the world is better off with some meat and dairy than it would be with none at all—though clearly, a sustainable livestock system would have to be much different, and smaller, than the one we have today. But suppose we did it right? How much meat could the world eat sustainably? The answer, most studies suggest, may be enough to give meat-eaters some hope.

Interdisciplinary researcher Vaclav Smil of the University of Manitoba got the ball rolling in 2013 with a back-of-the-envelope calculation published in his book, Should We Eat Meat? Let's assume, he reasoned, that we stop clearing forest for new pastureland, let 25 percent of existing pastures revert to forest or other natural vegetation, and feed livestock as much as possible on forage, crop residues, and other leftovers. After making those concessions to sustainability, Smil's best guesstimate was that this "rational" meat production could yield about two-thirds as much meat as the world was producing at the time. Subsequent studies suggest that the real number might be a bit lower, but still enough to promise a significant place for meat on the world's plate, even as the population continues to grow.

If so, there are several surprising implications. For one thing, the total amount of meat or dairy that could be produced in this way depends strongly on what else is on people's plates, says van Zanten. If people eat a healthy, whole-grain diet, for example, they leave fewer milling residues than they would on a diet heavy in refined grains—so a world full of healthy eaters can support fewer livestock on its leftovers. And little choices matter a lot: If people get most of their cooking oil from canola, for example, they leave less nutritious meal for feed after pressing out the oil than if they get their oil from soy.

A second surprise is the nature of the meat itself. Sustainability experts typically encourage people to eat less beef and more pork and chicken, because the latter are more efficient at converting feed into animal protein. But in the "livestock on leftovers" scenario, the amount of pork and chicken that can be raised is limited by the availability of milling residues, food scraps, and other food wastes. In contrast, cattle can graze on pasture, which shifts the livestock balance back somewhat toward beef, mutton, and dairy products.

Much would have to change to make such a world possible, van Zanten notes. To maximize the flow of food wastes to pigs and chickens, for example, cities would need systems for collecting household wastes, sterilizing them, and processing them for feed. Some Asian countries are well ahead on this already. "They have this whole infrastructure ready," van Zanten says. "In Europe, we don't." And much of our current animal agriculture, based on grain-fed livestock in feedlots, would have to be abandoned, causing significant economic disruption.

Moreover, people in wealthy countries would have to get used to eating less meat than they currently do. If no human-edible crops were fed to livestock, van Zanten and her colleagues calculated, the world could only produce enough meat and dairy for everyone to eat around 20 grams of animal protein per day, enough for a three-ounce piece of meat or cheese (about the size of a deck of cards) each day. By comparison, the average North American now chows down on about 70 grams of animal protein a day—well above their protein requirement—and the average European on 51.

That's a hefty reduction in meat—but it would bring significant environmental benefits. Because livestock would no longer eat feed crops, the world would need about a quarter less cropland than it uses today. That surplus cropland could be allowed to regrow into forest or other natural habitat, benefitting both biodiversity and carbon balance.

There's another dimension to meat's sustainability, though. The gut microbes that let grazing animals digest grasses and other human-inedible forage release methane in the process—and methane is a potent greenhouse gas. Indeed, methane from ruminants accounts for about 40 percent of all livestock-related greenhouse gas emissions. Animal scientists are working on ways to reduce the amount of methane produced by grazers. At present, however, it remains a serious problem.

Paradoxically, raising cattle on grass—better for other dimensions of sustainability—makes this problem worse, because grass-fed cattle grow more slowly. Grass-fed Brazilian cattle, for example, take three to four years to reach slaughter weight, compared with 18 months for U.S. cattle finished on grain in feedlots. And that's not all: Because the grain-fed animals eat less roughage, their microbes also produce less methane each day. As a result, grass-fed beef—often viewed as the greener option—actually emits more methane, says Jason Clay, senior vice president of markets for the World Wildlife Fund-U.S.

Even so, raising livestock on leftovers and marginal grazing lands not suitable for crops eliminates the need to grow feed crops, with all their associated emissions, and there will be fewer livestock overall. As a result, greenhouse gas emissions may end up lower than today. For Europe, for example, van Zanten and her colleagues compared expected emissions from livestock raised on leftovers and marginal lands against those from animals fed a conventional grain-based diet. Livestock on leftovers would produce up to 31 percent less greenhouse gas emissions than the conventional approach, they calculated.

Some sustainability experts also argue that as long as grazing herds aren't increasing, methane may be less of a worry than previously thought. Molecule for molecule, methane contributes about 80 times more warming than carbon dioxide does in the short term. However, CO_2 persists in the atmosphere for centuries, so newly emitted CO_2 always makes the climate crisis worse by adding to the stock of CO_2 in the atmosphere. In contrast, methane lasts only a decade or so in the atmosphere. If livestock levels remain constant over the span of decades, then the rate at which old methane washes out of the atmosphere will be about equal to the rate at which new methane is emitted, so there would be no additional burden on climate, says Qaim.

But with climate experts warning that the world may be fast approaching a climate tipping point, some experts say there's good reason to reduce meat consumption well below what's sustainable. Completely eliminating livestock, for example, would allow some of the land now devoted to feed crops and pastures to revert to native vegetation. Over 25 to 30 years of regrowth, this would tie up enough atmospheric CO_2 to completely offset a decade's worth of global fossil fuel emissions, Matthew Hayek, an environmental scientist at New York University, and his colleagues reported in 2020. Add to that the rapid reduction in methane no longer emitted by livestock, and the gains become even more attractive.

"We need to be moving in the opposite direction than we are now," says Hayek. "The things that are going to do that are aggressive, experimental, bold policies—not ones that try to marginally reduce meat consumption by 20 or even 50 percent."

This article originally appeared in Knowable Magazine, a nonprofit publication dedicated to making scientific knowledge accessible to all. Sign up for Knowable Magazine's newsletter.

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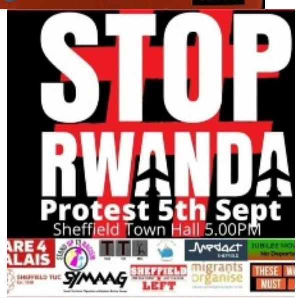

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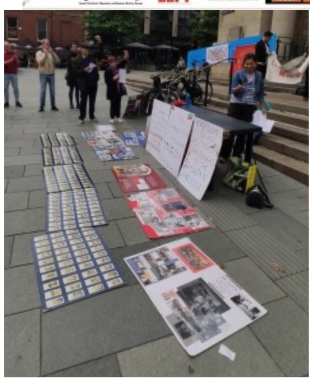

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