

6 Months of Starmer: What now for the Labour Left?

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SPEAKERS

James Schneider, campaign video, Dawn Butler, Michael Walker, Patrick Maguire

Michael Walker 00:15

Good afternoon and welcome to a Navara media The World Transformed cross over at this virtual fringe. I'm Michael Walker. Today we are going to be discussing suppose the big questions which surround this virtual Labour party conference What did stammers first six months as leader of the Labour Party, tell us about what he actually wants, how he wants to govern the party, not how he won the leadership election. And after five years of controlling the party are the labour left in a position to influence the new leader at all? Or, in terms of the party at least, are they in the wilderness now? To answer that question, I have a stellar set of guests. But first of all, I have Dawn Butler, Dawn Butler is MP for Brent Central. Dawn served as a minister under Gordon Brown and after nominating Corbyn in 2015, to broaden the debate, went on to be one of the most valued players in his Shadow Cabinet. She is now one of Labour's most high profile back benches. Dawn it is a pleasure to have you back on Navarro media.

Dawn Butler 01:12

Hey Michael, it's great to be back.

Michael Walker 01:14

Are you a regular TWT as well?

Dawn Butler 01:19

Um, I have done a fair bit, though probably not as much as they want me to, so apologies.

Michael Walker 01:26

I also have with me James Schneider. James was a founder of Momentum before going on to become director of Strategic Communications for Jeremy Corbyn. In the warts and all accounts that have come out since Corbyn stood down as leader James comes out relatively unscathed, which I think is owing to a general recognition that was many people in the Corbyn project fell through no fault of their own into

roles they might have been ill suited for. He was genuinely good at both communications and strategy. Welcome to the show, James.

James Schneider 01:53

Hi, thank you very much for having me. I think that's a bit too kind, but thanks anyway.

campaign video 01:59

And finally, I'm joined by Patrick McGuire, who was a political reporter at The Times. And Patrick is now a Westminster insider and has spent most of the Corbyn years at the New Statesman. He's the co author of the recent 'Left out- an inside story of the Labour Party since 2017'. It's a gripping read, though if you are invested in the rows that raged at the top of the Labour Party for the last three years, it's not very relaxing. I will warn you, Thank you for joining us this afternoon, Patrick.

Patrick Maguire 02:26

Thank you for having me. Don't hold that against me.

Michael Walker 02:32

You didn't advertise it as a relaxing read, so that's that's fine. We are going to start with a video because I am going to actually first of all I'll say I'm going to sort of divide this conversation into two parts. So the first half of the show is going to be who is Keir Starmer, what does he want, and the second half is going to be how can the labour left influence him or, you know, have influence within the Labour Party by whichever means we are talking about. So to kick off the 'who is Kier Starmer' I want to remind us of the pitch he made when he won his position as as Labour leader This is his first campaign bid which made waves when he first announced his bid to be leader of the party.

campaign video 03:14

(Speaker 1) "In the struggles of the 1980s the labour movement stood together in solidarity against Thatcher. Keir defended the print workers at Wapping. He was in the crowd that night when police on horseback charged into the peaceful picket. He was there for the dockers in Dover, in the P&O dispute, helping the families of strikers who'd had their benefits cut off by the Tory government. He gave free legal advice to the poll tax protestors in Trafalgar Square. And in 1992, he stood up for my Union, the National Union of mineworkers. When the Tories closed the mines we took them to court for failing to provide a just transition for workers. Keir stood in solidarity for workers and trade unions." (Speaker 2) Keir stood up for the protestors who were trying to stop the widening of the M3 and the destruction of the Downland when the full force of the state was against them. When Shell tried to sink the Brent Spar oil platform into the North Sea, Keir challenged this with Greenpeace to prevent an environmental catastrophe. For 10 years he defended Helen Steele and David Morris when they were sued for libel by McDonalds. They fought all the way and won. And Keir defended me and many others to bring public scrutiny and awareness to the presence of the United States visiting forces so that we can live in a more peaceful and less secretive society. Keir never asked for anything in return, never sought to take the credit, or make a name for himself. (Speaker 3) "In 2003 he published a legal opinion in the Guardian that the invasion in Iraq would be unlawful and marched with millions against the war. Keir took the last Labour government to court over its decision to deny welfare benefits to asylum seekers. I don't think anyone really expected someone who dedicated his career to defending workers, trade

unions and activists to become Director of Public Prosecutions. Keir never forgot where he came from. As DPP he stood up to the powerful. He had the courage to prosecute MPs for cheating on their expenses and take on the Murdoch press for phone hacking. He prioritised change in guidelines on violence against women and girls. And he was instrumental in getting justice for Stephen (Lawrence). I was delighted when I saw Keir become a Labour MP in 2015 and was so proud of the way he battled, alongside Jeremy Corbyn against Tory Brexit and the Tories' plans to sell off the NHS. (Keir Starmer) I spent my life fighting for justice, standing up for the powerless, and against the powerful. I still believe another future is possible, where we can open up power and opportunity to all of our communities. We can confront the climate crisis with a Green New Deal. We can promote peace and justice around the world, with a human rights based foreign policy. We can rebuild our economic model in place of the failed free market one. We can renew our democracy and spread power across all of our communities and halt the rise of racism and division across this country. Another future is possible for our party as well. We can put factionalism and division on one side and unify around a radical programme where we can draw on the talents and strengths of all our members and supporters across the movement. Our party must move forward. There can't be any going back. Another future is possible, but we have got to fight for it. Together we can, and we will win".

Michael Walker 04:33

So I watched that again for the first well not for the first time, revisited it this morning. Still almost brings a tear to one's eye. You can see how the guy won the Labour leadership, that along with his association with remain, was the appeal really. He was saying, let's unite the party, I'll bring forward the same activist spirit really that Jeremy Corbyn had, but whilst being competent and professional. Now he's won the leadership. Some people have seen or think the message has changed. Let's put it like that. So far from putting forward a radical agenda when it comes to the economy, Starmer has not really taken a position on anything, as yet. In terms of social movements, Starmer has been weak on Black Lives Matter and condemned direct action aimed at the Murdoch press. And I suppose you could see this is contrary to the to the commitment to unite the Labour Party, he has sacked two high profile socialist campaign group members from his front page, so Rebecca Long Bailey from the Shadow Cabinet and Lloyd Russell-Moyle, who was a junior Shadow Minister. Patrick, I'm going to start with you. I've obviously presented sort of a particular narrative there, and which is that Kier Starmer, presented himself as left wing, and then when he became leader turned out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing, and his greatest achievement was, I suppose to trick the left into thinking he was something that he was not? Am I being fair?

Patrick Maguire 05:50

I don't think you're necessarily being unfair. I mean, look, there are two crucial things to analyse here. One is Starmer himself. And that video does give us sort of fairly comprehensive overview of his career and his politics, which those who know him in the 80s do say we're sort of, you know, firmly to the left of the Labour mainstream. European red green is how a lot of people put it and I think in his heart, Keir Starmer, will undoubtedly still have those politics but the crucial omission in that video, if you look at his biography, and by his own admission, this was a crucial episode. He, you have their, you know, their years of activist advocacy, and then he's DPP and then he's Labour MP. The crucial episode, Kier Starmer says in developing his thinking- and this actually shed some light on, you know, the sort of moral underpinning of this competency critique, is he spent five years after the Good Friday Agreement

as the human rights advisor to the Northern Ireland policing board, obviously the Royal Ulster Constabulary, they're the sort of, the occupying force in the troubles as many nationalists saw it. Was being reformed in Northern Ireland and Keir Starmer was responsible for, you know, essentially telling this institution what it could and couldn't do and what it was getting wrong in terms of human rights. Now, I interviewed Keir during the leadership campaign in March and he said that was a crucial point, that he has always been anti police. He spent years and years pursuing individual cases against the police and he got inside the PSI. And then he said he found that actually, things that would take years, doing sort of pro bono legal representation for victims of police violence or whatever, he could do immediately you know it only the police could better exercise the power they have. And so if you tie that into what's happening now. You know the government will be doing a better job, if only you could do better you're not questioning the the underlying ethics or morality of policing in this case or you know, you're not you're not questioning necessarily the morality or ethics of the decision that government is making its, if you did it better, the net impact on the public would be would be less painful. So that's once crucial element and the second element as you said, you know, did Starmer, convince people he was the candidate of say ideological and political continuity and now he is representing a huge breach with the Corbyn years. So the crucial thing is regardless of what Starmer thinks about anything, look at the people who are around him. You know, people like Morgan McSweeney, David Evans. These are not people of the Labour left. These are not people whose careers in labour politics have been spent trying to platform left wing voices in the Labour party. indeed in terms of Evans and McSweeney, their whole mission, be it under Blair and be during the sort of, you know the years between the first leadership election and the 2020 leadership election, were thinking about how you marginalise the left. And it's true to say, you know, more than McSweeney's big thing is thinking about expressing things in terms of values and creating spaces where people who wouldn't necessarily agree on ideology can agree on sort of big picture issues and you know, in a way, the whole point of the campaign is people like that saw it was to marginalise organised corbynism or to, you know dislocate the the membership that was so supportive of Corbyn over the course of 2015-2020 from the sort of you know institutional moorings that sustained the left in power, without necessarily, not necessarily telling you that that's what they were doing. I think on that count, they've been very successful.

Michael Walker 09:19

I want to go to James, because you, I suppose you were an insider working with Starmer for a while, for a long time, when you were in lotto and he was Brexit secretary or shadow Brexit secretary, sorry. But then you went on to be sort of drafted in to Rebecca long Bailey's campaign. What do you make of his leadership compared to the Starmer you knew compared to when he was in the Shadow Cabinet? Do you think that he has sort of visually changed from the outside. Do you think he did sort of make himself out to be more left wing than he actually was and that we're seeing a different Starmer now that he's become leader of the party?

James Schneider 10:12

So I think he's leading in quite a similar way to how he was Brexit secretary, which is totally different to also shadow Brexit Secretary which is is really rather different to that, that campaign video. I obviously supported. Rebecca long Bailey as the left candidate, and I had gone on holiday in early January, and I came back and had my phone off for a week and that was lovely. But then I turned it on. And basically the first thing I saw was this video, and it genuinely gave me nightmares because it's so good. And you

watch that and you think about his appeal to the party membership is absolutely Pitch Perfect and true enough, it was. But I think we haven't heard any of that- I mean, I was just noting it down there- what made up the radical programme in his video, you know, rebuild the economic model we've had absolutely none of that, they've run away from talking about wealth, taxes or anything else. Green New Deal, there's none of that. Racism where you've mentioned the failings over Black Lives Matter. Redistributing power and democratic reform, we've not had a peep out of that. And then human rights foreign policy, there hasn't been any, and so I think that you know what he has been effective at is the management of media has been very effective and hats off to him for that and they are pursuing a coherent strategy and they are sticking to it. But I don't think we should be under any illusions that that strategy is a socialist strategy and it was ever going to be your socialist strategy. It is a strategy for progressive social reforms. It's a strategy to have nicer people running the government in the hope that they will run it better than the current lot. And of course they would do, but it's not a strategy for social transformation, it is not a strategy to confront the climate crisis. It's not a strategy to transform the economy, but you know on its own terms it's working quite well and, and I think we should, you know, we should be clear exactly what it is and not not criticise it for not being what it was never going to be. Keir was never going to be the genuine the candidate he presented himself as which is basically look you can have 80% of Corbynism, all the stuff you like, 80% of it, but it's just going to be more competent and more effective. You know, that was a great pitch for the membership, but we aren't going to have 80% of Corbynism from Keir, and that's fine, but we need to, we need to understand that and then adopt a left strategy based on that, which isn't just saying, Oh my god, I can't believe he isn't doing the thing that we wish he was doing.

Michael Walker 12:54

No, I mean, I, I think there's some strong argument there. I think one way of putting it is that Keir Starmer put himself forward. So what better way to sell a radical politics and to be someone who's knighted than to be a sir? And really you can turn that around and say if someone wants politics that radical would they have been knighted in the first place? And I think we're kind of, we're getting to the second part of of that now. I want to bring in Dawn now because we're sort of comparing Starmer or judging him compared to Jeremy Corbyn, and you obviously had a key role in the Shadow Cabinet when when Corbyn was leader, but you can also give us a longer term view of the party. You've been an MP under Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, not Ed Miliband, actually because you're out of Parliament for those five years and then Jeremy Corbyn, where would you place Kier Starmer on a left right spectrum between those four leaders?

Dawn Butler 13:42

I think it's quite complicated. I think if you look at the video, as you said, it's quite emotional and you will find it quite firmly being sort of full of hope I think this you know, and James has talked about it like from, you know, from the he's experienced how things are presented, I think that his strategy to me is basically, at the moment, to do nothing, to do very little and to expose that the emperor has no clothes on and so to reveal him and the rest of his merry men, and I think in a way that a strategy is often ro them been working, because we are level pegging in the polls but it's not going to be effective forever I think now now need to be implemented and those next steps need to be around policies and directions and where we're going and has to be more, it can't just be about our values.

Michael Walker 14:55

Dawn, I'm going to interrupt you because we're having a few problems. With your audio. So we're actually going to sort of go ahead to our next clip, and then we're going to come straight back to you and we will have sorted out your audio by then. So we've sort of looked at how leftwing Keir Starmer is. I've got a sort of more, I suppose. surprising question now one that I didn't realise I'd be asking six months after he became leader. How liberal is he? And again I want to show a clip of the Starmer, we knew before he became Labour leader. So this is Labour party conference in 2018. And this is, I suppose where Starmer puts himself forward as the tribune of remain, the tribune of members in the Labour Party who feel emotionally committed to the European Union. Let's take a look.

campaign video 15:42

(Keir Starmer) If Parliament votes down the Prime Minister's deal or she can't reach a deal, that is not the end of the debate and labour must step up again and shape what happens next. Our preference, our preference is clear. We want a general election to sweep away this failed government. Having swept them away, we want to instal a radical Labour government capable of transforming this country. And that's what should happen after two years of negotiations ending in failure. But if that's not possible. We must have other options and conference, that must include campaigning for a public vote. It's why the parliament has the first say it's right the parliament has to first say but if we need to break the impasse, our options must include campaigning for a public vote and nobody is ruling out remain as an option. Oh, sorry, I didn't realise it was gonna come back that soon, we're gonna go straight to Dawn, see how your sound is doing now. So the question I suppose I want to pose to you is many people would have had doubts about whether Keir Starmer is going to be particularly left wing, I suppose one of the advantages I fought when when he became leader, you know, compared to what came before. So, say under Tony Blair, for example, you ended up with the Labour Party was incredibly authoritarian, and, you know, okay in in terms of the Iraq war, and had no respect for international law, or the human rights of people in in other countries, I've thought with Starem, at least we have a human rights lawyer, you know, he's probably not going to do Tony Blair style things, and he did really pitch himself to Labour members as a liberal. Now he's going for a kind of social conservative angle. And I want to know sort of what your thoughts are about that. How worried are you that he's going to go in a sort of blue labour direction which we might not have expected when he put himself forward to be leader?

Dawn Butler 18:21

I think Can you hear me? Okay.

Michael Walker 18:23

You sound amazing now, Dawn.

Dawn Butler 18:27

I think the key is going to be that we need to hold Keir to what he originally kind of promised and portrayed. And I think that's vital and important. I mean, I don't know what his strategy is in regards to his direction. But what I do know is that we had a commitment to stick to the party's Manifesto, and we cannot be outflanked by the Tory government and at the moment I feel there are some policy areas, the Tory government are implementing policies that they are taking straight from our Manifesto. And they're

almost if you like more or less than us as a Labour Party and that will do us no good whatsoever. We will struggle and we can't just appeal to voters you have never voted for us. We've also got to make sure that we keep the voters who are solid to us, and our beliefs as a socialist party and we shouldn't be scared of that. I mean, I did. I was at a conference earlier today where they were saying, you know, we should sever our ties with the trade unions and you know, a Tory said that, and I said what a stupid, ridiculous thing to say. You know we need to start nipping all of this foolishness in the past now, and Keir needs to be leading on that and it just needs to be stronger in some issues. But as I was sort of saying earlier before sort of my mic disappeared, I think Kier's strategy at the moment to essentially do nothing and to just expose the Emperor with no clothes on and to give himself a platform to be able to be heard, maybe in areas that they weren't listening to labour before, which is cool, I can live with that. But we will need to start talking about, you know, our policies and our core strategies and beliefs as a Labour Party.

Michael Walker 20:13

I want to get up now, a quote from a Stephen Bush article which is, and this is going to be thrown at James in a moment. So this is his his explanation of why Starmer is sort of going down the more Brexit, social conservative angle than we might have thought when he was in the Shadow Cabinet. So, Bush writes "for Starmer and his inner circle a more economically and socially liberal labour might do better electorally, but it would be at the expense of the party's soul. Winning back seats labour lost in 2019 and 2017 is not just about achieving power, but about what type of party it is, as one of his close allies put it to me, We're not the Democrats, meaning a loose coalition of social liberals, big city progressives and some trade unions. Labour is a party of the Labour interests of working people in the trade union movement. It is the Labour Party's desire to revive that historic identity that distinguishes it both from its recent Corbynite past and its electorally successful New Labour days. It's not just victories Starmer aims for but to save labour as we know it." Now, when I read that I sort of thought of you James, because I was just imagining you're kind of pulling your hair out, actually, because I think I think there's could have been written about many people in the leaders office when Corbyn was leader, and one of the main reasons they sort of travelled away from that kind of positioning was that Starmer was dragging them in a different direction. So I kind of wanted to get your your response to what you see as Starmer's strategy being described in these terms now?

James Schneider 21:37

Yeah, I mean, that's rubbish. I agree with Dawn that the strategies are sort of win by default strategy and and that could win electorally. I actually don't think the strategic social conservatism is that weird relative to the hard remain. If you think what was hard remain continuity remain it was a it was mainly or in large part it was a professional managerial class project. Most of the people that were the leading figures of the People's vote campaign within the the hard remain continuity remain within the media and so on. That's the that's that sort of cast formation and you know, the idea I call it strategic social conservatism that he's following is because it's clearly not heartfelt, it's clearly not believed. It's a strategy to manage a group of people who you don't really have very much to offer to. And and it's, again, that scene that that reads to me as a kind of professional managerial class strategy, rather than the sort of strategy that Stephen bush was outlining there, which one is actually substantially similar to what you know, quite a lot of what the Corbyn strategy was, which is to try to prevent the cleavage within the working class majority in Britain that we are seeing animated by, by culture wars and by

Brexit, but to do so not by strategically moving to the right and not by saying nothing and allowing the conservatives to constantly drag the spectrum further and further to the right. But finding other grounds to unite people on the green new deal, on radical economic message, on redistribution, on reducing inequality on taxing the rich and so on. And I think I think that that briefing that's been given seems quite dishonest to me.

Michael Walker 23:33

Patrick, I want to go to you. And I suppose my question now is this. There's a number of ways you can interpret this because people who were very supportive of Keir Starmer, so someone like Paul Mason, who sort of comes on, they say, look, he might not look left wing from what he's saying to the public, but I know the guy he is. And he's just saying what he needs to say to win labour majority. And so the idea would be that ultimately, you know, he's, he's not an opportunist, he he sort of has these core values and they are left wing but what he wants to do is say whatever is necessary to get elected and then implement something a bit more radical. And you know from your conversations that you have in Westminster do you think there's any truth to that or should we take Keir Starmer at his word when he basically suggests he wants to be, you know, a more competent version of an establishment Prime Minister who's more competent than the current incumbent. Let's put it like that.

James Schneider 24:23

Well, the argument people around Keir Starmer that people make is essentially the one- Dawn hits the nail on the head when she says he essentially do nothing, winback a degree of trust among voters who, for whatever reason, have emerged in the past five years or longer, not wishing to give the Labour Party a hearing. And then once you have I don't know what the metric for measuring this is, but once you feel you have won their trust back, then you can start making economic arguments right that that that is why Labour's tax policy is essentially, it's not for us to have a tax policy until 2024. Because people around Keir Starmer feel that they don't have the credibility that Labour's brand is not strong enough to be advancing economic arguments. And that's sort of the what Keir Starmer thinks is sort of secondary to this question. And it comes back to the idea of pressure. You know, you look at recent interventions from you know, people like Andrew Fisher and the stuff, Dawn and James have been saying it's all about sort of maintaining pressure on Starmer, ro maintain the 10 pledges, to advance the economic arguments he said he was going to advance but that is not gonna be the only source of pressure. And you can look at them, he's on the front bench, you know, there are 10 MPs on the front bench most junior campaign positions, obviously you have momentum, you have the unions that aren't supportive of Keir Starmer. But if you look at sort of the key briefs related to the the key pledges of stopping a human rights based foreign policy or you know, a more dovish foreign policy, the economic radicalism, does anybody really think that a treasury front bench that includes that by majority you know, people like Pat McFadden, Bridget phillipson a, a foreign affairs front bench that has you know Wayne David And Stephen Dowty. And then you have the home, the home office with Holly Lynch, you know, all people from a labour tradition, but it's not the labour tradition that would make the ten pledges that Kier, Starmer made. And so those, you know, those policy teams really going to be agitating for the ten pledges, or are we going to be moving to a traditional, more sort of traditional sort of labour rights territory, because they were the big winners of the first front bench. And if you look at the remaining MPs who voted for air strikes on Syria, the 29 that are left, you know, I think a majority of them now have position on the front bench. So I don't really see even at the point where it comes to decide what

argument is going to advance that the pressure in the PLP is not really brought to bear in such a way that it's not going to even if you know it's the ten pledges, just by any other name. They're not going to be the you know, the spirit of those ten pledges, I don't think it's gonna be quite as strong as it was in intended to be in January 2020.

Michael Walker 27:10

Do you think Keir Starmer is a signpost or a weather vane. So you know, politicians are often divided into do they just go with the wind do they just allow themselves to find themselves in the you know the equilibrium between different sorts of pressure or do they stand by what they believe in try and change political reality.

Patrick Maguire 27:25

And well obviously I think that the strategic choice has been made now is to present him as a weather vane so that the so that then you might direct voters to the signpost that said sort of this as sort of, you know, strong social democratic platform here. But it depends, you know, if you are allowing yourself to spin it in a direction that a critical mass of the PLP and a critical mass of your front bench like, then, how do you put that genie back in the bottle. You have to be very assertive. And maybe, you know his mandate is as structured as it can be.

Michael Walker 28:01

there is not much evidence that that is the plan.

28:05

Yeah. Well, we look basically, the problem is much of the PLP agrees sincerely with the stuff you're saying strategically is part of the problem.

Michael Walker 28:14

Dawn, I'm going to go to you because it seems like we're going to move into our next phase of the conversation because it seems like there's there's actually relative consensus that Starmer isn't particularly left wing, you know, not that he is a, you know, an evil Blairite, who's trying to regain the party so he can invade a Middle Eastern country, but someone who doesn't have many commitments to you know, the kind of left wing vision that Jeremy Corbyn had and many Corbynite members with many people who traditionally go to The World Transformed. So we're gonna we're gonna move on to pressure. How can left wingers pressure on Keir Starmer to take different positions. And probably the most obvious place that a leader has problems with people who might oppose their positions is in Parliament is the PLP the parliamentary Labour Party. Dawn, you know, the MPs you're there, You're one of them. You sit among them. The impression I get from the outside is that, you know, Keir Starmer at the moment is completely unassailable. It seems like the the MPs predominantly are just incredibly relieved to have a leader who they see as you know, more of one of them, and this civil wars of the Corbyn era are over. And you know, Keir Starmer looks quite untouchable. Would you agree with that analysis?

Dawn Butler 29:22

You know what, I think it comes down to sort of discipline. And, you know, I actually think that sort of those of us You know, people like to those of us on the left actually think that we actually are really quite disciplined and to have the party's best interests at heart. You know, when Jeremy was leader you had, you know, everybody kind of copped in the background going in the media going mad attacking him, you know, and kind of destroying the Labour Party from within. And that's not sort of what the majority of us are about. And so I think, actually, that we've shown, we, you know that we've shown complete discipline and should be given credit for that. And how do we make our voices heard, I think is by ensuring that we do media. We can't be afraid of doing media. I mean, there are very few sort of MPs kind of from the Shadow Cabinet doing media at the moment. And I think, you know, they are, they are being very, very sort of closed, but I think a lot more of us need to sort of do media and talk about Labour's values and and where we're going because we are a broad church as they like to say. So you cannot exclude one section of the party or because I think we have to it has to boil down to policies, what are our policies? What is our strategy? What do we want the country to look like? You know, we need to be talking about post COVID. Now, when we come out of lockdown, what will the country look like? You know, we were we are facing. We're facing austerity like we've never seen before and we are facing a huge threat of no deal Brexit that is going to have a devastating effect on the majority of the country, even in areas that people voted for Brexit. So we need to start laying down our ground now and say, Look, this is what Labour is about. And, you know, come and talk to us, come and join us and we can't just wait for that to happen because the theory is, you know, the strategy's okay at the moment, but if you if you wait too long, there'll be a tipping point. And then people still won't listen to us. So you you've got to get it quite right.

Michael Walker 31:36

Can I ask Dawn, what your red lines would be and what I mean by this, I suppose the PLP have a fair degree of power in that they can go on the television and trash the leader. This happened all the time. On the Jeremy Corbyn, you don't strike me, as someone who's in a rush to do this, you don't strike me as someone who just wants to attack a leader for the sake of it. But are there any policies or any positions that you can imagine Keir Starmer taking where you would, you know, be straight on the phone to BBC or Channel Four and say, I want to come on your show, and say that what Keie Starmer has done is wrong, and that he, you know, should watch his back fundamentally.

Dawn Butler 32:07

So, I mean, you know, Michael, you know, like, my first priority is to get a Labour government and, you know, and I think, you know, Labour government is way better than any Tory government will ever be. And that will always be my first priority. I do think at the moment that Keir and his Shadow Cabinet, you know, many of them could be much stronger in areas around Black Lives Matter. You know, I think they could be stronger around that I can think they could be more aggressive in regards to the government incompetence and their handling of the pandemic. And, you know, we need to remind people that the government is responsible for where we are now because of their lack of action. You know, there is obviously the argument for you know, showing that the emperor has no clothes giving them enough rope downs as they say there is, you know, an element of that, but let's, you know, let's go out there and say, Well, actually, you're taking the fight to the Tories. I kind of Yeah, I missed, I missed the fight. If I'm honest with you. Its a wide open goal. I mean, you know, in fact, you know, Boris has been so incompetent he's not enjoying the job at all he's complaining that he's losing money every single day is

not getting enough money. You know, we could be 20 points ahead really, you know deep people used to say the problem was Jeremy now we've got somebody that people consider to be prime ministerial, competent. You know, he does, you know, fairly well at PMQs. It's not setting the world alight and exciting, but it's stable. So, you know, let's spend a bit more and let's get 20 points ahead. Let's not be just Oh, yeah, we're level pegging the government is seriously incompetent.

campaign video 33:52

We've had enough of strong and stable, you want to go on the attack I want to go to James and stick on the topic of the PLP. Because obviously, I suppose you spent a lot of time trying to manage malcontents and within the PLP, who were, I suppose either trying to undermine the leadership for its own sake or trying to drag the policy direction in a particular way. I suppose one, one legacy of Corbynism is that there are more left wing MPs than there were before. So the socialist campaign group used to be, I don't know, 10-15 people. There's now 34 people in it which is sort of the official block of left wing MPs and we can talk about opposition but also if Starmer words become Prime Minister if his appeal or his strategy which we've all said is, you know, reasonably successful to make himself seem Prime Ministerial to the population if he gets into that role, you could have these 34 MPs being real linchpins in terms of, you know they could they could cause defeats. My concern would be did they seem well organised enough? I mean, I haven't really heard much from those 34 MPs in the campaign group, and how much trouble do you think they would be able to call Prime Minister Starmer who was trying to shift the party to the right?

James Schneider 35:01

So I'm not going to answer your question because I think it's the it's the wrong one. It's the wrong focus. We have I think, because we've won, but I think that we need to, as a socialist strategy and thinking of all of the socialist resources that we have which are, you know, are quite decent. We need to get our heads out of Westminster. The front bench lotto because I think we're still slightly stuck there and thinking that we're able to negotiate with what has replaced us in a way that we can't you know, we can't really.

Michael Walker 35:44

There will be able to if Starmer was in power, right? I mean if they're empowered by loving MPs, they will have proper leverage.

James Schneider 35:51

I mean, perhaps but how they would actually have proper leverage is if we change the ground around the party and also around around the government. So by that I mean, if we were if there are real campaigns in the country, like black lives matter, but also like the tenants movement now against the evictions, those are the things which are going to shift, shift the political weight in this country, shift, what is it what is possible, and then change the ground that the leadership stands on and also strengthen the hand of those 30 odd socialist campaign group MPs. And I also think not having just the focus on the MPs and Parliament alone means that we're in a better position to have a strategy which is don't carp, build. We've got quite a lot of socialist resources across, yes some of in Parliament, across momentum in the grassroots and in the trade unions and in the whole galaxy, of movements and organisations that are that are progressive in this country. And I think rather than just trying to

focus narrowly on on Westminster we should be trying to unite those as much as possible into as formal an alliance that can then campaign and put forward the kinds of arguments that Dawn was saying, you know, what do we want to see in the post COVID world? How are we responding to climate change? What are we doing about the coming eviction crisis for tenants? And I think that's a far more effective socialist strategy, for for both changing the party but also changing society, because you're doing both at the same time and I think that's where our focus should be, rather than in thinking that Keir is basically guy maybe or he's not really our guy but if we push him a bit this way, he'll do more or our thing. I think no, the world is in huge flux, the you know, the and how it's going settle down in two years time nobody knows we need to be an organised socialist force. That is trying to remake that world to have enough socialist possibilities. I think that is the way that we influence Keir. That's the way we influence the future Labour government. And that's how we influence this government as well because you're turning government that doesn't have a clue what it's doing either and I think That is a far more coherent socialist social strategy than fixating on Whether we should get more of our MPs to criticise the leadership on this issue or that.

Michael Walker 38:20

I don't think its about criticism, I think about leverage right, so if Keir Starmer was in government, they are going to have a lot of material power to change policy, not do we want Ian Lavery to our shout at Keir Starmer this day or that day.

James Schneider 38:30

Well, I think I think the material power is if there is a national tenants movement for example, that is able to take serious action to insist on a particular in a particular policy. Let's say labour goes into the next election with most of the housing policies from the last manifesto were even just half of them in order for those to you know, Keir's strategy seems to be, if you have better people in governments they will be able to do good things. That is not what has happened in history basically ever, because the forces of reaction the forces of capital, the forces of the establishment, shift the government drag the government to the right. It is only if you have a government which is there and is open to an array of progressive forces of trade unions, of various social movements that are strong enough to force through the kinds of progressive policies that we want. And so I think our strategy, our social strategy, it has to be strengthening those progressive forces as much as possible because that is what we will need to get decent policies from any government.

Michael Walker 39:33

You've come full circle James, three years in Westminster and now you're all social movements again. Patrick, I want to go to you for an insider take on Keir Starmer's team. What do you think they're scared of? Not from not from the Conservatives, what are they scared of from the labour left or from forces to their left within society? Where are they under pressure?

Patrick Maguire 39:58

I mean, to be blunt, I think if you asked them that question, the answer will probably be some variation on not very much. And the risk of going back into Westminster, I think that's because they've calculated that the labour left is something of a busted flush, you know, they have, in their view, divided and ruled. They've won that big mandate. And they have won the right to ignore whatever argument any bit of the

left is making at any one time. That isn't to say they might disagree or agree with those arguments, but they think their internal position is strong enough that for now, at least, you know, pending the results of the gen-sec elections or the NEC elections, they have sort of free rein to basically ignore a left either carves or seeks to build, this thing about James just said it's the sort of thing Keir Starmer was saying in 1986-1987 when he was writing for, you know, obscure pamphlets. And you know, he was very much at this sort of Hilary Wainwright view of, you know, you unite the disparate fragments and liberation politics as they were then, not necessary what James is saying now, and you know, they cohere into a bigger broader base movement in the country. And that is what powers a genuinely representative Labour Party and unites the progressive force in British society that isn't necessarily what they're trying to do now, but to answer your actual question, are they scared of anything? I think they're scared of left wing front benches or left wing, especially in the Labour Party being seen as you know Dawn saying, let's get the campaign groups on television now. The campaign groups better organised than he has been, you know, I'm still quite wet behind the ears, but you know, it's a sort of, you know, much more public facing organisation in this parliament and that's a constant decision that is being made. But you know, I think if that if anything scares them, it's being seen to take left wing positions at this point or being seen as the party of, you know, say Dan Carlin goes on television tomorrow and says yes, I'm for wealth taxation. Yeah, that's the thought of a front bencher, even though there's campaign group from Benham on the front bench, and, you know, I think that scares them, hence why so keen to shut these discussions down hence why, you know, you had Anneliese Dodds saying we should look at wealth taxation, we had Starmer saying something, you know, a sort of diet version of that on LBC. And then within a couple of days the position was we don't talk about taxes. 2024 thanks very much. So if anything scares about the left I think is the labour left being seen to properly exist as an integral part of the Labour Party, not necessarily the position they take.

Michael Walker 42:30

So they're just worried about the labour left embarrassing them essentially because they could always just in that scenario sack Dan Carden as well right they've shown they're very willing to sack left wing front benches if they see them as an embarrassment.

Patrick Maguire 42:41

Yeah, but you know, it's, you know, the sort of, you know, the students in Starmer's campaign was made to embrace, you know, the Corbynite left or at least, you know, the bit of it they could live with, what has an integral part of the Labour tradition and presenting here is the inheritance of that transition. Now it's about saying well hang on, there's only one legitimate source of policy thinking within the Labour Party now and it is the leader of the opposition's office and the Shadow Cabinet. You know, and if you, so that that is that is the that is the sort of the the pinch point as it were.

Michael Walker 43:21

You wouldn't allow the kind of freelancing that he did as Brexit secretary?

Patrick Maguire 43:24

Absolutely, absolutely not. Absolutely not.

Michael Walker 43:31

We've got one last clip for you and this is an example I think of Kier Starmer oversteering so obviously his he took a knee for Black Lives Matter then Black Lives Matter came out wanting to defund the police. This made him a little bit terrified that he could get tarred with the defund the police. Black Lives Matter brush. And this was the Save he tried to make. Let's take a look at him talking to the BBC earlier in the year.

campaign video 43:50

(Keir Starmer) That's nonsense. And nobody should be saying anything about defending the police. I mean, and I would have no truck with that I was Director of Public Prosecutions for five years I worked with police forces across England and Wales bringing thousands of people to court. So my support for the police is very, very strong and evidenced in in the actions, the joint actions I've done with the police. There's a broader issue here the Black Lives Matter movement or moments, if you like, nationally is about reflecting something completely different and it's reflecting on what happened dreadfully in America just a few weeks ago and showing our knowledge in that as a moment across the world and it's it's a shame it's getting tangled up with these organisational if issues with the organisation black lives matter but I wouldn't have any trouble with what the organisation was saying about defunding the police or anything else that's just nonsense.

Michael Walker 44:50

So when when Keir Starmer said that there was some pushback initially because he'd I suppose, no one really expected the Labour leader to say they were in favour of defunding the police but because he called it nonsense people thought it was overly dismissive. It was mainly this line. There was a Black Lives Matter moment that pissed people off and why I think this is interesting Dawn, is not just that he said that but this actually seems like one of the one situations where He did get a bit uncomfortable. He did end up having to come out and say oh actually I regret saying that I regret calling it a blacklivesmatter moment. What I meant is it's a defining moment. I think he had to rewrite history because I'm pretty sure he went out there to try and distance himself from the movement, but the pushback scared him. And I wonder what your analysis is of of that series of events? Why was it that in that particular situation Keir Starmer had to roll back on what he'd said? Do you think he is genuinely worried that he could lose votes and popularity among young voters, ethnic minority voters, etc? Do you think we can see a glimmer of his responsiveness to people to his left in that particular sequence of events there?

Dawn Butler 45:54

This is why it's important that we keep him honest, right? Because if we were to lose, for instance, the black vote or the young vote or the progressive vote, then we will lose many, many seats, more seats than we will gain. So this is why we have to keep the party honest, from its core. And you know what Patrick said, hurt a little bit. Ouch. And, but, he may think or you know, the Shadow Cabinet may think that There'll be embarrassed by seeing the left on TV if you like. But actually, when you think about the policies, that from the 2017 and 2019 Manifesto, the Conservative Party are taking policies from those manifestos and I think it's important that we recognise that because come the next election, we will need to have some policies but we have to be mindful that a lot of our policies would have been stolen, which is fine, because, you know, they're great policies. They're not, they're not done to the whole realm of what we need to be done in society. But we you know, because we will kind of need to read

the room in terms of where we're going politically. So I think it's absolutely vital that we do organise and mobilise, like James was saying as well, because without our, unlike the Tories, so it could, it could be fine on paper saying we want to present ourselves this way, as a political party. But without our activists on the ground, we will not win an election because we will have nobody to deliver leaflets and knock on doors. We are not the Tory party. We don't have you know, millionaire funders who have been made richer- Some may say controversially by the amount of money that they've been getting from procurement contracts from Dominic Cummings and Boris Johnson. So they've been made richer, and they will have lots more money to pile in to the next general election. So actually, we cannot abandon our base. And we cannot abandon our heart of the party in the core of the party, because that will be a huge mistake.

Michael Walker 48:13

We're going to go to some questions in a moment. So start putting your questions in the comments. And I think I'm going to do it in a kind of quick fiery way. We're going to get everyone up on screen to do that. It might be chaotic. And that's what I'm hoping. I want to bring in James Schneider before I do that, because I've been about your response, which is basically a real change happens on the streets in social movements. And then you just pressure a political party, which is basically seen as something separate, to move into that space. Or, you might suppose, to cut the question short, what's the point in people being in the Labour Party in that vision? Because I know there was sort of an idea when Corbyn was leader that you'd have this thing called a movement party where social movements and the Labour Party would unite into this social force, and you'd have the leader of the Labour parties almost leading social movements if you're seeing them as purely external when applying pressure on the Labour Party from which you shouldn't expect that much. Why should people remain members of it?

James Schneider 49:03

I'm not suggesting that people should be outside the party at all. I mean, I think that we should, as part of the bringing together of those socialist resources, let's face it, the overwhelming majority of them lie within the Labour Party. And that is that is a potential source of strength. So when I'm saying bring bring forces together, I mean quite concrete things like a formal alliance with some kind of coordinating committee between the socialist campaign group MPs, the left lead trade unions, or the left of the unions that are not left lead momentum and perhaps some other groups to provide some coherence and coordination and direction for the left as for the left as a whole, and that sort of that sort of body would then be much better pace to engage with the parts of the movement which sit half outside half inside the Labour Party. I mean, obviously lots of activists in, in trade unions in tenants activists, Black Lives Matter activists, climate change activists and so on quite you know, a good bulk of activists in all of those movements are in the Labour Party, and that is, that is a source of strength. So I'm not arguing for the kind of thing that Patrick was suggesting that Keir was arguing for in the middle late 80s of a kind of airy fairy, if everyone comes together will will will pressure the politicians but let's not sully ourselves by getting involved. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying the party is not just what happens along two or three corridors in Westminster. So the party is over half a million people in every community in the country in every workplace in the county. And we should start viewing it more like that. And I think it's from there that we will, that we will get our strength.

Michael Walker 50:56

All right, can we get up for can we get everyone up on screen while we do some quickfire questions from the audience? Is that possible? Right, first question, I suppose you can sort of, you know, move your head a bit if you want to answer it. Does Starmer have a class analysis? Who's going for it? Yep. James is going.

James Schneider 51:19

Not in the way that would be capital and labour. And I don't think so. I mean, they, of course they they look at voter groups. And you can see that in his head of policy. They've got an idea of particular types of working class and the remaking of working class, but it doesn't seem to fit into a kind of a coherent class analysis that will come out of a Marxian tradition.

Michael Walker 51:49

And next question, did Ed Miliband become leader 10 years too soon? Dawn.

Dawn Butler 51:59

um, I think that's probably based on people seeing his performance the other day in Parliament, and they were like, they got excited because they're like, yes, that's what an opposition is like. And I think that's kind of based on the fact that you know, people have been missing that type of opposition. I mean, I wasn't there under his leadership, as you know, so I don't know if he became a leadership too soon, but I think people miss him now because he performed really well the other day and sucked it up to Boris. But mainly, that's what people like to see.

Michael Walker 52:34

A follow up for Patrick, I suppose, is Ed Miliband now the most left wing member of the Shadow Cabinet?

Patrick Maguire 52:40

I mean, there's some there's certainly an argument for that, a lot of people are very, there's, um, you know, whispers that lots of are quite worried about Ed Miliband, his willingness to, you know, talk about actual ideas in public. Again, there's some suggestion of a degree of a degree of jealousy at the the plaudits had just received earlier in the week and obviously the have, you know, Ed is someone with a fully formed idea of how an economy should work is thinking deeply and often out loud about what the economy should look like after COVID. So there is you know, potential for a little bit of tension there particularly with someone like Emily Dodds who obviously was thought of widely and deeply when she was in John McDonnell Treasury team, but is now you know, quite solidly holding the lotto line and not saying very much at all. So, you know, watch this space, but I think, yeah, basically, if you're judging, maybe don't you know, in terms of, you know, what's inside, but in terms of what he's doing, say out loud, yeah, certainly.

Michael Walker 53:41

Lucy asked, what sort of policies can we expect from the Labour Party come the next election? I mean, I suppose the background there is they're not, you know, they've said we're waiting until 2024 to announce our policies. If you've got a crystal ball in front of you. What What do you think the platform is going to be? James go on you blinked.

James Schneider 54:01

I think it would be quite stripped down probably not necessarily because they want to move to the right although I think there will be various policy Is that are ditched. But I think his head of policy, who seems very influential, who, Claire Ainsley, who if it's the same as under us, would be in charge of writing the manifesto. You know, her background is is more in comms, than is in policy whereas, Andrew Fisher's was more in policy than in comms. So I imagine it would be more written as a political document rather than the outcome of policy development over several years.

Dawn Butler 54:41

Yeah. I mean, can I just say that, like, if we don't have anything that inspires people, nobody will vote labour. So it wont matter what the polling said. I think, ultimately, you know, we need to get to that point, which Yeah, we have got a few more years to go. But you know, it does. It does worry me, because, you know, as charter cabinet members, we all had enormous input into what was written in our briefs. And I think, I think that's probably not the same at the moment.

Patrick Maguire 55:11

But also, from a sort of, you know, Westminster village perspective, if I can, you know, sorry, starting the conversation with this again,

Michael Walker 55:17

you don't have to apologise every time, Patrick. That's why we got here.

Patrick Maguire 55:19

Thank you. But it's just sort of bluntly in terms of media management, obviously. There are any number of reasons why Keir is getting a better hearing from the mainstream media, but I mean, look, if you just carry on saying nothing after a while, people get bored people just become boring. I know, already colleagues in the lobby are saying, you know, when is Keir going to say something? you know, you can sort of, you know, maybe maybe the maybe the idea is that, you know, when he does make an intervention it carries so much more weight put, you know, much longer. If this carries on for much longer. I think there'll be less of an appetite as Dawn suggested earlier. You have a very narrow window which you can be heard. There's only so long Keir can not be Jeremy And you know, obviously the the new leadership slogan is taking that to the nth degree and stringing out a bit more, but I won't be long before question starts to be asked about, you know, where's the beef. So that's another thing to bear in mind.

Michael Walker 56:15

Where's the beef in terms of like where's the meat instead of where's the Rouse?

Patrick Maguire 56:19

Yeah, where's the beef in this sort of, famously said to Gary Hart in 1984 democratic campaign.

Michael Walker 56:27

Holly Peacock has a good question. What would the impact be of proper left political leadership arising outside of the Labour Party and Which I kinda want to furnish with, I think in a different way is a very similar question which I think arising from it is, is the one thing that could fit that could sort of scare Keir Starmer is a sort of Corbyn led third party, you know, say they sort of expel someone who's really seen as a Shibboleth and then there is a bit of an exodus could there be A party which obviously is not going to win government but could be a wrecking operation. I'm not I'm not suggesting it I'm just saying that could you know, is this something that Keir Starmer should fear?

Dawn Butler 57:04

I'm not sure it will suit I think in regards to the ultimate goal which is getting into government and I think we should kind of ensure that that is part of our focus but I mean it does, it does seem as though you know, they will need to be some prodding Let's say at certain times, of the current leadership and You know that prodding should be welcome. I think that was quite good.

Michael Walker 57:35

James, you know, Corbyn best. What's he going to do next?

James Schneider 57:38

Well, he's definitely not going to set up a splitter wrecker operation I can take out for that, that for certain. I mean, Jeremy is he's campaigning already on the issues that he cares about. He's not getting involved in internal party fights and rowsers, you can see but you know, he's he's very active, especially on international issues and, and on justice issues, and he will be forever.

Michael Walker 58:06

Like, I'm gonna do the final question on you as an insider perspective, this is, I think, lots of people's fears in the next four years. Can you imagine a purge, so either have left wing members or have left wing MPs?

Patrick Maguire 58:21

Oh, it's a very good question. I mean, there are certainly I'm To be fair, I don't think you know, obviously, the the, the the dream of people on You know, the the you might call the hard right of the Labour Party if we're going to invert the, you know, classic Westminster, lexicon. And the dream is that the EHRC report drops on Starmer's desk or, you know, its already dropped on his desk. And for some reason, despite it being a sort of, you know, a statutory body, for some reason, the recommendation is expel Jeremy Corbyn and the whole campaign group. I mean, I don't think anybody in Keir Starmer's operation wants that he thinks it's a good idea. Or, you know, he's expecting that as much as you know, people on the outer rungs of his supporters might think that good idea. That's how you define purge. Obviously, we'll see how see what let's see what the Forde inquiry says ultimately, and what sorts of pretence that can be used for. You know, it's, you know, there'll be people around Keir Starmer, you know, Rachel Reeves has reported in the FT today sort of tenuous line in there about sort of being open to a poor purge of Corbyn supporters, whatever that means. But I think, you know, as far as you know, people, you know, worried MPs in the campaign, we might see it or people around Starmer, who are he think an organised left as an impediment to, to his leadership, right. That's an analysis. I think everybody in the party shares that are well organised left is in impediment to any effort by case Starmer

or the PLP or anybody else to move the party away from the ten pledges? You know their views? Well, if they don't like it, the left will purge themselves as they were. And that's, you know, I know that's a worry of people on the left that left wing members leaving I know that silently or not so silently behind closed doors, some people close this leadership or who supports leadership might say brilliant, if you don't like it, leave You know, I think the the view some people will be well, it's already happening so we don't need to wage this war. That withdrawal is, and the retreat, is already happening.

Michael Walker 1:00:33

Patrick's probably that has provided a more persuasive argument to stay in The Labour Party than I'm James managed, in fact, because the people who really want you to leave are not your friends. I think Patrick, that was quite a motive sort of finish to the conversation. James, Dawn and Patrick, thank you so much for joining me this afternoon. Navara media is going to be back at 8pm for another TWT crossover. This is for a quiz this evening. But finally, I want to say thank you to The World Transformed for putting on this virtual conference. It is a shame not to be there in person I did love the opportunity to to meet the Navara media to discuss our audience and our proper live events proper in real life events at previous conferences, but I think they've kept the spirit alive. And finally, Navarro media The World Transformed both organisations that rely on the support of their donors, their subscribers. And so please do check out both of those websites, go to The World transformed.org you can see what else they're putting on during this conference. Great programme. And yeah, get your wallets up for both. We'll be back at 8pm and thanks against all of my guests. Good night.