

The Thane of Bluster greets sycophants Starmer and Von der Leyen in Scotland

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“So foul ... a day I have not seen.” The line belongs to Shakespeare’s Macbeth, but it might as well describe the fog of vanity and menace surrounding Donald Trump’s latest visit to the United Kingdom. Less a tragic figure out of Shakespeare than a swaggering mob boss from a Scorsese gangster flick, Trump held court on the manicured moors of his Turnberry golf course in Scotland—his personal Dunsinane, outfitted with sand traps and taxpayer-funded Secret Service villas.

With an air of menace disguised as diplomacy, Trump summoned European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer to his private turf—both literally and figuratively. The rituals included not only handshakes and forced smiles, but lavish praise for Trump’s business genius and the splendor of his golf course, all delivered with the enthusiasm of hostages reading a ransom note. One could almost hear the bagpipes wheeze out *“Hail to the Chief (Executive Officer)”* as Air Force One cast its shadow over the green.

The US president prefaced his meetings with rounds of golf surrounded by a sycophantic media, which broadcast his every ignorant utterance, including his demand of European leaders, “On immigration, you better get your act together. You’re not going to have Europe anymore”, and his absurd rant against wind turbines—referred to as “windmills”—which are “ruining your beautiful fields and valleys and killing your birds.”

However, such grotesqueries must not conceal the importance of the issues discussed between Trump, von der Leyen and Starmer, which pose a grave threat to working people all over the world.

Trump’s 40-minute meeting with von der Leyen was used to announce a US-EU trade deal that was a ruthless assertion of US imperialist interests over its rivals.

Attempts were made to present the deal as a mutually agreed compromise, a climbdown from an earlier threat of

30 percent American tariffs on European goods. The reality is that Trump forced von der Leyen to accept 15 percent tariffs on all European goods (up from an average of 2.5 percent), with 50 percent still applied to steel and aluminium. This is coupled with a commitment from Europe to invest \$600 billion in the US, and make purchases worth \$750 billion during Trump’s term in office. In return, the EU agreed to level no countermeasures against the US.

As the outraged response in broad sections of Europe’s ruling elite, in France in particular, makes clear, this is seen as a major blow to their own imperialist interests. It can only be a staging post in an escalating trade war that threatens the destruction of hundreds of thousands, if not millions of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic.

European governments have been forced onto the back foot in large part out of fear of a more rapid descent into trade war. But also because they are determined to maintain US support for NATO’s war against Ukraine, which they are presently incapable of continuing independently.

Trump has already forced the Europeans to pay for the latest tranche of US weapons supplied to Ukraine. The hundreds of billions of purchases promised by the EU as part of the trade deal reportedly include military equipment, as well as fossil fuels.

Ukraine was a key consideration for Starmer when he flew to Turnberry on Monday afternoon, giving a grovelling display even by his previous standards. Across two audiences with the media, the British prime minister will have been most pleased by Trump’s statement that he was “very disappointed” in Russian President Vladimir Putin, and that whereas he had previously given him 50 days to agree a ceasefire in Ukraine before applying US sanctions, this was now cut to “10 or 12.”

More politically threatening for Starmer was how to square his determination to preserve relations with US

imperialism with attempts to manage massive popular anger over Israel's worsening genocide in Gaza.

He was forced to state at one point: "People in Britain are revolted at seeing what they're seeing on their screens." In the past week, he was one of 28 signatory governments to a letter arguing, "The war in Gaza must end now." And he joined France and Germany in issuing a separate statement calling on Israel to "immediately lift restrictions on the flow of aid." Starmer has recalled his Labour cabinet from its summer recess to formulate a response to Israel's deliberate campaign of starvation.

Trump gave Starmer very little to work with in his efforts to slither out of responsibility for the genocide in which he, his government and all their European and international counterparts are directly culpable. Asked whether he agreed with Netanyahu that there was no starvation in Gaza, the US president said he didn't agree with "Bibi" and that what was happening in Gaza was "real starvation stuff." He added that America was "giving a lot of money and a lot of food," and that it would be "nice to get a thank you," before repeating Israel's lying excuse that "[a] lot of that money is stolen by Hamas, and a lot of the food is stolen."

Saying he was "speaking to Bibi Netanyahu, and we're coming up with various plans," Trump added that "Hamas has become very difficult to deal with in the last couple of days because they don't want to give up these last 20 [hostages]." He blamed this on Iran "telling Hamas and giving Hamas signals and orders," pivoting to threaten Tehran that if it restarted its nuclear programme "we'll wipe it out faster than you can wave your finger at it."

This left Starmer to feebly repeat the position of the letter from 28 heads of state, praising Trump for his efforts to secure a ceasefire.

Behind Starmer's desperate attempts to placate Trump is an attempt to secure the interests of British imperialism. Whatever impression von der Leyen tried to give of a lessening of antagonisms between Europe and America, these conflicts are escalating inexorably as US imperialism leads a global contest to redivide the world and its resources.

Starmer, like his predecessor Tony Blair, who spoke of Britain as a "bridge" across the Atlantic, is still trying to maintain a balancing act between Europe and America. Since the Second World War, London has depended on its "special relationship" with Washington, secured by acting as its most faithful economic and military ally, to secure American investment in Britain and access to US markets,

provide a counterweight to German and French domination of Europe—its main trading partner—and generally to project its global interests.

The UK government press release on the Trump meeting boasted accordingly, "The UK and the US have one of the closest, most productive alliances the world has ever seen, working together to cooperate on defence, intelligence, technology and trade."

With a sneering nod towards the EU, it added, "The UK was the first country to agree a deal with the US that lowered tariffs on key sectors and has received one of the lowest reciprocal tariff rates in the world."

Trump threw a few treats on this score, snapped up by Starmer. After their press conference at Turnberry, the pair flew together on Air Force One to the next golf course, Trump International Scotland, Aberdeenshire, for a private discussion with oil executives.

The US president's grand tours and the fawning of various heads of state and the media will continue. He will soon return to the UK for an unprecedented second state visit, where he will be flattered by the company of the decrepit King Charles III. What is fundamental for the working class is to see through such masquerades.

No diplomatic manoeuvres will halt the ever deeper descent into trade and military war by imperialist governments, whose brutal agenda is being written in the blood of the Palestinians. This depends on the independent political mobilization of a unified European, American and international working class in a socialist anti-war movement.



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