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**Britain**

# **A new left party emerges?**

- Features -

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**A new left party is on the cards in Britain, but it is unclear what is going on behind the scenes. A look at the bigger issues a new party needs to address.**

The ingrained neoliberalism and racism of the Labour government can only pave the way for a Reform-Tory coalition government in 2029. This would be a disaster. The expectations of this Labour government upon coming into power were incredibly low, and they have failed to meet even those.

The Labour government has gone after pensioners, poorer families, disabled people and farmers. It has attacked the basic principles of the welfare state around universal provision and accommodated big business and the City of London instead of working people and their support base.

There is a space for a political alternative, one that can tackle neoliberalism, tax the rich and big business and rebuild the welfare state as well as contributing to making Israel a pariah state for its genocidal actions.

Since early July, there has been excitement but also confusion as various moves towards launching a new left party were raised, rowed back, and then raised again.

All eyes were on ex-Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, exiled from Labour and sitting as an independent MP. There are also a group of Labour MPs (for instance Zarah Sultana and John McDonnell) who have had the whip withdrawn for voting against the government on progressive issues like opposing the limits on child benefits.

Add to this key figures like ex-North East Mayor Jamie Driscoll and Andrew Feinstein, who stood against Labour leader Keir Starmer in their constituency and won 18.9% of the vote. Additionally, five MPs were elected in 2024 on a platform of solidarity with Gaza.

Another factor is the Transform Party, established by left-wing activists in 2023, which has been in a holding pattern waiting for a new, broader initiative to be announced. The SWP also launched a new initiative called We Demand Change, which may or may not be standing candidates in next year's local elections. There is also a secretive group called Collective, comprising senior people from Corbyn's time in Labour who operate behind the scenes.

Many people looked to Corbyn to make an announcement, but he was reluctant, no doubt unwilling to lead a new party. Although he did start to talk about a 'political alternative' to Labour in recent weeks.

On Thursday, 3 July, Zarah Sultana announced she was quitting Labour and co-founding a new party with Corbyn, though Corbyn did not initially respond. This led to rumours in the press that there was chaotic jostling for position behind the scenes and competing groupings and personalities were clashing over whether to launch a new party now or wait, or if such a party was launched whether to have it start as a loose collection of local initiatives or a properly constituted party from the start.

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Then there were embarrassing leaks to the mainstream papers about the arguments going on behind the scenes,

which only added to the confusion.

Despite all this, two polls have indicated that a new left party could garner between 10% and 18% of the vote in an election. Support is particularly strong amongst younger voters. There is an appetite for something credible.

## Democracy

ACR is in favour of a new left party, but the approach that seems to be taken is undemocratic and doesn't bode well for how such an initiative might work.

It is clear that politics is febrile and anything can happen in the next few years. There is genuine excitement about a left-wing Labour alternative. However, we must get it right, as there is a long list of failed projects stretching back over the last 35 years, including the Socialist Labour Party, Socialist Alliance, Respect, and Left Unity. Across Europe, there have also been new left parties that achieved in some cases considerable political success but then fell into political crisis, usually from promising radical change but then failing to deliver or even actively imposing the austerity politics they fought against, like Syriza in Greece.

Mass assemblies locally to help bring people together might be a good start for forming the basis of new branches, and there has been talk of a process to build the new party. However, so far, this is all being decided behind closed doors by unknown people. Not an auspicious start.

## The climate crisis

Any new party must make the climate crisis its central task, which means mass mobilisations and a clear anticapitalist perspective around tackling climate change and environmental collapse. Initially, this might be pitched as a Green New Deal-style politics, but what matters between now and the general election is the degree to which any new party can help foster and promote social movements and union initiatives that build confidence in fighting fossil capitalism.

Any new party will also have to be clear how it differs from the Greens, particularly in the context of the Zack Polanski 'left populism' campaign. A possible Red-Green Alliance in the next government election is not inconceivable, given the current flux in politics around Westminster. However, this also depends on whether a new left party is based solely in England or attempts to work with the Scottish and Welsh left as well., given different left developments in those countries

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## Anticapitalism and revolution

One thing is clear, though – there isn't a lot of room in late capitalism for reformist parties, and European politics is littered with defeated left reformist projects. It is an illusion to imagine that, because social democracy vacated the

'reformist' strategy, there is now just space for new reformist parties. Social Democracy abandoned those positions because the basis of capitalism itself shifted, the terrain on which 'left policies' could be enacted shrank as neoliberalism emerged.

A party led by Sultana and possibly Corbyn will undoubtedly have similar policies to those outlined in the 2017 Labour manifesto. Such a party falls far short of what is needed as late capitalism hurtles towards climate collapse. The capitalist state is not neutral in the class war, and even winning a parliamentary election in 2029 won't be enough to overthrow fossil capitalism.

This is why maintaining a revolutionary ecosocialist organisation is so important, regardless of what happens with this new party. That doesn't mean sectarian abstention or denouncing it for not having 'the right politics', but it does mean engaging in and consistently working to establish the new party on the best possible basis, and continuing to build a revolutionary ecosocialist force that can contribute to overthrowing capitalism.

## ACR's position

We agreed on the following at our recent conference in early July, which we believe forms the basis of a new left party in terms of how it operates and organises.

1. A top down party directed by personalities or a cartel of existing left currents is not a recipe for success. Any new party must be formed of members based in their communities, those members must be the people who decide policy and elect the leadership – this accountability should not be postponed while a personality group or currents embed themselves in the leadership.
2. Any fake democratic structure where leaders use internet /referendum systems should be avoided. This is what Iglesias did in Podemos to sideline critical currents like the Anticapitalistas. Those leaders with the greatest media profile should not be allowed to manipulate the members.
3. Caucus rights for LGBTQ+ and Black, Women and disabled members should be recognized. A false counter-position of identity versus class politics needs to be avoided. A party which is not inclusive will fail.
4. What will make a new left party useful is whether it can help to build social movements and resistance from below. If it only focuses on elections then it will end up a narrow electoralist party unable to build active roots in working class communities, workplaces and in social struggles. Crucially without an activist orientation it will be unable to help build the kind of radical movements we need around the climate between now and the next general election.
5. We will argue for a broad acceptance of eco socialism – integrating the class struggle with the ecological one. There can be no socialism on a dead planet. The rise of the Green party in Britain reflects the radicalization around ecological issues. Not only would a new party need to be participating alongside the Just Stop Oil or Extinction Rebellion activists but it should be looking for joint action with the Labour left and Green party activists locally and nationally.
6. A flexible approach to international issues like Ukraine or Palestine will be necessary If we want it to be broad based. Solidarity with the Palestinian people against the Israeli state and their right to resistance, an end to occupation, abolition of all Zionist discriminatory legislation and structures, and the right to return would need to be the minimum basis. But a new party could remain open about a two state or one state approach. On Ukraine

agreement on Russia withdrawal, a ceasefire and self-determination but leaving the arms issue for further debate would be acceptable.

7. Any new party should allow tendencies to exist and have the right to express their opinions openly, including in any press. Once the basic principles were agreed, debate going beyond that – the sort of discussions a revolutionary Marxist party might have needs to be set aside. Otherwise you have a continual debate like we had in Left Unity around programme and workers militias. This is one of the most difficult things to manage. If you have an open democratic party it is difficult to stop revolutionary currents joining but how do you stop their 'raids' and endless propagandising? You have to make sure there is enough of a genuine mass base and healthy local groups that have a majority who are not already members of organized groups.

8. Setting up a new broad party is not a guarantee of future success – the experience of Podemos, Respect or Syriza shows this. The danger of leaders and cadre being captured by the mass media and the institutions is very, very real. As we have seen if these parties achieve some success there are lots of jobs and even careers available for activists to take up. Constitutional mechanisms need to be in place to help prevent this by agreeing what to do about councilors or MP salaries, how the organization is staffed and of course the overall accountability of the leadership. The danger of being integrated into the establishment and then politically neutered is very real.

9. While the strategy of a new broad party means confronting Labour in elections this does not mean taking a sectarian line against any remaining Labour left MPs. Any new mass party will need to win the socialists currently in the Labour Party if it is really going to become a contender for power. So a new party needs to work creatively with any Labour lefts in united actions. It should not stand against active left people like McDonnell or Abbott. We cannot exclude entirely future splits or radicalization inside Labour even if a repeat of Corbynism where the left won the leadership looks very unlikely.

10. For a new left party to have mass impact it has to win support inside the trade unions. Antagonism between the unions and Starmer's Labour is more likely than a re-emergence of Corbynism. So building class struggle currents inside unions should be a priority for any new party.

11. One of the difficulties for a new party will be the fact that most of its instigators will not be from a younger demographic. The leadership of the radical left in Britain today is much older than what we had in the 1970s. So having a focus on winning younger people is a big task. Measures should be taken to bring them into the leadership. Propaganda and agitational material needs to be accessible for young people too

12. Support for the right to self-determination for Scotland and Wales, as well as a united Ireland, should be integrated into any new formation

13. A new party should be intervening culturally too – this may be one way of reaching a younger demographic but a new party needs to reject a narrow, over politicized look, it should relate to all of life – culture and sport. It should be joyful and fun to be a member. Party life and culture should prefigure to some extent the sort of socialist society we wish to build..

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

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