

LEFT

Magazine

Volume 2, Issue 2

Spring 2025



Lessons in Solidarity

**Labour's Landslide, Trump's Return
& The Left's Future**

Editor's Comment



I'd like to welcome you all to the next edition of LEFT magazine! Full of fascinating articles, ranging from Trump's election to the state of politics in France, I hope you thoroughly enjoy reading.

A big thank you to everyone involved in the process of creating this edition, especially to our incredibly talented writers. University life is notoriously busy, so I am endlessly grateful for those taking time out of their schedule to write about their political passions.

With Labour in government, our hard work cannot just stop. We must hold MPs to account, and ensure that they stay true to the values of the labour movement they claim to represent. There has never been a more important time to get involved and make your voice heard!

In solidarity, *Ronny Whetton*

Chair's Comment



At the end of yet another successful term, I want to thank everyone at Warwick Labour for a fantastic year overall.

Starting with the general election in Term 3 last year, helping to get Zarah Sultana MP re-elected meant we had a lot to follow up with.

Did we do it? Of course. Term 1 and 2 were packed with a variety of brilliant events, with the best turnout the society has ever seen. Thank you to our members.

It has been an honour to serve as Chair this year, and I know the new exec will be fantastic!

Over and out.

Ollie Chapman

Editor's Comment



I am thrilled to have been elected as the next Editor-In-Chief of LEFT!

Getting a taste of the role by formatting this edition has been so exciting, and I cannot wait to fully immerse myself in every aspect of this magazine.

I would like to thank Ronny for all of his dedication and hard work over the last two years. I hope to build on everything he has achieved by continuing to provide a platform for left-wing students at Warwick, ensuring our voices are heard.

Lola Fallon

Contents

1 - Connor Summerell - The UK: Change, Division and the Best of Democracy

4 - Cianan Sheekey - The US: A Polarised Power Dance

6 - Aaron Levy - Trump, WHO, and the Paris Accords

8 - Martin Day - Video Killed the Radio Star(mer)

10 - Ellie Smith - The Left Ascendant?

12 - Anna Bickerton - The Dunnes Stores Strike: Lessons from Ireland

14 - Lola Fallon - Kneecap: Rebellion, Resistance, and Reclaiming Irish Identity

16 - Alexander Peace - France: Boom and Bust

Follow us!



@leftmagwarwick



@warwicklabour



@warwicklabour

Keep up to date with our latest campaigns on our social media!

The UK: Change, Division and the Best of Democracy

By Connor Summerell



Pictured: Keir Starmer
Source: Flickr

2024 was a monumental year for the United Kingdom. We witnessed the first transition of power for 14 years and the largest splintering of the electorate for decades. The left had a brilliant year with the first centre left party election win for nearly two whole decades. We also saw more toxic elements of the left garner attention such as George Galloway and his fellow Workers Party candidates.

With regards to the right of British politics we saw an almost unprecedented schism between the Conservative and Reform parties that helped facilitate the Left's success and deepen the Right's parliamentary irrelevance. In this section I will look at the most pivotal events the transpired over the past 12 months and try (as best I can) to help us get our heads around the year that's just been.

2024 was a monumental year for the United kingdom. We witnessed the first transition of power for 14 years and the largest splintering of the electorate for decades. The left had a brilliant year with the first centre left party election win for nearly two whole decades. We also saw more toxic elements of the left garner attention such as George Galloway and his fellow Workers Party candidates. With regards to the right of British politics we saw an almost unprecedented schism between the Conservative and Reform parties that helped facilitate the Left's success and deepen the Right's parliamentary irrelevance.

In this section I will look at the most pivotal events the transpired over the past 12 months and try (as best I can) to help us get our heads around the year that's just been.

The first pivotal electoral moments for the UK in 2024 were the By-elections which were held in four conservative seats. Three of these were Labour gains with significant swings in their favour with the one disappointment being the by-election in Rochdale where (due to a scandal surrounding the Labour candidate) George Galloway managed to get elected despite his poisonous and odorous behaviour.

The first nationwide electoral event of the year came in May with the local elections. They were a resounding success for Labour who gained numerous councils and every mayoralty except for that of Tees Valley where Ben Houchen bucked the nationwide trend. This made Rishi Sunak's position as Prime Minister even weaker than it already was as it increasingly looked like the Conservative party was heading for an apocalyptic General Election result

The 22nd of May last year was a thoroughly exciting day for all political geeks in the UK. The day started with a deeply emotional scene in the house of commons when Craig Mackinlay returned to the House of Commons following a serious battle with sepsis where he lost both his hands and feet. He was welcomed with a rare and inspiring standing ovation from across the house showing the best of politics within the United Kingdom. Later that day, and to many people's surprise, Rishi Sunak walked out in front of Downing Street and called a General Election.

The image of Sunak announcing the election acted as a perfect signal to how the campaign would go. He stood in front of Downing Street without an umbrella in the pouring rain getting increasingly wet while D:Ream's Things can only get better played in the background. This shambolic display was contrasted with Kier Starmer's professional and prime-ministerial statement in response where he sat inside, in front of two union jacks and laid out an almost lawyer-like case against the government he aimed to remove.

Over the following weeks Labour ran a cautious and near perfect campaign (except for a few local issues with candidates and their previous statements). This was in contrast to the Conservative campaign that suffered such gaffes as Rishi Sunak visiting the Titanic Quarter in Belfast, him leaving D-Day celebrations early for an ITV interview and the scandal of a group of the Prime Minister's aids and MPs betting on the date of the election (15 people

have now been charged in relation to this for breaching gambling regulations).

This all culminated in the seismic electoral earthquake that hit Britain on the 4th of July. The Conservatives were swept out of power after 14 years suffering a humiliating slump in support to 23.7%. While Labour's percentage of the vote barely increased compared to its disastrous 2019 result, their increased vote efficiency and overall strategy allowed them to achieve a 174-seat majority. Smaller parties also did well with the Liberal Democrats becoming the biggest third party in Westminster for decades while the Greens managed to gain 3 seats (their first increase since 2010). However, what is undeniable is that Reform UK had a very good night taking the third highest vote share and coming second in a swathe of UK constituencies providing an ample foundation for future success. While it is not yet clear if this will endure to the next election, what is clear is that the Left must be alive to this threat and counter it.

The rest of the year was marked by two major themes: the far-right riots of the summer and the Labour government getting started on its path to fix Britain. Following the tragic murder of three girls and the injuring of 10 others in Southport following a Taylor Swift dance class a series of riots broke out across the UK in protest at immigrants and asylum seekers staying in hotels. While the government acted swiftly to put these down, the damage they did was heartbreaking and the irresponsibility of politicians who accused the police of coverups and spread lies about the killer's background helped the flames of extremism despite having no basis in facts. The response from local communities should make every Brit proud as people gathered to heal the physical and emotional damage these violent hooligans had inflicted upon them.

Once the deeply troubling scenes of the summer had concluded the new Labour government cracked on with its agenda of reforming a stagnant and exhausted nation. While the government had passed their King's speech before the summer recess, the bulk of their legislative work began in the Autumn. This mainly came in the form of Rachel Reeves's first budget which included measures such as record investment in the NHS, the formation of Great British Energy and a significant increase in the minimum wage (as well as the ending of age discrimination). On top of this we saw phenomenal House of Commons at its best.

planning reform announcements which aim to end the scourge of NIMBYism on our politics. The final major legislative moment of the year was the successful passage of the Assisted Dying bill at its first reading following a deeply respectful and well-informed debate in the chamber which showed the House of Commons at its best.

Once the deeply troubling scenes of the summer had concluded the new Labour government cracked on with its agenda of reforming a stagnant and exhausted nation. While the government had passed their King's speech before the summer recess, the bulk of their legislative work began in the Autumn. This mainly came in the form of Rachel Reeves's first budget which included measures such as record investment in the NHS, the formation of Great British Energy and a significant increase in the minimum wage (as well as the ending of age discrimination). On top of this we saw phenomenal planning reform announcements which aim to end the scourge of NIMBYism on our politics.

The final major legislative moment of the year was the successful passage of the Assisted Dying bill at its first reading following a deeply respectful and well-informed debate in the chamber which showed the House of Commons at its best.

As we have seen 2024 was a big year for Britain. It was a year of democracy at its finest with the people of our country getting to pass their verdict on their government and make a real change. We have welcomed in a new government and are now in a completely different political climate than we were merely 12 months ago. We have seen some of the ugliest parts of our politics this year in the form of the vile and extreme rhetoric of the far-left and the unjustifiable and racist riots of the far-right. However, we have seen the best of our politics as well through the welcoming back of Craig Mackinlay to the house with a standing ovation, the smooth transition of power and the reasoned and sincere debate of the assisted dying bill. With 2025 already looking like a rollercoaster year for global politics there will be plenty more politics for all us to enjoy!

Washington's Polarised Power Dance: Reflections on Contemporary US Politics

By Cianan Sheekey



Source: Wikimedia Commons

““I will give you a child and guard your cats with my life”, exclaimed Musk, whilst Trump focused on his stomach. “Silence!” he cried, “the stomach is speaking”.

Walz was right: The Republican ticket was full of weird people. And yet, as the odious events of the average Trump rally unfolded, Harris was far too busy with her brat summer to concern herself with a political assessment of it all. Even when the policy was the priority, issues still arose. Taking over the Democratic nomination from Biden - a man with an approval rating in the low 40s - required Harris to distance herself from the sitting President to have any chance of victory. What would she do differently to Sleepy Joe?

“[There is] not a thing that comes to mind”, Harris retorted.

Well, the incompetence of the campaign was, evidently, a culmination of overly enthusiastic blunders that, alongside the steely determination with which Trump reacted to the failed July 13th attempt on his life, ensured 2024 was only going to result in the return of a convicted felon to the White House.

Let's reflect upon recent events in the bafflingly incoherent, power-obsessed sphere of US Politics and try and make some sense of it all.

In November of last year, Trump's return to the White House was cemented with an electoral college landslide. The Republican candidate won 312 electoral college votes, far surpassing the 270 his dramatic return required - including victories in all 7 hotly contested swing states. The very states that toppled Trump's 2020 Presidential bid cemented his victory in 2024. So what changed? Why did these states swing so far to the right this time, and what can future Democratic candidates learn from this collapse? Many of these answers can be seen in 2024's failings, specifically those of the Biden- Harris administration.

Anyone who has suffered through a voting behaviour lecture before has heard the adage that economic competency is key to mobilising voters. Heading into the first Presidential debate last June, Biden needed to restore the electorate's confidence in Bidenomics, which had contributed to rising living costs and inflation. Instead, the adequately nicknamed Sleepy Joe mumbled around, only contributing confidence he was not mentally capable of continuing as President of the United States (POTUS). Biden's constant stumbling, falls, blunders, and mumbling - which persisted throughout the debate - made Trump look comparably charismatic (which, considering his oratory skills are entirely rabble-rousing, is some feat).

His uncertainty and cowardice in standing up to Trump only made Biden look even more fragile, compounded by Trump's constant mocking. “I don't know what he said there, at the end, and I don't think he knows ever”, remarked Trump whilst Biden gargled a half-formed response about border security. This cataclysmic performance assured voters remained fretful of the Biden-Harris administration's competency, even if it wasn't the incumbent who would be the Democrat's Presidential candidate come November's election.

After such a disastrous performance, Biden had to be replaced. Harris swiftly established a power base within the party, crushing any other candidates through sheer momentum. Indeed, this was her greatest weapon. The shift to Harris provided some much-needed optimism to a campaign which had begun to raise the white-flag months before votes



Source: Lawrence Jackson

were cast. Political commentators began suggesting the miracle Democratic revival was on the cards, especially after their brilliant August convention. With Harris broadcasted on a screen so large the Voyager 1 space probe could sneak a glance, the Democrats held a celebrity conference with music from Stevie Wonder and Pink, with household political names including the Obamas, the Clintons, and sitting President Biden all turning out in a flashy affair.

Such hope united the Democrats in a fashion we hadn't seen since Obama first ran for office in 2008, and the electorate reacted, with Biden's horrifying 30-point polling deficit behind Trump consistently shrinking. Momentum was their momentarily weapon; regrettably, it wouldn't be on their side for long.

It cannot be overstated how crucial July 13th was for the future of America. Ringing around Trump's Michigan rally, gunshots were aimed at the former President. Trump described the feeling of a “bullet ripping through his skin”...

... in a cruel anti-democratic attempt on his life. Trump has always been a potent figure, possessing polarising perspectives on immigration, gun laws, abortion, government expenditure, gender equality, and international security. Regardless, however, of how much the left collectively despises much of what he stands for, it is a shameful reflection of the polarised tribalism US politics has become that such an act of terrorism was mired in conspiracy and calls of Machiavellianism. Of course, Trump also used the event for political reasons, painting himself with gladiatorial grit in an attempt to sway undecided voters. The 'rally 'round the flag' effect in which American electorates get behind Presidents during/following times of hardship is a long-standing political phenomenon in the States, and the Harris campaign never really stood a chance the moment the assassin fired his AR-15.

The election cycle ebbed and flowed as we moved towards voting day. Harris performed well in her debates against Trump, although her success is arguably more attributable to the nonsense anti-immigration rhetoric spewing from the Republican. "They're eating the dogs", he claimed, in a barbaric, heinous attack on Haitian immigrants that was such nonsense it became one of the most comedic and mockable lines of the political year. Not all members of the Republican ticket appeared as insane - credit has to be given to JD Vance for his admirable performance against Tim Walz in the Vice-Presidential debate, with Walz suffering due to his unnecessary lies regarding his past military service. Harris also made some poor decisions, including a notably poor performance on Fox News, in which right-wing interviewer Bret Baier exposed the vague inconsistencies in her platform. Still, none of it had a notable impact. The Make America Great Again train had already barreled down the tracks, full speed ahead, and it seemed no one could find the brakes.

Some political commentators seemed to believe, and still seem to believe in retrospect, that the election was still all to play for. I vehemently disagree. Consider the comments made about Puerto Rico only days before votes were cast. A Republican rally consisted of a 'comedian' who went on to refer to Puerto Rico as an "island of garbage". Why ought this have been so earth-shattering for Republicans? Well, the state of Pennsylvania's population is just short of a tenth Puerto Rican, and as the most important state to win to secure the Presidency, a huge pro-Democratic fallout was expected. Yet, come the counting of the results, as with the rest of the swing states, it was Trump, Trump, Trump.



Source: President Donald J. Trump



Source: The White House

November 5th, 2024: Dominoes. As the polling came in, the politically engaged onlookers across the pond in Britain received pictures laced with Republican red. The Americans fiercely declared that Trump was their man for the next 4 years, with all swing states pledging their electoral allegiance. As the first polling data came in from Pennsylvania, we knew where this evening was headed, and most commentators had got it wrong. Donald was going to get a second shot at making America great again. Less coverage was given, however, to other Republican successes.

In the US, divided government typically ensures that the President does not hold all the cards, as he must contend with the scrutiny, criticism, and legislative influence of both Houses of Congress. Yet, Trump's return to the White House coincided with Republican majorities in Congress, meaning Trump has a rare period of united government, leaving his power practically unchecked. Not even the Supreme Court is likely to stand in Trump's way as it is currently dominated by originalist conservatives who echo many of the returning President's constitutional viewpoints.

A cabinet full of cronies, including Musk, Kennedy Jr., and Hesgeth, has only left Trump further unaccountable. Already, we've seen the results of Trump's immense Presidential powerbase: dismantling the Department of Education, engaging in a televised public row with Ukrainian wartime hero Volodymyr Zelensky, leaking war plans with Houthi rebels to a journalist from The Atlantic, or the introduction of 'reciprocal tariffs' to set in motion a global trade war, stimulating global economic downturns.

The frenzied dance of power that we all lived through in 2024 is over. Now, we have to endure its consequences; in many areas, it's already proven to be a rough venture.

If this is what winning is, then yes, Donald, I am tired of winning - we all are.

Trump, WHO, and the Paris Accords

By Aaron Levy



Source: Flickr

Ah, science – the cornerstone of modern civilisation. The foundations that help humanity solve complex problems, a central pillar that assists in the improvement of human life quality. Yet Trump doesn't think so! His naive and foolish disregard for these important scientific organisations will negatively affect billions of people, and within this article I'll be examining both how and why.

What's the price of global health? Less than \$500 million, according to Trump. That purblind populist's justification for the WHO (World Health Organisation)'s withdrawal was the \$500 million yearly fee, ironic considering Trump's new xenophobic deportation program will cost AT LEAST \$315 billion, enough to fund the WHO for over 600 years! I think Republicans forget the WHO is part of the UN, which was set up by guess who? The USA, because of their neo-colonialist, controlling policies after World War II. Because of this, some would therefore claim it's America's responsibility to pay a fair chunk of WHO funding.

What does the WHO even do you may ask? From leading international public health efforts, to promoting health equity, to responding to global health emergencies, the WHO's functions are vast. Examples include a holistic vaccination against smallpox, saving at least 60 million lives! This clearly isn't important enough for Trump; considering he's too occupied cuddling up to nazi-saluting billionaires!

Does everyone remember Covid-19, well the WHO published scientific information for governments and set up COVAX (aiming to ensure vaccines for low-income countries), but once again, Trump doesn't care! Rather than worrying about the global health

emergency, the tyrant channels his attention on ludicrous isolationist policies that attack some of his countries closest allies (such as the new tariffs on Canada).

Moreover, withdrawing from the WHO may be more than just for monetary reasons for Trump - it's a cruel political stunt that forces his 'America first' agenda right down America's throat.

During the pandemic, Trump spread xenophobic and absurd misinformation regarding China's involvement in Covid-19, ironic considering leaving the WHO, leadership of global health management will be ceded to other powers such as China. You hear that nationalistic republicans? Trump is blindly handing over global influence to China, even if it is through soft power.

Moreover, what republicans fail to understand is that, even on a national level, the WHO is vital for employment and education. For example, the WHO sets global guidelines on HIV treatment and prevention, which are adopted by American drug companies such as Gilead Sciences and Johnson & Johnson. This has created thousands of highly-paid quaternary jobs in the bio-science sector, as well as obviously saving millions of lives!

Trump (and many republicans) have an optimistic bias that their nation isn't in need of the WHO, when this couldn't be further from the truth.

For example, the WHO is engaged in several research programs looking at non-communicable diseases which include obesity, cancer and heart disease; all of which USA are placed in the top 15 globally.

The withdrawal of the WHO will not only affect the lives of people abroad, but there will be less money to fund the research into diseases that kill Americans the most! I don't need to remind people the sad reality of cancer, but that lethal killer affects those in the west the most - yet Trump doesn't care, he has other priorities, such as actively supporting the likes of Putin.



Source: Flickr

The Paris Agreement – set up during COP21, is an international treaty aimed at limiting global warming above 1.5 degrees of pre-industrial levels. As of January 24th, only 3 – oh sorry 4 – UN-recognised countries aren't signed up... Yemen, Libya, Iran and... the USA! The world's largest economy and a country that produces 15% of global emissions has pulled out of the most significant climate-related treaty? Wonder which fiendish fascist's fault that was?

With countries such as the Maldives expected to be completely underwater by 2100, the current POTUS couldn't care less! In fact, Trump has announced America will increase drilling in the country, further polluting our planet. Despite continued disapproval from the scientific community, this is the same man who claimed climate change was a 'concept' created by the Chinese to 'make US manufacturing non-competitive.'



Source: Pexels

Ignoring the blatant racism, this absurd denial of our climate catastrophe could risk the lives of us and our kids, but Trump doesn't care right?

The man uses cold weather events as justification to oppose climate change. I hate to get scientific, but global warming disrupts the polar vortex and jet stream, allowing Arctic air to dip south. Meanwhile, a warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, intensifying winter storms with heavier snow...

'But the earth warms naturally' is the justification used by far-right conspiracy theorists (including Trump) who are against climate change. Ironical considering the current rate of human-caused global temperature increase is significantly greater than what would be expected from the Milankovitch cycles alone (a natural process that causes climate change.)

Explaining the science of the Earth's orbit to Trump and his uninformed supporters might be more than they're willing - or able to grasp; because according to them the 2020 election was rigged!

Carbon dioxide (and other greenhouse gases such as methane) hugs our planet, absorbing and admitting long-wave solar radiation that consequently warms the earth's surface. And you'll never guess what country is the 2nd largest CO2 producer? That's right, the USA!

Trump's blatant refusal to admit that climate change exists ('I don't believe it' – a response to climate change when asked in 2018), along with his withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, will exacerbate the current climate emergency. This will plunge our earth into a state of disrepair, shortening its life span and putting our lives, along with that of our future families, at risk.

Trump and his money-loving billions don't care, when they destroy the earth, they can just launch to mars and leave the 99.9% of us that remain to suffer in a decertified and polluted wasteland, that will cause a severe global famine. Why do you think Musk is investing so heavily in Space X? If you thought it was for the good of humanity, you seriously need to stop watching GB news.

In all seriousness, science allowed us to develop modern day humanity. It helps us understand our ancestry, along with how we can equip for present and future threats. Trump wants to deny thousands of years of innovation and research, disrespecting the work of millions of scientists that conducted research within their respective fields (when looking at both vaccine research and climate change).

By educating the American and global public on the real causes of climate change and disease prevention, we can hopefully begin to turn the misinformation tide that currently washes-up on American (and to an extent, British) shores.



Source: Free Malaysia Today

Video Killed the Radio Star(mer): How the Media killed the Government

By Martin Day



Pictured: Keir Starmer via Flickr [edited], Newspaper headlines via TomorrowsPapersToday

Eight months ago, Labour won a resounding landslide, empowering the new government with an unprecedented and undefeatable 174-seat majority. New Prime Minister Keir Starmer vowed to assembled reporters that “our work is urgent, and we begin it today”.

Six months ago, after a summer of race riots and MP expulsions, Starmer completed the hat-trick by means-testing the winter fuel allowance. The subsequent revolt was spun as a watershed moment — a “reset” for the new government, having made clear the tough choices that lie ahead.

Five months ago, Starmer’s Chief of Staff, Sue Gray, resigned, citing the “distraction” her presence had become for the new government’s agenda. She was replaced by Morgan McSweeney, a political fixer on whom the press lavished praise. McSweeney, they said, would bring the “reset” Starmer badly needed.

Four months ago, Chancellor Rachel Reeves waved in historic tax rises and cash injections in Labour’s long-awaited Budget. The media hailed this event as the long-awaited “reset moment” this government had been waiting for: freeing up the cash to deliver long-awaited change at last.

Three months ago, in a set-piece conference to kick off the New Year, Starmer launched his “six milestones”. Despite insistence otherwise, the speech was widely billed by the media as a “major reset” after the past five months of failure — yet the proudly trumpeted “plans for change” were ridiculed as much of the same old tired lines.

Spotting a pattern here? You aren’t the only one. Eight months into this Labour government, it doesn’t immediately feel as though things have actually gotten off the ground. There seems to be no meaningful agenda besides the buzzword of “growth”, no coherent ideological mission, and indeed no sense of direction or forward travel. The overwhelming impression is of a government elected without an actual idea of what it wanted to achieve, besides sitting on the cushier side of the Commons.

In an apparent attempt to rectify this, Starmer has by this point initiated no less than five different “resets”, as though his party were an old phone that can’t find the signal. Despite that, actual change seems distant at best, and to understand how this can be, you have to understand the role media and communications play in this new administration.

If you can blame anyone, blame Malcolm Tucker. ‘The Thick of It’’s infamously vicious spin-doctor has provided the role model for an entire generation of political staffers, the ones who now call the shots in Downing Street and Whitehall. The central premise of that show was that the actual legislative agenda of government mattered very little, if at all — instead, everything was all about the spin: how policy and decisions could be presented as a success, rather than actually made one in any material sense.

Looking at the current government, you begin to see this everywhere. The strategists in power don't care about the actual material effects of their decisions, only that they embody what the "grown-ups" would do: proving that "the adults are back in the room". In a recent profile, Rachel Reeves delighted in telling the BBC's Nick Robinson that she still packed her own lunch every morning — as though this cosplay at cost-saving somehow proved her own fiscal prudence, rather than represent an absurd waste of time for someone of her importance.



Pictured: Rachel Reeves
Source: Flickr

This obsession with messaging — above all the messaging of "growth" — comes to the detriment of all else, embodied again by Reeves with briefings to the press that any policy proposal which didn't directly improve the economy would be rejected. Green policy? Water or energy nationalisation? Genuine, long-term benefits are trashed for fear of a negative headline from The Times, who now wield more power in political society than perhaps they ever have before.

For anyone who pays close attention to the media, too, you begin to notice to just how sheer an extent our political class is consumed by their image in the press. Endless, insidious, and permanently immature briefings — always anonymous — from advisors, MPs, and even Cabinet ministers(!) stuff every line of every political newsletter daily. And this would be harmless if the government weren't completely lost in this bubble as well. Lou Haigh's decision to shut down the advertising screens at Euston station — a policy proposal advanced solely by journalists on Twitter — encapsulated this perfectly, given actual analysis shows the new screens to actually be more dangerous than the previous small ones chastised so severely online. This was of little matter to Haigh, or anyone else in government, of course. All that mattered was the optics.

In short, the political media class — the press, social media, even beloved BBC satires — have conspired to utterly scramble the brains of this current government. For all their obsession with messaging, Blair's New Labour at least had an awareness of the need for genuine, tangible change to back up their soundbites. Starmer's Labour has none of this. Instead, all that comes out of Number 10 is cargo-cult Blairism, an obsession with echoing the vibes of that administration with none of the action. Like a dog chasing its tail, Labour spinsters feverishly pursue the image of success, whilst the country crumbles around us.

The Left Ascendant?

By Ellie Smith

‘As Reform rises, a hard-left party could be next’ writes Patrick Maguire for The Times (12th December 2024). This is certainly a striking take as it is no secret that under the leadership of Keir Starmer, the Labour Party has moved into an ideological position that many on the left are more than a little unhappy with. In fact, it isn’t much of a stretch at all to say that the Labour Party in 2025 is no longer home to true left-wing values and so there is a space on the political scene that desperately needs to be filled.

As many are quite painfully aware, Reform UK did very well in the General Election. They came third overall, on 14.3 per cent of the national vote share, and picked up five seats in Parliament. Terrifyingly, Reform also came second in 98 constituencies across the UK and in 89 of these, a Labour candidate took the win. Reform clearly did very well at appealing to disillusioned Conservative voters and so, coupled with Farage’s dominance of the media, the rise of Reform UK has been quite a simple achievement and it poses a real challenge to both the Labour government, as well as the other parties sitting on the other side of the lower chamber.

The simultaneous rise of a smaller party in a system long dominated by two others, and Labour’s move to the centre has many questioning the potential for a new left wing party to form and successfully fill the gap left. Many commentators, analysts and scholars, including Maguire, are reminiscent of the past and look back to figures such as Ken Livingstone, George Galloway and Tommy Sheridan, and their challenges to the New Labour movement of the 1990s.



Pictured: Ken Livingstone
Source: Flickr

If the opinion of one of Jeremy Corbyn’s former senior advisers is anything to go by, there is certainly space in the current political scene for a more left-wing party to rise. Speaking to The Guardian in November, the anonymous adviser stated their belief that Starmer has only proven that a Labour government will not bring a progressive change that so many desire. To put it bluntly, the Labour government is facing challenges from multiple directions and, especially keeping in mind the recent decision to cut welfare benefits, it really doesn’t seem like the Prime Minister is looking to change anything and make a move to the left anytime soon.

So, this supposed space on the left could do with filling and there are several left-wing groups seemingly poised and ready to slide into this space perfectly. However, the question still stands: which, if any, will succeed?

It would be frankly foolish to explore this topic and not discuss Jeremy Corbyn and the Independent Alliance. This group of five independent MPs have the advantage of a relatively significant and legitimate platform from which they can attack the government. Shockat Adam, Jeremy Corbyn, Adnan Hussain, Ayoub Khan, and Iqbal Mohamed (all very notably pro-Palestine) won their seats and beat their respective Labour Party competitors with relative ease, showcasing the significant discontent with the party’s ideological direction and highlighting how left-wing voters have been alienated by Starmer’s attempt to appeal to a wider voter base and ensure electoral victory.



Source: Flickr

Many have also questioned whether the three remaining ‘politically homeless’ MPs, who lost the Labour whip following the vote on scrapping the two child benefit cap in July and did not get it back after a review in February, could end up joining the Independent Alliance and, with there being strength in numbers, help it to become a real force to be reckoned with. Considering the fact that the notoriety of Farage’s name within the British media undoubtedly helped advance the name and message of Reform UK, there is no reason why the same could not also happen for an actual national treasure such as Jeremy Corbyn (dare I say that he wouldn’t even need to go on I’m a Celebrity to make him likeable).



Pictured: Jeremy Corbyn
Source: Flickr

Another high profile contender to be the voice of the hard-left (not really) is George Galloway’s Workers Party. One of the party’s key manifesto points is a claim to be committed to being a long-term alternative to Keir Starmer’s Labour Party, describing it as ‘nothing more than a wolf in sheep’s clothing’. One appeal of this party is their clear pro-Palestine stance, which is an issue many discontented voters have with the current Labour Party. Ultimately, though, Galloway himself is a self-described social conservative, and in May 2024 was called out multiple times for blatant homophobia, transphobia and his anti-abortion beliefs which makes both him and his party entirely unfit to be the new party of the hard-left.



Pictured: George Galloway
Source: Flickr

This brings us to Collective. As the name suggests, this is a collective of different left-wing groups that came together in late 2023. They claim to be driven by the spirit of ‘Corbynism’ and working to oppose ‘Labour’s rightward and authoritarian turn’. They have stated, very clearly on their website, that their ‘ambition now is to take the next steps towards the foundation of mass political party of the left... and be ready for local government elections in 2025 and beyond’. The looming local elections will be considered by many as the first true test of Starmer’s Labour government, so if Collective can deliver on this promise, it could have huge consequences for the future of the British political landscape.



Source: Flickr

Ultimately, it remains unclear whether these aforementioned grassroots movements can build a cohesive, electorally viable force. That said, the important thing to take away is that there is hope for the future of left-wing politics. It has become very clear that British politics is entering a period of total unpredictability so while a fully-fledged party may not yet exist, the seeds have been sown in networks like Collective and the Independent Alliance. These efforts, if organised effectively, could challenge Labour’s hold over key constituencies and send a message to Starmer that the policies that he has been implementing are far from being the change he promised the country.

The Dunnes Stores Strike: Lessons from Ireland

By Anna Bickerton

Mary Manning was 21 in 1984 when she refused to handle two grapefruits in her job as a cashier at Dunnes Stores, an Irish retail chain. The fruits had originated in Apartheid South Africa, a regime the Irish Distributive and Administrative Trade Union (IDATU) had long condemned. So, under instruction from her trade union, the Irishwoman remained firm, albeit nervously, in her defiance of management's insistence she processed the sale.

When predictably suspended by store management, it would prompt ten of her colleagues, all IDATU members, to walk out of the branch and onto a picket line that ultimately lasted almost three years. It was not until the Irish government banned the import of South African goods in April 1987 that the group would stand down.

But the strike was not solely the result of solidarity with Black South Africans living under a system of racial segregation. Manning later admitted she couldn't even spell 'apartheid' on the day she walked out. Discontent amongst Dunnes' employees, particularly women, had been brewing for a number of months in Dublin.

From timed toilet breaks to serious allegations of sexual harassment, management's preoccupation with humiliating bag searches and excessive disciplinary action against workers had left many seeking a chance to confront them.



Source: Geograph

In a 1984 interview with Ireland's national broadcaster RTÉ, striker Karen Gearon described regularly witnessing "young girls crying because the management [had] intimidated or upset them."

The unsuspecting customer's purchase of South African grapefruits then, presented the opportunity the Dunnes Stores women had been waiting for.

Yet it was a cause much of the Irish trade union movement had initially neglected. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) had passed motions condemning apartheid but had done little to enforce boycotts in the workplace. Even their own body, the IDATU, had only reluctantly agreed to support the picketers with £21 weekly and never formally endorsed the strike.

The Irish public also displayed widespread apathy, with some viewing the strikers as needlessly disrupting their own livelihoods for a distant issue.

It was the tenacity of trade union officials, most notably the late Brendan Archbold, that one could attribute the longevity of, in his words, "the finest example of trade union solidarity ever" to. Initially, the supermarket workers had only expected the protest to last a few weeks. Yet, just as with those who protested the invasion of Iraq or encamped on university lawns in solidarity with Gaza, once the Dunnes Stores strikers would learn more of the horrors of Apartheid South Africa, their resolve would strengthen.

A boost from former ANC activist and asylum seeker Nimrod Sejake just a few weeks into the strike played a pivotal role in educating the workers. Having spent years imprisoned alongside Nelson Mandela, Sejake provided firsthand testimony of the brutalities faced by Black South Africans. His presence on the picket line and impassioned speeches gave the workers a renewed purpose that transformed the strike from a labour dispute into an act of international solidarity. Famed Irish poet Seamus Heaney also visited to offer his support to the demonstration in 1985.

six years... Every delay on our part prolongs the suffering of the Palestinian people.”

A black and white photograph of three men. The man in the center is wearing a dark, quilted jacket and a flat cap, smiling broadly. To his left, another man is partially visible, also smiling. To his right, an older man with glasses and a suit is laughing. The background is slightly out of focus, showing what appears to be an indoor setting with a window.

PALESTINE 1917-TODAY

1. END THE IRISH GOVERNMENT
show some humanity and act for
the PALESTINIAN people.
2. LOFICIALY RECOGNISE THE STATE
OF PALESTINE
3. IMPOSE ECONOMIC SANCTIONS
ON ISRAEL.
4. END ALL DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH THE
BOYCOTT ISRAEL
AN APARTHEID STATE

**OPPRESSION
BREEDS
RESISTANCE**

**MAGHAHERRY - PORTLAISHE - HYDEBANK
REPUBLICAN PRISONERS STILL EXIST1917**

Their efforts were met with enduring gratitude even 13,000km away. In 1990, following Nelson Mandela's release from prison, the strikers were invited to meet him in London, where he personally thanked them for their steadfast support in the fight against Apartheid.

Later, in 2008, they also met Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Dublin, where he hailed their actions as a vital contribution to the international campaign against racial segregation in South Africa.

Today, the Dunnes Stores Strikers have continued to carry the torch for international solidarity movements in Ireland. Manning and Gearon's names featured on a list of signatories to a letter last year urging Ireland's Eurovision entry, Bambie Thug, to boycott the event that had allowed an Israeli entrant.

Organiser Brendan Archbold later served as Chairman of the Global Solidarity Committee of the ICTU. A year before his death in 2014, reflecting on the legacy of the strike for Irish trade unionism, he remarked, “we do have [a policy] now in relation to Israeli goods and the Irish trade union movement has succeeded in sidestepping it for the best part of

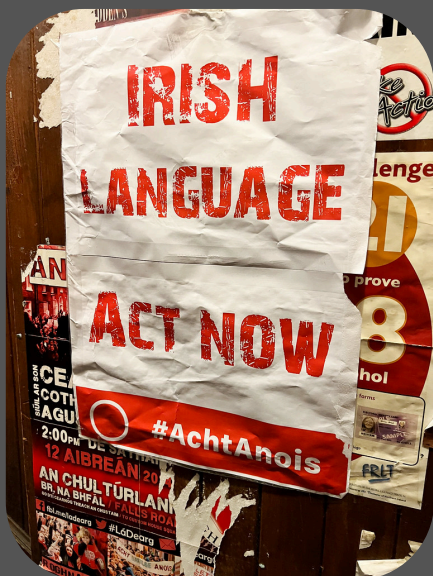
Kneecap: Resistance, Rebellion and Reclaiming Irish Identity

By Lola Fallon

On stages across the globe, Móglaí Bap (Naoise Ó Cairealláin), Mo Chara (Liam Óg Ó Hannaidh) and DJ Próvai (JJ O'Dochartaigh) blur the lines between protest and performance with their Irish Republican lyrics and provocative stage presence, eliciting both admiration from their fans and strong opposition from the establishment, and they wouldn't have it any other way.

This Belfast trio, better known as Kneecap - named after a common IRA punishment - unapologetically opposes British rule in the North of Ireland with their outrageous blend of Irish and English lyrics, redefining resistance in a post-Troubles era.

With a combination of their raw talent and overt passion for Irish reunification, they eventually caught the attention of English writer and director Rich Peppiatt. He approached them, wanting to make a film about the band's formation within the context of the fight for the Irish Language Act, which aimed to give Irish equal status to English. After the British Government initially promised that the legislation would go through in 2020, and then in 2021, the act eventually passed in 2022 with the help of public pressure, and was a win for the preservation of indigenous languages.



Source: Flickr

Overall, the film is a perfect blend of hard-hitting emotion and comedic timing, all supported with an excellent soundtrack of Kneecap's songs, with personal favourites being C.E.A.R.T.A and Guilty Conscience.

The band play themselves, with Michael Fassbender portraying Arlo Ó Cairealláin, Móglaí Bap's father, an IRA member who fakes his death and goes on the run to evade police capture. Fassbender's performance is excellent, and the scenes with Móglaí Bap are particularly emotional, especially when Arlo is begged by his son to speak to him again in his native tongue.

Also, in a pivotal scene between Mo Chara and Georgia, who has a Protestant background, he clarifies that when they rap 'Brits Out', they mean the 'British State [and] MI5', not Protestants, highlighting their disdain for sectarianism which was enforced by the British government to ensure the two communities remained divided.

While the film is impactful and political, it's also hilarious. The band's comedic timing is on point and the scene where Mo Chara steals a baton from a group of the Orange Order and shouts 'Rangers are fucking shite!' before running off is comedic gold. By blending politics with humour, it shows the film's ability to tackle serious themes and rewrite narratives surrounding Belfast, while keeping the audience laughing.

It is also hard not to laugh at the fact that DJ Próvai, named after the Provisional IRA, was a music teacher before the band's success, and initially wore the famous balaclava to conceal his identity from students at concerts. However, it is heart-warming to see that his passion to teach the Irish language has remained the same, though now it is not in a classroom, but on stage with 'Brits Out' written on his bum.

This film superbly encapsulates a new generation of young Irish voices, alongside fresh, peaceful attempts to defy colonial rule. One line in particular that stuck with me came from Arlo, who says 'Every word of Irish spoken is a bullet for Irish freedom', highlighting the profound significance of indigenous languages in ongoing struggles for freedom.

In an interview with Pat Kenny for Newstalk, Móglaí Bap confesses that it took Rich Peppiatt '6 months' and many 'pints of Beamish' to convince them to make the film as they were 'sceptical of English people profiting off Irish labour once again'. But, Peppiatt's genuine passion for this project and respect for Irish culture eventually won them over, and judging by the subsequent success, they're surely glad they said yes.

The film has been praised in the press, being described by Empire as ‘Such a Joy’ and ‘A must read for understanding the modern Northern Irish experience’ by The Broken Spine, where the author, Jay Rafferty, despite not being a fan of their music, still encourages readers to watch the film. Additionally, Kneecap boasts a 95% rating on Rotten Tomatoes and a 4.1-star average on Letterboxd, highlighting widespread popularity.

They have also received critical acclaim, winning the Audience Award at the 2024 Sundance Film Festival, as well as 7 BIFA awards including ‘Best British Independent Film’, which the band couldn’t help but laugh at the irony of on social media.

Then, after being snubbed at the Oscars as they were shortlisted but not officially nominated, Kneecap won four IFTAs and one BAFTA, which musically and cinematically cementing the bands’ position.



Pictured: Rich Peppiatt
Source: Wikimedia Commons

However, while this film has been received well, it has also come with legal issues, which has ultimately boosted their popularity once more.

In the summer of 2024, the band took the former Business Secretary, now Conservative leader, Kemi Badenoch to court for a discrimination case after she blocked funding to their film. They won this challenge as the court ruled that the UK government acted unlawfully and Kneecap received £14,250 (the grant money they were supposed to receive), which they donated to youth centres in Ballymurphy (a predominantly Catholic area) and Shankill Road (a predominantly Protestant area).

DJ Próvaí spoke on behalf of the band after this settlement, saying that ‘this [blocking the grant] was an attack on artistic culture, an attack on the Good Friday Agreement itself and an attack on Kneecap’. He goes on to say that blocking the grant was a ‘fascist type action’ from Badenoch, who is already struggling as Conservative leader despite only being elected in November.

Kneecap is far more than a Republican rap group that had a biographical film made about them. They are a cultural phenomenon that confront colonial legacies, celebrate Indigenous culture and explore the power of humour as a form of resistance. Their film and their music resonate with the so-called ‘ceasefire babies’, who refuse to be defined by the violence and bloody war that came before them, and their journey to cinematic acclaim is a testament to the enduring spirit of the Irish identity.

France: Boom and Bust

By Alexander Peace



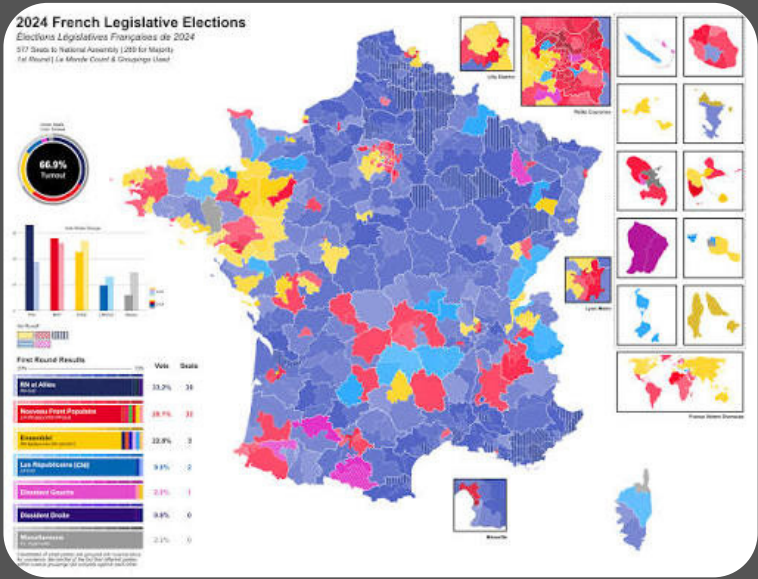
Pictured: French Prime Minister, Francois Bayrou
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Journalist Jamie Smith-Maillet suggested that 2024 was a year of boom and bust for French politics, where the boom was more or less the sound of France’s political institutions imploding. 2024 was the year of not one, two, but four French Prime Ministers, the shortest campaign period ever for a national election, and the shortest serving Prime Minister (lasting just three months) brought down by the first successful no-confidence vote in 60 years. Yearlong political instability combined with a budget emergency at the end of the year created what is perhaps the greatest crisis to face the French State since the inception of the Fifth Republic.

The year began as it was to be defined. Emmanuel Macron, who finds himself as longest-serving French President since Jacques Chirac as well as, with the resignation of Justin Trudeau, now the longest-serving leader of any Western Country, began a reshuffle of his top team after defeat over a key piece of immigration legislation plunged his government into crisis. Making way for this, the Prime Minister who had stewarded the French Government since Macron’s re-election in 2022, Élisabeth Borne, resigned. She made way for Gabriel Attal, a significant rising star in the ranks of Macron’s Ensemble Alliance. At just 34 years old, he was France’s youngest-ever Prime Minister as well as the first to be openly gay.

Attal began his premiership as one of the most popular politicians in France and was seen as a potential contender in the Presidential Elections due in 2027.

Despite his popularity and Macron’s wider efforts to inject new life into his ageing government, neither were able to prevent the catastrophic results in the European elections, which saw the Far-Right National Rally, still under the leadership of Marine Le Pen, pick up 31.4% of the vote, with the Ensemble Alliance in second place achieving just 14.6% of the vote.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

The results were nothing short of a political earthquake. Macron, eager to reclaim the political initiative, immediately decided to dissolve the National Assembly, calling elections for the 30th of June followed by a second round on the 7th of July.

Macron’s decision was a controversial one, with even Attal in opposition to it. Indeed, Macron himself conceded in his New Year’s address that the decision to call the election had “produced more instability than peace”. Even still, it is possible to see the logic behind the decision.

As Macron had suggested earlier in the year, there was a need to clarify the political situation in the aftermath of the shock European elections. It is not inconceivable to suggest Macron believed, in the wake of such a profound victory for the Far Right, that he could rally a broad coalition of centrists and left-wing voters to Ensemble in opposition to the National Rally, robbing them of any political momentum the European elections may have given them. Another more questionable theory even suggested that Macron wanted to use the election as an opportunity to allow the Far Right into government, in the hopes that they would prove themselves and their policies ill-equipped to tackle the serious issues in France.

In the end, neither scenario materialised, and Macron was faced with, arguably, the worst of all worlds. While tactical voting between centrist and left-wing voters did succeed in consigning the National Rally to third place in the National Assembly with 142 seats, Ensemble was not far ahead in second with 159 seats. On 180 seats, the largest grouping in the Assembly was the left-wing New Popular Front, made up of an eclectic mix of parties and led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

Despite the National Assembly being split almost perfectly in three directions Macron had to try and appoint a Prime Minister who could, at the very least, survive any confidence vote put to the Assembly. Attal resigned as Prime Minister when the results of the election became clear on the night of July 7th, however, Macron refused his resignation, asking him to stay on until a new government could be formed.

He would remain in post until September as Macron would institute a political truce over the summer so the political drama would not distract from the Paris Olympics. While Macron had ruled out a National Rally Prime Minister from the start, there were some negotiations between Macron and members of the centre-left Socialist Party, who nominated Lucie Castets to be Prime Minister.

Her candidacy however was rejected by Macron when the Socialist Party refused to serve in any government that did not include the whole New Popular Front. In the end, Macron selected the experienced conservative, Michel Barnier, who headed a government made up of Centrists and the centre-right Republicans, to navigate the fractious political scene.

The first major challenge for Barnier proved to be fatal for his government. France has a long history of budget deficits, with the country's last fiscal surplus being as far back as 1973. Pressures on French finances have only increased in the past four years and the 2024 French Deficit to GDP ratio was 6.2%, much higher than the EU requires its members to stay below.

Consequently, Barnier presented a budget which sought to cut the deficit by €60bn through a variety of tax rises and spending cuts. Facing opposition from both left and right, it proved impossible to pass the budget even with last-minute concessions to the National Rally.

Facing certain defeat, on December 2nd Barnier opted instead to use Article 49.3, which allowed the Government to pass the budget without a vote, yet in doing so he opened the door to a confidence vote in the government which passed two days later, toppling Barnier after less than 100 days in office and taking the budget with him.

In 2025, France's political crisis is not necessarily over. A week and a half after Barnier's resignation, Macron decided on François Bayrou, an ageing statesman and leader of the centrist Democratic Movement, as the new Prime Minister. His appointment received a lukewarm reception from members of the Centre-Left and he was able to win a confidence vote earlier this month.

Thus far, Bayrou has been able to steady the ship, navigating his Budget of €53bn in cuts through Parliament without a vote by courting the support of the centre-left Socialists, who lodge their disagreement but ultimately refuse to vote him down in the name of stability. Yet Bayrou faces all the same challenges Barnier did, and, likely, France's political instability will only continue into a new chapter as the 2026 Budget is devised in late April. The questions are not just for Bayrou, however, as without a functioning government, Macron's remaining time in office looks to be dominated by political paralysis, a situation which will not aid Macron's successor candidate, whoever that may be, when they face the electorate in 2027.

Macron must find a way to break the deadlock, re-energise the political centre-ground, and cultivate amongst the ranks of Ensemble a successor who can inspire France and emulate his victories in 2022 and 2017. If Macron fails, he will leave France, after a decade in power, at the mercy of extreme populists on both the left and right.



Pictured: French President, Emmanuel Macron
Source: Wikimedia Commons



'Encampment'
Emily Payne