

## Politics

# Red wall former MPs plan their return as Labour confidence grows

## Selection

**Toby Helm**  
Political Editor

As cash donations flow in, 2019's defeated politicians set sights on victory in old seats

A growing number of former Labour MPs who lost their “red wall” seats in 2019 are hoping to make a political comeback at the next general election as confidence grows that Keir Starmer is on course for Downing Street.

Party sources say that the number of defeated “red wallers” hoping to stand again, or considering putting their names forward, is now well into double figures as Labour sets its sights on a much quicker than expected recovery from the 2019 election disaster.

Already three defeated Labour MPs who held red wall seats until 2019 – James Frith (Bury North), Jo Platt (Leigh) and Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) – have been selected again as candidates in their former seats. Heidi Alexander, former shadow health secretary and MP for Lewisham East, who quit under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership in 2018, has been selected as the candidate for South Swindon.

Several more former MPs whose seats fell as Boris Johnson and the Tories broke through the red wall in 2019 with promises to level up the country are now ready to put their names forward either for their former seats or for other ones.

Former frontbencher Emma Reynolds, who lost in Wolverhampton North East in 2019, is planning to throw her hat into the ring for the selection in Wycombe, a seat held by the Tory MP and Northern Ireland minister Steve Baker.

Graham Jones, who lost in Hyndburn and Haslingden, is hoping to be selected again as the candidate

*Graham Jones and Anna Turley are both hoping to stand again.*



there, while Anna Turley (Redcar) Melanie Onn (Grimsby) and John Grogan (Keighley) are all considering standing again.

Many of the potential returnees were present at the Labour conference in Liverpool last week. Turley, who was there, told the *Observer*: “The party is in a different place now. I feel reassured and confident that it is really back in business under Keir Starmer. We are ready for government, and people want to put their shoulder to the wheel and help.”

Many of the potential returnees say that local constituency parties have also been transformed as the influence of the left has waned and the chances of moderates being selected has increased.

Jones added: “Some very good colleagues lost in 2019, and those I have spoken to feel it was an unfortunate one-off election where the local contribution was washed over by the national.” He said it was “frustrating” both to see what damage the Tories had done to local areas and not to be part of the Labour recovery from inside Westminster. “My colleagues probably think very similarly. They want to put the record straight.”

Meanwhile, as Labour aims to accelerate candidate selections so it is ready for an election, Starmer is making moves to prepare the party to go to the country as it forges ahead in the polls. The Labour leader has appointed Peter Hyman – former strategist and speech writer for Tony Blair who left Westminster to work as a teacher – as an adviser on strategy to work alongside director of strategy Deborah Mattinson. Claire Ainsley is being moved from her role as executive director of policy to a post in charge of writing the election manifesto. The party has also appointed the multi-award-winning advertising agency Lucky Generals to manage its image and branding.

Insiders say that while Labour is far from flush with money, it is receiving pledges of donations as the political mood turns in the party's favour – and the prospect of ending more than a decade of Conservative government.



## On the march: ‘It’s fantastic to see all the factions coming together’

Trade unions, climate activists and social justice campaigners unite in their thousands across Britain

## Cost of living

**Mark Townsend & Sundus Abdi**

Lizzie and Dnieper are new to the protest scene. But the mounting economic crunch, cost of living crisis and climate emergency have galvanised the young family.

“It’s a little bit scary out there at the moment – things are escalating fast,” said Dnieper Cruz, 32. Turning to his daughter Lumi, almost three, the teacher added: “We just want a better future for her generation.”

His partner, solicitor Lizzie Manchester, 32, said: “It’s time for us as a family to make our voices heard.”

Around them the crowd was building rapidly outside King’s Cross station in central London, just one demonstration among at least 50

being held in towns and cities across the UK on Saturday for people to register their anger at the cost of living crisis. Organisers describe it as the largest wave of simultaneous protests seen in Britain for years.

From Eastbourne to Edinburgh, Hull to Hastings, thousands turned up at protests timed to coincide with the jump in gas and electricity unit prices that will prompt bills to soar. Social media showed large crowds at events in Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle and Belfast.

In Glasgow thousands gathered on the Buchanan Galleries steps for a rally and chanted: “Tories, Tories, Tories! Out, out, out!” and “The workers, united, will never be defeated.”

Coordinated among multiple community organisations and trade unions to maximise their impact, Saturday’s protests were also staged



against a backdrop of the biggest rail strike in Britain for decades.

At King's Cross, Jade Anderson, 25, had travelled up from Somerset to make the point that "enough is enough. I just hope enough people mobilise for them to listen. It's fantastic to see all the factions coming together," she said, noting the alliance of transport unions, climate activists and social justice campaigns.

The King's Cross demo was one of at least six major demonstrations in the capital on Saturday, the combined volume of expected protesters prompting the Metropolitan police to announce that it was "equally important that the rights of local residents, visitors and business owners are balanced with those who wish to protest".

The warning did not stop climate protesters bringing Westminster Bridge to a standstill. At around 2pm, dozens of activists sat on the road and played music, blocking traffic as others chanted slogans about the climate crisis. Earlier, hundreds had also congregated outside Euston station.

The eclectic nature of those present was again quickly evident, with Just

Stop Oil, Extinction Rebellion (XR) and the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG) among the groups gathered. Some held banners denouncing capitalism "the enemy of Mother Earth", with others protesting against the government's recent mini-budget.

Teaching assistant Farzana Khanom, 23, explained that she was having to choose between paying energy bills and investing in her career. As she spoke, a recently launched petition calling for a general election to "end the chaos of this government" soared above 300,000 signatures by lunch.

Across the UK reports emerged of householders setting fire to their utility bills – a symbolic gesture promoted by Don't Pay UK, a grassroots movement that has received almost 200,000 pledges from householders who are prepared to cancel their direct debits if a total of a million Britons commit to not paying.

The campaigners' big precedent, the poll tax protests, took 4 million people refusing to pay – some of whom faced liability orders forcing them to pay – to get the government to scrap the levy.

**ABOVE**  
*The Just Stop Oil protest marches through central London. Antonio Olmos*

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[Observer Comment, page 48](#)

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[Sunder Katwala, page 53](#)



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[New Review, pages 12-17](#)

## “Profound damage has been done to the standing of Britain and the Tories

### Comment

Gavin Barwell



**K**wasi Kwarteng's anything-but-mini budget was one of the most dramatic shifts in UK economic policy that we have ever seen – a bigger change, perhaps, than if Boris Johnson had been succeeded by Keir Starmer rather than Liz Truss.

The new government is focused on the right objective – to increase the underlying rate of growth in the UK economy, which has been too low since the global financial crisis. If we don't find a way to address this, successive governments are going to be faced with a choice between not adequately funding public services or doing so at the price of a growing and politically unpopular tax burden.

The government's solution – reforming the supply side of the economy by speeding up the planning system and making changes to the immigration system to address labour shortages – is right too. And as a Conservative I share the view that lower rates of tax boost growth. So what's not to like?

Well, first, there is a question of fairness. The chancellor is right to say we need to focus on how we grow the cake, but that doesn't mean questions about how it is cut up can be ignored. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, if you look not just at the measures the chancellor announced the other day but at other changes to the tax system taking effect over the next few years (principally the freezing of allowances), the only people who will pay less tax are those earning over £155,000 a year. At a time when millions of people are struggling, that is morally indefensible.

Then there is a question of timing. It makes no sense to cut taxes, stimulating demand in the economy, when we have high inflation. The Bank of England will have no choice but to increase interest rates by more than it was already planning to do. This isn't a growth plan, it's a plan to plunge millions of homeowners into mortgage misery.

And third, there is a question of fiscal credibility. The government sacked the most senior official in the Treasury. It announced tax cuts funded by higher borrowing when we are already increasing borrowing to pay for freezing energy prices. And it refused to publish an independent forecast of the effect of its

policies. There is nothing conservative about any of this.

Imagine the field day that Conservative MPs would be having if a Labour government had introduced the second biggest increase in spending since the second world war funded solely by higher borrowing, and if that announcement had been followed by turmoil in the markets, criticism from the IMF and an emergency market intervention from the Bank of England. What has happened over the last few weeks has damaged the reputation of the country, and that has real-world consequences in terms of our long-term borrowing costs – this now costs us more than Portugal and Spain and nearly twice as much as Germany. Opposition parties and those in the Conservative party who oppose what the government is doing need to start thinking about how we repair this damage.

**C**redibility comes from strong institutions. The Johnson and Truss governments have weakened some of those institutions. The starting point should be how we can strengthen the independence of the Bank of England, with parliament having to approve appointments to the monetary policy committee.

We need to legislate to ensure that no future government can cut taxes or increase spending on this scale without publishing an independent forecast from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR). And we should give parliament a say in the appointment of key civil servants such as the permanent secretary to the Treasury and the head of the OBR, so that markets have confidence that in future ministers can't just sack respected officials.

The events of the last few weeks have done profound damage to the reputation of the Conservative party. Johnson's government showed a shocking disregard for standards in public life and the rule of law. It prioritised a hard Brexit over the integrity of our UK. The Truss government has thrown away the Conservative party's reputation for sound management of public finances.

Rule of law, Unionism, sound money: these are some of the pillars on which the Conservative party is built. It is shocking to see the party's leaders so casually undermine them. The polls show where this is headed. As with our country's reputation, it will take years to undo all the damage

*Gavin Barwell was chief of staff to former prime minister Theresa May*