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Reading the Crisis episode two: 'The Neoliberal Revolution' with Aditya Chakrabortty & Jeremy Gilbert

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Aasiya Lodhi

Hello, and thank you for joining us. I'm Aasiya Lodhi, a trustee of the Stuart Hall Foundation and a senior lecturer at the University of Westminster. I'm so pleased to welcome you all to the second event of the Stuart Hall Foundation's conversation series, Reading the Crisis, part of our 2024 programme, Catastrophe and Emergence.

The idea behind our programme is to consider how catastrophes signal a crisis of survival, knowledge and power, but also how they herald destruction and renewal, political closures and openings, the demise of old ways of knowing and the emergence of new ways to relate to our ever-changing world.

Against that backdrop, we ask you to join us in this conversation series to think about what kinds of tools and strategies we need for this moment, for some of the many crises that we currently face. From attacks on protest to the defence of confected culture wars, from the deepening of austerity and neoliberalism, our focus today, to the horrors unleashed on Gaza and the slow creep of diversity optics. This, we could argue, again, is a snapshot of our conjuncture, that rich and yet quite knotty term so often used by Stuart Hall.

Reading the Crisis aims to dig into our current predicaments and to springboard off Hall's work, which he offered to us as a critic, writer, theorist and more, to help us think through some of our social, cultural and political formations. In today's conversation we're turning to his 2011 essay, The Neoliberal Revolution, written in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008 and after the rise and fall of New Labour in the United Kingdom. And we'll be hearing from two very dynamic thinkers who've grappled with neoliberalism over a long period of time, its policies, its practices, its strategies and ideologies.

I'll introduce them both shortly, but again, as we said last time, we hope you were able to read this essay, and that you'll share in the conversation and put forward your thoughts. Our speakers will be in dialogue for about 45 minutes and then we'll turn to your questions in the second half, so please submit any questions or comments using the Q&A box at any point and we'll try to get to as many as we can. Automated live captions are available by clicking the CC button in the Zoom bar and there'll also be a video recording of this conversation in due course.

But for now, let's welcome our guests. Aditya Chakrabortty is senior economics commentator for the Guardian, where he writes a regular column and reports from Britain and around the world. His work has won several awards, including the British Journalism Award for Comment Journalist of the Year, the Harold Wincott Prize for Business Journalism, and the British Press Award for Best Broadsheet Columnist. Before joining the Guardian, Aditya worked for the BBC as Economics Producer, and he's now a regular broadcaster on TV, appearing on Newsnight and Question Time.

Jeremy Gilbert is Professor of Cultural and Political Theory at the University of East London. He is the current editor as well of the journal New Formations. He's authored several books, including Twenty-First Century Socialism, and most recently with Alex Williams, Hegemony Now: How Big Tech and Wall Street Won the World. Jem writes regularly in the British press as well as hosting three podcasts, ACFM on Novara Media, Love is the Message and Culture, Power and Politics.

So welcome to you both. Before we get into the nitty gritty of Stuart Hall's essay, I wanted to ask you both for a brief definition of neoliberalism. It seems to me it's a term that we use a lot nowadays, perhaps a term even that's very overused. And yet there's so many different things that can signal and obviously we're going to discuss how Hall defines it very shortly. But what is it in essence, to you, Aditya, if I could start?

Aditya Chakrabortty

Thank you, Aasiya. It's not a term I use very often in my own writing. Because I think, when you use a term like neoliberal, I kind of wonder which aspect of that you want to concentrate on. Is it flexible labour markets and insecurity of workers? Is it the reliance upon private finance to do the work of the public sector, and so on and so forth? In relevance or in association with this essay that we're going to touch upon today by Stuart Hall, I would say that that period that the essay was published from 2008 till 2010, 2012, was a period in which I heard the term neoliberal so many times. I mean, pretty much as soon as the Lehman Brothers bank collapsed, my inbox was full of rather excitable messages from people saying, *oh, neoliberalism is dead, it's all over*.

And then when David Cameron started talking about poverty and how much he liked my colleague, Polly Toynbee, again, people said*, oh, well, they're no longer the same old neoliberal Tories*. And I think one of the excellent things about Stuart Hall's intervention at that time was he showed you that actually there was more continuity than you might think. But as a term, it's not one I go in for. I'd much rather talk, you know, look at particular aspects of it.

Aasiya Lodhi

Okay, thank you. That's very helpful. Jem, have you got any definitions that you might want to add? I note, for example, that you've edited a collection of essays called Neoliberal Culture. So there's another term being yoked to it. Is that an area that you think perhaps gets overlooked when we talk about neoliberalism?

Jeremy Gilbert

Well certainly, neoliberalism, I would say, has promoted a certain set of cultural norms, which are basically the idea that everybody comes into the world alone and is an individual who must compete with other individuals for resources throughout their lives. And that ties into the idea of what a neoliberal government, ought to do for their citizens, which is that they ought to basically prepare them to compete in this ruthless labour market. And I think that's one of the definitions of neoliberalism for me, or that's part of it. Neoliberalism is a name we give to a broad collection of policies which governments have been implementing around the world since the 1970s, which focus on privatisation of public services, restrictions of labour organising, a general redistribution of assets from the the poor to the rich, and the general encouragement of the idea that the best way to be a successful human being is to be a competitive entrepreneur competing with others.

And I think you do need a term like neoliberalism, because otherwise you don't have a name for the sense in which there's a sort of family resemblance between what lots and lots of different governments have done, which incorporates all of those elements. So I think it's useful. I do remember the time when this was published, it's true, suddenly everybody was talking about it a lot, but I'd say also, my own experience was it was quite a struggle to get people to recognise the term in British politics. And it wasn't really until the late '90s that activists mostly engaged with Global South politics, especially in Latin America, that started to talk about neoliberalism, rather than say, talking about Thatcherism or something like that. And part of the point of it was to recognise the ways in which there was this sort of global project implemented by organisations like the

International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation, to basically force every country to some extent, to pursue a common sort of programme.

But I think, of course, you know, like any term, the problem is, you know, if you just use it as a sort of catch all term for everything that's bad, or if you use it as a term specifically just to mean capitalism, then it starts to lose its explanatory power. And I think that's the problem, the problem with the way it sometimes gets used if people talk about neoliberalism. There are lots of things that we can attribute to neoliberalism, which have been pretty consistent throughout the history of capitalism for the past few hundred years. And that's the question, of course, which Stuart is always inviting us to reflect on, like, well, what's changing and what's staying the same? So it's always a term that provokes as well as being useful sometimes.

Aasiya Lodhi

Okay, that's really helpful. Lots of sort of historical markers there as well, in what you just said, '70s, '90s. But let's come back to the actual essay then, 2011, which is not that long ago, in some ways. I did mention a couple of sort of key things that were happening, a decade of Labour rule, of course the financial crisis, I mean, in what ways did they underpin the provocation, if you like, that Hall is putting forward about neoliberalism? And how are they entangled with other things happening at that time? Could I ask you, Aditya, first?

Aditya Chakrabortty

So it's a really interesting time in British politics, in that you've come to the end of an era of one party rule, and that party looks exhausted. And the guy who's prime minister is the scapegoat for a lot of the ills of the entire regime, not necessarily his own. Does any of this sound familiar or relevant today? You tell me. But the other thing is that you've just gone through this massive seismic thing, which is the banks have collapsed. And the only way that the bank system is carrying on, and it's true, years later, even at the point that Stuart Hall's writing, even arguably until COVID times, the only way the bank system and the economy is ticking along is by central banks doing very, very odd things. Holding rates down to zero, making sure that banks had ready financing. And all of this throws up a pretty serious challenge to the idea that the economy basically is running along free market principles. And free markets do their thing. And that if you, the individual, and it is always an individual, Jeremy's completely right, if you, the individual, can't keep up with that, then that's your fault. That's on you. In that period from 2008 to 2010 in particular, you see how that is not true. You see that actually politics is always

there, keeping the economics on track in some deformed version. That's it, that's the kind of broad economic background.

The high politics are also really interesting because with the passing of Gordon Brown in 2010, as he moves out of Number 10 and David Cameron and George Osborne move in, there is an attempt made by those two, by their advisor Steve Hilton, he of the bare feet and t-shirts, that they're going to be different, right? They're going to hug hoodies, they're going to go up and ride with huskies, they're a different kind of conservative proposition. And they're not Thatcher, right? So I think that Cameron very early in his reign as leader of the Tory Party says, *well actually there is such a thing as society, it's just not the same thing as the state*. And that was a kind of attempt to show that he'd moved on from Thatcherism, who famously had said there's no such thing as society.

As I say, Cameron in particular did a whole series of quite smart, tactical moves in which he turned up and did the Guardian's Hugo Young lecture, he made clear that he was a huge fan of Polly Toynbee, which outraged Polly Toynbee, and they were very keen on pretending that there was some kind of distance. Their favourite philosopher was not Hayek, let alone Schumpeter, it was Burke and they quoted one phrase of his in particular, *'little platoons'*, which was the idea that society could fill in for where the state was retreating and that was a big kind of rhetorical move they were making as they set about making the spending cuts and kind of defined the decade we've just gone through. And one of the things that is really interesting about this essay, published in 2011, is Stuart Hall is right on the insignificance of these spending cuts and how they are actually helping the Tories perpetuate aspects of the old Thatcherite regime, aspects of what he calls neoliberalism, so yes you get more privatisation. I think early on in that period, George Osborne even tried to privatise the forests until that was beaten back. They sold off the Royal Mail with consequences that we are seeing today as it gets sold on to a Czech billionaire.

But what was so dismaying, distressing as someone who works in the media was seeing a number of people in the media, in my industry and in politics, who watched kind of open-mouthed in amazement and a degree of credulity which baffled me. You know they really took all of this in trust*: well this is all very interesting, well they're not the same old Tories, are they? Look at David Cameron, he wears Converse trainers*. This apparently was very significant, in fact I remember an entire Economist piece which looked at the old Etonian David Cameron and made clear how different he was from the Etonians of old because he wore Converse trainers. The level of triviality to which some of the commentary stooped, even in very serious, supposedly serious publications was something to behold.

The other great thing that I remember from the early 2010s I think most people on this call will remember it too, is that bloody annoying poster, Keep Calm and Carry On, that so many people had, right? I mean honestly, if there was one thing guaranteed to get on

my wick in that period it was that poster, and you look at it, *and oh things might be tough now after the bank crisis which you had nothing to do with, and during the spending cuts which are all going to be on you, but keep calm and carry on*! And this kind of faux-cheeriness that we were being implored to project in the run-up to the London Olympics, I mean it just stuck in my craw.

Aasiya Lodhi

Thanks. Do you want to come in, Jeremy? Because I think there's a lot of key sort of identifiers there of the British iteration at that point of neoliberalism, right? The harking back to British liberalism, so Burke and then the sort of media swirl around it as well as the Keep Calm, Carry On rebranding. How can we see elements of that that Hall is touching on and what's happened in that time, in this decade and a half really, in its sort of British characteristics do you think?

Jeremy Gilbert

Yeah, sure. Well I think we certainly can, up to about 2015, which is when I think the settlement sort of does start to fall apart, I think Aditya has sort of described the scene as I recall it too perfectly to add much to it, but I was writing about the Keep Calm and Carry On poster at the time and I think it's interesting to think about who all that was for, to some extent. Who was this performance of Cameron's liberalism for? Who is the twee, faux-cheeriness for? Who is it supposed to be persuading? Essentially I can say it was supposed to be persuading the same people who were offered significant material inducements for going along with the whole project and that was middle class homeowners who were about to see interest rates go through the floor and stay there for 10 years. And that's the constituency who the Tories judged they had to win back from Blair and keep if they were going to make the stay in power. And that was who all that performance was in aid of and it was a kind of distraction from the fact that younger people and that cohort would keep getting a bit older and a bit older and poorer people and people in the post-industrial regions had not been having a great time already even during the New Labour years in many cases and were about to have a much worse time.

So I think all that's a useful supplement to what Stuart mainly focuses on in this particular essay which is actually the question of who they're going to attack and who they are attacking, and he's completely right, he picks out the constituencies, people who are dependent in any way on the public sector, local government etc., people in the post-industrial regions, he picks out these constituencies and he's quite right about identifying the constituencies who are going to be lost from the Cameronite coalition over the next few years. It's also worth thinking, I think, about what was happening to

Labour, what it was that got defeated at that moment because the thing that got defeated at that moment, as much as anything else, was the extremely half-hearted attempt by Gordon Brown actually to shift Labour in something like a social democratic direction and that had, to some extent, the promise of that happening that had been crucial to the New Labour project from the beginning that the parliamentary Labour Party which was still much less right-wing than it became after 2010, and the trade union leaderships, they were all kept on board with this perpetual promise that eventually Gordon would be handed the keys and he would start doing social democracy again. That's what happened, eventually he was handed the keys and then there's a massive crisis and indeed, Aditya's already raised the question and it's the question kind of implied by Stuart's essay: well what does the crisis mean? And just as Aditya said, lots of people were saying, *well, this is the end of neoliberalism*, Stuart's whole point is that it clearly wasn't, and I think to some extent the strongest indicator of the fact that neoliberal hegemony was not over at that point was the policy regime that was implemented first by Brown and then by Cameron etc., that all of the material interests, in whose interest neoliberalism had been prosecuted - finance, capital, property developers, you know, the affluent third of the population - all those people didn't suffer at all. None of those people had to make any kind of sacrifices, in fact all the constituencies I've just mentioned got richer over the next five to ten years. I think Stuart's essay really does help to illuminate all that.

I think Aditya's quite right, I think also the phenomenon that Aditya was just pointing to, the fact that so many people pretended to be, claimed to be taken in by it, is an indicator of that as well. That at the point when Stuart is writing this, it's quite clear that neoliberal hegemony really hasn't failed yet because Gordon Brown's attempt to move away from it gets severely, drastically punished by the whole media electoral system. It's really forgotten these days what a terrible election result Brown got in 2010. It was a terrible result for Labour. In vote share and in terms of seats loss, it wasn't, it wasn't drastically different from the 2019 result that we're constantly told is Labour's worst result since the 1930s. It was a terrible, in terms of vote share, I think it was worse.

Aditya Chakrabortty

Yes, it was worse. Yeah.

Jeremy Gilbert

So it was a terrible - it's a catastrophic result. And it really did indicate the extent to which New Labour just had not done what even their most right-wing apologists had promised they were going to do in 1997, which was eventually rebuild a consensus for

social democracy. And yeah, I think Stuart's essay here is illuminating all that really helpfully.

Aasiya Lodhi

I mean, I think we're probably just going to have to get stuck into the current election, because I think all roads lead to this point. I mean, we have avoided talking about it so far. And I was going to ask you about the relevance of Hall's essay now, to the specifics of now. But yes, given that, you know, by this time, or, you know, in a week and a half, we're very likely to have the Labour Party returning to power. In what sense is this new Labour government likely to be a government of neoliberalism? If I just ask that in a very bold way, Aditya? Fancy having to go?

Aditya Chakrabortty

I'll have a punt and Jeremy will say something more intelligent in a moment. I have to thank you and the Stuart Hall Foundation because for the first time since Boris Johnson, this event prompted me to go back through some of Stuart Hall's essays. So I remember after 2019, Boris Johnson's triumph, I did look through Thatcherism and the Hard Road to Renewal. And then more recently, I haven't looked at Hall. For this event, I looked at the Neoliberal Revolution, the essay that we're touching on today. But I also looked at two essays that he wrote about that sort of 10-year period previous. So there's the Great Moving Right Show, which he wrote about Thatcher. And then there's the Great Moving Nowhere Show, which he wrote in that special issue, Marxism Today, if I've got this right, when they put out that special issue with Blair on the cover. And I think he had something like ‘wrong’-

Jeremy Gilbert

‘Wrong’, just ‘wrong’.

Aditya Chakrabortty

Yeah, that was it. So I went and had a look at those. And I would say looking at what Hall writes about Blair seems to me to be quite unfair, but the kind of criticisms he makes are very useful to bear in mind now. So he says about Blair, for instance, in that 1998-99 essay, he says, Thatcher created her subjects. She created the Essex man and that sense of the working class family that's able to buy their own council flat or council house. And they see a kind of opportunity to themselves within the Thatcherite society

and also the people who are able to participate in the Big Bang. People have got these big brick phones that they're shouting into. There's this whole consumer society that she somehow managed to mould for her own advantage electorally. And this obviously sits alongside Kelvin MacKenzie and what he's up to as editor the Sun and so on. And he says, Blair hasn't done that. Blair hasn't done that. And I think rhetorically, that's true. Blair never made a pitch in the same way. They talked about Mondeo man. And Blair certainly went off to Essex quite a few times. I mean, I think lead leaders of both the main parties, whenever they're on the make, they go to South Essex to try and touch up a voter and say, oh, look, they're on my side so I've tapped into England in some way.

But what he misses out on with Blair and Brown is through their use of tax revenues and spending, they did create an electorate that did thank them for putting them where they were. I don't really mean things like Sure Start centres and all the stuff that gets old New Labour people lachrymose on social media. I really mean the kind of creation of public service employment in areas which had basically been completely levelled by the destruction of manufacturing, and Brown's half-hearted compromise is to give those areas administrative parts of the central state to run: HMRC, DVLA, TV licensing, so on and so forth. And you see in the statistics, you see the growth of this kind of quasi-public sector under Blair and Brown, which actually Cameron and Osborne, when they take power, they decide they're going to attack and they make it about ideology. Really, it's about trying to stamp down on New Labour voters as much as anything else. So I think Stuart Hall has got that wrong when he says Blair and Brown didn't create their own voters. To some extent they did. They did. And it was one of Cameron's first and crowning achievements was that he immediately set about slashing into the state, slashing into public service employees and therefore reducing the people who might be tempted to go out and vote Labour, right? They're disconnected now from the economy and from politics.

However, sorry, this is taking a while for me to get round to this, that critique, *'he does not create his own voters'*, you can apply it in spades to what's happened with Keir Starmer in the run up to this election, right? There has been no argument had, no argument has been had with the electorate about what needs to happen come July the fifth.

You heard it this morning when the IFS come out and they say we've done all the analysis of manifestos and no one's fessing up to exactly what the landscape looks like in terms of tax and spend. That's a kind of technocratic version of it. But there's also just an attempt to shy away from any attempt to argue for any politics that will make any possible voter feel at all uncomfortable. They want as big a tent as possible. And you can see the electoral value of that, in getting them a big majority on July the fourth. You can also see the complete pitfall that they run into from July the fifth onwards because they will need to make decisions and they will need to alienate some of those people,

many of those people who turned out to vote for them. So in terms of electoral politics, perhaps it's a genius move. In terms of real politics, really quite destructive I think.

The other thing that does strike me about Keir Starmer's team is in many cases, these are the children of Blair. So these are people who came into the Labour Party in his wake. I'm thinking about people like Rachel Reeves, Angela Rayner. By age, these people who would only dimly remember the New Labour years, right? Most of their working years were spent under the Cameron and Osborne period that Stuart Hall was writing about in that essay. So the Blair inheritance isn't something that they're used to arguing with. It's just something that's been handed over to them. This is what it was. And there's a huge amount, it's not just in politics, more broadly, there's a huge amount of nostalgia for the '90s and for Blair and for New Labour and Britpop even now. Britpop is another thing I don't want to talk about because I will start to feel quite ill. But there is a nostalgia by people who've forgotten what that period was like, really, or think that the only real disruption to it was the Iraq War, even though actually there was lots and lots of other stuff, which meant that the Labour effectively destroyed itself in government.

And you can see, perhaps, it's too early to make this call, but I can certainly see some of the dangers to Keir Starmer's government. If you're not going to have an argument, if you're not going to have ideas, if you're not going to put forward things, and if all you're going to say is, whatever you think we are, that's what we are for now, then you're going to come into some really sticky situations really quite early on in your term in office.

And I do wonder what Stuart Hall would have written about this lot, because to me it's not about neoliberalism anymore. I don't think there's an ideological or even a kind of half-hearted sense that some of these things are right and we need to keep on with them. It's just a lack of any other ideas about what you would do. *We don't want to do politics because that might lose us some voters. We don't really want to think too hard about different ways of structuring the state because that's all very hard, and didn't the previous Labour lot try to do that and then they crashed and burned?* And so all you're left with is kind of a bit of, yeah, a bit of reliance on the private sector to do bits of infrastructure, and also, frankly, a bit of reliance upon some of Corbynism, you know, rail renationalisation, electricity decarbonisation, a new deal for workers. There are three big offers to people who are progressive or genuinely left-wing who might turn out to vote for them. They're all from Corbyn. So it looks like a very broken project already going into office. I'll be very interested to hear what Jem makes of it.

Aasiya Lodhi

Can you comment on that, Jem? Because I mean, just to take forward what Aditya is saying, it's not really even neoliberalism because they haven't put in the vision and the time and the strategy to deliver it and to envision it. If, yeah, if you agree with him?

Jeremy Gilbert

Well, I do agree it's not neoliberalism anymore. I broadly agree with what Aditya is saying, but I would say what's confusing analytically in a way that's not totally different from the way in which New Labour was confusing analytically, even to people like Stuart and people around Marxism Today for quite a long time, I think, is that it's not neoliberalism anymore, but it is going to represent basically the same set of interests. It's still going to basically represent, it's going to be representing the interests of developers, finance, capital, more than anything else. It will be a project which will try, for in exactly the ways Aditya has just laid out, it will try to hold together an electoral coalition by meeting some demands for some return to public ownership for some turn away from neoliberalism. And there's policy areas like the childcare policy, which are a very explicit break with the neoliberal model. They're just going to fund nursery places in schools, which is the thing that under New Labour was unthinkable. You couldn't possibly do that. You have to have this mad voucher system where nurseries all competed with each other, but there were never enough places to go with.

So I think it is going to be not neoliberal anymore, but it's still going to be quite right-wing, quite capitalistic, quite anti-democratic. And I think it's largely true, like Aditya is saying, that it's even more reactive than New Labour. There was, as Aditya was saying, there were these debates going on in circles that people like Stuart were part of in the late '90s. And I was a very, very young, very junior participant in those networks at the time. And people like Stuart and Chantal Mouffe were saying, *well, they basically don't have a project, it's purely reactive, it's just a version of Thatcherism*. And I was arguing at the time, I thought that was a mistake, and I thought it was a different kind of neoliberalism that was centrist, had a different approach to social policy, a different electoral base but it was going to continue to advance the neoliberal project, which, of course, by the time Stuart's writing the essay we're talking about today, that's entirely his view of the situation as it was lots of people's. I mean, it's not like I was particularly clever to see that emerging in that way. Partly a lot of that rhetoric about them not having a project from people like Stuart and Chantal had to do with how angry they still were, because they had shared intellectual networks with people like Blair back in the late '80s and were very, very angry still, really, at the extent to which they had moved away from where they had hoped things might be going.

But coming back to this question of the political character of the Starmer government, I mean, the other thing to say about it is the political character of the Starmer government and the Starmer project is, of course, partly informed by the fact that it's largely being shaped by a different tradition within the Labour Party to New Labour. New Labour was really a project of people who had come out of the soft left of the Labour Party, many of whom had roots in the Communist Party and what have you. And in some

cases had really embraced a kind of neoliberalism like quite, they wouldn't admit in those terms that's what they were doing, but it was quite explicit. And some of the sort of sociology and theory they were reading was more or less, I would say, weakly neoliberal in its approach. But they had an approach, they had an idea about what was happening to the country sociologically. They had an idea about what kind of a country you needed to build to compete in the global economy.

The trouble with the Starmer government is they come out of a different tradition, what is sometimes referred to as the old right of the Labour Party, which really has much older roots than the Blairite tradition, but which, as I said in a podcast interview recently, has not been in charge of the Labour Party since the '70s, because they managed to crash everything then and historically was dependent upon a kind of coalition of interests that included the right-wing trade union bureaucracies and manufacturers. I think the manufacturers are all gone now and the trade union bureaucracies are actually much less right-wing than they were then, or even when they were in the early days of New Labour. So they're really going to have a problem like assembling an equivalent coalition to put forward a project. I mean, basically what they've got now is an economic strategy which would work if you still had a manufacturing sector in this country. But the fact is we don't even really have one. And to get one, everybody's saying, even quite right-wing economists, as Aditya said, are saying you're going to have to engage in levels of investment far in excess of anything they're currently proposing.

So it's really not clear. And all that is a result of the fact that, as Aditya has indicated, even more than was the case with New Labour. There really isn't a sort of political sociology underlying what they're doing. All there is is an understanding of exactly which groups of swing voters you have to target in marginal constituencies to win a parliamentary majority. And they're very good at that. That's why it looks like they're going to get the biggest parliamentary majority in modern history on the back of probably a smaller vote share than Corbyn got in 2017, because they're absolutely brilliant at targeting literally the few thousand voters in a few dozen marginal constituencies that they need to win.

But that is being done at the expense of any kind of a notion of *what kind of a country actually is this today? What are the jobs people are doing? What are the jobs they might do in the future? How do we make that happen? How do we how do we engineer that?* And for all the reasons that Aditya's laid out, I think it's very unlikely to be successful. But I also think nobody really knows what they're going to do, because I don't think anyone, I mean, it's really striking that no one really is taking seriously the claims that they're going to do exactly what they say they're going to do now. Whether it's worse, whether it's better, it's quite clear that nobody really knows what the programmatic

project is going to be. But yeah, I think I agree with Aditya when we say it's not- I think it isn't neoliberal anymore.

And that's partly a symptom of the fact that the broader external forces to which British governments and especially Labour governments have always been subject have gone in a different direction. You know, the IMF no longer trains its economists to be neoliberal as they declared about eight, nine years ago: *neoliberalism is over now. That's an old thing. We're doing other stuff.* The American federal government under Biden is, again, is pursuing a kind of corporatism. It's not neoliberal anymore. They have sort of broken with some of the neoliberal norms, which was still informing economic policy all through the Biden administration. So for all those reasons, it's not really neoliberal anymore. But that doesn't mean it's necessarily going to be better. It might well be worse.

Aditya Chakrabortty

Aasiya, can I take on one of the points Jeremy's just made? I thought that your reference to manufacturing and Labour right, Jeremy, was really spot on. One of the things that does strike me about Starmer and Reeves in their economics, but also in their terms of references, is they have a certain amount of nostalgia for a very old-fashioned idea of working class. So the Starmer and the toolmaker thing. It may have come to attention, some of the people in this call, that Keir Starmer's father was once a toolmaker.

Jeremy Gilbert

I believe he was a toolmaker, Keir Starmer's father.

Aditya Chakrabortty

But there was also in, around the time, in the manifesto, there was references to coal miners. But also in their economics. Rachel Reeves talks about *securonomics*, which is an attempt to copy some of what Joe Biden's done. Except there's one massive problem with that in Britain, which is America still has a manufacturing base. It still has companies which sit right at the centre of the supply chain and they can commission stuff. We are no longer that kind of economy. Our manufacturing base blew out finally in the '80s and early '90s after long period of decline. And we've moved within the period of my own working life from being a manufacturing economy to being a branch plant economy with most of our stuff owned from abroad. So now being a warehouse economy post-Brexit where you see them on the landscape as you drive around the motorways, right? This giant warehouse is full of things stockpiled for when customers

want them, whether it's Amazon Prime or Ocado, whatever, you just see these giant warehouses everywhere.

So our attempt to rebuild an economy through manufacturing is for the birds. I cannot see it happening. I cannot see it happening. And yet it's interesting to me that that's the one thing that they have hit upon. If you remember, just to return to the time in which Stuart Hall's writing the Neoliberal Revolution, the other thing that happened in 2011-2012 was George Osborne started talking about the *'march of the makers'*, which led to the *'Northern Powerhouse'*, which led to *'levelling up'* under Boris Johnson and the destruction of the Red Wall under Boris Johnson. So there's a kind of electoral move going on as well. But there's also some attempt to put policy on them.

The thing that does strike me about all of this is it's happening without any kind of argument being put forward. Boris Johnson famously in the 2019 election, rather than face reporters, would go and hide in the fridge. And when he was confronted with a photo and a phone by a reporter, he took the phone and put it in his pocket. That's a very different style of politics to either Thatcher or Blair. Blair went on and on and on and on about having an argument with his party. That was what he kept doing. He also had within his party, Diane Abbott, Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, they were all there. They talked about sealing the tomb on them, but they had them. Keir Starmer is not having an argument with his party. His bureaucrats are attempting instead to use bureaucratic procedure to shove most of the people of dissent out of the party. And they've been pretty successful in doing that from Faiza Shaheen to Jamie Driscoll and all the people who wanted to stand as Labour candidates and got nobbled basically through the NEC.

So there is something, to return to another word that Jeremy threw out, there's something profoundly anti-democratic about this which, again, given what Hall always talked about in terms of the importance of democracy, I think he would have had a very interesting line in, but I think we should all be very attentive to, because this kind of anti-democratic politics then leaves a space - and I notice in the Q&As people are talking about Farage and Le Pen - what do Farage and Le Pen do? They pretend they are the democrats in this anti-democratic politics, *they're the ones who say the things that you think but you're not allowed to voice anymore, they're the ones who actually look and sound like you*. They don't look and sound like the party apparatchiks for the two main parties. That's the real danger, this kind of anti-democratic, non-argumentative, completely devoid of ideas politics that we've seen on Labour, is it then leaves a huge space, not for Rishi Sunak and whoever comes after, but for Nigel Farage. And people worse than Farage, actually, difficult though that may be to believe, there are worse than Farage. But there are, and they will move into this space. We now have an apparatus behind Farage - GB News, Talk TV, the channels on YouTube, social media, there's an awful lot of stuff which can keep that going, right. So Farageism is a real danger to our

politics and it grows in threat in part because of what Keir Starmer's team, the way they've prosecuted their politics.

Aasiya Lodhi

Can I just come back to that question that you referred to there, I just wanted to widen out a little bit as well to the recent election results in Europe which I think are also being referenced here, the Le Pens and so forth. I mean in that sense could we also say that neoliberalism is now giving way to a return of authoritarianism or a type of sort of new forms of authoritarianism? I don't know, Jem if you want to come in on this?

Jeremy Gilbert

Yeah, sure. Yeah, it is. I mean I would say, and this is where really, I think the legacy of Stuart and that whole generation of New Left thinkers to whom he belonged, and the one before him, really, that included people like Raymond Williams is so important. Because frankly, this is something they saw coming, going back to the early '60s. The argument being made by Raymond Williams in the Long Revolution in the early '60s, and other people at the same time, was you can only go so far with this model of liberal representative democracy. In a complex society, you're going to need more participatory, more meaningful forms of democracy, or else the whole thing is going to fall apart. And essentially what happens, I remember Stuart saying this several times in different talks, what happens by the '70s is the scale of democratic demands from various constituencies, from workers, from women, from people of colour, from young people, gets to the point where those democratic demands, those demands for an advance in democracy cannot be met without fundamentally threatening the profitability of capitalism. And the adoption of the neoliberal programme is a reaction to that.

This thing I didn't really say earlier, but one of the confusions you often get in the definition of neoliberalism is that there's a whole tradition of scholarship now in neoliberalism, which is a sort of history of ideas, which is interested in the way in which neoliberal philosophy and theory can be traced back to Hayek in the 1930s, and then Keith Joseph and Thatcher are reading Hayek. And then there's a more sort of materialist history, which I think would include people like David Harvey and would include people like Stuart really, which is more interested in the moment when those ideas actually get taken up, decades later, and they get taken up because they're useful as part of this project of beating down these democratic demands, but also of offering people something in return. *Okay, you're not going to get any more democracy because that would lead to communism, but we'll let you have much more personal freedom in your*

private lives. We'll let you have fantastic levels of private consumption that your parents and grandparents could never have dreamed of. Huge cheap TVs, foreign holidays. You can have all that stuff, but you're not getting any more democracy. And all that lasts, it lasts until this moment. It lasts until the financial crisis. And then in the immediate, at the time when Stuart is writing this essay, in the immediate wake of the financial crisis, it's clear that that project has been so successful that no alternative political solution can really emerge.

But I would say by about 2015, you're getting to the point where too many people can no longer be offered the cheap holidays and the cheap housing and the big TVs. And you get this massive push, both from the left and the right, really against the professional political class which had come into its modern form in the 1980s and '90s, which was represented by people like Blair, both of the Clintons and Obama, which secured its legitimacy with this kind of combination of slow social liberalisation, a kind of general liberalisation of the culture, the expansion of the consumer economy, etc. But also through a progressive weakening of democratic institutions, a weakening of collective institutions, a weakening of the labour movement, which the Labour government did nothing at all to strengthen during its entire period in office. And almost inevitably and predictably, as had been predicted by Stuart many times, the reaction against that - it's what liberal commentators call populism, but I think populism is not a good term for it, really. It's a whole range of responses which are all trying to make some kind of democratic demands. They're trying to make some kind of demand that their interests be represented in the public sphere rather than just having society administered on their behalf, or not on their behalf, by this corporate managerial elite.

And the situation Aditya was describing in Britain and in the Labour Party right now clearly represents a new stage, at least in Britain, of the absolute rejection of any kind of pretence of democratic norms by this professional political class. But their insistence on their right to hold office, irrespective of whether they have a mandate or a project. But we've already seen that in other countries. I mean, Macronism is clearly a manifestation of that politics.

The extreme example in Europe is Italy, which has literally had governments appointed for it by the European Union at least once or twice in the past few years, all because Italy had to be disciplined in the service of Eurozone neoliberalism. And it's absolutely predictable. It's entirely predictable. And it would follow historical trends going back over a hundred years, if once you have violently suppressed a leftist democratic project, which is essentially what happened with the crushing of Corbynism, then the response to that is people looking elsewhere for something that looks like and feels like a democratic project.

Because as authoritarian and illiberal as something like Farageism will be in practice, and as anti-democratic as I think it would be in practice, the desires which it expresses

are people's desire to feel like someone in government is someone who looks like them and talks like them, and who isn't just a member of this international corporate elite, which Starmer absolutely embodies. So I think this is, yeah, I think it's absolutely right and, you know, it's an old saying from the '60s, there are moments in history when the choice is between socialism or barbarism. And the project of that liberal technocracy is always to try to maintain a situation whereby the electorate perceives that the choice is either them or the barbarism of the far-right. You know, this is what the French political class are brilliant at. But it's also what's happening here. I mean, it's what's been happening here since the days of New Labour, when the choice was either Blair or Michael Howard with his extremely right-wing authoritarian position.

So, yeah, I think there is absolutely, absolutely across Europe, we are seeing that where the left is not able, it's not that just the left isn't able to secure a social majority, it's also that the kind of liberal centrists and the social groups they represent, the sort of professional classes really, especially in the private sector, are just completely unwilling to accept that we are in a historical moment when some kind of progressive project is the only alternative to authoritarianism. When they're just unwilling to accept that, which they haven't been willing to accept in France, for example, and they've been quite unwilling to accept here, which is why so many of Aditya's colleagues at the Guardian were so hostile to Corbynism, for example, then the inevitable result sooner or later is some kind of fascism.

I mean, that is exactly what happened in the '20s and '30s. It's not like we haven't been here before. That's exactly what happened. The liberals in Germany, you know, made quite explicit, you know, they would rather anything than allow the communists and socialists to form part of a government over a sustained period. And in the end, you got fascism. So I'm afraid, yeah, Aditya's absolutely right, that is where things are going to go across Europe if we can't form a political coalition that includes enough of the liberal blocs, but also sees that liberal bloc accepting that they have to make some concessions to the working class and to progressive agendas.

Aasiya Lodhi

Okay, I'm going to come back, there's a few questions that are linked to all these things, and I think moving towards a question which is that how can we gather together, therefore, in order to challenge and to resist and to focus on our collective well-being and also the sort of hybridity of ideologies? But I wanted to ask you this question from Susanna to Aditya, which is that this essay is interesting on the importance of regulation and mediating between government and private sector, but it doesn't say much about different kinds of businesses and how much that has changed in the last thirteen years. For example, did anyone predict private equities expansion and move into public

services? So in that sense, that also combines with an earlier question, which is saying, what did he, if anything, did he get wrong in this essay, or did he not foresee enough in this essay?

Aditya Chakrabortty

Yeah, I think that, so Susanna's question on regulators and business and then Chris Roberts asked a question which I saw was related, which *is what was missing from his essay?* And I think they're really interesting questions. To my mind, there are two really big things that kind of, not necessarily got wrong, but there are missing. One is the economics. Around the time of the great banking crash, analysis showed that actually for a substantial chunk of British workers, let's say the lower third of British workers, their wages had stopped growing at some point in 2003 and 4. So for five years or so prior to Lehman Brothers coming along and falling over, actually, the UK economy stopped working for about a third of the workforce. That's before you start thinking about the kind of jobs that people have moved to instead of the old manufacturing jobs that they used to have in their communities.

The classic examples of, you know, you no longer work in the factory, you work in a call centre. Well, obviously, the wages aren't going to be as good but worse than that, from the early 2000s onwards, from Blair onwards, the wages are starting to stagnate quite seriously. This leads me on to kind of a really big thing that's missing from Stuart's essay which is simply the economics of neoliberalism are no longer working, right? The system is no longer able to deliver on its promises. It's not just that the state has to get involved big time to save the banking sector, it's also that it's just not doing what it said it would, right? The old promise, we all remember this, from Thatcher and Norman Tebbit and Lawson, *you get on your bike, you look for work, you buy your own home, you get into the share-owning democracy*, all of this stuff in Britain is falling apart. Work no longer pays in Britain, this is something that I think is now accepted by both the main parties, but it was evident from the early 2010s, evident in that period in which Stuart's writing, so economically the system is no longer able to sustain itself. It is only going to breed discontent. How that gets expressed is a different question.

That brings me on to the second thing that I think is missing from this essay. This essay is 2011. Now the London riots are 2011 as well, and this is also the period in which you start to get a lot of unrest among students over nine thousand-pound fees in that period as well, right? So there clearly are, and there's UK Uncut as well, there's all kinds of small forces which are starting to emerge which are challenging the system. And I don't think Stuart in this essay is really attentive enough to those. Interestingly, to Susanna's point about private equity, the other thing that's happening in the early 2010s is private equity becomes a really big public thing. Damon Buffini, who's one of the great private

equity barons of our time, is hauled up in front of Parliament around this time, I think end of the New Labour period, and asked to account for himself. There is a fair amount of restiveness about this, right, so there's all kinds of things which you could look and say *hang on, are there challenges to this order that's coming along?* There's challenges in material terms because it can no longer pay people effectively enough and there's challenges in political terms.

Brings me on to kind of a question that's been in my head partly because of the questions in some of the Q&A and partly because of what Jeremy just said, I'm sure a lot of people on this call have noticed there's been a fair amount of kind of retrospective writing about the left over the 2010s. There was a book by Anton Jäger and a co-author about the left in 2010s across Europe, there was my colleague Andy Beckett's book on the Searchers, which I think is excellent, about what happened inside Labour, and yet, we get past COVID and clearly the intellectual energy, the dynamism, the money is all going into the far-right now. Not just here but across Europe. And these are parties and politicians who bolster each other, so Meloni helps Le Pen, Le Pen is useful to Farage, and they all look across the water to Trump, right? So there is a new formation and it is one of the kind of the great, the great puzzles of this period in that the 2010s began with this great blaze of left-wing energy, some of it misplaced as it always would be, but a lot of it making really good arguments about what was going on. People on the streets. Students throwing fire hydrants at the Conservative Party offices and yet we have now ended up with a guy in a boating blazer who went to Dulwich College who's now standing in Clacton and he's the one who sucks up all the attention and that's not just because of the media, it's because he's the only person who's really seen as a kind of substantial figure who's outside the system but is able to challenge it. How that's happened strikes me as being one of the most pressing questions.

Aasiya Lodhi

I think the role of the media is quite salient there.

Aditya Chakrabortty

I knew you were gonna say that.

Aasiya Lodhi

How can I resist as a former media person, I have to call it out. Right, I just want to go back, there are various questions about sort of resolving and moving and giving us hope but I just want to ask this question that was the very first question written in the chat, it

was the early bird one so we've got to address it really, just to go back, it's one for you, Jem. It's a history one, which is: this article draws a line into the 1970s and can we say that hybridity in ideologies (I'm not sure how they're really defining hybridity in ideologies) also came to life after the '70s. Do you want to have a go answering that?

Jeremy Gilbert

Well I'm not sure what they mean by hybridity in ideologies either, maybe we need them to clarify what they mean by that.

Aasiya Lodhi

Okay, I think perhaps what they mean is that, you know, well that neoliberalism is an amalgamation of liberalism and other aspects, right? And therefore perhaps one way we could draw it out is also that the cycles that come through neoliberalism and then, as we said, perhaps it's a mechanism to other, to right-wing-

Jeremy Gilbert

Sure, sure. Well I would say from that point of view, no, not really, insofar as actually existing ideological programmes and actually implemented ideological programmes have always been a kind of bricolage, as it's sometimes called, or they've always been, as Stuart would say, they are always constituted by articulations of different elements and they're never pristine and they're never like something straight out of a textbook. So I don't think that was new. I think actually and in this, and again I think Stuart would certainly agree with this, there has been a tendency in some sort of popular ideology critique about neoliberalism to somehow see neoliberalism or the historical phase of neoliberalism as being exceptional.

There's a whole wave of commentary which sort of notices around the beginning of the 2010s that actually as part of the wave Aditya's talking about, notices the way in which media culture and reality TV and news reporting, they all normalise neoliberal ideology and they try to make it seem completely natural and as if it's unchallengeable and people get very excited about this idea as if that's the first time it's ever happened. But of course, you know people like Stuart were talking about the way in which ideology naturalises the existing state of things in the mid-'60s and they weren't seeing that as a new phenomenon. So I mean there's this quote from Althusser who's one of, who was always one of Stuart's great, you know, inspirations that *'ideology has no history'* which it doesn't mean that there isn't always a history of ideology, but that there aren't any societies that don't have it, basically. There is always ideology and it's always complex,

so I don't think you can say that that's something specific to the period after the 1970s. It is true, I mean the question and the essay invites us to think about what's the relationship between neoliberalism and that class tradition, the older tradition of liberalism as such, and I think it's a really interesting question and for me, reading the essay today, it was really making me think about. Because I think there's a really, I think if you just, if you think about liberalism as a broad historical idea, this idea that basically, that the most important thing in administering a society is to make sure that every individual is free to do what they want and dispose of their property in the way that they like and this is an idea that has various iterations and various versions that Stuart discusses in the essay but it goes back hundreds of years.

And one of the really complex things, complex features I think of the political and cultural and social conjuncture in Britain after the '80s is that there's a real sort of revival of liberalism as the ordinary common sense, especially of the middle classes, whereas after the '30s up until the '70s it's really in retreat. Even people from elite universities in the '40s and '50s, a lot of them have this idea*, well you know that's a really old-fashioned idea and we need a more sort of collectivist way of organising society now, we need economic planning, and you know liberalism is a sort of Victorian idea that we're not going to go back to*, and liberalism kind of gets revived as the common sense of the middle classes in particular in Britain by the 1990s in a way which has a really complex relationship to neoliberalism proper, so even among people who would blanche at the thought that they would ever endorse the ideas of Hayek or want to see taxes slashed on the rich or want to see trade unions heavily suppressed, the fact that those ideas are the kind of governing ideas helps to create this climate wherein there is a general turn away from collectivist ideas and the general turn away from egalitarian ideas.

And that is a really important part of the cultural and social changes of the past few decades, which this essay does make us think about a lot and I think is really important. And it does present one of the real challenges, I'm saying that for a reason because I know a lot of what people want to think about is well how do we move forward politically, well, I'm really just doing what Stuart always does and indicating another obstacle, like another problem, but one of the things we have to overcome, I think, is the fact that liberalism has returned to being the sort of common sense of English culture in particular in a way which even if aggressive neoliberalism is no longer hegemonic or no longer part of the picture, you really have to sort of unpick it. But I mean in practice is, you know when I'm thinking about liberal common sense, I'm thinking about the way in which, well, an assumption that what the purpose of education, that education is kind of always a sort of competitive process is now sort of so normalised among the middle classes in particular in Britain, that even people who are not in any way self-consciously neoliberal, even people who are not so neoliberals, that it's quite hard to unpick, but you can't really build the kind of coalition we need for a radical and progressive alternative

to neoliberalism or whatever Starmer's going to do, unless you can sort of unpick that at some level. Unless you can really get people to start thinking, well actually a lot more of our social life could be cooperative, it doesn't have to be competitive and individualistic and so I think that complex relationship between different ideologies is important to think about.

Aasiya Lodhi

Thank you because I think you've outlined a little bit about how we might move forward in terms of, politically, culturally, socially but Aditya I want to come back to this question by Ailsa which is, basically I'll just cut to the end where they say how do we ensure brave politics and economic models that focus on collective well-being - but could we hone in on the sort of economic models for those of us that are not as economically literate as you are - how might we realise that sort of cooperative element and how can we actually challenge when these things are so deeply embedded in Britain anyway as we're facing this Labour government that's most likely to be in power by the end of next week?

Aditya Chakrabortty

Okay so I've got kind of two responses to that, one which is kind of practical and one which is a bit more in the realms of ideology. The practical one is this: I think in 2017 or 2018 I did a series for the Guardian called the Alternatives which was about different ways of structuring the economy and the task I set myself was essentially to go and look at places and people that were trying to do things which were cutting against the current. So I went to Preston which I think is now quite well-known but where the council has gone in for community wealth-building and trying to keep the spending as local as possible, kind of guerrilla localism, you know*, we will contract you, the local company, but you must treat your local staff according to certain parameters*.

There was also, I remember a fair amount about the cooperative principle in work and companies whose founders were handing them on to the workforce rather than selling them out entirely, but it struck me at the time doing that piece of work, that one, there was actually a lot of appetite for a kind of anti-austerity, on-the-ground politics and the thing that made it so interesting journalistically was it wasn't well-established enough to have the kind of dead-eyed careerists kind of all over it, so you're actually dealing with people who were genuinely taking a big risk with either their political careers or their own careers. They were taking years out. The big challenge was financial, that you could not get the financier who was willing to look past the quarterly or the annual reward return, right? At a point at which a tech company doing some banal thing can offer you, you know, options, a stake and then return, versus this thing which is a bit of a flyer and

might deliver you three percent a year or whatever after a couple of years. You know, there's no contest. So finance was a big obstacle and it remains I think one of the things that I think an incoming Labour government would be vulnerable on. Because if you think about, just to rehash an exchange Jeremy and I had earlier on this call, if you think about so much what they need, the Labour government, they need financing. They're going to be looking for financing and it seems unlikely to me that it's going to come directly from private equity or from private finance without extortionate rates being attached. So they're going to need something like John McDonnell's green investment bank in their economics and that I think then provides some source of finance for on-the-ground alternatives.

The second thing I want to say in the realm of ideology and I do definitely accept what Jeremy said about how middle-class parents sending their kids to school, they go in for private tutoring age four or whatever and in the hope they'll get them into some selective school and they'll you know go on and be able to fight in the workplace, but it also strikes me that one of the great movements abroad in this country at the moment, one of the kind of the things that's vital at the moment are these people who describe themselves as being post-liberal. They went around under the name of blue Labour or red Tories in the early 2010s but they're around now still and they have some degree of influence on Starmer's lot, but this entire thing of being kind of socially illiberal and economically left-wing (in some cases, not necessarily the blue Labour lot) but in some cases, some of these people who call themselves post-liberal now, you know, happily racist whenever it suits them, want the women to stay home, prize the family unit, are worried about the Great Replacement, you know, they'll go there on that, are very, very happy to talk about the need to have a response on migration. They're also around, right, and that is a direct challenge of a kind that you may not like to neoliberalism but it will require people from outside the Labour Party, because the Labour Party is not going to do a direct challenge to that, but it will require people from outside the Labour Party on the left to counter it. And trust me, it will need countering. Direct, quite confrontational refutation, because otherwise it will become the dominant rhetoric of our politics in the 2020s. And that really is - I grew up in the era of the National Front saying Enoch was right, I was a baby when Thatcher talked about people being worried about swarms of migrants coming into the country, that period of politics seems to me to be kind of coming around again now in the 2020s, and it will not be the Labour Party or the Tory Party which counter it. It will require street-level resistance and non-Westminster political opposition.

Jeremy Gilbert

I think it also requires the assertion of a politics which is socialist and libertarian as the alternative to liberalism. And for me, that's partly why Stuart and the legacy of the New

Left are so important, because it's very important to assert that the only alternative to liberalism is not illiberal conservatism. But you can be, I would say, and I think it's clear in this essay that it alone - Stuart is a libertarian. He's not a liberal. And I think that's really important, that that tradition of libertarian socialism, which has other manifestations in other countries, but in this country, that is the tradition of the New Left. That is the tradition that Stuart represents. I think it's really, it's really crucial.

Aasiya Lodhi

Okay, well, we'll come back to that. I just want to put in this very quick question from Bill, who's watching from the US, who wanted you to clarify, Jeremy, you said Biden is no longer neoliberal, so could you just expand on that briefly?

Jeremy Gilbert

Yeah, sure. I mean, a trillion-dollar infrastructure plan is not a neoliberal policy. No more is cancelling student debt. However little, it's been cancelled. So the thing about that, you know, those are not neoliberal policies. Those are anti-neoliberal policies. So is the attempt to improve conditions for union organising. I know all the ways in which Biden has kind of betrayed and disappointed the left on Gaza, on the railway strikes and everything else, but neoliberals didn't invent like betraying, disappointing the left, governments, including Democratic administrations, have been doing that for 150 years. So it doesn't make you neoliberal, the fact that you do that, I mean, there are different ways of doing it. I think analytically and historically, I think Bidenism is really, you know, it's important to try to analyse, but this is exactly the kind of thing that Stuart's conjunctural method is trying to get us to be able to analyse, that on the one hand, of course, it's not solving any of the fundamental problems that need to be solved. But it is also a move in a different direction to neoliberalism. It's moving such a short distance in that other direction that it isn't going to fix anything. And it might end up somewhere worse. It might end up with a kind of authoritarian, a kind of return to extreme militarism. But it's not neoliberalist, it's something else.

Aasiya Lodhi

Okay. I just wanted to ask you both a question, really, and Aditya has hinted at it by talking about a rise of really just racist rhetoric that's moving centre-stage in Britain. But I also wanted to come back to the point you made, Jem, which was right at the beginning, you said that there was a sort of Latin American tradition out of which neoliberalism grew, which I didn't really know that much about. So I'm interested that actually, to me, the essay was very limited in the way it sort of tied together analyses of

colonialism, which run all through Stuart's work and yet there wasn't really an attempt to sort of synergise readings of the colonial project and then the neoliberal project. I just wanted to ask you both again briefly, how does neoliberalism work in this context? And now where are we looking at Latin America, especially Brazil, where it is today, and the ways in which we now talk about these things? Because the very first event we had in this series, which was about Stuart's essay, The West and the Rest, was very much about that, you know, about the sort of civilizational superiority that the West credited itself with. So very briefly, I know that's a huge question, but how might you describe neoliberalism in the context of Global North and Global South now? Or as some people say, you know, hyper-imperialism is a new phrase, that's now entered, the phrase along with late-neocolonialism. Jem, I'm going to go to you.

Jeremy Gilbert

Well, neoliberalism - what I was referring to specifically was simply the neoliberalism as a term of critique really comes out of Latin America. Like, 'neoliberalism'. I mean, I can't remember how, I don't know how many times back in maybe the time we were talking about, especially the early 2010s, I got told like in this quite patronising way by, often by much younger people in some political meeting, *you can't use words like neoliberalism in a political context because people don't know what it means. Like it's too long a word, it's too complicated*. And I would always say there are peasants all over, there are illiterate peasants, or semi-illiterate peasants all over Latin America, who can tell you exactly what neoliberalism means. Also, I've been teaching kids from council estates what it means for years now. It's not that complicated. You know, especially when you've lived through it. So that's what I was referring to, really. But of course, I mean, the standard history of neoliberalism, which is you know the English, in the English-speaking world still the standard reference text on that is David Harvey's [Brief] History of Neoliberalism which Stuart refers to in the essay, quite correctly, starts with the coup against Allende's government in Chile, and that is the first place they really try to implement the self-conscious neoliberal project.

Neoliberalism always was a global project, it was a global project explicitly against democracy and communism and predicated on the assumption that one would necessarily lead to the other if something wasn't done about it. So it always was a global project, it always was a project which involved the imposition of violent neo-colonial, neo-imperialist regimes through the structural adjustment programmes all over the world, on the massive expropriation and the disruption of any kind of developmental economic projects in Global South countries and it was dependent upon, but it was also dependent right here in the post-imperial metropoles, it was dependent upon these very, very cheap manufactured goods coming from those places so that people didn't complain too much about the fact that in real terms and as a share

of GDP and profits, their wages had been declining since 1966, and that rents were so high. So neoliberalism was always dependent upon that. I would say, again I'm thinking back to the late '90s when there were big campaigns organised by organisations like World Development Movement, what is now Global Justice Now, against the general agreement on trade and tariffs which is the first time in Britain I remember people talking a lot about this idea of neoliberalism, even at the time when the activist culture was all about kind of solidarity with Global South, anti-capitalist activism, street protests, summit protests, I would try to get people to read Stuart and I would remind them of this saying from a Brazilian activist which always stuck with me, I think it was a Brazilian activist when asked, what is the thing we can do to help you in the Global South, his answer was: *get rid of your neoliberal governments*.

And the reason why Stuart, although he's completely conscious of all these issues, he's not really talking about it in this essay, is because Stuart quite rightly always said that whether we like it or not, the sphere of political action and physical consciousness at which people can actually be effective is still that of the national popular, as Gramsci called it, that of the nation. It's really frustrating and annoying, it's very disappointing that the international left has never managed to construct a set of institutions that have enabled us to really operate at an international level even as capitalism has become completely global. That's very disappointing and people might look back in 300 years and say *why were they even bothering to do national elections and the only thing they should have been doing is building these international institutions* which we eventually built and created socialism, maybe they will, but you know Stuart was partly not talking about that stuff because he's responding to the sense that well we can know all this, we can be perfectly aware of all these global and international issues but the site at which we can intervene is the one at which Global South activists have repeatedly asked us to intervene, which is the level of the national popular. So it's not that Stuart isn't aware of that stuff.

Aasiya Lodhi

Absolutely. Okay. Aditya, there's a response to you from Chris Roberts here saying, basically agreeing with you but saying the fact is that the new Labour government is going to just represent another shift to the right, it is a Great Moving Right Show but just carrying on so it's all very well saying these sort of grassroots actions have to take place but perhaps, certainly I might be misrepresenting what Chris has said, but to reorient and shift the discourse to the left is going to be hard to do in office but maybe not in power, he says, so that's interesting. I think as we round it up, just a very quickfire question to you both, therefore, if there's one thing you want to either offer as a kind of hopeful action or thought as we go into this election next week, or that you want everybody to be wary of as they go into it, I mean I think we are at this sort of political

juncture, it's impossible not to sort of end the conversation on that, final thoughts from you. Or if Stuart was about to vote, what would he have told us? Go on Aditya, over to you.

Aditya Chakrabortty

I can't ventriloquise or conduct séance, here's what I would think and Chris Roberts made me think, look, one of the things I really remember about that period from 2015-2019 was an awful lot of ex-parliamentary politics suddenly saw the Labour Party as their vehicle and they wanted to get involved. And that was very good in some cases for the Labour Party but perhaps not so good for those people because when 2019 came along, crash, the project they'd all been backing had fallen apart. And we all know the kind of configurations that the Labour Party's been through since so I think it's a useful thing for there always to be kind of a left politics outside the Labour Party, obviously I think that, and it was one of the things that comes through very clearly in Stuart Hall's writings on the Labour Party down the decades. He's always pushing it to be more receptive to social movements. I would say in terms of where the opportunities are for that, think about what you've been reading, think about what you've heard in the course of this conversation, this show will not be able to fund itself in two years' time.

Think about what politics looks like in two years' time, this is the thing I keep wondering about, the economy's not going to go gangbusters, it's not going to provide the kind of growth that the Labour Party is going to need to do the spending it's going to be under pressure for, right? There's going to be a change of, well, Keir Starmer's going to talk about change a lot and there will be a change of management, that's for sure, there'll be a change of tone as well. Keir Starmer will sound slightly sad as he denies nurses their pay rises, but there will be a point about two years in when the normal midterm blues kick in, that they will be amplified a hundredfold by the fact that this regime isn't able to deliver on what it said it would, on change, right. And that's when you'll be able to come forward full-throttle, I think, with your ideas and your pressure. I think the strategy surely should be, between now and then, to try and do the organising in particular and the thinking to make sure you've got your pieces in place. That's what I would say, I'd say for people who are pretty dismayed about Keir Starmer, 2024 is not your year, but 2026? I really think the world economy is going to look pretty choppy and the domestic economy and domestic governance is going to look pretty dangerous, especially, Farage is not going away. Remember, the guy said he's on a five-year project so he's going to be there.

Aasiya Lodhi

Okay, thank you. Jeremy, international left perhaps in the next two years?

Jeremy Gilbert

Well I agree, I'm going to echo what Aditya said, 2026 is more likely to be of value than '24. I'll also say, look, one of the things I learned from Stuart is when you're doing this kind of political analysis is you have to try to identify who are the specific social constituencies who the current hegemonic project needs to keep on side, and who are the ones that you might be able to peel away. Now, it's a really, it's an important thing for us to understand but everyone under 45 hates them already, hates Starmer already, is already annoyed and angry and disappointed and feels betrayed. Everybody who works in the public sector beneath the level of very senior management who are on corporate level salaries is angry and dismayed and disappointed already.

The only people who are really propping them up, the precise social layer propping up that kind of political class that Starmer represents is the sort of sections of the professional classes just beneath them. They're the people who've been bought off and bought off and bought off basically with low interest rates. They're the people who didn't like Corbyn, they might have voted for him in 2017, a lot of them didn't in 2019, and a lot of them went and voted Lib Dem or Green or didn't vote and they sort of believed the stories about anti-Semitism because it resonated with a general sense of discomfort they had, that this guy was saying stuff that they got told at university was all redundant now: socialism, history, it's those people. It's people who read the Guardian. They're the people who right now have to be propagandised at, who we have to win over, we have to persuade, we have to explain to them that Rachel Reeves or people who look like her are not going to save them from Farage and not going to save their children from climate change. That's why the work of Aditya is so important. He's been one of the very few people who is trying to tell exactly that constituency I'm talking about exactly what they need to be told. But it's what we need more urgently than anything in the next two years is not ten Adityas, a hundred Adityas. A thousand Adityas. We all have to be Adityas telling all those Guardian readers in our lives, look, face it, Reeves is not going to save you or your children, you're going to have to accept that these slightly uncomfortable-making people, the Mick Lynchs, the Jeremy Corbyns are the only alternative to Farage.

Aasiya Lodhi

I can't think of a more appropriate ending to this conversation that we're all going to embrace our inner Aditya as we go forwards. Thank you so much, we have to draw today's conversation to a close. Thank you to Jeremy Gilbert and to Aditya Chakrabortty, who's fighting the fight at the Guardian, for sharing all your insights in what was a really

important conversation at this moment. So thank you so much for sparing the time for this.

Aditya Chakrabortty

Thank you Aasiya, thank you. Thanks for chairing it so well. And Jeremy, you don't want to make a brown man blush, honestly.

Jeremy Gilbert

[laughs]

Aasiya Lodhi

Thanks also to Tayyab Amin and to Orsod Malik for all their support in running this event. I'll probably do some other thank yous, thank you especially to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Duke University Press and Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust for making this event possible. And of course a massive thank you to all of you for joining us, for your really interesting points and comments, I hope we got to all of them, and if we didn't, we'll hopefully be able to capture them and put them on the website when we make the recording available which will be in the next few weeks.

Please do keep an eye out on the Explore section of our website which has a growing set of digital learning resources, that's https://www.stuarthallfoundation.org/ - we are a small charity, our programmes would not be possible without support from our funders and our Friends, so if you enjoy our work, please do consider making a donation or pledging a monthly gift, the link is in the chat box. And finally, please join us for the third and concluding Reading the Crisis conversation on Cultural Identity and Diaspora with Gail Lewis and Roderick Ferguson, that's on Tuesday 23rd July from 5.30pm UK time. Hope to see you there. Many thanks again to Aditya and Jem for today, and goodbye for now.