

The Plebs News



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2023 Hotter than Hell : Climate Change moves to Climate Breakdown



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2023 Predicted to be 10th Consecutive Year of Temperatures of 1 degree Centigrade of Industrial Warming

Anyone watching the news across 2023 will have seen most bulletins either dominated or including some element of climate related emergency. Forest fires, flooding, extreme temperatures all have made the headlines contributing to human and economic disasters for populations across the world.

2023 is now likely to be considered the hottest year on record, after an extreme summer of unprecedented high temperatures that led to widespread heatwaves, wildfires, and heavy rainfall, affecting various regions all over the world. During the first half of 2023, a developing El Niño event combined with human-caused climate change has led to a surge in global temperatures, breaking numerous records.

Previously, climate changes have hit the Global South the hardest but this year has seen climate events across major parts of the Global North and developed economies. Canada, the US and Europe have all seen floods, forest fires and hurricanes. According to a report out Wednesday from Swiss Re Group, which estimated global insured losses from natural catastrophes at \$50 billion — the second highest since 2011. "The effects of climate change are evident in increasingly extreme weather events," the report notes. Losses in the US states is predicted to hit \$34 billion.

The changes and events of 2023 have prompted UN Secretary-General António Guterres to warn "Climate Breakdown" has begun. But what does this mean. Speaking to the BBC, Professor Sir Bob Watson, who is currently Emeritus Professor of the UK's Tyndall Centre for Climate and former chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said, "I am very concerned. None of the observed changes so far (at +1.2C) are surprising. But they are more severe than we predicted. We probably underestimated the consequences." No longer is the pathway to 2050 a straight line but much more catastrophic as elements of the ecosystem break down. Sea temperatures and atmospheric generators, such as the North Atlantic Jetstream are making predictions more difficult and extreme.

Not only are the effects climatic and economic they are also political and the actions we take will be governed by political structures and events affected by climate change events. If anything, 2023 shows that "business as usual" is not going to be possible and radical measures are needed to avoid catastrophic consequences.

COP 28 Climate Conference : Dubai, United Arab Emirates.



UN Climate Change Conference - United Arab Emirates Nov/Dec 2023

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The 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference or Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, more commonly referred to as COP28, will be the 28th United Nations Climate Change conference, held from November 30 until December 12, 2023, at the Expo City, Dubai. The conference has been held annually since the first UN climate agreement in 1992. It is used by governments to agree on policies to limit global temperature rises and adapt to impacts associated with climate change.

Soon before the opening of COP28, the United Nations will publish the first two-year assessment of global progress to slow down climate change called the "global stocktake." The overview was established during COP26 in Glasgow and is scheduled to be repeated every five years.

Greenwashing

On 1 August 2023, the UAE allowed environmental activists to “assemble peacefully” at the summit, and vowed to provide them a space to “make their voices heard”, despite its laws that prohibit unauthorized protests. Prior to the conference, the UAE attempted to whitewash its international reputation. The country hired PR and lobbying agencies, including Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, Gulstan Advisory and FleishmanHillard, to promote itself as the host of COP28. This included fake social media accounts. Hundreds of such pseudo accounts were operating on Twitter and Medium. The campaign aimed at promoting and greenwashing COP28, while also defending criticism against the conference.

Campaigning journalist Amy Westervelt has been critical of lead-up efforts by the UN organizers to improve the transparency of COP 28 by requiring industry lobbyists to identify and argues this measure is entirely inadequate to control influence. It is argued that domination by industry lobbyists and the huge delegations from the Global North have acted against the interests of the developing nations. COP conference declarations have almost always gone to the wire with developing nations unhappy with the outcomes and failure to deliver on earlier promises.

Climate Justice and a Just Transition

The power imbalances within the formal structures and the financial power of industry lobbying has led to an alliance of civil and citizen organizations arguing for more radical measures that tackle climate change and also bring about less inequality and more social justice in the world. Globally this has involved an alliance of developing countries, indigenous peoples, social movements and trade unions.

In the UK this has seen the TUC publish a Green Recovery Plan and a report A Million Climate Jobs. The report provides a detailed and in-depth update of the One Million Climate Jobs report, demonstrating that there are many more than a million good, well paid, skilled jobs that could be created if we get serious and urgently tackle the climate emergency, as the science demands. In 2015 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) drafted a Just Transition Declaration which was adopted by the COP 26 in Glasgow.

Globally the Just Transition movement has aimed to protect indigenous peoples resources, to protect biodiversity and finance to help developing nations with transition to net zero.

Africa holds its first COP to agree a unified position



Al Jazeera

African Climate Summit- Nairobi Sept.23

African nations held their first Climate Conference in an attempt to agree a consolidated negotiating position for the forthcoming COP 28. But even here disagreements surfaced between leaders and civil society.

African political and business leaders have adopted a declaration to address climate challenges in Africa on the final day of a major climate summit in Kenya's capital, Nairobi

The adoption – announced on Wednesday by the summit's convener, Kenyan President William Ruto – proposes new global taxes and reforms to international financial institutions to help fund climate change action in a declaration that will form the basis of their negotiating position at November's COP28 summit.

The Nairobi Declaration capped the three-day Africa Climate Summit which was dominated by discussions of how to mobilise financing to adapt to increasingly extreme weather, conserve natural resources and develop renewable energy.

According to the United Nations, the continent contributes only about 2-3 percent of global emissions but suffers the most from the changing climate. Extreme weather events like drought – in the Horn of Africa – and flood – in parts of Central and West Africa – have become more frequent in recent years.

“Renewable energy could be the African miracle but we must make it happen. We must all work together for Africa to become a renewable energy superpower,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday at the summit.

But many civil society organisations fear even this summit has been hijacked. This year, African civil society organisations sent letters to the CEOs of BP, Chevron, Exxon and Shell, among others, warning these companies against investing in the drilling activities of Reconnaissance Energy Africa (ReconAfrica) in the Okavango Basin in Namibia and Botswana. More than 500 civil society organisations issued an urgent call to reset the focus of the Africa Climate Summit from Global North and corporate interests to one of African priorities, such as a just and equitable phase-out of all new fossil fuel projects.

Every new fossil fuel project is incompatible with a liveable future. According to the International Energy Agency, respecting the 1.5C warming limit and securing a liveable future means there can be no new coal, oil or gas. Shifting to renewable energy and phasing out fossil fuel reliance will permanently bring down soaring energy costs and increase energy security. Renewable technologies are more affordable, can be scaled up more rapidly and do not introduce further volatility through increased climate damage, fiscal instability and stranded asset risks as global gas demand drops. They can also be community-led and -owned and can better reach rural communities.



UN announces 'climate breakdown' after record summer heat- Al Jazeera



Climate breakdown: where is the left?- NEF



Earth just had its hottest summer on record, U.N. ... - CBS News

We Can't Defeat Climate Change Without Defeating Capitalism

By Zarah Sultana- Tribune 2021

It was once the case that a major obstacle for environmental activists was climate change denialism. Funded in secret by the fossil fuel industry, the science was fiercely discredited. Misinformation was pumped out to hide a deadly truth. Today, with some notable exceptions, there are few who would deny the evidence of climate change. That argument has largely been settled. Even oil giant Shell is compelled to acknowledge the climate emergency, recently imploring us, in a tweet, to consider, 'What are you willing to change to help reduce emissions?' But the refusal to properly understand climate change has not altogether gone away. Instead we confront a different, more subtle form of climate denialism.

This perspective does not deny the science of the climate emergency: it denies the politics. It pretends that tweaking the system here, or modifying it there, is enough to avert disaster. It acts as if business as usual is viable, focusing on banning plastic straws and encouraging bags for life. It suggests that the climate crisis is a problem of personal consumption, as if a change in consumer preferences might be enough to prevent climate disaster. This liberal fantasy is accompanied with another misleading notion: the so-called 'Anthropocene'. A concept increasingly popular among both academics and climate activists, it suggests that human beings in general are responsible for the increase in parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere from 280 in 1750 to 417 in May of last year.

This approach to the climate crisis is similar to those schools of establishment thought which blame grave social ills — such as poverty or illiteracy — on society as a whole, rather than the economic system that causes them and the wealthy few who have power to ameliorate them.

There is also a darker side to the Anthropocene thesis. If human beings collectively can be blamed for the planet's ills, so the logic goes, then a reduction in human population could be a solution. This, of course, is not a new idea: British economist Thomas Malthus expounded similar ideas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Shortly afterwards, the Malthusian overpopulation thesis was critiqued by Marx and Engels, who called it a 'libel on the human race.' For socialists, Malthus had mistakenly attributed blame on humanity as a whole for the problems which derived from a particular social system. If things were produced and distributed based on human need rather than capitalist growth, and if technology was directed towards the same ends, there was no reason why humans could not live in harmony with the planet.

The evidence backs this thesis up. A 2017 report by the Carbon Disclosure Project showed that 100 companies have been responsible for 71 per cent of global emissions since 1988. In 2019, a similar study from the Climate Accountability Institute found that just 20 companies were responsible for 35 per cent of all energy-related carbon dioxide and methane worldwide since 1965.

Our problem, in other words, is not the Anthropocene. Our problem is capitalism. The ecological collapse we face today can be squarely blamed on the accumulation of vast swathes of the world's resources by a tiny elite, who drive climate change with their greed. Capitalism is a system of highly concentrated power. And whether as individual consumers — through their private jets and lavish overconsumption — or as capitalists in the broader economy — pushing for new oil and gas extraction and driving production to cheaper but more pollutant locations — the ruling class have a vastly disproportionate impact on our climate.

In a class society, the desires of a tiny minority are prioritised above everyone's survival, as capitalism conscripts us to endless accumulation. Capitalists and workers alike are disciplined under the rules of the market — we must sell or die. Capital, as Marx put it, is 'self-valorising value': wealth is compelled to generate more wealth. As we burn up the ground beneath us and herald rising GDP figures on our finite planet, the current social order begins to look like a death cult. The distinctiveness of capitalism is that it is both a system of class power and universal domination — these two impulses rendering it doubly toxic for the environment.

The thesis that capitalism as a system, rather than humans as a species, is responsible for our ecological crisis is growing in popularity. Swedish writer Andreas Malm's *Fossil Capital* explores the role that steam power in Britain's Industrial Revolution played in this dynamic, arguing that the logic of capital — and in particular its drive to subordinate labour—was crucial in the ascent of climate-changing technologies.

Jason Moore, an environmental historian and sociologist at Binghamton University, goes even further. He argues that it is not the Anthropocene which we are experiencing, but the Capitalocene — pointing out that the majority of the world's emissions come from production, something which the masses of the people have little to no control over. In our economies, the means of production remain squarely in private hands — in the hands of capitalists.

Once we can name capitalism as the problem, the solutions become much clearer. If capitalism means class power and an endless pursuit of profit, socialism must mean democratic power and production for need. Those two things should be our lodestars in fighting climate change.

Targeting the conspicuous, utterly unnecessary consumption of the capitalist class would be a first step. The main aim, as Moore suggests, must be winning collective control over production itself — a way of ensuring that what is produced today is not simply that which is most profitable, but best for society and the planet as a whole.

And think of the benefits that this could have. Rather than spending our lives tied to our jobs, we could take democratic control and plan our resources and our work. We could set climate targets and achieve them while ensuring that the standard of living for most people increased — through the redistribution of wealth, the effective organisation of production and, simply, greater time off.

And climate-friendly policies could have much broader benefits too. There are plenty of homes that need insulating, and solar panels and wind turbines to be built. We could train a new generation of workers for green jobs that help to mend the climate rather than further polluting it. States can do this, but only if they take wealth from capitalists and use it for common and useful ends, rather than private and profiteering ones.

This is the demand for a Green New Deal — the radicalism of which only grows as climate disaster approaches ever closer. Its alternatives do not offer us a future: a green capitalism, favoured by the liberal centre, fails to tackle the ecologically destructive tendencies at the heart of our system. Or worse, eco-fascism: a growing ideology which seeks to insulate a small Western minority from the fallout of the climate disaster while forcing the poor masses of the world to bear its costs.

This far-right environmentalist agenda places a spotlight on another aspect of our struggle. Capitalism is a global system. Any resistance to it must traverse borders too. Failure to do so will feed an increasingly exclusionary green politics which is more concerned with litter in our localities than floods which could displace as many as one in seven people in Bangladesh by 2050.

Decisions made around a boardroom in London or New York can pollute rivers in Bangladesh or destroy rainforests in Brazil. A Green New Deal that fuels electric cars with lithium batteries mined in unsafe conditions in the Global South is not good enough. The coalitions we need to beat fossil capitalism will gain their power by bringing together flood victims from England to Indonesia and many others too, in an eco-socialist movement that speaks for the global 99% and against polluting profiteers — wherever they might plunder the earth.

These are the first principles for a green socialism. Much of the important work lies in filling in the details, but the climate movement must begin by dispelling some illusions. To paraphrase an old line, those who do not wish to speak about capitalism must remain silent about ecological devastation.

Far from being the problem, the Anthropocene might be the solution: the idea of humanity collectively taking charge of our destiny, making history deliberately across borders in a common project to improve life. Today, the demand for democratic planning, pitted against the anarchy of the marketplace and the concentrated power of the capitalist class, is a demand for nothing less than survival.

Why Labour needs to win in the countryside?

If Labour is to win the next election and form a Government then a victory on the scale of 1997 is needed and many of those seats we need to win will be in rural or semi rural areas. In 1997 almost 200 of the seats won by Labour were classed as rural or semi rural but many were held for only one term. But these seats should not be one off hits for Labour as they all contain a history of Labour organisation and much work continues to be carried on by Labour activists building capacity for a future win. I became a Labour councillor in Kings Lynn in Norfolk in 1991 after defeating a longstanding Tory councillor in a by election. That initial victory started a steady climb of Labour victories that eventually concluded with a Labour run council and a Labour MP elected in 1997. Recent Council elections have seen the Tories lose control of Kings Lynn Council along with two longstanding Tory strongholds of Broadland and Great Yarmouth. Plebs News looks at the history and some of the continuing Labour organisation in the East of England but also notes Labour revivals in other parts of the country.

We begin with an article from Renewal by Luke Pollard written in 2021 when he was Shadow Minister for Rural Affairs in the Journal Renewal.

How does Labour become the party of the countryside? | Renewal

Luke Pollard MP | Renewal 29/3/21

A new divide is opening up between Conservatives and the countryside. Labour is well placed to seize this terrain.

Labour has a mountain to climb to win the next general election. It is a task that we cannot escape or run from. We need new ways of working and new thinking. To win a majority of just one, Labour will need to gain 126 seats, and to do that we will need to construct the broadest electoral coalition of any winning party in my adult life. It means winning back trust in communities in Scotland, across the North and the Midlands, beating newly elected Tories in red wall seats, taking back North Wales and winning those elusive marginal contests the nation over. And yes, it also means winning seats in rural communities the party has not won in years. We each have a role to play in building that broad electoral coalition, and winning more Labour votes in rural communities is mine.

Keir Starmer and I began this work at NFU president Minette Batters' farm in Wiltshire during a brief respite from lockdown in October 2020. Meeting in her muddy farmyard we both turned up in well-worn wellies, Keir in a bomber jacket. The NFU head looked surprised: the last politician on her farm had stepped out of the ministerial car on a wet day with no coat or wellies.

The inescapable truth is that while the Conservatives take rural voters for granted, Labour hasn't always turned up at all. Too many electoral contests with no Labour candidate to vote for – but, as well as turning up on the ballot paper, Labour needs to be heard and seen in local media, on the doorstep, in council chambers, on the letters page, in the pub and at church fetes.

Act on what is heard

We cannot simply turn up and listen. Crucially, we need to act on what we hear, and turn up in terms of policy and presence as well. Labour is never short on policy, but we need to examine more whether it is always the right policy for all the communities we need to win. Whitehall and Westminster are often accused of making policy for urban areas and then testing it against the needs of rural communities. However, even then, rural communities don't get that much of a look in. That needs to change.

Signalling this long overdue change, Keir's speech to the National Farmers Union annual conference last February launched Labour's Rural England Policy Review. He was our first leader to address the NFU since Gordon Brown thirteen years ago. The instruction from Keir is clear, Labour's next manifesto must offer as much hope and opportunity to people in rural communities as to those who live in towns and cities.

To do that, we must go beyond Labour's comfort zones (such as rural buses), and make an offer to countryside communities that spans the full breadth of policy. The top issues for countryside communities

are similar to urban areas but with added complexity: distance, smaller communities, high house prices and low wages. Rural areas are poorly served by a picture postcard view held in Westminster and Whitehall of thatched cottages, rolling countryside and picturesque moorland. You can't eat a view – and Labour's policy offer must reflect the realities of everyday life in rural areas.

Farming is now political

Rural life is more than just farming, but for the very first time since the landmark Agriculture Act of 1948, farming is political again. The 1945 Labour government viewed food production as a national security issue just as much as a driver of employment and landscape management. Since then, the Conservatives and Labour have, by and large, agreed on farming policy at the strategic level. There have been disagreements on detail, farming methods, chemical use and animal welfare, but support for the structure of farming was solid on both sides. That has now changed.

The Tories now have an unwritten manifesto of change for farming. If they came clean, their plans would crash under the profound weight of anger and opposition. These stealth changes represent the biggest assault on farming in generations. The new divide looks like this: the Conservatives want to import more food from abroad encouraged by post-Brexit trade deals. To achieve lower prices they're prepared to overlook production methods with lower animal welfare and environmental standards. They want to cut the absolute number of UK farmers, regarding them as inefficient after decades of EU cushioning. Their farm support payment changes are designed to put many small family and mixed farms out of business, favouring further intensification, automation and aggregation into bigger estates.

The offer we will develop through the Rural Review is fundamentally different. We favour growing more of our own food here in Britain, buying British, and investing to create countryside jobs, cut carbon and restore nature. We want Britain's high food and farming standards put into law, backing British farmers, small or large, to grow sustainably here. Instead of importing food produced to lower standards from the other side of the planet, we want to see trade policy driving global environmental gains.

Many farmers when confronted with this choice are already reaching the conclusion – sometimes to their surprise – that Labour is the party of the countryside rather than the Tories.

Better connection to the land

Because there is now a great farming divide between Labour and the Conservatives, it is even more important that our policies are informed by the real world experiences of farmers and rural communities, the wider supply chain, and consumers too. Even people with rural backgrounds can find themselves becoming detached from rural life and the challenges of food production.

James Rebanks wrote about his own journey away from his rural Cumbrian roots and back again in *English Pastoral*, a twenty-first century farmer's account of three generations of his own family: 'When we left, we were farmers. When we returned, other people, tougher people, were the farmers, and we just loved "nature". We had become free of the harsh realities and were then several steps removed from what others now did in our name to feed us.' His conclusion is telling: we need 'a politics that sees the land and what happens on it as being at the heart of building a more just and decent country'.¹

Polling on rural voters' attitudes to Labour is limited and dated – that is one issue I hope we can redress. What data we do have shows that rural voters do not believe Labour understands rural areas, or shares their values. In her 2015 report *Labour's Rural Problem*, Maria Eagle MP writes about Labour members: 'For too many, rurality is synonymous with Conservatism, and engaging with these communities is at best an afterthought, and at worst a complete waste of time'.²

We need to acknowledge that perception before we can challenge it. When Keir asked me to lead the Rural Review, I made it clear that the review must be authentic and comprehensive. It must stretch across the frontbench teams and be owned by Team Labour, not just me. It must be no quick fix, but instead a careful and thoughtful examination of how the party has got to this point. We must be humble. The review must not fall into the trap of assuming rural people to be the same the country over, or that countryside dwellers are different to urban people; instead, it must reflect the diversity of rural communities and understand the core

values which exist everywhere. It is because Keir was in the exact same place as me on this that we agreed to start this work.

Rural proofing has failed because it was never done properly

Defra's job as the lead on rural affairs includes 'rural proofing' policies across government. The government claims this is meant to ensure 'rural areas are taken into account in designing and delivering policies'. However, in practice, that exercise has merely served to highlight this government's utter complacency, the inadequacy of their understanding, and their siloed response to the real issues faced by rural communities. Rural proofing has failed because it was never done properly.

There is damning evidence of this recorded in Defra's latest rural proofing report. Among its findings are: houses are less affordable in rural areas than in urban; around half of all houses in the most rural areas are 'energy inefficient', just 7 per cent in urban areas; average public transport travel time to hospital is twice as long in rural areas as in urban; broadband speeds and 4G coverage are poorer. Not surprisingly with these disadvantages, the report found productivity is lower in rural areas and actually fell from 10 per cent to 18 per cent below the England average between 2001 and 2018.³

The stark reality is that, after eleven years in power, the blame lies solely with the Conservatives.

Labour's Rural Review is shining more light on the Tories' rural failures.⁴ This has found that young people in rural areas are struggling now more than at any time over the last ten years to get onto the property ladder, with house prices nearly nine times higher than annual earnings and an estimated 132,000 fewer young homeowners in rural areas now than in 2010; rural communities have been hit hard by cuts to police services with crime rates soaring over three times faster than in the country as a whole since 2011; rural areas have twice the proportion of officially 'non-decent' homes as suburban residential areas; local authority supported rural bus provision has declined by 54 per cent since 2011, filling country roads with more cars.

Rural proofing has failed because Defra has been taken over by a dreary managerialism, a failure of leadership driving a second-order department towards marginality, at a time when it should be growing its role and influence. Future Conservative rural proofing reports could well end up simply documenting how rural communities have failed to attract as much of the much hyped levelling-up funding; how rural businesses have been disproportionately devastated by EU trade deal red tape imposed by the government asymmetrically on this side of the channel; and how rural villages have continued to lose their banks, pubs, post offices and their last shops.

I don't like the concept of rural proofing because it starts from the assumption that countryside issues come after urban thinking. It's also paper-thin. Where is the hard and fast assessment of rural effectiveness? Where is the cross-government champion driving awareness of rural communities? Where are the consequences for ministers who so consistently and so obviously fail rural communities?

In contrast to the Conservatives' rural proofing, I want Labour policy to be rural positive, to make sure we can build joined-up policies – across transport, access to health services, housing, business, crime and policing, support for young people and skills training. So I am getting out and about with my shadow cabinet colleagues to turn up, listen and act on what we have heard.

Labour's rural drive as a political objective

Turning up in rural areas must be a conscious manifestation of Labour as a political force. As Keir stated in his NFU speech 'no party can claim to represent the country, if we do not represent the countryside'.⁵ No longer can rural voters be an 'afterthought' for Labour, or perceived as such: or else, how can we be surprised when we are an afterthought for them? Daniel Zeichner MP, Labour's Shadow Farming Minister, told me about asking a countryside plumber what made him vote the way he does, 'I guess I vote Tory because that's what people in South Norfolk do'. Polling shows that people who are very similar demographically vote Labour in Labour areas and Tory in Tory areas.

This government has not only taken rural votes for granted, but it has also treated our nation's food production with disdain. The Conservatives have surrendered their authority in the countryside and created a

toxic relationship with farmers and fishers. Labour and the NFU may not seem natural bed fellows, but they are standing shoulder to shoulder against the Conservatives on food standards.

Labour's 'buy British, buy local' campaign means buying more locally-produced meat, vegetables and fruit, but it also means making inroads into diets and behaviours going back decades: it means eating more British fish, instead of importing the fish we eat and exporting the fish we catch. Food miles need to be spoken about again, and we need to get serious about carbon and water use in supply chains, because when we do our local produce becomes more attractive than cheaply produced food from down-under or across the pond.

Labour has popular policies on green space and clean air, and our rural crime policy was praised by the Countryside Alliance. Labour can strengthen the rural economy, offering high-quality green jobs, access to training and education, and better digital connections for home working. Rural areas desperately need the properly-funded, better-quality public services which Labour can deliver. Labour is better placed to offer a more hopeful vision, a more thoughtful approach, and an economic plan which closes the gaps between communities that austerity has opened up.

This May, in an otherwise tough set of elections for Labour, Dr Nik Johnson was elected as Cambridgeshire and Peterborough mayor, and Dan Norris as mayor of the West of England. Labour also took council seats from the Conservatives in Chipping Norton and Witney, in Tunbridge Wells and Worthing, and reduced Tory majorities in many more rural wards across England. It was a glimpse of what we can achieve nationally.

As we have seen in our own traditional areas of support, the speed at which old, universally-accepted truisms of political faith can collapse is surprising. Every swing towards Labour in blue territory, big and small, further erodes the notion that the countryside dutifully votes Conservative as a matter of course. The role of the Rural England Policy Review is to ensure that when this happens, Labour is ready, armed with policy, equipped with a positive message and an abundance of trusted messengers.

Alongside the 'red wall' is a rural wall, if you will excuse me butchering this overused simplification of complex causes. The Tories' 'rural wall' borders nearly every Labour constituency. Fast-changing demographics could enhance the opportunity for political change, with urban workers relocating to the countryside in response to the pandemic. But this is not a question of binary oppositions. We do not live in either urban or rural communities: a myriad of villages, small towns, suburban communities and commuter towns are nestled in the countryside. Labour must maintain our strong support in cities but also address a sense of alienation that is setting in across the suburbs.

Rural voters alone will not win Labour power, but without them we will not stand a chance. That is the blunt political reality we must face and why Labour's Rural Review is an exercise in ambition not just practicality.

In Tony Blair's landslide 1997 victory, Labour won 179 seats classed as rural or semi-rural: currently we hold just 17. This shows that Labour has won trust here before, but also that there is no such thing as a successful Labour campaign that does not have something substantial to offer people in rural seats, no path to Downing Street that does not go through acre after acre of English countryside. If Labour are to climb the mountain in front of us, we will need to turn up – and not forget a coat and a pair of wellies.

Luke Pollard is Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament for Plymouth Sutton and Devonport, and Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

1. James Rebanks, *English Pastoral: an inheritance*, Penguin, London 2020, p200.
2. Maria Eagle, 'Labour's Rural Problem – Winning Again in Coast and Country', internal report, Labour Party, 2015.
3. Defra, 'Rural Proofing in England 2020: delivering policy in a rural context', Defra, London 2021: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-proofing-in-england-2020>.
4. The Labour Party, 'Labour's Rural England Policy Review', 2021: <https://labour.org.uk/page/rural-england-policy-review/>.
5. Keir Starmer, 'Speech to the National Farmers' Union', 23 February 2021: <https://labour.org.uk/press/keir-starmer-speech-to-the-national-farmers-union/>.

Where did the struggle begin? It began with the land.



This month saw Clive Lewis MP headline a list of labour speakers at the Burston School Strike Rally. But where is Burston? The rally commemorates the “longest strike” in history lasting over 25 years as agricultural workers in a Norfolk village set up a school for their children after the teachers, the Higdonns were sacked. The school strike took place alongside the organising of trade unions in the workplace and ventures into formal political structures. Trade union leader Joseph Arch had been elected as MP for Kings Lynn in 1885, as a Liberal, similar to early mining trade unionists.

In 1913, after organising among the local agricultural labourers, Tom Higdon successfully stood for election to the parish council, topping the poll with the local rector, and Chair of the School Board, failing to be elected, against his expectation. However, although the rector and the farm owners had been defeated in the parish council election, they still had control of the school's managing body and were determined to use this power to victimise the Higdonns. Since their arrival in Burston, the Higdonns had complained about conditions in the school, particularly the dampness, inadequate heating and lighting, lack of ventilation and general unhygienic conditions. Looking for a pretext for action, the managers accused Kitty of lighting a fire without their permission – to dry the clothes of children who had walked three miles to school in the rain. Their refusal to have life dominated by landowners and employers saw the school operate independently for 25 years between 1914 and 1939 and now stands as a museum to the struggle. The Strike school was supported by financial contributions from unions around the country and saw a joining together of the industrial and agricultural struggle.

The story of the strike was dramatised in 1985 by the BBC. *Screen Two: The Burston Rebellion* starred Eileen Atkins as Kitty Higdon, Bernard Hill as Tom Higdon, John Shrapnel as the Reverend Charles Tucker Eland and Nicola Cowper as Violet Potter. It was shown on 24 February 1985, following a documentary about the strike the previous day.

The Agricultural Struggle

Long before the workers' struggle of the Industrial Revolution another battle for democratic and economic rights was waged in the Southern Counties of England and across the UK as agricultural workers were forced off Common Land and forced into wage labour for landowners and farmers. In other places workers were displaced either to make way for sheep grazing or by the introduction of machinery. From the 1750s enclosure by parliamentary Act became the norm. Overall, between 1604 and 1914 over 5,200 enclosure Bills were enacted by Parliament which related to just over a fifth of the total area of England, amounting to some 6.8 million acres. The powers granted in the Inclosure Act 1773 of the Parliament of Great Britain were often abused by landowners: the preliminary meetings where enclosure was discussed, intended to be held in public, often took place in the presence of only the local landowners, who regularly chose their own solicitors, surveyors and commissioners to decide on each case. In 1786 there were still 250,000 independent landowners, but in the course of only thirty years their number was reduced to 32,000.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place. The Poor Law Commission's Migration scheme, 1835-37 - Peter Park Dissertation: Creative Commons Licence

Between January 1835 and June 1837 over 500 families, comprised of more than 5,000 individuals, moved from the agricultural counties of southern and eastern England to the manufacturing districts of the north. Their migration was carried out under the auspices of the Poor Law Commission's home migration scheme (one of the first attempts at social engineering by a modern British government agency), but approximately the same numbers followed them independently. The dissertation examines how some benefited from the migration and how others were coerced through the new Poor Law to leave family and friends behind. It has parallels with today in demonstrating how little agency workers have over their lives in both modern and historical capitalism.

KEY WORKERS UNITED

KWU no 20 September/October 2023, Norwich

SLOW YOU DOWN... BUT THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES!

THE ANATOMY OF THE STRIKE MOVEMENT



WHERE IS the strike movement today? And let's be clear, it *is* a movement that has been built and sustained by public service workers. Centred on pay, this has triggered a new rank and file willingness to engage in repeated strikes where none had happened before, and given heart to those in the private gig-economy like Amazon. This willingness has come out of the knowledge that most workplaces are tyrannised by the onslaught of *profit-centred services* rather than *social services*. Time and time again, workers have said 'this is not just about pay' and having returned to work, they find that nothing has basically changed. The RMT strikes continue because the rail companies are as determined as ever to worsen conditions, cut jobs (as in ticket office closures) and tear up agreements.

What have we learned? There's been a lack of co-ordination across unions for example with national or regional mobilisations on strike days. The campaign 'Enough is Enough' started to bring the public into active support, particularly drawing on picket line experience where community support has been massive, but it has not developed as hoped. The government's policy of attrition has worn people down, that's why teachers, nurses and posties have voted to accept offers and this has slowed the action. Union leaders clearly knew that the strikes posed two political questions:

'who runs the country' and 'what will really have changed when we return to work?'

Nevertheless, the strike movement has left a legacy that won't melt away. There will be many ways in which this can be built on in the coming months. During this slow-down we need a thorough and wide-ranging discussion of the situation. As the historian Edward Thompson said: 'we don't want to tell anyone how to write history. They must find out in their own way'.

CAPITLOCENE OR SOCIALCENE?

When Rosa Luxemburg used the phrase 'Socialism or Barbarism' in 1915, she was referring to the alternatives facing humanity during World War One. The four years of war witnessed capitalism 'red in tooth and claw' with unparalleled barbarity. Now, what has been called the capitalocene- the era in which the capitalist system is wrecking the planet- upholds Luxemburg's prophetic words. Her key insight was that the costs of war would be inflicted on the working class and they were by fascism. The same will happen with the climate crisis as the ruling elites will hide behind 'fire walls' whilst the majority will face rising sea levels, fires, devastating storms and social havoc. There is an alternative: the socialism that will inaugurate the socialcene era.

Unrest and strikes in Cardiff and Paris

By John Sillett

WHAT DO the riot and protests following the death of two lads riding an e-scooter tell us about the mood of a neglected and forsaken Cardiff neighbourhood? And then the riots that followed the fatal shooting of a youth in Paris that engulfed many French cities?

Given a cost of living crisis, can we compare these riots with the food riots of the 18th century or perhaps of the Luddites in the 19th century or 1930's protests against the poor laws and means test?

The backdrop to both the Cardiff and French events was police behaviour, but the bigger picture must be the destruction of public services and regular jobs and incomes by neo-liberalism. Here, there has been the biggest and widest strike wave for 40 years. France has seen big strike waves too, against raising the state pension age and not long ago massive "yellow jacket" protests against rising fuel and other prices.

Riots are sudden violent outbursts of disorganised behaviour, participants blindly hitting out. Strikes and marches are organised behaviour with participants consciously seeking demands. Even wildcat strikes have organisation and purpose. Clearly the Cardiff and French riots show us a discontent, even although some, or many, participants are simply against the police trying to crack down on car crime or unsocial use of e-bikes or of drug dealing, a criminality given space from the closure of youth facilities and other services.

The task has to be for the workers movement to show there can be a better and brighter alternative to the gig economy and deprived neighbourhoods. The danger is that contained within the rioters is lumpen elements who could be used to oppose the workers movement. However the funerals for the two in Cardiff were peaceful, organised and saw a massive 2,000 mourners. In France there were organised marches against police violence and the family of the shot youth were appalled at the destruction of the rioting. We must take hope that there is a deepening of class consciousness from the strike wave and with this that we can neutralise reactionary criminal elements.

Gig workers are key workers

By John Sillett

FRIDAY 4TH AUGUST saw a large solidarity picket outside of the massive Amazon warehouse in Coventry with coaches bringing trade unionists including some from Suffolk. What's happening here with workers organising in this sector could be seminal. Whilst not in the "Saltly Gates" league, the solidarity action closed the place down and workers were paid to take the day off, so desperate were management that they'd do this to avoid workers coming in contact with pickets. These large warehouses/distribution depots bring hundreds of workers together, reminiscent of Victorian times and the cradle of Trade Unionism. There are good prospects for organising as the workers are treated so badly. However, Amazon is a master of dirty tricks and is quite prepared to shut sites down simply to defeat a union.

Similar dirty tricks are used to disrupt organising in the retail and hospitality sectors. Often these workplaces are small scale, even if the employer is a large nationwide chain like McDonalds, and with high staff turnover and young staff like school leavers, unions like the Bakers or Unite Hospitality sector do sterling work. The fact that recently at McDonalds, so many young workers courageously came forward to say they had been abused or bullied by bosses, shows both their vulnerability and the need or trade union rights.

Memoirs of an ex-shelf stacker

By Attila the shelf stacker

TEN YEARS as a shop-worker was a valuable experience. I suppose the biggest change I saw was the increasing intensity of work. In the beginning the focus was customer care, older staff were valued, things had a friendly feel and there was a good team spirit. If a customer asked for an item you took them to its location and chatted about the range available, obviously closing it off with a sale if you could. At the end of 10 years you were more or less expected to just tell that customer the aisle number for that item and carry on working stock or dressing shelves because you were being timed or your work rate was under review. This never rung right with me. I stuck to the old way and got a lot of grief from new or young managers.

Over time the number of tasks and activities expected of you increased but pay declined to the minimum wage. For example, at the start, I was told I didn't need to do tills and the company boasted it paid over the minimum wage. In fact, workers then were divided into "shop floor", "tills" and "replenishment". After some years everybody had to learn tills and "replen" fell to all staff. We still had a "help" desk at the time which did returns. When that went, returns were handled on tills. Returning items required some customer security checks, a skill a notch up, but there was no extra money. Added to that a Key Cutting machine appeared next to the tills. There was no extra money for working that. Then we became a "post office", accepting and handing over parcels and you've guessed it, there was no extra money for that either.

Then all regular till staff were expected to work in the cash office. This had been a specialist job, with lots of cross checks to flush out any discrepancies and a precise recording system that needed a manual to learn. It seemed as if the company wanted to dispense with specialist staff. I suspect these staff had historically been awarded pay increments which the company wanted to end. Also, staff had to learn how to open tills first thing in the morning and how to do a close. Things like sorting out a float and locking away cash. Chairs were taken away from tills. We had to argue the case for their retention for disabled or pregnant workers. CCTV was used continually to monitor staff, without any agreement in place. Disciplinary were nasty trumped up affairs to scare people. At the end it was not a nice place to work.

Stories from the frontline: solidarity, support and co-ordination

NORWICH TRADES UNION COUNCIL, like all local trades union councils, is known simply as the trades council (TC). TCs promote effective solidarity in disputes, joint campaigns on issues such as health, education, welfare and transport, and, in general, provide the vital link between the workplace and the wider working-class community. We are currently supporting Aslef, CWU, NEU, RCN, RMT and UCU in their strikes in Norwich.

Trade unions are the central organizations of wage earners. Without strong trade unions, struggles for social justice, democracy in business and society and for a socio-ecological restructuring of production, transport and consumption will not be successful. They are guided within capitalism and at the same time point beyond it. Dealing with past and present, program and strategy discussions of the trade unions plays an important role in the work of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation. Important topics are questions and projects of the trade union revitalization debate, economic democracy, the change in the world of work and economic structures as well as conversion. The focus on work and trade unions is located in the Institute for Social Analysis and is realized in cooperation with other areas and the foundation network. About the trade unions discussion group activists from trade unions and companies as well as scientists close to the trade union should be involved in the work of the foundation.

RMT and NEU have really broadened the struggle with Mick Lynch (RMT) demanding for all what RMT are fighting for and Kevin Courtney (NEU) saying people are “alive today” due to teacher’s action during pandemic.

Ian Duckett, Education officer Norwich & District TUC

Cromer town Council has voted to support the reopening of the reablement services at Benjamin Court. Local MP Duncan Baker will call a public meeting! We will ask Mr Baker to



Benjamin Court Fight

approach the Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board (the commissioners of health and care in our area) about it, so look forward to getting his response.

There were powerful contributions from members of the public at the meeting, as well as from Town Councillors themselves, about the important role of Benjamin Court in supporting those leaving hospital. North Norfolk District Council members, including NNDC leader Tim Adams, plan to refer the matter to the Norfolk County Council Health Oversight and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) when more information is received, which paves the way for the closure decision to be referred to the Secretary of State.

ROYAL MAIL: report from a local CWU official

ROYAL MAIL were out to destroy workers terms and conditions and their trade union and any pay rise was to be self-funding which meant redundancies. They wanted total flexibility which meant that sometimes fewer hours per week would be worked with the rest “banked” and used at busy times. They wanted to provoke a strike where they could defeat the union. However the prolonged period of one and two day strikes, while well backed, did lead to attrition but the union is still in the workplace. The deal finally agreed, with a 75% yes vote and the biggest vote turnout ever within the union, has some disappointing concessions and many members are very unhappy about it. Royal Mail also wanted complete control over the 200 or so dismissal and disciplinary appeals but the union won an independently chaired panel to hear these. The one-off lump sum payments also helped with the acceptance vote. Royal Mail are now seeking to end the Universal Service Obligation and are reducing the hours customer counters are open at mail delivery offices.

Kings Lynn and West Norfolk’s largest social housing provider faces strike action at Freebridge Community Housing

FREEBRIDGE COMMUNITY HOUSING is paying poverty wages despite a £3.6m surplus. Nearly 60 Freebridge Community Housing workers at Juniper Lodge will strike over poverty pay. Many of the workers, who perform a variety of roles, including in cleaning and maintenance, are paid little more than the national minimum wage and many are struggling to pay their bills. They are angry that Freebridge has offered them a five per cent increase and a £500 non-consolidated payment, despite the association’s robust financial health. This is a significant, real terms pay cut when the real rate of inflation, RPI, stands at 10.7 per cent. Freebridge had a total turnover of £32 million and a surplus of £3.57 million in 2022 and increased its rents by seven per cent this year. The workers will strike on **21, 29, 30 and 31 August** and on **4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 September**. The strike action will severely impact Freebridge’s cleaning and maintenance services and will intensify if the dispute is not resolved. Unite regional officer Steve Harley said: *“The disruption that will be caused to tenants is entirely the fault of the association. It can absolutely afford to pay our members, who are struggling financially, a reasonable pay rise. That is what needs to happen.”*

**JOIN THE FIGHT FOR A SOCIAL RAILWAY – NO TO THE
PROFIT-CENTRED RAILWAY!**

**SLASH AND STANDARDISE FARES! FREE TRAVEL FOR
UNEMPLOYED AND DISABLED PASSENGERS!**

**NATIONALISE THE RAILWAYS! FOR A DEMOCRATIC,
ACCOUNTABLE & ACCESSIBLE RAILWAY!**

SAVE OUR TICKET OFFICES!

RMT STRIKES ON GREATER ANGLIA AUGUST 26 & SEPTEMBER 2

PASSENGER WATCHDOGS have reported a massive increase in consultation responses. RMT general secretary Mick Lynch said: “These damaging plans are not just about ticket office closures; they are a smokescreen for a widespread dehumanising of our railways. Our railway stations are at the heart of communities around the country and if these closures

go ahead the Tories will pay a heavy political price at the next election with boarded up ticket offices and de-staffed stations being a permanent reminder of the government’s vandalism of our railways.”

The history books tell us that ticket office staff could face danger and we should remember that railway work is dangerous work. Booking clerk Emma Eastway, aged

23, worked on the North Eastern Railway at Lemington station. In 1922 she went to collect tickets on the down platform and when jumping down from the platform, sprained her knee. Booking clerk Joseph Southward (17), who was working at Furness Abbey station in 1922, ran towards the up platform to collect tickets. As he crossed the track, he didn’t check that the line was clear and was hit and killed by a goods train. The investigation found lack of care on his part but noted that it was usual practise to cross the line. Southern Railway booking clerk T. Noble (19) at Betchworth in 1922 crossed the track and was hit. It was concluded that the station didn’t meet requirements for structural clearance and equipment. In 1919, booking clerk H. H. Bullock died at Mossend station on the



RMT picket line at Norwich station on 20.7.23. Photo: Richard Chilvers

Caledonian Railway. The NUR was present at the enquiry but it was not clear how he came to fall between the platform and some wagons. In 1937 Garfield Smith was employed at Cardiff on the GWR and was carrying tickets and cash in a case, fell foul of the rail and his hand and leg were run over: the fact that this route was beside a busy route was pointed out to the GWR. Redeployed ticket office staff sent to several stations would face similar dangers.

With thanks to Railway Work, Life & Death.



Chico Dall'igna 2023

NOR4NOR protest over ticket office closures at Norwich station on 18.7.2023

Tory vandals to axe adult education centre in Norwich

**PROTEST LOBBY AT NORWICH COUNTY HALL ON
26th SEPTEMBER FROM 8.30AM- BRING YOUR BANNERS**

WENSUM LODGE, a much-loved adult learning centre, faces closure and sell-off by Tory-controlled Norfolk County Council (NCC).

The site has been a haven for generations of learners with courses ranging from art and sculpture to languages. The County Council has a plan to close the site by the end of the year and list it for sale as it is, in their view, ‘surplus to requirements’.

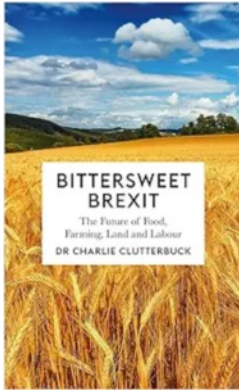
There is clearly no regard for the health and wellbeing of all adult learners who value and need the community aspect of these creative courses.

This is an act of sheer vandalism but it can be stopped. Artists 4 Wensum Lodge supports the campaign to make the site a community hub where adults of all ages and backgrounds can come to study with renowned local artists and specialist tutors using resources that can only be properly accessed in dedicated classrooms.



Wensum Lodge protest at County Hall on 3.7.2023. Photo: D. Welsh

Reading on the Agricultural Struggle and Rural Policy



Selected as one of OpenDemocracy's Best Political Books of 2017*

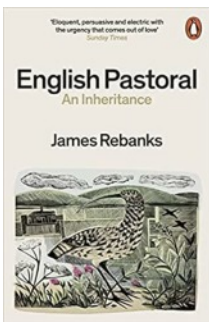
Although widely criticised and hugely wasteful, The Common Agricultural Policy did at least afford British farmers a degree of support. Post-Brexit, that support will vanish - to be replaced with a woefully misconceived agricultural export drive that cannot possibly deliver. Bittersweet Brexit suggests a solution: paying workers decent wages in the agricultural sector could radically transform the nature of farming in Britain. It would improve yields, increase sustainability and ensure greater self-sufficiency at a time when food security is becoming a vital issue.

This scenario provides a progressive, forward-thinking and optimistic future for food and farming in Britain, which, unlike many other industries, is currently being ignored. Charlie Clutterbuck

The author Charlie Clutterbuck is a soil scientist but his website contains loads of information on current rural and agricultural affairs. The short film featured presents startling similarities between the 19th Century Corn Laws and the recent Brexit debate which both split the Tory party and the country.



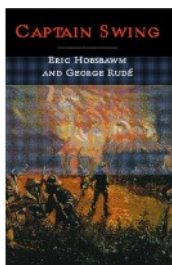
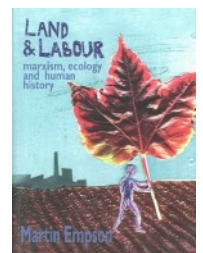
My 2 min film of UK food & farming from
1840s to 1940s



With or without Brexit Climate Change and food security have become important political issues and we now realise that things have to change in the way we farm.

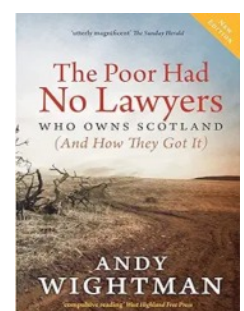
English Pastoral is the story of an inheritance: one that affects us all. It tells of how rural landscapes around the world were brought close to collapse and how the age-old rhythms of work, weather, community and wild things were lost. But this elegy from the Northern Fells is also a song of hope: of how, guided by the past, one farmer began to salvage a tiny corner of England that was now his, doing his best to restore the life that had vanished and to leave a legacy for the future.

Martin Empson draws on a Marxist understanding of history to grapple with the contradictory potential of our relationship with our environment. In so doing he shows that human action is key, both to the destruction of nature and to the possibility of a sustainable solution to the ecological crises of the 21st century.



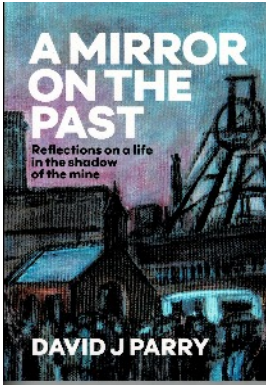
From 1830 onwards, rural England was shaken by a series of uprisings known as the "Swing". There were riots across the counties of southern and eastern England, machinery was wrecked, and farm buildings set alight. Captain Swing is the history of these uprisings, the people who made them and what subsequently became of them. It is the history of the rural poor of England and of lives without trace. And, in charting the rise and fall of the "Swing" uprisings, it is also a compelling account of the triumph of rural capitalism in the early nineteenth century. First published in 1969, Captain Swing has long been regarded as a classic work of English history.

The untold story of how Scotland's legal establishment and politicians managed to appropriate land through legal fixes. Have attempts to redistribute this power more equitably made any difference, and what are the full implications of the recent debt-fuelled housing bubble, the Smith Commission and the new Scottish Government's proposals on land reform? For all those with an interest in urban and rural land in Scotland, this updated edition of The Poor Had No Lawyers provides a fascinating analysis of one of the most important political questions in Scotland.



Reading and Media

Two local writers have recently released works that are of both political and human interest but also raising funds for Palestinian causes. Please support.



Dave Parry is an ex miner and NUM Official living in Sheffield, but originally from Barnsley. From a family of miners his book speaks of the effect the mine has on his life and political and human experience. Dave is also an artist whose work can be viewed on his website.

£10 per copy (£3 p&p)

Contributions from sales will go to SpaCE- charity supporting mobile play and psychological services for children and families in Gaza.

Email: parry.dj275@gmail.com Website parrydjpics.com

The Olive Tree- Kevin Hanson

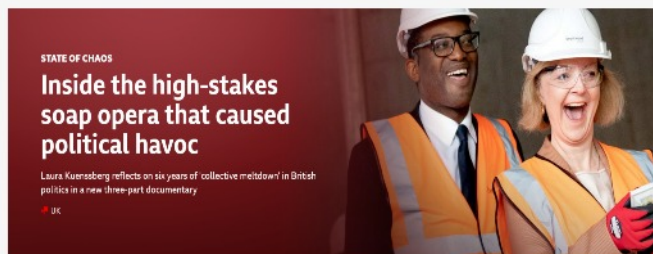
Another fine collection of poetry from Sheffield poet Kevin Hanson. Poems of life, love and politics from a well travelled man. Proceeds will go to a Palestinian charity. The charity is the Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund (currently supporting 68 women through university in Gaza and the West Bank). Price £10

Kevin Hanson. Email - kevin.edward.hanson@gmail.com

The Olive Tree



Kevin Hanson



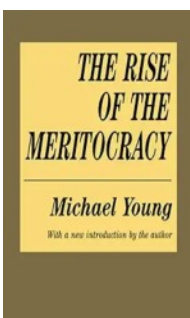
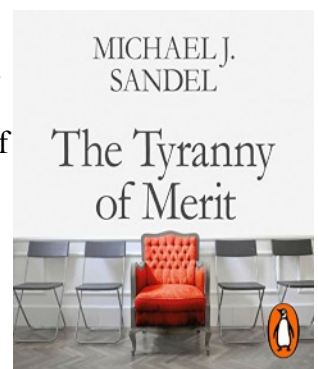
State of Chaos- Laura Kuennsburg BBC1

Love her or loathe her Kuennsburg seems to have the inside track on Tory Party politics. Over three episodes she explores how our Parliamentary system has fared over the crises of recent times.

The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good? - Michael

Sandell These are dangerous times for democracy. We live in an age of winners and losers, where the odds are stacked in favour of the already fortunate. Stalled social mobility and entrenched inequality give the lie to the promise that 'you can make it if you try'. And the consequence is a brew of anger and frustration that has fuelled populist protest, with the triumph of Brexit and election of Donald Trump.

A reworking of Michael Young's classic *The Rise of Meritocracy* Sandell examines how many of Young's predictions seem to have come true.



The Rise of the Meritocracy-Michael Young

Originally written as a satirical view on how the future may develop it appears to have become the playbook for modern politics and life. Young has christened the oligarchy of the future "Meritocracy." Indeed, the word is now part of the English language. It would appear that the formula: $IQ + \text{Effort} = \text{Merit}$ may well constitute the basic belief of the ruling class in the twenty-first century. Projecting himself into the year 2034, the author of this sociological satire shows how present decisions and practices may remould our society.