Green Party leader Zack Polanski bows to big business and British imperialism

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Green Party leader Zack Polanski has proved himself everything the ruling class could have wanted of the leader of Britain's largest "left of Labour" party.

In the last fortnight, he has made an appearance at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and welcomed a report from the Greens-aligned think tank Verdant backing maintenance of NATO membership and nuclear weapons.

The report recommends the UK take "a lead with other European EU/NATO allies in developing ways in which the alliance could still operate to provide effective mutual defence" and that "Government should be more open with the public about both the value, but also the limitations, of nuclear weapons in defence against national security threats."

The government should also "implement a Comprehensive Security Framework approach, including measures for the involvement of business and civil society… in building greater resilience." The report decries "heinous waste" in defence spending, which "is creating an active national security risk as it leaves armed forces lacking critical equipment".

This is an almost word-for-word repetition of the military strategy currently being pursued by the Labour government. Amid a rapidly escalating war between NATO and Russia in Europe, with Defence Secretary Wes Streeting warning of direct conflict in fewer than 1,000 days, the Green Party has signalled its fundamental alignment with British imperialism.

Polanski's claim in response to news articles that he had not backed the report's conclusions but instead "a proper conversation about national security" will convince no one. He has said previously that he is not in favour of withdrawing from NATO "straight away" and that his main concern is "an alternative alliance with our European neighbours, so we can ensure our military, our security."

The Greens leader repeated these arguments in his lame attempt to distance himself from the report: "We're less safe, less secure and poorer if we stick our heads in the sand hoping that nuclear weapons that rely on the USA, or a NATO that's led by the USA, are fit for the future."

Verdant has cut through these cynical evasions and spelled out their full reactionary implications. They are a programme for pursuing British imperialist interests in closer alignment with Europe, at a time when the European powers are expanding their militaries by spending hundreds of billions of euros and leading the confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia in Ukraine.

What popular support Polanski has garnered is largely due to his criticisms of the Israeli state and its genocide of the Palestinians. He has continued to verbally defend the motion passed at the recent Green Party conference titled "Zionism is racism".

Even on this issue, however, Polanski is evasive: stressing his "personal" opinions so as not to conflict with the Green Party's MPs and much of its leadership at national and local level who are fierce opponents of the motion. Some have resigned their Green Party position in protest. Meanwhile, he has announced his intention to pursue anti-democratic changes in the party's structures "giving leaders more responsibility to set the party's strategic direction".

It is over the issues of NATO and nuclear weapons, and by extension the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine, that the Greens' real attitude to imperialism is clearest. This is a war in which the NATO powers are using the Ukrainian working class as cannon fodder to secure control of the country and pile pressure on Russia in the hope of regime change. The Green Party supports it—and, in the conflict for control over essential resources, backs Europe against the "America First" agenda of the Trump administration.

This February, on the four-year anniversary of the war, Green MP Ellie Chowns denounced "Russia's war of aggression" without mentioning NATO. She called on the UK government "to redouble its humanitarian, diplomatic, and security support".

The Young Greens passed a resolution in the same month to "pressure the UK government into providing further aid for Ukraine," working together with the ferociously right-wing and militarist Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. It adds that the "UK can learn valuable lessons from Ukraine," a country under the martial law of a deeply corrupt, fascist-ridden state, for the "strengthening of UK democratic practice"!

Speakers from the Young Greens attended recent student demonstrations against war, highlighting the reactionary political role the party and Polanski play in British politics. Putting themselves forward as the voice of left-wing sentiment, they seek to corral it behind a right-wing and essentially pro-war agenda.

Polanski and the Confederation of British Industry

A few days before welcoming Verdant's security report, Polanski made clear he is an equally safe pair of hands for the ruling class when it comes to the economy. Appearing at the annual meeting of the CBI, he was eager to present his "plan" to the assembled representatives of the British capitalist class.

Polanski criticised Labour for "saying different things to different audiences" because "businesses have no idea what you really mean; how does anyone know there's a coherent plan? And what businesses tell me all the time is that they want to know what the plan is over the long term."

His appeal echoes his promise in an interview this spring to "communicate" with the bond markets over his economic policy and provide "stability"; he criticised Tory and Labour governments for their "lack of a plan". As the *World Socialist Web Site* commented, the only stable plan the bond markets, or the CBI, are interested in is one which guarantees the exploitation of the working class.

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Even appearing at the CBI, which for any real left-wing leader would be treated as the class enemy, is a statement of intent—a promise to pursue reasonable and respectable capitalist politics, not to excite the working class. In doing so, Polanski was following in the footsteps of Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, who attended every year of his leadership to make clear he was "not anti-business".

Corbyn was justified in making this claim. His programme was and remains a collection of minor reforms, also underpinned by a commitment to NATO and nuclear weapons.

Having formally adopted much of the Corbynite manifesto, Polanski focuses overwhelmingly on a call to bring the water companies into public ownership—something so un-radical, given the parlous state of the sector, that the policy has been entertained by the Labour Party.

No one in the room took his comments seriously in any case. Everyone was aware that Polanski and the Greens will never be in a position to enact any of their policies and will never lead a popular struggle for them. For the assembled businesspeople, Polanski's appearance was 20 minutes of light entertainment at the end of a long day.

Again, Verdant has said bluntly what it would be impolitic for Polanski to admit. The organisation is run by James Meadway—former adviser to Corbyn's shadow chancellor, John McDonnell.

Speaking about the Green Party's economic programme in March, Meadway told the *New Statesman*, "We can't do Corbynism anymore. Corbynism had it relatively lucky because we were in this peculiar position where we had the lowest interest rates in human history… That relatively luxury thinking—that we can end austerity and patch things up, and it's going to be cheap and easy—is gone."

Meadway also made clear the political orientation to a political alliance with Labour, bound up with this abandonment of opposition to austerity and implementing the most minimal of social reforms. The *New Statesman* reported, "Meadway's team will reach out beyond the party and onto the Labour benches"; he "seems convinced that the next general election will be more a question of Reform versus a progressive alliance".

Polanski advanced a version of this pitch in his closing comments at the CBI, saying he was "pleased" Andy Burnham had said, in Polanski's words, "Let's end neoliberalism." He then posed the rhetorical question, "Where are the policies to back that, where are the policies to support businesses that are actually doing the right thing and take on corporations and oligarchy?"

Polanski's "workers' party", six months on

In April-May this year, Polanski took advantage of the miserable collapse of Corbyn's Your Party to position the Greens as "the new workers' party". The Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and Socialist Workers Party (SWP), eager to move on from their endorsement of the Your Party fiasco, were happy to encourage this fantasy.

The RCP was initially the most effusive, breathlessly headlining an article in April, "Polanski sets out to make Greens 'the party of the workers'" and another in May, "The Green Party's foreign policy: Does it go far enough?"

In September, the RCP was advising Polanski to adopt "a much bolder programme: one that attacks the billionaires, landlords, and warmongers". Under "pressure from below, Polanski could be pushed further to the left", it asserted. In the end, "Events will ultimately prove which way Polanski goes; to which class the Greens orientate themselves; whose interests the party chooses to serve".

All of which makes a mockery of the formal warning included at the end that Polanski's "attempts to solve the problems of the working class within the bounds of capitalism will end in disaster." The "limits of the Greens' tepid reformism" are cast into the far future and cut off from any fight now to expose and overcome them.

For its part, the SWP wondered in April, "Will the Greens stay left?", presenting an "insurgent vision" of "councillors rebelling to win more funding, standing on picket lines and protests and campaigning" which they called on Green politicians to "be part of". We "celebrate whenever Polanski gives Starmer or Farage a bloody nose," they added. Come October they were calling on the Greens to "refuse to implement austerity and help mobilise resistance".

Longtime SWP theoretician Alex Callinicos wrote the same month in advice to Polanski that he "needs not to buckle in the face of this pressure" from the British establishment, to "keep his nerve and hold firm". He would "have to fight to change the Greens so that the party becomes a genuine reflection of the movement that has made their successes possible. And that movement also needs a strong and independent revolutionary left".

The RCP and SWP have gone quiet on the Greens since they had a chance to cheer the "Zionism is racism" motion, but their campaign will kick back into gear at the first opportunity. The function of these organisations is to prevent the working class from drawing the conclusion that an independent socialist party is necessary—not as a left-talking participant in a long march through various reformist and pseudo-left institutions, but as an irreconcilable opponent of these forces.

Over the last decade, the line of the SWP/RCP has translated into support for the five years of Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, appeals to Corbyn and trade union bureaucrats to form a new party for the next five years, and then championing Your Party. It has helped produce a situation in which Polanski—a man without the faintest connection to working-class struggle and leading a pro-imperialist and pro-capitalist party, at 9 percent in the polls—is put forward as the leader of the "left".

The revolutionary alternative

These betrayals have a material impact on the class struggle. In September, the Greens organised an "Anti-Austerity Summit" which set out an agenda of "asking" Burnham's national government not to impose cuts while carrying on implementing them at local level.

Polanski and Corbyn use moral outrage over Gaza as a smokescreen to conceal their policing of anti-imperialist sentiment and the class struggle: maintaining a careful silence over the Ukraine war and the European protest movement. Britain's exclusion from the European revolt to this point is due in large part to their efforts, aided and abetted by the trade union bureaucracy.

The Socialist Equality Party has fought consistently to break workers free from these constraints, opposing the RCP/SWP's opportunist attitude to illusions in the Greens from the outset. We warned last November, in the article "Zack Polanski's Greens are no alternative to Your Party's debacle":

> The popular striving for a left-wing solution to Starmer's [now Burnham's] police-state government of austerity and war can only go down to defeat if kept within the confines of either the Greens or YP, as has been the case with every similar formation—from Syriza in Greece to Podemos in Spain and the Left Party in Germany.
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> What is required is a genuinely socialist party of the working class, relentlessly opposed to the false hopes offered by Corbyn

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and Polanski, refusing to blur the class lines with them, and with the freedom to intervene in all aspects of the class struggle on an avowedly revolutionary line.

Every word has been confirmed, as have our efforts to build socialist consciousness by "fighting to bring the historical and international experience of the working class to bear on contemporary political issues, in order to break the working class from its potential misleaders."

The RCP has the gall to write in connection with Polanski that "the left reformists have all led workers and youth down a dead end," not mentioning their own role in doing so. Then they add, "But history is never wasted. The lessons from these events and experiences are being absorbed by an ever-growing layer."

History is wasted if the lessons absorbed are those taught by the RCP and SWP: that socialist-minded workers and young people should take a friendly "wait and see" approach to the class enemies of the working class, that a socialist party is a recipient of gifts handed down by History—at most required to hold a few classes in Marxist ABCs along the way—and not an instrument for freeing workers from the path of history laid down by the bourgeoisie and its agents.

When the great Marxists of the 20th century spoke of the "political independence of the working class"—a phrase which finds little favour with the RCP and SWP—they meant independence, "the struggle for every hand's breadth of independence" in Leon Trotsky's words, from the likes of Corbyn and Polanski.



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