

Far-right Reform UK, leading polls, prepares a cabinet of war and austerity for British capitalism

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The defection of leading Conservative Party figure Robert Jenrick to the far-right Reform UK is the latest step in leader Nigel Farage's preparations for government. Jenrick was sacked by Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch on January 15 after it emerged that he was plotting to leave the Tories and was unveiled by Farage as a member of his party later that day.

Farage has recruited a number of leading Tories since entering parliament as a Reform MP in the 2024 general election and climbing to the top of the polls of UK voting intentions. But Jenrick is by far the most high-profile, holding shadow and cabinet position under four previous Tory leaders.

Under Badenoch he was Shadow Secretary of State for Justice and Shadow Lord Chancellor from 2024 until 2026. In Rishi Sunak's government he was Minister of State for Immigration from 2022 to 2023. He held Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government from 2019 to 2021 in the first and second Johnson ministries and was a health minister under the short-lived Truss government.

Jenrick cut a particularly anti-immigration figure even within a Tory party shifting sharply to the right. This culminated in his support for and participation in a far-right demonstration outside the Bell Hotel in Epping last summer—the epicentre of a series of national demonstrations demanding the deportation of tens of thousands of asylum seekers.

He also promoted another far-right campaign, “Raise The Colours”, in which England's St George's flag and the Union Jack were hung in their thousands on lamp posts, buildings and in public spaces around the country.

Jenrick was the fourth sitting Tory MP to defect to

Reform, joining more than 20 former Conservative MPs—among them former Chancellor of the Exchequer Nadhim Zahawi, who joined just days ahead of Jenrick.

Exploiting Prime Minister Keir Starmer's unprecedented collapse in support—having provided no respite to millions of workers struggling with the cost of living and shattered public services—Reform UK has led the polls by around 10 points for most of the 18 months since Labour took office. It is currently sitting at 26 percent, with the Tories and Labour tied on 18 percent.

Increasingly feted by the right-wing media, Farage has been tasked by the ruling elite with assembling a “credible” party of government; he has praised the former cabinet members Jenrick and Zahawi for their “front-line experience”.

For the ruling class, it is essential that Reform be ready to serve as a replacement for the crisis-ridden Starmer government, ready to hit the ground running with an agenda for slashing welfare and overall public spending, while vastly increasing military spending with the proceeds.

Inspired by billionaire Elon Musk's vicious cost-cutting operation in the US Trump administration, Farage has nominated former Reform UK chair Zia Yusuf—previously a luxury concierge tycoon—as the leader of a “UK DOGE” (Department of Government Efficiency) team.

Reform runs 10 local authorities in the UK and is already imposing—as a demonstration of its ability to govern—hundreds of millions of pounds of cuts collectively in these areas. In Derbyshire County Council alone it is making 2,000 jobs losses—around 20 percent of the council's workforce—to make the

“overstaffed” authority “lean and mean”.

Jenrick declared his support for this agenda in a speech on joining Reform. He criticised Tory shadow chancellor Mel Stride, who “rightly attacked Labour for hiking taxes to fund more scrounging”, but “was the Cabinet minister who oversaw the explosion of the welfare bill.”

Decrying that “One in five working age Brits is now not working,” meaning welfare spending was surging, he complained, “We’re spending more on debt interest than on our defence and schools combined.”

For his part, Farage used an Op-Ed in the *Daily Mail*—which runs an ever more hysterical “Don’t Leave Britain Defenceless” campaign—to prove Reform’s militarist credentials. With military brass loudly denouncing Labour for not yet committing to handing the keys of the Treasury to the Armed Forces, Farage declared, “Our Forces deserve better than Labour’s bumbling platoon of no-hopers”. The situation was “truly bleak. Troop numbers are down, morale is low, our equipment is in a shoddy state.”

Backing military officers’ warning of a “£28billion defence funding shortfall over the next four years, he went on, “At a time when China is attempting to infiltrate us at every turn and Russian submarines lurk menacingly beneath our waters, this is nothing short of terrifying.”

Starmer and Chancellor Rachel Reeves “repeatedly argue that the Government has committed to raising defence spending to 3 per cent by 2035. But that’s a decade away. Just look at what’s happening in the world. We need to get a move on, pronto.”

Rather than “lavishing billions on benefits, Rachel Reeves should be handing that money to the military top brass to boost recruitment and invest in state of the art equipment, such as drones, fit for modern combat.”

Were Reform in government today it “would rapidly boost defence spending. By cutting waste and slashing the overseas aid budget, we would reach that 3 per cent figure by 2030.”

The mouthpieces of the ruling class in the *Times* and *Telegraph*, welcoming Farage’s military spending pledges, are keen to ensure any populist pretensions over living standards—always coupled with nationalist xenophobia—are done away with. To this end, the Tory Party is still being backed as a disciplining force.

As Jenrick jumped ship, both papers appealed to Tory

leader Badenoch to stabilise the Conservatives. The *Times* wrote, “In November, Reform was forced to recant its rash manifesto pledge of £90 billion in tax cuts, and the Labour chancellor Rachel Reeves’s budget revealed little appetite for tackling Britain’s - burgeoning welfare bill.”

It advised Badenoch to spurn the “populist fantasies of Reform”, and “reclaim” the mantle of “economic competence”. This meant advocating for “a defence budget sufficient to counter the intensity of global threat; a ruthless determination to take on the so-called stakeholder state, which blocks radical change in the public sector; restraint on welfare; a smaller state and lower taxes; and genuine spurs to growth.”

The *Telegraph* noted Farage’s comment on recruiting Jenrick that he was aiming for “the realignment of the genuine centre-Right of this country” behind Reform. However, “If this is the new branding, then policy will need to follow.”

Only last year “Farage announced his plans to lift the two-child benefit cap for a large number of households, clearly attempting to woo Labour voters: hardly a policy indicative of a desire to claim unique status as the party of the centre Right.”. This was “a misstep” and “he has since backtracked on this position”.

Meanwhile, Badenoch’s “vision of what’s wrong with Britain, and how it can be fixed” had supposedly produced a “sharp improvement in the party’s polling”. But it warned, while there was the possibility that “Britain’s oldest and most successful political party can reinvent itself yet again,” whether Badenoch “will seize this moment remains to be seen.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned last October: “This is the programme around which the ruling class expects an even more right-wing replacement for Starmer’s government to coalesce. Ideally for them, it will couple the more ministerially experienced and financially disciplined heads of the Tory Party with the right-wing street activism of Reform and its periphery.”



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