

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Europe, Great Britain > Great Britain & Northern Ireland (Europe) > On the Left (UK) > **UK: Aspire Party, Tower Hamlets, Gets Puff from New Left Review Blog, Sidecar.**

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Friday 21 July 2023, by [Tendance Coatesy](#) (Date first published: 11 July 2023).

George Galloway does not get in the news often these days.

Yet the dapper gent in the Fedora has sometimes, not often, or indeed hardly ever, certainly not in recent left publications, been considered a historic figure, of inspirational value.

In a panegyric, [Beyond Labourism](#), to communalist leader Lutfur Rahman, leader of his clique-party [Aspire](#), and Mayor of Tower Hamlets – he presides over their all-male (which the authors mention) and all Bengali background Muslim (which they do not) group of councillors – the former MP appears. Not as a laughing stock or a red-browner, but as a noble figure, part of the glorious past of the area. [1]

On the sovereigntist New Left Review *Sidecar Blog*, Matt Myers and Marini Thorne write,

“.....it is unsurprising that Tower Hamlets has become the springboard for the most serious challenge to the Westminster consensus. This small corner of East London has long incubated political dissent – a pattern that predates the arrival of the Bengali community. Its history of recalcitrance includes George Lansbury’s Poplarist welfare-rights rebellion in the 1920s, the momentous Cable Street anti-fascist demonstration in the 1930s, Phil Piratin’s victory as one of the handful of Communist MPs in Limehouse and Bow in the 1940s, the uprising sparked by the racist murder of textile worker Altab Ali and the squatters’ movement in the 1970s, and *George Galloway’s victory on an anti-war ticket in Bethnal Green in the early 2000s.* ”

Marini Thorne ([@MariniThorne](#)) & Matt Myers ([@MattJMyers](#)) on the political experiment in Tower Hamlets:

'A historic tradition of worker militancy, sustained by migratory waves, has created a hostile environment for the moderating tendencies of Labourism.' <https://t.co/KIThKLwLKp>

— New Left Review (@NewLeftReview) [July 6, 2023](#)

The puff mentions some of Tower Hamlet’s measures, only possible for Councils with substantial independent reserves, such as “Aspire has rolled out bursaries for university students and an Education Maintenance Allowance for 16-18 year olds. ” In fact the Council’s core policies below, while very welcome, are followed by many Labour municipalities in England. There is nothing distinctive about them whatsoever. Our Council Tax here, Labour run Ipswich, has been frozen to begin with, Council Tax reductions to those in need on benefits, have existed for decades, and the food help runs with help, warms hubs (libraries) have been created across the whole of Suffolk,

those on Pension credit and other types of benefit get special help for the cost of living crisis – from the (Tory run) County Council,

It's been a year since [@AspireParty](#) was elected.

Although it's unfortunate we need a role to tackle an ongoing crisis, I am proud of the work we've done and the very real impact we've had on helping our residents navigate this difficult time. pic.twitter.com/N3AMiDtb0L

— Saied Ahmed (@CllrSaied) [June 2, 2023](#)

If there is any municipal policy which Galloway is known for (it is about the only one) it is the Workers Party of Britain's campaign against Low Traffic Neighbourhoods in Birmingham Small Heath. It is interesting to note Rahman's parallel war against Low Traffic Schemes, comes in for some praise. "In Tower Hamlets, hostility to 'Low Traffic Neighbourhoods' among Aspire's base – many of whom rely on Uber or logistics companies for their livelihoods – will have to be harmonized with demands for traffic reduction and environmental regeneration." In fact like Birmingham Workers of Britain Aspire voices the demands of small businesses and ignores the majority of local residents, "Tower Hamlets mayor accused of 'culture war' against low-traffic schemes." ([Guardian February 2023](#))).

Tower Hamlets has one of the lowest rates of car ownership in London, with only **15 per cent** of the population owning a car, according to Transport for London (TfL).

The chirpy toffs of Sidecar claim at Labour is dead as a vehicle for any kind of left, citing the recently deceased More Borders Scottish Nationalist Tom Nairn wrote in 1964 – alas forgotten by nearly everybody – on this point.

They conclude:

Witnessing the delivery of Aspire's programme, the Labour left must choose between three potential pathways: bide their time and hope for the best within the party while remaining hamstrung by its new internal culture; deprioritise party work for extra-parliamentary campaigns to shift the balance of power elsewhere; or break free of the Labourist straitjacket altogether and build an alternative formation. Whatever they decide, in East London there are signs that resignation to staid austerian politics does not have to be the order of the day. British socialists will determine their own fate, whether they submit to inglorious inertia or rediscover their capacity for critique.

Aspire has no "formal structure"; it is indeed run by the neighbourhood big men without much democratic input. It is about as likely as Galloway's Workers Party of Britain, now engaged in a full blown red-brown front with known fascists – to fulfil a national or local progressive role on the left. One can note in passing that two well-known figures, both women, associated with Original Briefing, who backed Rahman in the past, have been absent from his camp for some years now.

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P.S.

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<https://tendancecoatesy.wordpress.com/2023/07/11/aspire-party-tower-hamlets-gets-puff-from-new-left-review-blog-sidecar/>

Footnotes

[1] [Aspire](#): “The ideology of the party is self-described as a form of [democratic socialism](#).^[12] It has been criticized for only fielding candidates of [Bangladeshi](#) heritage for the 2022 Tower Hamlets local election, with only three of their candidates being female.^[13]^[14] Shortly after these elections, new allegations over voter intimidation, family voting and impersonating voters were raised by independent observers.”