

Virtuous, Smug and Venal: British Electoral Interference in the US

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The British cannot help themselves. They are a meddling island people who conquered huge swathes of the earth in a fictional fit of absentmindedness and remain haughty for having done so. They have fought more countries they can name, engaged in more wars they care to remember. They have overthrown elected rulers and sabotaged incipient democracies. In the twilight of empire, Britain sought, with heavy hearted reluctance, to become wise Greek advisors to their clumsy Roman replacement: the US Imperium.

US politics, to that end, remain a matter of enormous importance to the UK. Interfering in US elections is a habit that dies hardest of all. In 1940, with the relentless march of Nazi Germany's war machine across Europe, British intelligence officers based in New York and Washington had one primary objective: to aid the election of politicians favouring US intervention on the side of Britain. As Steven Usdin [noted](#) in 2017, they also had two other attached goals: "defeat those who advocated neutrality, and silence or destroy the reputations of American isolationists they deemed a menace to British security."

Much of this is also covered in Thomas E. Mahl's 1998 [study](#) *Desperate Deception: British Covert Operations in the United States, 1939-44*, which was initially scoffed at for giving much credence to Britain's role in creating the office of Coordinator of Information, an entity that became the forerunner of the Office of Strategic Services, itself the forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency.

Mahl was, it was revealed in 1999, on to something. In a dull yet revealing [study](#) written at the end of World War II documenting the activities of the British Security Coordination office, an outfit established by Canadian spymaster **Sir William S. Stephenson** with the approval of US **President Franklin D. Roosevelt**, activities of interference are described on a scale to make any modern Russian operative sigh with longing envy. Those roped into the endeavour were a rather colourful lot: the classicist Gilbert Highet, future novelist of dark children's novels extraordinaire Roald Dahl, and editor of the trade journal *Western Hemisphere Weekly Bulletin*, Tom Hill.

During Stephenson's tenure, the office used subversion, sabotage, disinformation and blackmail with relish to influence political outcomes and malign the America Firsters. (How marvellous contemporary.) It cultivated relations with such figures as the 1940 Republican nominee for president, **Wendell Willkie**. It also offered gobbets of slanted information to media outlets, often produced verbatim, by suborned pro-interventionist hacks. In October 1941, BSC provided FDR a map purporting to detail a plan by Nazi Germany to seize South America, a document the president gratefully waved at a news conference. (The study claims its authenticity, though doubts remain.)

The Democrats are currently receiving the moral and physical aid of volunteers from the British Labour Party, who are throwing in hours and tears for a **Kamala Harris** victory in various battleground states. Their presence was revealed in a [now deleted social media post](#) from Labour's head of operations, **Sofia Patel**, noting that somewhere in the order of 100 current and former party staff were heading to the US prior to polling day to campaign in North Carolina, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

On the other side of the political aisle, **Nigel Farage**, now Reform UK leader and member for Clacton-on-Sea, has spent much time openly campaigning for **Donald Trump**. Hardly surprising that he should complain about UK Labour doing what he has been doing habitually since 2016. Walking political disaster and former Conservative Prime Minister **Liz Truss**, historically the shortest occupant in that office, also put in an appearance at the 2024 Republican National Convention to offer what limited support she could.

Trump's campaign team has taken umbrage at the efforts of Labour Party staffers, enough to file a complaint with the US Federal Election Commission (FEC). This is not small beer: any opportunity to allege an unfavourable distortion in votes will be pounced upon. In an October 21 [letter](#) to the FEC's acting general counsel, **Lisa J. Stevenson**, Trump's attorney sought "an immediate investigation into blatant foreign interference in the 2024 Presidential Election". This took "the form of apparent illegal foreign national contributions made by the Labour Party of the United Kingdom and accepted by Harris for President, the principal campaign committee of Vice President Kamala Harris."

The claim makes mention of another effort in the 2016 elections, when the Australian Labor Party furnished the Bernie 2016 campaign representing **Senator Bernie Sanders** with "delegates to be placed with the campaign". The ALP covered flights and provided participants with a daily stipend. The FEC subsequently found this to be a provision of campaign services to the Sanders campaign, and determined that it, and the ALP, had violated the foreign national prohibitions. Each received civil penalties of \$14,500.

Patel's announcement, the claim goes on to argue, seems to emulate the overly enthusiastic ALP model. As head of operations, "her LinkedIn posts indicate that she is speaking as a representative of the party." Her posts supported "a reasonable inference that the Labour Party will finance at least travel and facilitate room and board."

As regulations stand, FEC rules permit the participation of foreign nationals in campaign activities as long as they [remain uncompensated volunteers](#). If one accepts the narrow reading of the laws according to the US District Court for the District of Columbia in [Bluman v FEC](#), contributions must be of a non-financial nature. British **Prime Minister Keir Starmer** has [stated](#) that party staff have travelled to the US to campaign for Harris "in their own spare time", staying with other volunteers in the process. By no means is it clear that this did not involve a financial contribution.

Previous public efforts to sway election results in the US by British well-wishers hoping to test the waters have not ended well. In 2004, *The Guardian* newspaper launched Operation Clark County, a smug and foolish effort to dissuade undecided voters in the swing state of Ohio from voting for the Republican incumbent, George W. Bush. The response was one of unmitigated, volcanic fury. A [letter](#) from Wading River, NY captured the mood: "I don't give a rat's ass if our election is going to have an effect on your worthless little life. If you want to have a meaningful election in your crappy little island full of shitty food and yellow teeth, then maybe you should try not to sell your sovereignty out to Brussels and Berlin, dipshit."

The letter is coarsening in its finality. “Oh yeah – and brush your goddamned teeth, you filthy animals.” Starmer, beware.

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