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Britain

# Britain – difficulties and opportunities...

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**The last weekend of November will see a major conference take place in the city of Liverpool in the north west of England. Fronted by former Labour MP Zara Sultana and former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and with more than 50,000 sign ups, this will formally launch a new political party. The proto-formation currently has the clumsy, name of Your Party but the membership will at some later point decide whether and how to rename it.**

There is no doubt that there is a desperate need and a major opportunity to build a radical left organization with an activist presence in workplaces and trade unions as well as at the ballot box. The polycrisis devastating every corner of the globe with so many tentacles – environmental, economic, and social, further deepening existing inequalities – is playing out in its own ways in Britain – and indeed with different particularities in Wales, Scotland and England.

So if the sign ups show the opportunity, there is also a huge responsibility to develop ideas and ways of organising that improves the balance of forces for the working class in its most inclusive sense. The contribution that Your Party will make to these developments is not determined – and the responsibility of revolutionaries as always is to contribute collectively the lessons we derive from other attempts at home and abroad to tip the scales in the favour of the global majority

## Polarisation to the right

Following the general election in July 2024,, after 13 years of a Conservative government at Westminster, overseeing deepening poverty and inequality, Labour under Keir Starmer took their place. The crisis-ridden Tories lost the election rather than Labour winning it; though both Starmer and much of the mainstream media proclaimed it as a Labour landslide.

Few people, particularly on the radical left had many expectations of positive results from Starmer's government. ACR's Dave Kellaway explained that the manifesto on which Labour fought the election "is underpinned by an ideology that slavishly accepts the status quo as a model for organising the economy, the welfare state, and the government. Rather than generating hope for real change, it is imbued with pessimism about what we as working people can achieve, assuming the gods of the market and capital cannot be even minimally challenged. It even rejects a traditional social democratic vision of public ownership, taxation, and redistribution." But few predicted how far to the right the new administration would shift.

The July 2024 elections saw other notable developments. Nigel Farage had already made a major political impact with his reactionary nationalist Brexit Party winning a majority of seats at the European elections in June 2019 and campaigning for a no deal Brexit. They did not win seats at the 2019 general election but gained a great deal of airtime and pushed other parties to the right.

After Britain left the European Union in January 2020, in 2021 the Brexit Party rebranded as Reform UK. Anti-migrant policies and rhetoric are at the centre of their platform but alongside that is opposition to cutting carbon emissions, to vaccines and to lockdowns during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, slashing public spending – particularly but not only programmes that promote equality and inclusion. Farage is very much in Trump's ambit and has also increasingly aped the nativist rhetoric of the American far right.

This reactionary bile together with a number of own goals has had a significant effect on the deeply divided Conservative Party leading to electoral success with the election of five Reform MPs in July 2024. Combined with high profile defections from the Tories to Farage's party, this trajectory has deepened so that now Reform now also has one member in the Scottish Parliament, one member in the Welsh Senedd (their national assembly with less powers than the Scottish Parliament) two members of the London Assembly (a body with little power) and control of twelve local councils. Reducing so-called waste – often by closing down any programmes which particularly support the most marginalised whether it be targeted at disabled people, at the LGBT+ community, at women and/or at racialised and migrant communities alongside general antimigrant propaganda has been at the centre of what they do and say.

Creeping or even galloping fascism has not only been driven by Farage himself and his friends in the United States but also by a related but partially separate movement under the leadership of a man who calls himself Tommy Robinson but is actually called Stephen Yaxley-Lennon. Yaxley –Lennon has been a member of a number of explicitly fascist organisations a long criminal record and a particular focus on whipping up Islamophobia,

The summers of both 2024 and 2025 saw the far right whipping up vicious attacks on migrants housed in hotels as well as making propaganda against those crossing the channel in small boats. In 2004, false rumour were spread that the perpetrator of the appalling Southport murders a few weeks earlier was a Muslim asylum seeker. It was extraordinary that no one died in the riot at the Tamworth hotel which was probably the worst incident .

In 2025, the summer was again the focus for such far right and fascist mobilisations with the notion of 'protecting our women and girls' (meaning of course white women and girls) added to the themes of the previous years. Yaxley-Lennon has form on this subject – showing interest in questions of violence against women and girls only where alleged perpetrators are Muslims and the survivors are white. Protests against migrants also took place in parts of Scotland where such mobilisations had not previously occurred and politicians across the political spectrum and communities themselves have tended to be more welcoming of immigration.

Reform and Conservative councils in England and Wales – and in one case even a Labour administration - threatened action against the Westminster government using planning regulations to claim that no migrants should be housed in hotels. People sent to these hotels are often sharing rooms with others they don't know and don't always have a common first language have almost no disposable income and no choice about where they are sent. They are painted as scroungers living in luxury when they are denied the right to work. Divide and rule rhetoric disgracefully is coming from not only the far right but from a significant number of Labour politicians too.

Another aspect was the development of Operation Raise the Colours, where the union jack and sometimes the flag of the relevant single country – Wales, Scotland or England – were tied to lampposts and in some cases painted on mini-roundabouts. These were particular prolific in the same areas where the hotel protests were the largest and most long lasting. In at least some areas there were an increasing number of racist attacks in the same places – for example in my own area a football team of Chinese women were subject to racist aggression from a group of teenagers .

The culmination of this so far at least was the largest far right demonstration in Britain's history called by Yaxley-Lennon under the banner of 'Unite the Kingdom' attended by over 150,000 at which Elon Musk spoke via video link and called for a change of government. Chilling – and a real challenge to the radical left .

## Labour's further shift to the right

Meanwhile the response of Starmer's government was to speak and act as a hostile to migration as possible. There

are more instances of this than space here to cover in detail but one of the most notorious was Starmer's speech in May 2025 in which, heralding the publication of a new immigration White Paper, he spoke about Britain 'becoming an island of strangers' – a phrase deeply reminiscent of that used by the racist Enoch Powell in 1968. It beggars belief that neither Starmer nor any of his team, all of whom has since claimed they didn't know its origin. Even if that were true, nothing justifies either that formula or anything else in the speech. And now, Labour has announced that it will introduced further extremely restrictive measures in the next few days to some extent inspired by the deeply reactionary Danish model – selling the same as coming from the centre left and therefore not toxic....

Labour is not only ceding ground to the far right on migration, it's also on economic questions. In opposition, Starmer and other prominent Labour figures had championed women who had lost out when the age at which they could draw their state pension had been raised without proper notice, trapping many in unanticipated poverty. In office, they turned their backs on them – though there are rumours that this could change shortly. One of the vicious attacks carried out by the Tories was the introduction of the two child benefit cap in 2017 meaning that families with more than two children didn't get means tested benefits for the third or subsequent child. This not only forces more families further into poverty but is deepening and manipulating divisive images of the undeserving poor. Starmer opposed scrapping the cap in opposition but in 2024 Labour said it would scrap the cap 'but only when the 'fiscal situation permits.' They not only signalled this was some way off but threw seven Labour MPs who supported an opposition amendment to do so then out of the Parliamentary Labour Party. As we move towards next week's budget, amongst the many rumours swirling around is the idea that the cap will be raised to cover up to three children – rather than scrapped altogether as it should be.

Labour has been attacking disabled people. In Britain today because of low wage rates and weak trade unions many people in work – including full time work – are entitled to benefits in addition to their wages. At the same time the failure of employers to make adjustments to enable people with particular impairments to work and to implement draconian absence policies have forced increasing numbers of people out of waged labour and into dependency on benefits. But faced with a spiralling benefits bill, Labour did not seek to pressure employers or to strengthen antidiscrimination legislation but yet again to scapegoat the marginalised. Their initial plans to cut government expenditure were pushed back by a significant campaign by disabled people with some support from parts of the trade union movement and some rebellious Labour MPs (who again lost the whip for their principles.)

Meanwhile Labour came into office 9 months into the genocide in Gaza and essentially continued the Tories support for Israel. British arms sales have some military impact but even more significantly send a strong political message of which side the Westminster government is on. There has always been a relatively strong Palestine Solidarity movement in Britain but this has mushroomed significantly since October 7 2023. In the face of mass protests in September 2024 the new government did suspend some key export licences but this was more for show than to make any decisive step.

Further Starmer's government has been extremely repressive against protestors. The crackdown was initially cranked up against environmental protestors but has also targeted the Palestine solidarity movement. Two particular features merit mention. The first was the arrest of a number of prominent protestors – including a holocaust survivor – at a peaceful march in central London in January 2025 following the complaints reactionary Zionists that the march was going to near a synagogue – ignoring the large prominent Jewish Bloc on our march. Even worse was the decision to proscribe the direct action organisation Palestine Action in June and the subsequent arrest of more than 2000 protestors for silently holding signs decrying the ban.

All of this is taking place in the context of a rising cost of living initially brought about by the Tories but with little or no remedial action from Labour which allows the political space for divide and rule politics trumpeted by the far right but to often echoed by other mainstream parties to fester.

# Developments on the Left

While there is no doubt that the centre of political gravity has moved significantly to the right over the last eighteen months, other developments make clear that there is space and support to the left of social democracy.

The Green Party of England and Wales issued a press release on October 19 that it was now the third largest party in the UK overtaking the Conservatives for the first time – having previously surpassed the Liberal Democrats. Zack Polanski had been elected as the new party leader in September on an explicitly left populist platform. Polanski, who has been a member of the London Assembly since May 2021 won against a joint candidacy of two of the party's four MPs elected in July 2024, Adrian Ramsay and Ellie Chownes with policies way to his right. Not only did the Greens win more MPs than ever in 2024 but their percentage of the vote was higher – and greater than the four seats tend to suggest in Britain's deeply reactionary First Past the Post system for Westminster elections. It was clear that the party had a rigorous system of prioritisation of campaigning in areas where they thought they had a chance of success.

Their membership had been growing for some time but it is Polanski's election that developed a real spurt with a doubling of the figures. The internal election campaign allowed people to vote who joined the party up to the deadline – and there is no doubt that activists from the environmental and Palestine solidarity movements, including those who had joined Labour to back Corbyn, were a significant part of Polanski's support base. In recent weeks some opinion polls have shown the Greens ahead of Labour, second only to Reform.

Two parallel mistakes are being made by parts of the radical left in reaction. Sectarianism towards the Greens claim they are a petit bourgeois outfit – without clarifying whether this is a sociological description or a critique of their policies and praxis – and should be dismissed not only on the electoral front but as participants in key social movements and workplace organising that needs to be promoted as a crucial part of our response to the shift to the right. On the other some other activists, frustrated with some of the own goals and lack of urgency from Your Party centrally are not only putting all their personal energies into the Greens – a fair enough choice – but dismissing as sectarian those of us who raise criticisms of their record in office including as the largest group on Brighton council where they implemented cuts.

Alongside the growth of the Green Party, the 2024 general election saw other left developments too. Jeremy Corbyn, MP for the north London seat of Islington North had resigned from the leadership of the Labour Party after the 2019 general election defeat and was replaced by Keir Starmer. In 2020 he was suspended from the Parliamentary Labour Party after he allegedly downplayed the extent of antisemitism inside the Labour Party. Following an unsuccessful campaign to overturn this, Corbyn finally announced he would stand as an independent in the general election which had been called by then – gaining the support not only of a large number of local activists including long standing Labour Party members but mobilising many campaigners across Britain and further afield to come and work for him. The result saw Corbyn take 49.2 per cent of the vote and a 7000 majority.

The success of Corbyn's campaign was partly on the basis of his political ideas : opposition to austerity and support for migrants and for Palestine but also because he is a widely respected local representative with a personal support base broader than his politics. But he was not the only person to be elected as an independent MP in 2024.

Three other candidates were elected as independent MPs Adnan Hussain, Iqbal Mohamed and Ayoub Khan. Only Khan, who was previously a Liberal Democrat councilor, had any previous political experience, But in a situation where the campaign against the genocide against the Palestinian people was mobilizing huge numbers and this was a central part of each of their stances this allowed their elections. However though it was good to have people elected on the basis of support for Gaza, it's far from clear that on many other issues their political views are that progressive.

This also tied into other developments before the general election and before it where candidacies came forward in different parts of England against Labour candidates at parliamentary and at council level. Some of these candidates had previously been elected for Labour but were now blocked by the machine, some were successful at council level and a number had credible campaigns even where they were not elected.

# Own goals from whose party?

This is the context in which Your Party was launched by Zara Sultana the day before Labour had been in government at Westminster for a year. The following day Corbyn announced his involvement – but ever since there have been a series of media stories of arguments between the two. It's hard enough – as well as desperately depressing – for militants in England, Scotland and Wales to follow and analyse all the problems that have arisen since and imposing these on an international audience doesn't make sense.

Never the less two main headings need mentioning even if only to sketch the main features in outline:

- **The initial political programme is vague with major omissions and ambiguities.**

Four documents have been drafted in advance of the founding conference of which the political programme is by far the shortest at 263 words (1700 characters with spaces!).

There is no sense of urgency in the text – no mention of the rise of the far right and hardly any of the environmental crisis. There are positive aspirations but no specific measures or demands that could concretise those hopes.

There is lack of clarity about how much Cymru/Wales and Scotland will have independent structures. Branch offices run from London will not cut it – not only amongst those central to the independence currents in those countries but more generally amongst young people.

No lessons seem to have been drawn from other examples of parties to the left of social democracy globally which have foundered through inadequate understanding of the need for political independence be it in Brazil, Greece or in the Spanish State. Yet in all those cases those defeats strengthened the radical right as well as demobilised thousands of activists who felt they had been marched to the top of the hill – and then abandoned by their supposed leaders.

This lack of political clarity cannot in the end be separated from questions of democratic functioning – as the latter is the best guarantee that mistakes can be righted. This is why ACR has submitted both an alternative political statement and constitutional amendments to the founding conference .

- **There is no transparency**

The initial announcement of the organisation was July and the conference is in late November and no ongoing structures have been put in place in the interim. Attendees at the Liverpool event have been selected through a lottery system known as Sortition (with some unspecified weighting to include the most marginalised), With less than two weeks to go it's unclear what decisions will actually be taken then and which will go out to plebiscite afterwards.

It's true that setting up a democratic system of delegates for such a large numbers is challenging – no venue exists which could hold all of us for example. So i can live with the idea of Sortition at this stage but is more problematically it is being offered as a permanent part of the structure, That suggests it's a legitimate option not an inevitable stop gap A system with no accountability, no basis of recall, can't be part of a democratic structure.

And although 'proto-branches' have been set up in many localities these haven't been resourced from the centre. Without access to lists of those who have signed up centrally, inevitably those involved are the already organised and known to each other. In some places rival groups, each dominated by a different left group have developed.

Further to the major issues outlined here, there have been a whole series of negative stories both in the mainstream media and on social media with prominent figures associated with the project either announcing they are withdrawing or criticising each other or the way things are being run in public. Inevitably all of this means some of those who signed up initially those months ago have drifted away. Some have joined the Greens which is not so bad but some have almost certainly dropped out of politics.

Despite all these difficulties, it would be completely irresponsible for revolutionaries not to be involved in this process and straining every muscle to ensure the best possible outcome.

*19 November 2025*

*PS:*

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