

Sunday Socialist

INSIDE

What is socialism?
Lynne Edwards
talks to Natalie
Strecker



TORY SCAMS PART 3: THE NHS

• Drug prices set to rise as profits to private sector protected

AS Jeremy Hunt jumps back onto the Magic Roundabout that is the Tory Cabinet, centrists are letting out a collective sigh of relief that the grown ups are beginning to take back control from the tax cutting loony toons in the Truss cabinet. Except that some of us remember the leadership contest earlier this year when Hunt promised even more tax cuts than Kwarteng and Truss. 15% corporation tax anyone?

And for those of us with even longer memories there is his disastrous time as Minister of Health, alienating junior doctors, softening up the NHS for privatisation and leaving us totally unprepared for pandemics like COVID.

As a result we have 7 million on NHS waiting lists. We nearly ran out of blood this week because of cuts to staffing in the transfusion service. There are plenty of donors. 7,500 volunteered in a single day this week. But there are not enough appointments to go round. Talk of transferring staff from other departments will only increase the pressure on those departments. They are already struggling with staff shortages, not enough beds and not enough hospitals.

The Tories bleat about the costs, especially when avoiding the £10 billion needed to repair our crumbling hospitals or when they are facing down demands from health unions to pay a real living wage to staff, many of whom were already reliant on food banks before the cost-of-living-crisis hit.

Of course there is always enough money to pay one sector of the health industry, the private sector, especially the pharmaceutical companies. Around the world there are shortages of medicines and rising prices due to bottlenecks in supply systems and rising costs for energy and raw materials. The number of drugs in short supply to the NHS has tripled in the last year. When this happens the NHS can add drugs to a concessions list which allows them to pay more. This scheme has cost the NHS £136 million this year. And prices are set to rise even more.

Channel 4 carried a news item on Wednesday with some examples.

Drug	Treatment for	Tablets pre-scribed in July	July cost	September estimate
Alendronic Acid	Osteoporosis	185 million	£291,000	£4,900,000
Aripizole	Psychosis	1.2 million	£40,014	£3,100,000
Finasteride	Prostate	9.9 million	£342,777	£2,100,100

They also revealed how the government is profiting from what is in effect a tax on medicine. Supposedly to keep costs down and encourage a switch from branded medicines to generics, there is a complicated calculation that in effect boils down to a 5% levy on medicines rising to 15% next year. But the way the system works is discouraging foreign manufacturers of generic drugs from setting up in the UK.

Of course a simpler solution would be for the government to set up their own generic drug company in line with the proposals in the 2019 Labour Manifesto. The Tories won't do it and it has been dropped by Starmer. One more reason, if you needed it, to fight for a socialist transformation of society. Your life may depend on it. Literally.

FOOD PROTECTIONS TO BE SLASHED



[Read online](#)

MANY warned of the consequences of the intended bonfire of EU rules when Brexit came to pass, and it would appear they were right to be concerned. The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) has spoken out of the dangers inherent in dropping some of these rules from our statute books.

1500 pieces of law are set to be axed or replaced and included in these are obligations to alert consumers about allergens in foods. We have become accustomed to seeing these warnings on food products and those who do suffer from life-threatening allergies should be feeling very worried. Other provisions due to be scrapped include legal limits on chemical contaminants and safety rules for baby food.

And just as alarming are the other protections at risk, which include: GMO food and feed being placed on the UK market without any food safety assessment taking place, nor any obligation to label such food for consumers; legal limits on chemical contaminants in food, with possible consequences to human health; restrictions on use of de-contaminants on meat, such as the chlorine washes on chicken, and businesses' minimum hygiene standards.

This would leave some of the most vulnerable people in our society, and the public more generally, without any meaningful protection. CIEH is now working with a coalition of MPs in an attempt to gain clarity from the Government about its intentions and to ascertain how they intend to ensure that our food, environment, and public health standards are protected in this deregulatory agenda.

The Head of Policy and Campaigns at CIEH, Ross Matthewman, said, "The potential consequences of this agenda are deeply alarming. There had been vague noises from some of the new Prime Minister's supporters over the summer about the need for a change of economic policy, and for the UK to become more competitive. However, a full onslaught on scores of regulations sweeping right across vital areas from food to our environment did not seem on the cards."

For those unfamiliar with the Bill, It will abolish the status of retained EU law on December 31st 2023. After that date, the UK government may, or may not, introduce its own laws onto the statute book. Even those who voted for Brexit surely did not intend that they, and their families, should take back control by being poisoned. We are already facing a Tory government seemingly obsessed with stripping us of our rights, and now they wish to take away our protections also. The CIEH may be 'concerned' about this but we, the public, should be deeply worried – and angry.

LOW JOBLESS FIGURES HIDE A SECRET



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Original image:

THE OFFICE for National Statistics told us yesterday that not only was 3.6% unemployment an all-time low, but employment was at an all-time high at 75.5% of working-age people. Surely, then, news for celebration?

Hidden in the statistics was another figure which tells a slightly different story. Louise Murphy, Economist at the Resolution Foundation, made the following observation: “A tight labour market is ...reducing unemployment to a near 50-year low. But at the same time, more older workers in particular are leaving the jobs market altogether as inactivity due to long-term ill health reaches a record high of 2.49 million.”

According to researchers at Sheffield Hallam University, people are being ‘encouraged’ to become long-term sick to remove them from the unemployment count. Using figures from the DWP the researchers show how those on ‘incapacity benefits’ rose from 750,000 in the ’70s to over 2.5 million by the 2000s.

It’s a con

The SHU researchers show that at a time when official unemployment is 1.3 million, the real figure for unemployed people is closer to 2.3 million. Government statisticians have chosen to use a measure of unemployment which gives the lowest figure possible. It is, frankly, a con.

If you want to work and are unable to find a job, it really matters very little whether you are officially ‘unemployed’ or ‘long-term sick’. The fact is that the economy, which the government is supposed to make work for you, is failing. Economic experts say that unemployment is unlikely to rise any time soon due to recessionary factors which they cannot quite explain. This is probably true because the DWP quickly remove people from the unemployment count by declaring them as long-term sick. As the recession deepens, moving people from one register to another will not solve the underlying issues. We can expect real unemployment to rise as reduced consumer demand forces companies to lay off staff or go to the wall. It is unlikely in those circumstances that unemployment will remain stable. Wishful thinking is no substitute for realistic economic analysis.

For those without paid employment the opportunities to live a fulfilling life are severely restricted. Recently the focus has shifted to those on poverty wages, and this is certainly important, but equally as important is that we have a plan to create real jobs at a living wage and available to all those who want them. We challenge you to find the party manifesto that is making that promise anywhere in Europe or quite possibly the world.

The global economy is in recession, and the fact that the first impulse of government is to fiddle the figures should alert us to the fact that governments who support global capitalism not only have no answers, they have not even worked out the questions. We don’t need yet more failed reforms, we desperately need to change the entire basis of the system.

TRICKLE TREAT



Liz Truss and Jeremy Hunt lookalikes prepare for the trickle treat from their failed economic policies (Image courtesy of needpix.com)

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THE Bank of England has spent £2.2 billion to bail out the government bond market in the last two days. This is what it did a fortnight ago after the mini-budget sent the value of government bonds – i.e. government debt – into free-fall and threatened to take down the UK’s pension funds. Well, it is happening again.

The Bank’s intervention bought the government time. It did not solve the underlying problem. The Tories are planning to borrow £200 billion this year, double the original estimate. They are going ahead with most of their tax cuts in the belief that handouts to big business will encourage investment and produce growth. This is known as Trickle Down Economics and even US President Biden has declared it has never worked.

Trickle Treat

Even worse, Kwarteng expected the markets to trust him and wait until the end of November to produce the detailed costings of his policy. Now he has agreed to release these figures a month early, at Halloween. Will that be a Trickle Treat?

Other forecasts have already been produced by Citigroup, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and ratings agency Fitch which has downgraded the credit outlook on the UK from stable to negative. They all agree that the growth strategy is a non-starter. The UK is heading for recession with GDP falling next year. Interest rates will continue to rise, peaking at 4.5% and causing high unemployment and a slump in the housing market. The IFS predicts the government will have to find £60 billion in cuts if it is to balance the books by 2027. The economy will grow slowly if at all and Citigroup expects inflation to peak at 12%.

Tory MPs are in despair, not at the suffering their policies will cause, but at the prospect of losing their seats at the next election. So, Truss is facing continued rebellion on the back benches. One senior Tory politician told the i “*That budget gave people permission to desert. They thought Starmer might be boring but at least he’s not mad.*”

Labour are the New Tories

Starmer has shown he is prepared to welcome Tory MPs into the Labour Party while driving out Socialists and encouraging campaigns to deselect left wing MPs. This week Sam Tarry, the sitting MP, lost the vote in questionable circumstances to the right wing favourite, Jas Athwal, in Ilford South.

The Tories may be destroying themselves, but Starmer is well on the way to turning Labour into the next Tory Party. In order to defend our wages and conditions and what is left of the NHS and the Welfare State we cannot afford to rely on Labour. Whoever wins the next election, trade union militancy and mass protests are our best hope.

Woman! Life! Freedom! Protests Continue in Iran



Image:
Darafsh, I, via
Wikimedia Commons

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Uprising in Tehran, Keshavarz Boulevard September 2022

PROTESTS continue in Iran, four weeks after the death in custody of Mahsa Amini after she was arrested by Iran's morality police for failing to wear her hijab correctly. Women took to the streets in protest. Some burned their hijabs. Others have cut off their hair on the premise that if hair is so offensive that it has to be covered, they will shave their heads.

Women have continued to lead the protests, confronting the security forces on the streets. But they are not alone. Mahsa Amini's death has released anger against the regime that has been building for years. The protests have spread across Iran from the Kurdish region on the Iraq border to the capital, Tehran. The regime has responded with brutal repression. Thousands have been arrested, at least 200 have been killed, either beaten to death or shot. Most of them are men. But women, children and teenage girls have also died.

The internet has been closed down in an attempt to restrict the protests and stop images being shared. State media swings between denying that the protests are happening and claiming that they are part of a destabilisation campaign fostered by the West. The government's hard line has upped the stakes. As well as the original campaign slogan of 'Woman! Life! Freedom!' there are calls for an end to the regime and chants of 'Death to the Dictator!' in reference to Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei.

Economic crisis has led to mass strikes and demonstrations that were violently suppressed between 2017 and 2020 but did give rise to political demands from the Iranian Democracy Movement. Will the current protests fare any better? So far there has not been significant strike action. A strike was quickly suppressed at the Abadan oil refinery this week. Most of the government is holding firm, but one prominent conservative politician, Ali Larijani, has called for 'a less rigid response.' And there are rumours that the morality police's powers could be curbed.

The history of the regime shows that they are unlikely to submit to demands for reform. But equally, the protesters are not going to stop fighting for their rights. The Shah of Iran was overthrown after a year of mass strikes and protests in 1979 despite brutal repression and the support of the USA for his regime. The current regime emerged from that revolution and relies on anti-American feeling to bolster it against internal opposition.

But that opposition is growing despite the level of repression. If the strike at Abadan is a sign of things to come and the dissenting voices within the ruling class become more pronounced, the pressure for regime change could become irresistible provided the courage of the protesters does not falter. And let nothing detract from their courage. One young man told the BBC that when they go out to protest

"You know that you might never come back"

Yet still they go.

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No time for moderation

Last week the National Trust called for “government to commit to a ‘green, not grey’ growth agenda.” Concerns centred around a continued rise in proposals to rip up critical nature protections. The removal of planning regulations in so-called ‘investment zones’ and a review into environmental farming subsidies. The Director of Land and Nature at the Trust went on to say: “It is a myth that we can’t grow the economy and the environment together”.

The language used by the conservation charity implies that a compromise can be reached between economic growth and the environment. But just how effective might environmental protection be when weighed against the need for profits?

We currently have a right-wing neo-liberal Conservative government vying for power against Labour, another neo-liberal ‘Centrist’ political party. Both strongly support a capitalist agenda with Labour professing moderation as the only route to take in relation to fighting the Tory line. “Now is not the time,” is one of their favoured political mantras.

During a period when we are quickly running out of global resources we are seeing a push for more and more extreme capitalism. The rampant capitalist principles of constant work, competition, effort, growth, investment for profit and continuous development and redevelopment, are a vicious cycle that appear to leave little room to save a planet.

We have already witnessed the shambolic results from pitting common sense against Tory sense, with an energy market dominated by a capitalist cartel. The Tory refusal to interfere in the corporate pillaging of British customers and a complicit Labour response, mean neither have the will to challenge the capitalist beast, because they belong to it. Can we really carry on deluding ourselves that change is possible through the current system?

The middle ground advocated by the National Trust with their conciliatory tone underpins rather than undermines the Tory government and its capitalist rhetoric. Indeed, the goal of capitalism is to exploit all resources, but we don’t live in a world of infinite resources. So, a moderate approach serves no purpose when bold and radical solutions need to be our primary goal. We cannot argue with a future that predicts the extinction of our planet and with it our humanity. After all, if we continue to put our faith in maintaining a system that will kill us all, instead of changing the system, the earth and the people who live on it may share the same grisly fate.

We cannot ameliorate capitalism or even tone it down but saving the planet and socialism go hand in glove. Therefore, we can only try to stop climate change by changing our current ineffective political and economic system.

It’s time we prioritised global need over corporate greed.

BASIC FOODSTUFFS UP BY OVER 25%



Photo courtesy of
needpix.com

COST OF LIVING CRISIS

After a few weeks when food prices were relatively stable our basket of budget goods has started creeping up again. The price of a slab of cheese has risen in a single week by 10p, to £2.65. This is a rise of 40% since May and an additional 76p needed to buy our budget basket.

As we explained a few weeks ago dairy prices are rising due to the supply falling largely as a result of EU quotas. Whilst the price to you will rise as a result the profits for farmers have never been greater. All of that will matter little to families like the Joneses in Swansea who are struggling to make ends meet, or the Smiths in Hartlepool who on top of paying 18% more on their food bills are anticipating a fall in their benefits as the government makes the poor the scapegoats for their erratic and vindictive budgetary policies. The change from Kwarteng to Hunt will make little difference to the purses of the poorest in our society.

As the government fiddle with their fiscal policy to appease the money markets they are not even looking at the lives of people they have a moral and legal responsibility to look after. They can blithely state that they intend to cut benefits or freeze public sector pay whilst wilfully ignoring the fact that over the past 10 years or so it is these very people who have borne the brunt of their policies.

Rise in cost of goods in our budget since May 15th		
	Increase in pence	Increase in percent
Cheese	76	40.2
Milk	30	31.6
Bread	14	25.5
Apples	30	25.2
Spaghetti hoops	03	23.1
Margarine	20	18.3
Baked beans	04	18.2
Digestives	06	15.4
Crisps	40	14.3
Corn Flakes	05	9.1
Fusili	10	7.8
Tea bags	04	4.2
Tomato soup	00	0
Pizza	00	0
TOTAL	2.42	18

Some of these price rises may look small. 3p on spaghetti hoops, 4p on baked beans or 5p on a box of corn flakes. Most of us could easily absorb these rises without even noticing. But, 76p on cheese, 30p on milk or apples, these increases we tend to notice.

Remember these are budget goods, from a budget store. People who use those stores do not have 76p extra or even 3p. They are already struggling. These price rises are not a choice of what brand to buy but, rather, whether to eat at all. It is noticeable that the government whilst happily reducing the incomes of the poorest have nothing at all to say about helping them to eat.

Trickle down economics is a false theory that leaves the rich, rich and the poor even poorer. It is time for a change. But that is up to us.



Sandy Hook Victims Secure \$1billion Damages

Soon after the Sandy Hook school shooting in 2012 right-wing conspiracy nut Alex Jones took to the airwaves to proclaim the whole thing was a stunt, a false flag, and that nobody had been killed. Those familiar with the conspiracy theorist will know this was a new low even for him, but thankfully the families of eight of the 26 victims have got justice. After a three-week trial he has been ordered to pay \$860 million in damages. We can only hope this makes him think twice in the future.

Elbit Eight Trial Postponed Again

The Palestine Action activists known as the Elbit Eight were due to be on trial this month but the case has been postponed again. Unlike previous trials which have collapsed, this one also has the charge of attempted blackmail for three of the eight after they wrote a letter to the company which provides Elbit's London office space stating that their campaign would widen if the weapons manufacturer was not evicted. Only one case thus far has been successful and even that resulted in a conditional discharge for three months and a small fine. The activists are keen to go to trial as they see it as a chance to put Elbit in the dock.

Tik Tok rips off Syrian refugees

An investigation by the BBC has found that while displaced families in Syrian camps are begging for donations on TikTok the company is taking up to 70% of the proceeds. Children are said to be live streaming on the social media app for hours, pleading for digital gifts with a cash value. The BBC said it saw streams earning up to £900 an hour, but found the people in the camps received only a tiny fraction of that. This practice is said to be facilitated by so-called 'TikTok middlemen', who provided the families with the phones and equipment. When confronted Tik Tok professed outrage and said they had banned the accounts involved. We shall see.

Extreme weather down under

The extreme weather conditions around the globe persist with Australia again battling floods. Areas of three states – Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania – are under emergency flood warnings after an intense weather system this week brought more than a month's worth of rain to the southeast. This is just six months after flooding on the east coast killed 20 people and cost AUS\$4.8billion. A 71-year-old man has been found dead in his flooded back yard in this latest disaster.

And this is why groups such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil are causing disruptions - to bring attention to what is a global crisis.

OUR ROUND-UP FROM TRADE UNIONS

Compiled by Teodora Hansen

Teachers' to vote on strike action

Members of the [National Education Union](#) (NEU) are voting on a strike over pay. The proposed pay award for teachers is between 4 and 8.9%, depending on the scale a real terms pay cut given inflation is currently running at over 10%. The union has served the government with a legal notice of the dispute which cites “their failure to deliver fully funded, above-inflation pay rises for either teachers or support staff”.

Amazon workers have had enough

Hundreds of [Amazon](#) workers at their Coventry warehouse voted this week to strike against Amazon’s refusal to recognize the GMB union which wants to fight against poverty-level wages of £10.50 an hour. Feelings are running high as at least 97 % of the warehouse’s 1,400 workers support a strike, according to a consultative vote. According to *The Guardian*, workers at the Doncaster facility “are balloting simultaneously, and would coordinate any action with Coventry”.

Ambulance workers sick of low pay

Three ambulance trusts across the south coast are facing a strike vote as the [GMB](#) Union launches a formal industrial action ballot on behalf of their 3500 members across the trusts. The vote comes following a consultative ballot which saw over 90% of GMB members decide in favour of a walk out over poverty pay. These workers are angry over the Government’s imposed 4 per cent pay award which leaves them facing yet another massive real terms pay cut. The GMB Union has now announced formal strike ballots in all ten ambulance trusts in England.

Ongoing rail disruption

As the [employers](#) refuse to meet the demands of workers over pay and conditions localised industrial action is taking place affecting East Midlands Railway services on Monday the 17th and Tuesday the 18th October. There will also be industrial actions on Avanti West Coast services, on Saturday 22 October 2022 and Sunday 6 November 2022.

American Airlines Heathrow strikes are off after Unite secures 19% pay deal

Pay strikes by more than 50 American Airlines aircraft maintenance technicians and crew chiefs have been called off after an improved offer was secured. [Unite](#) has secured a three-year pay deal worth 19 per cent. Previously, the company had offered 5.3 per cent in year one, a one-off payment in year two and a pay freeze for year three.

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UKRAINE: VICTORY OR PEACE?

It is hard to answer this question without being emotive. The reporting in the West has focused on the catastrophic human suffering, brave Ukrainian soldiers leaving their families to fight for their country, and a President who has assumed God-like status in the West.

The history of my husband's own Ukrainian/Polish family is a testament to the tragedy of this country.

But we cannot risk a further escalation of this conflict, with the inherent risks of it developing into WW3. Already too many lives have been lost on both sides.

Conflict Resolution whether practised at micro or macro levels involves clarifying what the issues are, trying to bring both parties together to talk, and identifying a solution.

This is not ignoring the complexity of the issues, but it is an essential starting point.

The West should be doing everything possible to avoid further bloodshed. Not encouraging it by merely providing weapons.

Marilyn Tyzack

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Many want to see Putin's Russia beaten in Ukraine, but the priority has to be peace. Many thousands have died, and the war could drag on for years without a settlement, bringing more death and misery to millions. Of course there are those who smear people who want a solution as Putin apologists. Guess what? We're not. We just want an end to suffering with a just outcome. Is that too much to ask?



"In time of universal deceit telling the truth is a revolutionary act" - George Orwell

Howard Thorp

What would a victory look like? Would it involve Ukraine entering Russian territory in order to "finish the job" as Zelensky has hinted? Or might it be some negotiated settlement in which Russia leave Ukraine and Ukraine accepts some sort of assurance that they won't come back again? This must be one of the most dangerous conflicts of recent times for world peace.

The USA, who do appear to be pulling the strings, do not seem to want peace. This means Ukraine feels confident in their backing to continue with the war. If a Labour Party delegate can be thrown out of conference simply for mentioning 'peace' it shows how the establishment are determined to 'win' the war. After all, war in Ukraine is being blamed for every problem capitalism has. We should continue to argue for a peaceful solution and a stop to the killing.

Dave Middleton

Next week's question: Should we fear a return to the seventies?

Send your answers (no more than 100 words) to:

edgenotes@creatingsocialism.org

SITTING IN JUDGEMENT ON WOMEN

Susie Granic



Photo by Ethan Gregory Dodge on Unsplash

[Read online](#)

ANALYSIS

THE year is 2022 and the USA, an allegedly civilised country, has rolled back abortion rights by overturning *Roe v Wade*, while other countries such as India and Ireland are attempting to strengthen such rights. It's rather a damning indictment of the US when others, which we condemn for their human rights abuses, afford better protections to those seeking terminations.

[Middle Eastern countries](#) such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Djibouti, Algeria, and Morocco allow abortion to preserve the health of the woman, even if her life is not at risk. This is more than many states in the USA now do. And 14 of these states ban abortion even in cases of rape or incest. Perhaps unsurprisingly most of these 14 states also have a high rate of incest and a few do not even criminalise the act. So, if you're a 13-year-old girl who has been raped by her father or brother in one of these states, you cannot expect the state to support you in seeking an abortion. This should be horrific to everybody, but we are seeing more and more of these rights eroded in the 'freedom-loving' West.

Europe and abortion rights

We like to see ourselves, as Europeans, as being something of a beacon for women's rights, and largely this is the case, but three European countries, Andorra, Malta, and San Marino, have highly restrictive abortion laws which do not allow abortion under any circumstance. Three others, Liechtenstein, Monaco and [Poland](#), restrict a woman's right to an abortion and allow it only when the woman's health is at risk or the pregnancy is the result of rape.

We should not forget [Ireland](#), which only decriminalised abortion three years ago. Until then the laws had been incredibly restrictive, as they only too often are where the Catholic Church plays such a dominant role. Long has it been argued that church and state should be separate, and many may indeed think this is the case, but the Catholic Church has a powerful voice, and politicians listen. Although in the predominantly Catholic country of Spain abortion was decriminalised in 1985 and made legal in 2010, it is still a controversial topic in the Mediterranean nation. However, there is not a majority to see any serious call for legislation be pushed.

Italy, likewise, has had relaxed abortion laws since 1978, with legislation, known as [Law 194](#), protecting the rights of women to have terminations, but, with the election in September

of the far right Giorgia Meloni and her Brothers of Italy Party, protesters, fearing their rights may be under threat, took to the streets to send a message that they are not prepared to accept any roll-back of the laws.

It is worth mentioning [Russia](#) here, given it is in the news with the Ukraine war and the media calling out alleged war crimes and human rights violations, because Russia, as the then Soviet Union, became the first country in the world to allow abortions after the revolution. And though the number of abortions in Russia have declined a good deal latterly – from 1.2 million abortions in 2009 to 450,000 two years ago – it is still legal.

Middle Eastern abortion laws

[Tunisia](#) legalised abortion in 1973, offering safe abortions at hospitals and clinics. Women are not required to justify their decision to undergo the procedure, as long as it occurs within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. After the first trimester, abortion is legal in cases of foetal abnormalities and where the mother’s physical or mental health is at risk. Most of the abortions carried out in Tunisia are performed on rape victims.

However, since the revolution in 2011, Tunisia’s economic crisis has impoverished the already struggling public health sector, and these procedures are under threat. Social inequality, vulnerability, a lack of coordination between legal and medical public institutions, administrative rules, and the contradictory effects of various laws can hinder and seriously take their toll on those seeking abortions.



Photo by Manny Becerra on Unsplash

A mother’s mental health

Algeria also recognises that a woman’s mental health, alongside her physical health, is of overriding importance and sees it as an exception to the ban on abortions. Saudi Arabia, which certainly cannot be held up as an example to follow in most cases, does however allow for abortion procedures in the interests of a mother’s physical or mental health.

In the [UAE](#), the same exception regarding mental health applies and abortion is also legal if it is found that the baby would be born with deformities and would not survive, but the foetus must be aborted within 17 weeks of pregnancy and the procedure authorised by a medical panel.

Many countries which we in the West see as restrictive have fairly lenient laws regarding women’s reproductive rights. [Qatar](#) for example formalised a law back in 1983 which states that abortions may be legally performed on pregnancies of less than four months duration if continuing the pregnancy were to cause serious harm to the mother’s health. It may not seem a lot, but this is still

better than states in the USA which do not allow for this.

I'm sure most Americans would like to think they are far more modern and 'free' than India, but in that country abortion is now allowed for rape survivors, women with disabilities, minors and women whose marital status changes during pregnancy – for example due to divorce or a husband's death.

Their stories

Those are mostly statistics, let's look at a few individual cases:

A case I found interesting was the recent one in Malta where an American woman on holiday there suffered a premature rupture of the amniotic sac which made her pregnancy unviable at 16 weeks and she was refused an abortion. She was later airlifted to Spain where the procedure was carried out, but the woman, [Andrea Prudente](#), is suing the government of Malta for a breach of her human rights. If the same thing had happened to her while holidaying in her own country, in Alabama for example, she would have had no case to bring.

Just last year, in Paraguay, a country which has some of the strictest abortion laws in the world, [a 10-year-old girl was found to be 21 weeks pregnant after having been raped by her stepfather. The girl's mother requested an abortion but there is no exception for rape or incest.](#)

[An 11-year-old Argentinian rape victim](#) was forced to have a Caesarean section, and gave birth to a severely premature and underweight baby, after she was denied an abortion. The girl was raped by her grandmother's 65-year-old boyfriend, and went to a hospital at 19 weeks pregnant to ask for an abortion. She is just one of thousands of Argentinian girls who are raped and denied aid. Last year again, but this time in the USA, a 13-year-old girl who had been raped by her grandfather and found by her doctor to be pregnant, couldn't get an abortion close to home in [Texas](#), and so was driven hours across the state to terminate the pregnancy. And again, a 10-year-old rape victim from Ohio who was denied an abortion in that state was forced to travel across the state border to Indiana to undergo a termination.

Every single day girls and women are being raped and then denied abortions, in the USA and around the world. And every day women, who for many other reasons do not want to continue with their pregnancy, are being denied abortions. Governments have not learned the lessons of the past where we saw, and are seeing again, women turning to less safe means to terminate their unwanted pregnancies.

The last word should go to [Kelsey Leigh](#) who testified to the US Congress at the end of September after having a pregnancy terminated on the grounds that her child would have been unlikely to have been able to swallow, or breathe, and whose bones would have broken during delivery.

"Who are you going to be?" she asked of the lawmakers. "Will you sit in judgment of people who are pregnant without knowing them or their circumstances, or will you listen to me and us and be

Lobby TUC Congress: No Increase In Military Spending!



Lobby the TUC Congress 2022



Welfare Not Weapons
No Increase In
Military Spending!

12.30pm
Tuesday 18 October
Outside Brighton Conference Centre

Lynne Edward interviews Natalie Strecker

INTERVIEW



[Read online](#)

I am a socialist and I've been political since I was a child. I am also an ex-member of the Labour Party. I joined the party in 2015 and, like many others, I celebrated an inspiring and openly socialist leader who articulated the hopes and opinions of many. For the first time in my life I felt vindicated and proud to be a socialist. However, this feeling didn't last long, and over the past couple of years socialism has once again become a dirty word.

As a regular user of left-wing Twitter, I've found neoliberal rhetoric regularly dominates Labour Party discussions. But the worst thing for me has been the term socialism being devalued. People who are socialists espouse fairness and social justice but are regularly mocked, whilst others on the right call themselves socialist in an attempt to entice or steer others into supporting centrism.

I understand there are many versions of socialism, we're not one homogeneous group, we don't all agree with one another. I therefore decided to go on a mission to find out what our differences and similarities are, what are our constants? Through a series of interviews I'm hoping to answer this question by talking to other 'left wingers' about their values, influences and beliefs.



Natalie Strecker is a coach and mentor in education. She was also a human rights monitor in Hebron, Palestine, a woman who stood up to bullying and belligerent Zionist settlers attempting to intimidate her and others crossing into the West Bank. She was the founder of the Jersey Palestinian Solidarity Campaign and is an environmental campaigner, Amnesty activist and an ex-Labour Party member who has been excluded from Keir Starmer's Labour Party.

Coming from a working class family on the relatively affluent Channel Island of Jersey, Natalie became aware at a very young age of needless struggle and how unjust life can be. As a child her parents struggled to find work, life was difficult and she spent a number of years within the care system. She distinctly remembers the stigma of unemployment, standing in line with her step-father to beg support from the Parish (Jersey didn't have a welfare system). Natalie struggled growing up in such an unfair society. She remembers vivid examples of spiteful cruelty, such as

being shamed by her headteacher because her family couldn't afford to buy a school photo. She feels such childhood experiences had a deep impact upon her self-worth. Aged 14 Natalie was recommended for a place at the local grammar school. *"When I went to the grammar, we were encouraged to debate, think about things. It was here I began to look at what was right, and what was fair. It was also around this time I became involved in Amnesty. I stopped standing up for the National Anthem when I was about 14 because I didn't agree with the words. That debate got me thinking, I became keenly aware our society wasn't working properly, people didn't have equal opportunities."*

"It was then I guess that some teachers got me thinking about stuff. I was already a deep thinking and generally reflective child. Despite the dysfunction at home, my mum taught me about British colonialism and how the royals got their money, which I'm so grateful for, because those seeds sown early were very helpful. My mum's values were also very much to treat others as you would like to be treated."

"I was lucky getting into a grammar school because only a handful of working class kids did, most children were from middle class backgrounds. But, despite my education, I didn't have too many choices after school. I had to leave home at 17 and, being from a working class background, there was no support, no option for me to go to university. This was a shame because I know I had the ability, I wanted to be a teacher, I thought then, this just isn't right".

We discussed what it means to be political and Natalie made the distinction between politics and simple issues of human rights.

"They talk about Palestine as being political, but to me it was, and still is, about human rights. I nominally supported the Green Party and green issues, but in terms of getting involved in a political party or political struggle I didn't look at that again until Jeremy Corbyn became Labour leader. Before this I had very little faith in politics, believing politicians were liars, who only did stuff in their own self-interest." However, she found that "Jeremy's background and policies lit a flame in me that there could be a political movement, on a parliamentary level, that could make real societal change. I don't put people on pedestals though and acknowledge he made mistakes, but it was from this moment I realised politicians could actually work for ordinary people. So, I would say it was only at this point that I really began to think of myself as 'political' because prior to this I'd always thought of my views as just common sense really".



When asked about her views on capitalism and socialism, Natalie laughed, saying, *"Capitalism, I think means we're all f*cked to be honest with you!" It's an economic system that pits us against one another. I think it is a particularly unnatural system, despite what we are taught. Human society works best when we work collaboratively, whereas capitalism forces us into a state of fight or flight, and fear. It's a system that only serves 1% of the population, but ultimately for me capitalism means destruction. Destruction not just of our society and communities but the total undermining of our*

moral fabric".

"Socialism means the opposite really. It's about working for the benefit of all, collaborative social living. As Marx said, 'It's about workers owning the means of production'. Or in real terms it's about everybody getting fed, everybody getting a home, everybody getting support and their basic needs fulfilled. Living a life of dignity, that's what socialism means to me."

Natalie doesn't believe in being too dogmatic about defining yourself by 'isms', such as Marxism or even socialism: *"In some ways I don't know whether labels become their own barrier. For me it's about values, not theories. I'm not saying they don't have their place, they can be good, but I've seen different movements split and fight with each other, so it really put me off. I've read some Marx and Engels and to be honest found it quite boring! I feel socialism is really about instinct and a basic set of values, and how we implement those values into the modern world."*



We discussed what Natalie feels are the important current issues. She sighs and grins. *“Where do I start? Most of us are just feeling bereft at the moment, I’m desperately trying to develop a dark sense of humour!”*



For the past eight years, Natalie has repeated that the biggest threat to society is fascism. Initially, people at work teased her, calling her views ‘Apocalyptic Bingo’. Today, those same colleagues agree with her. *“Historically”, she says, “there was the terrifying attempt at the annihilation of a people, and today certain groups are still threatened. But we mustn’t forget that the left has always been on the top of that fascist threat list. The reason? Because the left is more likely to resist fascism and the targeting of vulnerable*

groups or those deemed undesirable. Capitalism is failing, that’s why we’re seeing a rise in fascism, it’s that and ecological breakdown that keep me up at night”.

One of the other things which concerns Natalie *“is this current inability to see things on a spectrum. Subjects such as Brexit, Ukraine, Trans rights have a polarising effect, whereby we are constantly forced into this binary position of ‘you must think this or that’ as if there are only two possible positions. We’re much more complex than this as human beings, and this narrow view can become quite dangerous. We need to be smarter and stop falling for the divide and conquer routine. Someone can hold a different opinion and that’s okay, but what is not okay is deliberately targeting people for their views. There is a lot we can agree on and work together on but some strident attitudes on the left have really put me off. I’ve been quiet lately about certain subjects (and that isn’t like me) because I feel I’m being forced into one camp or another. We really need to act with more humility, be kinder and more emotionally intelligent. If we don’t get our sh*t together we will all fail. I’ve just completed mediation training where we learnt to find the common interests, because labelling, screaming and people shaming does not change a thing.”*

However, Natalie also outlines her vision for a fairer future where we can all find a way to live together respectfully and peacefully. *“My actual hope is a move towards a more decentralised socialism within a more resource based economy”.*

So, what are values? Are they adopted, learned, formed from experiences or environment?

There are several strands I can tease out from Natalie’s life that show her values, influences and beliefs. Most of Natalie’s values come from her early life. Experiencing a less than perfect start in life, Natalie’s intelligence, strength, resilience and caring nature show through, leading to a strong sense of right and wrong. Brave and ideological before she even knew she was political, Natalie was never afraid to ask questions or speak her mind. She is a very spiritual person, and her faith is important to her. She acknowledges that political philosophy can be an important influence, although she finds political dogma can be quite tedious preferring to be guided by her own internal beliefs, her values.



Photos courtesy of Natalie, mostly from last week’s Chain Around Parliament in support of Julian Assange



Socialist Unity

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I think we are in broad agreement about the kinds, and complexity, of reasons for divisions within the left. But this begs a fundamental question: What is meant by ‘the left’, or indeed, the term ‘progressive’? Given the vast differences between views among people claiming to be on the left, is it still a useful term? However, some term of demarcation is needed to distinguish those who are broadly anti-capitalist from those who are not; so, for current purposes, and given its widespread historical use, I guess we must stick with the term.

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What makes this so important is that there is a desperate need for unity on the left. But I doubt whether this will be possible without some minimum agreement on a definition of just what constitutes ‘the left’ (I note you write Left with a capital ‘L’). If one reads the manifestos or Statement of Aims, of, say, Ken Loach’s Left Unity Party, or Progressive International, then I think that most who read Socialist Sunday would be in general agreement with them. So then, why is there not just disagreement on the left, but so much outright animosity?

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Which brings me to the case of Jonathan Cooke v George Monbiot we have mentioned. Firstly, I admit that the terms ‘authoritarian’ and ‘liberal’ are woefully inadequate, not to say distorting, to describe their differences (a brief comment could never do so). Cooke has recently written another sharp attack on Monbiot (see his Newsletter). Antagonism between Cook, and others, like Media Lens, has been running for some 20 years. I have been following it for several years.. Yet I would guess that they would all broadly agree on some such manifesto, or statement of principle. Cook, and many others, do not believe that Monbiot is on the left at all, but is a stooge of the establishment. [May I note my disagreement with you that “Monbiot has always been broadly supportive of military interventions by the West’, he hasn’t, or that Cook is a pacifist. But my views on both are too complex to be set out here].

What I take from this example - and there are countless more - is that there is an urgent need for a much more stringent account of what we mean by ‘the left’ - one that would ideally need a much longer piece than a platform like Socialist Sunday is possibly appropriate for. I know from 50 years experience of being involved on the left just how difficult defining ‘the left’, or achieving left unity, is. Nevertheless, the task is urgent. Yours in comradeship Stephen Morley

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ACTS OF RESISTANCE

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IN last week's Sunday Socialist we argued that voting Labour and hoping that would change anything was going to be a mistake. Inevitably, we were challenged to say what we would advise people to do. If not voting Labour, then who? And, if not voting at all, then what? In terms of the first we do not support a particular political party. People involved in producing the Sunday Socialist are members of a variety of parties and none at all. We consider voting to be the least important political act you will take. There are 1,836 days between elections (if they run their 5 year term) why so much emphasis on one day and so little on the other 1,835? To change society we need to do things on a regular basis. Not necessarily every day, but perhaps every week. Of course, you can spend lots of time at endless Labour Party internal meetings trying to get your 'leftish' friends into positions, but you can, in our opinion, do lots more.

One of our most imaginative writers, Luke Andreski, had started to compile a list of small acts that people could take to resist the onslaught of neo-liberal propaganda, we are indebted to him. The full list can be found at his Twitter account [here](#).

#1 acts of resistance #1

Join a union

#2 acts of resistance #2

Support strikers; join pickets; donate funds

#3 acts of resistance #3

Join a campaigning group such as Extinction Rebellion, Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Palestinian Solidarity Campaign

#4 acts of resistance #4

Join or form a food and/or energy co-op

#5 acts of resistance #5

Get involved with Critical Mass: write for us, help us spread the word, make socialism live

#6 acts of resistance #6

Start a local campaign with others to improve things in your area

#7 acts of resistance #7

Break the grip of the mainstream media...

Read and support alternative humanist, socialist, union and environmentalist news sources

Over the coming weeks we will be more specific about how to do some of these things, but if you can provide us with information about how you resist that would make our job a lot easier.

What do you belong to? Which demos do you attend? Send us a photo so we can inspire others. What local initiatives are you a part of? And, if you insist on voting, how do you decide who to vote for?

Remember the greatest act of resistance is actually the easiest and it is this:

Question Everything

<https://creatingsocialism.org/>

Ecco Homo Sapiens

A Look at Human Evolution

Fiat Knox



Image by eugene-zhyvchik-xJY-7gtC38o-unsplash

[Read online](#)

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According to one source, [The Smithsonian Museum](#), human evolution is defined as:

....the lengthy process of change by which people originated from apelike ancestors.

Scientific evidence shows that the physical and behavioural traits shared by all people originated from apelike ancestors and evolved over a period of approximately six million years.

Modern humans began to appear on this Earth about 300,000 to 100,000 years ago. By comparison, the Earth is tens of thousands of times older than that, and the universe itself is unimaginably old.

Yet, in terms of time, the universe itself is still young, and the human species is as young as a blink of the cosmic eye.

The Origin of Evolution – Charles Darwin

It's a safe bet that most people have heard of [The Origin of Species](#), but they have probably never actually read it. The whole point of the argument was that all species are here as a result of them being lucky in nature. Random chance, and a billion years of changing environments, statistically favoured the present species. Random chance and mutations drive change, and the result is all the species on Earth.

The controversy began when people realised that Darwin's book also included homo sapiens.

Humans.

You.

The Evolution of Humans

Humans are a product of evolution. We belong to a genus, Homo, with just one species – Homo sapiens (sapiens being the Latin word for “wise,” and the jury's out on that one).

We're the survivors of a process of aggressive, competitive natural environmental changes. Evolution set a bunch of other hominin species loose on the world – Neanderthals, Homo erectus, and so on – but of those different human species, only the humans, Homo sapiens, you see around you survived 300,000 years of tsunamis, earthquakes, plagues, and super volcanoes, to stand upright and proud right next to you in the queue for Starbucks.

The Future Of Humanity

The last century saw a unique new branch of speculative fiction, fuelled by the unfolding

revelations about human evolution. Science fiction authors' writing began to include speculative possibilities that Homo sapiens would somehow give birth to the species which would survive it.

Odd John and Last and First Men

Olaf Stapledon wrote two novels on the theme of human evolution. [Last and First Men](#) looked at how the future of humanity could unfold if evolution were to generate successive species of humans, leading to a tragic end when the stars, including Sol (our star) started emitting poisonous radiation.

Similarly, [Odd John](#) gave us a first glimpse into the mechanism which drives evolution – mutation. John, the protagonist, was an unusual human, who turns out to be a genetic accident with advanced abilities above and beyond his sapiens peers. He was the first example of psychic abilities being manifested by advanced humans. John possessed telepathy, clairvoyance, and a form of mind control – and he was not the last example of this trope

The Uncanny X-Men

This long-running comic book, movie, and TV series was created in 1963, the same year the BBC created Doctor Who. The concept was that the atom bomb had forced humans to evolve rapidly into the next stage of evolution, yielding superheroes.

That pretty much spiralled into your standard four-colour Spandex fight fests with some occasional dipping into romance tropes – but the series did create a slew of psychic mutants, such as Emma Frost, Charles Xavier (“Professor X”), and the mutant known as The Purple Man (played by David Tennant, who has also played The

Doctor in Doctor Who).

Star Trek

Early in the Original Series, psionics were prevalent in the first few episodes, from the M-113 Salt Vampire's ability to shroud its true appearance, to Charles Evans' telekinetic abilities in “Charlie X,” no relation to Professor Xavier above; and the mutated creature which was once Lt Cmdr Gary Mitchell, Starfleet, in “Where No Man Has Gone Before”.

2001: A Space Odyssey

This cult movie charted the evolution of humans, and introduced a truly science fiction element – namely, that an unnamed species of Overseers had jump started human evolution a few hundred thousand years in the past, and accelerated our evolution to the point where we could visit the stars; then left behind devices to draw us towards a place where they could jump start the next phase, the creation of the Starchild – our next evolutionary phase.



Any excuse for a picture of these icons

Photo courtesy of Needpix.com

The Tomorrow People

In the Seventies, Roger Price picked up the evolutionary baton and ran with it. His show The Tomorrow People tackled human interest stories, told from the point of view of a tiny gang of super-powered humans of the species Homo superior, a name which had been taken from Odd John, Stapledon's novel.

Evolution of The Mind: The Psychonauts

Parallel to the stories featuring the evolution of humans in popular culture, real-world experimentation into the steering of the evolution of humanity was taking place. These experiments were fuelled by the discovery of lysergic acid diethylamide, LSD, by Doctor Albert Hoffman. This cause was enthusiastically taken up by the late Dr Timothy Leary and Terence McKenna, and these experiments seemed to be beginning to yield interesting results, until the authorities cracked down on the whole thing.

“...But that crucial non□ game terror□ reverence awful moment comes... There comes a time when the ecstatic

cry is called for. At that time, you must be ready to pray. To go beyond yourself. To contact energy beyond your game. At that time you must be ready to pray. When you have lost the need to pray.... You are a dead man in a world of dead symbols. Pray for life. Pray for life.” **Timothy Leary**, [The Psychedelic Prayers](#)

At the same time, in the UK, an enthusiastic cabal of three experimental pioneers – Peter J Carroll, Phil Hine, and Ray Sherwin – began a movement which was intended to be the wave of the future, [Chaos Magic](#) – a movement which brought Alan Moore and Grant Morrison to the public’s attention, in the form of Watchmen, The Invisibles and the inspiration for The Matrix, which went down a rabbit hole and took popular entertainment away from the thought of human evolution.

Role-playing Games

The new and developing medium of tabletop role-playing games took a huge leap with the arrival in 1977 of Traveller. Psionics are included in this setting, but evolution is not.

However, some other games systems such as The Design Mechanism, a Canadian RPG company, have brought about tabletop science fiction role-playing games in which there is some room for the possibility of human evolution becoming a theme.

One of them is [Luther Arkwright](#): Role-playing Across The Parallels, a role-playing game where you play the roles of agents of an agency which travels across different parallel universes. And an Their most famous agent is the immortal Luther Arkwright, the first of a new species of human called Homo novus. The game is based on a series of graphic novels created by author Bryan Talbot.

Brave New World

The first 22 years of this century have been bereft of pioneering authors who enthusiastically supported the acceleration of human evolution, and the ones who are left are largely supporting the repugnant – and debunked – concept of eugenics instead.

Humans’ genomes are impossible to evolve through the same tools humans have used to domesticate animals, but eugenicists still pursue their offensive dreams of master races, even though the product of their efforts is looking less and less fit to survive with each generation.

Fiction which focuses on human evolution has stalled. Apart from Bryan Talbot, there are no new Olaf Stapledons, no new Kubricks, and no new Timothy Learys to conjure up the next Odd John or Tomorrow People. When stories reach the TV or movies, they are turned into Spandex adventures or tent-pole blockbusters with a glut of CGI special effects to cover up the fact that the stories are usually flat, shallow, and tawdry.

The current year is one of strife. Backwards nationalism, war, political shenanigans, autocratic regimes, global warming denial, toxic people on the internet, the erosion of democracy, rampant capitalism, and a general reversal of everything humans had struggled for from the Sixties ... all of these factors are contributing to a world where Homo sapiens has steadily become less and less qualified to retain the sapiens label. Perhaps we should look for a new author to write a story about human evolution, an optimistic look which dares to dream of Peter Carroll’s vision of humanity’s descendants practising their strange rituals of life among the stars, rather than huddled in the ruins.

And maybe we should be looking around the world to see how we can help human evolution along. The next human species won’t come from middle class suburbia. It’ll come from the slums and the favelas. How the next species of genus Homo will react to us will depend on how we treat it. So we’d best be kind.





Truss Loses Trust

Jo Buchanan

It is abundantly clear that short-term growth as proposed by the Government will have disastrous long-term effects on all of us. We are destroying life on Earth, and our political leaders have failed to prevent this destruction. We have lost half of the richness of our biodiversity in the UK. Destruction in other parts of the world is even greater. If we don't restore nature, there is nowhere on the planet that will be safe from climate change.

Liz Truss has been challenged by a number of environmental charities, several of which are not known for their activism. More than 10 charities with over 15 million members have sent a message to her: *"Prime minister, no one can afford nature to be under attack"*. Truss called her opponents part of an *"anti-growth coalition"* who hold the country back because they are seeking *"more regulation and more meddling"*. Whitehall has accused them of *"playing politics"* and being involved in a political campaign. Their reply stated that *"political campaigning was perfectly legitimate if the environment was being threatened"*.

The head of the National Trust, Hilary McGrady, has mentioned mobilising the Trust's 5.7 million members, many of whom may be Conservative voters, to express their opposition to Liz Truss's lack of concern for the environment, and conservationists may consider the threat to the countryside of more significance than their Conservative politics. McGrady stated that members were *"outraged and worried"* by the Government's proposals. Last week the National Trust urged the Government to be *"Green, not Grey"* and put the environment at the root of growth plans. It advocates that future plans *"should be rooted in green jobs, sustainable food production, clean energy and protected nature, heritage, and outdoor space"*.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has also made its objections known and also called the policies of the Truss cabinet an *"attack on nature"*. They strongly object to the UK Government's plans for *"investment zones"*, which would loosen planning restrictions. They fear wildlife places could be *"all under threat from bulldozers, from concrete"*.

The World Wildlife Fund too has spoken up and Tanya Steele, the CEO, has referred to their recent report as *"an inventory of human destruction"* and deplores the disastrous effect human activity has had on wildlife. In just under 50 years there has been a 69% decrease in the global population of wildlife. There is a *"crashing loss of wildlife populations around the world"*, indicating surely that human life is also at risk on a vast scale, one of the biggest threats being land use.

London Zoo has not remained silent. *"Every single global goal for nature has been missed"*, Dr Andrew Terry, Director of Conservation at the Zoological Society of London, told Channel 4 News recently, believing the World Climate Summit on global diversity next month is the last chance for nature, the last chance to stop catastrophic ecosystem collapse.

Truss and her Cabinet have certainly created a sense of outrage among fairly moderate generally law-abiding citizens. Might we now see them taking to the streets?