

The egos have landed

Political choices in Trump's post-truth era

In the court of Emperor Trump the oligarchs rule. At least they think they do. But as in any feudal system, even the oligarchs are just courtiers.

Courtier power is conditional, not on the amount of cash you shower upon the Emperor but on the ability to constantly praise his every word. The battleground between courtiers then becomes 'who gets closest to the Emperor's ear'?

At the moment Elon Musk has Trump's ear. Musk is not just an increasingly right-wing media mogul who helped rig the election in Trump's favour. He is keen to do the same for the AfD in Germany, the Reform Party in Britain and any number of right wing movements across the globe. This is what modern feudalism looks like.



For the rest of the world, however imperfect our democracies may be, the important thing now is to form alliances that might defend both democracy and the planet. This will be as much of a challenge for the Left as the centre. For Britain, what it means is that Starmer's Labour also needs a rapid and radical reset; something way beyond the language and priorities offered so far.

Britain must abandon any illusions about a 'special relationship' with America. Under Trump, this is no more than the relationship between the groomer and the groomed. It was not for nothing that Jeffrey Epstein called Trump his best friend. Trump will only ever see Starmer, Lammy and Mandelson as his personal totty; to be used, abused and discarded as the mood takes him. The rest of Britain will fare even worse.

A bonfire of the vanities

Trump's first term of office delivered huge tax cuts to the corporate rich. Now they are back for more.

Before and After the Trump Tax Law for 16 Prominent Corporations

Company	Effective tax rates		Saved taxes	% change 2013-2016 to 2018-2021*	
	2013-2016	2018-2021		in profits	in taxes
Verizon Communications	21%	8%	\$10.7 billion	18%	-52%
Walmart	31%	17%	\$9.0 billion	-3%	-45%
AT&T	13%	3%	\$8.2 billion	1%	-81%
Meta	28%	18%	\$8.0 billion	372%	203%
Intel	27%	13%	\$7.7 billion	47%	-31%
Comcast	24%	14%	\$6.6 billion	42%	-17%
Walt Disney	26%	8%	\$6.1 billion	-27%	-78%
Visa	32%	18%	\$5.2 billion	74%	-2%
Lockheed Martin	33%	15%	\$5.0 billion	46%	-33%
Capital One Financial	31%	16%	\$5.1 billion	42%	-28%
Target	34%	16%	\$3.4 billion	25%	-42%
Honeywell International	23%	6%	\$2.3 billion	13%	-71%
FedEx	18%	1%	\$2.1 billion	7%	-92%
Deere	30%	13%	\$1.7 billion	2%	-54%
Archer Daniels Midland	26%	6%	\$838 million	-30%	-83%
Dominio's Pizza	29%	9%	\$402 million	87%	-43%

*2017 was a transition year between the prior and post-Trump tax regimes and was thus excluded. Source: ITEP analysis of Securities and Exchange Commission filings of publicly traded corporations

For all his shortcomings, Biden attempted to rescue the real economy (and maybe the planet). Donald doesn't give a duck about either. His Mar-a-Lago lot are looters not lifesavers. Their demands for deregulation and deportations will wreak havoc with the US economy. So too will Trump's threat of tariff impositions on imports.

Canada has already pointed out that the main 'deficit' item in US-Canada trade is their supply of cheap energy surpluses to the States. Tax this and the price of everything in the USA will spiral.

Wild weather events have already hit US food prices and farmers are suddenly panicking that mass deportations will leave them without an undocumented agricultural workforce to exploit.

It is the same in the manufacturing sector, kitchen work and social care. Add to this the arbitrary job destruction facing those in equalities work, regulatory protection and (now) academia and you have a recipe for US insurrection.

'Mexico embraces you'

Meanwhile, south of the border, Mexico prepares to receive a potential human landslide with astonishing humanity. Huge tents are being constructed to receive whatever swathes of the 5 million undocumented Mexican workers are set to be deported from the USA.

Under President Claudia Sheinbaum's '*Mexico Embraces You*' programme, returnees will be offered shelter, medical care, help in reclaiming identity documents and immediate eligibility to work. Not the welcome Nigel Farage would ever offer.

In truth, this presents an enormous challenge for Mexico. But the hole left in the US economy will be no less vast. Thank goodness the USA hasn't faced any wild weather catastrophes that could have ripped great holes in their economy and social fabric.

Ooops! But that's exactly what the USA has faced. And these offer the most fitting metaphor for Trump's Second Term.

The firestorm of Executive Orders from Trump is consuming everything in its path. Just as one element of democratic rights gets razed to the ground, a change in the direction of Trump-wind trashes another. Every element of civil liberties, corporate constraint, democratic scrutiny and climate survival is being trashed by his regulatory bonfire.

Trump's policy making is as erratic as it is whimsical. Today he lays claim to Greenland and the Panama Canal. Tomorrow he may re-name the planet 'Trumpland' or claim Somerset as the next American state. Britain needs firebreak protection against such insanities, not a trade deal that sucks us in.

Finding the firebreaks

To begin with, Starmer needs to understand the difference between the words 'declutter' and 'deregulate'. Much of Britain's decision-making processes can be tediously drawn out and bureaucratic. A more dynamic economy can come from setting higher (but simpler) standards. Most of these involve meeting climate goals rather than abandoning them. Look at some of the practical examples of moving into post-fossil-fuel economics -

- In Germany, Freiberg's Vauban estate generates more electricity than it consumes, delivering energy security, low bills and a near zero carbon footprint. This was a precondition set for developers; raising the planning bar rather than diving into deregulation. The bids came in accordingly. By the year 2000 the whole estate was up and running.
- In the Netherlands, by law, new developments can now no longer include gas heating.
- Parts of Europe already insist that public transport networks (bus or tram) form an integral part of all development proposals.
- In Norway, public sector car loan schemes are restricted to EV purchases. (The same approach could be taken to the tax treatment of private sector vehicle support schemes), and
- Denmark races on-shore wind projects through the planning process *if they are owned and submitted by local community cooperatives as part of local energy programmes*. This is a commitment that builds decarbonisation and democratisation into tomorrow's energy system thinking.



To pay for such initiatives, innovative forms of co-financing have been created. Central governments, local authorities, insurers, pension funds and climate banks have teamed up to make low-carbon housing the

new norm. None were done by privatisation or deregulation. Casino economics were kept well out of everything.

Moreover, by making low cost finance conditional on post-construction inspection, tenants and owners get far greater protection against shoddy building. This is what a visionary Labour Chancellor should be grasping and delivering.

Ditching the climate clowns

Trump may be obsessed with “Drill, baby, drill!” but the world is heading elsewhere. If Labour cannot bring itself to be led by climate science, or by the wild weather events already trashing conventional economics, at least look at where the smart money is going.

In a prescient critique of the Davos failure to put Trump in his place, the analyst Gerard Reid pointed out that -

“Last year, more money was invested in solar power than in the entire oil and gas industry combined. Why? Because electricity is the future.

Over the past 24 months, more solar capacity has been installed globally than in the previous 24 years combined! To put that into perspective, there was 600 GW of solar added globally last year compared to only 3 GW of nuclear.

In terms of electricity production those 600GW will produce over 1,000TWh of electricity this year, which is 50% greater than the power consumption of Germany in a year! And this trend to solar will only accelerate, with solar prices expected to drop another 25% this year, and plug-and-play systems (with no electrician needed for installation) the next big leap forward.

Going forward, batteries and other storage solutions will replace replace fossil fuels as the cornerstone of 24/7 power systems, embedded in homes, businesses, and electric vehicles. Point again is the speed of change. Batteries are already everywhere and can be installed quickly, cost effectively and anywhere, just like solar.”

Trump grasps none of this. Or if he does, the oligarchs surrounding him want none of it. Actually, it's the other way round. They want everything. But only deregulated, Wild West economics would allow them to do so. The public - whether in the USA, the UK or anywhere else - no longer matter.

Rebuilding solidarities

Bereft of Trump, Labour doesn't know where to turn. This isn't just Starmer. It applies equally to the Left. And one honest starting point would to admit that Brexit screwed us all.

There are dozens of things wrong with the EU but I can't think of a single way in which I am better off outside it. Maybe the financial sector has done well. The richest of the rich have certainly prospered. But the rest of the economy is flailing. And Labour plans for a new runway at Heathrow merely demonstrate how bereft we are of fresh ideas.

In the big challenges coming our way - food shortages, energy insecurity, flood, drought and eco-system breakdown, internet insecurity and descent into the disinformation society - progressive politics must urgently repair some old fences and build some new ones.

Brexit divided the Left as much as the Right. And today, both Starmer and Reeves seem impaled on the same political ambiguities.

If he had any sense, following his phone call to Trump, Starmer would send a team to Brussels saying “Come back with your best ‘Rejoin’ offer and we'll put it to the vote. It is what trade union negotiators have to do. The final offer is put on the table, then the members decide.

Farage would be livid. Musk and Trump too. But let Labour pick a fight with the real enemy not seek to befriend it.

This is the most perilous stage of human existence, with economic breakdown and climate collapse threatening us all. It is a time that calls for leadership - real, visionary leadership - not appeasement.

Churchill summed up our predicament when he said "An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last."

Surely Britain can still aspire to being something better than a late lunch.

Alan Simpson

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