

Organicism and Fascism in the UK

BETA

100 YEARS OF FORGETTING

The threads connecting 1924's organic evangelists with the riots of 2024

A COLONIAL CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

The organic movement was built on learning extracted from Indian farmers during colonial rule

FARMERS & FASCISM

Organic pioneers praise Mein Kampf, call for national renewal and the return to a rural feudal idyll

WHAT CAN WE DO?

How can organicism move beyond safeguarding purity to instead champion justice?



TELL US WHAT YOU THINK HERE:

[LINKTR.EE/SEEDREP](https://linktr.ee/seedrep)

FOREWORD

The pages that follow were first offered to participants of [a session on anti-fascist approaches to food and farming at the Oxford Real Farming Conference at the start of 2025.](#)

This Little Book of Legacies forms part of Seeding Reparations, a recently-formed initiative that works to support a shift in visions for the future of the food system from ones that centre corporate power to those that centre reparations. Among the influences on how we have come to understand reparations is the [Declaration of the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance](#), which was held in Durban, South Africa in 2001. In it, and in [documents that emerged from the process](#), the concept of satisfaction is used to address harms that cannot be repaired. This could take the form of a formal recognition, an apology, and the implementation of methods which guarantee that such harm will not take place again.

At the time of writing, over a month has passed since we first shared these provisional thoughts at ORFC 2025. Thank you sincerely to all those who have endeavoured to get feedback to us through various pathways. We are still collecting and processing the insights people have shared with us. Once we have done this, our intention is to produce an expanded version with contributions from others who can deepen the conversation

and share some of their knowledge and wisdom on these issues.

However, we need not wait for the new version before we address one piece of critical feedback. In order to help you, the reader, understand our motivations and the type of discussion we hope to stimulate, we want to state our two main intentions in writing it: First, to contribute useful, albeit provisional, historical contexts to the discussions taking place within our movements about the need for reparative justice. Second, to help build relationships with each other with sufficient trust for dialogues about these urgent issues to continue.

Given this, why have we focussed on “organicism”? Simply, because the history of movements for organic farming are intertwined with histories of both colonialism and white supremacy. Of course, the harmful legacies of these trends can be found in many other areas of life shaped by four centuries of European colonial power. Just because these inheritances are so omini-present should not discourage us from reflecting on what we can do in our own realm and then take action to bring about repair. To take one example, structural racism still plays out in our own organisations and communities today - the tell-tale signs are everywhere, whether it is the racial composition of our charities, those who read our publications or come to our conferences. Structural racism is a legacy of our nation's history

of empire, transatlantic slavery, and colonial exploitation. Given the increasing influence of far-right ethno-nationalism in the UK, US, and Europe, structural racism might be expected to intensify in coming years.

The topics we discuss here are not new. For example, Seeding Reparations highlighted some of the issues we cover here during our [our talk at ORFC in 2023](#). The racist riots of July/August 2024, and successive gains by ethno-nationalist parties across the Western world, underscored the timeliness of these questions. Our Little Book of Legacies does not aim to salve the wounds of the past. Instead we ask you to join us as we hold a magnifying glass over them and consider the ways they might be stopping us from advancing cause.

Amongst the growing noise of fear, hate, false heroes and exhausted scapegoats, what clarity can we distill from our history? How might our vision for the future place justice at the core? Our intention is for this Little Book of Legacies to serve as an inevitably-imperfect prompt for those who want to have that dialogue in good faith. We make no judgement of the intentions or integrity of so many passionate, compassionate and hard working people flying under the banner of organicism and those involved in the related practices of

agroecology and regenerative agriculture. But we also believe all groups should be wary of assuming they have completed their ethical development and so have no need to reflect on difficult questions. In this we must be honest. We are asking you to have the courage to confront potentially difficult and complex feelings, without interpreting it as the result of an opponent who is trying to weaken you.

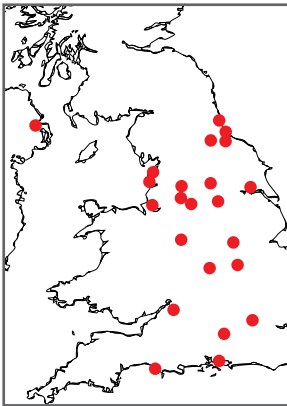
We hope you find something with which to engage in the pages that follow. Perhaps, an untold or incomplete story which tells us something about the present. A path for action on which you might embark or some resonance with a small voice inside you that you could not hear clearly until now. Most of all, we hope it enables you and us to have open and honest dialogue about our relationship to justice and our values.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the many people who contributed their time and expertise, both to the writing of this booklet and to Seeding Reparations more generally. We are grateful to them, but we take full responsibility for the contents of this booklet and any errors it may contain.

SEEDING REPARATIONS

February, 2025

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Seeding Reparations

CORE TEAM

Tatiana Garavito
Andre Kpodonu
Tom Wakeford

"Not everything that is faced can be changed,
but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

JAMES BALDWIN, 1962

"[Younger generations] cannot profess their own guilt for crimes they did not commit... No discerning person can expect them to wear a penitential robe simply because they are Germans. But their forefathers have left them a grave legacy. All of us, whether guilty or not, whether young or old, must accept the past. We are all affected by the consequences and liable for it. The young and old generations must and can help each other to understand why it is vital to keep the memories alive.... Anyone who closes his eyes to the past is blind to the present."

**RICHARD VON WEIZAÄCKER,
GERMAN PRESIDENT
1985**

JANUARY 2025

All reasonable attempts have been made to verify the nature and status of the primary and secondary sources collected here in good faith and in the public interest. Any opinions expressed are honestly held and based on facts true at the time of publication.

VERSION 0.23

INTRODUCTION

THE RIGHT SEASON

Join us in grappling with the disquiet and difficult questions raised by our food and farming movement's entanglement with fascism and the far right.



For over three years, the nascent Seeding Reparations initiative, our partners, supporters and co-conspirators have pursued the question: How can we pursue reparations within the UK's food system?

Where does one start with such a monumental task? Should we prioritise the urgent issues raised by what people alive today are doing, or the harms others have caused in the past? Do we spend our energy mourning the chances for change that were squandered in the past, or on envisioning worlds of the future, some elements of which seem within grasping distance?

Our sense is that the recipe for success requires all of the above, and then some. A dose of courage, a smattering of hope, enjoyed with friends who you trust and are committed to walking side-by-side with you towards truth and liberation.

This beta version of A Little Book of Legacies, is our first attempt to unpack some of these necessary ingredients. It is meant for everyone at ORFC 2025 and beyond¹. As you read it, we ask you to grapple these questions:

What are the implications of how the organic movement was formed a hundred years ago for people and organisations in the food and farming sector today?

How might we grapple with the dreams we have inherited from the pioneers of organicism, some of whom were also advocates of white supremacy, authoritarianism and even fascism?

How can we sharpen our thinking in order that we can envision more just pathways towards planetary repair?

First let's address the reformist culture of doing things slowly and in moderation that often pervades discussions of these issues (See

Letter extract on page 6).

As it enters the second century of its existence, the UK organic movement appears to have failed to find a "convenient season" to tackle an elephant in the room. How long will it take us? The information we present here may prompt you to experience uncomfortable emotions. It has not been easy to write. We know it might offend some.

We invite you to hold any discomfort you feel, as you might hold a book with valuable knowledge. Resist the urge to take immediate action to throw off feelings of anger, rejection, blame, guilt, shame, or complicity. The work of transformation must also transform the self.

LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL
(extract)

First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the... Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace, which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action;" who paternalistically feels he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by the myth of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait until a "more convenient season."

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1963²

<<< WORKING DEFINITIONS

How we understand the key terms present throughout our little book. The below is meant to aid understanding, rather than provide definitive ways of thinking about key issues.

Authoritarianism

A political system characterized by the rejection of political plurality, the use of strong central power to preserve the political status quo, and reductions in democracy, separation of powers, civil liberties, and the rule of law.

Anthroposophy

A new spiritual and religious movement founded in the early 20th century by philosopher Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925).

Biodynamic agriculture

A form of agriculture based on anthroposophy (see above), which is being developed as an alternative to industrial systems from the 1920s onwards.

Fascism

According to historian and philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), a fascist government is one that uses terror and domination to control people using the forces that can be generated within the communities in which they live. Having studied the rise of the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini, she believed that fascist and authoritarian systems would continue to arise, the result of a “fungus” that infected the brains of isolated people living in modern societies.³

Organic farming

A term inspired by the philosophy of organicism (see below) that has been used in the UK since the 1940s to describe an agricultural system that uses naturally occurring, non-synthetic inputs such as compost manure,

green manure, and bone meal and places emphasis on techniques such as crop rotation, companion planting, and mixed cropping.

Organicism

The philosophical position that states that the universe and its various parts (including human societies) ought to be considered alive and naturally ordered, much like a living organism.

Reparations

We use a “constructive” view of reparations taken from Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò (1990-), which is that the costs of building a fairer and more equitable world should largely be borne by wealthier countries, organisations and financial elites. These elites predominantly exist in the Global North, countries of which bear moral liability for past injustices.

White supremacy

A political ideology that imposes and maintains cultural, social, political, historical or institutional domination by white people and non-white supporters. In the past, this ideology had been put into effect through socioeconomic and legal structures such as the Atlantic slave trade, the labour and social practices imposed by European colonial powers, the Scramble for Africa, Jim Crow laws in the United States, the Treaty of Waitangi and activities of the Native Land Court in New Zealand, White Australia policies, and Apartheid in South Africa.

PART 1: 100 YEARS OF FORGETTING

FOOD, THE FAR RIGHT AND FASCISM 1924-2024



Location of riots in England
and Northern Ireland, July/
August 2024 - Adapted from
image produced by BBC
Panorama, 2024

The threads connecting 1924's organic evangelists with the riots of 2024

Do you remember the last summer's riots? They constituted the most widespread violent disorder in England since the Second World War, erupting across at least twenty-four towns and cities across the country, as well as in Belfast in Northern Ireland⁴.

Hotels housing refugees were attacked, along with mosques and buildings providing public services. In some cases violent mobs stopped passing cars at random and told drivers to lower their windows so they could ascertain the skin colour of those sitting inside.

Focussing their attention on the almost entirely peaceful protests against the genocide in Gaza, police intelligence units had incorrectly assessed the threat of violence from white anti-migrant protesters as being "minimal"⁵.

Whilst the public lynching of George Floyd in May 2020⁶ was interpreted by many at the time as highlighting an urgent need for the UK to confront legacies of structural racism and white supremacy, mainstream commentary on the riots of August 2024 ignored the clear narrative thread of white supremacy that wove them together with the events of four years earlier.

Keir Starmer and much of the UK media made little if any reference to race in the aftermath of the riots – instead implying that they were an instance of yobbery by an underclass of "thugs"⁷: A violent manifestation of a marginal subculture, which might otherwise be seen on football match-days or outside the bars of summer holiday resorts.

While some pro-organic and other environmental organi-

sations did make statements in support of the UK Black Lives Matter movement that arose after Floyd's murder, the same organisations do not appear to have felt the need to respond the riots of summer 2024. And yet the same narratives used to fuel people's anger, and then ignite them, last August, were closely entwined with the emergence one hundred years ago of pro-organic forms of environmentalism. These elements include: pride in the British economic self-sufficiency against

surgent tech oligarchs, they are re-emerging globally.

The manifestos of these far-right billionaires promise protection for some of us, so long as we are willing to allow a handful of corporations to become ever more rich by financialising almost every element of the living world, facilitated by all-pervasive technologies of surveillance and control that they will own. Those who stand to lose their rights and livelihoods will be in the majority world of the Global



Our movements could continue to ...assert that these are the problems of “that lot over there”.

perceived national decline, the desire for security for a UK population who identify themselves as white and whose notion of indigeneity is defined by their bloodline and their native soil. How much of this narrative framing survives, overtly or more subtly, in the pro-organic and environmental movements of 2025?

The sad truth is that pro-organic and environmental movements, both in the UK and across the Global North, have subtly accommodated these tropes over many decades. And now, backed by in-

South, and among those already marginalised in the Global North⁸.

A YouGov opinion poll taken at the time of the 2024 riots suggests that more than one in three Britons supported the racist violence of the rioters⁹. Our movements could continue to look the other way and assert that these are the problems of “that lot over there”. But what if an increasing proportion of us decide that these trends are something to do with us? What can and should we do to start to repair the harm?



ORGANICISM

TO THE

RESCUE

After the Boer Wars, concern for the strength of soldiers sent to fight for the Empire intertwined with calls for Britain's urban population to return to organic farms

DEPRIVATION IN 1904

In 1904 the UK Government responded to reports that half of its recruits to its Army to serve in the Second Boer War (1899-1902) had been malnourished to the point of unfitness for service. The Committee on Physical Deterioration's report identified a crisis of food security among the British working class. During the War, the infantry had even deemed it necessary to lower the minimum acceptable height of its recruits from five feet and four inches, where it had stood since 1800, to just five feet.¹⁰

DEPRIVATION IN 2024

On 25 September 2024 the Guardian made a survey of those involved in the summer 2024 riots, characterising the mobs as being made up of individuals who were “deprived, in bad health and out of work”¹³.

Britain's near defeat during the Second Boer War managed to turn the malnutrition of the working-class population of the UK into a scandal among its ruling classes, prompting the government to allow local authorities to give free meals to poor children¹¹. Given Britain's need to keep control over His Majesty's subjects, at home and in the colonies, it could never again be risk being stuck with new army recruits with insufficient physical strength to fight.

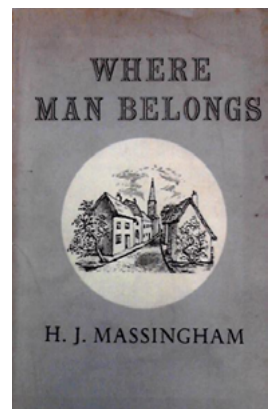
In the decade that followed the Boer War, widely read authors, such as Hugh Massingham (1888 - 1952), used evidence of the physical weakness of the population and what he perceived to be a loss of connection between “modern man” and the soil with the threat of national decline.

“Massingham...wrote of a displaced populace, ‘uprooted from our homeland,

and sickening, withering in our urban pot’. This was one of the overriding pre-occupations of England's pre-war organicist movement (a movement that, not incidentally, interleaved in complex and often contradictory ways with the rise of Mosleyite fascism): that ‘modern man’, the man of the city and suburb, the man with the radio and the telephone, had in some terrible and probably fatal way been cut off from the soil.” Richard Smyth, 2023¹²

Part of the answer according to Massingham, Henry Williamson (1895-1977) and several other influential writers of the time was a movement for organic agriculture. According to historian R J Moore-Colyer, an organic philosophy was much more to them than a “mere obsession with the use of dung, recycling and compost”. Organicism was an essential keystone of a particular way of life which in itself would

help a rediscovery of the tradition of England. It would promote what Massingham called “a means of developing character, independence, ownership whether co-operative or individual, and a right relation to nature”. “The organic way is” Massingham wrote, “the only one that can bring us within the influence of these everlasting principles that govern mortal life.”



A COLONIAL CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

Organic approaches to farming, practiced in India for thousands of years before British rule, were appropriated by a scientist of the British Raj, Sir Albert Howard and published in his book, which was a key influence on the UK organic movement.



At the beginning of the eighteenth century, before India became a British colony, India's share of the world economy was 23 per cent, as large as all of Europe put together. By the time the British granted India independence in 1947, India's share had dropped to just over 3 per cent ¹⁴. The reason was simple: for over two hundred years, India had been governed by the British for the benefit of Britain. Britain's rise to become a global super-power over a period of over 200 years was financed by plunder and resulting destitution and suffering in colonies like India.

Another export from India was the concept of organic agriculture, thanks to studies by Sir Albert Howard (1873-1947) when he was Imperial Economic Botanist to the British Raj, beginning in 1905. Howard observed Indian peasant farmers

and judged their pre-colonial farming practices to be better than the use of heavy doses of artificial chemicals, which were promoted as scientifically sound by mainstream Western agronomists. His 1940 book *An Agricultural Testament*, focused on the nature and management of soil fertility, with a particular focus on the composting techniques he had learnt in India, at the same time British Raj was promoting the very opposite approach. Why does the organic movement continue to pay homage to Howard's understanding of the soil, while appearing to fail to acknowledge both that his ideas came from Indians and that many of these farmers were often suffering conditions of famine caused by the genocidal policies of a British Raj of which Howard was part? ¹⁵

SPIRITUALITY

IN THE SOIL

A succession of British aristocrats advocated an organic and spiritual approach to agriculture promoted by Rudolf Steiner, who also believed in the mental superiority of people with blonde hair, blue eyes and fair skin.

As organicist, and often nationalist, discourses of agriculture were being popularised by writers like Massingham and Williamson during the 1920s and 30s, a group of British aristocrats were being inspired by the “biodynamic” ideas of Austrian founder of Anthroposophy (see above), Rudolf Steiner.

Steiner was an active proponent of the Lebensreform (literally “life-reform”) movement, which sought a “back to nature” style of living. He emphasised a healthy diet, expressionist dance and homeopathic-style medicine and what he called “biodynamic” farming. He taught these ideas around the Europe, including ten lecture tours of the UK in the years immediately before his death.

Steiner had a pseudo-scientific theory of “root races”,

suggesting that there were profound differences between what he called “the Negro race”, “the Mongol race”, and “the Caucasian race”, the last of which he identified as “the truly civilized race”¹⁶. In a more mystical passage, he wrote that: “The American Indians died out, not because of European persecutions, but because they were destined to succumb to those forces, which hastened their extinction.”¹⁷ In a 1922 discussion of the link between skin colour and intelligence he claimed that blonde hair, blue eyes and fair skin were directly tied to advanced mental abilities¹⁸.

In 1923 & 1924 British aristocrat Marna Pease (1866-1947) attended courses in Wales given by Steiner, during which he outlined the fundamentals of biodynamic agriculture. At 1928’s World Conference on Spiritual Sci-

ence she formed the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation. By 1946 it had 339 members in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as Australia, British Malaya, Ceylon, France, Guernsey, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Jersey, New Zealand, Nigeria, Nyasaland (now Malawi), South Africa, and USA.

In July 1939, one of Rudolf Steiner’s most fervent German followers, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer (1899-1961) presented a Summer School of Biodynamics at a farm in Kent, owned by the hereditary peer Walter James, (the Fourth Baron Northbourne, 1896-1982). Lord Northbourne took Steiner’s ideas, removed the more mystical elements of his organicism, re-named it ‘organic farming’ and published them in his book “Look to the Land”, in 1940.

FARMERS & FASCISM

Organic pioneers praise Mein Kampf, call for national renewal and the return to a rural feudal idyll

A MANIFESTO OF THE BRITISH UNION OF FASCISTS

(extracts)

“An Oriental can work for ten hours a day in exchange for a few bowls of rice, provided that such labour does not exact too much from his fragile physique or from his undeveloped intelligence...”

From the Rome of the past was derived the tradition of civilisation and progress... of which the British Empire is now the chief custodian... A Britain nearly self-contained and an Empire entirely self-contained [in terms of food security] can certainly be secured by the possible increase of British agricultural production...

We have it in our power to restore prosperity to the countryside and there to revive the vital breed of men on whom our past greatness has rested... We have in unison in our cause the economic facts and the spiritual tendencies of our age.”

Oswald Mosely, 1934¹⁹

A graduate of Oxford and Harper Adams universities, writer and new-generation farmer Jorian Jenks (1899-1963) was another who came under the influence of Steiner's organic philosophy. His writing has been described as a mix between "blood and soil mysticism and modernism"²⁰. Jenks claimed that Britain needed to "repeople the land" and to encourage the return of the "small working farmer". Like the British Union of Fascists (see extracts opposite), led by Sir Oswald Moseley (1896-1980), to which he be-

longed until it was banned by the UK Government after the outbreak of World War 2, Jenks also believed that authoritarian rule was necessary to provide the necessary stability for changes towards organicism to take place.

Historian Richard Moore-Colyer describes how Jenks promoted "home self-sufficiency in food...a vibrant farming community, secure and independent, supporting, sponsoring and nurturing the native craft tradition. This feudalist idyll, "represented an enduring and

eternal order and, to many fascists, was the well-spring of creativity and culture. The ultra-right divined a sort of organic link between rural people (simple, decent and full of innate goodness) and a closeness to nature.... Since the family farm was the seedbed of civilization, a civilization based on ties of blood, culture and history and drawn together by a common feeling for the land, more rather than fewer smaller holdings were required to offer opportunities for young people in the countryside." ²¹

BLACKSHIRT: SIR OSWALD MOSLEY AND BRITISH FASCISM

"In December [1938] John Beckett and Lord Lymington launched the Fascist and anti-Semitic New Pioneer, which...enthusiastically reviewed Mein Kampf and devoted space to organic husbandry, whose supporters included British Union [of Fascists] agricultural expert Jorian Jenks."

Stephen Dorril, 2007²²



BIODYNAMICS AND BLOOD

Despite building a new movement for organic agriculture after the Second World War, members of organisations like the Soil Association and the Biodynamics Association ignored the far-right narratives that gave fertile ground for Enoch Powell MBE's Rivers of Blood speech to seed a white supremacist discourse that blossomed into the overt racism at the heart of the riots of summer 2024.

In 1946, the secular branch of organicism became the Soil Association, which was co-founded by Jenks and others including, Lady Eve Balfour²³. Meanwhile the Anthroposophical Agricultural Foundation (which later became the Biodynamic Agricultural Association and now exists as the Biodynamic Association), continued to follow Steiner's original spiritual vision.

As Moseley attempted to re-

vive British fascism after the end of the War, Jenks continued to praise fascist ideas of authoritarianism and promote organic approaches because they preserved the "natural order". According to one biographer, Philip M. Coupland, he was "vital to the creation and survival of the Soil Association." "In concert with other key colleagues", writes Coupland, Jenks "kept the movement alive during its barren years on the periphery of public life, until finally, in the early 1960s, the door began to inch open". By then, inspired by writers such as Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) the United States had produced a generation of authors who warned of the dangers of industrial pollution – the most famous of which is Rachel Carson (1907-1964), author of *Silent Spring*²⁴.

In the UK, neither the pseudo-science of white racial supremacy (promoted by Steiner) nor the ideology fascism (supported by Jenks) seem to have been publicly contradicted, or even discussed, by organic advocates or other environmentalists for seven decades after World War Two. And yet many of the same narratives had contributed to the pre-War rise of the fascism in Germany, were used

to justify centuries of British imperialism, which in turn fuelled the rise of Moseley's far-right in the UK both before and after the War.

In 1968 Enoch Powell MBE (1912-1998) launched a tirade of race hatred (known as the "Rivers of Blood" speech). The widespread support for his views among white people in UK society in the half-century between his speech and the riots of 2024 has is a direct consequence of the normalisation of white supremacy narratives in Britain over four centuries²⁵.

Any of us who have advocated organic farming during the century that has passed since the movement's emergence in the early 1920s may want to explore the extent to which we have been complicit in sustaining racist narratives, either by being unaware of these narratives (as in the case of one of the authors of this booklet, for the early part of his career), or (as in the case of Jenks, Williamson) actively disseminating them²⁶.

PART 2: WHAT CAN WE DO?

CHOOSING TO ENVISION A FUTURE WITHOUT WHITE SUPREMACY





How can organicism fight for justice rather than safeguarding a historically problematic idea of purity?

In our lives, we constantly make choices between what matters to us enough to act, and what does not. Once we have learnt about our movement's historical alignment with racist narratives, it is possible to continue to abstain from taking action. For you, dear reader, there is now a choice; opposing ideas of racial superiority or not; to wait for "another season" (in Luther King's words - page 6) or to join us in the pursuit of justice right now.

In 2009, the Oxford Real Farming Conference was established as an alternative to the annual Oxford Farming Conference. It has been held annually ever since, becoming one of the largest conferences in the world to allow its participants to envisage agroecological and other radically-alternative approaches to industrial-capitalist models of food and farming.

In 2018, ORFC invited Lord Goldsmith to interview the then Secretary of State for Environment Farming and Rural Affairs, Michael Gove MP, in a live-streamed session ²⁷. Two years earlier,

Goldsmith had run a campaign to be Mayor of London against Sir Sadiq Khan that was regarded by some Muslim groups as being Islamophobic and by others of deliberately using racist tropes ²⁸.

In 2021, a year after the lynching of George Floyd prompted worldwide protests against structural racism in society, the Soil Association published a special commemorative issue of magazine Mother Earth (edited by Jenks for its first 17 years) to mark its 75th anniversary. It contained an essay by Jim Scown from the UK Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, who wrote: "Following a summer when the Black Lives Matter movement took centre stage, and in the year of the Soil Association's 75th anniversary, there has never been a better time to confront the ways organicist thinking raises uncomfortable questions of race and belonging."

Those who devote two days in early January each year to participating in ORFC, and those who fund it, inevitably

reflect established networks of influence among those who have been involved in the reform of UK food and farming. A report by Policy Exchange has found that farming and environment sectors are the two that have less racial diversity in England and Wales than any other ²⁹. A hundred years after the birth of the UK organic movement, whose visions of the future are being included at ORFC?



BOX 3: MUSK'S NORMALISATION OF HATE

Twitter had banned Tommy Robinson from its platform in 2018. Following Elon Musk's purchase of Twitter (renamed "X"), Robinson was reinstated in November 2023, just as Musk removed almost all limitations on what people could post on his platform. BBC Panorama reported the number of X accounts following Robinson rose to just under 1 million in August 2024. At the time of going to press (6 January 2025), there are at least 1.1 million followers. During last summer's riots Tommy Robinson's posts on Twitter/X were viewed over 434 million times. Musk's platform conducted a fact-check on just one of Robinson's posts during that time.³⁰

As we write this, the most successful far-right party in British history, Reform UK is in discussions about potentially receiving hundreds of millions of pounds from Musk over the coming years ³¹. The Royal Society, the UK's elite scientific academy (and a history of promoting science that undermines organic farming) is refusing to strip Musk of his membership, despite his avowed far-right beliefs and prediction during the summer 2024 riots that civil war in the UK was "inevitable". ³²

REPARATIONS

IN PRACTICE

Some humble initial suggestions for a way forward

Alongside General Election 2024 manifesto promises to “end the immigration crisis” were slogans relating to food and farming, such as “Fix the food security crisis [in the UK] by using good [UK] farmland”; “Focus on [supporting] smaller farms” and “Bring young [non-immigrant] people into farming”. Sound familiar?

The organic movement, and more recently grassroots movements for agroecology and food sovereignty, have been trying to dream of a way of producing food that is an alternative to industrial agriculture. Yet, for almost a century, the apparent inertia of the UK organic movement has made it hard to build visions that do not assume the continuation of white supremacy and patriarchy being at the core of the food and farming system.

It is not our intention to generate conflict or vandalise what has been achieved, but to allow everyone in the UK the possibility to be part of a visioning process.

We don’t intend to point the finger of blame at individuals. Like reparations scholar Olúfẹ́mi O. Táíwò, we believe that our task is to take collective responsibility for what we can do, rather than deciding at whom fingers should be pointed for past wrongs. It is now our responsibility to work out who benefits from the current system and so has the resources and the responsibility to change it. The rising power of overtly pro-fascist billionaires, makes our task all the more urgent.

Even in the unlikely event that the far-right withers in the coming years, our movements will face the contin-

ued migration of people to Europe from the Global South in the face of ever-more extreme farming conditions caused by climate change. How will we develop a strategy to combat the narratives of hate levelled against people fleeing for their lives?

Unless many movements, of which ORFC represents a good number, quickly start working together to form a broad front against the far right, we could succeed in creating a slightly better food and farming system, while we see our basic rights increasingly being trampled³³.

Even if we were to magically banish the two rising trends identified here - the risk of far-right authoritarian rule and race hatred due to climate-induced mass migration, the UK food system's future is still likely to be shaped by three overlapping policy agendas:

1. Nationalist policies that prioritise the interests of "UK plc"
2. Corporate-controlled mega-farms, biotechnologies and AI
3. Organic, ecological and regenerative food systems

At present, none of these agendas appear to be in the control of actors who are orientated towards justice. Our suggestion is that, working as a broad coalition that is conveniently brought together by ORFC every year, we ensure that considerations of justice are at the centre of efforts to shape the third of these agendas.

In October 2024, the German biodynamic standards organisation, Demeter, published their "Clear position against right-wing extremism", which noted that "right-wing extremists are trying to gain social acceptance by engaging in nature conservation and organic farming" and suggested that "it is more important than ever for organic farming associations to take a close look and clearly distance themselves from these groups."³⁴ At the same time, the consumption of organic food is being used as a shorthand for an out-of-touch Berlin elite by German politicians wishing to gain votes from those in the provincial areas who see their living standards having declined after a generation of neoliberal capitalism³⁵.

What about the UK? what should recognition justice look like for our movement?

Looking ahead, as we begin the painstaking task of reconstructing all our move-



"who has responsibility for addressing the harms done?"

ments with issues of justice at their core, we need to determine who has responsibility for practically addressing the harms done, both in the past and the present. Finally, we must re-orientate all our actions towards ones that make rights central to our movement - the rights of all workers to freedom from discrimination, having somewhere to live and work with dignity and without fear.

For reparations to take place we don't need white saviours, but we do need people who are able to develop the skills to work together across differences and finally embed justice in our movements.

"If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

**ABORIGINAL RIGHTS
GROUP IN QUEENSLAND,
1970s³⁶**

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Oxford Real Farming Conference calls itself “the UK’s largest gathering of the real food and farming movement” <https://orfc.org.uk/>
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- 4 Source, BBC Panorama, 19 August 2024.
- 5 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/dec/18/police-missed-clues-dangers-of-far-right-summer-riots-england>
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28 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/19/tory-london-mayor-candidate-condemns-zac-goldsmiths-2016-campaign>, and <https://www.theguardian.com/>

[politics/2016/mar/16/zac-goldsmith-leaflet-british-indians-heirlooms](#), and <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jan/05/zac-goldsmith-accuses-london-mayoral-rival-sadiq-khan-of-playing-race-card>

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36 (Quoted by Lilla Watson at the united nations decade for women conference, 1985)



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the near future. Your feedback would really
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