

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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Trump's first six months: A threat to our planet and its peoples

The election of Trump represents the coming to power of a neofascist leadership in the main imperialist country of the world, who is actively fuelling the genocide of the Palestinian people. This represents a further shift to the right in the international balance of forces, and strengthens the Orbans, Modis, Melonis, Bolsanaros and others.

Since assuming office on January 19, 2025, after winning a close election with a plurality of the popular vote, the Trump presidency has pursued a deeply reactionary agenda, threatening democratic rights in the US and aggression for the rest of the world. Trump also represents a particularly virulent threat to the US working class and oppressed communities throughout the world. One of his main fronts is his attacks on LGBTIQ*, particularly trans people, which is in line with large parts of the international far right including Putin. This is part of Trump's general reactionary social agenda with vicious attacks on racialized minorities, women's reproductive rights, migrants, climate change denial, hostility to democratic rights, readiness to use violence, a contempt for democratic processes and checks and balances, and a drive for total power.

The generalization of trade tariffs is an ideological obsession of Donald Trump, and this announcement was a show of imperial force from the first days of his mandate. But fears of internal economic impacts and announced retaliations, notably from the BRICS, made Washington step back and contributed to the crisis of hegemony of US imperialism. The 50% tax on Brazil's imports in US, with openly political purposes "punishes" the Brazilian government to pave the way

for Bolsonaro and others coup plotters to escape lawsuits. Contradictorily, the measure opened a new and positive political moment in the country.

His drive for total power aided and abetted by the Republican party and a section of the US judiciary makes him a would-be authoritarian and neo-fascist, and strengthens the hands of the far right worldwide. While opposition has not been banned and democratic rights not completely eliminated -indicators of neo-fascism- the tendency in that direction is clear.

The US has long been the biggest abuser of fossil fuels. Under Trump the US has left the ineffectual COP international climate change association, has given the green light to oil companies to increase fossil fuel extraction and use, and US regulatory documents have been scrubbed of all reference to climate change.

The Trump administration has launched a particularly cruel police-military campaign of persecution and deportation against millions of migrants, mostly Latin Americans and South Asians. With its cynical rhetoric equating all immigrant workers with criminals, it has turned El Salvador into a Guantánamo for hire. This campaign emboldens the most reactionary white supremacist forces.

Trump's attacks against elite US universities cynically accuse them of antisemitism for insufficiently cracking down on pro-Palestinian protests. This repression has chilled the Palestine Solidarity movement and the rights of free speech. The labelling of pro-Palestinian demonstrations as antisemitic serves to cover up the real antisemitism nourished by Trump's racist speech and policy.

Trump and his allies recently passed a reactionary budget giving enormous tax benefits to the ultra rich paid directly by cuts to Medicaid, a program of government health insurance used by seventy-one million people, and food stamps for the

poorest.

Trump's open threats to annex the Panama canal, Canada, and Greenland represent a return to naked nineteenth century imperialism. On Ukraine, Trump is seeking a predatory deal with Putin (with whom he shares many far-right ideological ideas) to share out areas of influence at the expense of the people who are the victims of the Russian state's colonial war.

After the political shock in the European powers faced with the disengagement rhetoric from Trump on NATO, this alliance recovered its historical place – the scenario of European subordination – when Trump used it to show European obedience to US orders for the increase of arms expenditure.

While the America First policy guides Trump's bellicosity to its allies, the recent attack on Iran reminds us that the US will not hesitate to use military force where its interests are threatened.

Trump continues Biden's and all US presidents' military and political support for Israel. His threat to empty the Gaza strip of its inhabitants and turn the area into a luxury resort would be a crime of world historic importance.

The Democratic party has shown itself to be totally ineffective in opposing Trump. This is mostly because the Democratic party serves the same 1% as the Republicans.

The huge and enthusiastic rallies of AOC and Bernie Sanders reflect the depth of anti-Trump sentiment. The recent victory of Mamdani in the New York City Democratic Party primary also represents a challenge to the Democratic Party establishment and his progressive social agenda shows the potential to elect progressive and anti-capitalist public officials. A mass anti-Trump movement in the streets has arisen over the last few months. Millions have participated in thousands of anti-Trump demonstrations in thousands of cities and towns across the

country. Immigrant workers have been at the forefront of this resistance. These demonstrations encourage those resisting far-right governments around the world.

The Bureau of the Fourth International solidarizes with the growing anti-Trump movement.

Down with the Trump regime!

Down with all US threats to other countries and peoples!

Hail the heroic protests in Los Angeles!

Stop US fossil fuel expansion!

Stop the war on migrants!

Self-determination for Ukraine!

Stop US support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza!

Executive Bureau of the Fourth International

13 July 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 been 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 [\[1\]](#).

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 the 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 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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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](#)