Move the bits, not the electrons – Duncan Chapel

On the first Thursday in September, several hundred people gathered outside Holyrood carrying banners against AI data centres. They had come from around fifteen local campaigns, Larbert to the Borders, Fife to Inverclyde, and their message to John Swinney was blunt: stop approving these things until there is a strategy, and until then, listen to the communities already saying no. Larbert alone has drawn 7,000 objections. Auchtertool's proposed Cato development, at 600 megawatts reportedly the second-largest data centre on earth, would sit inside a Fife village smaller than the campus itself. In the Borders, the Duke of Roxburghe has been offered a private briefing with every Scottish Borders councillor to make the case for his own £2 billion scheme on the Roxburghe Estate, a meeting leaked emails describe the council's own chief executive arranging and encouraging planning committee members to attend, against a petition that has by now passed 22,000 signatures. Edinburgh's council has already thrown one scheme out, at the former RBS headquarters, for failing to show its green credentials. The Scottish Greens tried to force a moratorium at First Minister's Questions before summer recess. The SNP's own National Council backed one too. The government has said no to all of it so far.

Every one of those campaigns is right to fight the site in front of it. Police Scotland has already warned it may need what it calls "robust security" if the Larbert scheme goes ahead over local objection, which is itself a measure of how far this has travelled from an ordinary planning dispute. The Larbert site would put 200 diesel backup generators within 50 metres of a 56-bed hospice for the terminally ill and within 400 metres of Forth Valley Royal, an 860-bed hospital. Action to Protect Rural Scotland, the charity that has done most to

knit these fifteen-odd local groups into something resembling a national campaign, now publishes an interactive map of every hyperscale proposal in the country, precisely so that a resident in Cockenzie or Dunbar or Bishopbriggs can see they are not fighting alone. What none of them can do alone is answer the question underneath all twenty-four proposals now in the planning system, which together would draw over 150 per cent of Scotland’s peak demand: why is this landing in the Central Belt and the Borders at all, when Scotland spends hundreds of millions of pounds a year paying wind farms further north to switch off?

The Duke’s own developers, to their credit, say the quiet part out loud. Their pitch for the Roxburghe scheme argues the site can help prevent some fifty million pounds a year of wasted wind energy, because it sits near turbines the grid regularly switches off. That is the correct diagnosis wearing the wrong politics. The waste is real. The fifty million pounds it could capture should not become one aristocrat’s private return on a family estate that already runs to fifty thousand acres, a castle, a golf course and a hotel.

Start with the waste, because the waste is the argument. Generators in Scotland’s congested transmission zones, principally the B4 and B6 boundaries in NESO’s own terminology, are routinely told to reduce output, and the system pays for both sides of that decision: for the generation turned down, and for the gas fired up elsewhere to replace it. NESO recorded £1.7 billion in thermal constraint costs for 2024/25, up 64 per cent on the year before. Widen it to every category of constraint and the total climbs to £1.9 billion, 71 per cent of Great Britain’s whole balancing bill. Gas dominates the replacement side: £959 million in gas offer costs in winter 2024/25 alone, much of it covering exactly the shortfall Scottish constraints create. This is not a technical footnote. It is public money spent unmaking electricity that has already been produced, on a scale NESO expects to keep

climbing toward £8 billion a year by 2030.

The obvious answer is more pylons, and National Grid is building them, slowly, at a pace that would make a Bolshevik weep. But that’s not quite right either. Electricity is expensive and contested to move over long distances. Data is not. So don’t move the electrons south to the compute. Move the compute north to the electrons.

Britain has done something like this before, once, in Manchester. The National Computing Centre opened on Oxford Road in 1966, one of the visible products of Wilson’s ‘white heat’ of scientific revolution, built to put scarce computing time within reach of industry when computers themselves were the bottleneck. By the 1980s that scarcity had gone, so the state let the Centre wither into a membership body and then sold its commercial arm into what is now NCC Group, a cybersecurity firm on the FTSE 250. The lesson is not the technology. It is that the state built serious public computing infrastructure once, and handed it to the market the moment the scarcity that justified it moved somewhere else.

Scarcity has moved on again, from silicon to electricity, and the shape of the answer is a national compute utility: not a single site but a grid of publicly owned compute campuses, sited where curtailed renewable power already sits. That is not official policy. It is an idea some policy people are starting to float, quietly, in the places where the mismatch between generation and demand is worst, and it is worth noticing that the people floating it are not, on the whole, socialists.

Which is where the moratorium campaign meets its harder question. Every one of the twenty-four sites now working through Scottish planning, Cato in Fife, Rufus in East Ayrshire, Aurelius in North Lanarkshire’s new AI Growth Zone, the schemes at Larbert, Hermiston and the Gyle, sits in or near the Central Belt because that is where the fibre, the

grid connections and the skills base already are. None of it is sited to relieve a single constraint. A properly sited national grid of compute campuses would look nothing like this map. It would sit north of the Central Belt, on the curtailed capacity these very same communities' wind farms are already producing and being paid to switch off, and it would be owned publicly, not by ILI Group or whoever comes after them.

That is a harder demand than a moratorium, because a moratorium only has to say no. A compute utility has to say what compute is for, who owns it, and where the profit that a hyperscaler or a duke currently extracts from a stranded grid connection would go instead. Public ownership of the racks means nothing if the models running on them are still licensed from the same handful of firms that own the training data and the chips. Nationalising the plug socket while leaving the extraction in place is exactly what happened to Oxford Road once its own scarcity ran out, and it is not obvious that a government which would not take Thames Water into public ownership when the case was overwhelming will treat compute any differently, or that a council chief executive arranging private briefings for a duke will treat the next landowner's scheme with any more scrutiny than the last.

There is a version of this that ends with a call for the moratorium campaign to become a nationalisation campaign, computing sited for the grid and not the shareholder, and that ending would not be wrong. The harder truth is that fifteen local groups fighting fifteen separate planning applications are not yet the same thing as a movement with a positive answer to what should replace the map they are rightly rejecting, and turning one into the other is the work still to be done.

Duncan Chapel is a member of Anti-Capitalist Resistance and the editor of RedMole.org

Map of Proposed Data Centres reproduced from the Action for

the Protection of Rural Scotland website is available here

Data centres are toxic capitalism – Cymru'n Codi

The following is a briefing note prepared by the Cymreig/Welsh ecosocialist organisation Cymru'n Codi (Cymru Rising) on the environmental and social impact of hyperscale data centres. It was originally published on their Substack and is reproduced here with their kind permission. For more information about the situation in Scotland, Action For the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) have a comprehensive guide and list of useful resources on this dedicated webpage

Background

Data centres are physical buildings that house computational equipment for storing, processing and sharing data, a server is a typical example. Services they provide fall into two main categories: AI computation and cloud computing, data storage and processing.

The resources used for these services are measured in terms of the maximum electrical power load required by the equipment using megawatts expressed as say as 1MW which would typically power 600 – 800 homes simultaneously.

In 2024 Cymru had the highest British data centre capacity outside London at 154MW and London at 1048MW. This is set to

change rapidly. The UK Government has designated North and South Cymru as Artificial Intelligence Growth Zones (AIGZs) to accelerate the development of AI infrastructure, with the support of the Secretary of State for Wales and Adam Price AM the current Minister for Enterprise, Connectivity, and Energy. Planned growth is huge with two developments in Cardiff proposing **148 MW** and **150 MW**, one in Newport **200 MW**, one in Bridgend **around 600 MW** and another on Anglesey **349 MW**. Maps and other basic information on current and future data centres is included in this Senedd Research paper and a longer version here.

Control over this expansion is being driven very hard by Westminster. Planning is a devolved responsibility to the Welsh Government so support for the AIGZs was required from the Welsh Government. Approvals would have to fall within environmental and other Senedd laws. However, national security is a reserved UK level power, and as many data centres will be involved with civil and defence issues, who would have the last say could become a challenge. The UK Cyber Security and Resilience Bill currently in the Lords is likely to strengthen this UK position.

Claimed economic opportunities and security interests are making the most of the investment, jobs, skills, and research opportunities projecting £10bn on investment in the South Wales AIGZ alone. Although the US experience indicates outcomes much less than originally claimed.

The toxic 'land and expand' process

These high powered signals of support for data centres is creating a legitimacy juggernaut for developers and opportunists to override any planning objections. The company applying for planning for the data centre in Pontylcun for example has never built one. They appear just interested in gaining approval and selling it on. Democracy for Sale has put their finger on the issue in relation to their work on

Palintir with identifying a process they describe as ‘land and expand’, first you get your initial plans through then once started it is very difficult to stop future growth. Political legitimacy for data centres has lit this blue touch paper: we are faced with challenging this toxic ‘land and expand’ process, and for the following five reasons.

1. Soaring energy demand.

The AIGZs policy is on target for Cymru to hit 1000MW or 1GB by 2030 the equivalent of 13% of Cymru’s electricity capacity in 2024. The Cardiff East data centre alone will consume 150GW equivalent of all Cymru’s solar capacity in the same year. Currently 315 UK data centres are waiting connection to the grid and in Ireland in 2021-25 a moratorium had to be imposed on building new data centres around Dublin as power demands soared.

Expansion of this size will put the Welsh Government ‘ambition’ to achieve net zero by 2040 and legal requirement by 2050 under great pressure. It will be almost a question of running faster to stand still with nearly all new renewable capacity being used to enable data centre power. To counter the grid issues and fluctuating provision of renewable energy, data centre developers are installing their own generation or a private provider, usually gas fired, but also diesel, which if allowed would make hitting net zero increasingly difficult.

One issue that is largely ignored in UK discussions is who pays? Expansion of the grid costs and like nuclear power, is covered in current electricity bills. So not only are we as consumers potentially faced with paying for the generating investment but high levels of demand whilst power generation is in private hands will potentially mean higher consumer prices.

2. Local water supplies

Water is required as coolant in data centres. It appears most

in Cymru will argue that they use water and air to cool equipment, but with rising are temperatures, water will be in demand. A mid-sized data centre could use up to 5m gallons (US) daily, as much as a small town. Development plans in Cymru have indicated that local supplies will need 'reinforcing' but that at this time it appears agencies and the Welsh Government have yet to address the issues. There are possible alternatives to public supplies and reusable systems but it is not at all clear if any the current or proposed developments in Cymru are considering these, and without a political lead and regulation, unlikely to happen.

Again who pays is rarely considered. And we know in Cymru our water bills are already some of the highest in the UK so if new investment is needed Dwr Cymru as a private provider only source of investment is again us as consumers.

3. Air pollution and climate

If electricity is not sourced renewably and onsite gas or diesel generation is used, net zero targets would be rendered harder to achieve. Such forms of generation in the US has led to intensifying local pollution with court cases being brought under clean air acts. Foxglove reported that just two new data centres will pump out more planet heating carbon emissions than Exxon Mobile. Alternatives exist, such as battery storage, combined with renewable public provision, but will require stronger proactive political regulation. After around six years it is expected that all the data centre equipment will have to be replaced. This has to raise important issues of recycling materials to avoid disposal.

4. Noise

Noise pollution has been cited as a main concern in the opposition to the data centre in Pontyclun. Local experience in the US has cited cooling fans and back up generation systems as a source of high decibel local

pollution. The same in Australia. Alternatives exist but require strong regulation and effective local enforcement – the sort of provision that has almost been lost due to local government austerity cuts.

5. Land competition

So far in Cymru data centres have been sited around places that have access to good internet connectivity such near Cardiff and Newport, a process that reduces 'latency' in electronic communication, something which is apparently less important to AI focused data centres. Data centres occupy large areas of land, with the average data centre covering 100,000 square feet. AIGZ application sites must demonstrate access to at least 500MW of power capacity by 2030 and have a minimum of 100 acres of land available for construction of AI infrastructure by 2028.

Building such large buildings near local communities with constant strong lighting, security and noise is causing concern around the world and increasingly in Cymru such as the opposition in Cardiff and Pontyclun that has already been mentioned. There is also concern about the impact on local biodiversity as in the Senedd Environment Act. Data processing infrastructure and the inevitable involvement of security and defence possibly centered on a particular data centre but also involved in all, with modern warfare, increases the possibility of a community being a target.

What can be done?

Due to political support for accelerating planning through the AIGZs, coupled with security concerns, it is giving virtual legitimate free rein to the 'land and expand' profit driven processes that lay behind the expansion of data centres. As this excellent article from Friends of Earth suggests it is difficult if not impossible to row back from the use of the internet that has now become embedded in our society and

culture but some very specific policies can be put into place to control the adverse consequences outlined in this newsletter and indeed in the linked article. Clearly there is a case for the construction, maintenance, and additional employment and development that will be derived from the data centre infrastructure. However, there is also the possibility that developments in software could start to render such large structures unnecessary and if we recognise the push to monetise and make a profit out of the internet as opposed to serving the needs of people, planet and peace, questions need to be raised about the direction and purpose of this investment.

What we clearly face is a state sponsored profit driven bonanza. With controls only on the initial planning approval stage, investors can tick all the boxes and once up and running the ‘land and expand’ process will increasingly put the power of decision making over the expansion of data centres in the hands of those who develop now and over all the five social and environmental issues listed above.

There is a weakness in the Friends of the Earth proposals in that they have an expectation that private companies will give serious consideration to their proposals. We don’t think they will and will drive forward a ‘land and expand’ profit driven strategy unless checked by collective opposition and government action. Consultation with energy generators and water suppliers not enough they need to pay for extra energy,water and recycling investment needed. state and consumers must not be forced to face increased prices to subsidise data centres. Real control only if data centres are seen as a basic utility and are developed under public ownership and control

Cymru’n Codi proposed demands and action

Stop the political open door.

- Support all opposition to data centres locally and propose supporting the following demands both for local council planning meetings and the Welsh Government.
- Demand a Welsh Government moratorium until all proposals accepted as follows:
    - Energy is renewable, infrastructure paid for by investors, electricity cost neutral, positive effect on Cymru net zero targets.
    - Additional water use is restricted as far as technically possible, where required infrastructure and charges paid by investors.
    - No additional air or noise pollution.
    - Brownfield land use only, special attention to avoiding any adverse bio diversity impacts.
    - Recycling of materials used as part of planning and investment requirements.
    - Annual reporting and Welsh Government statutory inspection established to ensure planning approval adhered to.
    - Local community views and assemblies to have enhanced standing in all planning considerations and have open access to inspectors and have the right to accompany them.

COP 30: Entrenching the crisis of climate politics

As the dust settles after COP30 in Belém, the scale of the failure becomes impossible to ignore. The world is on a path toward catastrophic warming, ecological systems are

collapsing, and millions across the Global South face annihilation, not in the distant future, but today. The world's political and economic elites arrived in the Amazon to negotiate when the 1.5°C target had already slipped out of reach, and they left with little more than symbolic gestures. No binding emissions cuts. No serious plan to phase out fossil fuels. No meaningful climate finance for adaptation. No accountability for the destruction already unleashed.

The gap between official international climate policy and the lived reality of a warming world has never been wider. In Belém, that gap became a chasm.

The world is heading towards roughly 2.8°C of warming by the end of the century. This is not a scenario compatible with human dignity – or even, for many, with life itself. Rising seas, extreme heat, drought, and flooding are eroding food security, displacing communities, and driving inequality to historic heights. The economic costs of climate disasters are skyrocketing, but the social and human costs are immeasurable: lives lost, livelihoods shattered, ecosystems irreversibly damaged.

These worsening crises play out in a world shaped by neoliberal austerity and debt dependency. Countries battling climate shocks are forced to cut social spending, privatise public goods, and surrender sovereignty to creditors. Governments continue pouring billions into militaries, fossil fuel subsidies, and the enrichment of corporate elites. The current political economy accelerates both warming and war.

The growing irrelevance of the COP

COP30 offered no mechanisms for enforcement, no firm deadlines, and no clear pathways to keep warming below 1.5°C. Nor did it include a fossil-fuel phase-out; oil-producing nations blocked binding language, and the final deal focused on voluntary road maps instead. What it did offer was an

expanded space for corporate actors, carbon traders, and mining interests seeking to greenwash extractivist projects.

What is staring society in the face – and what too few scientists are willing to acknowledge – is that the climate-crisis regime cannot be separated from the logic of capitalism. So-called "green transitions" simply open new arenas for profit while remaining embedded in the same global system of accumulation. Renewable energy may be expanding, but it does not replace fossil fuels; it merely adds to an energy expansion rather than driving a real transition.

Climate summits have become a "safety valve" for capital. They offer the illusion of action, while allowing the core exploitative relations to continue. For workers and communities already suffering climate breakdown, it is indisputable that the COP has failed them.

The Just Transition heist

COP 30 adopted the Belem Action Mechanism for a Global Just Transition (BAM) – a proposed new institutional arrangement under the UNFCCC designed to address the current fragmentation and inadequacy of global just transition efforts. Trade unionists and workers should have no illusions about this mechanism. It has no finances or concrete plans to protect workers and communities affected by energy and other decarbonising initiatives. There are no resources for a re-industrialisation in harmony with the protection of nature. So workers and other vulnerable sectors will simply be left behind. Words and policies in COP statements are a dime a dozen. Reality is harsher.

Why mass movements matter – and why institutions don't

If COP30 cannot deliver the mechanisms for decarbonisation or social protection, then the hope must lie in movements of

people: workers, peasants, indigenous people, women, youth, and the urban poor. Outside of a global mass movement rooted in national realities, the necessary steps to confront the climate crisis will not occur. Yet such a movement cannot be built if it fails to address the immediate needs of the working classes and the poor. The fight for climate protection and ecological justice must therefore begin with the fight for life itself – for clean water, decent housing, jobs, food, and security against the elements.

Right-wing climate denialists exploit the desperation of the poor to drive a wedge between ordinary people and climate action. They present environmentalism as a threat to livelihoods rather than the path to survival. To win the majority, our movement must link ecological transformation with social justice. We must demand the redistribution of wealth and power away from the billionaire class, big tech, and ruling elites who plunder the planet for profit.

By Brian Ashley, First Published in Amandla!, 25 November 2025

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Brazil's Decision to Drill for Oil Off the Amazon Shows Limitations of Government's

Approach

[On 20 October, exactly three weeks before the beginning of COP30 in Belem, Brazil's environmental regulator, IBAMA, finally approved a licence for the state-controlled oil company, Petrobras, to drill an exploratory well off the coast of Amazonia, close to the mouth of the Amazon River. That same Monday, within hours of the announcement, drilling began. A couple of days later, Petrobras said it would need to sink three more wells in Block 59 to evaluate the exact extent of the reserves. Petrobras is hoping these deep-sea oil fields will prove to hold reserves similar in size to the estimated 11 billion barrels that Exxon-Mobil has begun to exploit further north off Guyana, in waters disputed with Venezuela. That's more than 30 times the amount of oil held in the Rosebank field off Shetland, which the UK government is about to rule on.

On 23 October, eight Brazilian NGOs sought a legal order to block the drilling. They pointed to the lack of any proper consultation with Indigenous peoples in the region, and the failure of any full evaluation of the environmental impact, both locally and globally. They suggested the move made a mockery of the Brazilian government's commitments for the coming COP30. But it seemed unlikely their injunction request would succeed. President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva, of the Workers Party (PT), regretted that "nobody is in a position to do without fossil fuels". He said the income from the Amazon oil would be used to combat poverty and pay for the transition away from fossil fuels.

Subverta, one of the currents in the PSOL that makes up the Brazilian section of the Fourth International, says the decision reflects a much more fundamental limitation in the government's approach to the environment.]

On the eve of COP 30, to be held in Belém in Pará, this

decision is by no means just a technical choice, but rather a political repositioning of Brazil in the face of the global climate crisis; it contradicts the image of a country seeking to lead a global just transition and reinforces the perception that Brazil remains trapped in a historical cycle of dependence and extraction.

Although the current government's programme is based on an ecological transition with social and environmental justice, this authorisation of oil exploration in one of the most sensitive regions of the planet highlights the contradictions between theory and practice. The rhetoric of a 'just transition' collides with the continuation of an extractive model that depends on fossil fuels, and which is justified on the grounds of energy sovereignty and national self-sufficiency.

Exploration on the Equatorial Margin will have an impact well beyond Brazilian territory. Much of the oil extracted would go for export, transferring emissions to other countries and undermining Brazil's global climate responsibility. According to estimates by climate organisations, burning the oil potentially extracted from this region could release more than 11 billion tonnes of CO_2. That is about 5% of the total remaining carbon budget available if warming is to be limited to 1.5 °C. In other words, this has a planetary impact, not just a regional one, which compromises the country's role in the international climate fight.

This puts us in a situation of even greater climate insecurity and uncertainty. The planet has already exceeded seven of the nine planetary boundaries (defined by the scientific community as the limits of stability for the planet's ecosystems), and the fossil fuel industry is primarily responsible for this. It is a mistake to expand drilling for more wells, wherever they may be.

In addition to the environmental and climate impacts, there is

also an economic argument that cannot be ignored. Several international studies, such as those by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), warn that Petrobras' oil expansion represents a high-risk investment. They estimate that up to 85% of new production projects would only be profitable in a scenario of global warming above 2.4°C, i.e., in a context incompatible with the Paris Agreement targets. Although economic factors and figures alone should not be our main motivation for rejecting exploration, they show that, even according to the logic of profit, the country is investing in assets that may quickly become stranded by the global transition to renewable sources.

Petrobras, as a strategic company, occupies a paradoxical position in this situation. While seeking to reposition itself as a leader in the energy transition, with many renewable energy projects (despite a number of conflicts around wind and solar power plants in the Northeast of Brazil) and a lot of green advertising, it is also investing heavily in new oil fields. IBAMA's decision legitimises this ambiguity, and puts off confronting the need for a social and territorial restructuring of the energy sector.

The Equatorial Margin coastal region, stretching from Natal in the Brazilian Northeast to the border with French Guyana, is renowned for its high marine and river biodiversity, as well as being home to artisanal fishing communities, quilombolas and indigenous peoples who depend directly on coastal ecosystems. Even the installation of infrastructure for research and exploration in the Amazon estuary region will have a significant impact, not to mention the future risk of oil spills and contamination that could damage entire ecological chains, affecting fishing, water quality and traditional ways of life.

From an eco-socialist perspective, the permit given to Petrobras shows that territories on the periphery continue to be sacrificed for the sake of a centralised, dependent

development project; it illustrates in practice the impasse of a ‘transition’ that has been captured by capital. It is not a question of denying the need for energy, but of questioning who produces it, according to what logic, and in the service of what kind of society.

Drilling for oil in the Amazon estuary reveals a conflict between two kinds of rationale: the productivist rationale (of ‘commodity peoples’, in the words of Davi Kopenawa), which transforms nature into a commodity, and the ecological rationale (of the forest peoples), which understands the interdependence between living systems, territories and cultures. Defending the Amazon is not an ‘environmentalist’ demand in the narrow sense, but a political struggle for other ways of living and other kinds of social reproduction. Protecting the mouth of the Amazon means fighting for a future for our civilisation that cannot be measured in barrels of oil, but in flows of life, autonomy and socio-environmental diversity.

This dispute between different rationales also reveals how the path of more drilling for oil reproduces historical inequalities. The indigenous, quilombola and traditional communities that live on the Amazonian coast find themselves confronting the advance of the energy frontier with no access to real decision-making mechanisms. The absence of any free, prior and informed consultation, as laid down in ILO Convention 169, reinforces the marginalisation of these peoples. The colonial logic of exploitation and environmental racism is revived, imposing socio-environmental risks on those who benefit least from the extracted wealth.

The challenge facing the progressive camp, especially those who make up the social and political base of the government, is to insist that there can be no socio-environmental justice without a break with fossil capitalism. We need to strengthen initiatives that contribute to the development of a new energy infrastructure, with communities playing an active part from

the planning stage onwards the aim must be to replace thermal power and fossil fuels with decentralised, accessible, renewable and low-pollution public infrastructure at all levels.

We are opposed to any new thermal power plants, to drilling new oil wells and all other polluting projects, as well as to renewable power projects that lack socio-environmental justice. We must continue to promote dialogue with oil workers' unions and other workers in the fossil fuel sector. Only organised struggle will be able to stop fossil capitalism, and we call on everyone to join us in this struggle!

22 October 2025

Review – Against the Crisis: Economy and Ecology in a Burning World by Ståle Holgersen

Amongst the most overused terms in politics and journalism, 'crisis' must be a strong contender for the top spot. A quick glance at today's news headlines reveals – amongst others – a nightlife crisis, a tariff crisis, a cholera crisis, a housing crisis, and – heaven forbid – an injury crisis at a leading football club! More specifically, for the Marxist left, the notion of 'the capitalist crisis' has played an important role in our collective political imaginary. How many times have we heard something to the effect that "as the crisis deepens", the working class will shed its illusions and in due course

will rally to the socialist cause? Stale Holgersen recent book, *Against the Crisis*, takes issue with both the conceptual confusion surrounding the concept of crisis and, more importantly, at the notion that capitalist crises should be conceived as opportunities for the left.

In relation to the first point, Holgersen proposes a working definition of crisis which comprises three essential elements, as he writes, *"Crises are events that 1) come relatively quickly, 2) are embedded in underlying structures and processes, and 3) have negative effects on people or nature"* (p.5) Thus, as a consequence, he is sceptical about the concept of a 'permacrisis' (the Financial Times' word of the year 2022). As to the second, he stresses the role that crises play in sustaining the system and the political difficulties that they pose for the left:

"*While crises can – in theory – help us to reveal and expose capitalism's weaknesses and problems, they are also – in the actual political economy – central to the reproduction of capitalism. Crises are a good starting point for criticising capitalism, but they also make it harder to actually overthrow the system";* (p.10) moreover,

"If opportunities – as defined in textbooks – are occasions or situations that make it possible to do something you want or have to do, and if opportunities – as conventionally understood – entail moments of excitement, optimism and hopefulness, and chances for advancement, then we must refrain from referring to crises as opportunities for the working class, the environmental movement or the political left" (p.16).

'Make the Rich Pay for the Crisis!' may be an attractive slogan but, as Holgersen points out, it is rarely the case that they ever actually do.

Against the Crisis focusses on the nature of the recurrent

economic crises under capitalism and on the overarching issue of the ecological crisis. One of the main strengths of the book is how it analyses the specifics of each of these, their similarities and differences, and the complex relationship between them. Holgersen takes issue with the (reassuring?) view that the ecological crisis, in itself, poses a threat to the continued existence of capitalism. Paraphrasing Lenin he wryly observes, *"[It] is more likely … that the last capitalist will sell a jug of gasoline to his last customer in a world on fire; or that the last capitalist will order workers to use the latest technology to produce even more survival kits"* (p.106).

In attempting to understand these economic and ecological crises, Holgersen applies an approach which combines both empirical data and structural analysis by way of a series 'abstractions'. Thus crises, Holgersen argues, need to be understood simultaneously (1) at the 'surface level' (e.g. a financial crisis), which is in turn related to (2) the concrete organisation of nature/capitalism (e.g. 'neo-liberalism'), rooted in (3) the crisis tendencies of the system (e.g. the increase in the 'organic composition of capital') which are finally associated with (4) the profit-driven nature of the system and (5) ultimately, with the underlying contradiction between use-value and exchange value which characterises the capitalist system as a whole. It is at these, more fundamental levels of abstraction, that both the economic and the ecological crises – despite their specificities and important differences – can be conceptualised as different manifestations of the same systemic imperatives and contradictions.

Holgersen applies this overall framework to a number of specific issues associated with crises under capitalism. Above all, he underlines the essential class dimensions of such crises. Far from us all being in the 'same boat', crises are caused by one class but typically paid for by another. More

broadly he writes,

"[t}hat class struggle intensifies during crises of capitalism may sound like a dream to the left, who might be more than happy to welcome some extra class struggle. But most of this is nothing to cheer about. This is class struggle from above, subtly and quietly, often with murderous efficiency" (p.142).

Against the Crisis also includes a very useful discussion of the relationship between racism, fascism and capitalist crises. For Holgersen racism is a permanent feature of such crises, a predictable response *"within a capitalism built for centuries on colonialism and imperialism",* but *"[w]here racism is the rule, fascism is the exception; if racism is the eternal answer to crisis, fascism is the exceptional solution"* (p.187) and *"[f]ascism is a solution when it seems that the crises will not be able to reproduce capitalism. In other words, fascism becomes a possibility when the basic hypothesis of this book is challenged. Fascism is the shock therapy when capitalism really needs to change in order to survive"* (p.194).

Holgersen applies a variety of theoretical frameworks to help illuminate the nature of capitalist crises, drawing on both the Trotskyist tradition, especially the work of Ernest Mandel and Daniel Bensaid, and on the 'left eurocommunism' of Nicos Poulantzas, and specifically, on the latter's concept of the 'relative autonomy' of the capitalist state. This represents a potentially innovative fusion of traditions that have traditionally between somewhat remote and indeed hostile to each other; the resumption of a dialogue that briefly took place in the late 1970's and was subsequently lost to history, not least by the virtual disappearance of the 'left eurocommunism' perspective by the early 1980's[i].

However, whilst Holgersen's book is theoretically rich and stimulating, in a refreshing contrast with much current leftwing theorising, it also focusses on the practical

responses which capitalist crises demand of the left. Paralleling the analytical abstractions that he employs to understand the nature of crises; he distinguishes between three 'levels' around which the left should formulate such a response. In particular, he distinguishes between (1) crisis management (2) crisis policy and (3) crisis critique and argues convincingly that then left needs all of the above. In fact, it is the weakness of the left at the level of crisis management/policy, in contrast to its relative sophistication at the level of crisis critique, which leaves us vulnerable to collapsing into essentially 'Keynesian' solutions to when the crisis actually hits. Holgersen rightly stresses the urgent need for the left to develop its own distinctive and credible crisis policies and proposes several possible sources for these; including a renewed programme of 'transitional demands', the advocacy of anti-capitalist 'structural reforms' and a strategy which operates simultaneously 'in and against' the capitalist state. As he notes:

"Crisis and its causes are something we must fight against. Rather than opportunities we look forward to exploring, or moments when the fight for socialism is put on hold, the crises are problems we must solve" (p.19).

Overall, *Against the Crisis* is a fascinating and rewarding read providing useful material on a host of topics. If I have one reservation about the book it would be that whilst correctly stressing the 'destructive functionality' of cyclical crises under capitalism and their essential role in ensuring the reproduction of the system, it is not at all at clear that similar considerations apply to the more long-term 'organic' downturns of the system which can and do span numerous cyclical 'booms' and 'bursts'. It is not of course that Holgersen is unaware of the distinction here and in fact discusses it at various points, but perhaps the relationship between these different 'crises' (indeed whether the latter is correctly regarded as a 'crisis' in the sense that Holgersen

defines the term) could have been explored more thoroughly. The 'functionality' of capitalism's cyclical undulations makes much more intuitive sense than those of its 'long downturns', especially when the latter – for example in the case of the 'Great Depression' of the 1920's and 30's – required a cataclysmic world war to finally resolve. In a similar vein, whilst there is no guarantee that any particular crisis will be the 'final' crisis of capitalism, it doesn't follow that we can't or shouldn't talk in terms of an overall systemic decline.

Notwithstanding this, Holgersen's overall thesis is thoughtful, important, and timely. We can't rely on the crisis of capitalism to deliver the transition to socialism; on the contrary, it is only by finding the political resources to struggle effectively 'against the crisis' that we will find our way to a better society. Although crises typically and paradoxically strengthen the system, the ultimate challenge is, as Holgersen concludes, to definitively 'falsify' this very thesis.

[i] See 'L'État et la transition au socialisme. Interview de Nicos Poulantzas par Henri Weber', *Critique communiste* (the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire journal), no. 16, June 1977 translated to English as 'The State and the Transition to Socialism', in *The Poulantzas Reader,* ed by James Martin (Verso, 2008) pp. 334-360

Reviewed by Iain Gault, Against the Crisis: Economy and Ecology in a Burning World is published by Verso and is available here

There is a *Scotonomics* You Tube interview with Holgersen which outlines the main themes of the book and which is well worth a look. It can be accessed here

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collectives: the Zetkin Collective (ecosocialist group working on political ecologies of the far right) published *White Skin, Black Fuel* on Verso in 2021 and Fundament (a housing research collective) published *Kris i Bostadsfrågan on Daidalos in* 2023.

Review – For the Earth to Live: The Case for Ecosocialism by Allan Todd

“For the Earth to Live” is a compelling and essential read for anyone seeking a radical and comprehensive understanding of the interconnected ecological and social crises facing our world. Written by Allan Todd, with a foreword by Professor Julia Steinberger, it emerges as an unapologetic and passionately argued case for ecosocialism.

The book distinguishes itself by its direct and unwavering commitment to ecosocialist principles, boldly asserting the necessity of uniting ecological concerns with socialist solutions. In an era often characterised by cautious and diluted discourse, “For the Earth to Live” offers a bracingly clear analysis and position, advocating for a political direction that is uncompromisingly pro-ecology and pro-socialism. It actively seeks to combine “Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will,” drawing on the wisdom of Antonio Gramsci to provide both a stark awakening to the realities of our situation and a powerful call to action.

A significant strength of this work lies in its well-informed and thoroughly cited analysis. Todd presents a treasure-trove of political, historical, and scientific evidence to

contextualise the climate, biodiversity, and health threats we face within our prevailing political and economic systems. The book is structured logically, building from an exposition of ecological dangers to examining political and economic threats, culminating in a powerful argument for revolutionary ecosocialist politics as the necessary response. The extensive referencing provides readers with an excellent foundation for further exploration and independent understanding.

“For the Earth to Live” makes a significant contribution by aiming to articulate a majoritarian perspective for ecosocialism. It moves beyond the notion of ecosocialism as a fringe ideology, presenting it as the potential “political home of the majority of humans on planet earth” and of the rest of life on Earth. This book offers a more accessible pathway for arguing for ecosocialism as a vital project for the 99 percent.

Furthermore, the book actively seeks to counter the understandable despair that can arise when confronting the severity of the ecological and political challenges. By promoting Gramsci’s “optimism of the will,” it encourages readers to see “horizons even in the darkest night,” fostering the determination needed to continue the struggle for a better future. It explicitly states that ecosocialism offers the “best hope for replacing today’s ‘old order’ with a new one”.

The author doesn’t shy away from highlighting the dire warnings from climate, ecological, and pandemic-health science reports, illustrating the interconnected crises facing our environment and the failures of current political responses. The book also touches upon the historical context of humanity’s relationship with nature, including the more harmonious approaches found in Indigenous societies, suggesting important ways forward.

In conclusion, “For the Earth to Live” is a vital and inspiring contribution to the literature on ecosocialism. It

combines a rigorous and well-researched analysis with a passionate and hopeful call to action. By directly confronting the crises of our time and offering a clear and compelling alternative, this book will likely be an essential resource for activists, scholars, and anyone seeking a pathway towards an ecologically sustainable and socially just world. It encourages readers to embrace "optimism of the will" grounded in a clear understanding of the challenges, ultimately arguing that our best chance for the Earth to live lies with ecosocialism.

Reviewed by Duncan Chapel, "For the Earth to Live" is published by Resistance Books and is available here.

Allan Todd is an ecosocialist/environmental and anti-fascist activist. He is a member of Anti-Capitalist Resistance and Extinction Rebellion North Lakes (Cumbria), and is the author of *Revolutions 1789-1917* (CUP), *Trotsky: The Passionate Revolutionary* (Pen & Sword), *Ecosocialism Not Extinction* (Resistance Books), and *Che Guevara: The Romantic Revolutionary* (Pen & Sword).

Allan will speaking about the book at a free event in Glasgow at 7pm on 21st May 2025. For further details of the event and to reserve a copy of the book see Mount Florida Books