

# In Westminster at Last: The Threat of Nigel Farage

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*"This is the inflection point," [warned](#) Nigel Farage last month as he assumed the reins of power at the incarnated Reform UK party, standard bearer of the often inchoate group known as the hard right of British politics. "The only wasted vote is a Conservative one. We are the challengers to Labour. We are on our way."*

On July 4, an important stop was made on that way. A figure who had exerted more influence on British politics outside the houses of Parliament than any other this century, a figure who had conspicuously failed in getting elected despite seven previous efforts, had finally convinced voters he was electable.

The new member for the Essex seat of Clacton had unseated the Conservative candidate, Giles Watling, who had held the seat since 2017. The margin was impressive: 21,225 votes to Watling's 12,820.

To keep him company in the House of Commons will be such colleagues as Richard Tice, Reform's chair, along with former Southampton football club chairman Rupert Lowe, and former Conservative deputy chair Lee Anderson. They now form a snapping rearguard of politics that is not so much nipping at the heels of Britain's oldest party as tearing it apart.

As the Tories contemplate their ruin and richly deserved defeat, the new Labour government of Sir Keir Starmer will find little time to relish the joys of victory. Farage is already promising rapacious raids into enemy territory. "We are coming for Labour ... be in no doubt about that." While eschewing notions of working with the Conservatives, he offered an olive branch by way of invitation: Tory members could join Reform if they wished.

Commentators on Farage's life have noted a streak of luck suggesting the blessings of the devil. He has cheated death, surviving car crashes, a plane crash and a misdiagnosis regarding testicular cancer. The party that caught his eye, the UK Independence Party

(Ukip), would have vanished into the suffocating arms of the larger Referendum party of James Goldsmith had the latter not perished to cancer 10 weeks after the 1997 election. “Farage takes his chances, and though things often blow up – planes, parties, countries – he walks away and on to the next caper,” [writes](#) David Runciman.

Reform UK is certainly one such caper, and its somewhat anti-democratic operations, often chaotic, poorly organised and lacking any institutional framework, make its electoral returns even more remarkable. But even on Farage’s side of politics, it is hard to mistake the fact that he has treated the party [much like a political start-up](#), where he has assumed the role of director and majority shareholder. Reform will, in time, require reform if it is to be a durable force. Farage has [admitted](#) as much.

“We have a structure. We do have a constitution, but to build a branch structure, we have to give people the ability to choose candidates to vote.”

Durability, however, may have nothing to do with it. As with many charismatic buffoonish party goers, he may leave when required to help with the cleaning up, leaving the washing to the snarling and fractious functionaries who fight over the leftovers and break the crockery. This may well be Starmer’s hope. It is certainly the [assessment](#) of Fraser Nelson in *The Spectator*. “Whatever his intention, Farage has ended up serving as a purely destructive force. He has become the nemesis, not the rejuvenator, of the causes he purports to care about.”

Otherwise, the threat is palpable, and [comments](#) by the new Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds about Reform’s policies being like “Liz Truss in terms of the economy” and similar to “Russian positions in terms of ... the war in Ukraine” are unhelpful. Labour’s lack of clarity on how it will deal with the Channel crossings of irregular migrants is something Farage is salivating over.

Concerned about such matters, Tony Blair, Labour’s longest serving prime minister and overly remunerated circuit speaker, has been willing to [offer the sort of advice](#) in the *Sunday Times* he charges obscene amounts for. His typically soupy ideas all go to trying to blunt the effect Reform will have in the next election.

“We need a plan to control immigration. If we don’t get rules, we get prejudices.”

Showing his recurrent fascination with surveillance (as the Coronavirus pandemic raged, Blair suggested adopting a “Covid Pass” to distinguish the anointed from the unwashed), a “digital ID” could be used to maintain the integrity of borders. Law and order matters, another favourite of the New Labour era, also needed to be dealt with. “At present, criminal elements are modernising faster than law enforcement.” To round off the trifecta, it was also important that the Starmer government not succumb to “any vulnerability on ‘wokeism’.”

Farage is now in the temple of Westminster and, in time, hopes to bring it down. He will woo, seduce and despoil, as he has done to a string of lovers and prominent figures he has lured to his camp over the years. He will be remorselessly destructive. For Labour and for those more progressive than Starmer’s stiffly starched set, the threat has been truly enlivened.

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*Featured image: Farage campaigning during the 2024 general election (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0)*

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