

# CHARTIST

For democratic socialism

#330 September/October 2024

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## Time for change

*Prem Sikka*

*Ann Pettifor*

*Labour economics*

*Paul Nowak*

*Workers' rights*

*Tanya Vyhovsky*

*US Elections*

*Peter Dorey*

*Farage and Tories*

*Bryn Jones*

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*Andy Gregg*

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*Palestine*

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## Editorial Policy

The editorial policy of CHARTIST is to promote debate amongst people active in radical politics about the contemporary relevance of democratic socialism across the spectrum of politics, economics, science, philosophy, art, interpersonal relations – in short, the whole realm of social life.

Our concern is with both democracy and socialism. The history of the last century has made it abundantly clear that the mass of the population of the advanced capitalist countries will have no interest in any form of socialism which is not thoroughly democratic in its principles, its practices, its morality and its ideals. Yet the consequences of this deep attachment to democracy – one of the greatest advances of our epoch – are seldom reflected in the discussion and debates amongst active socialists.

CHARTIST is not a party publication. It brings together people who are interested in socialism, some of whom are active in the Labour Party and the trade union movement. It is concerned to deepen and extend a dialogue with all other socialists and with activists from other movements involved in the struggle to find democratic alternatives to the oppression, exploitation and injustices of capitalism and class society

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the EB

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## Editorial Board

CHARTIST is published six times a year by the Chartist Collective. This issue was produced by an Editorial Board consisting of Victor Anderson, Robbie Bentley, Duncan Bowie (Reviews), Andrew Coates, Peter Chalk, Patricia d'Ardenne, Mike Davis (Editor), Kier Dhillon (Website Editor), Mary Southcott, Nigel Doggett, Don Flynn (Managing Editor), Chris Ford, Roger Gillham, Hassan Hoque, Peter Kenyon, Sheila Osmanovic, Bryn Jones, Julie Ward, Karen Constantine, Robbie Scott, Dave Toke

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## Letters – Georgia questions

### Wrong on Georgia

#### Gerard Killoran asks what's wrong with funding transparency

If you watch any of the BBC's political output then you'll be familiar with Kate Andrews, the economics editor of The Spectator, a position roughly equivalent in status to being the literary editor of The Beano. Previously Ms. Andrews appeared as a representative of the IEA, one of a galaxy of organisations based at 55 Tufton Street in Westminster. These shadowy groups all had in common the same right-wing viewpoints and an outright refusal to disclose their sources of funding. The BBC has come under a great deal of criticism for allowing groups who are clearly lobbying for clients such as the fossil fuel industry to do so behind a cloak of secrecy. Who could disagree with the principle that NGOs who want to influence our laws and political processes should declare all foreign funding.

Well it seems that Christopher Ford and Alex Scrivener disagree (Chartist #329). Despite Georgia having a democratically elected government (tellingly described as a 'regime' in the sub-heading) it seems they have no right to pass a law very similar to FARA in the USA, or indeed Part 4 of our own National Security Act 2023, known as the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme.

So, who are these NGOs, who are their foreign funders and how do they wish to influence Georgian politics? I've read and reread the article but there is nothing explicit only a reference to Alex Scrivener being the Executive Director of the 'Democratic Security Institute', an NGO based in Georgia. Nowhere on their website or LinkedIn page do they state their sources of income except for one of their projects which as they say has 'generous funding of National Endowment for Democracy (NED)'. What could be more democratic? Except the National Endowment for Democracy is not as democratic as its name suggests. In fact it is little more than a 'cut-out' or front organisation for the CIA. I recommend the following online article from the late William Blum, Trojan Horse: The National Endowment for Democracy.

**Gerard Killoran, Leeds**

### Pro-Russian authoritarians

#### Christopher Ford replies

Gerard Killoran is wrong - the so-called 'foreign agents' law is not comparable to laws in USA and UK, but a copy of the one adopted by Russia in 2012 used to crack down on civil society, targeting independent media, NGOs and free trade unions.

The pro-Russian, Georgian government is backed by some of the richest and most powerful people, is highly authoritarian, unleashing violence against protesters – targeting opposition in their homes.

The entire trade union movement in Georgia, funded by workers, opposes the 'Russia law'. But for Killoran none of this matters.

He writes Alex Scrivener is part of an NGO, whose funding source he does not know but claims they were once linked to a project that got money from National Endowment for Democracy. Which is a 'front organisation for the CIA'. That NED is state funded and subject to congressional oversight does not matter as we have the thoughts of William Blum – a conspiracy theorist and Putin apologist, who argues Russia does not seek domination of Ukraine, sees Soros and foreign donors behind democratic movements in the east with Russia as the victim.

We should recall that the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation funded by the German State funds the World Transformed and an array of left initiatives in East Europe. By this logic as foreign agents all should be suppressed and in Georgia this may happen.

**Christopher Ford, secretary ,  
Ukraine Solidarity Campaign**

**The original text in this correspondence  
been condensed and edited to fit space  
constraints while preserving the key  
points. Full text will be on [chartist.org](http://chartist.org)**

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**Cover by Martin Rowson**

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# Our International History 10

## Flora Tristan and Jeanne Deroin: Socialist Feminists

**F**lora Tristan was born in Paris in 1803, her father being a colonel in the Spanish navy and brother of the Spanish viceroy, her mother being French. After a failed marriage and giving birth to four children, having failed to claim her inheritance in Peru, she travelled through Europe, publishing in 1838 her travel narrative as *Peregrinations of a Pariah*. Covering her attempt to divorce her husband and keep her children it caused a scandal. A diary of her visits to London was published in French in 1842 and eventually published in English in 1982. This included sections on the Chartists, the Houses of Parliament, prostitutes, prisons, the poor of St Giles parish, the Jewish quarter, Bethlem hospital and infant schools.

She returned to France in 1834 and associated with artists and radicals, including Charles Fourier, Victor Considérant, Proudhon, Louis Blanc, Arnold Ruge and possibly the young Karl Marx. Her first pamphlet argued for better facilities for women travellers. This was followed by a petition to the chamber of deputies for the restoration of divorce and a second petition calling for the abolition of the death penalty, the latter being after a failed attempt by her husband to assassinate her. In 1843, she published her manifesto for socialism- *Union Ouvriere* (The Workers Union). The manifesto called for an international association to be funded by workers' subscriptions and for equality for women given their double exploitation at home and at work. She set out on an extensive tour of French cities to promote her ideas and sell her book, but exhausted by the numerous meetings including several hostile audiences, died in November 1844 at the age of 41. Her diaries of her last months were published posthumously as *Tour de France*.

**J**eanne Deroin was born in Paris in 1805 and was a seamstress. A follower of Saint Simon, she was also influenced by the feminist, Olympe de Gouges and saw marriage as equivalent to slavery. Rejecting the hierarchical structures of the Saint Simonian organisation, she joined the Fourierists, publishing the first women's journal in France - *La Femme Libre*. Qualifying as a schoolteacher, she brought up her own children and those of Flora Tristan. With the onset of the revolution in 1848, together with other feminist Fourierists, she set up a women's club - The Voix des Femmes. This was followed by a feminist journal *Politique des Femmes* and an association to provide mutual support for working women.

Campaigning for women's suffrage, in 1849 she was the first woman to stand for the legislative assembly, though unsuccessful. Deroin was seeking to convert cooperative

associations into worker unions which could control industry. However, in 1850, she was imprisoned and having returned to teaching on her release, continuing her feminist campaigns, but fearing re-arrest, she fled with her two children to London.

Living in Shepherds Bush as a teacher and seamstress, she published women's almanacs and supported local cooperatives. She set up a school for the children of French exiles. In the 1880's she joined the Socialist League, with William Morris giving the oration at her funeral in 1894.

Extract from Flora Tristan: *The Workers Union*.

*"Now the day has come when it is necessary to act. It is to you, and to you alone, that it falls to act in the interests of your own cause. That way lies your life... or your death from that horrible end which kills in every instant: poverty*



*and hunger."*

*"Workers, your condition in present society is miserable and distressing. In good health, you do not have a right to work. Sick, infirm, wounded or old, you do not have a right to hospital. Lacking everything, you do not have a right to beg, because mendicancy is prohibited by law."*

*"Workers, put aside all your petty rivalries of trade and, outside of your particular associations, form one compact, solid indissoluble Union. Tomorrow, immediately, may all hearts be lifted up spontaneously in a single unique idea. Union! May the cry of union resound throughout France, and in one year, if you steadfastly desire it, the Workers Union will be established. In two years you will have forty million francs of your own in the banks to build a palace worthy of the great labouring people."*



### Further Reading:

Schneider, Joyce - Flora Tristan: Feminist, Socialist and Free Spirit (William Morrow 1980)

Pilbeam, Pamela - French Socialists Before Marx (Acumen publishing 2000)

Corcoran, Paul (ed.) - Before Marx: Socialism and Communism in France 1830-48 (Macmillan 1983)

Grogan, Susan - French Socialism and Sexual Difference (Macmillan 1992)

Moses, Claire - Feminism, Socialism and French Romanticism (Indiana University Press 1993)

Crosse, Marie and Gray, Tim - The Feminism of Flora Tristan (Berg 1992)

Tristan, Flora - The Workers Union (University of Illinois 1983)

Tristan, Flora - The London Journal of Flora Tristan (Virago 1982)

Tristan, Flora - Peregrinations of a Pariah (Virago 1986)

# Change has to mean radical change

**A**ttlee went for it in 1945 with the formation of the modern Welfare State and the NHS. Wilson followed suit in 1964 with investment in state industries and new technology, equal rights and improved welfare. Both followed periods of almost 14 years of opposition to Tory governments that had shrivelled state spending, overseen cuts in living standards and restricted rights of trade unions and civil society organisations.

Labour achieved a landslide on July 5<sup>th</sup> winning 411 seats with a simple strapline - 'Change'. Starmer's post election speech called for 'renewal' and an end to Tory mess, chaos and incompetence. This would be a government presiding over a steady recovery of living standards, investment and rebuilding the social fabric. No increases in income tax or national insurance. No 'dash for growth'.

There was a manifesto commitment to reducing poverty and inequality. Instead we've had the scrapping of the universal Winter Fuel allowance and the continuation of the invidious, poverty-boosting two-child benefit cap.

Worse, seven MPs were suspended for six months for opposing the measure; a vindictive and unnecessary move given that Labour has a majority of almost 200 seats.

The legacy economic black hole of £22b is reason enough for real structural change argues **Prem Sikka**. Labour must end state capture by big corporations. Stricter regulation, ending tax havens, borrowing to invest, taxing the rich - in Starmer's words 'making those with the broadest shoulders pay more' - will be a winning way.

His Rose Garden speech at the end of August alongside the predicted budget from Rachel Reeves in October does not auger well for this path to recovery and renewal. Instead it looks like more austerity.

Whilst welcoming the record number of new women MPs **Ann Pettifor** argues for a wealth tax in addition to bringing the Bank of England back into public control as a means to boost an economy that works for people before profiteers.

The election victory was however paradoxical. Labour won with less than 35% of the vote. Many Tory voters stayed at home and Reform split the Tory vote share. The combined Tory and Reform vote in over 100 seats was bigger than the Labour vote. There was a low turnout, at 60% the second lowest of the century. Notably, Labour secured its lowest total of 9.6m votes - less than in 2017 and 2019 when Corbyn secured 12.8m and 10.2m votes respectively. Winning nearly 40 seats in Scotland was a boost but masks the bigger picture and danger.

These facts underline the importance of Labour building a base, winning over undecided voters and challenging right wing narratives on the EU or trade unionists for our problems. **Don Flynn** explains the folly of pandering to right-wing narratives on immigration. Meanwhile, **Peter Dorey** analyses the Tory Party dilemma: does it shift further to the right to steal Farage's show or does it return to centre right, one nation policies?

Our correspondents recognise that in some areas Labour has hit the ground running. TUC leader **Paul Nowak** acknowledges that the acceptance of Pay Review Body

awards to teachers, junior doctors and others is a positive move while pushing for the full implementation of Labour's New Deal for Working people in the first 100 days.

**David Toke** finds positive evidence in the formation of Great British Energy and steps taken by Ed Miliband to boost renewable energy. Equally, **Paul Salvesson** finds moves by Transport Secretary, Louise Haigh, to be going in the right direction, particularly with greater local powers for buses. **Victor Anderson** outlines four key challenges while **Caitlin Barr** emphasises the importance of delivering for youth.

The balance sheet is not so promising on housing. **Duncan Bowie** finds serious weaknesses in commitments to build 1.5 million houses and new social housing every year. Local government is still reeling from an almost 50% cut in central government grants over the last 14 years. Youth services, libraries, environment, housing, arts, education have all suffered says **Tom Miller**. Localism without funding is an empty pledge. **Mary Southcott** provides an in-depth review of Andy Burnham and Steve Rotherham's manifesto for greater democracy.

On Europe Starmer proposes a new and closer relationship while implying a serious review of the appalling trade deal delivered by Johnson's government; welcoming the European Political Community and an iron-clad commitment to abiding by the European Court is a start. **Philip Gough** underlines the damage caused by Brexit disappointing many who believed it would bring bountiful results to farmers, fisherfolk, the NHS and numerous other areas.

The French parliamentary elections saw the united left platform as the winner stemming the march of Le Pen's far right National Rally. **Andrew Coates** looks at why Macron is prevaricating on a new leftist prime minister.

In our International Supplement various writers review the importance of Labour adopting a new cooperative approach to working with European allies. **Paul Garver** provides an update on the US election campaign while Progressive Vermont Democrat senator **Tanya Vyhovsky** reviews the Harris campaign.

Two major international conflicts continue to dominate: Israel's genocidal war against Gaza and the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and Putin's equally ruthless imperialist aggression against Ukraine. **Andy Gregg** and **Mary Mason** make our ongoing case for an end to all arms sales to Israel (whether offensive or defensive), an immediate ceasefire and full withdrawal from Gaza and all occupied territories. Meanwhile we reprint **Ukraine Solidarity Campaign's** comprehensive pre-election statement. We urge all Labour MPs to get behind this appeal.

The march of far right authoritarian populists in Europe, India (as reported by **Kabul Sandu**) and with Trump in the US is a major threat to democratic socialist aims.

Labour in government has an opportunity to thwart these trends by taking radical action and like Attlee delivering progressive change in the UK without delay.

## Labour has an opportunity to thwart authoritarian trends by radical action



# Railways and Riots

**Paul Salvesson** is cautiously optimistic on rail initiatives

**A**fter a rather pessimistic view of Labour's transport offering in the last Chartist, I have to say, a few weeks into the new government, that there's grounds for cautious optimism. The Secretary of State for Transport, Louise Haigh, has got off to a good start with a determination to make a difference. The appointment of former Network Rail chair, Lord (Peter) Hendy, was an inspired choice of Starmer's. Getting someone in the top rail job who is highly respected and knows the industry back to front, is very good news.

In the last issue I said that a quick win for Labour would be to sort out the long-running dispute with Aslef over pay. Fingers crossed, there's a deal on the table which the union leadership is recommending to its members. It won't solve all the industry's HR woes but will make a massive difference. Rightly, the pay deal is 'without strings'. There are however some big issues around workplace practices that have to change – top of the list should be bringing Sundays into the normal working week. In the post-Covid era, leisure travel has grown significantly and lots of people want to travel at weekends. It's bizarre that Sunday working for train crew remains voluntary on most networks.

There are other thorny issues which need to be addressed, in a grown-up way. The doomed attempt by the Tories to close hundreds of station booking offices provoked a great win for effective campaigning, both by the unions and passengers. But what now? Several commentators made good arguments to re-invent smaller station booking offices as local hubs with a mix of ticket sales and travel information with retail services – the local station becomes a village shop. These ideas need to be revisited without the threat of closure hanging over them.

Another issue is the quaintly termed 'manning' agreement – every train, on most routes, must have a guard along with a driver. That's good for passengers and good for revenue. However, on many lines trains are being 'can-



**Rainhill station - looked after by the local community but supported by Liverpool City Region combined authority and Northern Trains**

celled' because of lack of a guard but actually run, without picking up passengers, to get back to depot. This is highly frustrating when you're stuck, as I was recently, with a two hour wait for a train because the previous two are shown as 'cancelled' but actually sail through the station empty. There needs to be a way of ensuring that in exceptional circumstances (e.g. staff sickness) trains can run as advertised 'driver only' without encouraging train operators to cut staffing levels.

On a more strategic level, Labour is pressing ahead with the creation of 'Great British Railways' which is welcome. However, the devil will be in the detail and what isn't desirable is the re-creation of a highly centralised structure which stifles local or regional initiative. Starmer has shown himself willing to give the existing – and new – combined authorities greater powers over services such as public transport. Greater Manchester, which already has control of the bus network, is looking to take control of some local rail routes. Liverpool City Region has been responsible for the Merseyrail electric network for

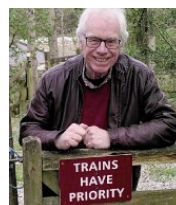
many years and wants to expand its reach to some of the non-electrified routes operated by Northern. West Midlands has similar aspirations for its own network.

That's all good; the combined authorities bring local accountability and knowledge but are big enough to benefit from a 'network effect'. That doesn't mean they should be responsible for everything: infrastructure is probably best left to Network Rail/GBR. But the operator (private or public) should be responsible to the combined authority, with local stations coming under their wing. It's worth trying out a few pilot schemes, learning from the experience of some of the light rail operations such as South Yorkshire Supertram, which now come under combined authority control.

It doesn't have to be just the urban networks. I've long argued for a more subtle approach to rural branch lines, looking at examples such as Switzerland where many lines are local authority owned and operated. If the combined authority model applied to an area such as Cumbria or the south-west, local railways could be integrated with bus networks, finally getting something like an integrated local transport network which feeds into the national rail network.

And finally...living in Bolton I was saddened, but not shocked, by the recent riots, stupidly termed by the BBC as 'protests against immigration'. Let's be clear, these were racist attacks on vulnerable people and communities. The police and courts were right to take a tough line and it was heartening to see a strong response from many communities in support of people and buildings that were attacked.

So far, so uncontroversial. However, I think the sentencing in some cases may do more harm than good. Locking up an elderly woman, probably with mental health problems, for posting admittedly highly unpleasant messages on Facebook might not be a good use of the prison system. A stern telling off with a fine and community service might have been a better solution. For now, towns like Bolton, Rotherham, Sunderland and elsewhere need to unite and champion what's good about their communities. **C**



**Paul's website is [www.lancashirelocomotary.co.uk](http://www.lancashirelocomotary.co.uk)**



# Threats to Labour's energy plans

David Toke on Labour and Green Party steps forward and back

**T**he wind industry has curtly rejected the opposition of the Green Party of England and Wales to new pylons in the East of England. Adrian Ramsay, the Green Party Co-Leader and new MP for Waveney Valley has called for a review of the pylon plan which is designed to connect offshore windfarms to the National Grid. Ramsay wants a review of the decision and argues for the connections to be done by an offshore transmission grid.

Peter McCrory, RenewableUK's Policy Manager for Networks & Charging, told me that:

'The idea that we're not putting a huge amount of electricity infrastructure offshore is incorrect. We are putting huge amounts offshore, including the transmission lines to take power from Scotland to England... Adrian Ramsay is calling for a review. But there have been reviews already.'

Not only will the extra offshore transmission system cost more than the onshore option but the offshore system will take rather longer to put in place. According to the analysis conducted for the National Grid Electricity Supply Operator (NGESO) it will also take at least until 2034. This is compared to the (Government) preferred onshore line option which should be ready by 2030. A new review will cause an even bigger delay. We have a climate emergency, and the logic of the wind industry is to want the quicker solution so that more power from offshore wind can be sent to the grid earlier.

It is all very well saying that the preparation for more offshore transmission should have been made a long time ago. However, we are where we are. The proposal that is ready to go is the onshore pylon scheme. Demands for a 'pause' in construction whilst a(nother) review is done seem oddly in contrast to the Green Party's call to attend to a climate emergency.

Meanwhile, back at the Miliband Energy Ministry, his proposals for 'Great British Energy' could radically reduce the costs of offshore wind compared to the existing way of building off-



Credit: Phil Platt/Wikicommons

shore windfarms in the UK. This will be very important for rolling out the large number of GWs of offshore wind that are needed to meet the exacting targets for clean energy by 2030.

Under the Great British Energy Company concept the initial pathway of the new offshore windfarms will be developed and owned by the state company, Great British Energy, and paid for by public investment. Projects will (I expect) then be sold off through a competitive tender system based on what price developers put forward to be paid for the electricity produced by the projects. The electricity will be sold to the state, as is done now through the 'contracts for difference' (CfD) system.

Essentially, the Government will be taking a lot of the risk currently facing private capital when they decide, under the present system, to buy a lease for some land on the seabed for an offshore windfarm.

That is a 'risk' investment for a start which the developers must pay. The Crown Estate may get the money, but in effect the energy consumer will be paying that money back to the developer later through their bills, plus a lot of interest for taking on the project 'risk'. Miliband's model is broadly similar to one that has been proved to be a winner in

Denmark. It should be a winner in the UK as well.

There is less good news on the home energy efficiency front. Green heating researcher and campaigner Richard Lowes warned that 'I've heard repeatedly that new members of parliament are being lobbied by the gas industry on hydrogen for heating which we all know is a terrible idea.'

Heat pumps are several times more energy efficient than conventional gas heating. Following this big lobbying push by the gas industry it seems that the new home energy building standards (the 'Future Homes Standard') will be delayed until next year. Miliband has promised that solar panels will be mandatory on new homes (good!) but has been silent about whether heat pumps will betoo.

Originally (as planned back in 2021) the new heat standards, to effectively mandate heat pumps in new build, were planned to apply to new building proposals from 2025. However, this timetable slipped under the Conservative Government, and it now appears to be slipping still further under Labour. Mandatory heat pumps for new buildings (where they are very cheap to install) are already in place in Scotland – so why not in England? **C**

**David Toke is Reader in Energy Politics at the University of Aberdeen. He is author of the recently published *Energy Revolutions – Profiteering versus Democracy* (Pluto Press).**

# The Captive State

**Prem Sikka** says reversing corporate capture of the state to pay for public services and a people's economy is essential for Labour

Credit: Peter Price

**G**overnment of the people, by the people, for the people" remains an idealist aim ever since Abraham Lincoln spoke those words in 1863. We are nowhere close to it. At best, neoliberal democracy is a conflict management system in which corporations and wealthy elites use their resources to colonise the political system to advance their interests.

No one ever voted for austerity, poverty, poor housing, low wages and pensions, corporate profiteering; cuts in education, closure of youth clubs, libraries and community centres; lack of healthcare or social care, premature death of their loved ones, or any of the other social ills bedevilling the UK. Yet these are inflicted upon the people by governments more concerned about corporate welfare. Indeed, parties compete to see who can craft a bigger dose of austerity and hand more public services to the exploitative private sector.

Corporate capture of the state is institutionalised. Corporations and wealthy elites fund political parties and legislators. Their ideological prejudices are presented by corporate funded think-tanks as policy options, eagerly embraced by political parties hungry for private money. Ordinary people never get a chance to shape policies.

In July 2024, the Labour Party won the UK general election. Just 33.7% of the share of vote gave it a huge majority in the House of Commons, even though it secured half a million fewer votes than in the 2019 general election. This precarious victory was built on corporate patronage. With the sun setting on the Tories, Labour was getting more in political donations than all other parties combined. It cashed in £19.5m from just 11 donors, including industrialists, hedge funds and gambling tycoons.

Corporations seconded staff and showered gifts to shape policies. Labour indulged corporate elites and lobbyists through meetings, dinners and lunches to reassure them that it would not disrupt their wealth and power accumulation. Lobbyists hired Labour MPs and staffers. Finance industry chancers such as BlackRock, Macquarie,

HSBC, Bloomberg, Lloyds, Brookfield Asset Management and Blackstone had easy access to the Labour leadership. Big accounting firms that routinely deplete the public purse by crafting tax abuses provided free staff.

The private sector does not donate money. It invests and expects a return. The main aim is to strangle unwelcome laws and regulation and secure favours. Chancellor Rachel Reeves proudly told business chiefs that "their fingerprints" could be seen all over the party's manifesto. The manifesto promised not to hike taxes on wealth and keep the public purse open for corporations. It promised economic growth but made no mention of how that would be equitably shared. The richest 1% has more wealth than 70% of the population com-

bined. The bottom 50% of the population owns less than 5% of wealth. Some 37% of total disposable household income in the UK goes to the top fifth of individuals, while 8% went to the lowest fifth. The median pre-tax wage of £28,584 is lower in real terms than in 2008.

Almost the first act of the newly elected Labour government has been to reaffirm the Tory two-child benefit cap, the biggest cause of child poverty. It affects some 1.6m children and deprives their families of £3,455 a year, subjecting many to hunger and hardship. Seven Labour MPs, lifelong anti-poverty campaigners, who voted against the government, had their whip withdrawn.

Pensioners came next. Without any commitment in the manifesto, the government has abolished the



**Prem Sikka is a Labour member of the House of Lords and emeritus professor of accounting at the University of Essex**

Winter Fuel Payment, worth between £100 and £300, for pensioners not receiving pension credit or other means-tested benefits. To receive pension credit a single pensioner needs to have an income of less than £218.15 a week and couples must have joint income of less than £332.95 a week. The UK state pension is less than 50% of the minimum wage. 2.2m UK retirees live in poverty. 2.5m skip meals and 1.3 million are at risk of undernourishment. Around 68,000 retirees die in poverty each year. Last year there were nearly 5,000 excess pensioner deaths from cold. Yet Labour has cut Winter Fuel Payments without any consultation.

Ever since the 1980s, the UK state has been restructured to become a major guarantor of corporate profits through privatisations, outsourcing and the private finance initiative (PFI). Labour promised to continue with this. Its manifesto promised to de-risk additional private investment i.e. guarantee corporate profits. A key vehicle for this is the £7.3bn National Wealth Fund for investment in public projects. Its aim is to secure £3 of private funds for every £1 of public cash, though no mention is made of the returns guaranteed to the private sector. It is a revival of the PFI scheme which ran from 1992 to 2028, under which the government secured £60bn of corporate finance with repayments of over £306bn. The £9bn Lower Thames Crossing may be the first PFI project under the Starmer government.

Following its manifesto promise, Labour is to bring rail passenger services into public ownership. However, rolling stock companies (ROSCOs), the most lucrative part of the rail industry, will remain in private hands. Just three companies own 87% of rolling stock which they lease out to train and freight operat-

ing companies. They are owned by financial services and infrastructure investment companies located in low/no tax jurisdictions. ROSCOs paid dividends of £409.7m in 2022-23 and had a profit margin of 41.6%. The Labour government will not disrupt this outflow of cash, the cost of which is ultimately borne by the public purse.

After the 2007-08 financial crash, the UK state provided £1,162bn of cash and guarantees (£133bn cash + £1,029bn of guarantees) to bail out banks. Another £895bn of quantitative easing was handed to capital markets. An EU-backed law sought to curb reckless risk-taking by imposing a cap on bankers' bonuses. In 2023, the Conservative government abolished the cap. Labour appeased its corporate backers by supporting the abolition and has promised not to reintroduce it. Senior bankers stand to get bonuses of ten times their basic salary.

Labour fully supported the Financial Services and Markets Act 2023 which reversed another pillar of the post-crash reforms. It requires regulators to facilitate the international competitiveness of the UK economy, and its medium to long-term growth. This is effectively a race-to-the-bottom with light-touch regulation which inevitably erodes a consumer protection mandate of the regulators. The Labour government is now putting pressure on the UK's financial services regulators to promote the growth of the City of London. Chancellor Rachel Reeves is set to carry out a "financial services review to go through the rulebook and tear up rules that are unnecessary or duplicative". The deregulatory move is an attempt to grow the finance industry described by the Chancellor as a "jewel in the crown of the UK economy". Between 1995 and 2015, the finance industry made a negative contribution of

£4,500bn to the UK economy.

There are some positive signs in that the government has approved a 22% pay settlement for junior doctors and public sector workers are in line for a 5.5% pay rise, though the real average wage in the UK is unchanged since 2008. The government has become a slave to its arbitrary fiscal rules and the Chancellor has referred to "tough decisions on welfare and spending", a code for another bout of austerity.

We can now see that it is business as usual. No matter what the outcome of any election, one group always wins: that is big corporations and wealthy elites. Their power ensures that corporate welfare programmes continue unabated whilst the welfare of children and pensioners is downgraded. Dreaded PFI has returned and private equity and hedge funds must be laughing all the way to the bank. Good purchasing power for the masses is essential for any sustained economic revival but Labour has not indicated any plans. Corporate takeover of the Labour Party is already delivering huge dividends for its backers. But this will only disenchant people and drive many into the arms of the far-right extremists. A change of course is urgently needed, but that requires Labour to stand up to organised corporate interests.

It is appropriate to end this article with a quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln: "I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country... corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed." **G**

## Printer ad

# Starmers' headaches

**Victor Anderson** looks ahead at the difficulties for the new Labour Government

**T**he new government hit the ground running. The sheer number of bills announced by the King's Speech (35) is evidence of that. So is the close continuity from the Shadow Cabinet to the Cabinet, with very few being moved except where members lost their seats at the election. They haven't just been spending their time opposing: they've been preparing for government, and with only a few exceptions, have avoided the drama of being pitched into jobs as Secretaries of State which they haven't prepared for. There have also been some good immediate decisions, such as Ed Miliband changing the rules for onshore wind and stopping the process of issuing new North Sea oil and gas licences.

No-one knows how the next five years will unfold, but it is obvious that the initial claims to have brought back 'stability' will face severe challenge as the new government tries to cope with a whole series of difficulties.

First Past the Post has put them in the paradoxical situation of having an enormous parliamentary majority without corresponding public support. Labour's vote share was only 34%. Even that overestimates its positive support, because it is clear that the shift in votes was due more to an anti-Tory vote than a pro-Labour one. The rise in Labour's share of the vote compared to 2019 (1.7%) was less than one-tenth of the fall in the Conservative share (19.9%). The huge rise in the number of Liberal Democrat MPs also suggests a clear desire to vote against the Tories, using whatever party looked best placed to defeat them.

That may not matter much until we get a lot closer to the next general election. What is going to matter is on one hand the strength of the Labour majority in the Commons and on the other hand the possibly insoluble problems which may catalyse opposition and eat away at that majority.

First (I put this first because it is complacently played down by the mainstream commentators) is the consequences of the climate crisis. Despite 28 CoPs and much target-setting, the world is still heating up and we have seen increasingly



**Thames Water at work – easy ride from Labour**

severe floods, droughts, hurricanes, melting ice and rising sea levels. It is impossible to believe that this won't have major consequences for the UK over the next five years. The decarbonization agenda will at last be moving forward with Ed Miliband at the Energy Department. But there needs to be an adaptation agenda to go with it, to tackle two particular problems. One is the flooding of infrastructure, including the railways and in some cases power stations, and of course housing. The other is food security, with problems both for UK agriculture and also for the continued ability to import food in the light of problems for food growing elsewhere. Where are the plans?

Second (another underrated problem) there is the question of 'the new PFI'. The Private Finance Initiative was used by the Blair and Brown governments to reduce government spending in the short term by entering into contracts with the private sector, but at high cost over the long term. We may now be heading for a similar situation, after the Labour leadership boxed itself in over large areas of taxation. There will be massive reliance on private sector finance, including inward investment from overseas. This is not going to be forthcoming without the prospect of profit, and profits are in turn affected by regulation. Labour's reluctance to take a tough line on the private water companies can be explained by a desire not to discourage private sec-

tor inward investment in other parts of UK infrastructure. The price of this policy approach may turn out to be very high indeed.

Third (and more predictably) planning. The Government wants to make it easier to override local opposition to new housing and other developments. People invest a lot of time, money, and sense of identity in where they live and defence of one's local area is a powerful motivator. 'Nimbyism' will be tempting not only to the LibDems, Greens and Conservatives, but also for Labour MPs, especially as the election brought in many more Labour MPs in green belt areas than before. Keir Starmer is very committed to delivery but he is not an instinctive champion of local democracy, so it is not difficult to predict problems ahead, including for party management, as his planning agenda moves forward.

Fourth, there is the problem of growth. The Government is depending on growth to bring in increased revenue, having ruled out raising the rates of most taxes. Growth is hard to achieve and anyway unlikely to be achieved within at least two years. That is enough time for very mainstream Labour figures across the party to get very worried about local government funding, child poverty, public sector pay, upgrading the national grid, boosting the military, etc. These worries are not going to be confined to the people who used to be known as 'Corbynistas'. **C**

**Victor Anderson is a Council member of Global Justice Now and Chartist EB**

# Time to tax the rich

**Paul Nowak** sets out the case to boost worker's rights and living standards

**L**abour's historic election victory was a real moment of hope for working people.

After 14 years of Tory austerity, chaos and division, the new government has a mammoth task ahead. Pay has stagnated, living standards have fallen, insecure work has surged and our public services are falling apart. Rather than fix these problems Conservative ministers drove a divisive politics pushing blame instead on to migrants in boats.

Recent attempts by the far right, including street violence, to sow division and hatred among communities have brought home just how urgent the job of delivering change is.

The far right has preyed on the disaffection caused by Tory failings using lies to divide communities, spread Islamophobia and xenophobia, and incite violent disorder. The new Labour government has a chance to address the underlying problems that are being exploited by Farage and Tommy Robinson.

Our job as a movement is to unite workers, while together with Labour we must work to get our economy and workers' wages growing, address spiralling in-work poverty and insecurity, rebuild our shattered public services and tackle the politics of hate.

In its first 100 days, Labour has hit the ground running. Its new National Wealth Fund will channel investment into strategic growth sectors. The Green Prosperity Plan will help us deliver a just path to net zero, while foundation industries like steel are crying out for the prospect of a proper industrial strategy.

But growth alone is not enough: we need to ensure working people share in its proceeds through higher living standards. With over four million workers trapped in insecure jobs, it's clear our long experiment with a low-wage, low-rights economy has been a terrible failure. That's why trade unions have been campaigning hard for Labour to implement its New Deal in full – and why we welcome the employment rights bill.

The New Deal will be a genuine gamechanger. Day one employment



RMT Union members striking outside Kings Cross station

rights, a ban on zero hours contracts, an end to fire and rehire, fair pay agreements in sectors like social care, new rights for unions, and the repeal of the anti-union legislation will all benefit millions of workers. These measures will deliver a fundamental reset in the world of work, stopping good employers being undercut by the bad, and preventing rogue firms like P&O Ferries breaking the law with impunity.

Ministers have shown a willingness to face down siren voices who are seeking to delay and dilute this vital legislation. Stronger employment and labour rights will benefit workers, businesses and the economy. The naysayers were wrong about the minimum wage introduced by the last Labour government – and they are wrong about the New Deal.

Another key step will be repairing our crumbling public realm. Our schools, hospitals, prisons and other key services are on their knees and the Tories left a massive public sector workforce crisis. The long-running junior doctors' dispute is symptomatic of the way our services have been run down, with nearly 300,000 vacancies in the NHS and social care. Meanwhile, the number of teaching vacancies has more than doubled in the past three years. Patients, pupils and parents are all paying a catastrophic price for years of Tory neglect.

Labour's focus on growth will help boost the public coffers, and we welcome commitments to scrap tax breaks for private schools to fund new teachers in the state sector,

and to close non-dom loopholes to bring down NHS waiting lists.

But unions want the government to go further. Last year, the TUC called for a national conversation on taxing wealth to fund our services. There remains a strong case for policies such as equalising capital gains tax with the taxes paid on earnings. It's only right that those with the broadest shoulders pay their fair share.

Going forward, the trade union movement will work with Labour to deliver national renewal. There may well be moments of tension that come with being a critical friend, but our shared history and values will help us navigate the profound economic and social challenges ahead.

While it is for the Labour government to deliver the leadership Britain needs, the trade union movement faces a huge job too. We recorded a welcome 90,000 rise in our net membership last year, but we must do more to reach young workers and workers in the private sector.

We must do more to make our movement more representative, more diverse and more inclusive. Tackling discrimination against disabled and LGBT+ people, sexism and racism must be at the heart of our campaigning and bargaining work. With the far right a clear and present danger, our work on equality matters more than ever.

Trade unions play a unique role in uniting communities and challenging hate, and we will stand firm against those that aim to pit workers against each other.

The recent vote at Amazon may have been a setback, but we should face the future with confidence. Using every union-busting trick in the book, the American giant only prevented union recognition by the narrowest of margins. But our fight is not over: using new rights being delivered by Labour, we'll be going after bad bosses.

Welcome though the recent change of government is, cabinet ministers can't negotiate better terms and conditions and MPs can't hold every bad boss to account. Only we can give workers the collective voice, power and influence they deserve.

Solidarity to all! **C**



**Paul Nowak is general secretary of the TUC**

# Social renting critical

**Duncan Bowie** on problems for Labour's housebuilding ambitions

Rachel Reeves chose to focus her first speech as Chancellor on Labour's ambitions for housebuilding. This was followed quickly by announcements from Angela Rayner, in her role as secretary of state for housing, communities and local government (the 'levelling up' designation being dropped), and a series of statements of proposed policy, including a consultation version of a proposed revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Given housing and planning were not major issues in the election (other than in relation to the perceived impact of immigration), this was perhaps surprising, though it demonstrated the extent to which Labour had been developing its policies in the last few months and also showed the extent to which civil servants had been preparing for a change of government. Myself and many colleagues have in fact been busy over the last year or so briefing the then shadow minister (and now Minister for housing and planning) Matt Pennycook, on a number of policy changes discussed in *Chartist*.

That there is a housing crisis in the UK and that there is a lack of strategic planning (at least in England) is largely uncontested. There are different views on the appropriate solutions. The ambitions of the new government are welcome, but there are, to put it mildly, major challenges of implementation. The main headline has been Labour's target to build 370,000 homes a year. Labour's pre-election target was in fact 300,000, the same as that of the Conservative government, but the figure has been pushed up to the higher figure actually advocated by the LibDems. Average annual output over the last few years has been 228,271. The main constraint has actually been the lack of construction workers rather than shortage of sites or a lack of planning permissions.

What is however missing, as pointed out before, is any target for social rented homes – the previous figure of 90,000 a year was not included in the manifesto. This is partly because the Government does not know how an increased social rent programme is to be funded. It is rumoured that Rayner is seeking to double the housing

investment budget, but it seems highly unlikely that this will be included in Reeves autumn budget.

Many local authorities are actually cutting back their housebuilding programmes as they can no longer afford them. Rachel Reeves has apparently said it is not the state's role to build homes, though I always thought that councils were part of the state.

Labour's manifesto was very focused on promoting home ownership, blaming the Tories for the increased cost of mortgages. Labour even announced a 'freedom to buy'. The manifesto however did not include the previous ambition to increase home ownership to 70% (from the current 62%), which was both an inappropriate priority and undeliverable. What Labour is actually proposing is an extension of the previous government's mortgage guarantee scheme, which is great for building societies, but could be expensive for the government when mortgagees default.

Moreover, assisting home buyers who otherwise can't afford to buy, helps a few households in the short term but just adds to house-price inflation as it increases the competition for a limited supply.

On the private rented sector, Labour has rightly committed itself to bringing back the Renters Reform Bill, which fell when parliament was dissolved for the election. This will abolish section 21 (no fault) evictions, which is long overdue.

However, there are no proposals as yet to limit rent increases or initial rents for new tenancies. We also have to recognise that what would be even worse than the current rented sector, would be a reduction in private rented supply, given this is the only option for many lower income and middle income households. Limiting landlord security or revenue income leads to landlords withdrawing supply and without radically increasing social housing supply through new building or transfer of privately rented homes into council or housing association management, the situation becomes worse not better for many households.

The government has announced new mandatory housing targets for each council. The implication being that the government would inter-



Credit: Peter Price

vene if councils failed to deliver, though the form of intervention is as yet unclear.

There are however real problems with the approach. Firstly, each council target is based on a 0.8% annual increase in relation to the existing housing stock, with a further increase in areas where houseprices are very high in relation to incomes. This approach has no relationship to any assessment of housing requirements in an area, or to the development capacity within an area. The methodology has the odd effect of increasing the housing target in regions outside London, notably in the Home Counties.

This of course raises the issue of the Green Belt. The new Government is rightly suggesting that Green Belt designations should no longer be a justification for not meeting housing requirements, and that 'grey belt' sites should be developed, though the definition of 'grey belt' is very vague and will certainly be contested on a site-by-site basis. What however is missing is any recognition that appropriate sites (with transport links and social infrastructure) should be developed for housing meeting priority needs including social rented housing, and not just for speculative market development. It is not going to be easy for the government or for local authorities. Further detailed guidance on implementation, and most critically, a lot more public investment is needed if Labour's ambitions are to be realised. **C**

**Duncan Bowie is Chartist reviews editor. Among his published books is *Radical Solutions to the Housing Supply Crisis* (2018)**

# Rancour on the Right

**Peter Dorey** looks at the rise of Reform UK and the threat it poses to both Tories and Labour

In the 2024 general election, Reform UK won five seats, having been supported by 4.1 million voters, representing 14.3% of all votes cast. The seats won were Ashfield, Boston and Skegness, Clacton, Great Yarmouth, and South Basildon and East Thurrock. In Ashfield, the victorious Reform UK candidate was Lee Anderson, who had recently defected from the Conservatives, having won the seat in 2019. Meanwhile, in Clacton, much of Reform UK's support was doubtless due to the candidature of Nigel Farage, who had announced his return to leadership of the party after the formal announcement of the election: hitherto, Farage had indicated his intention to spend time in the United States to support Donald Trump's Presidential election campaign. Reform UK also finished in second place in 98 constituencies, often pushing the Conservatives into third place, whereupon Farage boasted that the party (or plc?) would now be targeting the Labour Party.

## Who voted for Reform UK?

Support for Reform UK in the 2024 election was strongest among voters who had previously voted for UKIP in the 2015 election, for Brexit in the 2016 EU Referendum, and had supported either the Brexit Party or Boris Johnson's Conservative Party in 2019, determined to 'get Brexit done'. This support was strongest among distinct demographics. According to the detailed post-election survey conducted by YouGov, Reform UK's popularity was greatest among older, poorer, and less-educated (in a formal or academic sense), sections of British society: 18% of the 60-69 age cohort voted for Reform UK, compared to 9.5% of the 18-29 age group.

In terms of socio-economic status, 20% of the working class supported Reform UK, compared to 11% of the middle and professional classes. Educationally, 23% of those with GCSEs (or no academic qualifications) – ie, who had left school at 15 or 16 – voted for Reform UK, compared to 8% of those who had a university degree. There was also a discernible gendered division, with 17% of men supporting Reform UK compared



Credit: Gage Skidmore

**Farage: – returns from US to target Labour**

to 12% of women.

There is clearly a considerable overlap between these demographic characteristics. For example, citizens with fewer academic qualifications are generally more likely to work in less well-paid jobs, and have fewer opportunities for career advancement and promotion (and the higher salaries this entails). Moreover, in the 1950s, only 3% of the population went to university, and most people left school at the age of 14 or 15 to work in a local factory, industry or shop. Hence there were few opportunities for today's older generation to pursue well-paid careers and professions, enjoy further/higher education, and experience other cultures via travelling overseas or 'gap years'. Instead, many of them lived and worked in the same town throughout their whole lives, and quite possibly developed a strong sense of community, coupled with a suspicion of 'outsiders' and dislike of social change.

In turn, many such citizens have been compelled, by lack of opportunities and material circumstances, to live in poorer areas characterised by cheaper, lower-quality,

housing, and fewer civic amenities or decent public services. This can then breed anger or resentment, which Right-wing populist parties like Reform UK exploit, by blaming such hardships on immigration and/or the out-of-touch 'liberal elite' who have supposedly abandoned the working-class.

## The attitudes and values of Reform UK supporters

Reform UK reflects a strong strain of cultural conservatism and social authoritarianism in parts of British (albeit primarily English) society, particularly among the working- and lower middle-class or petit-bourgeoisie. Another recent YouGov poll of Reform UK supporters found that:

- 85% believe that courts are too lenient when sentencing criminals.
- 78% believe that multiculturalism has been bad for Britain.
- 77% want the death penalty restored for some crimes.
- 69% think that people should not be legally permitted to change their gender.
- 61% believe that governments have done/spent too much to reduce carbon emissions.
- 60% think that welfare benefits in the UK are too generous.
- 51% believe that governments are taxing too much, and spending too much, on public services.

In effect, most Reform UK supporters are deeply unhappy with the ways that Britain has changed in recent decades, and are convinced that what liberals call 'progress' has actually been deeply damaging, and destructive of tradition; they want to turn back the clock to some imagined 'golden age', presumably in the 1950s.

However, although its socio-cultural conservatism and authoritarianism clearly places Reform UK on the radical/populist Right, its supporters also evince support for a few values and policies which are normally associated with the Left. For example, 73% of Reform UK supporters believe that ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth, and 71% think that utilities like energy, water and railways should be under public ownership. >>



**Pete Dorey is Professor of British Politics in the School of Law & Politics at Cardiff University. He has published extensively on aspects of British Conservatism, and Thatcherism. His latest book, *A Short History of Thatcherism*, was published by Agenda in 2023**

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**How Reform UK damaged the Conservatives**

The bulk of Reform UK's 2024 electoral support emanated from former Conservative voters who had been angered by the ousting of Boris Johnson (who had 'got Brexit done') and disillusioned by Rishi Sunak's premiership. One of the Hard Right's complaints of the Sunak government was that it was not truly Conservative, due to presiding over high(er) public spending and taxes, and failing to 'stop the boats'. There were also complaints that Sunak pandered too much to 'woke' issues and environmentalism, and thus ceded far too much ideological ground to the Left.

The extent to which Reform UK attracted the bulk of its support from the Conservatives is clear from comparing the latter's 2024 support with its support in 2019. In 2019, the Conservatives had won 14 million votes, which represented 43% of all votes cast, but in 2024, its support fell to just under 7 million votes, and a share of 24%, compared to Reform UK's 4 million votes, and 14% share. Although the Conservatives lost some support both to Labour, and the Liberal Democrats, the largest loss of votes was clearly to Reform UK.

In many constituencies, the Conservatives' loss of votes to Reform UK was sufficient to allow Labour or the Liberal Democrats to win the parliamentary seat. For example, in Redcar, the Conservatives won 12,340 votes, which was 6,471 fewer votes than they won in 2019. However, Reform UK won 7,216 votes, which enabled Labour to win the seat with only 379 votes more than it had won in 2019. This pattern was replicated in dozens of other seats, to the clear advantage of Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

**Reform UK and a new schism on the British Right**

The Conservatives now face a serious electoral and ideological dilemma. Many on the Party's Right are urging it to move closer to Reform UK to win back these lost votes by 2029, but the risk of this strategy is that the Conservative Party loses even more of its 'moderate' or 'One Nation' supporters to Labour and the Liberal Democrats. On the other hand, if the Conservatives seek to move back towards the centre-ground, Reform UK will probably attract even more support from those Tories who view such a shift as an abandonment or betrayal of 'true Conservatism'. The British Right now faces the prospect of years of bitter infighting, factionalism, and fragmentation. **C**

# Churchill's urinal and a people's bank

**Ann Pettifor says low tax revenues hampered by a low investment Tory legacy mean Labour has an uphill climb to tackle economic renewal and the climate emergency. Will chancellor Reeves take back control?**

**I**t was not just the election result. No, it was the clumsy attempt by embarrassed Treasury officials to dismantle Churchill's urinal in the new Chancellor's office. That story sent me off on an odyssey: straight back to the 1979 election - and a significant societal shift.

Back then only eleven Labour women MPs entered parliament - fewer than in 1945 and fewer than any post-war parliament since. It was a number that drove me into the arms of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, and the Labour Women's Action Committee (LWAC). Together we embarked on two decades of sustained campaigning - opposed by men on both the left and right - to increase the number of Labour women MPs. We began by mobilising grassroots support for changes to the rules, and then deployed the 'one woman on the shortlist' tactic before the 1992 election, and 'women-only shortlists' after 1993. In 1995 our campaign was successfully challenged by two men backed by Tony Blair; but soon after, the 1997 election showed how much progress LWAC had already made. 101 Labour women MPs entered parliament in that year. 27 years later, and 45 years after the 1979 debacle, 190 women entered parliament this July as Labour MPs - 47% of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

To top it all: Britain has its first-ever woman Chancellor in Rachel Reeves, who has refused to agree to the £8,000 cost of removing Churchill's urinal.

That is some vindication of grassroots, feminist power.

**Another, green societal shift**

This election has revealed another societal shift: growing grassroots pressure for a green transformation. Will Labour's economic conservatism match Ed Miliband's commitment to clean energy systems? Can the country be liberated from

an economic ideology that uses monetary policy to enrich the few, and 'fiscal rules' to impoverish the many and limit public investment? Above all: will the new Chancellor liberate the power of the state to mobilise the finance needed for the transformation of the economy away from fossil fuels?

Right now that is doubtful. Chancellor Reeves has trodden very carefully, and given every sign of an approach based on outdated economic orthodoxy. But, like so many women thrust into top jobs, she faces major challenges inflicted by her male predecessors. First, the mess that is the public finances. Second, the urgent need to settle public sector pay negotiations - a settlement she quickly financed, and must be commended for. Third, a populist and racist uprising whose leaders fully intend to destabilise the new Labour government. Fourth, the instability and imbalances of the global economy and the potential for another great financial crisis.

However the greatest challenge she faces is on her doorstep and is twofold.

First, it's the obsession of both the economics profession, the media and politicians with the public finances and fiscal policy. It's as if the government's finances are the be-all and end-all of economic policy. As if the British economy, and the international financial system that shapes much of it, are of much lesser significance. Above all, it's as if fiscal policy is the only economic tool available to the new Chancellor. That monetary policy is not, and cannot be a powerful tool at the disposal of elected politicians governing the British state.

The obsession with fiscal policy, and the blind spot for monetary policy suits the governors of two powerful state institutions- the Debt Management Office (DMO) and the Bank of England. Not just in the UK, but in all OECD countries.



**Ann Pettifor is Director of Prime Economics. She is also author *The Green New Deal* (Verso)**



Credit: HM Treasury

### Chancellor Rachel Reeves arrives at the Treasury

The CEO of the DMO – Sir Robert Steethman (succeeded this summer by Ms Jessica Pulay) - is barely known to economists, politicians and to the public. His, and now her institution plays a powerful and largely unaccountable role in setting the terms – rates and duration - at which the government borrows from both domestic and foreign capital markets. During World War 2, when the government needed to finance a destructive war, politicians could not afford to hand over this power to a third party. Instead rates were set by the Chancellor/Treasury in tandem with the Bank of England.

The governor of the Bank of England and members of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) make decisions ‘independently’ on the economy’s most important policy lever: the Bank rate of interest. Thanks to her predecessor Gordon Brown, that power is no longer available to the Chancellor.

First, some clarity. The Bank rate is not set by ‘market forces’. Instead it is set and varied periodically by a committee of men and women, the MPC. To my mind, it is the most important lever in the economy as it influences the price both government and the private sector pays to borrow - in order to invest. It is a lever fundamental to Britain’s recovery, and to the health of both public and private sectors. Yet it is a lever wielded by the MPC largely in the interests of creditors and hedge and asset management funds active in global capital markets.

It is not a lever that can be used by an elected government to help finance the urgent investment needed for the economic transformation away from fossil fuels.

#### What to do?

Currently the Bank rate is unsustainably high in real terms – 5%. It is far too high to encourage both private and public borrowers to raise Britain’s uniquely low levels of private and public investment.

And for Britain’s private and public debtors, repayment at that rate can be considered extractive, or usurious.

Finally, the brutal ratcheting up of rates has not brought down an inflation triggered by international supply constraints and commodity price speculation in global markets. Andrew Bailey, governor of the Bank showed his class war credentials when he wrongly blamed inflation on rising wages. Because of his institution’s flawed analysis, the Bank’s high, real rates will continue to stall ‘growth’.

#### Usurious lending

I follow the weekly announcements of the DMO, and if my calculations are correct, the institution raised about £26 billion from investors between the election on 4th July and its latest auction on 7th August. So the £20 billion ‘black hole’ in the public finances was quickly filled up. So far, so good. However, the horror story is this: the loans issued by the DMO this last month were made at what can be considered an exorbitant rate – 4.1/4% - 4.1/38% -

for debts repayable over periods ranging from one, to ten to thirty years. In other words, because of decisions taken by the BoE and DMO today, the British government will be repaying loans at those high rates for up to thirty years.

So while the new Chancellor faces the prospect of low tax revenues generated by a weakened, low investment economy, her chances of borrowing at sustainable rates of interest in order to increase public investment are scuppered by an institution more concerned with the interests of global capital markets (i.e. the City and Wall St.) than with the interests of the British people, and the need to tackle climate breakdown.

While the Chancellor has her attention focussed on the interests of the domestic economy, the governor of the Bank has his sights fixed on the interests of financiers in global capital markets.

While the Chancellor is elected to serve the interests of labour, the Bank governor serves the interests of wealth. The answer to this dilemma is straightforward. The Bank has to be re-oriented to serve the interests of those working and living in the domestic economy.

The best way to do that is to restore public, accountable authority over the Bank of England, and over the governors – all civil servants - on its payroll.

We’ve done it before. We can do it again. It’s the sort of challenge a strong woman confident enough to live with Churchill’s urinal, could rise to. **C**

# Moving beyond manifesto essential

After savage Tory austerity cuts, funding local councils is basic common sense says **Tom Miller**

**A**longside the landslide secured by the Labour Party in the 2024 General election, it is worth remembering that this was preceded by a Tory collapse in the local and mayoral elections just a couple of months beforehand. The Conservatives now only control six councils, having lost ten during that election. Labour controls 51, having gained eight, and all of this in the face of a one percent swing against the party.

Labour councillors have spent fourteen years campaigning against the ruinous austerity policies carried out against local government by Tory Westminster. A recent report from Kate Ogden and David Phillips from the IFS lays out the scale of the damage done. Funding fell in real terms by 26% on average, but the total fall in funding from central government was 46%, the remainder being offset by annual increases in Council Tax. Tory cuts to local government dwarf those suffered by central government departments, whose services are themselves often seen as being in collapse. I should add that the above statistics are only an average; poorer areas were hit considerably harder. Over a thousand Labour councillors now find themselves confronting austerity with a Labour government in office, itself elected on a platform of fiscal conservatism. Money can be found to ease up on local government, but without new ways of raising funds, Labour's fiscal conservatism will hold back action that is desperately needed to fix the country for some time, if not indefinitely.

The authored response to this self-imposed and widespread manifesto limitation does seem to be a welcome concession. Instead of relying on the politics of spending or investment, Labour seems most ready to tilt things leftwards where there are inexpensive "quick wins", or in addressing the politics of ownership and control.

This latter element is crucial and a welcome move, despite the party's fiscal conservatism. Labour has committed to lifting the Tory ban on municipal control of busses and bus routes, and to give mayors the power to create integrated transport systems – something that Labour led cities across the country



Credit: David Dixon/geograph.org.uk

## Bury Town Hall – bring back local control

have shown can work far better for passengers and the people working to keep them moving.

There are less specific commitments to deepen local devolution deals, and expand them into new areas. It would be helpful if the underpinnings of these were made more uniform, and the decision making giving rise to them made more transparent than the "secret lottery" we saw under the Tories.

Where the manifesto falls short is its pledge to introduce "new powers over transport, adult education and skills, housing and planning, and employment support." Sadly, these are areas where devolved and local government are already largely in control of the brief, except perhaps in the question of how schools are governed and funded (a must for return to local democratic control). Important areas with huge local impact are missing from the list.

Recent years have seen water companies torn to pieces for their appalling treatment of the environment and public, and failure to invest in anything like an adequate level of long term infrastructure. Thames Water has suffered an investment strike as the holes in the profit-making business model became clear, along with unmet liabilities, and the scope of action that would be required of government if it folds is recognised in Whitehall as a strategic national risk.

"What kind of government would let this happen?" is a question that

the public have already answered. However, if Labour allow itself to be limited to the fairly unambitious terrain in its manifesto, it will fail to deal with the answer to why this happened; utilities have been divorced from the people who rely on them and hitched to shareholders instead, under the assumption that the market will allocate money and work rationally. The result has been rivers of affluence and financial collapse.

Of course, a social democratic government needs to stand for more than this. To do so, we need to move beyond our manifesto, which represents a limit on our ability to carry out basic common sense.

Like rail, water supply and management is still largely carved into regional domains by the architecture of the initial privatisation process. Even those utilities which are not still serve definable regions and run into particular local concerns, like broadband speed and coverage in rural areas.

There is a clear case that they should be overseen by those who rely on them and potentially those who work within them, provided that this is on a not for profit basis. In most cases, there is a clear case for local control over the delivery side of the business. Whether it is done through local government collaboration or via cooperative means, the case for publicly controlled utilities is strong, and lacks a real alternative. Greater ambition is the only sensible answer. **C**

**Tom Miller is a Brent councillor and member of Chartists EB**

# Whatever happened to Social Democracy?

**Bryn Jones** examines the metamorphosis of a political creed under Labour plc

**I**nterviewed BBC Radio 4, Pat Mc Fadden MP, one of PM Starmer's inner circle, referred to Labour Party members as 'stakeholders'. This is an interesting choice of business jargon, redolent of the mindset of 'socially-responsible business', in which corporate managers look out on a distant hinterland of various interested parties: those who need to be kept onside but who have no formal rights or powers. It reveals views about Party democracy by those at the top of Starmer's clique.

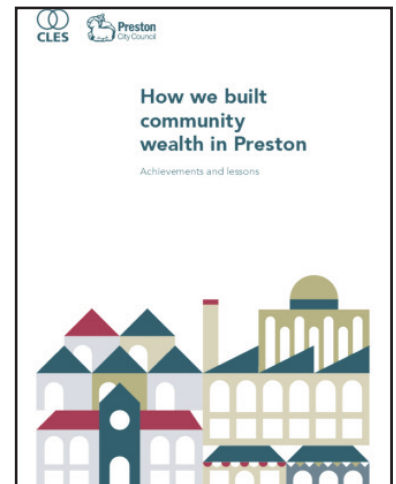
Party Conference is a useful sounding board but it has little direct impact on the leadership's actions. Indeed it's plausible to regard the current Labour Party as resembling a kind of corporate business. The board, i.e. leadership makes all the executive decisions – delegating a few to its operations team, a.k.a. the NEC – but bringing in the equivalent of 'non-executive directors': the increasing numbers of corporate and financial figures helping to shape policies. While other business magnates are taking on the role of investors through their weighty donations. Investors in corporations don't necessarily decide management's policies but if their investments are not being properly served they will cause a fuss or have a quiet word in the corridors of power: opportunities that are denied to the peripheral 'stakeholders'.

In contrast to this managerial outlook, the British version of social democracy aimed at spreading power through redistributive economics and public control of key industries, albeit through the existing Parliamentary system (see Chartist # 329). Labour in government seems to be applying a managerial approach to economic governance and decision making. Task forces and advisory bodies, crammed with business interests are being hurriedly formed. There are policies like prospective urban planning reforms that will side-line local 'stakeholders' – community groups and local councils. Democratic mandates seem to follow the logic of corporate governance. Elec-

tions resemble shareholders' meetings which aim to endorse the executive management. Ditto for governments, authorised by five-yearly general elections. By contrast social democracy had a general aspiration for wider democratisation: workers control, or at least representation, in the running of businesses or tenants' groups on housing estates. Although the TUC, for one, kept the flag of industrial democracy flying into the 2000s such voices have, in the argot of football crowds 'all gone quiet over there'.

Arch-technocrat Rachel Reeves, who described herself, relatively recently as a social democrat may be in need of some re-education in the principles of social democracy? For this didn't only mean Bismarckian 'cradle to grave' state welfare but the capacity to exercise democratic rights to shape such systems, albeit through traditional parliamentary democracy, and also extending these rights. Rachel's family background and PPE degree at Oxford would have schooled her in the basics of social democratic ideas. However, induction into economist roles at the Bank of England, and Halifax-Bank of Scotland via a masters course at London School of Economics would have required a mental make-over to the orthodox canons of neoliberal economics centred on the gods of competition, fiscal balances and top-down economic management.

As Chief Financial Officer to UK plc, Rachel has wasted no time in encasing the skeleton of British social democracy in neo-liberalism's fiscal straitjacket. The much needed and over-due pay rises for teachers, NHS and other public service workers are exceptions. As personal financial expert Martin Lewis has commented, means testing to replace an assumed right to winter fuel payments for all pensioners will bear heavily on many just above the threshold and about 800,000 eligible but not claiming pension credit. Moreover, the energy regulator, Ofgem, is predicted to permit a 10% rise in energy prices from October via the price-cap mechanism: which protects gas and electricity firms' prof-



**Preston's 'community wealth building' – an example of 'The Everyday Economy'**

its.

So much for social democratic welfare; what about the 'democracy' element? Labour has made ambiguous noises about decentralisation of power. For example, the Manifesto proposed putting 'communities' and councils in charge of some renewable energy schemes. Regional mayors have also been promised more powers over public transport, housing and some areas of education and training: a progressive move if regional mayors are actually more accountable than Westminster, or local councils. When it comes to Labour's mantra of raising prosperity through growth, Labour plc ought to take seriously the expansion of 'community wealth building' successfully launched in Preston and parts of Wales and the local 'foundational economy'. An approach that Reeves herself endorsed back in 2018, as *The Everyday Economy*. These initiatives extend some democratic influence over local economies; as local elected representatives can play a major role: tackling rootless, anti-social capitalism 'from below'. Starmer's board could spin-off some autonomy and control to such local political 'subsidiaries'? Their economic promises to voters may well be achieved more quickly in this way than through grandiose hi-tech projects needing years to benefit local communities. **C**

**Bryn Jones is a member of Chartist EB**

# Gaza – break with Washington consensus

Labour needs to radically reorient its political approach to Israel argues **Andy Gregg**

If Labour is to even begin to win back support from large sections of Muslim and pro-Palestinian voters then Starmer and Lammy will have to break clearly from the Washington consensus on Gaza and forge an entirely different course. However, any attempt to set out to break with the pro-Israeli positions that they have hitherto supported would necessitate a comprehensive break with the Pro-Israeli views of large parts of the Labour Party. Before the election more than a third of the PLP were members of Labour Friends of Israel and the support for the Jewish Labour Movement is considerable compared to the support for Jewish Voice for Labour who represent those in the Jewish community who are anti-Zionist and critical of Israeli settler colonialism. A substantial number of JVL members have already been thrown out of the Party for alleged ‘anti-semitism’!

Lammy has made a few small gestures recently, promising to restore funding for the UNRWA in Gaza and to consider recognition of a Palestinian state at some unspecified future time. These are nowhere near what is needed to heal the rift caused by Starmer’s unequivocal support for Israel shortly after October 7th. His disastrous interview on LBC in which he appeared to suggest that Israel had a right to limit essential supplies, including water and electricity, to Gaza as part of Israel’s right to self-defence has opened up almost incurable wounds with large sections of the Muslim and Pro-Palestinian Left. In addition, Starmer and Lammy are far more likely to respond to the highly organised pro-Israeli lobby than to any pro-Palestinian positions. More recently, even the mildest threat by Starmer to consider an arms embargo on Israel has been condemned by Labour Against Anti-Semitism as exacerbating anti-Semitism.

Any real attempt to change the situation in Gaza and the Occupied Territories would have to include an immediate call for a ceasefire

followed by Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a recognition and condemnation of the potentially genocidal nature of the IDF’s outrages in Gaza and Israeli Settler pogroms in the Occupied Territories. The Government’s rather vague recognition of the powers of the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice but their denial of the Chief Prosecutor of ICC’s call for the arrest of members of Israel’s Government (as well as Hamas) are a clear concession to recent US lobbying. Unequivocal support for the ICC and ICJ and an agreement to arrest Netanyahu and Gallant if the opportunity occurs should be the basis of UK policy.

## Any real attempt to change the situation in Gaza includes an immediate call for a ceasefire

An explicit condemnation of the violent abuse faced by Palestinians in Israel’s prisons should also be made. B’Tselem, the highly respected human rights group, has concluded that Israeli prisons should now be designated as ‘torture camps’. Appeals for the release of Israeli hostages held in Gaza should also acknowledge the rather larger number of Palestinians (nearly 10,000) held effectively as hostages in these dreadful prison conditions many under administrative detention without charge - a number of whom are children. Reliable estimates suggest that up to 40% of Palestinian men have been arrested at least once in their lives and this use of imprisonment is a key part of the continuing Israeli occupation.

Serious disturbances occurred recently when Israeli Right-wing protesters stormed two IDF bases after nine reservists were arrested following an army investigation

into the ‘substantial abuse of a Palestinian detainee’. Some Israelis are now effectively rioting over the right to rape Palestinian prisoners without any intervention of the law. The immediate recognition of an independent Palestinian state (with the same rights to self defence as any other UN member state) will also have to be on the agenda along with an end to any arms sales to Israel. There should be a pledge of substantial aid to rebuild Gaza and a comprehensive boycott of Israeli settlement goods leading to a wider set of sanctions on Israel if it doesn’t move immediately to a ceasefire. A key issue is to support findings of the ICJ that the occupation of the West Bank is illegal and that all settlement activity needs not only to cease but be disbanded. The ICJ judgment has called on states to stop aiding Israel’s unlawful presence in Palestinian territories.

Will Starmer and Lammy do any of this? Of course the Labour Government will be under some pressure to act from Independent MPs as well as Greens and Scottish Nationalists (and even Lib Dems) but its huge majority and its continual threats to any Left or pro-Palestinian MPs that remain in the PLP make this highly unlikely.

This of course means that, in the long run, the Labour Party has lost significant support from two of its most loyal constituencies - Muslim voters and Pro-Palestinian internationalists on the Left. Both of these groups hitherto supported the Party but are now looking to vote Green or Independent. Whilst Labour has its current huge majority in Parliament this will not be a major concern for it. But as times get harder and the electoral map tightens, the loss of these core sections of its traditional support will become increasingly damaging. Conversely the Conservative Party is already outbidding Labour in seeking the support of hard-line pro-Israeli opinion (both Jewish and non-Jewish). For all of these reasons the Labour Government’s continuing largely uncritical support for Israel is not in its longer term interest. **C**

**Andy Gregg was  
Director of Race  
on the Agenda**

# Voice for Palestine

**Mary Mason** asks what impact can the Independents have?



Credit: Tashim News Agency

**T**he General Election was a huge victory for Starmer, elected on a promise of creating change, kickstarting economic growth, reforming Britain's economy, and improving the NHS, schools, and public services without raising taxes.

The General Election wasn't all good news though. The priority to get the Tories out was mixed with wariness about Starmer's authoritarian leadership alongside horror at the Labour Party's ongoing support for Israel as it commits genocide against the Palestinian people.

The Party has drawn a clear line between those who support the Israeli Government and those who call for the recognition of an independent Palestinian state, an immediate ceasefire, and divestment from companies engaged in selling arms to Israel.

Perhaps most cynically, the smear campaign against protestors as supporters of terrorism, has been used to attempt to isolate and reduce the right to protest, the very essence of an open society.

Independent Socialist Councillors and MPs grew primarily from

the Labour Party's refusal to allow debate on Palestine and to label dissenters as antisemitic. It was the pivot on which Starmer spun to eject international socialists from the party. A large number were Jewish people, who rejected Zionism, and were expelled from the party for anti-semitism.

Independents, running a campaign on support for Palestine, gained large support from Muslim communities who for the first time turned away from Labour. They were elected with a commitment to support international law and solidarity with Palestinians in struggle. But they also support the right to free speech, to democratic decision making and to reversing the draining of funding from local services, and the NHS. Independent MPs are organising as an alternative group in Parliament; while locally, Independent Councillors are meeting together to support communities in struggle.

The rise of the independent socialist voice provides a platform for community organising, community representation and national support for peace, justice, and equality. Locally, Com-

munity Assemblies are being planned, aiming to hold elected representatives accountable to their constituents with the aim of building a voice for all.

In Haringey discussion about Palestine and Israel in the CLP and the Council has been ruled out of order. A Council Pensions Committee meeting heard petitioners seeking divestment from arms companies, but the minutes of that meeting were then agreed behind closed doors and no further discussion was allowed.

But our community, like so many others, are organising. Haringey Community Action Network (HCAN) has been growing for the last two years. It brings together local community campaigns in the Borough, including Migrant Support, Right to Food, anti-racist campaigns, Trade Unions and Climate campaign groups. It is a vibrant and lively organisation, dedicated to claiming its place and its power in Haringey. Haringey's Independent socialist group councillors actively support HCAN and work closely with community organisations. We are listening and building an alternative vision for British politics. **G**

**Mary Mason is an Independent Socialist Haringey Councillor**

# What has gone wrong with Brexit?

**Philip Gough** on the fantasies and realities

It can be argued that the UK's exit from the EU happened by accident. Feeling threatened by UKIP and the euro-phobic wing of the Tory party, David Cameron announced a referendum on our membership in 2015 assuming this would put the issue to bed for a generation. The unexpected result and the way it has played out has caused a huge disruption to the UK's post-war geopolitical trajectory.

Vote Leave and its key players deliberately kept vague what Brexit could actually mean. In a classical case of populism, people were invited to believe it could bring whatever they wished for, irrespective of whether it was realistic or not. So on an individual level the average Brexit voter must inevitably feel disappointed – Brexit has not resulted in an extra £350m a week for the NHS; food prices have not come down; manufacturing has not been reinvigorated; a quantity of well-paid, secure jobs for 'ordinary' workers did not suddenly materialise; and there is no tangible feeling of being freed from an oppressive (and imagined) tyranny.

At the top of the Vote Leave hierarchy, while encouraging the notion that individual dreams could come true, there were broader policies being promulgated. The ongoing problem for the Brexit project is that these 'policies' were not consistent across, for instance, the official Vote Leave campaign and Nigel Farage's alternative. There was also no requirement for them to be costed or tested for feasibility, and most of the campaign's leaders knew they would not have to implement them if they won.

Much was made by Vote Leave of removing the UK from the EU Customs Union – allowing the UK to negotiate its own trade deals. However, the reality has been sobering. The Office for Budget Responsibility has estimated that new deals with New Zealand and Australia will add 0.08% to UK GDP over 10 years. The holy grail of a deal with the US is now so remote it can be discarded. Agreements with countries like Japan simply duplicate the ones we had through membership of the EU.

Veterinary checks and export health certificates - now the UK is outside the EU single market -



Credit: Suffolk for Europe

mean extra costs and delays for UK food producers which export. Many have given up exporting.

Fishing was held in 2016 as an exemplar: after Brexit, the UK would regain control of its waters. But the leave campaign failed to see, or was happy not to reveal to our now extremely disappointed fishing communities and the wider public, that fishing is a complex and delicate structure - the UK could not impose an exclusion zone around its coast line and still expect to be able to fish in other countries' waters, and indeed sell their fish in those countries.

Immigration was a cornerstone of the referendum debate in 2016. It was claimed an exit from the EU would drastically reduce the number of people coming to live in the UK. According to Vote Leave this would mean shorter NHS waiting lists and easier access to accommodation with affordable rents. However, net migration has more than doubled from about 330,000 in 2016 to more than 700,000 in 2023.

One of the most shocking aspects of Brexit has been the damage done to the education and arts sectors. Belatedly the UK is back in Horizon, the EU's scientific research programme which as EU members we benefited from more than any other country. But damage continues to be done: musicians and actors no longer have the freedom to tour for long periods or take up longer posts in EU countries, and we have withdrawn from Erasmus which gave generations of young people support to study abroad. Young EU citizens are deterred from studying here by what are now much higher fees. Language studying at A level and in universi-

ties continues its steep decline.

Far from being 'global', Brexit has spitefully inflicted insularity on us.

The first weeks since their election landslide have shown that Keir Starmer and his government are serious about addressing the many serious flaws contained in the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

At July's European Political Community summit held in Blenheim Palace, Starmer could not have made it clearer to the other 46 members that the UK is back as a serious and engaged European partner, "We want to work with all of you to reset relationships, rediscover our common interest, and renew the bonds of trust and friendship."

So what has 'gone wrong' with Brexit? Many people living in economic jeopardy, enduring poorly performing public services damaged by austerity, were sold Brexit as a silver bullet. It could never satisfy the expectations placed on it by individual voters. Overseas money, the agendas of various press barons, a number of shadowy think-tanks, and manipulation of social media all helped bring a result which Brexit's backers (unbeknown to most Brexit voters) hoped would lead to a deregulated, low-tax, small state 'Singapore on Thames' indifferent to its voters' needs. This 'vision' has collided with the reality that, far from being a world power able to operate unilaterally, the UK can only maintain its status as a major European actor in a symbiotic relationship with its nearest neighbours in the EU. Nothing less will allow us to together constructively address the huge challenges facing our countries' citizens and the world. **C**

**Philip Gough**  
(pictured, left)  
is Vice Chair of  
Suffolk for  
Europe

# Left block Le Pen's far right

**Andrew Coates** welcomes the victory of the left alliance in recent French elections but sees President Macron continue to manoeuvre

**A**fter snap legislative elections in July France remains without a Prime Minister elected by the National Assembly. After the national populist National Rally, (RN) headed the poll in the June French European elections (with 30 seats) it's said President Macron gambled on rallying anti-RN electors around his bloc, Ensemble, and marginalising a divided left.

Despite some initial pessimism the left became the largest group in the National Assembly with 180 deputies, Macron's Ensemble bloc, 157, and the far right bloc headed by Jordan Bardella, and Marine Le Pen's RN, at 125.

In the contest the left overcame divisions in its previous alliance, NUPES (New Ecological and Social Popular Union) to form a wider body, the New Popular Front. The Front, whose name echoes the 1930s Popular Front, is very broad. It includes moderate social democrats, including those who backed François Hollande (Socialist Party President of France from 2012 to 2017), allies of this Parti Socialiste, such as Raphaël Glucksmann (son of the philosopher André Glucksmann) of the centre left pro-European Place publique, the Green Party (now known as Les Écologistes), Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France insoumise, who make up its largest component, the French Communist Party, and a small galaxy of other groups, including the Fourth International aligned Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste.

The election was marked by large popular protests against the far right. In mid-June, on one day alone, 250,000 demonstrated. The breadth of this support put a damper on Macron and centrist efforts to claim that LFI was as bad as the RN. The two round French electoral system allowed many moderate figures to stand aside for the NFP in order to block the way to the party of Marine Le Pen and Jordan Bardella. Known as the 'Republican Front' this reaction echoed feelings in the 1930s against the possibility of the extreme right coming to power.

There has, nevertheless, been no parallel to the labour and social



**Macron – prevaricating on PM**

unrest of the 1930s, let alone factory occupations. Inside the institutions the left lacks the 289-seat absolute majority needed to impose its policies and leadership.

It is said that Macron and his advisers are still banking on the left's divisions. To buy time, up to and during the Olympic 'truce' they refused to accept potential NFA's nominations for Prime Minister. The latest figure proposed to head a government, the impeccably measured Lucie Castets, was rejected out of hand by the President. It's said that their ambition is to reach agreement with more centrist forces around the Socialists.

That there are differences on the left cannot be denied. Some call for an alliance with the left middle class, "la bourgeoisie de gauche". Others continue to disagree strongly with what was known a few years ago as the "bloc bourgeois" strategy, pointing to the need to reconnect with the 'peripheral', often one time industrial, areas of France which have turned to the

sovereignist right. On a more factional level La France insoumise has had a small split, L'Après, which involves the well regarded internationalist leftist Clémentine Autain. Many say that the leadership of Mélenchon, the non democratic nature of his national 'party', and his efforts to influence what goes on in the Parliamentary group (he did not stand as an MP this time) have created long-standing frictions. Disagreements between him and the rest of the left over issues such as Ukraine and Venezuela (Mélenchon remains a partisan of the 'Bolivarian revolution') remain. The latest Macron candidate for PM appears to be former PM under Hollande, Bernard Cazeneuve. He is unlikely to appeal to many on the left. Predicting what will happen is rather like weather forecasts, they change from day to day. But the NPA, by election results alone, is an example of what an alliance between the radical left and the centre left can achieve in its hour of need. **C**

**Andrew Coates**  
is a member of  
Chartist EB

# Modi constrained

**Kabul Sandu** says Modi is weakened but far from down

**N**arendra Modi is one of several strongmen currently seen around the globe, democratically elected, who then go on to flout democracy's key parameters.

He has now been elected as Prime Minister of India for the third successive time.

Wherein lies his appeal?

He had been Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2002 till he became PM in 2014.

His nationalistic appeal has been to the Hindus who make up about 79% of the Indian population. Modi is steeped in the ideology of Hindu nationalism. Since childhood he was a member of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh - a right wing paramilitary organisation established in the 1920s along European Fascist lines. One of its members assassinated Gandhi in 1948. Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) believe Hindus were downtrodden during Mughal and British rule. The BJP implicitly and explicitly promotes animosity towards minorities especially Muslims who are about 14% of the population.

Whilst he was Chief Minister of Gujarat rioting occurred in which organised Hindu mobs killed around 2000 Muslims. Modi is believed to have, at the very least, allowed the rioting to go on for several days before police action was enforced. Prompted by these events the US and the UK banned Modi from entry. The ban was only lifted when he became Prime Minister of India in 2014.

Modi's increased profile in Gujarat propelled him to Prime Ministerial office. Now on the national stage he and his party continued discriminating against Muslims and attacking any opponents.

The Chief of Amnesty International India Branch said 'the authorities have exploited and weaponised various financial and terrorism laws to systematically crackdown on human rights defenders, activists, critics, non-profit organisations, journalists, students, academics and political opponents'.

A few months before the June General Election the leader of the



Credit: Vikramjit Kakati/Wikicommons

**Charges of sedition have been revived against author and political activist Arundhati Roy**

Aam Admi party, Arvind Kejriwal, was falsely arrested on corruption charges. Similarly Congress, the leading opposition party, had its bank account frozen thus hobbling its election campaigning.

The BBC India office was raided by police looking for tax irregularities. Other media outlets including the Indian film industry were harassed and cowed. Jawaharlal Nehru University is regarded by Modi and the BJP as a hotbed of opposition. Its students have been physically attacked on campus by BJP inspired thugs. Later when students tried to show a critical documentary about Modi their power was cut off!

The stoking of anti-Muslim feelings continued with them being referred to as 'infiltrators' during the General Election. Muslims were supposed to be also waging a 'love jihad' (love war) meaning Hindu girls were being lured into marriage to increase the Muslim population.

Yet despite the power of incumbency and the anti-democratic and Hindu chauvinistic actions outlined above Modi and the BJP 'lost' the election. The party fell to 240 seats below the 272 required to be the majority party.

Modi is now dependent on a coalition with about 40 regional parties and he seems to have lost some prestige. Now the government is being referred to as the NDA (National Democratic

Alliance) government, not the 'Modi government' as in the past. His allies have to be appeased and rewarded to keep on side.

Hence billions of rupees given to Telugu Desam Party's Andhra Pradesh state and to Maharashtra where Shiv Sena rules. These two parties bring the largest number of MPs to the BJP coalition.

However, it's too early for democrats to think Modi's autocratic rule is on the wane. The BJP's national vote was only slightly down from the previous election.

Moreover, although the BJP lost seats in its northern heartland it made gains in the South where it has traditionally been weak. There is no sign of the party edging Modi out of leadership. He is still the BJP's superstar with great oratorical skill and clever political pragmatism.

Modi and the BJP continue their nationalistic fervour. An indication of this and a sign perhaps of confidence and adherence to a continuation of beating the nationalist drum, is the revival of a 10 year old charge of sedition against internationally renowned author Arundhati Roy. In essence she had dared to suggest independence for Kashmir. Without Modi's approval this charge against Roy would never have been revived.

Modi may be down but he is not yet out. **C**

**Kabul Sandu is a member of South Basildon & East Thurrock CLP**

# Trump catastrophic for Ukraine and Palestine

**Tanya Vyhovsky** says Trump can be beaten but Harris has to go out and meet the people

**W**hat would be the impact of a Trump victory on support for Ukraine?

It would be catastrophic. I wouldn't be shocked if he started backing Russia. We never quite know what's true or not true with Trump. We have to take it as a serious threat. Anything is on. His previous record is he tried to extort President Zelensky. So he has not got a track record of being on the right side of the conflict.

**Should Ukraine be free to use US supplied weapons inside Russia?**

Generally speaking I'm pro-peace but the lines have shifted. If Crimea is Ukraine's not Russian they have to take it back. They have every right to fight for sovereignty and take back their land. If it means they have to attack across borders then yes, it has to be on the table.

**What's behind the shift in support for Harris and can it be sustained?**

More people are becoming aware of the Trump threat to our democracy and to our rights, especially those from marginalised communities who have fought hard for and sometimes died for those rights. She may not have been first choice, indeed many may not even like her, but she has injected energy into the campaign that was lacking for Jo Biden. There has been a huge outpouring of support for Harris here in Vermont from Democrats and progressives. They recognise that as in France we have to unite against Trump or we are not going to have a democracy worth fighting for.

I don't think people took seriously the Trump threat last time around. I spoke to large numbers before election night saying they thought there is no way he could win. I took a different view that Trump was going to win, even months before. Now we know he can win people are taking the threat much more seriously.

Will Trump accept the result if he loses? Unlikely. We know he hasn't in the past.



It's hard to know what the danger is. I would not have expected what happened on Jan 6th 2022. I was stunned and horrified. He has taken things to such extremes; we have to prepare for anything.

**What programme is Harris likely to fight on?**

She already running a different campaign from Biden: organising more events, drawing more crowds. That's all good. That's what it takes to win hard elections-grass roots organising. In terms of administration she has a good voting record in the Senate so I hope she recognises that she needs to lean in to the needs of the most vulnerable Americans so we have a living wage and affordable housing. My hope would be to see her invest more in the people. I'm not holding my breath for this but I hope she leans away from corporate politics and towards grassroots and real people politics.

**Will she take a more progressive view on the Gaza war, calling for an end to arms sales to Israel and accepting rulings of the ICC that genocide is happening?**

No. She has a history of being a Zionist politician. She has said some pretty horrific things on the campaign trail. When the announcement was first made Netanyahu was in Washington DC. There was a protest that day I took

part in. I did hope she might take a different stance. I now believe it's unlikely. I'm equally cynical on a change in her view on ICC rulings.

**Can Harris win in the rustbelt and what does she need to do to win?**

She needs to show up and tell people in those areas what she is going to do for them. Bernie Saunders wins in those places and has widespread support because he shows up to people who can't afford to put food on the table. She needs to come up with policies that will enable people to put more food on the table.

We do know progressive candidates can win in these states. Biden has helped by going on picket lines.

**What should be, and what is, her position on the border and migrant rights?**

Her position on border and migrant rights has not been clearly laid out. What's happening on our border is inhumane and has absolutely got to change. When Trump was President we had virtual concentration camps on our borders and everyone was up in arms. Biden did not make that go away. Harris has to.

**Recently we've seen far-right mobs in England being supported by Elon Musk and Trump. What needs to be done to curb the power of the tech giants, if anything?**

We need regulation of tech giants. We need Elon Musk to pay his taxes so he doesn't have so much spare money to funnel into far right extremism. We need to more strongly regulate what can go out. Currently he can do what he wants with impunity. This is a threat to US democracy. Political speech is more protected than regular speech given rulings by the Supreme Court. We need to fine tune what is political speech. If it is blatant lies is it political speech? I think that change is unlikely with the current make-up of the court. So I'd hope Harris would expand the SC so that this will stop.

I'm cautiously optimistic about Harris winning. **C**

**Tanya Vyhovsky was recently re-elected as a Democratic candidate for state senator in Vermont**

# Head North

Mary Southcott on mayors with ideas and a manifesto for action

Born only streets apart, Andy in Fazakerley where the Rabbit came from in Liverpool 10, and Steve Rotherham from Kirkby, where the song says they play “tick with hatchets”, supporting different football teams, Everton and Liverpool, Andy and Steve seem unlikely friends or joint authors of a book advocating agreed progressive change. They end up having more in common than divides them.

They were both elected to the Commons, Andy in the 1997 General Election landslide which meant he served in Brown’s Cabinet, and Steve in 2010, having been Liverpool councillor for Fazakerley, Lord Mayor during Liverpool’s Capital of Culture year in 2002 and Parliamentary Political Secretary to Labour Leader, Jeremy Corbyn. They both fought for justice for the Hillsborough families after the football disaster on 15 April 1989. They left the Commons at the 2017 general election to fight for Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region as elected Mayors.

This book has received a lot of coverage and it comes recommended by Gordon Brown, after he chaired and produced the report of the Commission on the UK’s Future, the Brown Report. A Democracy Bill was floated for the 2024 King’s Speech it was dropped, along with automatic registration, and reversal of the Conservative changes back to first past the post for Mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner elections. The two mayors prioritise devolution, and having an assembly which would in future coordinate nations and regions. Prospects are thought remote given that Labour has been the massive beneficiary of an outdated voting system which depends on where different parties put their efforts to establish themselves in first and second place. So the 2024 result could be reversed by a six per cent swing in 2029 without any safeguards.

Those of us who thought that English regional government offered a better chance of bringing people together especially where there was no former metropolitan authority, have been impressed with the way elected mayors offered an alternative view to the govern-

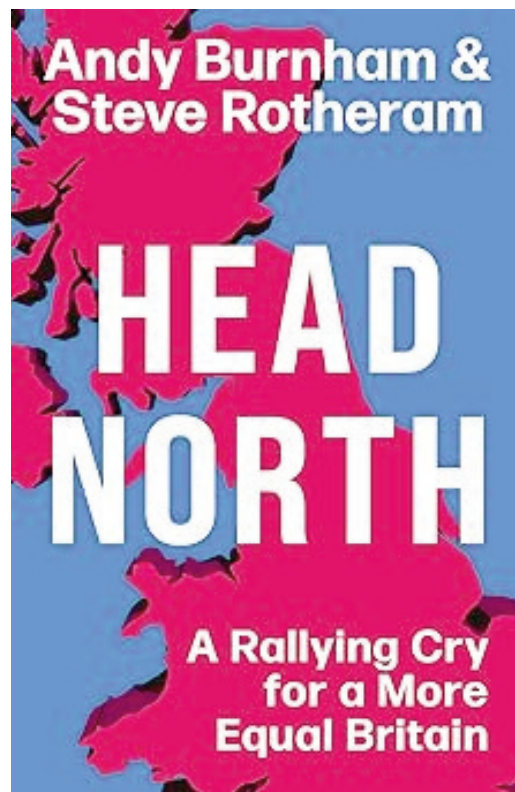
ment in the last five years. We would like to see more than other combined authorities filling in the gaps. Perhaps Regions, often with larger populations than Scotland, could be recognised in some way: perhaps in the top up of an Additional Member System for electing MPs or regional Q&As with regional representatives coming together in a Grand Committee. Margaret Thatcher did away with this layer in 1986 along with the Greater London Council, despite opposition in her own party, and some say the Queen. For Greater London this has been partially reversed. We have done the same for the other met counties. But Bristol, the largest non-metropolitan council, had two mayors, one recently rejected by referendum and the other almost a reconstruction of the old Avon.

More people need to respond to the Head North manifesto for real change to happen, a total rewiring, their mission from 2017. They were inspired by the Hillsborough relatives who sought justice, just like the other “burning injustices”, the post office workers, Orgreave victims, haemophiliacs who were given blood infected with HIV, the Windrush generation. They talked with equivalent mayors in the States and learned from Germany where the Basic Law, Grundgesetz, states there needs to be equivalent living standards between all the German Lander. It was Britain, the Allies, who gave them their constitution, their voting system and their version of devolution, to prevent any possibility of the power concentrated at the centre being seized by a fascist dictator.

## The HEAD NORTH MANIFESTO

- A Written Constitution
- A Basic Law
- Reform of the Voting System
- Removal of the Whip
- A Senate of the Nations and Regions
- Full Devolution
- Two Equal Paths in Education
- A Grenfell Law
- A Hillsborough Law
- Net Zero to Reindustrialise the North

Each of these ten points involves a transfer of centralised power towards a more functional



politics of place. There is also emphasis on safety standards in Design and Construction for public buildings, and their management and policing, of high rise flats and sports stadia. On the constitutional side their manifesto is not too different from the Brown Report, the Commission on the UK’s Future. Head North has 264 pages compared with the 150 pages of the Brown Report but theirs is much more accessible because seen through the eyes of the authors. It is fulfilling their pledge to change Westminster from the outside. It is about a mindset change but also a transformation of political culture. People as usual are ahead of the politicians. Non inclusive decision making risks mistakes which cost lives and cover ups waste money in the end. Their letter to their grandchildren is about giving people equal treatment and equal living standards across the regions and nations. Anything wrong with that? **C**

**Head North: A Rallying Cry for a More Equal Britain by Andy Burnham and Steve Rotheram. Published by Trapeze £22**

# Rocky Attraction

**Patrick Mulcahy** says no happy ever after but hope

The battle between capitalism and socialism is played out vividly in the American independent film, 'Peak Season', written and directed by Henry Loevner and Steven Kantner. It's a love story set in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, a wilderness with shiny clean rivers, rock faces that can give a climbing novice a sense of accomplishment and non-judgmental friendliness from townfolk. It's the sort of place Americans say they want to retire to, when what they really want to do is to stick it to their boss. The film presents have and have nots as having equal strength. The haves thrive on the pressure to over-achieve (good for business). The have-nots live through the pressure of getting through the week with limited resources. We admire the have-nots for their adaptability, acquired not without cost. The haves can be assholes.

When we first meet him, Loren (Derrick Joseph DeBlasis) is sleeping in his car, woken by an old guy who warns him that he doesn't want to be caught by the local police. Loren has a dog in the front seat, but he's not a neglectful owner, rather a good provider. By day, he teaches visitors how to fish while standing in the river, providing them with waders and overalls. He cautions them not to expect to catch a fish first time. He also washes dishes in a local diner, gives climbing lessons, and occasionally does gardening.

He has a best friend, Josh (Will Neff), who dog-minds for him and shares snatched saunas after paying customers depart. He has consciously not sought solidity because he enjoys knowing that he has a skill to impart what businesspeople lack. His opposite is Max (Ben Coleman), who blows into town with his fiancé Amy (Claudia Restrepo). Amy is a second-generation Mexican American; she speaks Spanish to the housekeeper. She has recently quit her job in advertising – has a

job offer but would rather explore options – and is tasked with planning their wedding, which involves 250 guests and the calling in for a favour from a relative of Dave Matthews of Dave Matthews Band farm. Whilst Max enthuses about the actual artist playing 'Ants Marching' at their nuptials. Amy prefers a different song.

Max is booked in for a fishing lesson with Loren by another family friend only he has to go back to the city. Amy stays on to take the lesson and connects with

rating Josh from Loren, Amy has a shot of making Loren think about laying down foundations (getting a home). She is also announcing her emotional investment. Loren hasn't entertained the idea of romance; male friendship is as good as it gets. Josh is thinking about old age.

Amy and Loren's relationship cools. When she sees him in a store buying a six pack of beer she encourages him to take a shower at her holiday home, a place so huge it has two showers. Amy has laid out snacks. They are both refreshed. Then comes the unexpected interruption.

'Peak Season' is one of those rare love stories that actually makes you feel invested in the central relationship. We know Max isn't going to be a great husband because he curses out Siri. If he does that to Artificial Intelligence, just imagine what he will be like with people. He even gives Loren a tip to thank him for taking care of Amy, reducing a romantic rival to a hired hand (he knows what he's doing). When he is recognised by an old flame he and Amy happen to run into, he doesn't even introduce her. This is standard manipulative film making. However, we've met men like Max before. They don't practice or inspire kindness.

The film speaks to an audience whose view of open spaces is mediated by technology. Loren shows Amy a stunningly formed cliff face and she exclaims, 'it's a screen saver'. Of course she would think that; like most of us in the early 2020s, she's been on her laptop too long. Loevner and Kantner made the 2021 Covid romantic drama, 'The End of Us'. 'Peak Season' speaks to an audience that survived the Covid interruption. It certainly spoke to me. Charmingly understated and packing a winning punch, it doesn't give us 'happy ever after' but instead provides hope.

**'Peak Season' awaits UK distribution but is on release in the US and Netherlands**



Loren. They have an easy chemistry. He doesn't mind sharing his painkillers with her; he has recurring shoulder strain. She doesn't mind sharing his car after Max took the hire vehicle to head for the airport. It's a small town. They keep running into each other to the point where something romantic might occur.

At the film's core is a bar scene. Loren is drinking with Josh. Amy has tagged along. Josh is on the verge of leaving. His dad has threatened to cut him off. Loren tries to talk him out of it. Amy takes Josh's side. The undercurrent of the scene is clear. By sepa-

# Orwell and Stalin

**Glyn Ford**  
ON  
totalitarianism

**George Orwell and Russia**  
**Masha Karp**  
Bloomsbury £21.99

Orwell was an anti-Stalinist revolutionary socialist from the mid-thirties until his death in 1950. What drove his anti-Stalinism deep was his experiences fighting in Spain with the militia of Britain's Independent Labour Party's (ILP) sister party the *Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista* (POUM) and the consequent civil war within the civil war when in May 1937 during the Barcelona days the Communists suppressed the POUM. They outlawed the organisation, and arrested, tortured and murdered its leadership claiming the Party was in league with Franco. POUM's offence was to argue that winning the war was consequent on first winning the revolution. Incompatibility with Soviet foreign policy meant Stalinism became a counter-revolutionary force.

The seeds of Orwell's antipathy were already planted. When he set off on his January 1936 pilgrimage to Northern England - captured in *The Road to Wigan Pier* - many of his guides were members of the Independent Socialist Party (ISP) that had split from the ILP in 1934 over the entrust activities of the Revolutionary Policy Committee conspiring to drag the ILP into the Communist Party of Great Britain's (CPGB) close orbit. Orwell's loathing was further dressed by more Moscow trials and the August 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact.

As Masha Karp details, Orwell saw little to choose between Nazi totalitarianism and its Soviet variant. True the USSR was the lesser of the evils, but both had to be fought. Yet after November 1942, when the tide of war turned decisively in the Allies favour, the totalitarian threat to Britain and Europe was no longer from Berlin and Moscow, but Moscow alone. Orwell saw his task from 1937 on to save socialism by destroying the Soviet myth. He had three strikes; *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), *Animal Farm* (1945) and closed with *1984* (1949). The barrier to understanding was Britain's

besotted intellectuals, the CPGB's apparatchiks and their fellow travellers. He abhorred the gramophone mind no matter the tune it played and saw in the likes of Kingsley Martin, the editor of *New Statesman*, and Victor Gollancz, his erstwhile publisher - both of whom had refused to publish his Spanish horrors - as dogs sufficiently well-trained to jump without the whip.

In 1941 he applied the POUM's analysis to Britain in his unsung manifesto *The Lion and the Uni-*

European Unity' (*Partisan Review*, 1947) calling it 'the only worthwhile political objective today'.

Karp breaks new ground in detailing how Orwell's legacy was betrayed and subverted by false friends. His anti-Stalinism was hijacked to serve as proxy for an all-encompassing attack on socialism. Of *Animal Farm's* Ukrainian and Russian translations, the first was flawed and the second fraudulent. Orwell had determined that neither should be brought out by any reactionary 'white' publisher and was prepared to provide financial assistance to guarantee that. He was twice betrayed. The Ukrainian edition in 1947 was published by *Prometheus*, after promises that it was an association of ex-members of the Bolshevik party representative of the opposition inside Soviet Russia. This was an overly generous description at best, especially when they arbitrarily decided to cut sentences from Orwell's preface deemed unsuitable for 'Western Ukrainians'.

The 1949 Russian version was far worse. Here, despite assurances from the British Foreign Office that the people running the Russian publisher *Possev* in Germany were known to them and reliable, they turned out to be 'whites', many of whom had collaborated with the Nazis and in some cases fought in the Russian Liberation Army under Nazi command. They then proceeded to bowdlerise the text stripping out all references to the raven Moses - who represented the collaboration of the Russian Orthodox Church with the Soviet authorities - to shape the narrative to fit their political predilections. It was a case of praise the Lord and pass the ammunition to Orwell's detractors on the left.

*George Orwell and Russia* is exceptional in adding new depth to Orwell's story. My only carp is the author's failure to resist in the end hawking his spectre around her favourite political hobby-horses and concluding that the two of them were as one mind. Orwell was far too nuanced a thinker to be so easily pigeon-holed.



*corn*. In this runt of the Orwell canon he argued the war was unwinnable with the current people in charge. 'It is only by revolution that the native genius of the English people can be set free ... Whether it happens with or without bloodshed is largely an accident of time or place.' He wasn't to know that Tokyo's miscalculations at Pearl Harbour was to deliver America's capitalist cavalry as respite to Britain's need for fundamental change. *George Orwell and Russia* covers his post-war escape from this 'neither Washington nor Moscow' dilemma. The place to make democratic socialism work at the necessary collectivist scale was to be in a United Socialist States of Europe as he posited in 'Towards

# Essays written in war, for peace

**Daphne Symon**  
on trauma of war

**One Woman's War**  
Dana Mills  
Five Leaves £10

This is a remarkable book and deserves to be read widely. It describes one woman's experience of living in Israel as a Jewish woman who is committed to justice and the upholding of international and humanitarian law. It is an up-to-date account of her reactions to the recent outbreak of war in Gaza. The book's fascination lies in its bringing together of past history and present day traumas for both Israelis and Palestinians. It is an extremely personal account, written by an academic, set in the context of an excellent foreword by Sally Abed who is a Palestinian peace activist living in Haifa in Israel.

Dana Mills describes her horror at the unexpected assault by HAMAS on innocent civilians in Southern Israel on October 7th 2023. She knew some of those killed and injured in the attack. She remains in contact with some of the families who were moved to safety from their Kibbutz close to the border with Gaza. Six days after October 7th she started writing a diary to help her deal with her own shock and horror at what had happened. She then used extracts from her diary to set up a blog to keep in touch with friends and family. Almost daily she describes what is happening in the ongoing war in Gaza and how it is affecting the inhabitants of Tel Aviv where she lives. It is these extracts which have been transcribed into essays which form the basis of this book. She writes about the brutal conflict

with insight and integrity. She is not afraid to admit to her own reactions after hearing news of the assault. Nor to her reactions in the following three months as the Israeli army responded. Throughout the book she is seeking what she calls "a paradigm shift" in the thinking of everyone who is involved in attempting to resolve the issue.

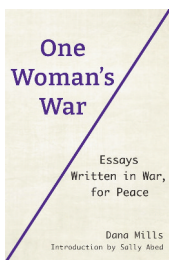
She explores the options open to loyal Israelis like herself who want peace and stability in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. In one particular extract she describes a visit with other peace activists to a Palestinian farm in the occupied West Bank during the olive-picking season. Whilst there she experienced being arrested by Israeli police but she was later released. She hopes that her activities as a peace activist attending protest rallies and meetings gives hope to everyone working for peaceful solutions. She gives voice to the many Israelis like herself who deplore what is happening and feel powerless to effect any change. Dana Mills has pursued a career as a professional dancer, an author and an academic. She obtained her DPhil from Oxford University in 2014 and has taught there as well as in several other academic institutions in different parts of the world. She has also been committed to peace activism since she was 13 years old. In 2021 she decided to leave her home and academic life in Oxford and return to Israel and become a full-time peace activist, working alongside Sally Abed who has written the foreword to the book.

Dana Mills is well qualified to expound her views on the

Israel/Palestine situation and she is exceptionally adept in her ability to analyse the strengths and weaknesses in the arguments of both sides. She combines this with a refreshing modesty and openness to new ideas. Her desire is for Israelis and Palestinians to live alongside each other "from the river to the sea" (as she puts it) in peace and with mutual respect.

This book is not an easy read and not for the faint-hearted. Every few days a new atrocity has been committed either by the Israeli army and/or HAMAS and the author delves deeply into the details and displays her own shock and despair. She is harsh in her criticism of her own Government for its breaking of international law and its disregard for humanitarian care. She longs for the hostages to be returned and for a ceasefire to be declared. She is also profoundly disappointed by what she sees as the poor response of the international community.

The book comes to an end three months after the October 7th attack. Dana Mills is under no illusion that a lasting peace will necessarily be the outcome once the fighting stops. But she is full of hope and belief in a long-term future if Israelis and Palestinians can be allowed to live alongside each other, share being educated together about past history and wrongs, and together enjoy everyday activities. Then they will be able to understand each other and build a better future. One is left wondering how things will actually play out both in the near and distant future and what will be the final outcome to this seemingly intractable situation.



## From Maidan to War

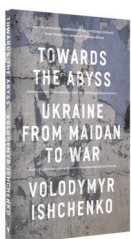
**Duncan Bowie**  
on Ukraine

**Towards the Abyss**  
Volodymyr Ishchenko  
Verso £12.99

This is a rare political analysis by a Soviet Ukrainian. What is different from other contemporary works is that this is not the simplistic advocacy of Ukrainian nationalism, which tends to dominate commentary in the west. Ishchenko provides a nuanced analysis, based on his understanding of the social, linguistic, political and economic divi-

sions within Ukrainian society. His historical analysis examines the conflict between different traditions – the association with Russia and soviet society which is still significant amongst the mainly working-class population of Eastern Ukraine, and the new urban based intellectuals and professional classes who look towards the European Union for a different lifestyle. He points out that Zelensky and the westernisers do not represent the interests of all Ukrainians. Nor does he consider that the adoption

of western capitalism is necessarily in the interests of Ukraine. While not seeking a return to the Soviet model of governance, he is also critical of both neoliberalism and a Ukrainian nationalism he sees as regressive. He sees class as more important than identity politics. Ishchenko however is pessimistic as he sees no end to the war – Zelensky will not compromise, while he sees Putin's autocracy in Russia as strong and largely unchallenged. This makes for sober reading.



# Deeply sentimentalised and over-romanticised

**Gerry Hassan**  
on the  
London  
Labour Left

**The Searchers: Five Rebels, Their Dream of a Different Britain, and Their Many Enemies**  
Andy Beckett  
Allen Lane £30

This book covers the rise and fall, and rise again and subsequent fall, of the Labour left over a period of over fifty years - from the late 1960s to the present. Andy Beckett locates such an epic canvas through telling the story of five connected individuals - Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott.

Such an approach aims to make this more human and relatable. However, this is a questionable conceit, as it assumes a major thread connecting all these figures in the late 1960s. Benn, an arch-moderniser under Gaitskell and early Wilson, became disillusioned with the latter's technocratic managerialism, and in Beckett's telling by the events of 1968. This he argues was at the same point that the others of a younger generation were also radicalised, with Benn acting as an older tribune of this new left.

There are strengths in this account including fascinating portraits of some of these key figures - such as Tony Benn and his slow estrangement from his Bristol South-East seat post-1979. For all his talk of 'community politics', in his 33 years representing the seat he never permanently lived there but commuted from London. Livingstone's GLC and second coming as London Mayor also provide a rich tapestry.

This is at its heart a flawed book. One assumption is that the intricacies of the London Labour left can tell a story of the wider British left. London is writ large as Britain: a problem with much of UK politics, but acute here in that the five politicians, four of who represent London seats (and all London residents whilst elected) are presented as telling a story not just about London. Never in this 540-page book are these assumptions and presumptions made explicit.

Another is that the inner

machinations of the Labour Party and left and its revolutionary socialism are still seen (despite their proven limitations) as what matters. It is as if the past 40 years never happened, and that we are forever in 1981 and the Labour Deputy leadership contest.

The external world is relegated to a shadowy existence. For example, the 1979 and 1997 general elections - the two watershed contests of the past 45 years and changing of the guards in terms of

ical radicalism of Tony Benn; the rise and fall of Bennism; the fate of the Bennite left after Benn in the 1980s; the odyssey of Ken Livingstone from the GLC to London Mayor (and then political wilderness); and the emergence and subsequent defeat of Corbynism.

Unexplored are shortcomings of the inner world of the Labour left, despite the ample space provided to study its minutiae. Related to this is the relegation of electoral success and popularity. Thus, there is no consideration of why the left has been so poor at winning enduring popular support and has at times managed to diminish public support for even potentially popular issues by the way it does politics.

Hence the fact that Ken Livingstone proved remarkably adept at putting together winning coalitions at the GLC and as London Mayor, compared to Benn in 1983 or Corbyn as Labour leader, is left untouched. Part of the reason is surely that for all Livingstone's radicalism, he was also adaptive, flexible and outward focused, with a story to tell of a diverse, dynamic city.

In Beckett's account the mistakes of the Labour left are always with the best intentions - like Brexit, allegations of anti-semitism - while it is the Labour right in the 1980s fightback against Benn or scheming against Corbyn which are always up to no good, plotting and engaging in faction fighting.

This strange book is never sure what it is, beyond one long apology for the Labour left and individuals profiled. This deeply sentimentalised, over-romanticised account is the type of perspective that dominates too much of Labour's history, resulting in the party believing in its own inner world and ethos to the ultimate detriment of itself and the country.

A history of the rise and fall of Bennism with the benefit of years passed, or a critical examination of Corbynism, would be a book worth reading, but this is sadly none of those things.



**THE** Five Rebels, Their Dream of a Different Britain, and Their Many Enemies  
**SEARCHERS**  
**ANDY BECKETT**

parties, eras and ideas - are passed over with fleeting mention. The inference is that neither matter compared to the gargantuan issue of the struggle for socialism in the Labour Party.

Similarly, the 2016 Brexit vote and Corbyn's complicity in the narrow victory for Leave is given little space, and Corbyn's role minimised and excused. There is only the most passing mention of the 2014 Scottish independence referendum: something on which all the primary figures of this book had next to nothing of originality to say but which shook the British state to its foundations.

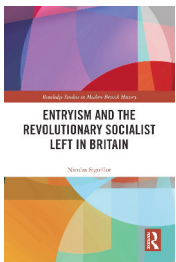
At least five different threads run through this book and struggle to be heard. There is the polit-

# Wrong in commission and omission

**Glyn Ford**  
on Entryism

**Entryism and the Revolutionary Socialist Left in Britain**  
Nicolas Sigoillot  
Routledge £135

Spanning more than seventy years, Sigoillot covers the ground, from 1920 and the CPGB's open penetration of the Labour Party through to 1992 when Militant was the last to be parachuted out to land as the Socialist Party. Split chronologically, first up its the CPGB - on Lenin's advice - openly, then clandestinely, attempting to organise a reverse takeover of Labour for 'history demonstrates that, at the first stages of revolutionary upsurge, the masses turn to the mass organisations'. Labour pushed back and Britain's Communists pulled out with the Comintern's 'class against class' third period that gifted Hitler an easier rise to power.



The early to mid-thirties saw Communism's Sunni-Shia schism open a second front in their civil war inside the Independent Labour Party (ILP) as the Stalinist Revolutionary Policy Committee (RPC) fought it out with CLR James and the Trotskyist Marxist Group for a Bolshevik transformation of the ILP. The operation failed with the RPC jumping ship in 1935 - making off with a hundred ILP activists - while the Marxist Group managed their expulsion in 1936.

The post-war boom was bad news for the far-left. A whirligig of names and numbers came and went as many hibernated inside the Labour Party waiting for economic winter. It finally turned cold in the mid-sixties and Britain's four main Trotskyist groups conducted a danse macabre in and out of the Labour Party and each other, splitting, dying and resurrecting. The

International Marxist Group failed from too little hands on leadership and the Workers Revolutionary Party perished from too much. The Socialist Workers Party survives while Militant, the most successful of them all, conspired with their enemies in a final departure.

*Entryism and the Revolutionary Socialist Left* has an eye-wateringly criminal price, an untranslated alphabet soup of organisations, while badly edited, and in places repetitious and wrong in commission and omission. For instance, Sigoillot is naive to accept the then minuscule RPC's claim it orchestrated the ILP's disaffiliation from the Labour Party, and a serious oversight to entirely miss Harry Selby, the first Militant Labour MP representing Glasgow Govan from February 1974 - 1979. If you must, look in the local library!

# Modi and Hindu nationalism

**Nigel Watt**  
on the  
largest  
democracy

**Malevolent Republic - A Short History of the New India**  
K.S. Komireddi  
Hurst £14.99

This is a very readable blistering critique of India's powerful leader, Narendra Modi and the steps he has taken to create and ringfence Hindu supremacy. But Komireddi starts at the beginning. When Britain allowed Jinnah to create Pakistan it left an India where the Hindu majority was proportionately greater but with a still huge Muslim minority. This meant that Nehru, India's founding prime minister, tried to create a political culture that was secular (and mildly socialist) in a very religious country. His biggest mistake was to distort this vision by allowing the Congress Party to become a family fiefdom. He had groomed his daughter Indira Gandhi to be his successor and, after the short rule of Shastri, she took over.

The author damns Indira, especially for the State of Emergency which badly damaged democracy and thus also secularism. Congress limped on with Indira's sons, Sanjay and Rajiv and Rajiv's Italian widow still the shadow behind Manmohan Singh

who killed off any relics of socialism and unleashed a capitalist boom that widened the already huge gap between rich and poor.

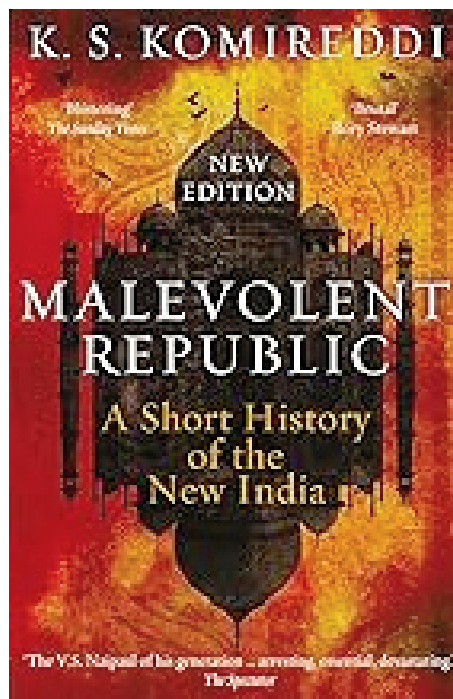
Against this background Hindu

becoming politically organised, winning in some northern states. In 2001 Narendra Modi became chief minister of Gujarat. His vicious overreaction to Muslim riots caused

him to be sanctioned by the US and Europe. Modi won power at a national level in 2014 (and the US and Europe feted him). His record has been one of growing authoritarianism and nurturing of Hindu extremism.

The author details his actions which include undermining the universities, promoting a distorted Hindu version of history, controlling the media (India dropped to 138 in the index of press freedom), suddenly abolishing all high value banknotes, undermining the well-respected army where non-Hindus held high ranks, increasing the power of the executive, supporting harsh punishments for minor offences, prematurely pronouncing victory over Covid in one year and using every effort to harass and exclude Muslims. He also pressurised the courts to arrest opposition leaders prior to the recent election.

The paperback is well worth a read.



fanaticism represented by the RSS and then the BJP, was growing and

# An East End shootout

**Duncan Bowie**  
On  
anarchists in  
London

**A Devilish Kind of Courage**  
Andrew Whitehead  
Reaktion Books £15.99

The story of the Houndsditch murders and the Sidney Street siege of January 1911 has been told before. Whitehead, a leading historian of British anarchism, not only retells the story in a comprehensible and readable narrative, but has found new sources in the London Metropolitan and national Archives including newspaper reports, Home Office, police and fire brigade records.

The anarchists involved were of Latvian and Russian origin, whose contacts with the indigenous anarchist movement were limited. They were members of the Jubilee Street anarchist club and knew Rudolf Rocker and the Jewish anarchists in the *Arbayter Fraynd* group. They also knew the Italian anarchist Enrico Malatesta who ran an engineering workshop in Islington at the time and (unwittingly) provided equipment used in the raid on the Houndsditch jeweller's shop, which led to the death of three policemen and one of the raiders, George Gardstein, who had shot the policemen.

One of the more curious aspects of the story is that Malatesta, though interviewed by the police, avoided any charge, conviction and deportation. As the two surviving raiders, Fritz Svors and Josef

Sokoloff were killed in the Sidney Street siege, dying in the fire, which was probably instigated by the police to smoke out the raiders who fought off the police and army for several hours, there was no one left to convict of an actual crime and the police failed to pursue any of the raiders associates, with the exception of Nina Vassileva, Gardstein's girlfriend. She was convicted of being an associate of the gang, before being released on appeal.

The Houndsditch raid and the Sidney Street siege are always associated with 'Peter the Painter' though there is no evidence that he was either directly involved in the raid or the siege. Identified by the police at the time as Peter Piatkov, his real name, only recently revealed, was actually Janis Zaklis. Zaklis had a long history of socialist and anarchist activism in Latvia (then under Russian Tsarist control), being a leading figure in the Latvian insurrection in 1905 before being expelled from the socialist party for unauthorised activity, taking several colleagues with him and then active in Latvian exile circles in London, Marseilles and the US.

While the East End events of 1910 were unprecedented as far as British politics were concerned, and attracted massive media attention, the Latvian revolutionaries had an extensive record of expropriations and armed conflict with the authorities in Latvia and in the US. In the UK, the group had been involved in unsuccessful attempts at robberies in Tottenham and Motherwell in Scotland. While Whitehead traces the activities of the Latvian group before and after Sidney Street, reference should be made to the earlier extraordinary study by Phillip Ruff, *A Towering Flame*, published in 2019, which provided a detailed chronological narrative of the group's activities from Latvian sources.

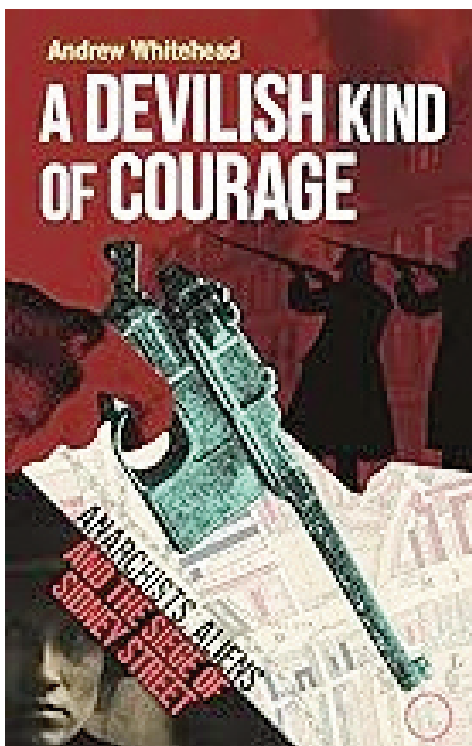
Few of the Latvian and Russian anarchists spoke English, and it is unsurprising that they had little contact with the British labour movement. However two of the Latvian exiles in London who remained socialists did – Jakob Peters, who was in fact Svors' cousin, who was a member of the British Socialist Party and on returning to Russia, became deputy head of the Bolshevik Cheka after 1917, and Alexandr Zernis, who was to translate a study of the *Revolution in the Baltic Provinces of Russia*, published by the Independent

Labour Party in its Socialist Library series in 1907 (with a foreword by none other than Ramsay Macdonald), which was published anonymously but actually written by the Latvian socialist Hermanis Punga (who went on to become foreign minister of independent Latvia). Zernis joined the Tolstoyan colony at Tuckton house near Bournemouth run by Vladimir Chertkov. Incidentally, Zernis was the father of Melita Norwood, revealed in 1999 as having been a long-term Russian agent (and inspiration for the 2018 film *Red Joan*).

One interesting aspect of Whitehead's study is his focus on the role of the popular media in turning the siege into a sensational event and creating the myth of 'Peter the Painter'. The years before the First World War saw the origin of tabloid popular journalism, with papers such as *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express* and *The Chronicle* giving massive coverage to the events, with much use of photographs. Moreover, four newsreel companies attended the siege, with newsreels being played across London within hours of the events.

Much of the coverage was explicitly anti-Semitic, with the press arguing that the fact that the Latvian anarchists were in the country and armed showed that the 1905 Aliens Act was ineffective. The fact that Winston Churchill as Home Secretary in the Liberal administration attended the siege for a few hours wearing his silk top hat, surrounded by armed policemen and soldiers, enhanced the sensational coverage.

What was however curious about the aftermath of the siege is that the associates of the anarchist gang, such as Malatesta and Rocker and the anarchist philosopher, Kropotkin, (who all disassociated themselves from expropriatory tactics) were not arrested and that the courts dealt with the anarchists arrested leniently- all with the exception of Vassileva were released immediately, including Svors's girlfriend, Luba Milstein, with Vassileva discharged after a few weeks by the Lord Chief Justice. There was considerable sympathy with opponents of Tsarism, though clearly a wish that revolutionaries would limit their expropriatory activities and arms dealings to their home country. It was only with the outbreak of war in 1914, that Asquith's government tightened up its policy on aliens.



# An alternative to neo-liberal capitalism?

**Hugh Gault**  
on economic power in the US

**The Road to Freedom: Economics and the Good Society**  
**Joseph Stiglitz**  
Allen Lane £25

Well-known for dismantling globalisation and explaining why inequality is in none of our interests, Stiglitz takes aim here at neoliberal capitalism itself, his title a rejoinder to Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*. Stiglitz is even more dismissive of monetarism and the misleading arguments Milton Friedman and his colleagues put forward. Thatcher was just one of those who subscribed, Pinochet another. Their devastating impact on 1980s Chile was soon apparent, while the legacy is still unwinding in Britain.

In the de-regulated free-for-all that followed, a wealthy few thrived but most of us lost out, particularly due to feeble and unfettered regulation around the privatised utilities or lack of housing. One of Stiglitz's points is that the rich and powerful set rules that suit themselves rather than society. A clear example are the travesties English water companies have been allowed to get away with, paying dividends to their shareholders while polluting our environment in the most egregious ways. So much is already well known. Rarely mentioned though are the one-sided terms of reference for the regulators written by Michael Fallon when at the BIS department in about 2012. The shroud waved was that regulation should not be allowed to hamper growth (by which Fallon meant 'wealth').

This would have made an excellent illustration of Stiglitz's argument that those in power 'tilt [the] rules to serve their own interests'. Instead, the US Constitution is invoked, before Stiglitz goes on to assert that 'progressive governments today [focus] on changing these rules to generate a more equitable distribution ...' Unfortunately, the references cited are not to practical illustrations in the real world but to economic treatises that may

have caused a stir in the higher reaches of academia but have had negligible impact on anybody's living conditions.

There are several debatable propositions and statements:

Stiglitz applauds governments' 'long history of publicly funded research' for the development of the Covid vaccine but downplays the role of the private sector, which 'was eventually involved, but only towards the end'. This may have been the US story for Moderna and Pfizer, but it would be questioned in the UK. (Stiglitz

gate demand but supply constraints and demand shifts,' writes Stiglitz. Profiteering, strangely, is not mentioned.

'The US is perhaps distinctive in the influence it has on what is considered acceptable or desirable behaviour by its leaders and government.' Really!

'In the US, one of the two major parties has been taken over by politicians and voters willing to stare facts in the face and deny them.' This may be a legitimate domestic argument but people living in the non-western world might think the US imposition of its ideology through 'might is right' more critical. The CIA fomented wars in Africa, Asia, South America and elsewhere during the terms of Democrat presidents as well as Republicans.

Stiglitz appears to believe that science is value-free. Some may be but that doesn't mean it all is; though perhaps relative to much of the economics he is arguing against it appears so.

This leads on to my major concern with Stiglitz's book. There are some UK examples, but they are few and far between. Similarly, one might expect the United Nations to be critical to ensuring global equity, especially at a time when planetary climate crisis is one of the greatest threats to people's futures - not only in the less wealthy and less well-developed countries for the migration consequences

affect us all. It is mentioned once in relation to the US block on the UN as the developing countries' preferred forum for discussing global digital taxation. There may be an issue over enforcing UN resolutions, but they surely ought to be the global regulator par excellence. That the Security Council is frequently split between the interests of the west and the rest is thought a weakness by some. For at least half the world it is a strength.

Stiglitz comes close to an alternative to neoliberal capitalism but never gets there, hoping that "there's a good chance the next generation" will come up with the answer. Realistic or cop out?

JOSEPH E.  
STIGLITZ

Winner of  
the Nobel Prize  
for Economics

THE ROAD TO  
FREEDOM

Economics  
and the  
Good Society

allen lane

makes a similar US-centric argument regarding the development of the internet.) Where the public sector was predominant in the UK was in the roll-out, getting the vaccine into people's arms. What illustrates his wider theme of one person's or country's freedom constraining the freedom of others is that western countries virtually monopolised the available vaccines for their own populations, with the less well-off being reliant on what in effect were hand-outs - sometimes from UK vaccine developers such as Astra-Zeneca selling on supplies at cost.

'The underlying problem [of increased inflation post-pandemic] was not an excess of aggre-

# Delivering for youth



Caitlin Barr is studying for an MA in journalism at City University

**Caitlin Barr** reports Starmer wants to lower the voting age – but asks will Labour deliver for young people?

**F**or many young people, Starmer’s Labour government will be the first they remember. Most of us have only hazy recollections of Blair and Brown and would struggle to name any of their flagship projects beyond Sure Start and the Iraq War. After 14 years of Tory rule, which has further entrenched class inequality and made it harder for young people to afford basic necessities like food and shelter, Labour government represents hope. After all, as D:Ream sing, things can only get better.

But will they? Many promises were made before the manifesto launched: an end to the two-child benefit cap (which didn’t make it into the final document), abolishing no fault evictions, and lowering the voting age to 16. Months later, it’s unclear how any of them will pan out, especially with the shock exile of seven MPs who voted for the SNP’s amendment to remove the cap just a couple of weeks after Starmer’s premiership began. Wes Streeting’s posturing about banning puberty blockers is making many young trans people and their allies incredibly worried. Maybe... things could actually get worse?

Starmer will need to do a lot to convince young people that he can be trusted to deliver for us. After all, many of us turned our backs on the party at this general election, with 41% of people aged 18-24 voting Labour, down from 56% in 2019. Whether that’s to do with a less inspiring manifesto than Corbyn’s 2019 one, or the pull of more ideological parties such as the Greens and Reform, Labour has some work to do. Young people need more than a greyscale photo of Starmer looking serious with ‘change’ pasted next to it – we need radical action.

As



Credit: Garry Knight/Flickr

someone looking to move out of my family home, I’m often shocked by the hugely inflated prices of tiny, uninspiring rooms in increasingly far-flung corners of London. I’ve accepted that it’s unlikely I’ll be able to afford a house of my own in an area I’d like to live in any time soon. 74% of 16-24 year olds privately rent according to the 2023 English Housing Survey. A 2022 study found that four in ten people under 30 pay over 30 per cent of their income to their landlord. Renting reform needs to be a priority for Labour if they hope to persuade young people they’re in good hands.

In this year’s manifesto, Labour promised to immediately end no fault evictions, but they’re yet to do so, and I know of several people who’ve had Section 21s served to them since July 4th. They also said they’d work to help renters challenge rent increases, raise standards in the private sector in line with Awaad’s Law, and give first time buyers ‘first dibs’ over international investors, but there’s been no movement on any of these pledges either. If Labour deliver on any of these promises, young renters will be on the way to being protected against predatory landlords and shocking standards of living for extortionate prizes. For young people being ripped off for the basic human right to a safe place to live, Labour cannot act on this soon enough.

Of course, this assumes that the tiny HMOs me and my friends are scouting out aren’t underwater by

the time we can afford the deposits. Many communities in the UK are starting to see the effects of global warming, while our friends in the global South have been displaced and killed due to dramatically rising temperatures, flooding and famine brought on by the climate crisis. Ed Miliband’s tenure as Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero has been promising so far – he’s already lifted the offshore wind ban. But there was some confusion just a few days into his new role, as many outlets reported that he had ordered an immediate ban on North Sea oil drilling – which it turned out he hadn’t.

In fact, he told the oil industry the very next day that he would never ban oil and gas drilling in the North Sea, just a week before Just Stop Oil protestors were handed unprecedented long sentences for planning road blocks on the M25. It’s young people who will feel the effects of these decisions when climate catastrophe can no longer be ignored, with high temperatures and exceptional rainfall increasing in frequency year on year. Young people deserve to plan for our futures without worrying it’s futile. We need decisive action on climate change, and time is running out.

Keir Starmer has the opportunity to make life less hopeless for young people – but he needs to deliver, or he’ll keep losing us to parties offering more radical change. There’s no point lowering the voting age if you have little to offer young voters. We can’t afford to wait much longer. **C**

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