

Rishi Sunak has finally called an election and while many will relish the chance to kick out the Conservatives the polls indicate not many are hopeful about their life under the winner. After 14 years of decay and Tory chaos the Labour government-in-waiting, having destroyed its left flank, is managing expectations to ensure their expectedly large parliamentary majority will achieve little progressive change.

Sunak, the fourth Conservative Prime Minister since 2010 and the second publicly unelected one, has been deeply unpopular since the start of his tenure in 2022 regularly polling at similar levels to Liz Truss, whose government collapsed before a live-streamed lettuce expired. Constitutionally, he had to call an election before January 2025 but with Spring passing by without an announcement, it was generally viewed that we would be in for an Autumn election. The sudden change has taken the public, commentators, and most of his own party by surprise. It seems Sunak had become increasingly disturbed by the possibility that if he waited until after the summer, people would perceive him to be a “squatter” in No. 10. He hadn’t previously worried about that when dismantling legislation from the 2019 manifesto Boris Johnson was elected on whilst not having been elected himself. He also hasn’t made much progress with the five pledges he set out in 2023 but sensed the opportunity to seize the initiative and launch his election campaign off the back of announcements that UK inflation rate is now 2.3%, the lowest since September 2021. A multimillionaire and our richest ever Prime Minister thought that this nugget of lukewarm economic news sounded triumphant enough, highlighting his detachment from people’s living situations and how dire things are in the UK today. It will not translate into pounds in people’s pockets, it does not help the overstretched National Health Service, and it does nothing to address the growing housing crisis. None of that matters though, as Rishi Sunak stood soaking in the pouring rain announcing a UK General Election on 4th July.

A five week election campaign is nowhere near enough to turn around Tory fortunes who, by all accounts, will lose their historic majority, and could even be heading for an extinction event if some polling is to be believed. The public is fed up and furious, and licking their lips to vote for an alternative, however, does it exist?

The Leader of the Opposition and Labour Party, Sir Keir Starmer has been in Parliament since 2015 and served as Shadow Brexit Secretary under Jeremy Corbyn, advocating for a second referendum which, after being adopted in the manifesto, was arguably disastrous for Labour in the 2019 election. On the Labour leadership campaign Starmer ran on an explicitly left-wing platform with ten pledges which promised to increase income tax for top 5%, continue Corbyn’s Green New Deal policy, nationalise multiple public services including rail, energy and water, and abolish tuition fees and the House of Lords. Today, none of those pledges still stand and that’s even before entering government.

When asked what happened to those promises to the members who elected him, party officials declare that this is the way to do politics, to know your audience and change your message, that this is grown-up, serious politics, not student organising. However, they can’t be listening to the public since support for nationalising utilities and transport regularly polls in the 60s and there is appetite for an ambitious green agenda. Keir Starmer’s Labour has lost almost 200 000 members from Corbyn’s peak in 2019 when Labour stood at 532 000 members and the largest party in Western Europe. The current leadership doesn’t seem to mind though as money from business lobbies enters the party’s coffers in place of grassroots

membership fees. Starmer is clearly trying to channel Tony Blair but with none of the hope, vision, and enthusiasm of 1997 and arguably further to the right than post-Iraq Blair of 2005. We hear that his father was a toolmaker and his mother a nurse so he understands 'working families', he was a leading human rights lawyer who has been virtually silent on Gaza, and he's never pictured far from a Union Jack flag, something only the far-right British Nationalist Party used to pose with. After ditching those original ten pledges, Starmer announced and then abandoned a £28 billion Green policy package, and a worker's rights deal that has been gutted in an apparent betrayal to unions who were consulted and publicly supported it.

The country is adamant on voting the Tories out and Labour know that people want change, which is why Starmer has repeated the slogan "time for change". However, when asked on specifics Starmer says that he cannot, in fact, change anything e.g. abolish tuition fees or raise nurses pay, due to budget restrictions and the need to grow the economy first. When asked if he will introduce these changes when the economy is in a better situation, he says no.

What he has done is change the Labour Party, ruthlessly dragging it to the 'centre' and suspending his predecessor, who he once called his "friend" Jeremy during his leadership campaign. He has also suspended Diane Abbott, the first Black woman in Parliament, for more than a year while welcoming defecting Conservative MPs. The central party has barred various incumbents from running again, citing a range of issues such as liking tweets, and are pushing candidates on local party organisations without democratic process. Corbyn will run as an independent in his constituency and is expected to win, while Greens, after a hugely successful local election last month, are targeting a handful of Labour's urban seats for voters who feel betrayed by the party.

In Scotland, the SNP are preparing to lose their position as the biggest party in Scotland after successive corruption scandals and three leaders in a year. Nigel Farage has decided not to contest any seat for his far-right Reform UK having failed 7 times to be elected in his career, and is instead helping the Trump campaign across the Atlantic.

Starmer's personal ratings (net negative) are the lowest ever seen for an opposition leader ahead in voting intention, his politics is not what is driving the election but disgust for previous governments. Just as Thatcher utilised the saying "there is no alternative" Labour and Starmer are not trying to appeal to voters they are preparing the public for a hopeless future, indicating that their 'fiscal rules' take precedence above all else to protect the status quo whilst being gifted an election through Tory implosion. But moving from Tory chaos to Labour's managed decline is not good enough, people's lives will not improve opening up a space for the far-right to exploit down the line.