

The rise of the watermelons

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If you were once left of centre in the UK, you thought of Labour as your natural political home.

You do not any longer. That is not because you have changed. It is that Labour deserted you three or so decades ago and has lurched ever further to the right ever since. A party founded on the backs of working people, the trade union movement and Methodism has become a party of the wealthy, big business and corruption.

What was is no more. Labour is over. You owe it nothing, and least of all an apology for bidding it farewell. No one should shed a tear about its demise. The handiwork of Blair, Mandelson (and let us not forget), the unreformed Alastair Campbell, is over. All that remains is for the few left in its fold to attend to the funeral rites.

What now, then?

As Aditya Chakrabortty [notes in The Guardian this morning](#):

This winter is a hinge moment in British politics, the point at which the default choice of leftwing voters is no longer Labour. In Wales, it will be Plaid Cymru; in Scotland, the SNP. And in this corner of inner London, as in many English cities, it will be the Greens.

As he adds, and a report on the massive growth in support for the Greens in Lewisham in South East London:

Look up “one-party state” in a political dictionary, and alongside Pyongyang, there will feature Lewisham. At the last council elections in 2022, Labour scooped every single seat, plus the mayoralty. The local Green party, on the other hand, shrank so drastically it came close to shutting down.

Then: lift-off. Lewisham began 2025 with about 500 Green party members; by autumn, almost as many were signing up in just one week. At the start of 2026, the local party stands at about 2,500, putting it just behind the Green “fortress” of Hackney. At the school’s entrance I meet Ed, whose job it is to call up local newbies and welcome them

to the party. Last January, the task was his alone. Today, he heads a team of nearly 25.

My information tells me that this is also happening elsewhere.

Now, let's be clear. Something like this has happened before. I am old enough to remember the rise of the Social Democratic Party (the SDP). But that was a bunch of Labour cast-offs, some of them rather too close to the Tories for comfort as it turned out. Its rump is now a part of the far-right. The rest long ago merged with the Liberals to form the LibDems. They did not arrive on the political scene to shake up politics. They existed to maintain it as it was.

And that is the difference between the wave of support they got in 1981/2 and what is happening now. The Greens, especially under Zack Polanski, are not in existence to maintain the status quo. They want to break the mould, which the SDP also claimed (for those who recall their campaigns long ago), except they were clearly not committed to delivering on it. In contrast, the Greens are, and that is exactly what those now arriving in the party want.

They are what might be appropriately described as watermelons: red on the inside, green on the outside, and intent on making an irresistible political offering, at least as far as England is concerned. Scotland and Wales have different offerings, and in Scotland, the Greens are, in any case, a separate party, not always aligned with the policies of the Greens in England and Wales.

Why does this matter? There are three reasons.

First, for some time there has been no major political party on the left in the UK. The fiasco surrounding Your Party, which will not recover from the disasters and infighting surrounding its launch, means that the Greens do not need to create a space for themselves now: there is a vacuum for them to fill.

Second, that vacuum is sucking in the watermelons. They want politics with at least a green tinge. Most of those arriving are young enough to have never lived without a background of climate concern underpinning all their political awareness. Without that issue being on the agenda, they cannot imagine politics at all. But, equally, they are not the environmental hard core of old. They want politics for people. They want a political economy of care. They wish for a focus on meeting needs. They are all too aware of the power-grabbing of big business and the wealthy, and want it consigned to history. The logic of Beveridge and the social safety net supplied by the state is something they embrace. They agree with Keynes that we can afford whatever we are capable of doing. This is left-of-centre politics, but not as we have seen it in this country for a long time, or maybe ever before. That is what makes this sustainable. This is not a revival. This is answering a real need.

Third, those coming in are competent. They are precisely the people who have been missing from politics for far too long. They are not think tankers. They are not ideological diehards. They are not committed to climbing the greasy pole. They bring real-world skills to get things done. I am not denying that some will have ambition. So what? If you don't want to win, you cannot change the world through politics. People of that sort are required by any movement, but there are more than that. They are also committed to making real change in communities, which is where the bedrock of real politics is located, which Labour is showing it no longer comprehends by abolishing councils, alienating communities in the process.

Do I see this as a real change in that case? I think the answer is clear: I do. There is something very radical happening as people seize the chance to resist neoliberalism and forge something better. The day of the watermelons has arrived.