

Far-right Reform UK benefits from the electoral collapse of Britain's Labour Party—what way forward for the working class?

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Britain's Scottish and Welsh parliament and UK local council elections have marked a deepening in the collapse of the Labour Party.

Having long ago lost power in Scotland, historically a stronghold for Labour, it has now been wiped out in the devolved Welsh Senedd, where it has been the ruling party since the Senedd's creation 27 years ago. Labour fell from 30 out of 60 seats to nine out of a newly expanded 98-seat parliament.

In local council elections across the UK, the party lost close to 1,000 seats out of roughly 2,550. At the time of writing, it was losing four out of every five seats where it previously held a 5-10 percent majority and one in every two where its majority had been higher than 30 percent.

Among the lost councils were multiple major cities with long Labour histories: Birmingham, Sunderland, Hartlepool and Leeds. Manchester and Wigan would have fallen too if all their seats had been up for election this year.

Not only do the vast majority of workers see no reason to cast a ballot for Labour, most actively despise it. They were promised "change" from the Tories and have received more of the same.

The faces are new but they speak the same lines: austerity in the interests of the "bond markets," "fiscal discipline," and "financial headroom"; more military spending for the war in Ukraine, to carve out a niche amid the ongoing US-led war on Iran, and to reinforce Britain's support for Israel.

Among young people and Britain's Muslim population in particular, Labour will never be forgiven

for its complicity in the Gaza genocide—reflected in gains for the Green Party, especially in the capital London.

But by far the biggest beneficiary of Labour's collapse is Nigel Farage's far-right Reform UK. The party took 34 seats in the Welsh Senedd and gained over 1,000 councillors across the UK.

According to analysis from Sky News, the vote suggests Reform would win 27 percent of a national vote, close to double the 14 percent it received in the 2024 general election. The Conservatives, the traditional party of the British right, would come second with 20 percent and Labour third with 15 percent—less than half its 34 percent share in 2024. The Greens would receive 13 percent.

That a party characterised above all by its attacks on welfare recipients and migrants—led by a multi-millionaire former stockbroker and advocate of privatising the NHS—is leading the polls in Britain, with its support concentrated in more working-class constituencies, is a devastating indictment of what has passed for the "left".

Labour has been haemorrhaging support since Tony Blair, but what has really given Reform its head is the repeated sabotage of the striving by workers for a left-wing alternative. More than anyone else, the man who bears responsibility for Reform's rise is Jeremy Corbyn.

A decade ago, he was handed power by hundreds of thousands of Labour members, backed by millions more around the country, to kick the Blairites out of the party. His supporters wanted a fighting opposition to

austerity, NATO and Britain's nuclear weapons. They were betrayed on all counts.

Corbyn capitulated to the Labour Party's Blairite right to the point of being thrown out of its ranks, being branded as an antisemite. After years of his Labour leadership in which he and the trade union bureaucracies brought the class struggle to a record low, he then retired quietly to the backbenches, sitting on a volcano of social discontent.

For four years, Keir Starmer's Labour Party was given the field as the "left" answer to what was approaching a decade-and-a-half of Tory rule.

When Starmer came to power, with the aid of the trade union leaders who throttled a growing strike movement, the mantle of the opposition was allowed to pass to Reform. Corbyn—still promoted as the figurehead of a left-wing movement by the Socialist Workers Party and other pseudo-left groups—refused all entreaties from the same to form his own party.

While the government dutifully amplified the nationalist talking points of Reform UK, launched xenophobic campaigns and implemented anti-migrant policies that have virtually invited Farage into office, Corbyn preached peace, love and understanding.

While the media worked to enforce a right-wing monopoly on opposition to Starmer, criticising him for failing to spend on the military, cut welfare and attack laws on employment and renters' rights, Corbyn tutted at a Labour leader he would not even name.

When he finally launched Your Party, he did so only to neuter it, leading an anti-socialist witch-hunt. Amid its shipwreck, the title of Britain's leading "left" has passed to Green Party leader Zack Polanski, an empty charlatan whose only political principle is to say what wins favour at the time.

Only the Socialist Equality Party told the truth of what Corbyn was doing and its consequences. When what most workers were hearing was that his insipid semi-reformism and anti-socialist scheming was what constituted left-wing politics, many turned away. As long as this is allowed to continue, the inevitable result will be an ongoing march to the right.

Thursday's results also expose the bankrupt character of the Together Alliance and all organisations which seek to subordinate politics to the slogan "Stop Reform" and the strategy of tactical voting and parliamentary alliances between the other capitalist

parties. Workers know what these parties are and they will not be persuaded to vote for them.

The only way forward is the fight for a genuinely socialist party opposed to all the others, for which great opportunities are now opening up.

The Socialist Equality Party treats the rise of Reform deadly seriously. But we have nothing in common with the middle-class despair over the rise of the right.

Starmer's refusal to "plunge the country into chaos" by resigning as prime minister and Labour leader, is about more than personal arrogance. He knows the significance of shattering the de facto two-party system which has been a straitjacket on British politics. He knows the radicalising effect that the consequences of the war on Iran will have.

The working class is asking new political questions, which only the socialist movement can ultimately answer. It will increasingly be pitched into struggles, international in scope, which reveal the real class interests served by each political tendency. Through those experiences, workers can be won to socialist politics by a policy of intransigent opposition to all forms of capitalist inequality and oppression.

The same issues are posed across Europe and internationally. The old social democratic and liberal parties are in freefall. Their nominal "left" alternatives, from Polanski to France's Jean-Luc Mélenchon to the German Left Party, oppose a struggle by the working class for socialism, advocating meagre reformist measures.

In country after country, the result is either the far right in government, such as in Italy and the Czech Republic, or leading the polls as in France (the National Rally), Germany (the AfD), Austria (the Freedom Party) and Romania (the Alliance for the Union of Romanians).

The decisive political lesson to be drawn is the urgent need to build the Socialist Equality Party (UK), the Parti de l'égalité socialiste (France), the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Germany) and new sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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