

# The Critical Mass Sunday Socialist

May 8<sup>th</sup> 2022

## The votes are counted

It's probably fair to say that most socialists did not hold out much hope of anything dramatic happening in Thursday's local elections.

We hoped for, and got, a drubbing for the Tories. We hoped for, and got, the failure of Starmer's Labour to make any improvement upon the performance of Corbyn's Labour just four years ago. We hope for, but didn't get, a swathe of genuine socialist candidates taking seats from both the Tories and Labour. What we perhaps did not concentrate enough on, at least this side of the Irish Sea, was Sinn Fein becoming the major party in Northern Ireland.

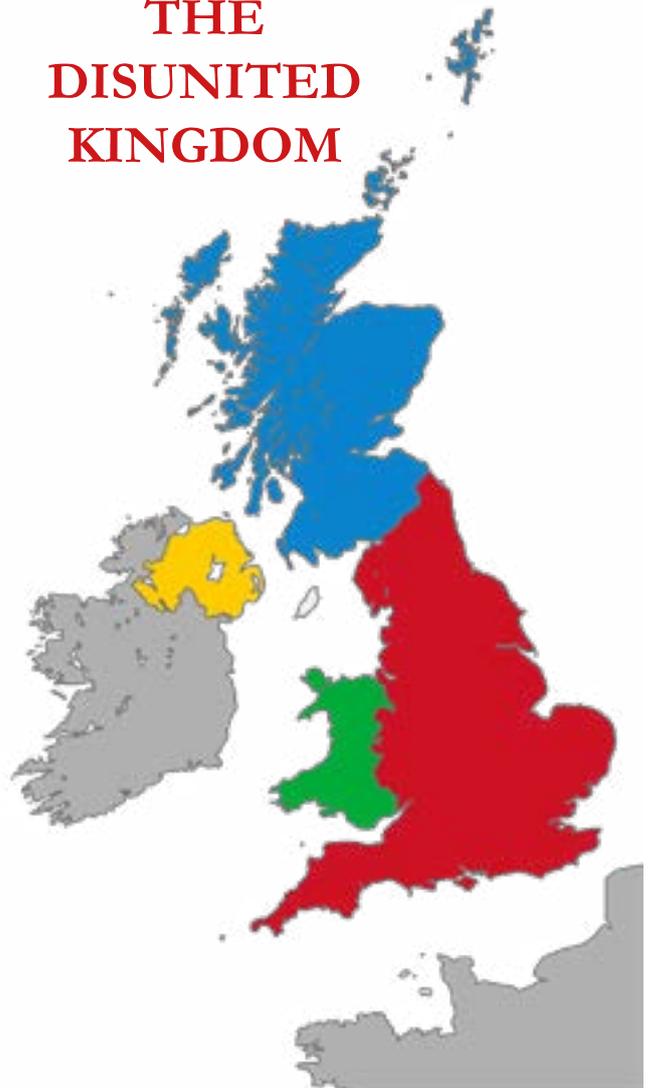
In times like these we celebrate successes where we can and it is certainly a major victory not just for that particular party but for an end to the ridiculous and undemocratic partition of that island.

The break up of the union looks increasingly likely with reunification on the cards in Ireland, the Scottish National Party consolidating their hold on power north of the border and Wales the only bright spot on the Labour horizon albeit led by Mark Drakeford a one time supporter of Jeremy Corbyn.

England, for too long the political hub of the UK, never had the support of the majority of ordinary people in Ireland, and both the Tories and Labour have betrayed the people of Scotland. The fact is that even England is not the unified nation that people often think.

These elections have shown only too clearly that the north-south divide remains as potent as ever. For socialists the breakup of the UK is not the main goal. We must continue to believe that working people in all parts of these islands have more in common with each other than they do with the rich and powerful who continue to drain their lifeblood. So, whilst we continue to support independence movements we do not support the replacement of pan-national capitalism with a nationalist capitalism. These movements give us the chance to argue for a new type of society and we must do so.

## THE DISUNITED KINGDOM



## inside this issue

Notes from the edge featuring Luke Andreski , Marilyn Tyzack, Susie Granic, and Tamweer Dar

UK votes • Starmer lies • Republicans regress

# EVERYONE'S A WINNER

*Dave Middleton & Mike Stanton*

**I**t was largely predicted that the Tories would lose somewhere between 800 and 1,000 seats in this week's local elections. So called Polling expert [Lord Hayward](#) said ahead of the poll:

**“The Tories are at an historic high for a governing party after nine years in power. A fall from that level is therefore inevitable at some stage and it will come this year - with force.”**

Which probably just proves what many of us have long suspected. Most pollsters don't really have much of a clue. In the event the Tory losses were not quite as dramatic as we had hoped, but Labour's gains were not quite as impressive as they would have hoped either.

## Labour Hubris

Sir Keir Starmer, not letting a little matter like actual facts get in the way of his celebrations was spreading the good news:

**“This is a big turning point... From the depths of the 2019 general election, we're back on track.”**

Yet, John Curtice had a slightly different take on what was happening telling state sponsored news organisation the BBC:

**“Actually outside of London Labours vote is a little bit lower than it was in 2018, it hasn't done quite as well as Jeremy Corbyn did.”**

It would be churlish to remind Labour that it was those who now surround Starmer who constantly told us how anybody but Corbyn would be streets ahead.

## Indicative Results

For the left simply seeing the Tories doing badly cannot be the only option. Especially when the replacement is a Tory imitating Labour Party, a Tory partnering Lib Dems, or a Corbyn attacking Greens or SNP. Critical Mass has a range of left opinion and in the run-up to the election we promoted the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition and also independents such as Ray Woolford in Lewisham who received a credible, if disappointing, 154 votes.

Whilst TUSC, as seems to be traditional in these cases, is presenting the results as a victory of sorts, the fact is that in almost every seat they stood they received the lowest number of votes of any of the candidates. In Barking and Dagenham, Gascoine ward, Ruth Mason did particularly well polling 154 votes and taking 3.87% of the vote. This only looks impressive because so few TUSC candidates managed to get into triple figures. Ian Pattison, for example, in Waltham Abbey Honey Lane ward in Epping Forest, got a creditable 6% of the vote, but that was achieved with only 64 votes, and he still trailed behind the other candidates.



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<a href='https://www.freepik.com/vectors/recognition'>Recognition vector created by pch.vector - www.freepik.com</a>*

## Liberals in bouyant mood

As Labour claimed victory and the Tories tried to minimise the damage the Lib Dems were in bouyant mood. The country seems to have either forgotten 2010 or forgiven them for bringing in austerity, but regardless there is little doubt that the Lib Dems are the only major political party that can realistically claim a success from Thursday night. Quite whether their gain of 191 seats overall justified Sir Ed Davey's claim that the tectonic plates of British politics were shifting is highly doubtful although it is hard not to disagree with his assessment that people had had enough of Boris Johnson.

There was no electoral joy for the Tories in Cumberland, Westmorland and Furness, North Yorkshire or Somerset. These are new unitary authorities that abolished the old district councils. Labour-led Cumbria had put forward a One Cumbria proposal but this was rejected by the government and the courts, while Conservative-held Somerset and North Yorkshire were given the green light on similar proposals. The two new Cumbrian authorities with populations of around a quarter of a million each are dwarfed by North Yorkshire (840,000) and Somerset (560,000) and smaller than the government's own guidelines for a minimum population of 300,000 needed for viable delivery of services.

If the intention was to weaken Labour and favour the Tories, it did not work. Labour won a landslide in Cumberland and the LibDems won in Westmorland. LibDems won easily in Somerset, which has been Tory held since 2009. The Tories hung on in North Yorkshire by one seat compared to their 38 seat majority in the old county council. Maybe having Sunak as a local MP has its downside after his pathetic response to the rise in energy prices.

Partygate and fat cat profiteering from the cost-of-living crisis may have upset the Tory calculations of political advantage. But that does not alter the fact that these changes were designed to serve the needs of the Conservative Party rather than the people who have to live with the consequences of their decisions. So, no change there.

Starmer was quick to turn up in Carlisle on Friday, claiming the victory in Cumberland as vindication of his leadership. He was keeping well clear of Hull, where less than a quarter of voters turned out to vote and the LibDems took the council off Labour. The Tory collapse has favoured the LibDems and the Green Party as much as Labour.

## National Vote Share

Whilst I hate to disagree with state broadcaster Laura Kuennsberg who said of the National Vote Share:

**“The projected national share percentages are important numbers.”**

the fact is that these statistics which the national media love are almost entirely worthless. Before we consider why that is the case what do the numbers tell us? If the results were replicated across the county in a General Election the result would be:

Labour 35%  
Conservative 30%  
Liberal Democrat 19%  
Others 16%

Labour activists will no doubt read that and think that they are, as Sir Keir stated, on their way to a Government forming General Election victory.

But there are a lot of caveats. First and perhaps most importantly no General Election has ever replicated a local election result from two years previous. Second, and equally as importantly, a number of places did not vote at all. It was around a third of English council seats that were up for grabs. Third, turnout was around the 30% mark as Mike Stanton predicted in Critical Mass last week. What this means is that whilst this represents the current core vote for the parties it does not tell us what will motivate the vast majority of floating voters in two years time. Fourth, there is a lot of time between now and the next General Election. Fifth, local elections are a good opportunity for a protest vote. Many Conservatives will have been sending a message to the party either by voting for another party (most likely the Lib Dems) or by not voting at all. And, strictly from a Labour perspective, this result is exactly where Labour were under Jeremy Corbyn before Starmer's disastrous decision to back a second Brexit referendum completed the Labour establishment's hatchet job.

Critical Mass writers have been vocal in their opposition to Starmer's Labour and this weeks Edge Notes will certainly reflect their frustration. As Luke Andreski told me:

“For Labour to do worse than Corbyn's 2018 results in the Red Wall is pretty derisory, and suggests that Labours recovery of those seats at the next GE is by no means a given. Labour failing to make gains against a government as bad as Johnson's can only be seen as a major thumbs down for Starmer.”

Whilst Jo Buchanan could not see how Labour was heading for a victory in two years time. She told me:“Starmer maintains he has done well but London doesn't reflect the rest of the country. I believe quite a number of left-wingers allied with the centre and turned out to defeat the Tories especially in their flagship council Wandsworth. Labour is clearly not making the headway which it should in the context of one of the most disastrous duplicitous ill-trusted governments in our history. Labour is not even beginning to approach forming a powerful principled opposition suited to take on government.”

## Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales

In Scotland it was pretty much a wipe out for the Conservatives who lost 63 seats overall. These were shared, more or less, equally between the SNP (now with 453 councillors), Labour (282), the Lib Dems (87) and the Greens (35). An increase of 20 seats for Labour which has Scottish Fabians Leader, Richard Wheatstone entering the land of make believe so beloved of Labour centrists. He wrote for MSN News:

“in both the UK and Scotland Labour has made symbolic gains..”

If there is anything symbolic in their results it is a symbol of a party that having ripped its own soul out is now unable to build on its own rhetorical promises.

Meanwhile in Wales, led by once Corbyn-supporting Mark Drakeford, there is a genuine cause for Welsh Labour supporters to take heart. As the Conservatives lost 86 seats, it was Labour who were the major beneficiaries gaining 66 seats to bring their total number of councillors to 526, though that is still 200 less than they had in 1995.

As Mike Stanton says in this issue the politics of Northern Ireland can realistically be described as going through a seismic shift. Until recently, politics was absolutely dominated by the unionists but in recent times their grip on power has been gradually waning.

Whilst the rest of the UK are busy electing councillors in Northern Ireland it is the Assembly's 90 seats that are being contested. Sinn Féin is on track to be the largest party, a position as the BBC's correspondent Lewis Goodall points out:

“Northern Ireland was literally designed so that wouldn't happen, so there would be an in-built unionist majority..”

You might wonder why this piece of gerrymandering has received so little attention from our mainstream media, but then if you know our mainstream media probably not.

On this occasion Sinn Féin deputy leader Michelle O'Neill, was probably right to say that the election is “historic”. Given that Sinn Féin also has a majority in the Republic of Ireland this could well be the beginning of the end for the union. And, not before time.

Having said that Sinn Féin are not having it all their own way. The avowedly centrist Alliance Party, led by Naomi Long, have also made gains. The Alliance Party are a so-called moderate unionist party. In practice, this means that they oppose any attempt at reunification. On one of the other big issues in Irish politics - abortion - the official stance of the party is that it is a matter of conscience, thus sidestepping the question of womens' rights.

### So, what happened overall?

It's probably true to say that from a socialist perspective very little has changed. Of course, seeing the Tories getting a drubbing is always a pleasing experience, but watching Labour writhe as the Starmerites try to pretend that this is all good news is just as enervating.

In truth as Mike Stanton also wrote this week, many people will have used this election as a protest. For Tories that probably meant not voting, for Labour voters it might have meant giving their vote to a party such as the Greens, Plaid Cymru (in Wales) or the SNP (in Scotland). Though overall turnout was very low, in some seats as

few as 20% of voters actually bothered.

And, who can blame them when the campaign is almost entirely focussed on the lies of Boris Johnson and Keir Starmer?

What this shows us very clearly is that electoral politics in the UK are dominated by the main political parties in a way which means that the vote is always a vote for the continuance of the status quo.

Nonetheless, they can also provide a barometer for the state of politics at a given point in time. And, based on this showing, politics is still dominated by the sense that politicians cannot be trusted.

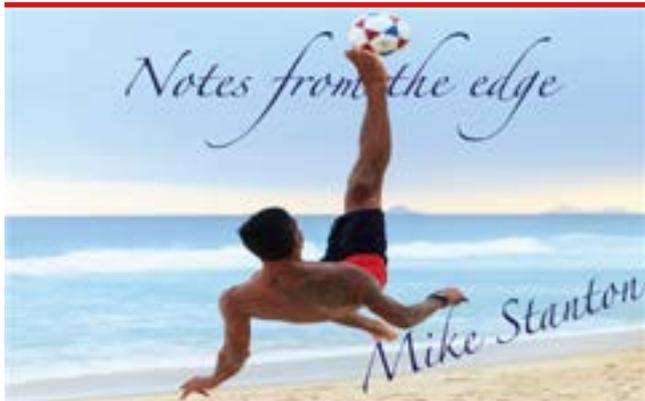
Of course, socialists will grasp at straws. Some TUSC candidates received 4-6% of the vote (whilst coming last in most cases) and they will say, inevitably, that this is something to build on. In their tweet TUSC claimed that “Thousands voted for socialism”. Which is probably just about true. But it is arguable whether this represents any kind of challenge to Labour's dominance. But, this will not stop hundreds of committed socialists from continuing to pursue an electoral agenda.

From a Labour perspective in both England and Scotland given the collapse of support for the Tories they should have done better. Whether this was due to Starmer or the low turnout it is hard to say. But, up against the most corrupt and divisive governments in living history the upward curve needed to be shown very clearly.

With the exception of Wales Labour is standing still. If people are fed up with the Tories it is certainly not translating into votes for the Labour Party. Yes, they made some gains, but this was not the result of a brilliant strategy being pursued by Starmer and Mandelson, but rather the collapse of the Tory vote. Now it is worth remembering that when Blair's so-called New Labour won in 1997 that too was the result of a Tory collapse.

But, is it enough for the Labour Party to do so little to inspire support and to hope that the Tory faithful sit on their hands to deliver them into Number Ten. The reality is that for all the centrist venom aimed at Jeremy Corbyn, based on these results, Labour have made no substantive gains since 2019 at all. And, certainly everybody, apart from the delusional Labour hierarchy, seems to agree that these results are not indicative of a party heading for power.

For some people, including many on the left, the thought that after all the damage they have done, the Tories will very likely still be in government after 2024 will create a sense of panic. We can expect to hear that anybody who opposes Labour from the left is a Tory enabler delivered with increasing desperation as the General Election gets closer and closer and they realise that they need our votes to win.



## Northern Ireland

Alongside the council elections in Great Britain, voters in Northern Ireland are electing their devolved government, the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Ever since the start of the Assembly, after the Good Friday agreement that marked the end of armed sectarian conflict in the province, the loyalists have been the largest party and thus nominated the First Minister. The nationalists have come second and nominated the Deputy First Minister as part of the power sharing arrangement.

That is set to change. Sinn Fein has achieved more first preference votes than any other party and already has 16 members elected out of the 30 so far declared. Second preference votes now come into play to decide on the remaining 60

seats. But Sinn Fein is favourite to emerge as the largest party.

The unionists are bitterly opposed to the Northern Ireland Protocol that formed part of the Brexit agreement. It effectively placed Northern Ireland within a customs union with the EU and created a border in the Irish Sea.

Until this is settled, they are unlikely to accept a Sinn Fein First Minister. So the constitutional crisis in Northern Ireland will continue.

Sinn Fein's success reflects the demographic change taking place in Northern Ireland. The original borders were gerrymandered to create a permanent unionist majority. But Catholics are set to outnumber Protestants before too long, and these election results will boost Sinn Fein's campaign for a Border poll and for Irish unity.

So, while Starmer wraps himself in the flag and proclaims himself for the Union, (not the Trade Union, obviously) the United Kingdom continues to unravel.

## Never Mind the Ballots – What About the Pope?

*Mike Stanton*

**N**ever mind the ballots in the Council elections which took place on Thursday; they ought to fill all socialists with enthusiasm. At last, we should be stuffing it to the Tories and making them pay for the corruption, the incompetence, the sheer criminal negligence of their handling of the pandemic. How many people would be alive today if they really had placed ‘a protective ring of steel’ around care homes? They have agreed that their actions were unlawful by their decision not to appeal the recent [High Court ruling](#) against them.

### Never Mind

Then there is the cost-of-living crisis. George ‘Useless’ Eustice, the Tory Environment Secretary entered the fray by suggesting that poor people could manage their budgets if they chose to buy cheap brands at the supermarket. Never mind that there are no cheap rents and no cheap energy prices. Never mind that Johnson again refused a windfall tax on the inflated profits of the energy giants for whom the crisis is just another business opportunity. Never mind the Tory tax increases. And never mind that, as [Luke Andreski](#) pointed out on Tuesday, Starmer thinks that attacking the left in his own party is somehow a vote winner in a battle with the most right-wing government in living memory.

### Opposition to NATO

Starmer doubled down on his position that criticism of NATO is incompatible with Labour Party membership in an interview with [Times Radio](#). The Campaign Group of left-wing Labour MPs have already caved in and withdrawn their support for Stop the War’s statement on the war in Ukraine. But NATO membership has always been a contested issue for the Labour Party.

In 1947 the *New Statesman* published a pamphlet, *Keep Left*, jointly written by Michael Foot, Richard Crossman and Ian Mikardo, that opposed NATO. Michael Foot went on to lead the Labour Party. Richard Crossman served as a cabinet minister under Harold Wilson and, like Keir Starmer, Crossman and Mikardo were both committed Zionists. By a twist of fate Ernest Bevin, Foreign Secretary in Attlee’s post war Labour government, was both antisemitic and one of the architects of NATO. Who would you expel there, Starmer?

### Pope Attacks NATO

Now the Pope has attacked NATO. He thinks NATO’s aggressive stance towards Russia contributed to Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine

Pope Francis said that the “barking of NATO at the door of Russia” might have led to the invasion of Ukraine and that he didn’t know whether other countries should supply Ukraine with more arms.

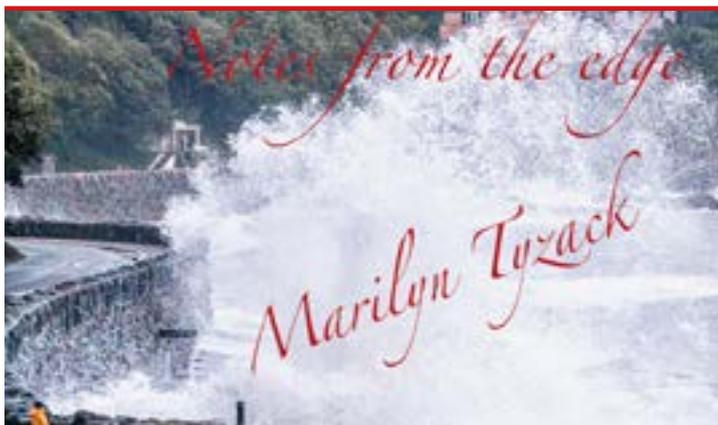
Pope Says NATO Might Have Provoked Russian Invasion of Ukraine (wsj.com)

The Pope can hardly be described as one of Putin’s puppets. He has

condemned the invasion and even criticised the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, who backs the invasion, of being ‘Putin’s altar boy.’ He went on to compare the war to other conflicts that he said were fomented by international interests: “Syria, Yemen, Iraq, one war after another in Africa.”

So, what did this mean for Catholic voters in the local elections? Like the socialist vote they have little choice. Apart from independent socialist candidates, those standing under the [TUSC](#) banner and the Green Party, all the major parties support NATO. And if Catholic members of the Labour Party are forced to choose between Starmer and the Pope, will they face a choice between expulsion and excommunication?

It will be interesting to see how that devout Catholic convert, war criminal and mentor to Starmer’s Labour Party, Tony Blair responds to the Pope’s words. Will he see the error of his ways and lead his own Pilgrimage of Grace in the Red Wall? On past form he is more likely to call for airstrikes and regime change in the Vatican.



### *Social Class in the Workplace*

I have to say at the outset that I am not a fan of Angela Rayner. Her treatment of her once friend and colleague, Jeremy Corbyn, is by any standards unforgivable.

However, the nature of the attacks on her by unnamed Tory sources, and the way this was defended by columnists like Dan Hodges in the Daily Mail, has put a magnifying glass on the values held by many in positions of influence and power in Britain today. It was not just men who attempted to defend the indefensible. Predictably, Sarah Vine advised that she should embrace the compliment quoting Mae West:

**“It’s better to be looked over than overlooked.”**

Sadly, the overt misogyny is unsurprising. The Daily Mail had already run a story in January when she first faced Johnson about how she “flirted with him in pearls at PMQs”. But it was the reference to the fact that Angela Rayner had to resort to other tactics because, with a comprehensive school background, she could not compete with Johnson’s Oxford Union debating skills, that was really inflammatory.

It actually brought home the fact that it doesn’t really matter how much progress we make in our working lives, how many educational qualifications we achieve, those from privileged backgrounds will always look down on and diminish these achievements in numerous unstated ways. For working class women and members of the BAME community this is a double disadvantage.

### *Inequality entrenched from birth to work*

Research by the Government’s social mobility commission found that inequality in Britain is “now entrenched from birth to work”. Being born privileged means people were likely to remain privileged. But being born disadvantaged meant they may have to overcome a series of barriers to ensure they and their children do not remain locked in a cycle of poverty.

The problem is that the rules around breaking the series of barriers are not always clear. This is summed up by research into social class and career progression in the Civil Service published in May 2021 “Navigating the Labyrinth” It talks about the elitist unspoken behaviours that still influences appointments at this level.

This is, despite a supposed rigorous process of open and fair selection. Strikingly, the composition of the Senior Civil Service, where only 18 % are from working class backgrounds has barely changed since 1967. The preferred behaviours are referred to as “studied neutrality” and consist of the obvious such as accent and style of speech, but also includes being emotionally detached with an understated presentation.

What this shows is that the baggage of our class origins do not disappear once we enter the workplace. The class ceiling is very real. Its impact is profound and those holding the reins of power will do everything they can to legitimise that power. That is why the attack on Angela Rayner needs to be seen through that lens. Attacks of this nature have one objective. To ensure that privilege is not challenged and we continue to know our place.

## Starmer Relying on Blair to Boost Labour Vote

*Mike Stanton*

**K**eir Starmer was relying on Tony Blair to boost Labour's vote in this week's Council Elections. On Sunday's Sophie Ridge show on Sky News he welcomed Tony Blair's endorsement, telling her that his party "doesn't win elections very often" so "having Tony Blair's endorsement is very valuable".

Sophie Ridge on Sunday

### Electoral Decline

It is worth remembering that Blair's 1997 landslide victory was largely down to a collapse in the Tory vote. Labour gained 2 million votes, but the Tories lost 4.5 million. Throughout the Blair/Brown years Labour's vote declined from 13.5m people in 1997 to 8.6 million in 2010. Membership declined by 300,000. They only stayed in power because the Tory vote stagnated.

This was symptomatic of a general decline in electoral politics. Turnout for general elections from the 1950s onwards averaged around 75%. In 1997 it was 71.4%, the lowest since 1935. By 2001 it was 59.4%, the lowest since the introduction of universal suffrage. There has been an improvement since then, but we are still below that low point in 1997.

### Votes That Matter

This is because people are more likely to vote when they think their vote matters. When the main parties have very similar policies, and the argument is about who will manage capitalism better, that is not going to inspire the dispossessed and the left behind to get out and vote. Corbyn seemed to change that. He increased the Labour Party membership and the Labour vote. In voting terms, even in 2019, "[our worst election result ever.](#)" he did better than Miliband, Brown or Blair (2005).

### Council Elections

What does all this mean for this week's Council elections? The turnout is expected to be much lower than in general elections, at around 30% overall. So, it provides a useful indication of the parties' core support rather than the floating voters who turn out at general elections. Local elections, like by-elections, are also a vehicle for protest votes. Usually, they are a measure of discontent with the government. But this time they give socialists an opportunity to register their discontent with the opposition, that is with Starmer's Labour Party, enablers of this vile and heartless Tory government.

### TUSC

The [Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition](#) stood 113 candidates in these elections. And our own [Ray Woolford](#) stood as part of an independent slate of candidates in Lewisham. A vote for these candidates was not just a protest vote. It is a vote to build a movement. It is a vote to organise grassroots opposition to the status quo.

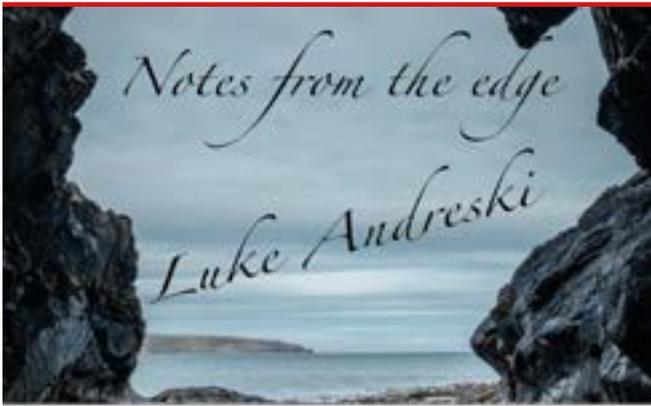
The rest of us had little choice but to vote for the least obnoxious candidate or, spoil our ballot. But we can all choose to build a future alternative. So, check out TUSC. [Subscribe](#) to Critical Mass and, if you can afford it, make a [regular donation](#).

As socialists, we approach elections with an understandable degree of cynicism. But they are also an opportunity to engage with people who share our anger against the system and are willing to join us in campaigning for real change.



**Warmonger and American lapdog Tony Blair is the spiritual leader of Starmer's Labour Party**

*Photo courtesy of World Economic Forum*



Choice is a uniquely important word in a society seduced by consumerism. The Right are very good at appropriating slogans. They're associated with 'choice' and 'freedom' while managing to associate the Left with big government, rules and regulations. It's a perception which needs challenging. The Left needs to demonstrate how so-called choice often leads to big winners and even bigger losers. Not an easy task.

We need a strategy which puts PRO CHOICE front and centre of an alternative narrative – a narrative attractive to new generations who've grown up with consumerism and levels of aspiration that the current system cannot meet.

Below are a couple of examples from this week's news.

### *Pro Choice: Home Ownership*

Aping his hero, Margaret Thatcher, Johnson announced this week that he wants to give tenants the choice to buy their social housing for discounts of up to 70%.

At the beginning of the '80s Thatcher allowed council tenants exactly this choice (though with a markedly smaller discount). The underlying idea was to make Britain a property-owning democracy, giving people a stake in the country's wealth. With a personal stake, the scheme would 'stimulate attitudes of independence and self-reliance'.

However, the cost was enormous. Council housing fell from 33% to 18% of the total stock. As public assets these were lost for good. Tenants lacked the resources to maintain their property, and about half of the ex-council houses were sold to private landlords who subsequently made fortunes out of price rises and extortionate rents.

### **Why does this matter?**

The diminished public housing sector led to a reduction of choice for many who did not have the resources to buy. The young no longer had access to social housing

and lack of a public option forced home-seekers to go to private landlords, while the reduced council housing stock led to increased rents. The monied classes, seeing an opportunity for profit, bought more properties, further driving up prices. In the 15 years from 2003 home ownership has fallen from 71% to 64%, and for adults in their mid-30s to mid-40s it has fallen from 90% to 66%. A third of millennials are expected to never own a house, forcing them to raise families in insecure tenancies.

So we get choice for a privileged few and no choice for the rest of us. The young will have their aspirations curtailed and retired people will find themselves in rented accommodation with little security in old age. Housing benefits will escalate out of control, and for what? This short-sighted strategy is a direct transfer of wealth from the public to the rich. Polly Neate, the chief executive of Shelter, criticised the "hare-brained idea" as "the opposite of what the country needs". With 1 million on social housing waiting lists, it makes no sense to sell off what little is available. We need more social housing not less. More real, tangible choice for ordinary people, not less.

### *Pro Choice: Women's Rights*

The US Supreme Court is about to rescind the Roe v. Wade law which gives women the right to choose to have an abortion. Many right-wing states have been making this choice extremely difficult in recent years, with the support of conservative Christian movements. In future, each state will be able to set their own rules.

There's been an interesting response by corporate America. This week Amazon, with a terrible reputation for industrial relations, said it would provide expenses to employees who need to travel out of state for medical procedures, including an abortion. This follows similar moves by other major firms.

What happens in the US often influences the Right in the UK. They have a long tradition of wanting to control the lives of women, affecting their rights within marriage, rights to birth control, child care etc. etc. Our government's first move is likely to be a reduction in the number weeks available for an abortion.

Watch out for a reaction from the Catholic extremist Jacob Rees-Mogg. Choice really isn't on his agenda. His 'freedom' is really about limiting the freedom of others.

## Abortion rights threatened for American women

Howard Thorp

**T**he Supreme Court of the USA (SCOTUS) draft majority opinion on *Roe v Wade* has been leaked to [Politico](#). The leak sparked outrage and protests outside the supreme court building. **Politico reported:**

“The draft opinion is a full-throated, unflinching repudiation of the 1973 decision which guaranteed federal constitutional protections of abortion rights and a subsequent 1992 decision – *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* – that largely maintained the right. “*Roe* was egregiously wrong from the start,” Alito writes.

“We hold that *Roe* and *Casey* must be overruled,” he writes in the document, labeled as the ‘Opinion of the Court.’ “It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people’s elected representatives.”

The *Roe v Wade* SCOTUS ruling [occurred in 1973](#) when Norma McCorvey (‘Jane Roe’), a resident in Texas, challenged the state’s ban on abortion. Wade was her local district attorney and McCorvey’s lawyers filed a lawsuit alleging that the ban was unconstitutional. They won in Texas, but the state appealed to SCOTUS which ruled 7-2 that the constitution has a ‘right to privacy’ which protects a woman’s right to choose an abortion.

Ever since that judgement, religious and right-wing groups have been working to overturn it. In recent times, since Joe Biden’s win, Republican-lead state legislatures have introduced draconian anti-abortion laws. [CNN reports](#) that 13 states have enacted ‘trigger laws’ designed to come into effect if *Roe v Wade* is overturned by SCOTUS. Ohio is a state planning to bring in [a law](#) which would not allow a woman or a girl to have an abortion even if the child was conceived through rape or incest. Some states are even planning to prevent a woman [travelling to another state](#) for an abortion.

The assault on women’s rights is not unexpected and it has been facilitated by Republican presidents, most recently Donald Trump, packing SCOTUS with conservative judges. But the Democrats also bear responsibility for the situation. In his 2007 election campaign Barack Obama [promised to codify](#) the right to have an abortion into law but failed to do so, despite having a majority in congress. In theory it is still possible for the Democrats to codify abortion if they remove the [filibuster](#), but this looks very unlikely.

Unsurprisingly, many Twitter commentators are comparing the probable end of a woman’s right to choose abortion to Margaret Atwood’s book ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’, in which women are subjugated and forced to bear children for others. Atwood herself has commented, “It is really a form of slavery to force women to

have children that they cannot afford, and force them to raise them”.

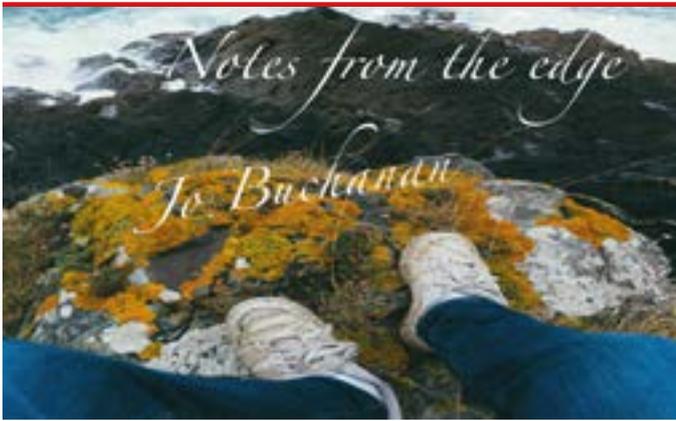
What this judgement and the proposed bans show is that the right’s ‘concern’ for the unborn child doesn’t extend



Women in America are having to mobilise once again to defend rights they thought were theirs by right.

Photo by Gayatri Malhotra on Unsplash

to children who have been born. Once they have been born, they can be abandoned to lives of hardship and poverty. If only they cared as much about children and adults as they appear to do about embryos and fetuses. Make no mistake, the right-wing groups that are attacking and undermining women’s rights are Christian-fascists with a patriarchal vision of society. If they succeed, what will be their next target? Expect further attacks on the LGBT community and PoC.



### *Landmark*

January 1973 saw a landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Roe v Wade*, ruling against a Texas statute which stated that abortion was a crime unless there was a threat to a woman's life. The 1973 decision created a legal precedent with far reaching consequences and made abortion much safer and more available in the United States. It is hard to overestimate the impact. Statistics prove the beneficial effects on the lives and health of women and their families, and the decision opened up an increased number of opportunities for women.

Ever since 1973 there have been challenges to *Roe v Wade* and attempts to overturn the ruling. The document leaked recently from the Supreme Court would end half a century of abortion rights and allow states to decide on whether to restrict or ban abortion. Abortion is a particularly divisive subject in America, and there have been demonstrations in favour of safe legal abortion and against, with emotions running high.

### *Obstacles*

The impact of overturning *Roe v Wade* would be desperately serious for millions of American women. President Biden opposes the new proposal, but there are obstacles if he tries to block it, with the filibuster tactic being used to prevent such a move.

Each state would make its own decision, with some determined to protect women's rights.

California Governor Gavin Newsom suggested on Twitter he might further protect abortion rights: California would propose an amendment enshrining "the right to choose" in its Constitution. "We can't trust SCOTUS to protect the right to abortion, so we'll do it ourselves,"

According to NBC News two dozen states and territories would ban abortion immediately and 13 have trigger laws waiting. The Guttmacher Institute counted 26 states it considered certain or likely to ban abortion, based on laws passed before and after *Roe*. Some states could prohibit women from travelling elsewhere for an abortion.

### *Implications*

What are the implications of abortions once again becoming illegal? If a woman has an unsafe abortion she risks serious medical problems such as haemorrhage, perforation of the uterus by a sharp object (sticks, knitting needles, broken glass), causing damage to the reproductive organs and genital tract, infection, incomplete abortion and death. Each year around 7 million women in developing countries are admitted to hospitals for complications of unsafe abortion and between 4.7% and 13.2% of maternal deaths can be attributed to unsafe abortion.

Seldom are the serious mental and emotional impacts of illegal abortions emphasised, but these can be soul destroying and life threatening or result in long term mental illness.

There are other consequences of outlawing abortions, where women may have no choice but to carry a pregnancy to term, such as broken relationships, births of children who may end up suffering in a wide variety of ways, with painful unmanageable disabilities or with parents who are unable to care for children or place them in extreme danger.

Any legislator in the US with any sense at all should remember that laws which place severe restrictions on legal abortions lead, not to lower abortion rates, but to horrifying outcomes for millions of women.

# Starmer's War On The Labour Membership

*Luke Andreski*

**K**eir Starmer's Labour has lost at least 200,000 members. This is [according to Ann Black](#) of Labour's National Executive Committee. However, the figure could well be higher:

Labour acknowledges its membership statistics are [no longer reliable](#) following the ransomware hack of its outsourced membership system

Labour's headcount is well-known for taking months to catch up with reality

Some leavers may simply be waiting for their annual subscription to lapse

In my [last article](#) for Critical Mass I looked at the reasons motivating those who are turning away from the party, and concluded by asking whether Labour's shedding of its members was an accidental and unwanted outcome of Starmer's leadership, or an intended one.

Let's see if we can answer that question now.

## Unity

On 4<sup>th</sup> January 2020 Keir Starmer launched his bid for Labour's leadership. He had been [positioning himself as the unity candidate](#) for some time, and he began his leadership campaign with a [clarion call for unity](#). On his personal website, in the section *Unite and Reform*, he wrote, 'We need our Party to function like friends round a table, where each of us can be confident that our ideas are valued while we work together to find a way forward.'

On 4<sup>th</sup> April 2020 Starmer succeeded in his campaign to become Labour leader.

The unity candidate was now in charge.

## Warning signs

In no time at all Labour's new, unifying leadership discarded all thought of unity.

There had been early warning signs.

Starmer's participation in the ill-fated 'chicken coup' of 2016, his jostling with Owen Smith, behind Corbyn's back, for 'leader in waiting' status throughout 2017, and his [public contradiction](#) of the official Labour position on a People's

Vote in the 2018 Labour Conference suggested he was no team player. But a more dire warning was to come on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020, barely a month into his leadership campaign, when Labour Party members from his own constituency sent a letter to the Camden New Journal [stating](#), ‘Time and time again, as left-leaning members, we have been subjected to hostility and abuse, a symptom of the chronic factionalism in our Constituency Labour Party. Those that are close to Keir Starmer, rather than welcome involvement from the left, have actively prevented it.’

## War

Starmer initiated his war on the left-leaning membership with the appointment of his first Shadow Cabinet. With the exception of Rebecca Long-Bailey and one or two moderates, the Shadow Cabinet was stacked with Labour right-wingers, including the increasingly notorious [Rachel Reeves](#).

In Starmer’s first nine months of leadership he:

Initiated a programme of suspensions and expulsions of left-wing Labour members

Appointed David Evans as Party General Secretary, a man who once wrote that ‘representative democracy should be as far as possible [abolished in the Party](#)’. And, ‘With hundreds of thousands of Labour Party members opposed to the leadership’s attempt to pull the party dramatically to the right, the leadership will feel the need to once again attempt to [neuter members’ influence](#).’

[Sacked](#) Long-Bailey from the Shadow Cabinet

[Suspended](#) Jeremy Corbyn from the Labour Party

Ramped up [expulsions](#) of left-leaning members following Corbyn’s suspension

Many other actions can be seen as provoking the exit of members:

The attacks on [Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi](#), [Maxine Peake](#), [Ken Loach](#)

Starmer’s statements on [nuclear weapons](#)

His gung-ho support for NATO

His continuing courtship of right-wing Jewish lobby group The Board of Deputies.

Evidence for these actions being a deliberate attack on Labour’s membership can be seen in the views of Labour officials such as Evans, and in the statements of Labour MPs such as Angela Rayner and Rachel Reeves. Rayner asserted in November 2020 that she was willing to suspend “[thousands and thousands](#)” of party members (on the basis of Labour’s mistaken anti-Zionism/antisemitism conflation). Rachel Reeves said in January 2022 that the loss of Labour Party members was ‘[a good thing](#)’, as it allowed the party to shed unwelcome supporters. And Starmer told the BBC in September 2021 that ‘winning is more important than

unity’.

We also see this anti-member message creeping into social media. One Twitter user I encountered called the lost members ‘a good riddance’, describing them as ‘hindrances’ whom Starmer would be delighted to lose. When I read this response my jaw dropped. *Two hundred thousand hindrances?* What sort of party leader, or supporter, would see so many hard-working, fee-paying Labour Party members in such a sectarian light?

## Three myths

So why did Starmer and his team initiate this war against the party membership?

I believe it’s because they fell prey to three reality-deforming myths.

### *The myth of the beneficial purge*

This is the myth that to become electable Labour must first shed the Left.

It’s a myth because the last time this approach was tried it *may* have assisted in Blair’s rise to power *but* it just as likely led to Kinnock’s two lost elections.

In today’s world it seems more probable that an attack on socialists such as Corbyn and Loach, and the expulsion of swathes of Labour members, will lose Labour voters to disenchantment, apathy or alternative parties, while the public in-fighting makes Labour unattractive to swing voters. Indeed, this is borne out in [fact](#): virtually all local and by-election results since Starmer assumed leadership have shown a sharp drop in the voter proportions favouring Labour.

## The myth of the unelectable Left

Starmer and many of his supporters believe the myth that the Left are ‘unelectable’. But why should this be so? Left wing governments have frequently achieved power around the world, and, by UK standards, many of the governments in Northern Europe over the last forty years can be viewed as comfortably left-wing. Meanwhile, here in the UK, both of Corbyn’s General Elections (2017, 2019) gained more voters than the elections fought by less-left-wing Milliband (2015) and Brown (2010).

## The myth of the political marketplace

It's of little surprise, in our hyper-commercial culture, that the majority of our politicians are wedded to the concept of 'selling' themselves and their parties as *commodities* to the electorate and the media. Individually, they strive to become celebrities and develop a 'brand'; and the parties become all about packaging and spin and much less about content or fact. Within the Whitehall Bubble our General Elections have become a transactional sales process in which the only thing that matters is the successful sale...

But an active and enthusiastic membership won't see it like that. They'll want principle and substance. They'll want to inspire and to be inspired.

That makes them a hindrance to the seamless marketing operation in which the leadership believe.

Therefore...

...better to be rid of them.

### Group characteristics

The infatuation of Starmer's coterie with these three myths is reinforced by a number of undesirable group characteristics:

Paternalism (career politicians know best; the members are foolishly naïve)

Authoritarianism (career politicians should dictate the direction of the party; the members should simply do what they are told)

Conservatism with a small 'c' (sometimes known as Centrism)

Tribalism ('Us', the inner circle of Labour right-wingers vs. 'Them', the dirty, unwashed, diverse and annoyingly aspirational membership)

### My question answered

These group characteristics, and the myths on which right-wing Labour feed, mean they see themselves as the heroes of a corporate sales drive, and the membership as an obstacle to be removed from their path.

So, is the shedding of Labour's membership accidental or intentional?

I think the answer is clear.

Those 200,000 members?

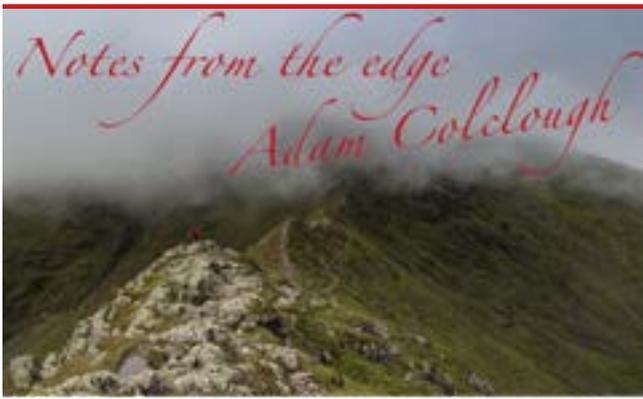
From the perspective of Starmer and his team, they'd passed their Use By date. They were a hindrance and a handicap. They had to go.

In my next article for Critical Mass, *Inspiration vs. Pragmatism: How Labour Under Starmer Missed A Trick*, I'll look at whether a better approach could have been taken by Labour after their defeat in 2019.



Is choosing a political party just like going to the supermarket to choose vegetables?

*Photo courtesy of Shutterstock*



The Comments Made By George Eustice Tell A Truth About The Tories We Should All Know.

Often the thing most remembered about a politician isn't something he or she did, but something they said, even if it was wholly or partially misquoted.

Just ask Edwina Currie or James Callaghan. One will be forever associated with an incorrect statement about salmonella and eggs, the other, not entirely accurately, with saying 'crisis what crisis' when caught off guard by a journalist.

Environment Secretary George Eustice looks set to join the political equivalent of the twenty-seven club. Just as there is a cohort of musicians remembered as much for dying early as anything they recorded, there is a matching one of ministers, and history will know them only for fitting both feet into their mouth at once.

Speaking to [Sky News](#) this week Eustice advised Britons feeling the pinch to buy value brand food at the supermarket, saying that by doing so they could "*actually contain and manage their household budget*".

Then, perhaps sensing that he sounded like Marie-Antoinette telling the poor at her gates to eat cake if they had no bread, he added that the government were trying to help people, "*We've got to take a proportionate approach to try to help people through that difficult time. We can't go too far; we can't mitigate all of the impacts otherwise we will fuel even greater inflation.*"

Anyone in need of clarification as to why George Eustice's comments are painfully insulting to the millions of people struggling to make ends meet need only open the pages of their local newspaper.

Mine, the [Sentinel](#), ran a story a couple of weeks ago about local Co-Op stores having to put packets of cheese in security cases because so many were being shoplifted.

Simon Harris, chief executive of North

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Citizen's Advice told the paper they were "*seeing increasing numbers of people who are really struggling to meet their basic day to day living costs*"

He went on to say that as fuel prices, council tax and food bills continue to rise "people may find themselves having to resort to extreme measures to survive".

This is where we've come to in a wealthy nation in the twenty-first century people are having to steal to survive. They have reached a point where all the budgeting in the world won't put even own brand food within the limits of what they can afford.

This isn't a new phenomenon, if you read the small paragraphs at the side of your local paper at any time over the past decade you will have encountered miniature stories of people brought before the courts for stealing food. They are the unseen victims of a decade of austerity and forty years before that of neo-liberal economics.

The obvious question is what planet do George Eustice and the other Tories who articulate similar views come from? To which the equally obvious answer is the same one as the rest of us, they just don't care about the people they share it with. Whether its playing Twister while the rest of the country was locked down or telling the people they have made poor with their policies that they aren't doing their sums properly they have mastered distancing themselves from the consequences of their actions.

This is a truth that should be self-evident yet needs repeating constantly. Doing so is the job of socialists of all persuasions because we are the ones who have seen through their lies from the start. That is why they use a, mostly, tame media to call us alternatively mad or dangerous for saying that a society that abandons its poorest members has lost its morals. It is why they're using the viciously illiberal Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill to stop us protesting.

We are telling the truth they don't want people to know, meaning it is something everyone needs to know; that the comments made by George Eustice weren't a slip of the tongue. They were the closest anyone in this government is likely to come to telling the truth.

However warm the words they say about 'levelling up' places that have been left behind the Tories don't care about anyone less rich than they are. They never have and they never will.

# There's lies, damned lies and Starmers' lies

*Susie Granic*

**A**LMOST everyone in the UK – and abroad – knows that Boris Johnson lies; we've become so accustomed to it that a more shocking headline might read 'Boris Johnson caught telling the truth'. It gets a fair bit of media coverage, as it should, but what is interesting is that the lies told by Starmer and cohorts don't get nearly as much attention, unless you're a Daily Fail reader that is.

Labour Party members and ex-members are well aware he lied in his leadership campaign with his Ten Pledges and promises of unity; his praise for Jeremy Corbyn only to then suspend him from the Party; his firing of Rebecca Long Bailey for simply sharing a newspaper article online; the anti-racism stance while ignoring Islamophobia and endorsing Zionism, while again ignoring what is happening to Palestinians. He even lied in Parliament last year about the European Medicines Agency; there is video evidence of this but where is it in the mainstream media? And why aren't Labour supporters concerned about these lies?

## Beergate

Now that 'Beergate' has taken over from 'Partygate', Starmer supporters are attempting to paint it as a case of 'Johnson's lies are worse' or even 'It was not a lie', but the fact remains that he and others did lie about the event in Durham where they were caught on camera drinking beers when it was against lockdown rules. They also denied Angela Rayner was at the event and then admitted she was, all the while claiming it was an 'honest mistake'. And they still insist they broke no laws. Yet, at that time, any gathering indoors with people from outside your household or support bubble was against the law, although there was an exemption for 'work purposes', and it is this Starmer and co are clinging to as their defence.

One year ago, at the end off April 2021, Starmer was pictured with a bottle of beer in the office of City of Durham MP Mary Foy ahead of the Hartlepool by-election. The party quickly said he was in the workplace, meeting a local MP in her constituency office and participating in an online Labour event. But they denied Deputy Leader Angela Rayner had been there.

Speaking to Sky News, Starmer said his party made a "genuine mistake" when it said Ms Rayner was not at the event in Durham. Asked if the deputy leader was at the office, he said: "Yes. *We were in the office, we were working, we paused for something to eat, there was no party, no rules were broken and that is the long and short of it.*" So, if no rules were being broken, why did the Party issue the denial over Rayner being there?

## Labour's mendacity goes further

Personally, I find the whole Durham saga to be sad and pathetic, but the fact that the Labour Party lied about it, whilst condemning (rightly so) the Tories for lying, doesn't just have the stench of hypocrisy about it, it is putrid. And it is not the least of the Party's lies.

Labour is making big noises about the upcoming local elections, promising all sorts of things should the public vote for them, and many are believing them. But a vote for Labour on May 5th will **not** have any effect on the cost of living, it will **not** give you the promised 'up to £600' off your energy bills, it will have **no effect** on the NI hike, small businesses will **not** receive discounts of up to £5,700, 19 million homes will **not** be insulated. These are local elections which have no bearing on national policy whatsoever, and yet the Labour Party are putting out propaganda that, by voting Labour this week, you will suddenly be so much better off.

Labour's lies – those we know about – may not be as big as Tory ones, but they are falsehoods nonetheless. Starmer has lied since his leadership campaign and continues to do so. He has broken his pledges and made it clear he would be willing to break them again. The fish rots from the head down.



Welcome to my weekly column about finding, and having, a very real, practical faith that we need every day, just to get up in the morning.

### Key Performance Indicators

So, this week just gone, the United Kingdom has held its local council elections. Back in Westminster, the blue rosette organised crime gang will be looking at the performance of local councillors at the polls as a bellwether of their standing in the event of a General Election.

It would be nice to imagine them feeling a sense of existential dread and fear, going into the weekend.

### The Tories Choice

Whatever the ultimate results of the elections, what we can learn from the morning after the elections (Friday 6th May) is that the public agree with Steve Baker MP when he said *'I'm sick of the Cabinet sitting there, fat, dumb and happy.'* I think we need to give the Tories the clearest message yet that we don't want Johnson in power any more; and, **The Comments Made By George Eustice Tell A Truth About The Tories We Should All Know.**

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This isn't a new phenomenon, if you read the small paragraphs at the side of your local paper at any time over the past decade you will have encountered miniature stories of people brought before the courts for stealing food.



For the first time ever I spoiled my ballot on Thursday. I honestly felt that I had no choice. I could not vote Tory, the Lib Dems should never be forgiven for collaborating with austerity and Labour are now a party who seem hell bent on promoting a world war and who can turn their backs on the suffering of Palestinians, and worse, justify it.

But shouldn't a socialist recognise the suffering of our forebears and value the vote that others died to secure? I have used that argument myself in the past and also the one that says that if you vote for anything but Labour you are enabling a Tory. I took it for granted that Tories were worse than Labour, no matter how bad the Labour candidate was. Now, I am not so sure.

Some of my comrades on Critical Mass argue, as I once did, that Labour defend local services whilst the Tories destroy them. They also argue that one of the major problems preventing a Labour victory is an unfair electoral system. I've been voting Labour for 40 odd years and I can tell you that in all that time I have seen as local services have cost

more for less.

Labour has been as keen as the Tories to bring in what they call "private finance" to bolster their ever shrinking budgets. In other words, the privatisation of local services has been achieved, very often, by Labour councils using the argument that to do anything else would be to hand power to the Tories who would be worse.

Would electoral reform make a difference? Well, that depends on the type of reform. Based on evidence from around the world, how our representatives are voted for makes little difference to the tendency toward convergence in actual policies. Indeed, so-called proportional representation far from giving you, the voter, more choice, actually reduces it by handing power to party bureaucrats who decide who will represent you. Of course, just how much depends on the actual system.

On Thursday I wrote "none of the above" on my ballot paper. I believe that in any election voters should have the right to say I do not want any of the candidates as my representative. Indeed, I'll go further and say it is undemocratic to force me to spoil my paper because the difference between the candidates is so wafer thin.

Have a good week and keep up the fight

Dave Middleton