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Britain

# Labour panders to racism – playing the far right's game

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**When Keir Starmer was standing for Labour leader in 2020 after Jeremy Corbyn resigned, his slogan was “Another World is Possible”. This was a call back to the ideals and hope of the anti capitalist movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s before 9/11 made our world more reactionary, more dangerous, more cynical. As part of his bid for leadership to win over a membership that had only recently elected Corbyn twice over, Starmer gave a speech in which he outlined his view on immigration; “We welcome migrants, we don’t scapegoat them. Low wages, poor housing, poor public services, are not the fault of migrants... we have to make the case for the benefits of migration”.**

Music to the ears of the left – fighting a rearguard action every day against the right wing press, fascists and the political right who are constantly beating the drum that all our problems are ultimately down to mass migration.

It is no surprise of course to see Starmer totally collapse on this issue in the face of the growth of the Reform vote. Starmer has no principles, no spine, no moral code. His only interest is power, and exercising power for the sake of maintaining the collapsing status quo.

Starmer’s speech was to promote the new immigration white paper – in reality a white flag to racism that collapsed Labour’s policy agenda into Reform’s. Nigel Farage gave a statesman performance in Parliament, not crowing or goading, simply acknowledging that Starmer was now on the right track but could go a little further – call a state of emergency at the border for instance. Don’t be surprised if that happens before the end of this parliament.

We are living through the most eroded, politically bankrupt form of a Labour government. Bereft of ideas or inspiration apart from Rachel Reeves’ laughable neoliberalism greatest hits covers band, all they can do is flail around as their hopes of a rejuvenated Britain fuelled by GDP growth collapses around them. News reports of 0.7% GDP growth are hailed as a glimmer of hope, in a world where the tendency towards stagflation and economic decline is growing stronger.

Austerity, austerity and more austerity. Death by a thousand cuts. But you cannot blame the tax dodging businesses or the super rich, and you certainly cannot propose even going back to even the middle ground of post war social democracy. All there is are markets, businesses, wealth and power and the complete subordination of our lives and communities to them.

No such thing as society, indeed.

But there is racism. And nationalism. The last refuge of a desperate scoundrel. And is there any more desperate or scandalous than Sir Starmer? Beating down on migrants and refugees is so commonplace now Starmer probably doesn’t give it a second thought. The ghost of his own self from 2020 is waved away, after all you have to be realistic when you’re in power don’t you? And realism today means transphobia and racism; fresh, bleeding red meat for the hungry mouths of the culture wars.

## Labour’s racist history

Of course this is nothing new, Labour has routinely thrown 'foreigners' to the wolves despite the fact they historically got a lot of the Black vote.

In 1924 during their first government, one Labour minister proclaimed "I'm here to make sure there is no mucking about with the British Empire". Labour reluctantly gave up India in 1947 only because of the success of the anti colonial movement, but made sure to partition the country at the cost of millions of lives.

Labour opposed the Tories 1961 anti immigration legislation that would limit the number of people from Commonwealth countries, only to legislate their own three years later. Harold Wilson was clear that Labour "did not contest the need for control of immigration into this country" because as he said the "number of immigrants with differing cultural and social backgrounds" was causing "difficulties". This was just a few years after the racist riots at Nottingham when local young white people had attacked Black people living there.

The reality is that immigration under capitalism is always turned on or off for the benefit of business and the bosses. When there was a Labour shortage after World War Two every political party backed recruiting Black workers from the Caribbean. By the 1960s when concerns over economic stagnation began to set in, the anti-immigrant rhetoric ramped up, not just over competition for jobs but a feeling that 'British culture' was being undermined by people from abroad. The idea that culture always evolves and changes is lost on the nationalist, all they see is a fake nostalgia for an imagined past, impervious to nuance or facts.

Labour doesn't just pander to these prejudices to win votes – though it does also do that.. Labour is a political machine for managing capitalism, it claims to shift the balance slightly more favourably towards 'hard working people' though as we have seen this is usually just electioneering for the grim reality of servicing the needs of big business and the capitalist class. Because it is a machine that is embedded in and welded to capitalism and the nation state, it will happily attack immigrants if they can convince themselves there is an economic logic to it.

The key shift in Starmer's speech is that instead of attacking 'illegal immigrants' and 'bogus asylum seekers' Labour is now going after legal migration – workers and students who have visas.

In a situation of economic decline, the logic to restrict immigration even to sectors that traditionally rely on workers from abroad like social care and health, is based on the theory that too many 'cheap' migrants depress wages, therefore there is no investment in new labour saving technology and this limits productivity and therefore growth.

So the idea is that if cheap migration is stopped and British bosses have to start using 'more expensive' workers then the incentive is to introduce technology to eventually make them redundant. This is not a pro workers argument, it is a pro business argument because it boosts 'productive' sectors like manufacturing (itself increasingly automated) at the expense of sectors that are less profitable. Those people backing the clampdown might do well to think through how this is actually going to help anyone apart from some sections of business.

## The fightback

Mass migration is not the cause of the problems in Britain, it is decades of neoliberalism and austerity, huge wealth inequality, the collapsing welfare state and public sector and the growth of reactionary divisive ideas that are tearing apart communities. At the root of it, the problem is an economy predicated on private property and people being mere pawns in the wealth creation of the rich.

Of course it is true that a major growth in population could put pressure on public services, but decades of under-funding or an almost entirely unregulated market in homes is the primary cause of that. But the Reform, the Tories and Labour Party don't want to tackle the actual problem of the people with economic and social power so they go after Black people and anyone else they can use as a political football to kick around.

We have to be clear – we resist racist policies and nationalism as fake solutions to the more fundamental problems. We are united as working people to fight for a decent quality of life for everyone and we are implacable opponents of anyone and anything that gets in the way of that.

A mass anti racist movement that is rooted in working class communities, including the trade unions is central to this. You cannot fight Reform in isolation, calling them a racist party is limited as a strategy, because a lot of people are voting for them because they are racist, or because their voters on one level do think that mass migration is eroding the country.

Also how can we challenge Reform in isolation when Labour is adopting their policies? The collapse of Labour into Reform's policy agenda also raises questions over whether 'voting Labour to stop Reform' is a viable tactic. The current political dynamic is toward the authoritarian right and Labour is absolutely part of that, whether imprisoning climate protesters, building more prisons, rolling back social provision, its new Crime and Policing Bill or its war on refugees and immigrants, Labour is absolutely in the same game as the Tories and by extension Reform.

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Source [Anti\\*Capitalist Resistance](#).

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