

Ed West

How bad will a Labour government be?

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I'm old enough to remember the sense of optimism, hope and promise felt when Tony Blair was elected back in 1997; not by me, obviously, but I could at least appreciate that other people felt that 'things can only get better'.

Whether you think they did or not, Blair transformed the country in his own

image, just as his predecessor Margaret Thatcher had done during her similarly long reign. No one could say the same of the recent 14 years of Tory-led governments, a period that has been marked by a continual drift away from conservatism both within civil society and in many ways driven by the administration itself.

Labour is a mishmash of coalition interests that will need identity politics to keep it together as a reconciler of contradictions

As I have said one or two times before, you could have woken up from a long coma and had no idea who had been in charge the whole time. It's an indication of how far the Overton window has shifted that proposals to limit student-led immigration are considered way out there despite being mainstream only a decade ago – proposals which the Prime Minister backed out of. One of the benefits of being in government should be the ability to shift the terms of debate, but whereas the rest of Europe is mostly turning right, Britain under the Tories has gone the other way.

In retrospect, and I have definitely said this more than once or twice, the post-Brexit immigration policy was their biggest mistake. It meant the worst of both worlds for the country and for Tory coalition building, alienating both a large section of voters for leaving the EU, and the many cultural conservatives they picked up in 2019 who saw the referendum as a vote on immigration.

In a parallel universe where the government reduced net migration to five figures, there may well have been immediate pain: struggles to fill vacancies, inflationary pressure caused by rising wages, and universities which could not survive without using the immigration system as a funding mechanism. But the Tories would have been on 30 per cent rather than 20 per cent; that they aren't aware enough to understand this is strange.

Rishi Sunak's decision to hold the election early is very curious. Perhaps he was worried that enough letters would be handed in triggering a leadership contest; perhaps he feared that Nigel Farage would reappear and make the Reform party even more of a problem. Perhaps he's just impetuous and has had enough. But the announcement itself, in pouring rain and drowned out by a New Labour anthem played by a public nuisance, was fitting.

The Prime Minister is very unpopular, and the Tories are currently polling at catastrophic levels, but there is little enthusiasm for Labour and more people think the country will get worse than better after they are elected.

Yet despite this, Starmer's landslide may well dwarf Blair's, and many will greet this development with anxiety. I suppose those of us hoping the new regime will be moderate will be heartened by the influence of the Blairite think-tank Labour Together, who are seen as having a hand in shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves's 'securonomics' speech last year. They have also ruled out a wealth tax, and Reeves 'has pledged to abide by the Conservatives' fiscal rules almost wholesale', which means 'radically improv[ing] Britain's public services without spending extra money'.

They will have little room for manoeuvre on the economy, sadly. The one trick that would help the British economy, liberalising planning laws, is hard for Tories to enact because so many voters in core constituencies oppose it, but I don't have huge faith in Labour fixing this; mostly because I think there is too little appreciation that excessive rents and mortgages are the result of under-supply, rather than greedy developers and landlords. While Labour has rejected a rent cap, Reeves has said she is in favour of councils having the power to cap rents, and both Sadiq Khan and Andy Burnham support the idea. The housing shortage is also heavily linked to record levels of immigration, which the Labour party are ideologically even more committed to than the Tories.

Starmer may be radical on social issues, although I suspect that would only become apparent in a second term, as with Obama when competition between different elements of the progressive alliance helped drive the Great Awokening from 2013.

Like the Democrats, Labour is a mishmash of coalition interests that will need identity politics to keep it together as a reconciler of contradictions. As an example, 'all of the top ten constituencies where signatures came from to remove LGBT content from the curriculum are Labour seats, and nine out of ten of the top ten opposed to removing LGBT content are also Labour.'

In Britain this coalition is in some ways more fragile than in the US because Labour has come to rely, in many seats, on Muslim community leaders who can deliver votes. Tony Blair and Jack Straw rewarded them by abolishing the rule banning fetching marriages, one of the most consequential policies of that regime and which has driven the current problem with political Islam.

Since October 7, Labour has lost a great deal of support among Muslims who vote along religious-identity lines, and may even lose one or two seats to George Galloway, but they will probably enjoy such a large majority that this isn't an issue – although this may change during a second term.

Labour will also probably be able to reduce immigration; the Hong Kong and Ukraine situation temporarily increased the total, and today's figures already show net numbers returning to moderate levels (685,000 per annum).

On gender issues, Labour will tend to go as far as the activists can push them. A couple of years ago the party pledged to 'ban all conversion therapy', the conversion therapy in question being the version trans activists lobbied for. In an indication of the direction of travel Angela Eagle said that Labour will: 'Legislate for a trans-inclusive conversion therapy ban. Make anti-LGBT+ hate crime an aggravated offence. Modernise Gender Recognition processes' and

‘Appoint an international LGBT+ envoy.’ Let’s hope the Tories don’t respond by starting a culture war!

I happen to agree with Louise Perry that the gender radicalism of the Great Awokening is in retreat, but the more central race element will only get stronger. Labour has already rowed back on some of its more ‘woke’ gender ideas, a victory largely won by centre-left feminists, but the push for a racial reckoning will get stronger.

Starmer has taken the side of the National Trust in its recent culture war, and has also undergone unconscious bias training – which is junk. As Matt Goodwin points out, they have pledged a new Race Equality Act to tackle ‘structural racism’, and this promises changes in discrimination law so people will be able to bring lawsuits without proving ‘direct discrimination’, which may lead to more actions like the £760 million equal pay lawsuit which helped bankrupt Birmingham.

It also promises a full curriculum review of diversity in schools, while Thangam Debbonaire, Labour’s Shadow Culture Secretary, supports teaching children about ‘white privilege’, and the party may also give ‘black-led’ firms privileged access to government contracts. David Lammy has called for ‘community courts’ to reduce the number of BAME men being sent to prison, and the party has made noises about minorities being underrepresented in some areas of commerce.

The guiding philosophy of the American left might be called Kendism, the belief that inequality of outcomes between groups can only be explained by racism (except in the various areas where whites do worse, which is just ignored). There is certainly a strong element of this in the Labour party, and one can guess at where British progressives are heading by watching events in California, where the state has recently initiated a system allowing criminals to claim racial bias in sentencing.

Because British progressives are enthralled to America, how woke Labour go will depend on events in the United States, and whether there is pushback against progressivism and its real-world consequences in law enforcement and education.

Perhaps the most disturbing thing about Starmer's rule is the furtherance of 'stakeholderism', the Blairite system that ensures arms-length, unelected bodies essentially rule the country with minimum democratic input. This, in essence, is what conservatives mean when they talk about the 'blob', although as an idea it's hard to define so inevitably sounds conspiratorial and sometimes a bit mad ('is the blob in the room with us right now?')

So Gordon Brown proposes to give every person living in the country free healthcare, education and housing, with 'safeguards' written into the constitution. These rights would be protected by a new 'Assembly of the Nations and Regions', to replace the current House of Lords, and able to block legislation drafted in the Commons on constitutional grounds, giving more power to quangos at the expense of elected representatives.

J Sorel has observed of the next prime minister that:

> 'Everything about Keir Starmer's life so far has taught him that his project – the defence of British society as it existed from 1997-2016 – can be achieved by simply illegalising all opposition. He openly avows this idea, and has never strayed from it.
> His constitutional reforms, drawn up by Gordon Brown in "A New Britain", will give the law courts broad new powers to strike down legislation; will create a "rights package" (including welfare payments to migrants) that is to be put beyond the power of Parliament to abridge; and will give Whitehall a statutory existence – meaning it will become virtually impossible to reform its workings or fire any of its personnel. Starmer will complete the process of franchising out democratic governance to independent watchdogs: energy policy will go to "Great British Energy"; low-level offences to

"community payback boards"; much of the budget to an "Office for Value for Money"; and what remains of Westminster health policy to an "NHS mission delivery board". The planned Race Equality Act will tighten existing equalities legislation, which already does so much to constrain elected governments, and which has created what we now recognise as the DEI bureaucracy. It will further entrench the programme of state multiculturalism from which there is a direct line to the atrocities in Rotherham, Telford and Rochford. Outlets like GB News will almost certainly find themselves censored by a beefed-up Ofcom.'

If this all sounds bad, at least they will not have an easy ride. The next government will face multiple crises, both at home and abroad. The international situation may worsen, especially if China invades Taiwan, and they will be split over Gaza. They will probably become unpopular quite quickly.

Much of this won't be their fault. William Atkinson recently wrote at Conservative Home that after the 'Tory telenovela that has numbed Britain's sanity for the last 14 years' the party will be 'leaving Labour a vile inheritance. The same issues that have scuppered Rishi Sunak – NHS waiting lists, small boats, anemic growth – remain unresolved. Public confidence in public services is at an all-time low… Blair had growth at an average of 2.8 per cent across the five years before he entered office. Starmer will have had only 0.2 per cent. Public sector net debt is two-and-a-half times what it was in May 1997: 99.2 per cent of GDP rather than 37.6 per cent. Reeves has made clear, post-Liz Truss, that Labour will not hike borrowing to pay for more spending. Sorry! There is no money.'

Some of these problems, though, will not be down to the Tories but deeper underlying trends. While Blair was lucky to have a huge boom in house prices and low interest rates globally, he also had demography on his side – in contrast, Britain is now ageing considerably, and the cost of our elderly population is going to become extreme in the next decade. For 25 years we've tried the cheapest short-term fix to this problem, immigration, and I imagine

that will continue to be the solution.

The Tories will be in no position to benefit from this because they will be so defeated, so few in numbers and still so hated for their failures. There is also a strong possibility of an opponent emerging to their right, despite the electoral system, as British conservatives become ever more European, just as the left has become Americanised.

On the other hand, and to put my optimism goggles on, a change of government will be good news for one core demographic – right-wing pundits. The Brown regime was a golden age for the conservative blogosphere, and under Labour we will be back to where we're happiest, complaining about the state of the country and taking no responsibility for our role in making a mess of it. So things will get better, for some of us.

This article first appeared in Ed West's Wrong Side of History Subtack.



WRITTEN BY

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Ed West writes the Wrong Side of History substack

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Nicky Foreman-Walker
16 minutes ago

There is no bravery in the Tory party; no bravery in Labour. The tail continues to wag the dog.

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Draco Was A Wimp
18 minutes ago

Moderate levels? 650,000 . West, you're living on another planet.

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journalista ↗ Draco Was A Wimp
a minute ago

"today's figures already show net numbers returning to moderate levels (685,000 per annum)."

Agree with your point

0 0 Reply

Spectator User ↗ Draco Was A Wimp
2 minutes ago

I'm sure he was being ironic.

0 0 Reply

Nigel Watson
18 minutes ago

The prospect of being governed by the likes of Rayner, Lammy, Dodds and Streeting should be enough to frighten the living daylights out of anyone remotely sensible.....

2 0 Reply

N **Norman Goldner**
25 minutes ago

how bad? If Labour win we'll know soon enough.

As usual the Conservative Party will be required to sort out the mess left by Labour.

0 0 Reply

J **Jane Marple** ↗ Norman Goldner
17 minutes ago

Because they've done that so well over the past 14 years...

0 0 Reply

P **Paul Sutton**
37 minutes ago edited

The article touches on the most serious aspect, for most here.

Starmer believes in using the law to outlaw dissenting views as 'hateful'. His deplorable record as DPP shows this.

Combine that with wars on 'disinformation', and many here will find themselves under police investigation. The initial form will be through harassment, using the 'process is the punishment' route. Our corrupt judiciary will be no defenders of freedom of speech - they've been the very opposite. Starmer is well-versed in how to use all these methods. He's not once ever spoken out, for freedom of speech - indeed, see his treatment of Rosie Duffield.

Since this is already happening, under a supposed Conservative government, we'll within a few years be in full 'licensed speech' territory.

Expect no assistance from the MSM, except from Toby Young and the FSU. But that organisation will be harried very hard. Fraser Nelson will not fight it, nor will most journalists. Instead, they'll suck up for their own advantage. Ditto for most writers.

2 0 Reply

C **Chris Smith**
an hour ago

I look across to the opposition side of the house and see the Liebour 'Shallow cabinet' and my spirits drop.....

2 0 Reply

M **Moira Girvan**
an hour ago edited

I think they will start off all statesman like, conciliatory and moderate. But after a brief period of time their worst tendencies will move to the fore. All the identitarian malarkey will be imposed with ease - taking much of their inspiration from the crazies in America. And it will be thanks to the wet Tories - who've paved the way for much of this madness and made it all possible. Only a few months away from now. I hope and pray that the Tories never recover.

3 0 Reply

P **Peter Shaw**
an hour ago

I want to live in another country. I dont want to die in this s -hole

2 0 Reply

T **Tony**
an hour ago

Apart from that "moderate", a very good article, in sharp contrast to the Boles crap elsewhere in the Speccie.

1 0 Reply

L **Liz Beaumont**
an hour ago

One thing leapt out - net immigration of 685k is 'moderate'? In what universe? Sub 100k might be moderate, which is what successive Conservative governments have promised, only to ramp levels up once elected.

5 0 Reply

> C **CanonReview** → Liz Beaumont
> an hour ago
>
> That’s only 1% of the entire population every year, focused in the big cities. A mere trifle!
>
> 2 0 Reply

Eccles Cake
an hour ago

A purely speculative, entirely negative, Spectator sour grapes attack.
Ed had better hope a Labour does well - after 13 failed Tory years, the country's demise will be terminal if Labour fails as well.

0 0 Reply

Chris Smith → Eccles Cake
an hour ago

We know from history that Liebore are gonna fail.

1 0 Reply

Eccles Cake → Chris Smith
40 minutes ago edited

Then bring back the "£10 Pom" scheme so people can emigrate.

0 0 Reply

Tony
an hour ago

"returning to moderate levels (685,000 per annum)"

Hang on a moment...

5 0 Reply

Jerry Owen
an hour ago

Good article. But 'right wing pundits', where are they seeing as GB News is surely for the chop?

1 0 Reply

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