

Britain: Dump the Tories but organise for an anti-capitalist alternative

Wednesday 5 July 2023, by [KELLAWAY Dave](#) (Date first published: 4 July 2023).

Dave Kellaway examines the Tory crisis, while pointing out it is their contradictions rather than much positive about Labour which is driving the polls.

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Sunak is facing a losing battle to stop a Tory defeat at the next election. Everyone can see that the Tory party is riven by factions with no credible project. Johnson's grubby exit sums it up as he rewards his mates with gongs and honours while he sets up his new HQ at the Daily Mail. Polls give Labour as much as a 24 points ahead.

All the attacks on migrants and Tory culture wars cannot wipe out the everyday reality for the vast majority of us - wage cuts, soaring energy bills, a crisis ridden NHS, cash-strapped schools and council spending choked off. While the planet burns or floods and our rivers are polluted by privatised water companies Sunak increasingly panders to the climate change deniers in his party. Faced with the strike wave and a rising tide of environmental protests he passes repressive laws that aim to demonise activists and break the will to struggle.

His MPs know their days are numbered and are fighting like rats in a sinking ship. Many do not even bother to support their leader by attending Prime Minister's Question Time. Some are looking to secure a better pay day; others are conspiring to win control of the party after a Sunak defeat.

The myth of Brexit giving people back control or ushering in an era of plenty based on free trade deals with the US will not con the electorate for a second time. Recent polls show there is a comfortable majority for turning back from Brexit and restoring a closer relationship with the single market.

The Covid public inquiry is up and running and exposing how the Tories cavalier and corrupt policies led to thousands of unnecessary deaths. It also exposes how the Labour leadership's timid opposition to Johnson, concentrating on his incompetence rather than denouncing his contempt for the health of the people, meant it missed an opportunity to put this government into a bigger crisis much earlier. For Sunak there is no respite since the inquiry will continue right into the election year.

All the economic projections suggest the same - there will be little room for giveaways before the next election. People will be coming off fixed rate mortgages to take on much higher rates costing thousands more each year all the way through to the next election.

So the Tory crisis is the main reason for Labour's huge lead in the polls rather than any enthusiasm for Labour policies or campaigns. Even the moderate alternatives proposed by Labour on energy or

housing seem an alternative to the catastrophe we are currently living through under the Tories. The only question is the scale of the Tory defeat.

Until recently some pollsters suggested Labour would not have an absolute majority but now it seems they are more likely to win enough to govern on their own. There is always a risk that Starmer's hyper cautious approach may weaken to some degree the perception that it is a real alternative government.

The more it moves to the centre, the more other parties in that area could pick up votes that could go to Labour. Certainly Labour Party activists on the left are right to argue that a more radical manifesto will enthuse more voters and help achieve a clear majority.

What change will Starmer's Labour make?

Millions of workers will vote Labour in order to end a regime that is making their lives and the environment worse. Labour does have some policies such as rights at work, cutting the cost of land for housing, the green energy plan or investment in the NHS that we support as first steps to exit the multiple crises.

Certainly radical change requires a much bigger investment. For example the recently postponed £28 billion a year for the green energy plan is already dwarfed by plans in countries like France or Germany. It requires wealth taxes, taking back key utilities and industries into common ownership and a challenge to capitalist power. Starmer's relentless removal of Corbyn's progressive policies aims to reassure the bosses that their power will not be touched.

Purging the party of any pro-Corbyn candidates and of sitting left MPs where possible reinforces these signals. A popular Labour mayor like Jamie Driscoll is prevented from even getting on the short list for the regional mayoralty in the North East because he was part of a discussion about culture with Ken Loach. If you talk to anybody defined by Labour as antisemitic then you are presumably contaminated. Local parties are prevented from discussing any aspect of these purges under threat of being closed down.

Such Stalinist, anti-democratic functioning does not bode well for the way a Labour government might operate. Activists are repelled from working for Labour and even voters do not find it attractive. There is no pretence maintained that Labour conference or members have any say over policy or candidates. A spokesperson for Labour was quoted recently as saying the manifesto is decided by Starmer and his leadership team.

Worse still not a week goes by that shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, does not water down even these timid policies - first the green energy plan has been delayed for two years and now universal child care appears to a lot less universal. A tax on the digital corporations has been dropped or rather redefined as not a pledge in the first place.

An earlier promise about free school meals for all primary school pupils has been deemed fiscally risky despite the open support of Sadiq Khan, Labour mayor of London. Rent controls have also been ruled out despite Sadiq supporting the measure. At this rate the mayor will have to watch it, he might provoke Starmer in deselecting him for the upcoming election.

Even the Liberal party is outflanking Labour to its left by proposing government funds to soften the effect of steep mortgage rises. Labour has ruled out such government support. Continually changing position allows the Tories to paint Starmer as someone you cannot rely on; one moment he supports

Corbynism and later he opposes everything about it.

The election manifesto could be even more moderate. Starmer's team think this is the way to guarantee victory and win back those Brexit-voting Labour traditionalists in the so called Red Wall constituencies. This strategy grossly oversimplifies what happened in those areas in the last election and will also lead to losses of progressive voters, particularly younger ones, to the Liberal Democrats or Greens. Decreeing the Brexit debate as over despite clear evidence of its negative consequences means Labour will fail to pick up support from the growing numbers who know Brexit has been a disaster.

What is astonishing about Labour's caution is that the news agenda is full of evidence that Corbyn's policies of taking the utilities into common ownership makes sense. Thames Water is on the brink of collapse after ramping up its debt while dishing out billions to shareholders - including Saudi sovereign funds. People know the energy companies have been ripping them off big time. Some rail companies have been de-privatised already. You would have thought a big campaign by Labour denouncing privatised utilities and explaining the advantages of common ownership would be a no-brainer. Instead the leadership mainly publicises its endless wooing of big business at specially arranged events.

Labour is being careful not to align itself with progressive opposition to the Tory offensive against migrants, environmental protestors or supporters of trans rights. It refuses to take sides in the culture wars. Rather than unambiguously supporting the right to asylum it criticises the government for incompetence and not sending people back quickly enough. At least it opposes sending migrants to Rwanda but mainly on the grounds of costs and efficiency. It does not campaign for safe and accessible routes for asylum seekers. Ukrainian refugees, thankfully, are not on the boats precisely because there is a safe and legal route.

Is there a difference between a Labour or Tory government?

Apart from the marginal, but significant, differences in policies, organising under a Labour government is less constrained. People will feel more confident about change and if - as is likely - Labour keeps change within very strict limits then historic illusions in Labour can be weakened.

Trade unions have been more active this year and are mostly affiliated to the Labour Party. They could be a base for winning more radical policies. Sticking to fiscal rules aimed at reassuring the capitalist establishment could well lead to a conflict particularly with public sector workers defending wages and public services. Traditional loyalty shown by union leaders to 'their government' may be weaker this time. Leaders like Sharon Graham has already indicated she wants her union to be more independent from Labour and it is not clear that some tinkering with the repressive Tory labour laws will be enough to buy them off.

Whatever happens with the election, the most important priority is to deepen and extend the self-organisation we have seen in the strike wave and campaigns. We support all initiatives to bring together activists from across the unions who have been involved in these struggles. We should not hold back and wait for Labour. The Labour leadership refuses to support strikers and has abstained on the new repressive laws going through parliament. Real anti-capitalist change will only come through the left, whether inside or outside the Labour Party, working together to patiently build a culture and network that can draw in mass support and lay the basis for a socialist alternative.

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P.S.

• Anti*Capitalist Resistance. 30 Jun 2023:

<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/dump-the-tories-but-organise-for-an-anti-capitalist-alternative/>