

# weekly **worker**



**Politics continues to move to the right, with Starmer's government and Reform UK's 'bridgehead' of MPs**

- Letters and debate
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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# A GAZA ELECTION?



## LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

## BRS transition

Mike Macnair's response article, 'Minimum programme again' (June 27), was quite hard to follow. Trying to engage in the eclectic mix of argumentation, completely false assertions, distracting, meandering and irrelevant subject matter, etc is a bit like trying to juggle jellyfish with very slippery hands. If this is an example of a legal brain in action, no wonder it is one of the least regarded of professions.

Mike's critique of *Britain's road to socialism* embarrassingly falls flat on its face at the first hurdle. He asserts its "immediate demands" are all about "economic issues" and ignore "constitutional" or "democratic" questions. Absolutely false. Chapter 5 is headed 'Alternative economic and political strategy' and states the aim is to develop a comprehensive class struggle, including "on three main distinct, but interconnected, fronts: the economic, the political and the ideological and cultural" (my emphases).

This chapter sets out a whole set of political and democratic demands - alongside (of course) economic, social and cultural - so how Mike can assert the programme is "economistic" is beyond me. As Jack Conrad put it - referring to the immediate demands in his *Draft programme* (although I argue that they hold equally for those in *BRS*, and I quote not to cause mischief, but simply because I agree with him and like the wording) - these are "the economic, social and democratic measures that are needed if the peoples of Britain are to live a full and decent life". I also agree it is likely these "demands can only securely, genuinely, comprehensively be realised by way of revolution" ('Programme makers' June 13).

In *BRS*, immediate demands proceed from the real needs of the working class in the here and now. They are explicitly not limited by what capitalism says it can afford or are achievable, and in their individual - but, more importantly, in their comprehensive, interconnected and joined-up - nature, point to the ultimate need for the working class to take state power for itself and to establish socialism.

Just as it would be wrong to ignore or downplay political and constitutional questions, especially the question of working class rule, it would be equally wrong to ignore or downplay those economic issues which are immediately about working class living standards, as Mike appears to do, in favour of the former. All these demands are about creating the economic, social and political space and capacity for the working class to develop and exercise its leading and independent role in society.

*BRS* argues that the fight for the adoption of such a comprehensive, alternative political and economic strategy will help develop a mass democratic movement, based on the working class (and alliances with wider strata of the working population), which is determined to impose its interests and leading role on society, in place of those of the capitalist class.

If this were to produce a 'left government' - ie, a government based on the interests of the working class - including via a general election, the implementation of such a programme would require major inroads into the wealth and power (so economic

and political) of the capitalist class. This in turn would result in a major intensification and sharpening of comprehensive class struggle, which we would hope to resolve through the complete overthrow of the rule of the capitalist class, to be replaced by the political and economic rule of the working class: ie, socialism.

So, yes, it is entirely appropriate to use the term 'socialist' to describe this "overthrow of the rule of the capitalist class" - not because it introduces "instant socialism" as per the Socialist Party of Great Britain, or is "economistic", (or even Bakuninist! A most weird conjecture by MM), but precisely because it has the aspiration of establishing full socialism and then full communism. Establishing the political and state power of the working class must come before the establishment of socialism proper. Clear enough, Mike?

Yes, 'the day after' such a socialist revolution, we would still have capitalism, but the new working class state would proceed immediately to expropriate the big capitalists and start to establish socialism in the economy and thereby in wider society. There is no reason or expectation that any such socialist revolution would be confined to just one of the advanced capitalist states - there is every reason to expect (and hope), given capitalism, imperialism and the working class all being international, socialist revolution would break out across a number of countries (perhaps even a continent) in the first instance.

But communists in Britain "must, of course, first of all settle matters with [our] own bourgeoisie" (Marx's *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848). This is not to advocate "socialism in one country", but simply that communists in Britain (or in any country) are responsible for the development of revolutionary consciousness and the socialist revolution in their own countries.

Mike claims I argue "for a transitional phase of socialism beyond the phase of working class rule, but before communism" - but Jack Conrad, talking of his *Draft programme* (which Mike is supposed to "accept"), refers "to the epoch of the transition from capitalism, by way of socialism, to communism" - which is what exactly I did in my letter of June 20.

Socialism can be clearly defined as the period from the point of the establishment of the working class state power - the political and economic rule of the working class - to the point of true global communism, in which all vestiges of the former capitalism, including states, classes themselves, means of government, money, markets, etc, have disappeared.

'Full or developed socialism' would be the later stage of this, where a large number of countries have been socialist for a while, the material, social and cultural needs of working people are increasingly met and satisfied, but material incentives and rewards are still required to encourage socially useful and productive work. The (working class) state apparatus would still be required to 'hold down' the former overthrown classes, and to defend the socialist countries against those of existing capitalism and imperialism. The USSR of the 1960s was clearly a far more advanced, complex and sophisticated society than that of the 1930s, for example.

Rather than see socialism as a "transition" between capitalism and communism, I would see it more as a series of processes and stages, in which the building blocks and

main elements of the new socialist/communist society are consciously built up by the working class over time - socialist and communist consciousness as much as the material forces of production. There are no 'Chinese walls' between the stages of socialism and of communism.

It will take time for socialist revolutions to spread around the globe, time to reorganise and develop socially useful production to meet the real needs of the people, time to develop and implement an effective economic mechanism for socialist democratic economic planning, time for the overthrown classes to lose their hostility, desire and capacity for capitalist restoration, and time for full communist consciousness to develop throughout the whole working population, for people to work freely to produce socially necessary goods and services.

Obviously, the quicker all this happens, the better, but we can't guarantee it will be achieved rapidly: it might take generations.

Andrew Northall

Kettering

## BRS first

Mike Macnair claims that *Britain's road to socialism* is an "economic issues first" programme, comparing it to the Trotskyist transitional programme, Bakunin's opposition to 'political revolution' and Possibilism. This critique, honestly, does not make much sense, since *BRS* has a significant amount of distinctly political (ie, relating to the constitution, media, etc, rather than economic policies or social reforms) demands and policies.

Section 5 lists the details of a programme for a socialist government. It starts by detailing how the class struggle that intensifies once a leftwing government is elected has three components: the economic, political and ideological. The section then continues by listing the various policies of the *Left wing programme* that are directly political. For example,

■ "The institutions of state and their top officials must be made answerable to elected representatives, who in turn must be fully accountable to the people."

■ "Measures to restore the democratic and civil liberties abolished or eroded by Conservative and Labour governments since 1979, especially those relating to assembly, demonstration and detention without charge... This would also mean repealing the anti-trade union laws, so that trade unionists are free to govern their own organisations and decide their own policies."

■ "So that Britain's parliaments and assemblies more closely represent the preferences of the electors, they should be elected by single transferable vote in multi-member constituencies."

■ "Greater diversity of sources and views, a statutory right of reply and an end to the use of injunctions and libel laws by the wealthy and powerful would hugely expand media freedom in Britain."

■ "The House of Lords should be abolished and the Church of England disestablished as the official state church. Wherever possible, powers repatriated from the EU and its institutions should be devolved to democratically elected national, regional and local bodies."

■ "National parliaments in Scotland, Wales and England, together with English regional assemblies, should be elected [by single transferable vote within multi-member constituencies], with powers to raise revenue and specifically to advance

democratic control through public ownership, state investment and public procurement."

■ "A federal upper chamber elected by the national parliaments and regional assemblies should have responsibility for upholding national and regional rights and revising all legislation."

Section 6 ('Towards socialism and communism'), which describes a "second stage" of the revolutionary process following the election of a leftwing government committed to the *Left Wing Programme*, details a further series of political policies, which include:

■ "The police, secret services and armed forces will have to be made fully and openly answerable to elected representatives of the people at national and British levels. Their functions and priorities will need to be reviewed and, in some respects, altered fundamentally."

■ "The state's corps of military reservists would have to be expanded and linked with large workplaces and local working-class communities. The trade union movement could be involved in its recruitment, education and administration. Over time, reflecting the development of an independent foreign policy based on peaceful coexistence, the balance of resources will tilt away from a full-time selective professional army towards popular military reservists with specialised professional units."

With all of this considered, it's

rather apparent how *Britain's road to socialism* isn't "economic first" and that the programme is very much concerned with the transfer of state power from the bourgeoisie to the workers.

Bernardo Creadli  
Oxfordshire

## Own petard

As much as I admire Eddie Ford, and read everything he writes with interest and (often) delight, it seems to me that he has misstated something historically important in dealing with the Farage farrago ('Nigel's me too moment' July 4).

He writes: "According to Reform rules, every potential candidate is asked to declare their past or present political affiliations - specifically whether they have ever been a member of the BNP. This is reminiscent of The House UnAmerican Activities Committee asking people: 'Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?' If you give the wrong answer, you are out - a sinner cannot repent in Nigel Farage's party."

The whole point of the question, 'Are you now or have you ever been ...', as put to hundreds of people called to testify in front of the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, was that there was no right answer. If you said, 'No, I never was', you were confronted by 'friends' who had testified that they saw you at

## Online Communist Forum



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**JULY 4**

# A Gaza election?

The low turnout and lack of enthusiasm for Labour could not prevent a Tory bloodbath on July 4. **Paul Demarty** examines the results, and warns of the right's hidden strength



The headlines of the July 4 general election result were more or less as predicted by the polls. The Tories, who won the last election in high style with a majority of 80, were immolated, losing more than 250 seats. Sir Keir Starmer's Labour gained 212, giving him a majority nearly as large as that of Tony Blair in 1997.

The mood music from Starmer's camp is thus, understandably, triumphant. At the victory presser he even smiled! But there were not many smiles from those in blue. Rishi Sunak tried to be gracious in defeat, but there was no other word for the Tory performance than, precisely, *disgrace*. He spoke at the same lectern at which he was drenched in a summer rainstorm all those weeks ago - his wife looking on sadly and silently behind him, like a ghost noticed in the background of an old school photo. He was asked what his legacy was; he replied that he had got inflation down to the Bank of England's target of two percent. Truly one for the history books ...

Many Tories, according to *ConservativeHome*'s Henry Hill in a *Guardian* article, were even relieved that the result was not *quite* as bad as it had sometimes seemed: "... when it looked at one point as though [the party] might return fewer than 70 seats, and there seemed to be the faint possibility of Sir Ed Davey as leader of the opposition, the 1997 result minus 20 or so seats suddenly didn't look so bad."<sup>1</sup>

Yet this is still a drubbing of astonishing proportions - the Tories' smallest ever share of parliament, and indeed of the popular vote. London and Wales are now entirely denuded of Conservative MPs. Great streaks of Liberal Democrat orange are painted over the true-blue shires. The red wall is, apparently, rebuilt. Of the seats of all the five Tory prime ministers of the last 14 years, only Sunak's is still standing. Talk of a 'strange death', compared to that of the former Liberal Party, is extremely premature, but understandable, given the circumstances. The remaining big beasts are preparing their leadership bids; but there is not a great deal left to *lead*.

## Catalogue of failure

So, above all, the July 4 result is a rebuke to the Conservative Party for its near disintegration as a functioning instrument of state these last five years. Bloated with cronies and riven with cliques, and beset by 'external' shocks like Covid and war in Ukraine, it was functionally incapable of sticking to a policy and, in the end, even sticking to a prime minister. Given the catalogue of failings of the Johnson years, it is strange to reflect that he was finally offloaded in an incomprehensible scandal involving a gropey whip by the implausible name of Chris Pincher. His successor, Liz Truss, notoriously became the shortest-lived prime minister in modern history after she lost a staring contest with the Bank of England. The

**There was a strong vote for some pro-Gaza candidates which depressed the Labour vote, but for the left to take solace from that amounts to self-delusion. The votes of the organised left were either marginal or statistically so small as to be irrelevant. The only exception being George Galloway's WPB**

**It was the rise of Reform UK which crashed the Tories and gave Sir Keir his landslide parliamentary majority**

Tories have been 20 points behind ever since (and Truss, as noted, deservedly lost her seat, despite apparently retaining some ambition to return to the top spot). The worst that can be said about Sunak is that he was utterly incapable of fixing that damage.

While Labour has succeeded in getting a huge majority, one does not have to look very closely at all to reach the conclusion that this has little enough to do with any positive enthusiasm for the new government. Labour won barely a third of the popular vote on a historically low turnout - very slightly over a fifth of eligible electors voted for them all told, fewer in absolute numbers than voted Labour in 2019, which (you will remember) was considered a total disaster. The mismatch between popular vote share and share of seats is anomalous not just in British history, but in all the world's parliamentary systems.

Several things have conspired to produce what is a grotesquely undemocratic result. The most fundamental is the UK electoral system, which tends to produce duopolistic competition and freeze out more radical and reactionary voices. Secondly, the Labour leadership's strategy was to tack as far to the right as possible, but it is not clear that this did much more than alienate certain core constituencies - particularly against the background of the Gaza war, which is repellent to both the progressive left and the large Muslim populations that have

tended to vote Labour over the years.

The far left is in too shoddy a state to take much advantage, but this discontent found some meaningful expression both in strong votes for 'pro-Gaza independents', on the one hand, and Greens, on the other. (A split vote between the two in Ilford North means we have to put up with Wes Streeting for another five miserable years.) Thus the Labour vote itself was more depressed than it might have been under sunnier circumstances.

## Contradictory

That is nothing, however, compared to the pressure the Tory Party came under. After the Liberal Democrats' near wipeout in 2015, one member quoted in the press conceded that, if you stand in the middle of the road, you are liable to get run over. Rishi Sunak's government has found itself standing not so much in the middle of the road so much as the middle of a giant cloverleaf intersection! The Tory Party glamour, going into its 14 year reign, was a reputation for "economic competence" (which, like most such reputations, was largely a media fiction); and cruelty politics directed against indigent criminals and migrants.

We are so *used* to this combination that we sometimes forget that it is contradictory. 'Lock 'em up and throw away the key' policies cost money, because prisons are expensive (and presently, like much of the rest of the social infrastructure

in this country, on the verge of collapse). The economic benefits of kicking people off benefits are doubtful at the best of times, and if a Truss-like cretin decided to go for the full 'feast of Malthus', starvation in British cities would hardly look good on the report card. Many such cuts have, in any case, made it harder for people to have kids, which in the longer run leads to greater demand for inward migration.

A Tory administration is obliged to play an endless, solitaire game of Jenga to keep all this going. As with Jenga, one tends to survive a few hairy moments, but the inevitable result is total collapse. The *failure* to achieve the 'red meat' demands alienates the radical right base, and calls forth outfits like the Reform Party (strictly speaking, Reform UK Party Ltd - proprietor Nigel Paul Farage). Some gambits to keep things on an even keel can backfire (viz, the Brexit referendum). As the chaos mounts up, the 'sensibles' are liable to float off and vote for the Liberal Democrats - or a sufficiently rightwing Labour.

This is, roughly, what has befallen the Tories. As an illustration, in my part of the world, Devon and Cornwall, the Tories nearly swept the board last time out. After July 4, they have lost *every seat* in Cornwall to Labour or the Lib Dems, and several in Devon (including the 'big beast', Johnny Mercer, in Plymouth Moor View, where he quite genuinely had some local popularity as an individual). In at least half of these seats (including Mercer's), the Tory vote plus the Reform vote is a winning ticket, sometimes very comfortably. Of the four former prime ministerial seats lost last week, three would have been won but for Reform.

That is true for England. The other important component of Labour's now imposing majority, of course, comes from Scotland. The case is similar in some respects, but simpler: the Scottish National Party, like the Tories, are ending a long period of near total dominance, both in devolved government and in Scotland's Westminster contingent, in a scandal-plagued state of fractious exhaustion. They have looked vulnerable to the Tories and Labour alike, but only one of those parties was likely to benefit, given the wider picture. As a result,

the political map has reverted somewhat to type: the Nats holding the highlands, with a red belt of Labour seats in the south.

## By-election

Add all this up, and this historic general election - this narrow, crushing victory - resembles nothing so much as a giant by-election. It is as if the entire Conservative Party (and the SNP) has been caught taking a bung or assassinating its secret lover's Great Dane, and resigned under a cloud; all the strange creatures of politics have assembled in the obscure, declining provincial town that is Britain in 2024; and, on a pitiful turnout, a fragmented vote delivers 100% of the seats to a predictable winner. Of course, Labour has merely a near two-thirds majority, but that is perilously close to rebellion-proof. The only true thing Rishi Sunak has said in the last five years is that voting Reform would let Labour in.

It is a dangerous thing to try to predict future political trends on the basis of by-election results. It is especially true of this very grand one - simultaneously overwhelming and oddly indeterminate. A more proportional, multi-party system is trying to birth itself out of the dysfunctional majority-making machine that is the present one (though scant chance of Starmer, of all people, playing midwife). Is this a blip, and will normal two-party service be restored, one way or the other, soon? Or is this the new normal, with vastly different outcomes attending the chaotic eddies of electoral arithmetic?

We do not buy the analysis that the Tory Party is likely to be finished off by this blow. Indeed, we probably would not do so if Henry Hill's nightmares had been fulfilled, and they had not even managed to form the official opposition. Class parties do not simply *die*. The Conservatives will retain their position as capital's first eleven, as illustrated by the tardiness with which *The Sun* finally plumped for Labour. It is not, as we have previously argued, *The Sun* wot wins it; but it is an important bellwether. Rupert Murdoch's reluctance to get on board is telling.

That is not to say the Tories do not face serious challenges in the short term. The entry of five Reform MPs into parliament gives a

persistent voice to a challenger from the right. There are those within the Tories who seek to absorb them, and perhaps place Farage in the leadership. That will not happen before the *next* leader is elected, but the unignorable presence of a 'prince across the water' will be destabilising.

More fundamentally, what has been broken is a very short-lived electoral coalition - of older working and middle class voters in the deindustrialised north and (also older) middle class voters in the south-east. Brexit has broken it: the prosperity of the Home Counties is ultimately an outlier of the prosperity of London, which benefited handsomely from free economic interchange with its nearest neighbours. Those among the plebeian classes who had any hopes for Brexit precisely hoped for national regeneration, free from Brussels diktat, and reductions in migration numbers. These things simply cannot be held together in the face of the *reality* of Brexit. It is up to the Tories to come up with a new strategy, which may take some time. Yet they will do it in the end. The raw material is there: only the overall design is lacking.

## Complacency

What of our own side? Certainly, there are those on the left who take heart. "Labour's support is shallow and quite narrow", wrote Charlie Kimber in *Socialist Worker*, going on to survey the strong showings of the 'independents', Greens and Corbyn himself. The conclusion will be familiar to any regular reader of that paper: "Elections matter, but the fight for Palestine and against austerity will crucially take place in the streets and workplaces."<sup>2</sup>

Reading Andrew Murray's take in the *Morning Star*, one could almost believe Starmer had lost. After all, his vote was, in absolute terms, down on 2019. Reform is eating away his votes in some Labour heartlands (a doubtful proposition, but we suppose academics will look closer at this, as time goes by). The Gaza war has resulted in humiliating Labour defeats for a handful of barely-known candidates, and, of course, Jeremy Corbyn's victory. A strong challenge from Andrew Feinstein means that Starmer's own vote has dramatically fallen. So it goes on.

Murray mentions the case of Faiza Shaheen, axed and replaced "with an unwanted Starmeroid imposed from outside ... The lesson: racist factionalism doesn't work." He concludes:

Thursday's result was a vindication of Corbynism as well as Corbyn himself. Should, as I would expect, the new government led by the former state prosecutor be unwilling to face that reality - well, it will have to be made to. For Labour to carry on as proposed is the road to Farage, Suella Braverman and perhaps still worse. Mass pressure for real change has never felt more critical.<sup>3</sup>

But for the slightly SWPish final sentence, this article is very much an example of that broader genre, where a pundit declares that everything will go to hell if some powerful person does not implement all the pundit's particular suggestions. It is an unusually complacent and ridiculous example of the genre, however, since Murray was an influential figure in the Corbyn leadership himself - along with others, like Seumas Milne, of similar political backgrounds and inclinations (in the pro-Soviet, left-centrist *Straight Left* faction of the

old Communist Party). The result of all his cunning plans was the defeat of 2019, the ejection of Corbyn from the leadership and - at length - from the Labour Party, and the election of a rightwing leadership which now has at its command a huge majority. Yes, Sir Keir really ought to sit up and listen ...

In some respects, Murray has a point. The shallowness of Starmer's support will embolden his opponents, on the left and the right. He does not mention it, but the same will surely be true of the Tories, once they finish the traditional leadership-campaign bloodletting in the coming weeks and months. It matters not that Starmer has not foolishly announced a target net-migration number, like his Tory predecessors; he will be held to one anyway by Farage, the Tories and the press. His obvious unwillingness to deviate even fractionally from US policy is trouble enough with the Gaza slaughter, and will be more so if - as now looks likely - Donald Trump returns to the Oval office next January.

The idea that the *left* will be the main beneficiary, however, is sheer wish-fulfilment. It perhaps has some sense if we include the Greens there, but a glance at the German equivalent, war-crazed and presiding over the return of coal-fired power plants (burning the dirtiest coal) in order to prosecute America's war aims in eastern Europe, ought to be sobering to a man of Murray's views. So far as the *left of the workers movement* goes, we are in a shocking state. We should face this reality squarely, rather than play-acting at bourgeois political reality.

The obliteration of the Conservative Party was closely followed by a shock defeat for France's far-right National Rally in the assembly elections across the channel. Both can be interpreted optimistically as rebukes for the nationalist right. Murray is sensible enough to see the threat of "Farage, Suella Braverman and perhaps still worse" over the horizon. The overall picture is a *general* drift to rightwing nationalism, in the imperial centres and the periphery alike. It is not uniform - how could it be? - but we are entering a dangerous world. In such circumstances we should be plain - the most likely beneficiaries of discontent with Starmer's supermajority, all things being equal, will be the *far right*, both within and without the Tory Party.

All things need *not* be equal. The left's weakness is partly a function of extremely difficult circumstances, especially since the fall of the USSR, which discredited socialism (not wholly unjustly) and led to the collapse of left political forces far afield. It is, however, partly a matter of *choice*. We remain attached to strategies that have failed, again and again - whether the too-clever-by-half attempts to split the Labour centre-left from the right with opportunist gestures, or facile, anarchistic anti-electoralism.

We cannot assert ourselves because we lack what Labour has, and the Tories have, and even the Greens - a *party*. We could have the rudiments of one within months, if we chose to take the task of building one *seriously* ●

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## Notes

1. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jul/05/what-next-tory-party-general-election-results-future.
2. socialistworker.co.uk/general-election-2024/general-election-result.
3. morningstaronline.co.uk/article/failure-victory-starmer.

## Fighting fund

# Keep it coming

**S**o far, so good. After 10 days of the *Weekly Worker's* July fighting fund, we are hitting the right speed, as we aim to reach that much needed monthly target of £2,250.

After only just getting there in June, thanks to some last-minute donations, we are looking a bit better so far in July, with a running total of £825 in the kitty.

Since last week we've received £39 from FK, £35 from BO and £30 each from CG, IS and NH. They all came in the shape of standing orders or bank transfers, as did the £25 which RG, DV and GD each contributed, plus £20 from JD, £10 each from comrades CH, SM and PM, and £7 from TT.

Then there were PayPal donations from BD (£40), MH and GW (£10 each), plus an excellent £40 that comrade JM added to his annual *Weekly Worker* subscription by cheque (yes, we still accept them!), while someone identified as 'Bob' handed a

£10 note to one of our comrades at last weekend's Palestine demonstration in London.

All that came to £406, taking us to over a third of the way to our July target with a tiny bit less than a third of the month gone. So, yes, we can do it - and we *need* to do it! As I keep saying, we absolutely rely on the support of our readers to keep producing this vital weapon in the fight for a single, democratic, principled Marxist party.

So please play your part by contributing to our fighting fund. Please use the website link below to find out how you can do it. Keep up the good work, comrades, to help us do the same! ●

**Robbie Rix**

Our bank account details are name: Weekly Worker sort code: 30-99-64 account number: 00744310 To make a donation or set up a regular payment visit [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate](http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/donate)

**LEFT**

# Not marvellous at all

Carla Roberts looks at the deluded souls who are celebrating the low turnout, Labour's poor share of the vote and the election of four petty bourgeois independents



It is rather odd to see so many on the left celebrating the election results - not because the left's vote was so very good (it wasn't), but because Labour's vote was so very bad (not true either).

Andrew Murray, for example, writes in the *Morning Star* that "Starmer's four-year war on the left now looks like a failure even in the terms by which its progenitors would insist that it be judged - winning votes."<sup>1</sup> Utter nonsense. The war on the left has been extremely successful from Starmer's point of view - he has sufficiently transformed the Labour Party, which is now once again deemed fit by the ruling class to oversee capitalism on its behalf. There is no flight of capital, the entire mainstream media has adopted a broadly favourable attitude and the FTSE 100 index and sterling rose.

Tusc, the electoral front of the Socialist Party in England and Wales, lauds the "shallow social base of the new government" and the low turnout: "Never before, since the Labour Party first contested a majority of seats in the 1918 election, has the combined share for Labour and the Tories been so low." The message: the government lacks the "stable social base" to enforce "the coming second age of austerity, privatisation, war and climate crisis retreats", and so "the situation will not continue indefinitely". Well, nothing does. But the implied 'crisis of expectations' seems extremely unlikely. Chiefly because

there really are no expectations - Starmer promised next to nothing. Quite clever, really: any small improvements he now introduces will positively surprise.

Jackie Walker thinks it "a marvellous election in terms of the result", because "the Labour vote went down in many places" and the fact that there are now "five excellent independent MPs in parliament" who ran on an explicitly pro-Gaza ticket.<sup>2</sup>

We very much doubt that Starmer will lose even two minutes' sleep over the fact that more people voted for Labour under Jeremy Corbyn in 2019 and 2017 and probably cares even less about the low turnout. But the election of the four additional independent MPs too is no slam dunk, from a communist perspective. Jeremy Corbyn - who, as expected, romped home in Islington North with 24,120 votes (49.2%) - might have announced at Saturday's Palestine march that "parliament will now be very different. I will be joined by four great comrades who were also elected on a pro-Palestinian platform..." But will things be "very different"?

There is no party in parliament that fights explicitly for the interests of the organised working class. It is, of course, excellent that in many places, the horrific slaughter in Gaza is shaking up the establishment. Labour can no longer rely on the vast majority of Muslims to automatically vote for it. The organisation, Muslim Vote, successfully mobilised many

**Fiona Lali, the only candidate of the newly-styled Revolutionary Communist Party. She stood as an independent and got what, for the organised left, passes as a good result: 1,791 votes. Not quite the level of support that warrants her organisation's excited prediction that there will be a "British revolution" in "five to ten years' time."**

**In fact, with the exception of WPB, the left groups achieved derisory results. But without exception the politics were derisory**

British-Asian voters to choose candidates according to their stance on Palestine.

## Muslim Vote

In addition to the four independents who won, candidates backed by Muslim Vote came second in over a dozen constituencies - sometimes a very close second, like Leanne Mohamed with 33.4% in Ilford North and Akhmed Yakob with 33.2% in Birmingham Ladywood. The success of the campaign is a red rag for the right, naturally. It is a "glimpse into a horrifying future", cries *The Daily Telegraph*, which warns of the "group's sectarian insurgency over Gaza".<sup>3</sup> Muslim Vote certainly made a marginal difference in this election.

Of course, it is not only Muslim candidates the organisation supported. In Preston, for example, it backed Michael Lavalette (member of Counterfire, the split from the Socialist Workers Party) who came second with 21.8% of the vote. Andrew Feinstein came second in Keir Starmer's seat of Holborn and St Pancras, where he polled a very decent 7,312 votes (18.9%), pretty much all of which are likely to have been former from Labour voters. But Starmer lost a lot more votes than that: he only got 18,841 votes this time, compared to the 38,641 people who voted for him in 2019 (64.5%). It was, however, never in doubt that he would keep his seat and those on the left who thought Feinstein had a realistic chance of winning were

fooling themselves (and anybody who took them seriously).

Muslim Vote's criteria<sup>4</sup> led to quite a few questionable recommendations - where, for example, a Liberal Democrat was chosen over a candidate of the pro-Palestine left, because the former is a Muslim. In the Sheffield constituency of Hillsborough and Brightside, the organisation recommended that Muslims vote for the Green Party - and not Maxine Bowler, long-standing member of the SWP who stood as 'Independent for Palestine' and has undoubtedly done an awful lot more work on the issue than the Green candidate. As these recommendations only really mattered in areas with large Muslim populations, this was no problem for the eventual winner: Labour's Gill Furniss.

The main question with the four independent MPs is exactly that - they are entirely *independent*. They most definitely do *not* form "the sixth largest party" in Britain,<sup>5</sup> as the *Telegraph* fumes. None of them identify as socialist, as far as one can tell from their websites. Yes, they all talk about the need to defend the NHS and deal with the cost-of-living crisis, but who doesn't? Ayoub Khan, who was elected in Birmingham Perry Barr, was until recently a councillor for the Liberal Democrats. Shokat Adam (Leicester South) runs his own optician's practice and Adnan Hussain (Blackburn) used much of his campaign to talk about "assisting small businesses and enterprises in the

town to create greater opportunities for young people".<sup>6</sup>

They might be good on this or that issue - or they might not. They are accountable to nobody and will be voting with that worst possible political compass: their 'conscience'. So they *might* vote with Jeremy Corbyn, when it comes to issues around Israel and Palestine. But how will they vote, when it comes to, say, abortion rights? Trans issues? Euthanasia? Crime and punishment? Nato's proxy war in Ukraine? We are going to have to wait and see. This is clearly not the kind of principled, coherent voice the working class so desperately needs.

### Galloway's WPB

Someone who has been publicly speaking out against Muslim Vote is the Workers Party's Craig Murray, who came third in Blackburn with 7,105 votes (18.3%) behind Labour's Kate Hollern (10,386 votes or 26.7%) and Adnan Hussain's 10,518 votes (27%). According to Murray,

Muslim Vote refused to endorse me, because I'm not a Muslim. But I'm much more pro-Palestine and have been campaigning for Muslim rights for decades, so this feels like a strange rejection. The majority of those who voted for me probably were Muslims and didn't do what the mosque told them. We should not copy the way that Labour has been hijacked and controlled the Muslim vote - that does not seem a very legitimate way. Blackburn is extremely segregated - there are wards which are 99% Muslim - and this election has opened my eyes to a lot of issues around electioneering.<sup>7</sup>

As we have pointed out, Muslim Vote *did not* support only Muslim candidates, but nevertheless Murray points to a certain truth here.

Some readers might disagree with our decision to include the WPB under the left heading. Edmund Griffiths, for example, excludes them from his excellent overview of leftwing election results since 1841,<sup>8</sup> and there is plenty in the WPB manifesto we disagree with - its red, white and blue patriotism, social conservatism and its Fabian socialism. In the 1930s Fabians combined elitist concern for the poor with technocratic gradualism and an admiration for Joseph Stalin. In that spirit, the Fabians called for the collaboration of "all productive classes": workers, farmers and industrial capitalists. The WPB refers to "the old war between workers and managers" that it wants to overcome by appealing to common national interests.<sup>9</sup> Hence the numerous mentions of "one nation, one class". There is nothing wrong, of course, with trying to win over other sections of the population, but not by subordinating ourselves and our programme to them - which, we would argue, the WPB does (just like the Fabians did).

Still, we would also argue that the WPB is clearly on the left and, if any of its candidates had won a seat in parliament, it would have had to be seen as a victory for the pro-Palestine movement, not a victory for their anti-trans rantings, anti-immigration views or other reactionary parts of their programme.

The 154 candidates fielded by WPB collectively polled a total of 210,194 votes, though the average WPB vote of 1,364 votes per constituency disguises the fact that the results varied rather dramatically, depending, we should honestly say, on the percentage of British-Asians living in each area. In Richmond and Northallerton, for example, Louise Anne Dickens polled a measly 90 votes. In the majority of seats it contested, the WPB did as well

(or, more precisely, as badly) as much of the rest of the left: it got a few hundred votes.

But in a number of areas with a large Muslim population WPB came second: for example, in Birmingham Yardley, where the converted Muslim and disability campaigner, Jody McIntyre, polled 10,582 votes and was only just beaten by witch-finder and sitting Labour MP, Jess Phillips, by a small margin of 693 votes.<sup>10</sup> James Giles polled 26.6% in Birmingham Hodge Hill and George Galloway himself came a close second in Rochdale with 11,587 votes (29%) - but was apparently so disappointed that he refused to go to the count in order to avoid having to congratulate Labour's Paul Waugh (who won with 13,027 votes, or 33%).

In another 22 constituencies, WPB candidates polled more than 5%. Their claim to be "the sixth largest Britain-wide party by votes cast" is certainly more realistic than the claim that the 'independents' form any such thing, though we do note the WPB's emphasis on "Britain-wide": this caveat excludes, for example, Sinn Féin (which polled 210,891 votes in the 18 seats it contested).<sup>11</sup>

However, I get the distinct impression that WPB comrades are not happy with the results. "We can hold our heads high," they write post-election.<sup>12</sup> "Many, however, will be understandably disappointed we will not have an MP in the next parliament."

It seems George Galloway was not kidding when he repeatedly said during the election campaign that they were expecting to win about a dozen seats (later adjusted to a "handful"). Chris Williamson, who stood in Derby, coming third with 5,205 votes (13.9%), admitted to "getting a little carried away. I thought we'd get over the line. There were people queuing up to have their pictures taken with me."<sup>13</sup> The whole WPB manifesto is, of course, written in the style of 'what we will do when we come to power' rather than placing demands on the current state. This looks even more delusional in the cold light of post-election day.

### And the rest

SPEW really should do the right thing and put its electoral front, the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, out of its misery. It was clinging on for dear life during the Corbyn years, but, having lost its only union affiliate, the RMT, it surely is now well on its way to sect nirvana. The run-up to the elections was bad enough, when virtually no serious organisation took up the increasingly frantic attempts by Tusc election agent Clive Heemskirk to make it a viable electoral umbrella. The membership application of the Oehlerites of the Spartacist League made it a laughing stock on the left.<sup>14</sup>

**George Galloway's WPB combines social-patriotism with 1930s-style Fabianism, and managed to save some two dozen deposits**



The aim was to stand 100 candidates in order to reach the "fair media coverage threshold" that would have given Tusc the right to a TV broadcast. In the end, no more than 40 candidates could be found - getting an average of 314 votes (former Labour MP Dave Nellist came top of its list with 797 votes, or 2.2 %).<sup>15</sup>

Tusc and SPEW have recently added their support to Collective, the political wing of Corbyn's Peace and Justice Project, which states that it wants to "eventually transform into a political party".<sup>16</sup> We do not expect any such party to be remotely principled or based on democratic control by members, platform rights and representative conferences. But at least this is rather more interesting than Jeremy Corbyn's declaration that we just have to "keep on marching".

We hear he is still dragging his feet a bit, but surely he must now be under immense pressure by friends and allies to properly and officially join Collective. In which case its current membership of a measly 220 people (on the website, this is rather honestly featured as 220 financial "contributions") would no doubt expand rapidly.

Mention should also go to Fiona Lali, the only candidate of the newly-styled Revolutionary Communist Party. She got, for the left, a good 1,791 votes (4.1%) in Stratford and Bow. Not quite the level of support that would warrant her organisation's excited prediction that there will be a "British revolution" in "five to ten years' time".<sup>17</sup> Of course, she did *not* "run this election campaign under our own banner", as the RCP paper *The Communist* breathlessly claims, but as yet another independent. She actually stood against two other leftwingers: former RMT official Steve Hedley (who also stood as an independent, polling 375 votes, or 0.9%); and the Workers Party's Halima Khan (3,274 votes, or 7.5%). Incidentally, attempts by the local left to cohere around one candidate were somewhat railroaded: the RCP did not participate in the hustings, while Halima Khan lost against Hedley - but she stood anyway.

In Manchester, Caitriona Rylance stood for Communist Future, polling 131 votes. Despite standing on an openly communist programme (despite its rather abstract nature), she did no *worse* than other leftwing candidates who once again stood on programmes which can only be described as 'motherhood and apple pie' - for example, Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (its 12 candidates polled an average of 301 votes), the *Morning Star's* Communist Party of Britain (14 candidates, average 187 votes), the new Transform Party (two candidates, average 298) or the Alliance for Green Socialism (two candidates, average 189).

### Labour left

Lastly, let us take a look at what remains of the 'left' inside the Labour Party. Zarah Sultana spells out the extremely unambitious plans of the so-called Socialist Campaign

Group of Labour MPs in an email sent out by Momentum:

I want the new Labour government to outline a bold, transformative agenda to tackle the crises we face. That includes scrapping the two-child benefit cap, introducing wealth taxes to fund our crippling public services, implementing the New Deal for Working People in full, and upholding international law by ending Britain's supply of arms to Israel's brutal war on Gaza.

It seems that Momentum has struck a deal with the SCG and now operates as its social media wing - John McDonnell, Olivia Blake and Mish Rahman were speaking in a (very dull) Momentum Zoom meeting on July 8, repeating pretty much verbatim Sultana's demands. It is perhaps not surprising that McDonnell is hooking up with an organisation that was used by its founder, Jon Lansman, to implement the witch-hunt (for example, by denying Momentum membership to those who had been unfairly expelled from Labour) in the campaign against Corbyn. Momentum, of course, has now gone full circle and did *not* support Jeremy Corbyn on July 4 - despite him being its *raison d'être*.

Both Lansman and McDonnell were united in bending over backwards to the pro-Zionist right in and outside the party, calling for "zero tolerance" on any charges of anti-Semitism - when, of course, most of those charges had been blown up, weaponised and were, in the vast majority of cases, comments critical of Israel. The current situation in the Middle East shows that this 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' campaign had two main aims: firstly, getting rid of Corbyn and the left, secondly, delegitimising all critics of Israel. Any pro-Palestinian protest can now safely be dismissed as 'anti-Semitic' - and, boy, are they making use of this weapon!

It seems that Zarah Sultana, who kept a well-advised distance from Momentum in the past, is now fully on board. That is a real shame and perhaps she is not as politically astute as one might have hoped. Or perhaps it is simple career mathematics. Which makes her decision even more unfortunate ●

### Notes

1. morningstaronline.co.uk/article/failure-victory-stammer.
2. *Not the Andrew Marr show* July 7.
3. *The Sunday Telegraph* July 7.
4. themuslimvote.co.uk/the-muslim-vote-candidate-selection-methodology.
5. *The Daily Telegraph* July 6.
6. *The Guardian* July 8.
7. *Not the Andrew Marr show* July 7.
8. edmundgriffiths.com/leftge.html.
9. workerspartybritain.org/manifesto-britain-deserves-better.
10. *The Sunday Telegraph* July 7.
11. www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2024/uk/regions/N92000002.
12. workerspartybritain.org/general-election-2024.
13. *Not the Andrew Marr show* July 7.
14. 'Farcical Labour Party mark two' *Weekly Worker* February 8: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1477/farcical-labour-party-mark-two.
15. The votes of all leftwing candidates can incidentally be found on this useful website: averypublicsociologist.blogspot.com/2024/07/left-of-labour-general-election-results.html.
16. we-are-collective.org.
17. communist.red/how-the-communists-in-britain-are-preparing-for-power.

## Communist University

Saturday August 3 to Saturday August 10 (inclusive)

International Student House, 229 Great Portland Street, London W1  
(nearest tube: Great Portland Street)

Cost: Full week, including accommodation in en suite rooms: £250  
(£150 unwaged). Solidarity price: £300.

First/final weekend, including one night's accommodation: £60 (£30).  
Full day: £10 (£5). Single session: £5 (£3).

Make payments to account 'Weekly Worker'. Account number: 00744310.  
Sort code: 30-99-64. Please quote payment reference 'CU2024'

Email your booking, stating single or double room, to: office@cpgb.org.uk

**RIGHT**

# Reform Ltd gets five

Politics continues to move to the right, with Reform UK now having a 'bridgehead' of MPs, writes **Eddie Ford**. What happens next with the Tories, now that Kemi Badenoch is the front-runner, remains to be seen

**B**efore the election, Nigel Farage had talked about Reform UK establishing a "bridgehead" in parliament - with an exit poll published at the end of voting suggesting that they might get 13 MPs, which would have been incredible.

Actually, Reform ended up with five seats, but that was still quite an achievement, given 'first past the post', which generally punishes third (or 'insurgent') parties. After all, this time last year the idea of it having five MPs would have sounded fairly fanciful, and only a month or so ago you would have hesitated before betting on Reform getting any more than one or two seats - Farage in Clacton and maybe the obnoxious gadfly, Lee Anderson, in Ashfield. But not only did it get five MPs, including party chair Richard Tice and Anderson himself, it picked up the third largest vote at 4.11 million, or 14.3% of the poll - beating the Liberal Democrats (3.52 million, or 12.2%), which, nevertheless, found itself with 72 MPs, thanks to the rotten electoral system.

**If we had**

If we had had proportional representation, then the situation would have been flipped, with Reform on 94 MPs and the Lib Dems getting 77.<sup>1</sup> But if we had PR people would have voted differently, so this is just a thought exercise. Of course, our new prime minister is never going to change the voting system, nor will the Tories ever fight for electoral reform, though Farage, quelle surprise, has said that he would "campaign with anyone and everyone" to change the system. We in the CPGB demand proportional representation ... but, as might be expected, we shall not be campaigning alongside Farage.

Now, it was widely expected, including in this publication, that Reform opinion poll support would bleed into the Tory Party as the election campaign progressed - returning to the mother party. But that did not happen - once Nigel Farage threw his hat into the ring. The rightwing vote was thereby split, making Labour a sure winner - though it has been called a "loveless landslide", as its share of the vote was only marginally above what Jeremy Corbyn got in the last election in 2019. Maybe this would have happened even if Farage had not entered the race, but it seems doubtful - he appears to have given 'shy Reform' voters the courage of their convictions.

As we saw on the night, Reform's support was too evenly spread to win many constituencies, but if we dig deeper into the statistics it is easy to see the devastating impact it had on the Tories. Of course, Reform's previous incarnation, the Brexit Party, in 2019 stood aside in more than 300 seats previously won by the Tories, amid concerns it could split the pro-Brexit vote. But not this time, as the new party contested 630 seats across England, Scotland and Wales. Wisely, Reform focused its resources on a handful of target seats, coming second with 98, of which 89 were won by Labour - though it is worth noting that was a bit less than the 120 seats where the UK Independence Party came second in 2015. Unsurprisingly, Reform advanced most in areas where people voted 'leave' in the 2016 referendum: more



**A Trump victory in November would give a considerable boost**

than 70% voted Brexit in the five seats won by Reform.

A quarter of 2019 Conservative voters switched to Reform, at least according to a poll conducted by Tory peer Lord Michael Ashcroft, which also suggested that the bulk of Reform's support came from voters aged 45 and above, while it had the lowest vote share of any major party among those between 18 and 24 years old.

Reform managed to get this far, as Farage noted in his acceptance speech, without a significant infrastructure, plus only four weeks of real campaigning and hampered by a lack of finances - with the party reliant on Richard Tice for 80% of funding since 2021, amounting to £1.4 million in loans and donations, compared with the £35 million allowed for each party nationally. But Reform is hoping that traditional former Tory donors will begin to open their chequebooks, thanks to its credible election performance.

**Rebellion**

Following the election results, Nigel Farage vowed to build a "mass national movement" that sees Reform mounting a "proper" general election challenge in 2029: "This is just the first step of something that is going to stun all of you." An ebullient Richard Tice talked in similar terms

- "a people's revolt was underway" and this is only "the beginning", as "we are just warming up" - with both the leader and chair of the party saying they were now "going after the Labour vote".

As a devoted fanboy, Nigel Farage must have been delighted by the congratulatory message he received from Donald Trump, who is likely to be US president again, as things stand. Trump stated: "Nigel is a man who truly loves his country." Two great patriots leading a rightwing rebellion to save the nation from the 'woke left'!

Even though it came as no surprise to absolutely anyone, given that Reform is bound to attract disgruntled refugees from the Tory Party, there were near endless reports about Reform candidates making bigoted and racist comments - including calling the former prime minister a "fucking Paki". Responding to the fuss, Farage has insisted that Reform "will be a non-racist, non-sectarian party" - absolutely no question - "and I give my word on that". More interestingly, at a press conference in Westminster immediately after the election, he promised that his party would "democratise itself" by allowing its 115,000 paying supporters to vote on regional branch chairs - hoping to increase participation in the party and perhaps

also boost individual donations, which it desperately needs.

At the moment, of course, Reform does not allow its supporters any say or vote on its leadership or policies and is registered as a limited company (an "entrepreneurial political start-up") with no individual membership or written constitution. Naturally, Farage is the majority shareholder, owning 53% of 'Reform UK Party Limited' and Tice has a holding of around one-third of the shares, while chief executive Paul Oakden and party treasurer Mehrtash A'zami each hold just under 7%. Having said that, Reform has previously admitted that its structures - or lack of them - might not be sustainable in the long term and this could be an indication of a possible change in the works.

Recently, Farage talked about Reform engineering a "reverse takeover" of the Conservative Party. At the same time, post the election, he has also said that he would not join any pact with the Tories, preferring instead to "let the Conservative Party tear themselves apart". That may well be the case, but its future relationship with the Tories is more than likely to be determined by who emerges as its new leader.

In that respect, the defeat of Penny Mordaunt in the general election removes a key leadership contender boosting the chances of those on the

right, such as Suella Braverman, and current frontrunner, Kemi Badenoch.

This brings us to the release by YouGov of the first post-election poll of Tory members about who they want as new leader.<sup>2</sup> Badenoch is the clear frontrunner by some distance on 31% - effectively twice that of Suella Braverman and Tom Tugendhat, who are on 16% and 15% respectively. However, James Cleverly, seen by some as a potential 'unity candidate', has 10% and could possibly pick up support if the leadership contest gets too unpleasant.

Badenoch and Braverman have very different approaches to the Reform threat, of course - the former dismissing Farage as an attention-seeker, while the latter has argued that Farage should be welcomed into the family. Braverman has come under fierce attack very recently for using a speech in the US to describe the pride flag flown over the home office as a "monstrous thing" that symbolises "the liberal Conservatives who trashed the Tory Party" - the woke enemy within. This caused Ben Houchen, the Conservative Tees Valley mayor, to say that the party will be "in opposition for generations to come" if it chos Braverman.

**Not Braverman**

But what is even more interesting about the YouGov poll is that almost half of Tory members want a merger with Reform (47% in favour and 48% against, with the remainder unsure) - a finding that mirrors a similar BMG Research poll three weeks ago. Predictably, EU leavers are more than twice as likely to support a merger than remainers (59% to 25%) and - just as predictable - support for the idea increases, as one moves up the age ranges. Furthermore, support for a merger is also stronger among working class Tories than their middle class counterparts, as well as among those who backed Truss over Sunak two years ago (59% to 27%).

In which case, it is very hard to imagine a Tory leadership contender ignoring the party's rank and file, or polls like these - but once in office that could easily change. However, with Badenoch as the bookies' favourite the chances are that we will not see a merger, rather competition for the rightwing nationalist vote. After all, the combined vote of the Conservative Party and Reform is much bigger than Labour's.

If Sir Keir fails to fix 'broken Britain', a predictable outcome, Badenoch will be hoping that Labour will prove to be a one-term government and that she will be the one who gets the keys for No10. On the other hand, a Trump victory in November and the failure of the Labour government could see yet more voters desert the establishment mainstream and set the stage for a Reform breakthrough in 2028 or 2029. Banking on a return to the centre and a revival of consensus politics would be foolish. The centre is moving ever further to the right ... as shown by Sir Keir's government ●

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**Notes**

1. electoral-reform.org.uk/how-the-2024-election-could-have-looked-with-proportional-representation.  
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GAZA

# Counting the dead

As the genocidal assault on the Palestinian population of Gaza continues, Israel is doing its damndest to downplay the death toll. But, says, **Ian Spencer**, if anything, the figures issued by the Gaza health ministry are an underestimate

**O**n July 8, the Israeli military invited reporters into Rafah, the first time international media visited the city since it was invaded 10 months ago.

Rafah's recorded history dates to 1303 BCE. Israel, which has long tried to efface Palestinian history, has worked hard to bomb Gaza back in time. In reducing it to rubble, the Israel Defence Forces have not only obliterated its history, but targeted contemporary culture and civilisation, as schools and medical facilities have been destroyed. The IDF's targets also include civilians, journalists, medical personnel and children.

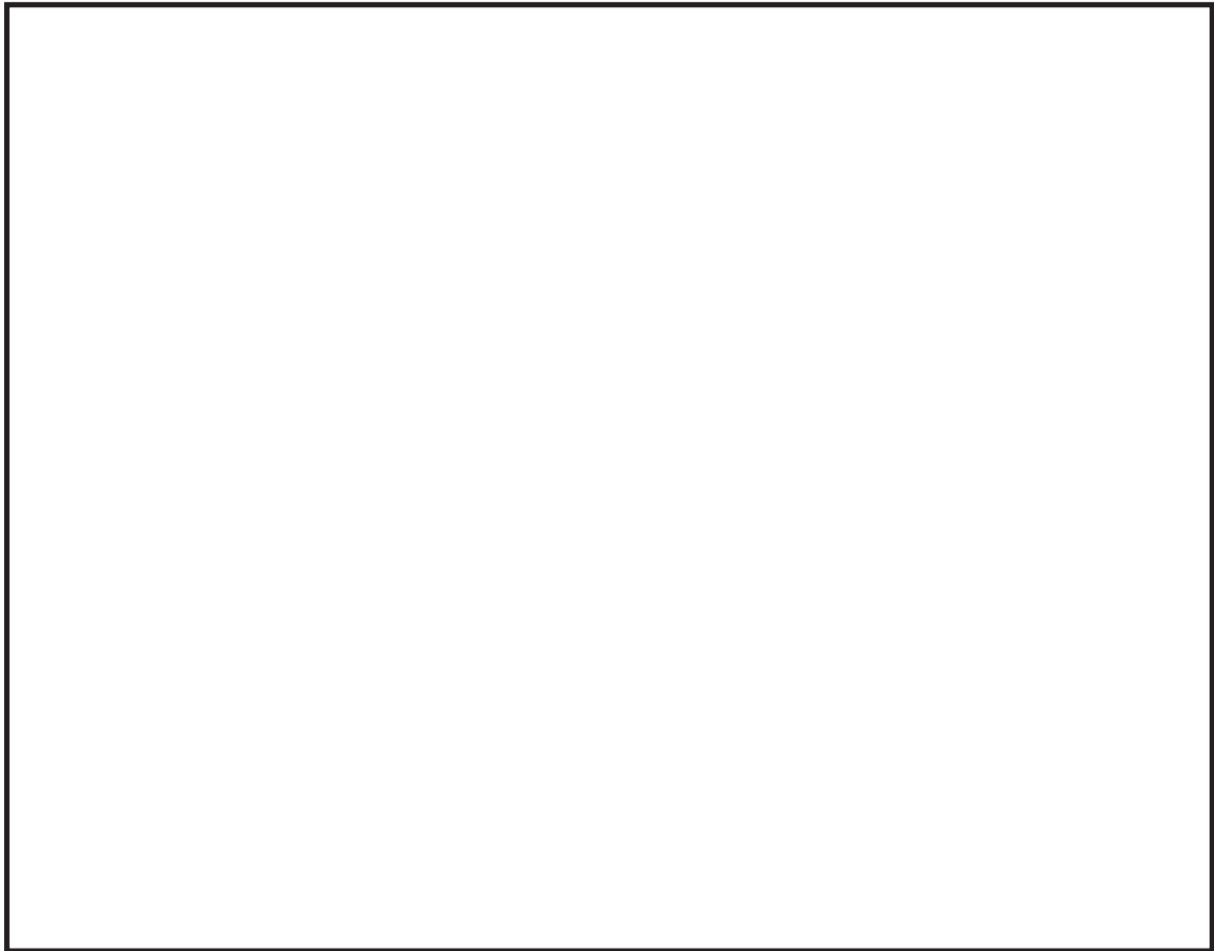
On July 6, 16 were killed by an air strike on a school run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (Unrwa), the majority of whom were children. On the same day, five journalists were killed. On July 7, a school sheltering displaced persons was targeted by an air strike, killing four Palestinians. The day before, a UN-run school for displaced Palestinians was targeted, killing 16 and wounding dozens. In central Gaza, the IDF struck a residential building in the al-Zawayda area, killing six people. According to the Palestinian Red Crescent, the dead included two children.<sup>1</sup> Five children were among nine killed after an air strike on Bureij refugee camp on July 9.

Palestinians are being killed directly by the IDF at about 40 a day, but that leaves aside those dying from malnutrition and disease. The UN estimates that about 50,000 Palestinians remain in Rafah, which sheltered more than 1.5 million people displaced in the earlier phase of the war. The Gaza Strip was one of the most densely populated places on earth before the war. Now this population has been displaced into ever more densely packed areas, hardly different from ghettos or concentration camps. Gaza City was ordered to evacuate again on July 9, but to where? Everyone in Gaza knows that there is nowhere safe.

At the time of writing, at least 38,193 have been killed and 87,903 wounded since October 7. Unsurprisingly, Israel has disputed these figures. It has used the fact that over 10,000 of the dead have not been identified and in many cases are unidentifiable, in order to question the overall numbers. Israel tries to say that the figures must necessarily be inflated, as they are largely compiled by the " Hamas-controlled ministry of health", as if that rendered them inherently unreliable. This strategy has been embraced by the US Congress which voted 269:144 for an amendment that would bar the State Department from using the Gaza health ministry's count. As for the BBC, whenever it reports the death toll, it adds the caveat that " Hamas is officially proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the UK government".

**Credible**

All this is despite the fact that the Israeli intelligence services regard the Palestinian ministry's figures as "credible".<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that the systematic targeting by Israel of health facilities has made it more difficult to accurately calculate the numbers of dead and wounded. However, the highly respected medical journal, *The*



**Gaza: premature babies**

*Lancet*, which has previously accepted the veracity of the health ministry's figures, has responded, pointing out that, given the number of buildings reduced to rubble, the dead still underneath the destruction is likely to exceed 10,000. Moreover, there is good evidence that the ministry of health estimates remain frighteningly accurate.

Indirect deaths are likely to increase in the coming months and years, even if the war ended today. These are due to starvation, trauma, communicable and non-communicable diseases - especially considering the ferocity of this war, with its destruction of healthcare infrastructure, severe shortages of food, water and shelter, and the loss of funding to Unrwa, which is one of the few humanitarian organisations still active in the Gaza Strip.

According to *The Lancet*, in recent conflicts, indirect deaths

range from three to 15 times the number of direct deaths. Applying a conservative estimate of four indirect deaths per one direct death to the 37,396 deaths reported,<sup>3</sup> it is not implausible to estimate that up to 186,000 or even more deaths could be attributable to the current conflict in Gaza. Using the 2022 Gaza Strip population estimate of 2,375,259, this would translate to 7.9% of the total population of the Gaza Strip. A report from February 7 2024, at the time when the direct death toll was 28,000, estimated that without a ceasefire there would be between 58,260 deaths (without an epidemic or escalation) and 85,750 deaths (if both occurred) by August 6 2024.<sup>4</sup>

One of the lead authors of this research is Martin McKee - a member of the editorial board of the International Advisory Committee of the Israel

National Institute for Health Policy Research.

Around 75% of the Gazan population has been internally displaced and 1.1 million people face catastrophic food insecurity - 'level 5', as defined by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the conflict, Israel has issued orders for the entire population to evacuate areas to supposedly 'safe' locations, only for those to be attacked too. The deliveries of aid, particularly food and water have also been deliberately disrupted. Where aid lorries have been allowed through, such as at the Kerem Shalom crossing, the IDF has tried to argue that the food shortages are the result of aid agencies not properly distributing the supplies or because Hamas had looted them, which the organisation denies.<sup>6</sup>

The problem with such a blatantly dishonest account is that it ignores the fact that the targeting of aid agencies has been a deliberate policy by the IDF, including the killing of Médecins Sans Frontières volunteers. Unrwa itself has been targeted by the IDF and had 193 of its staff killed and 188 of its installations damaged, leading to the deaths of at least 520 Palestinians, who were taking shelter in them. Unrwa's funding was also reduced, following a campaign of disinformation by Israel about the involvement of its staff in the events of October 7.<sup>7</sup> The countries that have been the quickest to reduce funding, such as the US and UK, are also directly complicit in Israel's genocide by the supply of weapons, intelligence and both military and logistical support to the IDF.

Despite all of this, some aid is clearly getting through. Northern Gaza has seen an increase in food and repairs to water and sanitation infrastructure, although even there around 20% of the population are still classified as suffering catastrophic food shortages.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, a

malnourished population, particularly children, will remain extremely susceptible to death from water-borne disease, typically causing diarrhoea leading to dehydration. Around 67% of Gaza's water and sanitation infrastructure has been destroyed.

**Propaganda**

The regular contact between 'Genocide Joe' and Benjamin Netanyahu seems calculated not to hinder Biden's reelection by ensuring that the sight of starving children does not prick too many consciences. While it is highly questionable that Netanyahu would choose a Biden presidency over a Trump one, the Biden administration's squeamishness at the sight of starving children is not matched by the sight of them being killed in air strikes with US-supplied ordinance.

If Biden's tenuous grasp on power can explain the pressure on Netanyahu to ameliorate the food shortage, the same cannot be said of the approach to Israel of Sir 'Kid Starver'. The former human rights lawyer and one-time member of Socialist Alternatives had no qualms before the UK election in defending Israel's 'right' to restrict food and water to the civilian population of Gaza, as well as to engage in what is clearly collective punishment, at best.

The manifest absurdity of the UK voting system has delivered Starmer a 'loveless landslide', with just 35% of the vote. However, the fact that Gaza played a prominent part in the election of five independents, and possibly four Green Party MPs, did not stop Netanyahu being high up on Starmer's 'to do' list, when it came to phoning national heads. What it might have done is to make it likely that the UK government will drop its challenge to the International Criminal Court over its issue of an arrest warrant for Netanyahu. Not that this will make the slightest difference to the people

of Gaza. Netanyahu is not going anywhere soon.

The suggestion in *The Guardian* that Starmer has spoken with the Israeli PM about the "clear and urgent" need for a ceasefire in Gaza is a piece of political theatre, from a man who has unashamedly described himself as a "Zionist".<sup>9</sup> I suspect Starmer's overture to Palestine president Mahmoud Abbas about the "undeniable right to a Palestinian state" is the beginning of an attempt to regain support lost from the Muslim community in last week's election. Then there is the small matter of Britain being held to be complicit in genocide by the ICC, given the UK reticence to prevent arms sales to Israel and the failure to even call for a ceasefire before the election.

The UK is now one of the few countries that has refused to restore funding to the Unrwa. Labour's new foreign secretary, David Lammy, a trained lawyer, has allegedly said of the publication of official advice about the legality of arms sales to Israel that he would "look at the legal assessments", adding: "I will begin that process, of course, as soon as I'm able to."<sup>10</sup> I suppose that is the advantage of a legal education.

Most people would just say that selling arms to a country that is using them against an occupied civilian population and inflicting tens of thousands of fatalities and injuries was wrong and stop it immediately. But then, most people are not the same as those who head client states of the USA - Starmer and Lammy will do as they are told by the world hegemon.

While the UN also often defers to the USA, that does not stop some of its human rights experts from speaking truth to power. Ten independent UN experts on July 9 said that "Israel's intentional and targeted starvation campaign against the Palestinian people is a form of genocidal violence and has resulted in famine across all of Gaza."<sup>11</sup> Naturally, Israel rejects this and points to repairs to the Gaza water desalination plant, which was destroyed by the IDF in the first place. It is like when a murderer gives you a plaster for one of your wounds, before stabbing you again.

No-one is fooled by the numbers game. A temporary slowing of the rate of mass murder does not stop it being genocide. Nor will it stop the pace of killing from being picked up later, when matters of political expediency are less pressing ●

**Notes**

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**ECONOMICS****Reeves and her 'securonomics'**

Labour's leadership is relying on big business to bring the economic growth needed to fix 'broken Britain'. Michael Roberts predicts a one-term government



**W**e have had 'Abenomics' in Japan,<sup>1</sup> 'Modinomics' in India<sup>2</sup> and 'Bidenomics' in the US.<sup>3</sup> Now we have 'securonomics' in Britain! This is slick terminology for the basics of the new Labour government's economic policy - as expounded by its chancellor of the exchequer, Rachel Reeves - a former Bank of England economist.

When Reeves was in Washington before the general election, she told her audience that "Globalisation, as we once knew it, is dead". And she was right. The great boom in world trade since the 1990s came screeching to a halt after the great recession of 2008-09 and since then world trade has basically stagnated. And that has been expressed in the UK, which now has its largest trade deficit in its history. And it is not just trade.

Foreign investment has been declining - something British capital has increasingly relied upon since the 1980s. The UK is getting less productive investment by foreign companies into the economy. The number of foreign direct investment (FDI) projects landing in the UK has fallen by 6% year-on-year for the past two years, hitting a low of 1,555 in 2023. This represents a significant 16% decline since the Covid pandemic.

The pandemic was in fact the last straw. Global supply chains collapsed, while trade and investment shrunk. World economic growth is slowing - the International Monetary Fund calls it the "tepid 20s"<sup>4</sup> and the World Bank forecasts the worst growth rates in 30 years. It has become clear to Reeves that Britain can no longer rely on global expansion. It must fend for itself.

Thus we have 'securonomics', meaning in effect a nationalist approach to the economy. The watchword among many G7 economies is 'industrial strategy'. 'Free markets' are out - now governments must launch policies that guide and encourage their own capitalist sectors to invest

and produce in the 'right areas' to boost economic growth. Whereas 'Abenomics', 'Modinomics' and 'Bidenomics' were mostly a mixture of old-fashioned policies of Keynesian tax and credit stimulation to boost 'aggregate demand' and employment, along with neoliberal structural measures to weaken the labour movement and privatise state assets, Reeves claims that 'securonomics' is different.

In her recent Mais lecture (Mais is a business school in the heart of City of London), speaking to the representatives of big business and finance, Rachel Reeves set out a different view: that an "active" state can underwrite the security of businesses; to provide a "platform" of safety from which we can "drive sustainable economic growth". As she put it,

Sustained economic growth is the only route to improving the prosperity of our country and the living standards of working people. That is why it is Labour's first mission for government. It means being pro-business and pro-worker. We are the party of wealth creation.<sup>5</sup>

Securonomics means depending on "a dynamic and strategic state", she continued. That "does not mean ever-growing government, but it does mean a more active, smarter government that works in partnership with business, trade unions, local leaders and devolved governments".

So the new Labour government will not wait for the capitalist sector to invest, employ and grow: it will intervene to 'encourage' it into the right direction for Britain's industrial revival. This is no takeover of capitalist sectors to be run by the state. Yes, there will be more public investment, but only "where it can unlock additional private-sector investment, create jobs and provide a return for taxpayers". You see, Labour's industrial strategy will be "mission-driven and focused on the

**The economics of Rachel Reeves very much smacks of the strategy outlined by Mariana Mazzucato - the Italian-American leftist economist, who reckons that what modern capitalism needs is a "purpose-driven" partnership between the public and private sectors**

future. We will work in partnership with industry to seize opportunities and remove barriers to growth."

**Humpty Dumpty**

This smacks very much of the economic strategy of Mariana Mazzucato<sup>6</sup> - the Italian-American leftist economist, who reckons that what modern capitalism needs is a "purpose-driven" partnership between the public and private sectors. Mazzucato argues for public-private that can "capture a common vision across civil society, business, and public institutions".<sup>7</sup> Governments and capitalist companies should share the risks and then share out the rewards: "It is not about fixing markets, but creating markets". Mazzucato sums it up: "The Mission Economy offers a path to rejuvenate the state and thereby mend capitalism, rather than end it." Such is the purpose of securonomics too.

But can securonomics put the Humpty Dumpty of a broken Britain back together again? The key must be a sharp rise in productive investment to restore economic growth that will deliver more income for all and more revenues for government to invest to meet the social needs in health and social care, education, transport, communications and housing - all of which are flailing and failing in a "broken Britain".<sup>8</sup>

Where is the extra investment to come from? As I showed in my previous post on Britain, the UK's investment-to-GDP ratio is pathetically low (around 17% of gross domestic product, compared to the G7 average of 23%) and investment by the big corporations is even lower at 10% of GDP. As for public investment, that ratio is as low as 2% of UK GDP.

A recent London School of Economics study called for an increase in public investment of 1% of GDP, or a rise of £26 billion a year at current prices.<sup>9</sup> But what are Rachel Reeves and Labour proposing? They plan just

£7.3 billion "over the course of the next parliament" - through a National Wealth Fund, "making transformative investments across every part of the country". The Corbyn-led Labour Party proposed £25 billion; but the Reeves-Starmer leadership proposes just a quarter of that and a fraction of what even the LSE economists reckon is needed. Indeed what is needed for a proper transformation of industry and public services is more like £60 billion a year over next five years, or a rise of at least 2%-3% of GDP each year. Instead Labour's plan actually implies a *fall* in public investment as a share of GDP over this parliament!

Of course, the hope is that this tiny increase in public investment will attract "three pounds of private investment for every one pound of public investment, creating jobs across the country". But, even if it did (and that is doubtful), then the total increase would still be way, way short of what is needed to turn the UK economy around.

Why are the Labour leaders so timid about increasing public investment? The first reason is that, because the UK economy is so weak, government tax revenues are too low to fund increased investment. The only way to do so would be for the government to borrow more: ie, issue government bonds to the banks, etc. But that would increase the deficit on the government budget and raise the level of public debt - already at a record high.

Yes, the government could ignore the lack of 'fiscal headroom', as it is called, and just go ahead and borrow a lot more, with the expectation that the extra investment would boost growth and revenues and so pay for itself and avoid a rising debt burden. That is what Sharon Graham - the leftist leader of Britain's biggest trade union, Unite, suggested to Reeves.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, if you are a supporter of 'modern monetary theory', you would not even bother with issuing bonds: instead just

‘print the money’ (ie, get the Bank of England to credit the banks with more billions).

But what would foreign investors and bond holders make of that? Back in October 2022, in effect, in her drive for ‘growth’, the briefly appointed Tory prime minister, Liz Truss, proposed just that. What happened? The Bank of England did the opposite and raised interest rates, while the foreign bond holders went into capital flight and the pound collapsed in value. The Labour leaders are afraid of a similar investment-strike by financial markets if they borrow ‘too much’. So instead they are planning to borrow too little!

Starmer-Reeves have also placated the City of London by announcing that they will not be raising income tax rates, or social security rates (given that tax revenue relative to weak GDP is at a post-war high). Indeed, they have even pledged not to raise the corporation tax on big business - at 25% already the lowest in the G7 - in order not to ‘deter’ investment. They even say that, if other countries cut their rates, they will follow the race to the bottom by cutting further. And they will continue to provide 100% tax allowances on capital investment. The irony is that cuts in business taxes and exemptions have failed to boost private investment anywhere over the last two decades.

## Vicious austerity

Where will securonomics concentrate its timid investment strategy? The answer is in financial services, the automotive industry (wholly owned by foreign companies), life sciences and ‘creative sectors’ (film, design, theatre, fashion, etc). These are supposedly the sectors where the UK has an edge.

But what about the broken public services in Britain? The national health service is starved of funds and staff. During the election campaign, Reeves promised not to raise the main tax rates, which account for three-quarters of total tax revenue. Instead, she pins her hopes on higher growth, coupled with a narrow range of revenue rises worth around £8 billion. According to the latest optimistic estimates of UK economic growth, that means Reeves has just about £10 billion to spare on improving public services, unless Labour breaks its promise not to raise taxes or to borrow more. That means the vicious austerity that the NHS, local government and schools and universities have experienced over the last decade or more will continue - at least until the miracle of faster growth appears.

Indeed, the Nuffield Trust reckons that the current spending plans of the new Labour government for the NHS will mean a further period of austerity.<sup>11</sup> A 0.8% annual growth in total health spending would result in the next four years being the tightest in NHS history under the Labour pledges - tighter even than the former Tory coalition government’s ‘austerity’ period, which saw funding grow by just 1.4% in real terms a year between 2010-11 and 2014-15.

What about housing? The new Labour government says it will aim to build 300,000 new homes a year through the next five years. Sounds good, although it is way less than needed and way less than Labour governments built in the 1950s and 1960s. But how is even this to be done?

It is not going to be through a National Building Corporation that will employ building workers, architects, etc directly to build good houses and flats to be owned by local council at reasonable rents for

tenants, to get the huge waiting lists down. No, the whole housing plan will depend on private developers building homes for sale with minimal monitoring for ‘affordable homes’. The Labour leaders are more concerned with removing planning regulations in local areas, so that private developers can build where and how they want.

And who are these developers? As has been pointed out, they are the likes of BlackRock, the American investment company, which already owns 260,000 British homes on which it is charging some eye-watering fees - around £1.4 billion last year. So the likes of BlackRock will be the beneficiaries of this housing expansion.

Securonomics means that there is to be no public takeover of the productive sectors of the economy; or the financial sector; or the big investment funds. Take the disaster and scandals of the Royal Mail since its privatisation (it is now being sold by its private equity owners to a Czech billionaire). What is Labour’s plan?

Royal Mail remains a key part of the UK’s infrastructure. Labour will ensure that any proposed takeover is robustly scrutinised and that appropriate guarantees are forthcoming that protect the interests of the workforce, customers and the United Kingdom, including the need to maintain a comprehensive universal service obligation.

So it is regulation, not the restoration of public ownership, that matters in this “key part of the UK’s infrastructure”.

Then there are the energy and water utilities. The scandal of these privatised utilities is for all to see, where shareholders have got billions in dividends, while debt and prices rise. The total collapse in the water infrastructure has reached the point where the UK’s water supply, rivers and beaches are no longer safe to drink or touch. And yet, Labour has no plan to bring these utilities back into public ownership. Instead, it wants ‘better regulation’. Apparently, it wants *less* regulation in housing and more regulation in utilities and the postal service.

Labour has pledged to bring railways back into public ownership - but only gradually, as the private franchises (some 10-years-long) expire. Labour under Corbyn pledged free broadband for all as a public right. This was called “communism” by the rightwing press. Labour under Starmer only proposes “a renewed push to fulfil the ambition of full gigabit and national 5G coverage by 2030”.

**Mariana Mazzucato:  
her ‘Mission Economy’  
offers a  
“path to rejuvenate the  
state and thereby mend  
capitalism,  
rather than end it”.**  
**Exactly what Jeremy Corbyn  
and John McDonnell  
proposed to do**



‘Securonomics’, however, does mean more investment in one key sector: defence. The new Labour government has pledged to raise defence spending to 2.5% of GDP in this parliament in order to ‘secure’ the country - supposedly from the threat of invasion by Russia or China, but in reality to meet the demands of the US and Nato. UK defence spending already stands at 2.3% of GDP - but more is to be spent, while the NHS remains in austerity mode.

## One-term Labour

Securonomics is really a return yet again to the idea of ‘public-private partnership’. What that means is that the government will borrow or tax a bit more to invest a bit more - mainly to encourage and subsidise the capitalist sector to invest more and let them take the lion’s share of any extra revenues produced. Public-sector investment will mainly be used to help the capitalist sector invest, not to replace it.

That makes sense if your founding belief is to make capitalism work better. Capitalist investment in the UK is some five times greater than public investment. It would be a different economy if that ratio was the other way round. But that will not happen under securonomics.

The problem is that the capitalist sector has failed to invest enough over the last three decades and much of its investment has not been in productive sectors of the economy, but in finance, real estate, defence, etc. The reason is because it was just not profitable enough to invest elsewhere. Labour’s plans do not suggest any change in that trend.

Securonomics is supposedly a strategy for British capital to ‘take control’ of its economy with the help of a pro-business government, and so fend for itself in an increasingly stagnant and protectionist world economy. But the UK economy is frail and it has not escaped (and will not escape) the twists and turns of the global capitalist economy. There is every likelihood that the world economy will enter a new slump before the end of this decade. Slumps emerge every 8-10 years and the last two were the worst in capitalist history. Even without a slump, global growth is slowing and trade is stagnant, with little sign of improvement ahead.

Labour’s plans do not suggest ‘security’ against vicissitudes of capitalist accumulation. After each previous slump, the incumbent government has been ousted (Labour in 2010 after the slump of 2008-09 and the Conservatives eventually in 2024 after the pandemic slump of 2020).

This could be a one-term Labour government ●

Michael Roberts blogs at  
[thenextrecession.wordpress.com](https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com)

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# What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question—ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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# No solutions on offer

Masoud Pezeshkian was elected on a wave of unenthusiasm. Yassamine Mather looks at the challenges facing the new president

**A** bit like Keir Starmer, Masoud Pezeshkian, Iran's newly elected 'reformist' president, did not make many concrete promises during his election campaign. The 16.4 million votes (55%) he received were as much against Saeed Jalili, his rival in the second round, as opposed to an endorsement of him.

Jalili was seen as the continuation of the regime under the much hated, ultra-conservative former president, Ebrahim Raisi - he was and remains an opponent of Tehran's 2015 nuclear pact with the major western powers. A few years before the deal, Jalili had served as Iran's top nuclear negotiator for five years from 2007 - a period during which Iran took an aggressive and uncompromising approach in discussions. This coincided with the first tranche of major sanctions imposed on the country.

However, as many people have pointed out in recent weeks, sanctions, far from punishing Iran's political leaders, have created opportunities for many of them and their relatives to become multi-millionaires - in some cases billionaires. Most of these people regularly move their ill-gotten gains abroad into accounts held by relatives or offshore bank accounts, with no risk of facing any sanctions. Meanwhile, ordinary Iranians suffer, as price rises and rampant unemployment or underemployment makes life extremely difficult for them.

## Second round

On the morning of July 6, the day after the second round, most of those who were celebrating Pezeshkian's victory seemed relieved that the two main conservative candidates and representatives of a corrupt bunch of reactionaries, Saeed Jalili and Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, were defeated. Soon afterwards, the various factions of the conservative camp began recriminations, blaming their adversaries for failing to unite. According to the *Amwaj* website,

Conservative political figures have confirmed a previously rumoured intervention by the commander of the Quds Force [international branch of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Command (IRGC)] ahead of the elections. [Revolutionary Guards general] Esmail Qa'ani is said to have attempted to convince Jalili to step aside in favour of Qalibaf - a move which may come to haunt the military commander.

No-one has any doubt that Qalibaf was the candidate of the much-hated IRGC.

However, as I wrote last week,<sup>1</sup> no-one should expect much from the new administration. Supporters of the Islamic Republic's 'reformist' factions tell us the fact that Pezeshkian was allowed to stand - and that votes were not 'manipulated' to bring about a conservative victory - proved that supreme leader Ali Khamenei is keen to make a deal with the USA. There



Masoud Pezeshkian ... voting for himself

is no doubt that with a 'reformist'-led government in office, Khamenei can now show flexibility in foreign policy without losing face (more difficult under Raisi).

Nevertheless, in his statement congratulating Pezeshkian on his electoral success, the supreme leader advised the president-elect to "follow the path" of Raisi and "make use of the abundant capacities in the country". This was followed by a five-hour meeting between Khamenei and Pezeshkian. We will know more about Iran's direction once Pezeshkian nominates his cabinet.

There is a lot of speculation that, given the important role of former foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif during the presidential elections, he might be offered the same post once again. At a campaign rally in support of Pezeshkian on July 3, Zarif told voters to "send home those who have accomplished nothing for the country but sanctions, humiliation and misery". Writing on Twitter a day after the results, Zarif commented that Iran under Pezeshkian will be "more unified, resolute and prepared than ever to tackle its challenges, strengthen its relationships with neighbouring countries, and reassert its role in the emerging global order".

However, it is unlikely that Zarif will be acceptable to the Iranian majles (parliament), currently dominated by the conservatives and led by Qalibaf - unless there is direct intervention by the supreme leader. The president-elect also held a meeting with his former rival, Qalibaf, who is the speaker of the majles, so we assume its role in approving or rejecting ministerial nominees was discussed.

## Limitations

Pezeshkian will soon find out all about the limitations of the top executive post in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The experience of his predecessors,

'reformists' Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) and Hassan Rouhani (2013-21), give us plenty of examples.

First of all, he will have to be prepared to confront the obstacles created by the more conservative factions. During his presidency Khatami regularly faced protests and demonstrations by groups like Ansar-e Hezbollah, shroud-wearing protestors, and *bassij* (militia) motorcyclists, angry at what they called the government's tolerance of 'anti-Islamic' behaviour, as well as the arrest and imprisonment of journalists (even some supporters of the president, as well as critics). All created huge problems for the government.

One of the most important previous challenges came in a letter from 24 senior IRGC commanders to the then-president. After an incident at Tehran University in July 1999, they warned that "our patience has run out" and, if the student protests were not stopped, they would take action. This letter was a veiled threat against the second most powerful figure in the Islamic Republic and was seen by some as hinting at a coup.

During Hassan Rouhani's presidency, problems and challenges manifested differently. What were described as 'autonomous' groups became active and there was public expectation of improved economic conditions that would come with what Rouhani claimed would be 'the government of hope'. The incompetence of the government led to the bloody protests of 2017 and 2019, as well as a series of strikes.

The economic failures arose partly because the government based its plans on the nuclear agreement. Once this failed - following Trump's withdrawal - the president was faced with a parliamentary resolution blocking the path to a revival of negotiations.

Although, as I have pointed out,

Pezeshkian did not make many promises during his campaign, he did say: "I guarantee that the entire government will stand firmly against mandatory patrols, censorship ... and external pressures".

## Not straightforward

Many of those who voted for him presumably believe that taking measures against the 'morality police' and censorship should be a priority. However, success in these areas is not straightforward, because, according to officials, issues like the mandatory wearing of the hijab are a 'governmental obligation' and Khamenei has repeatedly emphasised that he will not compromise on that issue. In early 2022, Ebrahim Raisi issued an executive order called the 'Hijab and Chastity Plan' to executive and law-enforcement agencies, and a bill with the same name has been approved after several rounds between the majles and the Guardian Council. Its implementation was only delayed due to the parliamentary elections last year and the recent presidential election.

Although six out of 13 members of the committee that controls the 'filtering' of the internet and social media are from the government, the other members, nominated by unelected agencies, seem to have more influence. On May 15, the then minister of communications stated: "Internet restrictions are not in our hands, and the 'filtering' committee must be responsible for lifting what blocks websites and social media platforms." In such circumstances, it is unclear how Pezeshkian can overcome these "external pressures" when it comes to censorship.

On the question of the 'morality police', if they continue the crackdown on women who refuse to wear the full hijab on the street, how

will the president react? Will he keep his promise?

Beyond the immediate challenges, the new president is also faced with a long list of long-term political and economic issues, some related to foreign relations. Very similar problems persisted during Rouhani's administration and remained unresolved by the end of his term.

Beyond the presidential elections, economics professor Saeed Laylaz remarked that Pezeshkian's candidacy was approved because of his potential to "resolve the severe economic imbalances in Iran". Laylaz said that addressing economic problems requires a government with maximum legitimacy, and a 'reformist' government would better facilitate a solution. During the campaign, Pezeshkian linked some of his economic promises to improved foreign relations: his aim was 8% economic growth, which depended on attracting \$200 billion in annual foreign investment.

Although Pezeshkian has pledged to do his utmost to remove Iran's name from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) blacklist, my understanding is that this is related to Iran's financial support for Hezbollah. Given the current instability in the Middle East and a possible escalation between Israel and Hezbollah, it is difficult to see how the new president will reduce Iran's financial contributions to the Shia group.

When it comes to relations with the US, Ali Abdolizadeh, head of Pezeshkian's campaign, has promised to "negotiate with Trump to lift the sanctions. He is a businessman, and we understand the language of commerce well." It could be that the new president has been given the green light by Khamenei, but, if not, Iran's foreign relationships will remain very limited (to the likes of China and Russia).

Economist Hadi Kahlzadeh has told BBC Persian that one of Pezeshkian's significant challenges is that the government has practically been stripped of its policymaking powers in economic, welfare, health and social domains, leaving Iran virtually in a state of "non-government". Kahlzadeh noted that the government's ability to make policies and solve national issues has therefore been drastically reduced.

The government's financial resources are limited too and its expenses are very high, which means it continues to face a budget deficit. This has squeezed resources. So will Pezeshkian do what other Iranian presidents have done and borrow from the central bank, which in turn fuels inflation?

As I have noted many times, while we should not expect regime collapse any time soon, it is hardly in a secure or stable situation ●

## Notes

1. 'Don't expect much', July 4: [weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1498/dont-expect-much](https://www.weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1498/dont-expect-much).