

**LABOUR**

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original

# Briefing

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## Britain needs socialist policies





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## EDITORIAL



# Millions are relying on you

Once the General Election was called it became very difficult to produce a paper copy of this magazine so we just sent out an electronic effort and got on with campaigning in one form or another. In that issue, however, we did point out what makes our publication a bit different. We made clear that the election of any sort of Labour Government is not the end product but actually the start of a lot of serious campaigning activities.

In the event we witnessed a total collapse and implosion of a Tory Party mired in sleaze, nepotism and a very peculiar set of dogmas. Many of their leading lights lost their seats and whole chunks of England now have Labour MPs for the first time ever. In Cymru/Wales there are now no Tory MPs and both Labour and Plaid gained seats. In Scotland the SNP fared very badly after all their troubles and Labour were the main beneficiaries. In the Six Counties Sinn Féin now has the most MPs as well as being the largest party in Stormont and having more councillors than any other party. A United Ireland now appears inevitable. It is very clear now that four separate and very different states make up this very far from United Kingdom.

We have now had the Kings Speech and things are taking shape. *Briefing* obviously welcomes the abandonment of the cruel, unfair and ludicrously expensive Rwanda policy. The commitment to increases in offshore wind turbines and the help for solar power are important, as are the pledges to take the various rail contracts back into public ownership as the franchises

expire. [It is always amusing to hear the scion of the House of Windsor talking about taking services back into public ownership!].

However the lack of commitment to scrapping the 'two child limit' on benefits, the creation of safe routes to apply for asylum, or repealing much of the Tories anti trades union legislation and the continued pouring of cash into nuclear weapons and expensive armaments all show the deficiencies of Starmer and his pals. As a mentor of *Briefing*, Tony Benn once said - "If we can afford to kill people, we can afford to feed people!"

There were also the successes and near misses of the candidates who fought to raise Gaza as an issue and demand support for Palestine. Four Asian candidates won seats and of course Jeremy Corbyn, one of *Briefing's* founders in 1980, romped home as an Independent in Islington North. In Starmer's neighbouring seat the ex-ANC representative Andrew Feinstein cut the Leader's majority to less than Jeremy Corbyn's. Many candidates and prospective ones were treated shoddily by the party machine and the struggle for an open and accountable party goes on.

So the election of a Labour Government is the start of a major series of battles. *Briefing* welcomes the end of 14 years of the Tory despots but we now all need to roll our sleeves up and move the struggle on to the next level. Millions of people need a Labour Government. We must not let them down.

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# Vote early, vote often

This summer, there are several important elections for Labour's internal committees. Some, like the NEC elections, are still voted on by OMOV, albeit with a voting system skewed to favour right wing candidates, others are voted on by delegates at Conference.

It is vitally important to elect Left delegates, and try and mandate them to vote for candidates who support members' rights and Party democracy. The deadline for nominations and the election of delegates has been extended to 31st July. Support the following candidates:

## **For the National Executive Committee (NEC) CLP Section:**

- Jess Barnard (L1204334)
- Gemma Bolton (L1405940)
- Yasmine Dar (L1173052)
- Mish Rahman (L0137964)

### *Youth Rep:*

- India Rees: (L1449629)

### *Disabled Members Rep:*

- Ellen Morrison: (L1509954)

### *Welsh Rep:*

- Sam Swash: (L1618444)

### *Local Government Reps:*

- Soraya Adejare: (L0126481)
- Minesh Parekh: (L1230833)

## **For the National Policy Forum (NPF)**

### *London:*

- Aydin Dikerdem (L1217068)
- Rathu Guhadasan (L1362546)
- Dave Levy (A006829)
- Pat Quigley (L1505915)
- (Youth) India Burgess (L1928388)

### *South East:*

- Alexa Collins (L1281294)
- Kiran Khan (L1644090)
- Theresa Mackey (L0058638)
- Charlie Wilson (L0080568)

### *North West:*

- John Bowden (L0147273)
- Fianna Hornby (L1330132)
- Sangita Patel (L1750981)

**We can stop the erosion of party democracy by electing people to internal party committees who will stand up for members' rights.**

- Evangeline Walker (L1965535)
- (Youth) Antonia Shipley (L1948862)

### *Eastern:*

- Rachel Garnham (A777413)

- Bryn Griffiths (L1949828)

- Shahid Nadeem (L1811877)
- Maxine Sadza (L1431770)
- (Youth) Alex Small (L1733607)

### *South West:*

- Marina Asvachin (L1279958)
- Jane Begley (L1279958)
- (Youth) Ada Gravatt (L1947136)

### *East Midlands:*

- Dean Collins (L0144227)
- Fraser McGuire (L1823756)
- (Youth) Liv Marshall (L3108212)

### *West Midlands:*

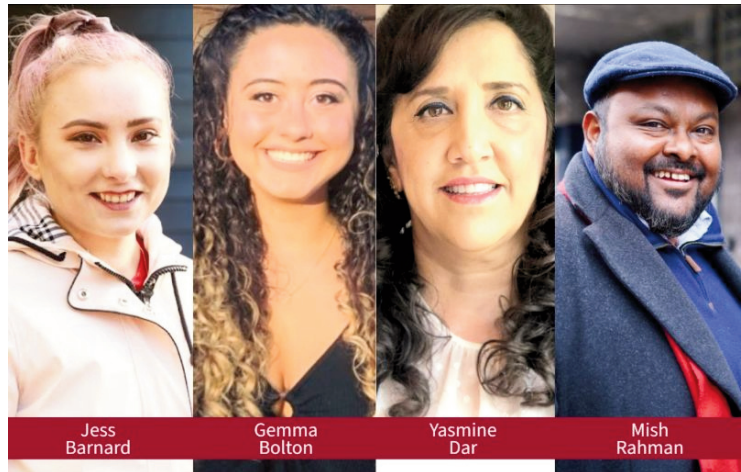
- Teresa Beddis (A399419)
- Syed Hussain (L1183151)
- Sachin Mathur (L3004219)
- (Youth) Niamh Iliff (L3102095)

### *Yorkshire & the Humber:*

- Jack Ballingham (L1766555)
- Corinne Furness (L1493177)
- Chris Saltmarsh (LL180242)
- Sandra Wyman (L1640558)

### *North:*

- Rochelle Charlton-Laine (L1210405)
- Hannah Cousins (L1424316)
- David Ray (L1488264)



- Samantha Townsend (L1462687)
- (Youth) Josh Freestone (L1783553)

### *Scotland (supported by Campaign for Socialism):*

- Finn Beyts (L1239090)
- Debbie Boyd (L1441073)
- Anna Dyer (L0081865)
- Scott Hartles (L1457452)
- (Youth) Aaran McDonald (L1446458)

### *Wales (supported by Welsh Labour Grassroots):*

- Zoe Allan (L1393044)
- Bel Loveluck Edwards (L0123450)
- Dawn McGuinness (L1681583)
- David Smith (A406305)
- (Youth) Bethany Thomas (L1796866)

## **For the National Constitutional Committee (NCC)**

- Rachel Garnham (A777413)
- Emine Ibrahim (L0150489)
- Dave Levy (A006829)
- Khaled Moyeed (L0128862)

## **For the Women's Conference Arrangements Committee (WCAC)**

- Zoe Allan (L1393044)
- Jean Crocker (L1306356)
- Rathu Guhadasan (L1362546)

# Revolting East Enders

We're accustomed to weighing the Labour vote in Parliamentary elections in Tower Hamlets. At the last General Election in 2019, also known as the 'worst defeat since the formation of the solar system', Rushanara Ali, in what was then Bethnal Green and Bow, raked in 72.7% of the vote with a stonking majority of 37,524. Here in Poplar and Limehouse, Apsana Begum had to make do with 63.1% of the vote, with a not so shabby majority of 28,904. So when the Tories surprised us all with the snap announcement of a General Election, what could possibly go wrong?

After all, this was Keir Starmer's changed Labour Party, with messages carefully phrased to please the media, business leaders, and 'hero' voters, ie those who had voted Tory last time. Endorsed by right wing outfits from the BBC to the *Guardian* (yes, you read that right), Starmer got the kind of publicity that Jeremy Corbyn, or even Neil Kinnock, would have given their right arms for.

The seats were considered so safe that activists were implored to go and work in Thurrock instead. That admonishment lasted until the first canvass results came in. Then it became apparent that Labour was in trouble in east London. Big trouble. 'Don't go to Thurrock!' came the messages from HQ. 'Stay and work here instead. Especially in Bethnal Green and Stepney!'

I was shocked to my core by the open hostility to Labour shown on the doorstep, especially by voters of Bengali family origin. The voters, that is, that Labour completely depends upon around here. Mostly, it was the war in Gaza, of course. Electors needed to vent their anger at both mainstream parties about the lack of meaningful action towards bringing about a

**Christine Shawcroft, Poplar and Limehouse CLP, reports that Starmer's foreign policy almost lost him some supposedly safe Labour seats in east London.**

ceasefire. Doors were shut in my face when I said I was from the Labour Party. I was called a child murderer. I did manage to point out to some reluctant voters that I'm a member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and asked them if they were, too. Oddly enough, none of them were.

But of course we were lucky in Poplar and Limehouse with our candidate. Apsana had an excellent record in support for Palestine and early calls for a ceasefire. Many people told us they didn't want to vote Labour, but would vote for Apsana. In Bethnal Green and Stepney, it began to look like Oona King all over again. In an unspoken acknowledgement that Apsana was (relatively) safe but Rushanara was in serious trouble, the messages from HQ became more and more desperate, calling on members to go and help.

Meanwhile, activists from Ilford who came to help in Poplar, unlike our own CLP officers who were busy in Bethnal Green when they could spare the time from North Durham, told me that Streetering was also in big trouble in Ilford North. They felt that Leanne Mohamad couldn't win but that she would take enough votes from Labour that the Tories would take the seat. This didn't especially trouble them, as they felt that the Tory was considerably to the left of Wes Streetering. In fact, they have a bit of a parlour game where they try and think of somebody, anybody, to the *right* of Streetering. No one has yet succeeded.

In the end, of course, Streetering held onto his seat by 500 votes and Leanne

came second. Apsana's majority was down to 12,560 - 43.5% of the vote on a turnout which only just broke 50%. Surprisingly, the Greens came from nowhere to take second place, with 13.88 of the vote. So they were obviously the beneficiaries of the left anti-Labour vote.

The real shocker was in Bethnal Green, also with a very low turnout, where Rushanara's lack of action on the war turned a majority of over 37,000 into a majority of 1,689 - 34.8% of the vote. Before this year, I wouldn't have thought that was possible. The anti war independent took 14,207 votes.

Starmer needs to bear all this in mind as he cosies up to the US and calls Israel one of our closest allies. These results show that the old certainties are over and Labour voters will not be taken for granted any more.





# Red Wall: brick or papier mache?

On the face of it, a great night for Labour across Yorkshire and the Humber. Of the 54 seats up for grabs, the number of Labour MPs shot up to 43 with the Tories trailing on nine. But for Harrogate, the Region would now be a Lib Dem free zone.

Campaign Group members, Richard Burgon and Jon Trickett were re-elected and some former MPs made victorious comebacks. In York Central, Rachael Maskell, who was an early champion of an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, consolidated her position. Gaza also had an impact in the West Riding.

As national exit polls had forecast Labour taking 410 seats with a whopping 170 seat majority, Tory Cabinet ministers started falling like dominoes. Grant Shapps, Penny Mordaunt and Jacob Rees-Mogg among the early casualties. So, 'reasons to be cheerful?' Maybe not.

Once the actual results began to appear and the Labour gains started piling up, people were asking 'Could memories of Johnson's demolition of the Red Wall in 2019 and Labour's worst defeat since dinosaurs ruled the earth now be consigned to history?' Well, I'm afraid not, especially if Yorkshire results were anything to go by.

On election night, the media were camped out in North Yorkshire and Rishi Sunak's seat. Labour had poured enormous resource into fighting the seat with some newspapers foretelling Richmond as potentially the biggest loss of the night. The 'Portillo Moment' as they dubbed it. In the event, he won easily but took the opportunity of the result's announcement to concede national defeat.

The 'Portillo Moment' came early on Friday as former Prime Minister, Liz

**Veteran Yorkshire Labour Movement activist George McManus wonders how safe are some of the Labour wins.**



Truss, was chunked out. But back to Yorkshire and the Humber and those 43 Labour seats. In West Yorkshire, Labour's Gaza policy saw an independent victory in Dewsbury and sitting Labour MP, Naz Shah in neighbouring Bradford cling on by only 700 votes. Labour did have a great night in Leeds where the council's titanic efforts to encourage postal voting paid off. Indeed, as the PVs flooded in, Labour may even have garnered enough votes to call it before July the 4th itself.

We celebrated the defeat of odious Tories such as Andrea Jenkyns who famously pictured Nigel Farage on her election leaflets. That worked, didn't it? Good move Andrea. More significant, of course, was the collapse of the Tory vote and the rise of Reform. But of particular concern to Labour is the number of seats won which are vulnerable to either a Reform takeover or a Tory recovery.

With so many boundary changes, it's difficult to make direct comparisons, and we can't assume that all Reform voters were disenchanted Tories, but nonetheless, in at least nine former Red Wall seats in Bradford, Doncaster, Grimsby, Halifax, Normanton, Penistone, Rother Valley, Scunthorpe and Spenn Valley, if Reform and Tory votes had been combined, Labour

would have lost. In at least another five seats in Colne Valley, Calder Valley, Leeds SW, Ossett and Scarborough, Labour would have either lost or come very close to losing. In reality, of the 43 seats won by Labour, it's fair to say that maybe only 25 can be classed

as 'safe'. So, if the Red Wall has been rebuilt, it's extremely fragile in places. Some might say it's built of papier mâché rather than brick.

And, but for Labour's success in Morecambe, the 'blue barricade' of nine Northern Tory seats stretching from the Irish Sea to the North Sea would still be intact. Even against the backdrop of Tory chaos and the rise of Reform, they still returned Tory MPs.

The bottom line is that Labour's vote in the region remained static compared to 2019. And while Labour's vote went up in Scotland, nationally Keir Starmer polled 600,000 less votes than in Jeremy Corbyn's 'disastrous' election of 2019, three million less than in 2017. So, as in the rest of the country, Labour's landslide can be put down to the collapse of the SNP and the Tories, not the overwhelming surge of enthusiasm for Labour's manifesto.

But, with five years to rebuild trust in Yorkshire and the Humber, Labour could restore its fortunes especially if the Tories are still in disarray and Rachel Reeves's growth hopes come to fruition. If not the Red Wall will prove to be extremely fragile and as any five-year-old in art class will tell you, papier mâché falls apart when it starts to rain.

# Kent changes colour

With the few exceptions of some of our seaside resorts, the whole of Kent has consisted of Conservative strongholds since time immemorial. Even in the landslide election of 1997 there were still nine Tory M.P.s and only eight Labour ones. Only two of the Labour ones survived until 2010 and they both went that year.

In the "Annus Mirabilis" of Jeremy Corbyn's election campaign of 2017 we managed to snatch Canterbury, the only city in Kent, which had been Tory for over a hundred years. We managed to hang on to Canterbury in 2019 by pouring resources into it. The score stubbornly remained at Labour one, Tory 16.

Yet change was afoot. In various places and for different elections Labour started picking up the odd seats and getting organised. In May 2017 Barry Lewis defeated the sitting councillor for the Margate Division of Kent County Council, thereby winning the County's target seat for Labour.

Down here there is the slightly derogatory word "DFL" which is shorthand for "Down From London" but does reflect the fact that many Londoners have moved to the coast or countryside. These people are from places like Inner North London or the East End where the Tories have almost become an extinct species and voting Labour is the norm.

The pandemic speeded up this process as did the ability to do work over the Internet, with the opportunity for more professionals to go into their desks only occasionally. Canterbury was in many ways a harbinger with its large student population and a growing population of both young people and black and ethnic minority groups. The Tory total control was interrupted by the UKIP phenomenon from 2013 to

**Kent County Councillor (Margate) Barry Lewis and Keith Veness, East Thanet CLP, celebrate the sweeping gains in Kent.**

2016, with former Tories (and in some cases BNP and National Front supporters) flooding in to its ranks.

Farage's attempt to be an M.P. was thwarted in South Thanet but Thanet Council itself passed into UKIP control - the only one in the UK. This soon collapsed in a shambles and a lot of the ex-Tories rejoined their alma mater.

Last year's local council elections were the first big breakthrough with Labour winning Canterbury, Dover, Folkstone & Hythe, Gravesham, Swale and Thanet. These were clear harbingers of the general election to come. Lots of members across Kent were unhappy about what seemed to be overcentralisation by the Labour H.Q. in selections, campaigning and organisation.

Nevertheless as election day started the near impossible started to look achievable. Target seats like Dover & Deal, East Thanet, Gravesham and Sittingbourne & Sheppey duly fell. We held Canterbury with an increased majority.

So far so good but then others fell: Ashford, Dartford, Folkestone & Hythe, Gillingham & Rainham, Chatham & Aylesford and Rochester & Stroud all tumbled (the latter three being constituencies in the Unitary authority of Medway). The sideshow of the contest in Royal Tunbridge Wells resulted in the only Lib Dem gain in Kent.

The final tally was Labour eleven, Tories six and Lib Dem One. However it is not all sweetness and light. The self-styled Reform Party [a.k.a. UKIP mark 2] polled strongly in a number of seats that were won by Labour and even



Photo: iStock, Laurence Berger

came second in Dover and Deal. They do the usual dog-whistle politics on the doorstep of racism, homophobia and nimbysm. If Labour fails to deliver real improvements to people's standards of living and to the services people rely on, these Poundshop Mussolinis can step in again. They also serve as a cover for the openly neo-Nazi groups.

Whilst it was good that the immigrant bashing of the Tories didn't work even in Dover, we now face the real tests. Next year's County Council elections will be the first opportunity to see how a Starmer regime is doing and it could prove difficult. However the most difficult target of Labour winning Kent County Council is now a possibility.

[ N.B. Barry is standing for re-election in Margate if any *Briefing* readers fancy a trip to the seaside next April and May.]



# Organise and fight back

## Matt Willgress



The recent election took place in the deepest cost-of-living crisis in generations, which provides the context to the dramatic Tory collapse. In order to change the world, it is first necessary to understand it - and in Britain today we must understand and state the extent of this crisis. As Rosa Luxemburg said, "The most revolutionary thing one can do is always to proclaim loudly what is happening." So what is the situation after 14 years of austerity?

Councils are going bust. Poverty is spiralling. Homelessness is out of control. There are regular warnings unemployment could be set to jump dramatically. And living costs keep going up, whilst wages don't follow. Yet throughout the election, there was a conspiracy of silence regarding the depth of this crisis across both frontbenches. This can only be understood if one grasps that the whole political establishment is intent on never-ending austerity.

This is reflected by Rachel Reeves' 'fiscal framework,' which in recent years worked its logic through to the abandonment of policy after policy that could start tackling the cost-of-living crisis. There is a commitment to an injection of cash into public services that would see an extra 40,000 NHS appointments a week, and an additional 6,500 teachers in state schools and 13,000 police and community support officers.

These pledges are most welcome, but an objective assessment of how deep the crises we face are shows this is not even a sticking plaster. And when discussing whether austerity

will continue, context also matters. Just days into the campaign, Keir Starmer talked of how abolishing the 2 child benefit cap "is not our policy for a reason [as] we are not going to be able to afford to scrap it because of the damage the Tories have done." In other words, Labour will maintain a flagship austerity policy, condemning millions to poverty!

Now - with Labour in Government - we can't let a consensus for 'permanent austerity' be formed. It's the route to economic and social catastrophe, and a further rise of the far-right. We therefore need to put forward policies that could actually address the crises we face. As part of this, we are renewing efforts to get further support for the Workers Can't Wait demands online, including these 10 measures:

☑ Britain needs a pay rise - National Minimum Wage raised to at least £15 an hour for all; the pay rise public sector workers are asking for; increase Statutory Sick Pay to a real living wage for all from day one.

☑ A social security system to end poverty - scrap the 2 child benefit cap, reverse the Universal Credit cut and extend the uplift to legacy benefits; boost & inflation-proof benefits; for a minimum income guarantee.

☑ Control costs - energy price freezes now at April 2022 rates, cap rents and basic food costs.

☑ Stop the corporate rip-off - public ownership of energy, water, transport, broadband and mail to bring bills down and end fuel poverty. Lower public transport costs. Higher taxes on profits and the super-rich. Open the books - back the workers' com-

mission on profiteering.

☑ Extra resources to create universal, comprehensive public services - stop cuts and privatisation; Save our NHS - for a national care service; properly fund local government. Tax wealth to fund our public services.

☑ Homes for all - no evictions or repossessions; tackle the homelessness emergency; fix the housing crisis with a mass council house building programme.

☑ For the right to food - enshrine the right to food in law; universal free school meals all year; for a National Food Service.

☑ Decent jobs for all - for full employment; end insecure working and ban zero-hours contracts; for the right to flexible work on workers' not bosses' terms.

☑ Defend and extend our right to organise - reverse anti-trade union laws and repeal the draconian anti-protest laws; ban fire-and-rehire; for full union rights to bargain for better pay and conditions.

☑ End austerity for good - invest in our future with a Green New Deal - end the dependency on fossil fuels and soaring oil and gas prices; for a massive investment in renewables, green infrastructure and jobs; insulate buildings to bring bills down.

Please add your name, take the policies to movement and community groups for discussion, and keep mobilising for investment, not cuts.

• Join over 22,000 others - add your name to the demands at <https://www.change.org/p/workers-can-t-wait-urgent-action-to-tackle-the-cost-of-living-crisis-now>



# How the West was won

I have often written here about the West Midlands Badlands. A region mostly Labour controlled, but no good place for the democratic, progressive left. Where four Birmingham Constituencies were kept under Special Measures for 24 years! Where, aside from Zarah Sultana, the last genuinely left MP would have been Lynn Jones in the early 90's to 2010. Some limited progress was made during the Corbyn years, so where are we now?

I must start by saying how relieved we should all be to see the back of a disgusting, corrupt, entitled, incompetent Tory Party, who have done such immense damage over the last 14 years. They are so far, far to the right, we didn't seem to know we needed Reform until just now. So, as the HATED Thatcher would say: Rejoice! Rejoice!!

As in much of the country, there were huge gains across the West Midlands. Some of the 'Red Wall' seats lost in 2019 returned to Labour. And some never previously held went Labour. Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall, Coventry, Wolverhampton and Stoke now all have Labour MP's. The brilliant Zarah Sultana increased her majority from just over 400 to over 10,000 in Coventry South. But I struggle to identify many others who I would call true comrades in this election.

And before you start, I am not being sectarian. It's not me, it's them! The selection process just about everywhere around here was neither fair nor transparent and democratic, and rarely genuinely 'constituency led' The control freaks saw to that, purge the left! I could name names...

The most significant results were in Birmingham. There are nine con-

**Labour Movement activist Steve Price reports on opposition to Labour in the West Midlands from Muslim independents and Reform. Even the discredited Tories scraped a few wins.**

stituencies in Brum, including Solihull and Sutton Coldfield which are the two posh suburbs and historically very safe Tory seats. They both stayed Tory, but with greatly reduced majorities. The real action was in the other seven seats. With a large Muslim community each seat was hotly contested by insurgents.

Six of the seven stayed Labour. All of them were much closer results this time. Tahir Ali won in Hall Green. A member of the SCG, who voted the right way on Gaza, he nevertheless had four opponents from the Muslim community. The split favoured Tahir, because in aggregate their votes would have defeated him.

There are some high profile MPs in Brum. Liam Byrne won very narrowly in Hodge Hill (700 votes). Preet Gill won comfortably enough in Edgbaston but Shabana Mahmood and Jess Phillips only just got over the line against very vocal opposition. Feelings are running very high over the Genocide. They both complained bitterly at the count of harassment and intimidation.

The significant defeat was for the influential Khalid Mahmood in Perry Barr who lost to Independent Ayoub Khan. Reform got worrying levels of support from its low base. It is no coincidence that Farage held his big rally in Brum in front of 4,000 deluded nationalists and racists.

Expect them to grow in future, and remember that Enoch Powell made his notorious 'Rivers of Blood' speech in Birmingham.



Zarah Sultana MP

Turnout was very low across the region, reflecting the general disillusionment with politics in this country. The cynicism, the distrust. There was apathy, not anger. Remind me, what precisely was 'the offer' from the Labour Party? Winning with a lower percentage of the popular vote than Corbyn in 2019!

The Muslim Community was mostly very supportive of Labour during the Corbyn years, and supportive because of the progressive class based economic policies, and the position on Palestine. That's gone now, and I don't see it coming back.

For the record, I don't believe in 'British Exceptionalism' and we have to be very aware of the rise of the far right all across Europe and beyond. These are the most dangerous times in my lifetime. It's Socialism or barbarism my friends.

# Going, going ... gone

At least he lasted longer than a lettuce. After serious questions about his campaign finances, a vote of no confidence, Plaid withdrawing from the arrangement with Labour in the Senned and the resignations of Welsh Ministers, Vaughan Gething, the Liz Truss of Welsh politics, has resigned.

Meanwhile, looking at the general election results, an image comes to mind about Welsh Labour, from the poet RS Thomas whose phrase 'brittle with relics' describes a sandcastle when the tide is about to turn. This is perhaps the '1906 moment'. The Liberal Party then dominated Welsh politics but within 16 years it had been eclipsed by Labour which went on to dominate Wales for the next hundred years.

Llanelli, Neath & Swansea East and Rhondda & Ogmore are each represented by doyens of the Labour right: Nia Griffiths, Carolyn Harris and Chris Bryant. In each, Reform polled 28%, 25% and 24% of the vote in turnouts hovering just above 50%. Llanelli in particular saw Reform come with 1500 votes of taking the seat and UKIP took 600 votes. Plaid was third with 24%. Lanelli was the centre of far right activity over the Stradey Park Hotel and refugees. Katie Hopkins and others have created a toxic brew that has gone unchallenged by Labour at Parliamentary and Council level. There is a perfect storm building that will challenge Labour in 2026 and in 2029.

In Neath & Swansea East right wing enforcer Carolyn Harris replaced Corbyn ally Christina Rees. Reform leapt into second place over Plaid. In Aberfan & Maesteg Stephen Kinnock and the Labour right have done nothing about the far right, growing since Brexit. The same can be seen in Rhondda & Ogmore. Starmer loyalists

**Cllr Martyn Shrewsbury, Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe CLP, reports on the fragile state of some Welsh wins, and bids farewell to the First Minister.**

triumph with a lower turnout and percentages significantly lower than 2019 and 2017. Labour made gains in the North and in seats like the Vale of Glamorgan and Pembroke in the South West, won from the Tories because Reform split the right wing vote. These gains will be vulnerable in 2029. Mid Wales illustrates the difference between two approaches. In Brecon, Radnor & Cwm Tawe a centrist Labour candidate rowing back on the environmental policies of Mark Drakeford came third despite boundary changes bringing 30% of the old Neath seat, which gave a notional Labour majority of up to 1000.

Montgomeryshire & Glyndwr, by contrast, saw Steve Witherden becoming the first Labour MP in a seat dominated by Tory and Liberal party gentry going back nearly 500 years. Somehow Steve sneaked past the witch hunters and ran a community based, people powered campaign. Virtually every member of the Left in Wales crowded into the Constituency. Steve was helped when the Tory was dropped because of 'Fluttergate' and Reform split the vote. At least Wales has replaced Beth Winter with another socialist.

Plaid dominates the coastline of West Wales from Carmarthen, through Ceredigion, Dwyfor Marionnydd and on to Ynys Mon, taken from the Tories. Plaid has tacked to the Left and three of its four MPs are women. It held its own in several valley seats against Reform and in the north in Bangor Aberconway. In 2026 and 2029 they will be a force to be reckoned with. The Greens took a reasonable 15% in

Cardiff South & Penarth with its leader Anthony Slaughter. It reached 7% in Swansea West.

Wales lacked anything resembling Andrew Feinstein's group Collective or Owen Jones' 'We Deserve Better' although many of us are considering how the Welsh left from the ecosocialist wing of Plaid, the Labour left, independent socialists and the Greens could explore policies and campaigning. Wales apart from Cardiff and Swansea and to a lesser extent Lampeter, Aberystwyth and Bangor does not have the student numbers that much of England's larger towns have for a radical, critical left movement.

This election has shown Welsh Labour to be 'brittle with relics'. It's vulnerable at Parliamentary, Senedd and Council levels. In Ystradgynlais our local councillors pride themselves on upholding the status quo rather than campaigning. Labour membership, halved since 2017 is still dropping. After the Liberal Democrats' win in the General Election I suspect that they may come here in the next round of local elections in 2027. An old Welsh proverb states, 'if you want to be a leader, be a bridge.' This is falling upon deaf ears and Labour risks losing in Wales. It kept power by renewal, reinvention and radicalism... but sadly it's fading like a sandcastle at low water mark.





# Make policy not tea

I first met Keir Starmer 10 years ago at a meeting of Labour's National Policy Forum. The Party's policy making platform brings together stakeholders from all sides of the Party to discuss plans for future manifestos. Are you still with me?

I'd been elected to represent Yorkshire and Humber constituency members since 1997 and it was always a great way to discuss ideas with ministers, when in government, and shadow ministers when in opposition. But it was also an opportunity for invited guests, on the margins of the formal discussions, to find out more about how the Party machine worked and to engage with like-minded people.

Over the years, I'd travelled the length and breadth of Yorkshire and the Humber to encourage members to get involved in the process and play a role in manifesto development. These visits included Rachel Reeves' constituency in Leeds. Rachel had only been elected in 2010, but I knew her sister Ellie very well as she'd also been an NPF member for some years.

It was during a tea break that I was approached by Rachel who asked me to have a word with Keir. Keir wasn't an MP at the time but he was thinking of stepping up to the plate at the next

**Labour Movement activist George McManus was somewhat underwhelmed at his first meeting with Keir Starmer.**

general election and really wanted to know more about how the policy making process worked. 'George knows a lot more about it than I do,' said Rachel very graciously and asked me to give Keir a brief outline.

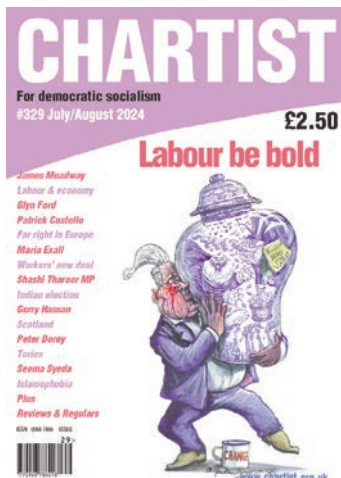
Now, I'm the first to admit that it is a rather weird process which is based on protocols rather than strict rules. As the late Margaret McDonagh once told me, we do have rules, they're just not written down. It's a concept which is sometimes difficult to understand even for seasoned political operators but to a lifelong civil servant, used to clear guidance and a rules-based system, it must have been a mystery wrapped up in a whole set of conundrums.

After five minutes his eyes glazed over and I asked him if he had any questions. 'Where can we get a cup of tea?' came the reply. He was very polite and kind thanking me for the explanation, but I came away realising that explaining to a civil servant how the Labour Party works is like trying to converse in a foreign language with someone from another planet.

This is no criticism of Keir or Rachel but it does serve to highlight the extent of the learning curve he's been on since getting elected in 2015. It might also explain how his approach to building a united party has been based on managerialism rather than traditional political process. But it doesn't explain the result of a hollowed out Party.

The most important commodity in politics is luck. The planets aligned for Keir on July 4th. The Tory vote collapsed, much of it going to Reform and the Lib Dems. The SNP vote collapsed, much of it swinging to Labour. Turnout fell. Last week Keir Starmer got 600,000 less votes than Jeremy Corbyn got in 2019.

Keir Starmer is a lucky leader but he can't rely on the planets in 2029. I really hope he can bring down waiting lists, solve the housing crisis and get rid of child poverty but only time will tell. Government is much more rewarding than opposition but it's much harder work and it's when the going gets tough that you need the security of a strong, united Party, and your friends, around you.



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## Labour Party

# Keeping flame of democracy alive

With a weak and divided parliamentary opposition, it is even more vital to strive for greater party democracy and to hold the new Labour Government to account. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) has always focused on making radical reforms to the Party Rule Book to give members greater power as well as ensuring Leadership accountability to the rank and file. Notable CLPD successes over the years include mandatory reselection of MPs and election of the Leader.

CLPD believes that this is a more effective path to transformative change than just tabling motions at annual conference which, in addition to manifesto pledges, have often been ignored by Labour governments. An immediate priority is the forthcoming NEC elections and to support, in collaboration with Centre Left Grassroots Alliance, the left candidates: **Jess Barnard, Gemma Bolton, Yasmine Dar and Mish Rahman.**

CLPD is also committed to a long-term campaign to reverse retrogressive rule changes and practices aimed at giving the leadership greater control and to advocate additional reforms to further democracy, including:

**Safeguard Labour Party internal ballots from rigging.** Procedures used for online elections, including at meetings, internal party elections and candidate selections, should be rigorous and transparent. Software applications must be approved by the NEC, and where possible observers appointed to monitor the voting.

**CLPs should be allowed to consider local candidates.** If there are candidates who have applied for the Parliamentary selection in a particular constituency, who have been living there for at least the previous 12 months, then any longlist and shortlist

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**Barry Rodin, Orpington CLP, says that the work of CLPD in campaigning for more power for grassroots members is still needed.**

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must include at least one such candidate. This is to help reverse the shift from candidates with a range of employment backgrounds to those who have been primarily working in politics, who tend to have little or no knowledge of the local area.

**Stop the factional abuse of 'due diligence' checks.** These checks must be restricted to matters of breaches of Party rules, serious financial concerns, safeguarding issues, or any other exceptional circumstances which the selection panel may consider a serious issue of personal conduct. Due diligence checks in selection procedures must not be used as a catch-all pretext to exclude candidates because of their political views.

**Selection must be above factionalism.** Staff working for the Labour Party must play a neutral organisational role in the Party's internal democratic processes, including annual and regional Conferences, internal elections and selection of candidates. The new clause codifies this important principle and gives the democratically elected National Executive Committee responsibility for ensuring it is implemented. It is also in line with recommendations in the Forde report

**Members need a Party Ombudsperson.** Currently members have no formal channel to complain about party maladministration. An Ombudsperson would give members a route to submit complaints where the Party has not acted within the rules or has acted unfairly.

The Ombudsperson would be elected by delegates to Party Conference on a

renewable three-year term of office. Decisions by the Ombudsperson are final.

The deadline for CLPs submitting rule changes motions this year has been extended to July 31st. Rule changes will be voted on at the 2025 Annual Conference. The CLPD website will have more details on CLPD activities and arguments for democracy: <https://www.clpd.org.uk/>

CLPD will also be sponsoring model motions to Annual Conference on contemporary issues, with advice to CLPs on the new restrictive and complex rules governing their acceptability. For instance, the motion must deal with a topic which arose after the publication of the reports of the National Policy Forum (NPF), Policy Commissions or National Executive Committee, or has not been substantively addressed in those reports. Moreover, the issue could not otherwise have been raised through the NPF process. Phew!

Whatever the political weather CLPD, has assiduously campaigned for reforms in the governance of the Party and particularly in recent years to also encourage activists to remain in the Labour Party. We must ensure that the roots of democracy remain intact to provide a healthy basis for renewed activism and creation of radical and Left policies.

For more details, including candidates for other 2024 internal elections:

<https://www.clpd.org.uk/campaign/nominate-grassroots-centre-left-candidates-for-internal-elections/>





# UPHILL STRUGGLE

## Kevin Flack

This column comes to you from, rather surprisingly, Labour-held Forest of Dean – home of the free miners and rather a lot of trees.

For once, we can celebrate Labour victories in rural and semi-rural seats across England and Wales – brought to you courtesy of a perfect storm. From South East Cornwall to the Derbyshire Dales, from the Isle of Wight West to Penrith & Solway, and from Montgomeryshire & Glyndwr to the huge and always-Tory seat of Hexham.

And South West Norfolk – let's say that again. South West Norfolk, where well-respected Thetford Labour Councillor Terry Jermy unseated Liz Truss.

And spare a thought for Central Devon – not a single Labour Councillor in the seat, but they came within under 100 votes of winning! Throughout the countryside, people ignored dodgy Lib Dem bar charts and voted Labour.

The perfect storm that produced most rural seats since 1945, when agricultural workers were significant in both number and union organisation and there were rows of railway workers' cottages in many villages, was brought about by three factors that I can see:

- Firstly, the swing to Labour appears to have been higher the further into previously-safe Tory country you go;

- Secondly, even if only 50% of Reform voters would have voted Tory without Farage's intervention, Labour wouldn't have won any of these seats;

- Thirdly, Labour's Head and Regional Offices didn't interfere – except to try to encourage our local band of uphill strugglers to give up and go elsewhere.

The gains in rural seats are all the more stunning when you look at Labour's vote nationally – down from 10 to 9.6 million on 2019. Not 2017 – 2019!

It wasn't just Labour that did well. The Greens relentlessly pursued the issue of pollution in our rivers and seas.

Picking up the local paper here, there was a big feature on Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall up to his knees in the River Wye with the Green candidate for North Herefordshire, pointing out the disgrace of sewage discharge into the water.

She went on to unseat the Tory and become one of the four Green Party MPs. I bumped into Feargal Sharkey (away from the campaign trail) who did the same with Labour candidates around the coastal constituencies.

He told me he was campaigning so hard because he, "couldn't wait another five years to sort this out."



It is a volatile electorate out there – and if Reform collapses there will be a large angry mass to address. The Labour Party doesn't appear to care much about its rural parties and is simply not geared up to support them.

The big organisational challenges now are to recruit members and activists from these first-time Labour voters, working with trade unions and green groups; to ensure the new MPs are the key campaigners on issues from environmental protection to bus services; and to establish a base of Labour Councillors where the Labour vote was highest.

But above all, it's the politics that will matter – the unerring pursuit of radical, socialist solutions around housing, public transport (especially buses and new train lines), NHS accessibility, a sustainable countryside, decent rural wages and not to forget faster broadband!

We are now entering an unprecedented period of government where the new Prime Minister has a negative popularity rating and Labour actually lost votes. This is likely to be a once in a lifetime opportunity – don't let the Labour leadership waste it!

*Kevin Flack has left the hustle and bustle of the Kent hop fields to report from the New Forest. Future articles may disproportionately mention broadband connectivity.*

# The Starmer/Reeves proj

Keir Starmer has a poor grasp of economics (needing a 2021 crash course from Lord Falconer of all people). Therefore, he heavily relies on Chancellor Rachel Reeves. She talks up the Bank of England part of her CV: not impressive in itself, but even less so is her working for Halifax Bank of Scotland when it crashed in 2008. No surprise her go-to memory is of mother doing household accounts at the kitchen table instead.

Reeves has coined a new buzz-word 'Securonomics' in economic discourse but apart from giving the state a role in creating markets and a regional emphasis, it's more style than substance. As recently as 2018 Reeves wanted to end inheritance tax loopholes, halve the annual capital gains tax allowance and have it paid at income tax rates, restrict higher rate pension contribution tax reliefs and compel UK pension funds to invest in British jobs raising, in her words, "over £20 billion per year of tax revenues and a further £20 billion of investment funds which could be used to build up the proposed Sovereign Wealth Fund", but these ideas have vanished. There are some useful policies remaining, however:

## Workers' Rights

An end to fire and rehire and enforced imposition of zero hours contracts, as too a promise to improve wages and training in the Care sector, as well as acquiring employment rights on Day One of a new job. That said, no real new money is promised, and these policies are likely to be the first diluted, which is why the unions declined to endorse the manifesto.

## Green Policy

Some good ideas: doubling onshore wind, tripling solar power and quadrupling offshore wind by 2030. There are obstacles, and not just technical diffi-

**Larry O'Hara examines the economic credentials and policies of the new Prime Minister and his Chancellor.**

culties (e.g. copper shortage) to achieving Net Zero by 2030. The £28 billion p.a. Green New Deal flagship policy has already been junked, replaced by a paltry £8.3 billion for 'Great British Energy' over five years. Furthermore, GBE is not the nationalised body the sector needs, but a means of subsidising private capital investment. As with the banking crisis, we pay but private companies profit. And putting polluting water companies in 'special measures' is no substitute for nationalising them.

## National Wealth Fund/Investment

On the one hand, there is industrial intervention with the National Wealth Fund (£1.5 billion p.a.) and a broader remit for the British Business Bank. On the other, the Institute For Public Policy Review believes "a Starmer-led government would end its first term having cut investment more than the entire Conservative 2010-24 administration".

As for private investment: despite multiple proposed talking shops, reviews and consultations there is no mechanism to compel City funds to invest. While the word 'resilience' is thrown about like confetti, there are no precise policies capable of bringing it about. Other policies are unpalatable in principle:

## Continuing Austerity

Under the 'Fiscal Credibility Rule' austerity will continue. Unaltered Tory spending plans mean (according to the



Resolution Foundation) £19 billion cuts in Justice, The Home Office & Local Government by 2028-29. Making no change to income tax thresholds until then (if at all) means a real cut in living standards, increasing at the rate of inflation each year. Not raising thresholds is itself a tax increase, rendering hollow the promise not to increase tax.

## Not Confronting the City

This government is deferential towards the City of London: while an October 2023 tweet criticised the last government scrapping a cap on banker's bonuses, three months later, Reeves announced Labour would not reimpose the cap. Her justification referred to business needing 'stability'— in other words bankers wouldn't like it.

A policy document was issued in early 2024 'Financing Growth: Labour's Plan For Financial Services'. Of the Report's 'Advisory Panel' every single member works in the City. With not one representative from the unions, industry, academia or (god forbid) the general public. Unsurprisingly, not only does the report not see the City, now a bloated laundromat for worldwide dodgy money, is a big problem,



# ject: a view from the Left

Reeves thinks it part of the solution, something repeated in the manifesto.

To be fair, no U-turn yet on a proposal to tax private equity bonuses, an increase from the current 28% rate on deals to 45%, which the *Financial Times* thinks might raise £400 million p.a. Rest assured though, that policy reversal is almost as sure as indefinite delay to applying VAT/business rates on private schools.

## The Numbers Don't Add Up

The Reeves/Starmmer mantra is that everything in the manifesto was fully costed: which the unwary might have thought meant the numbers add up, guaranteed by 'iron-clad' fiscal rules that (in the manifesto's words) mean "day to day costs are met by revenues and debt must be falling as a share of the economy by the fifth year of the forecast" and, equally important, that "policies not listed here will be funded from existing budgets or do not have a cost".

In other words, anything exceeding the stated figures will be funded by yet more cuts. Of course, we are asked to believe instead that growth will markedly improve, meaning increased tax revenues, but given a likely paucity of investment, not likely.

The manifesto uses as illustration 2028-29 figures, with increased revenue of 7.35 billion and new policies costing £4.83 billion, meaning a nominal £2.5 billion surplus per year. Leaving aside that these figures exclude massive interest payments on the national debt, there is still a big problem.

While the government has already reneged on the 2019 pledge to 3.5 million women affected by the raising of the state pension age (WASPI women) to whom the Ombudsman recom-

mended £3.5-10 billion compensation, other fiscal demands are harder to ignore. Here the Tories were for once astute, kicking cans down the road. First is a projected £10 billion to compensate victims of infected blood. Then there is a likely £2.4 billion to compensate 4,000 affected by the Post Office Horizon IT scandal.

Both policies wipe out completely any room for fiscal manoeuvre within current plans. Additionally, Starmer's jingoistic adherence to the so-called nuclear deterrent is another financial millstone. In December 2023 it was revealed costs had risen by £38 billion in just one year, a trend likely to continue. And not budgeted for. Add to this near-bankrupt councils, crumbling NHS, universities and schools in chronic crisis, and a disintegrating criminal justice system....

## Limited Room For Manoeuvre

Over and above 'fiscal rules' and a pledge not to increase VAT, income tax and corporation tax, there are two further ways the government has limited room for manoeuvre.

They are doing nothing about the Bank of England's malign influence, and even worse, continuing to defer to the 'Office For Budget Responsibility' who will seek to prevent any innovative policies or increase in borrowing.

## There Are Still Options

The Reeves/Starmmer project is not necessarily doomed: headway can be gained by interest rate reductions, and reclassifying borrowing and spending elements. Eliminating £37 billion per year interest the Bank of England (unbelievably) pays to private banks due to the Quantitative Easing policy is another idea, but would alienate City interests. Reeves has assiduously courted.



## How Should The Left React?

Such popularity as the government has accrued, by simply not being Tories, will soon evaporate. There will be increasing pressure, not least from workers subject to years of austerity, a rejuvenated Tory party, and (based on historical precedent) a resurgent Far Right. While it seemed clever PR to put Keir Starmer front and centre of the manifesto, a cover picture promising totally unspecified change and totally reminiscent of Michael Douglas in 'Falling Down' mode, there are no reservoirs of keen activists or a viable vision to inspire anybody when the going gets rough.

In this situation the admittedly embattled Left needs continued policy development (the Right has few ideas), to maintain organisational cohesion, and support workers and communities struggling against ongoing austerity. We should also explain to Labour members and MPs what is happening and why, while advancing an alternative (just as in the 1970s with the Alternative Economic Strategy), and not be drawn into defending indefensible policies now a reality.

Linking with Left MPs (of whatever denomination) and extra-parliamentary groups will be crucial here. Mandelson once boasted of putting the Left in a sealed tomb: this strategy failed once and may do so again, if we hold our nerve. There is no other way.

# The world needs peace

Britain has a new government. The Tories are gone, after 14 years of misrule, but what comes next? A Labour government committed to a 'triple lock on Trident'. Clearly there is much work to be done, but there is a new and more positive atmosphere.

Not least, enormous relief and happiness that our Vice-President Jeremy Corbyn has been re-elected, as an Independent MP – so we will have his powerful and principled voice for peace in Parliament. It has been great to see the election of four other independent candidates on the platform of ceasefire in Gaza. Together with MPs from other parties that oppose the genocide, this will be a strong base in parliament.

Clearly there is much more analysis to be done: but Labour has a landslide of seats based on less votes than it received in 2019. The right-wing vote has been split between Tories and Reform; they may regroup and attempt a come-back at the next election.

Other issues are raised too. The SNP has been much reduced: what will this mean for anti-nuclear work in Scotland, where the promise of independence had provided an avenue for achieving nuclear disarmament? In better news, the Green Party now has four seats; they are

**Kate Hudson, General Secretary of CND, calls on activists to redouble their efforts to win the new Labour government for peace.**

good on many of our peace and anti-war issues but they have recently changed their policy on NATO, not in a good way.

The Lib Dems now have a much larger cohort of MPs although they have recently changed their policy on Trident for the worse. But there is strong anti-nuclear sentiment within the party. Wales is now a Tory-free zone: are there new possibilities for the peace agenda there?

The Labour government's policies are explicitly pro-nuclear weapons, pro-increased arms spending, pro-war in Ukraine and Gaza, pro-NATO, and tied into the US ideological and military framework. Much is the same as the previous government's policies, but this is a new situation, and we need to assess our strategic approach to the new government.

Labour is expected to undertake a review of Defence policy in its



*Kate speaking at Lakenheath*

*Photo: Linda Walker*

first year. We need to be part of this where possible and raise key issues outside the Labour Party where direct engagement is not possible. In CND, we will be raising crucial issues: not only the urgent issues of the moment – Gaza and Ukraine – but broader underlying policies: nuclear weapons possession; NATO; the return of US nuclear weapons to Lakenheath; the AUKUS alliance; the cold war on China; the British economy and the so-called 'defence' industry and its relations with sections of the trade union movement.

This new post-electoral situation presents us with many challenges, but also opportunities – and hope for the future. Let's make the most of it!

**Can all *Briefing* readers who are members of UNISON please ensure they vote YES in the Political Fund ballot. If you haven't had your ballot, ring UNISON Head Office on 0800 085 7857**



# Boost workers' rights

The new Labour government has taken the first step in reversing the country's failed 14-year experiment with ultra-flexible labour markets by announcing plans for a law to boost workers' rights. The legislation includes a large range of measures including on zero-hours contracts, fire-and-rehire and trade union rights. The government has said that it will deliver its New Deal for Working People "in full".

That the plans are designed to boost wages and kickstart the economy is demonstrated by the government's billing of the changes as "fundamental" to its growth mission. The Employment Rights Bill, which is to be introduced within 100 days, will be the "biggest upgrade to workers' rights in a generation".

There is also a strong signal that years of anti-union attitudes in government are over with ministers highlighting a "new partnership between business, trade unions and working people". Among the measures in the bill will be a ban on exploitative zero-hour contracts. The government has said that workers will have a right to a contract that reflects the number of hours they regularly work and will get "reasonable notice" of shift changes and compensation when shifts are cancelled or cut short.

This is desperately needed because the number of people in insecure work has reached a record high of 4.1 million, according to recent TUC analysis. There was an increase of more than one million in the number of people in precarious employment – such as zero-hours-contracts, low-paid self-employment and casual/seasonal work – between 2011 and 2023. Black and minority ethnic workers have been particularly hard hit. Some employers are keeping workers on insecure contracts for years on end with two in three work-

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**The TUC outlines the new Government's plans for a New Deal for Working People and looks forward to the relevant legislation being presented.**

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ers on zero hours contracts having been with their employer for more than a year.

The government has said that it will bring an end to 'fire and rehire' and 'fire and replace' by providing effective remedies. It has said it will also replace the inadequate statutory code introduced by the last government. Currently, exploitative employers are taking advantage of gaps in the law and ineffective enforcement. In 2022 P&O Ferries sacked 800 seafarers while deliberately ignoring its legal obligations. But its bosses suffered no consequences. Some firms have used fire and rehire to cut wages, a particular concern during the Covid pandemic.

The GMB's narrow failure to secure union recognition at Amazon's Coventry warehouse recently shows the barriers that unions face in trying to organise in new workplaces to help workers improve their pay and conditions. The union first had to prove it was likely to have over 50 per cent support to even get a ballot – and that was without even being allowed on site.

Amazon then pulled out all the stops to prevent the union succeeding in the vote, including pressuring workers into cancelling their GMB membership, bombarding them with anti-union seminars and threats to terms and conditions. Labour has said that the Bill will simplify the process of statutory recognition and introduce a regulated route to ensure workers and union members have a reasonable right to access a union within workplaces.

Other measures in the Bill will include: extension of parental leave, sick pay and protection from unfair dismissal from day one on the job "for all workers"; the right of all workers, no matter their earnings, to sick pay from the first day off; making flexible working the default from day-one for all workers, with employers required to accommodate this as far as is reasonable; a prohibition on dismissing any woman who has had a baby for six months after her return to work, except in specific circumstances; a new Fair Work Agency to enforce workplace rights; a fair pay agreement in social care, so that workers and employers agree minimum pay and conditions for the sector; reinstatement of the School Support Staff Negotiating Body; the removal of unnecessary restrictions on trade union activity – including the Tories' minimum service levels law. A separate Equality (Race and Disability) Bill will tackle pay gaps and pay discrimination at work.

The government also said it will deliver a genuine living wage and remove the discriminatory age bands that cost young workers aged 18 to 20 up to £2,400 a year. There is overwhelming support for labour market reform from voters of all stripes. For example, in a poll of 3,000 voters carried out by Opinion on the day after the general election, almost two-thirds of respondents (64 per cent) supported giving workers' protection against unfair dismissal from day one of a job. Bosses increasingly support change, too. Decent employers no longer want to be undercut by bad ones. They know that treating their staff fairly brings productivity gains.

# Orgreave 40 years on

The Battle of Orgreave was a violent assault on striking miners by police on 18 June 1984. 40 years on, it stands as a stark symbol of the divisive policies of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. However, this attack was not an isolated incident. It was a culmination of deep-seated classism and economic policies that favoured deindustrialisation and free-market capitalism, and systematically weakened the labour movement – destroying working-class communities in the process.

The late 20th century was a period of significant economic upheaval in the UK. Traditional industries, such as coal mining, steel, and manufacturing, faced decline due to globalisation, technological advancements that were utilised for profit, and right-wing politics. These industries were concentrated in working-class areas, where communities were heavily dependent on these jobs.

Thatcher's government embraced policies that promoted free-market principles, deregulation, and a shift away from state ownership. This approach aimed to modernise the British economy but came at the expense of the working class. The Conservative Party and its capitalist backers viewed coal mines as inefficient and unprofitable. Thatcher's administration viewed the powerful National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) as an impediment to economic progress and was determined to curtail its influence.

In March 1984, the National Coal Board announced plans to close 20 coal mines, which threatened thousands of jobs and the livelihoods of entire communities. The NUM, led by Arthur Scargill, called for a national strike. The strike was not just about saving jobs; it was a battle for the survival of the mining industry and a stand against a deliberate attack on the

**In a *Canary* editorial, first published in June, it is explained that the Battle of Orgreave wasn't about coal. It was about power, class and the right to a livelihood.**

working class by Thatcher's government.

However, the government anticipated the strike and had prepared extensively. The government's deployment of police during the strike was not about maintaining order; it was about breaking the strike. This militarised response highlighted the government's stance against the miners and underscored the class divide. The police assault at the Battle of Orgreave was one of the most violent and notorious events of the miners' strike. On that day, around 5,000 miners gathered to picket the Orgreave coking plant in South Yorkshire. They were met by around 6,000 police equipped with riot gear, horses, and dogs.

The ensuing attack was brutal, with mounted police charging into the crowd. At least 100 miners were injured, some seriously, while 95 were arrested, charged with "violent disorder" or "rioting". Subsequent investigations revealed that the government made sure the police's actions were highly coordinated and aggressive. Police used excessive force, made wrongful arrests, and fabricated evidence against the miners. Moreover, the media coverage at the time was largely biased to the government, promoting its propaganda. It intentionally portrayed the miners as violent agitators to skew public perception.



The Battle of Orgreave was not merely a labour dispute but a manifestation of class conflict. Thatcher's government representing the interests of the middle and upper classes. The aggressive policing and vilification of the miners was an attempt by the Tories to dismantle the power of the working class and their unions, which had long been a thorn in the side of governments.

However, the government's approach to the miners' strike was informed by a broader ideological battle against collectivism and state-supported industries. By breaking the NUM, Thatcher aimed to reduce the power of trade unions. She could then reshape the labor market in favor of employers.

The aftermath of the Battle of Orgreave and the miners' strike had profound and lasting effects on British society. Many mining communities never recovered from the closures, leading to long-term economic and social decline. Successive governments, both Labour and Tory, failed to address this. The strike also marked a turning point in labour relations, significantly weakening trade unions and changing the landscape of British politics.



## Peace & Justice Project International Conference 2024



The second annual International Conference of the Peace & Justice Project, featuring panels on the issues we face as a planet and speakers from world politics, will take place at the Blizard Building, 4 Newark St, London E1 2AT on Saturday 14th September.

**Speakers include:** Jeremy Corbyn MP, Andrew Feinstein, Lindsey German, Vijay Prashad and Binalakshmi Nepram.

The Peace and Justice Project brings people together for social and economic justice, peace and human rights in Britain and across the world and was founded by Jeremy Corbyn in 2021.

Since its launch, the Peace and Justice Project has grown local, national and international campaigns. We connect people, communities and organisations through events and discussions on vital issues such as climate action, new economics and refugee protection.

For more information: [www.thecorbynproject.com](http://www.thecorbynproject.com)

# Winning from the Left

On June 2, the Right in Mexico suffered a historic defeat. Claudia Sheinbaum - successor to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) of the MORENA party - won the presidential election by a landslide margin of over 32 points, becoming the first woman and first person of Jewish descent to be elected president.

The election saw Sheinbaum receiving the highest number of votes ever recorded for a candidate, surpassing López Obrador's record of 30.1 million votes, by achieving just under 36 million votes!

The background to - and crucial to understanding - this victory is that in the last four years Mexico with 'AMLO' as President has made remarkable progress in social welfare, education, health, women's rights, equality for Indigenous people and Afro-Mexicans, and in terms of the recovery of national sovereignty over resources such as petroleum, gas, electric power, water supplies and now lithium.

On the regional and global stage, it has played a leading role in the new progressive tide across Latin America. As well as being of interest in itself, the success of this agenda also has many lessons for the Left globally. The goal has been what movement supporters call the "4T" - a Fourth Transformation of the country through a democratic renewal to end corruption and impunity, and benefit the many, not just the few.

The main objective of the 4T agenda is to reverse decades of neoliberal policies, and to promote a more equitable and people-centred economic agenda. Key to this is prioritising social programmes, and there has been moves towards a more universal approach to welfare and social security. The effects

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**Tim Young, Labour Friends of Progressive Latin America, reports on the left landslide in Mexico.**

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are very real - state payments now reach 65% more people than under previous governments.

Alongside this, in an empowering move - and something it feels like we could only dream about currently in Britain - welfare programmes are now enshrined in the Constitution as entitlements rather than 'hand-outs'. Other new social programmes have included, but are by no means limited to:

- scholarships to students at various levels, including basic education, high school, and university, alongside vocational training opportunities
- economic support to farmers to promote sustainable rural development
- support for reconstruction efforts in areas affected by natural disasters.

In terms of seeking energy sovereignty and an end of handing over the riches of Mexico's natural resources to multinational corporations and uber-rich oligarchs, the aim is to put people and public need before corporate greed. Examples of progress on this front are too numerous the list, but include reining in the power of foreign mining companies through a new Hydrocarbons Law enabling permits to private firms that commit certain violations to be revoke.

Meanwhile strengthening CFE, the state-owned electricity company, has seen limiting the requirement on it to buy electricity from the private sector, meaning less loot for greedy private polluters and profiteers - something we could surely do with here! This reclaiming of national wealth has helped fund vital state-led investment and infrastructure projects, including a

1,554 km-long intercity railway traversing the Yucatán Peninsula.

Also part of a more prominent role for the state and public sector, halting and reversing privatisations has been both successful and popular. In moves that will be of great interest to activists in Britain, government functions that had been outsourced to private and semi-private firms have been brought back in-house and the subcontracting of public services has been abolished.

Workers' rights have also improved, starting to shift power in the workplace and economy. The formal rights of domestic workers are now recognised for the first time, and precarious hiring practices have been eliminated, including through the banning of 'fire-and-rehire' style practices. Meanwhile, the process for forming new unions has been simplified. Action has also been taken on wages and incomes. To give just one example, the largest minimum-wage increase in more than forty years saw the income of the poorest grow by 24% before COVID hit.

Finally, even statutory holidays have doubled - something I'm sure all *Briefing* readers could get behind! The lesson from Mexico then is clear - rolling back neo-liberalism not only works, it wins for the Left too!

- You can follow Labour Friends of Progressive Latin America at [www.facebook.com/LabourFriendsOfProgressiveLatinAmerica](https://www.facebook.com/LabourFriendsOfProgressiveLatinAmerica) and [x.com/labourfplam](https://x.com/labourfplam)

- You can follow the Mexico Solidarity Forum at <https://e-voice.org.uk/mexicosolidarity-2/>



# BACK FOR GOOD

## Keith Veness

What a few weeks we just had, with the Tories being reduced to a rump of useless M.P.s. Sinn Fein has become the largest party from the six counties representing Westminster seats [they are already the biggest party at Stormont and the largest party in local government for the statelet].

And the French left has finally united to become the largest bloc in the French parliament. A three way accumulator bet on Sinn Fein, NUPES and Jeremy Corbyn would have yielded a tidy sum indeed !

However, what happens now for socialists in Scotland, Wales and England once we have got our breath back? Starmer and his pals are currently surfing a wave created by stabbing Jeremy Corbyn in the back, repudiating the major commitments made to get elected as Leader and making certain plans largely indistinguishable from what "one nation Tories" would have made thirty or forty years ago.

The fact that Jeremy Corbyn is hugely popular in Islington North with literally tens of thousands of working class people there he has helped, organised or campaigned with doesn't mean he wants to found a new revolutionary party, or indeed he could.

Equally, seats with large South Asian populations [Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist as well as Muslim] that were outraged by statements giving the Zionist government carte blanche to bomb and shoot the Palestinians and cut off water and power to Gaza, doesn't mean these communities

want to permanently end their close ties to the only party that helped them over periods of time and from when they first arrived here.

The victory in Leicester South and the near wins in Ilford and Chingford were acts of solidarity with the people of Gaza and the West Bank, not attempts at launching a new Fourth International!

I have always been annoyed at these characters who post on Facebook, "X" and Tik Tok urging Jeremy and other left M.P.s to set up a new party - with the clear implication that other people can do all the hard work and they will then deign to join it.

All these ultra-left windbags were noticeable for their absence when it actually came to knocking on doors and stomping the streets of Islington North. Over 150 party stalwarts resigned their party membership so they could work for Jeremy's campaign.

They were then joined by literally hundreds of people from community groups, black and visible minority organisations, and assorted campaigns who are not Labour Party members but could be made into ones with the right approach.

The reverse question is: how did the established ultra-left sects and demagogues fare? As usual the answer is "not very well". George Galloway's spouting about destroying the Labour Party following his antics in Rochdale and Oldham simply got him into the Guinness Book of Records as the only politician who won three by-elections

and lost each time when a general election came along.

Galloway is far from being progressive on issues of gay rights and abortion, to name but two. He also has a long record of fawning on various Arab despots and dictators.

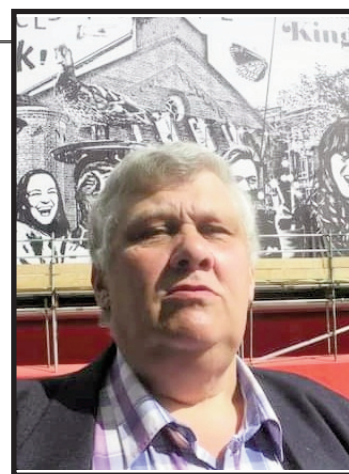
The self styled "Trades Union and Socialist Coalition" [The Tuskers as they have become known] had its usual abysmal results. Since Bob Crow's death this is now nothing more than a very frayed front organisation for the Socialist Party a.k.a. "The Militant Tendency". It achieved the unenviable record of getting nil votes in a council by-election. All these outfits streak across the firmament and then burn out like tiny meteors.

The reality is that the Labour party, because of its close links to the trades unions and the Co-operative movement will remain the receptacle of working class hopes and a focus for activities.

The current leadership has been particularly repressive but their attempts to get rid of Diane Abbott failed, as did their appalling treatment meted out to Apsana Begum.

We now face the task of Sisyphus in rolling the boulder back up the hill - but there really is no alternative so let's roll our sleeves up and get back to the task in hand.

VENCEREMOS COMRADES.



# Struggle for France

After a depressing first round the relief of the second round elections here in France is overwhelming. Marine Le Pen's remodelled Rassemblement National (RN), nothing to do with her father's collection of old Petainist and Algerian colonials of the Front National, has failed. Apart from a dissident handful of Republicans, including the Party's President Eric Ciotti, the RN failed to make inroads into what is left post-Sarkozy of the traditional republican right wing vote.

The system, where you vote for who you like in the first round and against who you dislike most in the second, delivered enough votes to keep the RN results down. The New Front Popular, (NFP), the defensive alliance of Socialists, Greens, Communists, and Trots with Melechon's LFI, France Unbowed, being the largest component, took the principled stance of withdrawing all 200 third-placed candidates in the first round.

The centrists and right were not so disciplined, but enough saw the difference between a political adversary and an 'enemy of the Republic' to stand down leaving a two way contest. Enough left wing voters held their noses and voted for the best candidate to defeat the RN, and despite the mutterings of their Party leaders, enough centrist voters did the same.

Today we have an Assemble National with the four parties of the NFP as the single largest block, Macron's Ensemble second and an enlarged RN group the third. None of the three can form a stable government. The President should invite the leaders of the largest group to try and form a government, but whether Macron will or not remains to be seen. Macron's idea of a silent but mobilisable centrist majority was an illusion, and his risk of calling an election at the start of the

**Our French correspondent, Pete Shield, ex-Chair of Hackney Trades Council, has a strong sense of disaster averted after the second round of Assemble National elections.**



*Assemble National building*

*Photo: iStock, Photitos2016*

summer holidays has fallen flat on its face. Roughly speaking, the Mediterranean south save the university cities, and the strip alongside the Rhone River voted RN along with the ex-Industrial areas of the North. The mountains and urban working class areas voted Left and the west of the country voted centrist. The RN-voting retired Algerian colonist in Perpignan has very different priorities to the young RN-voting lad in Lille. Equally the left-voting organic farmer from the Ariege has a completely different world view to the Muslim nurse in St Denis.

The cost of living, state of the public services and decent jobs, are all of major concern. The Left had policies of state intervention funded by a return of the wealth tax abolished by Macron, and a windfall tax on large corporations. The extreme right proposed a variety of contradictory ideas centred on reducing diesel costs and deporting migrants. The centrists simply said weren't the problems terrible as if they were a result of some natural calamity.

The age of retirement is a huge issue, with Macron failing to push through increases after a huge trade union led protest. The RN leader, Jordon Bardella, changed his position in four consecutive interviews; any RN inclined voter could take away which ever answer best suited them. The dis-appointment in the Le Pen camp is

palpable. They claim the vote was stolen by an unholy alliance of Macronists and Marxists. However, they made advances in key electoral areas, eating deep into old Socialist strongholds.

They failed in the multi-cultural big cities, but took a large part of the white working class vote. However, in the second round the antisemitic, racist and homophobic views of some of their candidates got a lot more airing. The Left core vote continues to be the public sector and middle class urbanites with the addition of old Socialist and Communist rural areas. The mobilisation of "new voters" from urban migrant descendent communities is not as large as claimed.

Whether the electoral alliance of the NFP has any future remains to be seen. The Socialist party, decimated post-Hollande is back as the second largest left group, amazingly with Hollande himself. The greens of the EELV are third, with the Communists refusing to die in fourth. The largest group, Melechon's LFI, have had problems. Three of the five de-selected Deputies got elected against official LFI candidates, and were backed by the PS and Communists. Despite no internal democracy within the LFI dissident voices continue making it unlikely that the LFI would propose him as a Prime Ministerial candidate.

The Left has been very successful in mobilising young people and community groups in the working class areas around the major cities, to combat the rise of the RN. The challenge is now to extend that out into the wider community of small towns and villages.



# Palestine: it's arms stupid!

The list is endless of the things a Labour Government should do. They could start with recognising Britain's historic responsibility to put right the wrongs done to the Palestinian people since the Balfour declaration in 1917. Siding with the oppressed indigenous people rather than the oppressive coloniser would be a beginning.

But if the liberation and self-determination of Palestine is the objective, words are nowhere near enough. There are short-term steps: restoring the funding of UNRWA; stopping the Tories' obstruction at the ICC, done at the behest of the US; actively pursuing an immediate and permanent ceasefire; recognising Palestine.

However, these are measures that any progressive government should do. Much more is necessary if Labour is to recoup the trust lost because of its failure to call for a ceasefire before it was, in reality, too late. The damage and the killing had already been done by the time Labour got around to it.

The core problem that needs to be tackled is Israel's impunity – no matter what it does, the West lets it get away with actions that would not be tolerated by any other country. Israel knows that the US and its allies have their backs. For most countries Israel is already a pariah state. They see the apartheid regime in action and witness the genocide in progress, and cannot understand why the world doesn't act.

A significant act by Labour would be to start the process whereby there are consequences for Israel's breaches of international law. The system of international law relies on the fact that there is an obligation on Governments to take action against the renegade nation failing to comply. It is not a pick and mix – choosing which laws you agree with and which to follow. There

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**Hugh Lanning, Labour and Palestine, argues that the top priorities are demanding an embargo on arms sales to Israel and calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.**

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need to be sanctions. In South Africa, there was no real movement towards dismantling the apartheid regime until Governments started imposing sanctions. So, if Labour is going to make a difference, it can take advantage of the UK's alleged 'special relationship' with the US and stop acting as their glove puppet.

It is arms stupid! To mimic the well-used slogan of Clinton's 1992 campaign, it is arms that are both the Achilles heel and the oppressive strength of Israel. It is not by its own endeavours that Israel has become one of the most powerful military forces in the world, it is directly the result of \$3.8bn annual aid from the US.

Between 2018 and 2022 Israel spent more per capita on its military than anywhere apart from the mega-rich Qatar. In 2022, Israel dedicated 4.5 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to the military, the 10th highest percentage in the world. Even before the war on Gaza, Israel was a top military spender.

The ICJ ruling of a plausible case of genocide in Gaza should be sufficient for a Labour government to immediately impose an arms embargo. The new Government should publish the advice the last Government got, and act on it. The UK is not a huge supplier of arms to Israel, but it would be a signal that we will not tolerate Israel's blatant disregard for international law.

We see on the television nightly how Israel uses its weaponry – it bombs, shoots and kills innocent Palestinians

in their thousands. It uses food, water and electricity as weapons. A recent Lancet report stated that the indirect deaths being caused by the Israel military machine are in a ratio of four to one. 37,000 deaths should be sufficient cause to act – but the estimate of up to 180,000 or more deaths should make the case for sanctions overwhelming.

There is a danger that political groupings will seek to arrogate the issue of Palestine to themselves. Rather than lecturing the Palestinians, our focus should be on ending the UK's complicity with Israel's regime. There should be an immediate arms embargo whilst Israel remains in breach of international law. This would be far more effective than vague promises about recognition at some future date. Israel needs to know that the world is going to act if it doesn't stop its settlement and colonisation of Palestine.

The election showed the people of this country support peace and the liberation of Palestine. They expect a new Labour Government to do the same. But this won't happen unless we keep the pressure up both on the streets and within the party. The unions have a crucial role to play using the mandates from their members. At this crucial time we need coordination and unity – arms is both morally and politically the right focus.

Please sign the petition to Keir Starmer and David Lammy at [bit.ly/armsembargo](https://bit.ly/armsembargo), or follow the link: *The new UK Government should impose an embargo on arms sales to Israel.* - Action Network .

# Iran's farcical election

Massoud Pezeshkian was elected as Iran's new President after the death of Ibrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash on May 19, 2024. Despite all efforts to create hype and enthusiasm amongst the voters, the participation in this futile exercise was recorded to be the lowest in the first round since the Ayatollahs came to power in 1979.

Mr Pezeshkian, who is a cardiac surgeon by profession and was a former Deputy Speaker of the Iranian Majlis and a health minister, won the presidency in the second round. He is not a political newcomer. He served five times as a deputy in the Iranian Parliament.

He was born in Mahabad city of a Kurdish mother and Azeri father. Mahabad was the capital of the then Kurdistan Republic of Qazi Mohammed. He speaks Kurdish fluently. Even though he dared to say 'Long live Kurdistan! Long live Iran' in his last rally held in Mahabad's Cwar Chira meydan, most Kurdish political parties called their supporters to boycott the elections. The number of voters in the Kurdistan region was more than halved. In Tehran it was only a 23% turnout at the polls. In Sistan-Baluchistan only 40% of eligible voters went to the polls. There is a widespread dissatisfaction with the regime in all the regions of Iran.

The all-powerful Guardian Council vets the list of candidates wishing to take part in the presidential elections. Although 80 people registered to compete for the Presidency, only 4 were allowed to run in the elections. Most Iranians have lost confidence in their political class. They don't believe the elected politicians can solve Iran's chronic economic and

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**Ihsan Qadir, secretary of the League of Kurdistan Regions, reports that a new President in Iran is not going to deliver the change needed.**

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political problems. They know that as long as a few unelected religious clerics continue to monopolise power in their hand, Iran will not change.

In the Nizami Jomhuriyeyi Islami Iran, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is the real decision maker. He gets chosen, not elected by popular vote, by the Assembly of Experts. All the 88 members of this assembly are thoroughly vetted by a ten-member Council of Guardians, who are themselves appointed by the Supreme Leader.

The Supreme Leader is the commander-in-Chief of the Army as well as controlling the judiciary, state radio and television, the Guardian Council and a 48 member body, the Expediency Discernment Council. All 48 members of the council are appointed by the Supreme Leader. The people can clearly see that the popularly elected politicians have no real power, and all the key decisions are concentrated in the hand of the Supreme Leader and his appointees.

It is no wonder that less than 40 per cent of the eligible voters chose to take part in the first round of the election for the Presidency. Only when two candidates were left, and the choices were much clearer was there a slight increase in voter participation. In the second round of elections, many Iranians opted for a candidate who was calling for rapprochement with the international community, better relations with neighbours, compliance with international financial rules and co-operation on the nuclear

issue. The result of the presidential election made it crystal clear that while it will not bring about serious changes, it exposed the structural and moral fault lines of the political system. The people of Iran and Kurdistan are not willing to provide a further lifeline to a decaying system of government. Mr. Pezeshkian is fully aware of this.

He, in fact, warned the Ayatollahs that they cannot maintain their power if they do not reform. He won the election because he could openly call for changes to the morality law. The other candidate, Mr. Saeed Jalili, who portrayed himself as the only candidate for defence of the achievements of the Islamic revolution, despite the public backing of key figures, failed to get elected. He could only get 13,538,179 votes out of 61,452,321 registered voters. Despite extending the deadline for voting to late in the night, less than 50% of the electorate voted and Mr Pezeshkian received the support of 16,384,403 voters.

Mr. Pezeshkian will soon find out the limits of his power. Ali Khamenei and his co cannot afford to relinquish their power. Their gravy train feeds a lot of people who will not let go of their privileges and power. The revolutionary movement in Iran will gain momentum from this. Change in Iran can only come through a revolutionary upheaval. A democratic, federal and plural Iran is not impossible. Iranian people of all nationalities deserve a better life, a fairer system and an accountable class.



## Forward march of Progress continues

When Keir Starmer was selected as Labour's prospective candidate for Holborn and St Pancras in 2014, one councillor in the constituency described the choice as: "The forward march of Progress halted." Starmer had effectively come through the middle of the selection, with the organised right backing council leader Sarah Hayward, and the left plumping for her sometime predecessor Raj Chada. Sceptics of the party's rightward drift greeted the choice not with celebration, but with some relief.

His campaign for the Labour leadership in 2020 took a similar tack, supposedly a safe pair of hands that would continue the popular policies of Jeremy Corbyn without any of the so-called baggage. He was neither Rebecca Long-Bailey's continuity Corbyn nor the miserablist retreat of Lisa Nandy. But his path to power has been littered with the bodies of the Labour left, most notably that of Corbyn. Such is his leadership's authoritarian clampdown that this human rights lawyer who once flirted with Trotskyism is now known by some as "Sir Keith Stalin".

Tom Baldwin's enlightening new book is more hagiography than biography, having started life as a ghost-written memoir which Starmer subsequently abandoned. It is the first such book to have extensive access to, if not full authorisation from, the Labour leader, his family, friends and staff. Its author is best known as the Murdoch press political editor who became Ed Miliband's communications director, but a footnote shines light on a more interesting connection to Labour.

In the summer of 2018, Baldwin, then chief spinner for the People's Vote campaign, joined Starmer, then nominally loyal to Corbyn as shadow Brexit secretary, and Alistair Campbell for

**Conrad Landin reviews *Keir Starmer: The Biography*, by Tom Baldwin. William Collins, 429pp, £25**

"fairly clandestine meetings over coffee and eggs... in cafés dotted around Kentish Town". Though Baldwin insists Starmer was initially resistant to a second referendum, this was no doubt the beginning of his conversion to the cause that would wreck Labour's chances in the general election the following year.

When Starmer effectively launched a shadow leadership campaign in March 2018, less than a year after Labour had deprived the Conservative party of a majority, it was known as the "Arlington Group". Weekly meetings were held at the home of fellow MP, and later chief of staff and Labour peer, Jenny Chapman in Arlington Road, Camden Town. "Coincidentally, Arlington Road was also the title of a Hollywood thriller... about a sinister right-wing terrorist plot involving seemingly normal neighbours," Baldwin wryly notes. Such moments of insight and humour aside, much of the book reads like a desperate plea against the characterisation of Starmer as both boring and unprincipled. We repeatedly see him playing eight-a-side on astroturf. Baldwin stresses Starmer's discomfort with speaking about his family and personal life, though this can't be that acute given how often they appear in his speeches.

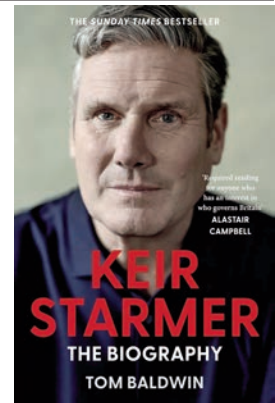
And though Baldwin has an eye for a good anecdote, his tone often veers into the overly defensive. He is forever anchoring Starmer's blunders in the context of personal tragedy. He rubbishes criticism as snobbery or conspiracy theory. Starmer's strategy is formed of three stages: proving his party has changed from the Corbyn

era, demonstrating the Tories are not fit to govern, and then giving people a positive reason to vote Labour.

Baldwin acknowledges that the third stage is potentially compromised by his fixation on "responsible government", itself a product of stage one. Yet Starmer's insistence on keeping to Tory spending plans will hinder his ability to make any meaningful difference to public services. To emphasise that the party has changed, Starmer welcomed the hard-right Tory MP Natalie Elphicke into Labour. It seems an odd way to prove the Tories are unfit to govern.

More still, his abandonment of his own leadership campaign pledges displays an erratic reactionary bent. His statement that Israel "does have that right" to cut off water and power from Gaza, which he later claimed he never meant, despite it being on tape, was followed by a contradictory defence of the principle by Emily Thornberry. Labour's rule book now also states that "neither the principles of natural justice nor the provisions of fairness... shall apply to the termination of party membership". So much for human rights.

So far, Starmer has evaded much scrutiny of these worrying tendencies. But will he still be able to rely on media compliance now he's in government?



# Apartheid exposed

I very rarely miss an exhibition at the Photographers Gallery, which is just off Oxford Street, central London. The UK's first gallery dedicated to photographic art. It's always cutting edge, but accessible, and always implicitly or explicitly political. In this case very explicitly political.

*House of Bondage* is a retrospective on the work of Ernest Cole. A black South African, with an interest in photography from a very young age. He became radicalised through mixing with dissidents and anti-apartheid activists, and, from the early 60s he set out to record the daily life of his people. In 1966 Cole fled South Africa, smuggled out his photographs, and settled in New York:

"Three hundred years of white supremacy in South Africa have placed us in bondage, stripped us of dignity, robbed us of self-esteem, and surrounded us with hate," he wrote in the introduction to his photobook *House of Bondage*. First published in 1967, it exposed viewers around the world to the many forms of violence embedded in everyday life under apartheid—a government-sanctioned system of spatial segregation on the grounds of race.

Working methodically and at times in secret, Cole traversed the country to



26 Labour Briefing

**Culture Culture** Steve Price recommends *House of Bondage* at the Photographers Gallery, London, which runs until the 22nd September.

e x p o s e  
 apartheid's  
 forms of economic oppression.

A hundred photographs, organised under headings that speak for themselves -

Nightmare Rides, Education for Servitude, Heirs of Poverty, Banishment, African Middle Class, Religion, The Mines, Police and Passes, Segregation, For Whites Only, Master and Servant, Shabeens.

The images are all black and white. Appropriately. There's a room which talks about the anti-apartheid movement in London. Many of Cole's images were used by the ANC, and the wider protest movement. I asked my friend Gill McCall if she would visit the exhibition, and give me her impressions:

"I spent my first 17 years as a child in Apartheid South Africa, 1952-1969, before coming to the UK. What I saw today was an accurately painful pastiche of the memories branded into my memory.



build in me, a sense of inevitability, as each aspect of the exhibition exposed another raw nerve of that tortured society.

"It came flooding back, childhood memories; our lived experience, as privileged Whites but where my dad had been surreptitiously involved in the ANC struggle: the moral dilemma; the sharp loss of innocence as a child trying to make sense of a sick society... the oppression, the brutality, the fear..."

The contemporary relevance wasn't lost on me. Many of us consider Israel to be an apartheid state, and many of their dehumanising modes of oppression can be seen here. The boycotts helped to bring down the disgusting apartheid regime in South Africa. We need a massive BDS campaign to shame Israel, and bring about liberation for the Palestinian people.

"A growing wave of sadness began to



### Whoops!

The narrow victories of some of its most favoured acolytes has understandably put the wind up Labour HQ. The likes of Jess Phillips and Wes Streeting crawling over the line with 500-vote majorities must have had the leadership biting their fingernails down to the elbow.

Now it seems London's *Evening Standard* 'newspaper' shared their angst. When it published charts of the election results, somehow they forgot to include Leanne Mohammad's votes on the chart for Ilford North.

Their graphic showed the People's Wes with a healthy majority over - the third placed Tory. After complaints, they had to print the full results, which some consider to be the job of a so-called news organisation.

At *Briefing*, we're just happy we live in a free country with a free press, unlike those poor benighted Russians with their state-controlled media.



### Clive versus Charles

On taking their seats in the new Parliament, MPs have to take an oath of allegiance to the King. In a move that has probably made him a marked man in the eyes of Sir Keith, Clive Lewis took the oath - but made it absolutely clear that he was taking it reluctantly and that he hoped that one day, Britain would be a republic and drop all this feudal nonsense. Great job, Clive!



### They seek him here, they seek him there

We've heard of paper candidates, but in the July election 'political party' Reform seem to have taken it to the next level. It would appear that Reform stood up to 60 candidates who don't seem to, um, how can we put this, actually exist.

When local people have investigated the name put forward as a Reform candidate in their area, they have been unable to find any trace of them online. Not a photo, not a CV, nothing.

There are reports that Reform parliamentary agents have complained that they never met their 'candidate'. In the south west, a regional campaign manager posted on Facebook that the important thing was to vote for the Party, not a name, and that if Reform were to win a certain seat, then a local person would be chosen to represent it. *After* the election, which as far as

*Briefing* understands is illegal.

The alleged 60 ghost candidates picked up 280 votes between them. Some commentators have suggested that this could be a ruse to increase party funds. Short money, named after a previous Labour Deputy leader, is paid to opposition parties on the basis of the votes they get in a General Election.

And of course, Labour won many seats where Reform split the Tory vote. Nevertheless, *Briefing* is sure that the new PM will be demanding an investigation.

### Tombstone vote

Tactics are important in an election. Parties have to decide which voters they want to attract, and target their message appropriately. The Labour leadership decided long ago that they wanted Tory switchers to deliver an election victory, so that's who they went after. 'Labour's changed, you know, now we're Tory-lite. It's safe to vote for us now.'

And it worked! 1.1 million 'hero' voters switched from Tory in 2019 to Labour in 2024. However, according to provisional results from YouGov, even more Tories, about 1.4 million, actually died. And about 2 million young people, first time voters, abstained. So chasing a vanishing demographic, and ignoring one which could be enthused to vote for a radical Labour message, as they were in 2017 (Labour got 3 million more votes then) maybe doesn't look quite so clever after all.





## BEHAVING BADLY

### Christine Shawcroft

Apparently, when Napoleon was thinking of appointing new generals he used to ask the potential candidates, "Are you lucky?" I'm assuming they all said "Yes" anyway, it would be a pretty silly would-be general who said, "No, I'm afraid not sir, I often drop my toast and it always lands jam side down." History is silent on how Boney used to distinguish between the genuinely lucky and the unlucky liars. Maybe he couldn't, and that's how he met his Waterloo.

But I'm sure none of them could even have dreamed of the luck of Keir Starmer. To become Leader of the Labour Party at just the time when the voters are sick to the back teeth of the Tories! To win a stunning General Election victory with *fewer* votes than your hated rival got in the last two elections! It's less likely than winning the Lottery.

Of course, the new PM will counter that it wasn't just luck, and that he made his own luck anyway. And who could argue with that? Anyone can see that there are laws of political gravity, and that after a while what goes up must come down. Timing your bid for the leadership is absolutely crucial. Maybe he took advice from Gordon Brown.

It may be that Gordon told him that supplanting a leader isn't the main problem, what you need to do is make sure that the leader doesn't win an election and isn't Prime Minister when you start sharpening your knife. After his nasty shock in 2017, when Jeremy came within 2000 votes of

Downing Street, Starmer took careful note. Such a thing must never happen again. But how to bring Jeremy down yet win the affections of party members in order to take his place as leader?

Ah yes, Brexit. A gift from the gods. Many members, including most of the left, were harbouring the delusion that *another* Referendum would produce a different result, so harangued Jeremy with demands that he call for a 'People's Vote', something which he was quite unable to deliver, not being in charge of the country, even if it had been a good idea anyway. Which it wasn't.

Because the other benefit of the gift that keeps on giving was that most of the Red Wall seats which we need to win a General Election had voted heavily for Leave. Appearing to want to reverse Brexit drove them into the arms of the Tories, which lost us the election and caused the longed-for resignation of the party leader. Clever, eh?

I can hear you groaning from here. 'Why does she keep banging on and on about this? It's over,' I can hear you saying. And you're right, it is. Now we have to look to the state of the party. And it isn't looking pretty. Hundreds of thousands of members, having believed Starmer when he said he would keep Jeremy's policies, voted him in then left, disillusioned. Many have been expelled or suspended, of course, but the victims of a purge which would have made Stalin blush are far outnumbered by

those who just upped and left of their own accord.

Lately, hundreds of members of various CLPs have left in order to support independent candidates. And I have to say I sympathise, up to a point. It's gut wrenching when a well loved, hard working MP or democratically selected candidate gets done over by the hard right. But what state have Chingford and Islington North, to name but two, been left in by this mass exodus? Within a couple of years we will be selecting candidates for the 2019 General Election, and what chance have we got of getting decent ones in, when most of the left have gone?

During Apsana Begum's campaign, when our right wing CLP officers went to help in North Durham (honestly), we were helped out by members from Islington who were extremely concerned that, come the council selections next year, left councillors could find themselves deselected. Ex members turned up to the launch of Apsana's campaign to support her, but unless we can get them to see sense, they won't be there to support her in the next trigger ballot.

Pete Willsman says that the Right will always defeat the Left, because the Right are utterly ruthless and the Left are a bunch of snowflakes. He seems to be right so far. When Jeremy was elected leader, the right wailed and gnashed their teeth - then regrouped and reorganised. They didn't leave, they fought. And they won. When are we going to learn to do the same?