

Starmer's right-wing reshuffle prepares austerity budget

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Labour Prime Minister Keir Starmer has been continuously criticised by Britain's ruling elite for falling short when it comes to attacks on social services and increasing military spending.

With France plunged into political crisis by huge planned spending cuts, and Labour preparing its own austerity budget for November, Starmer has been forced to bring forward a cabinet reshuffle originally planned for the autumn to reassure his corporate and financial masters that there will be no retreat from the right-wing agenda they are demanding.

A pretext was made of Angela Rayner's resignation last week as deputy prime minister and deputy leader of the Labour Party, after a tax-sleaze scandal fuelled by the right-wing *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail*.

Her departure was a political gift to Starmer, allowing him to replace a hate-figure for the right despite her essential loyalty to Labour's pro-business, militarist agenda. Besides the crime of a northern, working-class background and an outspoken dislike for Tories, she led the only two Labour initiatives which are not openly right-wing: a housebuilding programme and a "workers' rights" bill.

Two of Starmer's replacements—of Rayner as housing secretary and her ally Justin Madders as minister for employment rights by Blairite loyalists Steve Reed and Kate Dearden—are aimed at assuring finance and big business that these specific policies will be tailored to their every whim.

But the reshuffle goes much further. It is intended to convince the ruling class that Labour will carry out in full what it was helped into office to achieve: a historic reduction of social spending and the return of the military budget to levels not seen since the Cold War.

For more than a year, the government has been accused of dragging its feet over increasing military

spending—set to increase to 3.5 percent only by 2035, at least two general elections from now.

Starmer has tried to assuage his critics by rewarding David Lammy, formerly foreign secretary and point-man for the UK's support of the Gaza genocide and the war in Ukraine, with the deputy prime ministership—once again by again replacing Rayner. Having defended British military backing for the criminal Israeli regime, Lammy was also made justice secretary.

On the economic front, howls of media and business outrage greeted a U-turn this summer on roughly £1 billion of cuts to winter fuel allowance, and a retreat from £5 billion in cuts to disability welfare payments—just a fraction of what international finance insists must be done.

Starmer has responded by replacing work and pensions secretary Liz Kendall, despite her impeccable Blairite record, with the more veteran right-winger Pat McFadden. The *Telegraph* noted that Kendall had been a "lame duck" since the disability payments climbdown and said of McFadden's appointment, "Starmer signals plan to slash benefits with tough new welfare chief."

Business Secretary Jonathon Reynolds—considered the only other cabinet minister besides Rayner with any connections to the trade unions—has been replaced with Peter Kyle, described approvingly by the *Spectator* as "an arch moderniser on the right of the party."

Darren Jones, who led the spending review at the Treasury and is described by the *Guardian* as a "Blairite-style reformer", was taken into Starmer's leadership team to run the Cabinet Office. He is joined at Number 10 by Tony Blair's former and now Starmer's new director of communications, Tim Allan.

Blairite Health Secretary Wes Streeting remains in place and did his bit this week by letting it be known to

the *Financial Times* that he is considering reviving private finance initiative building schemes to construct 200 new health clinics, opening the veins of the National Health Service yet wider to private profiteers.

Throughout the summer, right-wing pressure on Starmer was provided with a vehicle by the universal media and political promotion of far-right, anti-asylum seeker protests and the anti-migrant, law-and-order campaigning of Nigel Farage's Reform UK. He has used the reshuffle to embrace this agenda wholesale.

Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, who has led the criminalisation of opposition to the Gaza genocide and stepped-up raids and deportations of migrants, was given Lammy's old job of foreign secretary. Into her shoes stepped prominent right-winger Shabana Mahmood, who has demanded further cuts in immigration and deportations of asylum seekers.

Lucy Powell, meanwhile, was sacked as leader of the House of Commons after her card was marked for calling out anti-migrant dog whistling over grooming gangs earlier in the year.

Mahmood's first significant act in office was to oversee the arrest of nearly 900 people in London's Parliament Square at last Saturday's protest against the proscription of Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation.

She will soon begin work on Starmer's announcement that the government will significantly bring forward its plan to end the housing of asylum seekers in repurposed hotels, one of Reform's main demands. The proposal being discussed is to put them into military barracks—a policy first put into operation by the previous Tory government.

Tory leader Kemi Badenoch was moved to offer—in part in a bid for political relevance after Starmer has advanced her party's agenda more effectively than it was able to in its last years in office—“Sit down with us. Let's agree a way to bring welfare spending down. And I will offer him the support of the Conservative Party.”

With Starmer appointing a cabinet of war against the working class to meet what the *Financial Times* called his “biggest test”, “to close a £40bn hole in the public finances in the November Budget”, what passes for the left in Labour rushed to make clear its loyalty to the party.

Ex-Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and MP Zarah Sultana's planned new party is courting Labour

defections. But the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs seized the opportunity to insist on its role in contributing to Labour's “broad church,” in former shadow chancellor John McDonnell's words. What was posed was not a fight against Starmer's leadership but “in the interests of the party, to unite the party... to show leadership to the country”.

McDonnell is still not allowed to sit as a Labour MP by the party's whips, having voted against the government maintaining punitive Tory welfare policies. But all he and his handful of allies asked for was a deputy leadership contest in which candidates “reflecting all opinions of party members are enabled to stand”. And they have been denied even this.

Starmer's leadership has required prospective candidates to secure the nominations of 80 Labour MPs, all but ensuring the coronation of his preferred option Bridget Phillipson, with the underdog Lucy Powell the only possible alternative. The one nominally left candidate who came forward—Bell Ribeiro-Addy of the Socialist Campaign Group—managed to secure just 24 nominations from the 399 MPs of Starmer's nakedly right-wing party.

Downing Street has said Lammy will remain deputy prime minister regardless of who becomes deputy leader of the party.

It is a mark of just how savage the attacks being prepared by Starmer's cabinet are that it will not entrust a genuine election even to a party membership largely gutted of any vaguely left-wing sentiment.

This is government by a hated, right-wing cabal, headed by a prime minister with the lowest popularity ratings of any leader in the western world. It rules in open hostility to the population, on behalf of warmongers and the super-rich.



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