

London mayoral elections: A contest between two right-wing candidates

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2 May 2016

On May 5, the London mayoral elections are being contested between Conservative Party candidate Zac Goldsmith and Labour's Sadiq Khan.

On all the basic questions confronting the working class—the threat of war, the assault on jobs, wages, health care, privatisation, the housing crisis and increased state repression—Khan and Goldsmith are at one. They are vying solely for the political affections of the super-rich as to which can best impose their dictates.

Under Tory Mayor Boris Johnson, London has cemented its position as the playground of a corrupt financial oligarchy and one of the most socially polarised cities on the planet. According to Beauchamp Estates "Ultra Prime Barometer" survey, London now has around 140 billionaires. Literally a few miles away from their luxury havens, in parts of London's East End children are stealing bread from shops so they can eat or living on charitable handouts.

Goldsmith is one of the wealthiest MPs in Parliament. It is estimated that his father, Sir James Goldsmith, a financier, who died shortly after the 1997 general election with a £1.2 billion fortune, left him £200-£300 million. His Wikipedia entry notes: "Some tax experts have speculated Goldsmith's income could amount to as much as £5m per month from the trust left to him alone."

Like Johnson, Goldsmith is campaigning for an assault on the working class through an exit from the European Union in the upcoming referendum on the UK's membership.

He has mounted a filthy campaign based on whipping up anti-Muslim sentiment, accusing Khan, a former human rights lawyer, of sharing platforms with Muslim "extremists" and representing "a real danger to London." According to the *Financial Times*, Goldsmith

sent out leaflets "to Hindu and Sikh voters highlighting a Labour policy on taxing heirlooms, posing an apparent threat to the tradition of passing down gold between generations."

Khan, as does the majority of the Labour leadership, supports the Remain campaign in the EU referendum. He visited all the main business organisations from the London Chamber of Commerce & Industry to the City of London Corporation and assured them he will represent their interests. The *Financial Times* said Goldsmith "has yet to convince the business community—and the City of London—that his election would be in their interests."

Khan is a calculating and cynical supporter of imperialism. A Blairite, he voted in 2006 against any inquiry into the Iraq War and voted in 2007 against the principle of an inquiry. He voted in 2011 for a no-fly zone over Libya and for British air strikes in Iraq, under the pretext of fighting Islamic State in 2014.

While Khan's father was a bus driver and his mother a seamstress, his background does not prevent him from supporting the super-rich. "I want to be the most pro-business mayor yet," he repeats ad infinitum. In an interview in the right-wing Conservative *Spectator* magazine, he enthused, "I want *Spectator* readers to give me a second look. ... I welcome the fact that we have got 140-plus billionaires in London. That's a good thing. I welcome the fact that there are more than 400,000 millionaires. That's a good thing."

Under him, London will remain a global financial centre, he pledges, by "dismantling the barriers to growth that exist, and increasing productivity."

Khan considers himself as Johnson's natural heir and has distanced himself from even the mealy-mouthed and insincere reformist policies party leader Jeremy Corbyn claims to uphold. He told the *Spectator*,

“Bearing in mind who our leader is it’s important to reassure the right people that he doesn’t represent all Labour thinking.”

Khan’s right-wing credentials were reinforced last week, as he became the first leading party figure to demand the suspension of Labour’s first London Mayor Ken Livingstone, on bogus accusations that he was anti-Semitic. Khan was integral to this campaign, orchestrated by the Blairite John Mann and backed by the Tory Party and various Zionist groups.

Johnson is responsible, alongside Labour-controlled borough councils, for socially cleansing 50,000 London families from their homes. They have ridden roughshod over local opposition to property developers building luxury flats. He has overseen the closure and selling off of fire and ambulance stations, and closure of ticket offices at all 265 London Underground stations.

To enforce this Johnson championed a huge assault on the right to strike and purchased water cannons to suppress future opposition.

The low turnout in 2012 at the last mayoral election expresses growing hostility to both parties of the business and financial elite. The fact that the Labour Party put up Khan speaks volumes about how right-wing the Labour Party is.

As the election approaches, Khan is pushing a law and order agenda. “On day one” he would put London “on a war footing with these terrorists.”

He demands Internet providers and university campuses clampdown on users because, “You can be radicalised now in your bedroom.”

On the wearing of hijabs and niqabs he used inflammatory language stating, “People born and raised here who are choosing to wear the jilbab or niqab ... what is going on in those homes? ... In public service we should be able to see each other’s faces.”

There are signs of mounting class conflict in London from protests over housing, hospital strikes, bus, rail and Tube strikes and occupations of council services threatened with closure.

To stifle this rebellion, the trade unions and the pseudo-left organisations that orbit the Labour Party have lined up behind Khan. According to the London *Evening Standard*, the rail and London Underground unions donated £100,000 to his campaign.

Among the backers of Khan’s right-wing campaign is the Socialist Workers Party (SWP).

The SWP cite Khan’s fulsome praise of London’s billionaires and millionaires, before concluding, “But regardless of Khan’s views, many workers will see that a defeat for Labour in London would be a shattering blow for Corbyn. ... So *Socialist Worker* will stand with the Corbyn supporters and call for a vote for Sadiq Khan.”

Corbyn and his Left Futures/Momentum movement, formed by a section of the Labour Party apparatus, also endorsed Khan as “our candidate”—even as Khan refuses to campaign alongside Corbyn.

The May 5 election poses the necessity of the working class making a political break with Labour and the trade unions and waging a struggle for socialism against the profit system. There is no way forward that does not include seizing the wealth of the billionaires, taking over the banks and major corporations and running them to meet the essential need of the majority, not the super-rich.

Such a unified movement of the working class and youth demands a new political leadership is built—the Socialist Equality Party and its youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



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