

LEFT

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ONLINE EDITION



UNCERTAIN FUTURES

Chair's Comment



I hope you all enjoy this edition of LEFT, which Ronny and the writers should all be proud of.

This term has been brilliant. As usual, we have consistently campaigned in the local area with Zarah and Grace (for Westwood!). Being joined by Socialist Future as well as nominating our own candidates for Labour Students, on their slate, has been fantastic. We also saw two Union events with Young Labour Unions and progress within the SU.

Additionally, we hosted a variety of social events, Circling remaining a familiar favourite, with Pints and Policy cemented as a Warwick Labour tradition. We even saw our annual 'Dress Like A Tory' bar crawl, which was as great as always. We have continued our 5-a-side football campaign and hosted rock up and play netball too.

Most importantly, we have continued our solidarity with Palestine, attending demonstrations, and making our stance clear on the failures surrounding the situation by the SU, party leadership, government and the University in particular.

Finally, we have elected our new exec, and we are absolutely delighted to be continuing the hard work we have seen and excited to show you what lies ahead!

Ollie Chapman

Editor's Comment



Welcome to my first issue of LEFT! We have four really talented writers and four really fantastic articles, I hope you all enjoying reading. The theme is "Uncertain Futures", which everyone has really taken and ran with.

Don't forget to get involved with the society on campus and the party around the country. Only together can we undo the mess of the last fourteen years.

Ronny Whetton

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MILEI AND ARGENTINA

Where do they go from here?



Pictured: Javier Milei

It has been some time now since self-described 'anarcho-capitalist' Javier Milei assumed the Presidency of Argentina, after defeating centre-left rival Sergio Massa by three million votes in November's election. But what is this Mick Jagger-impersonating, chainsaw-wielding, socialism-loathing, Al Capone-adoring enigma of an individual planning?

Nicknamed 'el loco', translating to 'the crazy one' due to his outbursts of aggression, he plans to completely upend Argentine society, especially regarding its economy. He has already devalued the Peso by 50% to 800 to the US Dollar, as part of the process to Dollarise the economy. An opponent of the state itself; the number of governmental ministries has been halved from 18 to 9, subsidies for fuel have been slashed and hundreds of rules have been scrapped to deregulate the economy. He has also said he wants to 'blow up' the central bank.

His personality is certainly reflected in his policies.

An annual inflation rate of 143% has left four in 10 Argentines in poverty, and a \$43 billion trade deficit coupled with a further \$45 billion owed to the IMF has meant the country does not have a particularly strong credit score. Economist Simon Kuznets suggested that there are four types of economies – The developed, underdeveloped, Japan and Argentina. Japan being an economy that has had every chance to fail, but hasn't, and Argentina as an economy that has had every chance to succeed, yet still continues to not. Successive elections of charismatic leaders, promising to overhaul the economy, have all led to the same outcome. Mismanagement of tax, debt refinancing and frankly poor monetary policy from short term political decision-making have led to the cycle of inflation and poverty continuing.

Many also blame the enlarged Peronist state for the country's mismanagement, supporting Milei in his attempts to row back on its reach, believing it to inhibit growth.

But a large state cannot be the reason for such destruction, especially when it works in Nordic states for instance. Instead, Argentina is plagued with an unrelated evil – rampant corruption, alongside incompetent politicians. Various scandals including the \$1 billion syphoned from fake contracts under former President Cristina Fernández serve as evidence for distrust. Milei promises to end this, but shrinking the state will not erase corruption, rather exacerbate it. Since when has the market and the few at the top who control it ever been trustworthy?

Turning to privatisation is not the answer. One look at the US' healthcare system shows why this would be undesirable for all but the top 1%. Now imagine a similar system controlling, or not controlling, prisons, education, even the judiciary. Nightmarish.

Add to the mix an enormous dose of austerity which is only going to harm the vulnerable further, especially during an economic crisis. It would be harsh enough post-recession, but in a time of suffering? Alongside hardship it may well worsen the country's misfortunes as a whole, as Greece discovered in 2008. Crises should not be the time to balance budgets, protecting citizens should be the primary concern. Just because prior attempts have been disastrous, abandoning the people entirely is not the way forward either.

These are not just the views of a left wing student, but of more than 100 economists including Thomas Piketty and Jayati Ghosh, whose open letter warns of the 'devastation' that Milei's measures will likely bring. Raising concerns over whether Argentinians have enough Dollars in reserve to dollarise, they suggest the policies overlook the 'complexities of modern economics and ignore lessons from historical crises', accentuating already severe inequalities. Damning.

Fortunately, the remnants of the state's functionality could prevent, or at least water down, some of his proposals. His 'omnibus' austerity package has been approved by the Lower Chamber, but will face challenges in the Senate. Milei's LLA party does not have a majority, meaning it will face steep opposition in getting it to pass. However, former President Macri's centre rights are the biggest in the Senate, and he happens to be a supporter of Milei's proposals. An alliance would not be off the cards, but would still likely come with concessions which could dampen some of the proposals.

The bill is also already facing challenges from the public. More than 60 lawsuits against the measures have been filed and on January 24th, thousands of protestors marched through Buenos Aires to voice their anger. Economic improvements are yet to be seen. Economist Martin Epstein told AFP that the move to devalue the Peso would increase competitiveness, but that its gains would be offset by further increases to inflation.

An accurate prediction, with it doubling from 12.8% to 25.5% in his first month. He can point to praise from the IMF for his drastic actions, but that will be of little comfort to a population who is already feeling squeezed. Austerity measures, as history has proven, hit the most vulnerable the hardest.

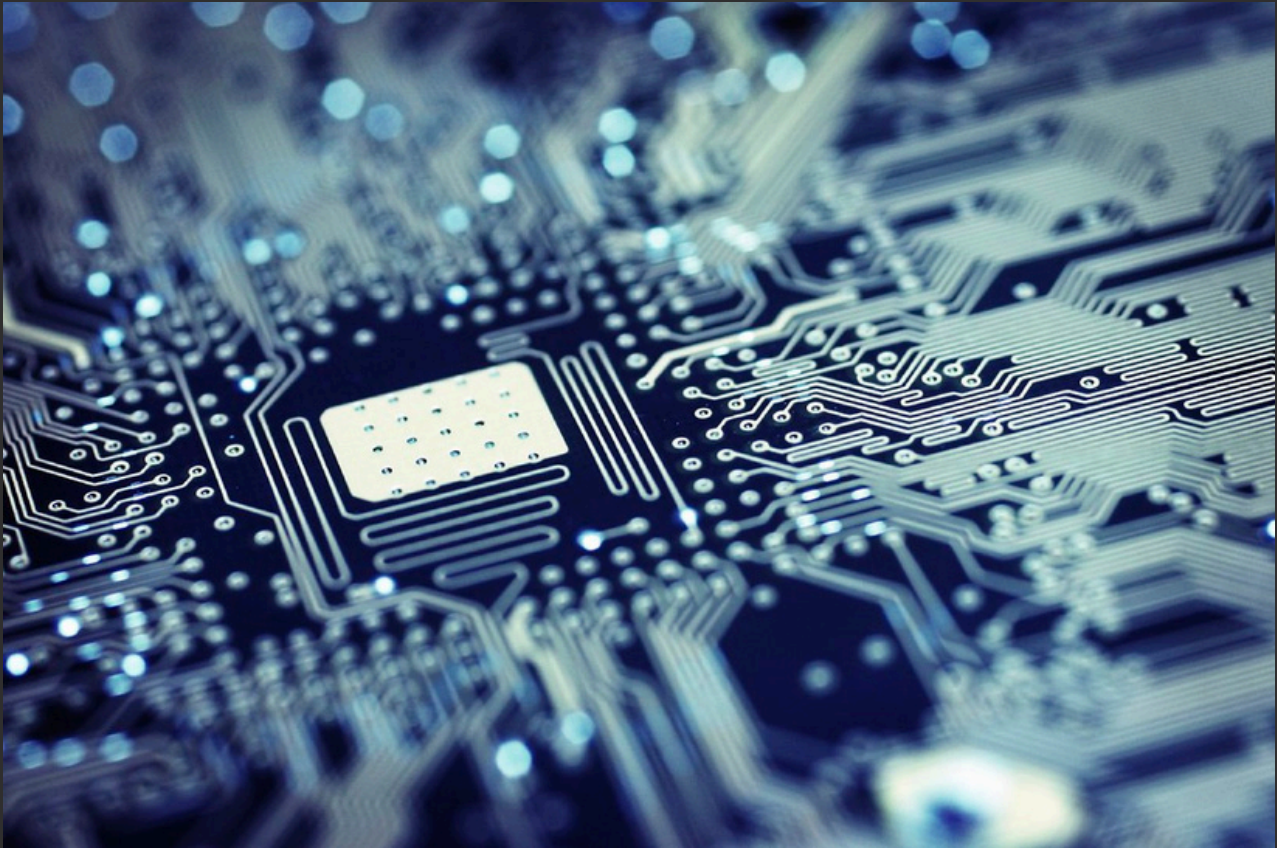
Political Scientist Lara Goyburu suggests that unrest will likely increase as the measures continue to bite, driving up utility and insurance bills, further pressuring families. Milei and his cronies believe this confirms that they're "On the right path", as tweeted by security minister Patricia Bullrich, who blamed strikes on 'mafioso unionists', threatening to dock the wages of public sector workers who took part. Trying to scare society's most vulnerable into complicity, so very 'libertarian'. The solution to craziness is unlikely to be more crazy. Neoliberalism is now widely recognised as the scam that it is. Wealth doesn't trickle down, middle classes are destroyed, the poor suffer further, and wealth is hoarded at the top of society. Argentina has been making the same mistake for decades. Under Milei, it will make different mistakes. When none other than Nigel Farage describes the measures as 'Thatcherism on steroids', cause for concern is warranted for all who have a modicum of humanity. In fairness, he has always been transparent in his ideas. If and when they likely fail, the 'crazy one' can at least hold his head high that he stuck to his word. Although holding one's head high should be impossible considering what he plans to do.

Drawing inspiration from Bolsonaro and Trump, he is the epitome of a populist, providing simple answers for complex issues. Rights groups raise concerns over his domestic policies. A social conservative, viewing intrusions of the state into people's lives as immoral, being pro-gun, anti-euthanasia and against vaccine requirements. It has also led to him being indifferent to LGBTQ+ and drug rights due to him being against state incursion, yet contradictorily remains anti-abortion. Environmental groups are especially concerned thanks to his climate change denial, calling it a "socialist lie" "promoted by the neo-Marxists". Internationally he wants to be the US' lapdog. He has pulled out of plans to join the BRICS, pledging to freeze relations with China and following in Trump's footsteps in relocating the Argentine Embassy in Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, demonstrating unconditional support for all things America (and genocide). Milei is not the cause of Argentina's woes, for now, but he's certainly a symptom of it. If there hadn't been such poor governance, then there would not have been a climate to allow for his election.

In an interview with Wall Street Journal, he claimed there is "No plan B", putting himself and his country on a collision course with disaster. The only hope for this impending catastrophe is that this serves as a hard reset for Argentina's political climate. In the last election, the choice was a continuation of the status quo, more of what had already caused an inflation rate of 140%, or a risk in the form of a real life Reddit libertarian's wet dream. A choice between the definition of insanity and a man wielding a chainsaw was not pretty, but Argentines were aware of the need for change. Unfortunately this was the choice they were confronted with, but maybe it will eventually lead to a more viable alternative. Gradual, measured structural reform is required, as is dealing with corruption. Destruction of the state is not only a bit over the top, but completely unworkable.

THE WHITE HEAT

Social media and the future of politics .



To paraphrase Harold Wilson, the white heat of the social media revolution looms over our politics. At the last general election, political parties spent over £6 million on Facebook ads and over £3 million on Google ads, and the prominence of the online in British politics is only set to grow. What implications has this had for our politics – and for the left in particular?

For one, social media has fostered a more decentralised and democratised politics. It's provided us with a cheap and accessible means of not only propagating our own opinions, but also forming connections with like-minded people. During the 2010 UK student protests, a response to Conservative-imposed tuition fee hikes and spending cuts, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were crucial for organising demonstrations and petitions – allowing students to mobilise quickly and effectively. However, it's important not to overstate the extent of this decentralisation – political activism online has often harmonised democratic input with clear, well-established hierarchies. Such a hybrid has gained momentum within Momentum – Labour's left-wing faction. At the national level, the organisation's social media strategy is highly centralised, with members having little input over its messaging. However, local-level Momentum groupings have much more autonomy, having the power to create their own social media campaigns and choose which issues to prioritise. This dualisation has its advantages – allowing Momentum to maintain message discipline on the national level whilst simultaneously being responsive to unique aspects of local political contexts.

Social media has the added benefit of allowing campaigners to spread the left-wing gospel without needing to rely on a deeply oligarchic, reactionary British press. During the 2017 general election campaign, the Labour Party used online platforms to encourage users to register to vote and promote its own policies – social media was an especially effective tool given the mass following both Jeremy Corbyn and Labour had on sites like Facebook. Not only was Labour able to get its message across in a manner untainted by right-wing bias, but it also used social media to counter the all-out assault the party faced from the likes of the *Mail* and *The Sun*. Negative reporting of Labour's policies by the print media was rebutted using animated videos which gave detailed explanations of its policy offer.

In collaboration with Momentum, whose Facebook videos were watched more than 23 million times in the final week of the election campaign, the party successfully used online tools to send Theresa May careening towards the political graveyard.

This is not to say that social media is without its disadvantages. Whilst it has allowed for the creation of tightly-knit political communities that can act collectively to enact change – the flipside of this is that it can create echo chambers that polarise and poison our politics. Not to forget just how much it's facilitated the spread of fake news – the British right have clearly caught on in this regard. In the run-up to the 2019 election, online organisations such as Parents' Choice, funded by ex-Tory ministers and associates, promoted misinformation about Labour's policy agenda.

And we all remember that infamous moment where a Conservative Party Twitter account posed as a factchecker during the 2019 election leaders' debate, using a veneer of neutrality to disseminate right-wing propaganda. What makes fake news particularly pernicious is that it's profitable to the platform. It is generally more engaging than content rooted in hard fact, with one study suggesting it spreads 10–20 times faster. Given social media platforms reap substantial dividends from this increased engagement, they have very little incentive to remove fake news. This means there's an onus on governments to more heavily regulate or tax online misinformation if a healthier politics is to be made possible.

All in all, the online realm is a double-edged sword. It is a potent tool for mass mobilisation and collective action, allowing the left to bypass the right-wing press as it attempts to promote its prospectus to the masses. That being said, its capacity to create echo chambers and aid the spread of misinformation that often seeks to undermine progressive causes is something we must be cognizant of as well. Ultimately, how strategically left-wing actors use online platforms, alongside how effectively governments regulate them, will determine whether social media's white heat is a force for better or for worse.

UNPOPULAR POPULISM

The future of the Conservative Party.



Pictured: Rishi Sunak and Olaf Scholz

Rishi Sunak's tenure has represented a profound stalemate within the Conservative Party, where the regicidal instincts of a disillusioned party have to be suppressed just enough to make it to the next election without cameras turning to Graham Brady again. Upon entering Parliament in 2015, Sunak would have found himself on the right of the party as a leave supporter opposing remainers and soft Brexiters in his party. He now finds himself as a 'moderate' within the Tory party without having moved a muscle. The membership is to the right of the Parliamentary party, and Sunak has never won them over and is currently one of the most unpopular cabinet members amongst party members. Having been defeated by Liz Truss 57% to 43% in the 2022 leadership election, Sunak was able to walk into 10 Downing Street uncontested, after the crash and burn of Truss and Kwarteng's neo-Thatcherite agenda, and ostensibly be the face of stability.

While it was not expected that Truss would be at all repentant, you may have expected some level of caution or reticence and perhaps an approach where her contingent takes some time to rebuild their messaging and find a new approach. Instead, Truss has lashed out and blamed her downfall on a 'left wing economic establishment', which she claims to be made up of the rugged Marxists who work in the IMF, Bank of England, and the City of London.

Her contingent is louder than ever, and the Tory party base are still aligned with her worldview, especially the most active of them, as shown by the crowds around Liz Truss's speech at conference compared to Sunak's. They have stayed active within a number of new hard right groups, such as the National Conservatives (or Nat C's as I like to call them) and more recently the Popular Conservatives splinter group. This faction has deep ties to the American right, with National Conservatism being funded by the Edmund Burke Foundation in the US, and Truss herself having deep longstanding ties with the Heritage Foundation.

The future of the Conservative party will involve the continued importation of American right wing talking points, such as Truss saying the country is full of 'secret conservatives', a remix of the 'silent majority' trope used by US Republicans from Nixon to Trump. Additionally American culture war framing has been used, with Sunak repeating transphobic catchphrases regarding 'what a woman is', which were popularised in a transphobic American documentary of a similar name.

Sunak has leaned into the "Culture War" as a means of appeasing the right-wing base of his party without subscribing completely to their economic views, but as we have seen over the last 16 months, this hasn't shut them up. Sunak's strategy to win over the country at large also seems doomed. The Uxbridge and South Ruislip by-election victory made the Tories lean into anti-ULEZ and climate sceptic rhetoric, trying to assert that any green policy will be at the expense of working people. This has further indulged the right-wing panics about 15-minute cities as well as Sunak's promise to scrap non-existent plans for a meat tax. Despite this inspiring rhetoric the polls still somehow haven't budged.

Assuming a Labour victory at the next election, the conclusion will not be that they failed in government due to their cruelty, idiocy and corruption, the conclusion will be that they 'weren't conservative enough'. The Tory selectorate will likely reflect that view, leading to speculation that Kemi Badenoch or Suella Braverman could be elected Leader of the Opposition. Badenoch and Braverman themselves are in safe seats, but the leadership options and capacity for coalition building within the Parliamentary party may depend on how severe the Tory defeat is, as many prominent hard right MPs seem likely to lose their seats such as Lee Anderson and Miriam Cates.

The amount of time Conservatives have spent in government historically can be partly attributed to ideological malleability, and an immense capacity to read the room and change leader to maximise electoral prospects. For now, it seems they have lost this ability. While no one can be sure who will take the hard right mantle, any leader from this faction would have much more time as opposition leader to set out their stall than Truss had in office, and a Starmer government will have to deliver transformative change to hold them and their ideas at bay.

HOLLAND & WILDERS

Where do they go from here?



I first became aware of Geert Wilders when I was studying politics in sixth form. For an early assignment our teacher had split us into groups and provided us each with a populist movement in Europe to do a presentation on.

We got Geert and his 'Party for Freedom'.

I was genuinely shocked to discover that the wave of populism that had hit my country and many of our neighbours had even made it to the Netherlands; I'd always viewed the country as among the most forward thinking and progressive on the continent. I was even more shocked to discover how blatant this brand of populism was in its bigoted rhetoric. Wilders, often seen as the Dutch equivalent of trump, won't simply say the quiet part out loud ; he'll scream it from the rooftops. He has openly admitted his hatred for Islam on numerous occasions in the past and has advocated for a ban on the building of new mosques. He has also made a number of other hilariously extreme statements – claiming once that 'if we do not stop Islamification now, Eurabia and Netherabia will just be a matter of time'. At that point, the prospect of Wilders getting into government was possible but unlikely. However, following a resounding win in a recent set of elections – it is now a very conceivable political reality. So how and why did the Netherlands get here and how could it change the country's politics?

To understand the present situation, we need to look at the past.

Geert Wilders started his parliamentary career in 1998 as an MP for the centre right VVD (People's party for freedom and democracy). He later quit over disagreements regarding turkey's potential membership of the EU and formed his own far right party, the PVV (Party for freedom). He has since used this party as a platform for his Anti Islam, Anti migrant and Anti EU views.

The PVV won 24 seats in their first national election in 2010, making them the third biggest party in the dutch parliament. Somewhat hilariously, they then spent the next 2 years propping up his old chums at the VVD before he withdrew his support for their government over disagreements surrounding budget cuts. Wilders has not been involved in the ruling coalition since then, and until his recent resounding win it seemed unlikely he would be.

However, now the largest party and with government in his sights, it seems Wilders will once again have to compromise with more moderate forces.

I don't blame you for being a bit confused at this point. Isn't Wilder's supposed to be far right? How is someone who talks like him even capable of working with moderates? The strange fact is, despite his consistently shocking rhetoric; the 'Dutch trump' has shown a remarkable amount of pragmatism over the years.

This was especially true in the recent election where he successfully distanced himself from past remarks to broaden his appeal and increase his prospects of forming a coalition - claiming his policies in regard to closing mosques were 'on ice/in the fridge'. He also performed strongly in TV debates, promising to be a PM for all. With this strategy he has retained his hardcore base whilst making himself more palatable to centrist voters frustrated with the political establishment - a combination that has proven a winning recipe electorally. He has also taken votes from more recent right wing political projects who had gained and lost popularity at rapid pace, such as the BBB (which started as a farmer's protest group) and the New Social Contract Party.

However, Wilders hasn't got the top job yet. In fact, it could be a very long time until he does. Following the 2021 election, current caretaker PM Mark Rutte took around 9 months to form a governing coalition, a moderate who had been in power for over a decade - as opposed to Wilders, a perceived 'extremist' who has no record in government. Moreover, the recent exit of the New Social Contract party from coalition talks has further thrown his prospects of forming a government into question.

Suppose he does come to power though. How much would this shift the country's political landscape? He will need to rely on other parties to prop up his government, it is unlikely any of his most radical ideas will get anywhere close to being enacted. In fact, experts speculate that much of Wilders' policy platform will need to be scrapped if he hopes to become PM.

Either way, Wilders' electoral success and the continuing popularity of his party shows that the west's wave of populism is far from dead - and with the prospect of a Trump victory this year looking ever more likely, it could be said to be in something of a renaissance. Once again, a disjointed political left has allowed financial hardship to be utilised by national populists for political gain. And although it's unlikely the shift to the political landscape in the Netherlands will be seismic - it will still make waves, waves which will travel across Europe.



Thank you for reading.



Edited by Ronny Whetton.

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