

Labour Party suffers Gorton and Denton by-election wipe-out by Greens

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Thursday's Gorton and Denton by-election marks a new stage in the collapse of the right-wing Labour Party and of Britain's two-party system.

In a constituency held continuously by Labour since 1931—a solidly working-class stronghold in south-east Manchester—the party was pushed into third place as its vote collapsed. Such is the disillusionment of millions of workers with Labour, which governs as a party of austerity and militarism, that a seat it won at the 2024 general election with a majority of over 13,000 (and a more than 50 percent vote share) was taken by the Greens.

Green Party candidate Hannah Spencer, a former local councillor, secured 14,980 votes, taking 41 percent. On a swing approaching 30 percent, the Greens defeated the anti-migrant, anti-Muslim Reform UK, which won 10,578 votes (28 percent). Labour trailed in third place with just 9,364 votes, barely reaching 25 percent. Turnout was just over 46 percent.

The scale of the defeat in what was Labour's 38th safest seat in 2024 underlines the depth of the crisis confronting Keir Starmer's government.

There was speculation that defeat in the by-election could force Starmer to stand down. With a net poll rating of minus 50, he is among the most unpopular prime ministers of the modern era, with worse figures even than Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair.

His cabinet still backed Starmer en masse two weeks ago, in the knowledge the seat was likely to be lost. However, a leadership challenge is now ever more likely after May's local elections, which Labour is also expected to lose heavily.

This is the Greens' fifth seat in a 650-seat parliament, and was both their first ever by-election victory and their first 20-seat in northern England. They won by presenting themselves as a left-wing alternative to

Labour. Zack Polanski became party leader six months ago on a platform of pitching the Greens to Labour's left and declared his aim was to "replace Labour."

Polanski promotes what he calls "eco-populism." He advocates a wealth tax, the abolition of landlords, and has politely questioned long-term British membership of NATO, arguing for closer alignment with European powers rather than the United States. He has repeatedly denounced Israel's genocide in Gaza and spoken at mass demonstrations in London against the slaughter and ethnic cleansing.

For all their very newly minted left rhetoric, however, the Greens remain a party that upholds and defends capitalism. They offer no genuine alternative for the working class.

As the WSWWS has noted, Polanski was a member of the Liberal Democrats between 2015 and 2017, joining *after* the party had spent five years in a pro-austerity coalition with the Conservatives. He joined the Greens that year, later citing being a "pro-Europe Jew" as one reason he could not support Labour under Jeremy Corbyn. In doing so, he embraced the "antisemitism" slander campaign waged against Corbyn and his supporters by the Blairites, Tories, the Zionist establishment, and the Israeli and US governments.

Reflecting the Greens' repositioning, Spencer made few references to traditional environmental policies in her acceptance speech. She focused instead on social inequality and the cost-of-living crisis overseen by Labour and the Tories. "Instead of working for a nice life, we're working to line the pockets of billionaires. We are being bled dry," she said. The Greens made great play of the fact that Spencer works as a plumber, as she pledged in the speech to "make space for everyone doing jobs like mine."

Reform UK, which has eclipsed both the Tories and

Labour in national polling, secured a 14 percent swing. It drew support from disillusioned Labour voters and from the Conservatives. The Tories lost their deposit, winning just 706 votes—under 2 percent and six points down on their general election result.

A decisive factor in the result was the shift among the constituency's large, predominantly working-class Muslim population. Around 30 percent of voters are Muslim. In one of the four Manchester wards in the constituency, Longsight, the figure is about 60 percent. For decades these communities largely backed Labour. Many have now broken with the party over its support for Israel's genocidal assault and ethnic cleansing in Gaza and the West Bank, and over the government's repression of opposition to the slaughter.

The constituency's social composition underscores the broader significance of the vote. Gorton and Denton epitomise former industrial urban areas long abandoned by Labour as it embraced Thatcherite market orthodoxy with the advent of New Labour in the 1990s.

The area was central to Manchester's rise as the world's first industrial city. Gorton housed vast locomotive works and engineering firms. Huge cotton mills dotted the district covered by the constituency. Together these industries employed many tens of thousands. One mill in Gorton owned by a wealthy 19th century industrialist, John Rylands, employed over 5,000 workers.

These jobs were destroyed as deindustrialisation began in the early 20th century and accelerated after the Second World War. Between 1960 and 2000, Manchester, as did all Labour industrial heartlands, saw mass job losses. A staggering 144,000 manufacturing jobs went in the city, many in Gorton. What remains is entrenched deprivation.

By 2025, after decades of Labour and Tory rule nationally and Labour dominance locally, Gorton and Denton ranked as the 15th most deprived constituency in England and Wales. Thirty-five of the constituency's Manchester-side neighbourhoods are in the top 20 percent most deprived nationally.

Approximately 45 percent of children—over 12,100—live below the breadline in Gorton and Denton. In its Levenshulme and Longsight wards child poverty rises to 59 and 56 percent respectively. More than 61 percent of households are deprived in at least one dimension: employment, education, health or housing.

The by-election was triggered by a scandal that epitomised Labour's transformation into a party hostile to the working class. Former MP Andrew Gwynne was suspended in February 2025 after derogatory remarks in a private WhatsApp group made up of local Labourites were exposed.

Gwynne mocked a constituent, saying, "You f***ing well live in" a "shithole." He said he hoped a 72-year-old woman would "croak it" after she complained about bin collections. He described others as "illiterate" and residents of one street as "crackpots."

His contempt for constituents was matched by hostility to socialist policies. The *Manchester Evening News* reported 183 references to "trots" in the group chat, with calls to "obliterate," "bury" and "stamp" them out.

The seat was not among Reform's priority targets, so the party selected Matthew Goodwin, a prominent far-right activist and *GB News* presenter, to wage a deliberately provocative campaign. On his defeat, Goodwin and party leader Nigel Farage claimed without evidence that Muslims had cheated at the ballot box, electing the Greens with an illegal organised "family vote".

Goodwin declared, "We are losing our country. A dangerous Muslim sectarianism has emerged." Farage called it "a victory for sectarian voting and cheating", adding that the vote raised "serious questions about the integrity of the democratic process in predominantly Muslim areas."

The Greens were helped in presenting themselves as the principal left alternative because the other main parties nominally to Labour's left, Your Party and Stalinist George Galloway's Workers Party of Britain, declined to field candidates.

Both Your Party's main leaders, Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana, issued statements backing the Greens, as did Galloway, who stood in the constituency as an Independent in 2017, winning almost 6 percent of the vote. A Workers Party candidate took over 10 percent in 2024.



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