

Britain: Suella Braverman's speech shows Tory culture wars' election strategy

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Britain's ruling Conservative (Tory) party is holding its annual conference. Commentators have characterized this simply as a forum for future leadership candidates to set out their positions and campaign for support. It is widely expected that the Tories will be severely defeated in the next parliamentary elections due before January 2025 and that current leader and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will then stand down provoking a leadership election. [IVP]

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A sizable portion of the Conservative Party's ever more right wing base will support Home Secretary Suella Braverman's bid for the party's leadership after the next election.

In 1968, right-wing Tory MP Enoch Powell made his famous "rivers of blood" speech, predicting a race war if non-white immigrants came to Britain in large numbers. Home Secretary Suella Braverman's speech at a right-wing US think tank predicted "truly colossal" numbers trying to break into Britain. Powell's 1968 speech led to his ostracism from the political mainstream, including in the parliamentary Conservative Party. By the time Margaret Thatcher became prime minister in 1979, Powell's racist views had won the day in the Conservative Party. Now Suella Braverman wants to go much further and put in question Britain's position in the 1951 convention on refugees.

"Anti-racism grew up in the 1970s in opposition to Powell and the fascist National Front and gave a voice to the lived experiences of many millions of people from multicultural communities and multicultural classrooms too."

In fact, her speech to the American Enterprise Institute aimed to do three things. First to reinforce her position as the main spokesperson of the Tory right; second to position herself to take the leadership of the Tories if they are defeated in the general election; and third to define the anti-immigrant centre of gravity of the Tory platform for the next election.

Braverman aligns with global far right anti-immigrant rhetoric

The different Tory factions are also hammering out a wider “anti-woke” stance for the election. Racism against immigrants comes first, then opposition to climate change action, and if the Tory right has its way, anti-LGBT prejudice as well. In other words, Braverman wants to pull the Conservative Party into line with the likes of Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Marine Le Pen in France, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), and the rabid pro-Trump right of the American Republican Party.

Braverman’s speech, however, highlighted a reality: the number of refugees from climate change, war, racism, and anti-gay oppression is likely to grow. But her dystopian nightmare of millions on the move in the short term is wrong. Millions would like to leave the disasters that the West has inflicted on the Global South, but most cannot afford to move, do not want to risk a dangerous trip, and do not want to leave their families and communities. Only a small minority of those on the move want to come to Britain.

Of course, we should be helping the many thousands of refugees with safe legal routes. European governments want to put all the blame on the gangsters who provide the overcrowded boats on which thousands of refugees have died. But the European governments are themselves mainly responsible for the deaths in the Mediterranean and the Channel.

There should be a Europe-wide agreement for each country to take a proportion of the refugees. Italy and Greece have a point when they complain about having to accept a huge number of refugees, while other European countries just try to keep them out. The insistence that refugees must stay in the first safe country they arrive in is out of date. As each country tries to strengthen its own borders against refugees, the Schengen Agreement guaranteeing free movement within the European Union is being shredded.

The fascist and semi-fascist right in Europe and North America all have a position against trans rights, but most of them are hostile to “LGBT lobbies” as well. Probably this kind of social conservatism will not play so well in Britain, where multiculturalism is deeply entrenched in the form of really multicultural cities, mixed marriages and partnerships, and in a tradition of art and music. Anti-racism grew up in the 1970s in opposition to Powell and the fascist National Front and gave a voice to the lived experiences of many millions of people from multicultural communities and multicultural classrooms too.

Braverman’s speech included an anti-LGBT position that has been widely noted: her claim that many people are seeking asylum solely on the basis of being gay or trans. But this is the result of the acceleration of anti-gay and anti-trans persecution in a swathe of African countries where corrupt rulers play to the gallery of anti-LGBT prejudice fuelled, especially by reactionary Pentecostal Christianity. Being gay is illegal in dozens of African countries, where it can lead to harsh imprisonment or, in the case of four, to the death penalty. LGBT people facing persecution come from a wide range of other countries, including Iran and other countries in the Middle East.

Climate disasters will drive more migration

The climate change disaster in the Global South is going to drive more people to take the highly risky journey to Europe and the United States. It is going to be the central issue of the coming decades. The likes of Donald Trump, Giorgia Meloni, and many other far-right leaders will advance anti-immigrant culture wars, as will the British Tories. Labour leader Keir Starmer and his shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper adapt themselves to anti-immigrant hostility and mainly criticise the

Tories only on the basis of their inefficiency at keeping refugees out, not on the basis of challenging their racist and reactionary anti-immigrant position. The storm of criticism of Suella Braverman's speech shows there is a huge well of potential support for clear pro-immigrant positions from the labour movement and the radical left.

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<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/suella-bravermans-speech-shows-tory-culture-wars-election-strategy/>