
Concours d'entrée 2023

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Teacher strikes: Unions team up in England pay dispute

Hazel Shearing, *BBC*, April 29, 2023

Teachers in four unions in England say they will team up on any strike action over pay - which could mean full school closures in the autumn term.

Only the National Education Union (NEU) has enough backing from members to organise walkouts at present. The next strike will be on Tuesday.

5 But the three other unions, including two for head teachers, are asking their members whether they want to strike.

The government said co-ordinated action would be “unreasonable”.

The four unions teaming up in the dispute are the NEU, the NASUWT, the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL).

10 Paul Whiteman, NAHT general secretary, called their decision to co-ordinate action an "unprecedented show of solidarity".

Joined-up strike action - if it were to happen - would affect every state school in England, according to Kevin Courtney, joint general secretary of the NEU.

15 Between 300,000 and 400,000 teachers could be involved, he said during a joint press conference at the NAHT conference in Telford.

“We would sincerely apologise to parents for disrupting their children's education if we're pushed to that,” he added.

Many teachers are about to be asked for a second time whether they want to strike.

20 Three of the unions have already held ballots this year. However, when the results were announced in January, only the NEU had enough members voting to move ahead to strikes.

NEU walkouts have been held since February, and it is about to reballot its members - asking them whether they would want to continue strike action into next term.

The NASUWT union and the NAHT did not meet the turnout threshold needed to strike in England in their last ballots - but both are due to reballot their members ahead of next term.

25 The fourth union, ASCL, is due to ballot members for the first time in its history.

Shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson said the issue was caused by "failure on the part of the government to be serious about negotiating", adding that the joint strike action "demonstrates the scale of the anger and the scale of the dissatisfaction" among teachers.

30 More than half of England's 22,000 schools either closed or partially closed on NEU strike days in February and March.

If members from several unions, including head teachers, were to walk out together, it is likely there would be more full school closures.

35 A Department for Education spokeswoman said: “For unions to co-ordinate strike action with the aim of causing maximum disruption to schools is unreasonable and disproportionate, especially given the impact the pandemic has already had on their learning.”

The joint announcement comes after the NAHT announced it would be reballoting members on pay, funding, workload and wellbeing.

Katie Chilvers, a Year one teacher in Birmingham, supports the NEU strike action and has walked out this year.

40 But she did not take part in the latest strike on Thursday because she could not “justify” losing another day's pay.

“We're looking at around £80 a day that we'd lose out on, on average,” she said.

She said she was finding other ways to support the cause, such as “spreading the word” on social media.

The NEU says members can apply to access hardship funds.

45 **What are teachers' pay demands?**

Most state school teachers in England had a 5% rise in 2022, and a 3% rise was recommended from September 2023.

But the unions want above-inflation increases, and extra money to ensure any pay rises do not come from schools' existing budgets.

50 After the February strikes, the government made a new pay offer for school teachers, which included a

£1,000 one-off payment this year and a 4.3% pay rise for most staff in September.

The starting salary for teachers in England is also due to rise to £30,000 a year by September - a previous government commitment.

55 The Department for Education described it as a “fair and reasonable offer” and said that schools would receive an extra £2.3bn over the next two years.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) said in December that the increased funding would mean that school spending per pupil “will grow in real terms through to 2024 and will return to at least 2010 levels”.

All four unions rejected the offer. They said it was still not fully funded, meaning schools would have had to make cuts elsewhere to afford it.

60 Education Secretary Gillian Keegan said the offer was no longer on the table, so the decision on pay would now be made by the independent pay review body.

Bishops criticise Government's Bill to restrict strike action

5 Francis Martin , 28 March 2023, *Church Times*

THE Bishop of Manchester, Dr David Walker, has joined the Bishop of London, the Rt Revd Sarah Mullally, in criticising government proposals to restrict strike action. In a House of Lords Committee debate on Thursday, Dr Walker supported several opposition amendments to the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Bill.

The amendments sought to reduce the extent to which the new law would limit the power of unions by requiring high levels of service during strikes in a wide range of industries, and to protect workers who were served with a work notice during industrial action.

The previous week, Bishop Mullally warned that the proposed law was “open to abuse”, referring to a “complete lack of clarity about how [the new law] could be used” (News, 10 March).

Dr Walker drew attention to the existence of “Henry VIII Clauses” contained in the Bill, which would allow the Government to amend it in the future without going through the parliamentary process. He expressed concern that “the Government are taking this exceptional power either because they are not sure what they want to achieve, or because they do not know how to get there.”

The Labour peer Baroness Chakrabati was among those who questioned whether the Bill’s required levels of service met the UK’s obligations as a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights, and as a member state of the UN’s International Labour Organization (ILO).

The Under-secretary for the Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero, Lord Callanan defended the Bill, however. “The Government firmly believe that the Bill is compatible with our convention rights and complies with all international conventions that the UK is signed up to,” he said.

“Our Bill does not prohibit strikes or other industrial action, but it does enable employers to continue to deliver a minimum service level to their users and stakeholders during and notwithstanding that action.”

Lady Chakrabati, who is a former Shadow Attorney General, said that it was “important to put these commitments in the Bill because it will make our courts the ultimate referees of whether future ministers, when exercising these broad regulatory powers, are actually complying or not”.

Proposed amendments to the Bill came from Labour and Liberal Democrat peers. All were dropped without going to a vote, but could be resurrected at the next stage of the Bill’s progress through the House of Lords. Dr Walker spoke in favour of an amendment proposed by the Liberal Democrat peer Lord Fox, which would have introduced a stipulation that “all options to avert a strike [must] have been exhausted” before minimum services rules were allowed to come into effect. Dr Walker said that this seemed to be common sense. “Surely it is appropriate that, if a work notice is to be issued, it is issued only when all the options to avert a strike have been exhausted,” he said.

Responding on behalf of the Government, Lord Callanan said that the requirement would put a “burdensome requirement on employers”. “Employers are already incentivised to avoid strike action due to the substantial cost and disruption that it causes them,” he said.

Dr Walker also expressed concern that, under the terms of the Bill, employees who did not comply with a work notice could be sacked, suggesting that such a punishment would be disproportionate. “Some lesser maximum penalty would be more appropriate,” he said, and referred to the Royal College of Nursing, which argues that sacking workers for this offence “would exacerbate severe nursing workforce shortages”.

He also emphasised the emotional impact of work notices. “Were I a worker issued with such an instruction, the stress I would suffer in consequence could quite likely render me unfit to turn up to work on the day — and, as I trust your Lordships have begun to recognise, I am a fairly tough nut.”

There was a danger, he said, that striking workers who were not subject to work notices could also have their livelihoods threatened under the terms of the Bill, because, if a union is not adjudged to have taken “reasonable steps” to have complied with the requirements, the whole strike could be deemed illegal, and those taking part would consequently face losing their jobs.

Dr Walker argued that trade unions wanted to find mutually agreed solutions, which were the only solutions that worked in practice. “But if the Government adopt a more heavy-handed approach to strike action in those sectors where they have what elsewhere might be called coercive control, or if employees feel pressed to do so under fear of civil action, as we have heard today, this risks further division and delays agreement.

The Catharsis Candidacy

Michael Brendan, May 31, 2023, *National Review*

5 In the middle of his campaign kickoff speech in Iowa, Ron DeSantis was ticking through a seemingly endless list of legislative accomplishments he has had in Florida as governor. But then he suddenly stepped aside from the microphone and invited his wife Casey DeSantis to speak.

10 The decision to hand over this part of the introduction seemed to have a specific purpose. More easily than her husband, Casey DeSantis summons genuine passion in her political oratory. She was there to talk about the governor's leadership during Covid and to emphasize that this crisis was a test of political leadership, a test that Ron DeSantis alone passed.

15 "When you look at Covid, the world descended on Florida," she said. "You had the corporate media, the Left, the White House, Fauci, Birx, all prognosticating that every bad thing would happen unless the governor followed their dictates, and their politicized, unscientific orthodoxy. But he held the line in defense of the liberties of the people he represented. He never backed down. He took their livelihoods and their happiness above his own."

20 Notice she included "the White House" in the list. In other words, this campaign isn't the first time Ron DeSantis went against Donald Trump. His Covid move was the moment that really mattered, she said. The one that "forever impacts the people."

25 "You can take the path of least resistance. You subcontract your leadership to the medical bureaucracy. You can aim for self-preservation. You can be more interested in your political career. Or you can hold the line. Do you defend the rights of the people? Their ability to earn a living, to be with their loved ones, especially in their final moments. Do you fight for our children to be in school, to breathe without a mask being forced on their face? Do you ensure that people have the choice as to whether or not they want to take an mRNA vaccine and certainly not make it contingent upon their job? At the end of the day, it's what you do in the moment that matters."

30 Now, many liberals and some conservatives reading this list will shrug. They were happy to mask their kids for two years. They credit the vaccines with ending the public-health emergency. But for a huge swath of voters, this issue really did bond them to Governor DeSantis. At the moment that Casey DeSantis mentioned masks on children, the crowd spontaneously started roiling with noises of anger at the pro-mask policies — and approval of the governor, for rolling them back.

35 Those days three years ago really were the moment that many families started wondering whether they too should join the scores of thousands of other Americans who were moving to Florida during the pandemic. This was the moment that made Ron DeSantis a national figure. These voters credit Florida — and to a lesser degree Georgia and Texas — with normalizing the country after the pandemic. These voters knew what the experts also knew but refused to admit publicly: that they didn't need the vaccine because they had already contracted Covid and had natural immunity; or that they were young and not vulnerable to severe Covid. They knew, long before the experts admitted, that the Covid vaccine did not stop transmission, and that the logic of mandates was therefore mooted. In their hearts, these voters knew that expert opinion was a kind of guild conspiracy that — when joined with the force of government — directly threatened their livelihood, their family, and the well-being of their children.

40 And DeSantis took unorthodox steps to protect the social fabric of Florida. He used the emergency powers the public-health crisis granted to him to mandate that schools remain open, and to mandate that schools *not* impose their own mask mandates on children. Any fool — even Dr. Fauci himself at the start of the pandemic — could figure out that child-sized cloth masks bought at a sunglasses stand were not an effective public-health measure against an airborne virus. But only DeSantis and a handful of other governors ever acted, and acted vigorously, on this obvious truth.

45 By using his powers in this way, he pioneered a model for how he would begin using constitutional executive power to prevent the ideological contagions of the left from seizing all the institutions of public life. Later in the event, the governor spoke for himself: "We also pledge to usher in a reckoning for the federal government's disastrous Covid policies. From lockdowns to mask mandates, to fiscal and monetary measures. The policies eroded freedom and imposed great harms on American society. We desperately need accountability so this never happens to our country again."

50 This is something that Ron DeSantis offers that no other candidate does — and it will infuse his campaign with critical popular support in the GOP: He is the catharsis candidate. He's the candidate who is telling millions of Americans that they weren't crazy, that their informed instincts around the pandemic were sound after all. His election is the closest thing to justice on offer for those millions. They're going to fight like hell for him.

55

Midterm election results reflect the hodgepodge of US voters, not the endorsement or repudiation of a candidate's or party's agenda

Robert B. Talisse, *The Conversation*, November 23, 2022

The results from the U.S. midterm elections came as a shock to many. The sitting president's party typically suffers significant losses in House, Senate and gubernatorial races in the first midterm election of a president's term. Several projections leading up to Election Day speculated that a "red wave" – at one point upgraded to a "red tsunami" – of massive Republican gains across the electoral board would swamp Democrats.

Yet it was clear by the end of Election Day that Democrats had performed far better than expected. The "red wave" never materialized. Republican gains in the House were meager. The Democrats maintained control of the Senate by flipping Pennsylvania and winning tight races elsewhere.

The Democrats' success bucks a long-standing trend in U.S. politics. The president's popularity is often taken by pollsters and analysts as a key indicator of his party's midterm prospects. Biden's approval rating has been low throughout his presidency. Going into Election Day, his unpopularity was comparable to that of preceding presidents who endured substantial midterm losses. Current polling shows that 57% of Americans disapprove of Biden and 70% say the country is on the wrong track. Moreover, Americans trust the GOP more than the Democrats to handle important issues such as inflation, crime and unemployment. Yet the Democrats pulled off a surprise victory – by not losing as much as expected.

What happened? [...]

Elections are complex, and citizens are complicated. Voters embrace a range of priorities, they have different levels of information about their options and they're motivated by different concerns.

Some data suggests that citizens have vastly different ideas about what it means to vote. Some see voting as a display of support for one's party, others view it as the registering of one's desires and some see their vote as expressing a judgment about the common good. It's plausible that many citizens took themselves mainly to be voting against disliked candidates rather than for favored candidates.

So while politicians and pundits are fond of saying that elections express the "will of the people," in reality they don't. Taken as a collective, the electorate is too much of a hodgepodge to have a will of its own.

There's no big picture

It goes without saying that Democrats will interpret the results as proof that their political platform is widely embraced by the American people. Meanwhile, Republicans will seek an explanation for how their message failed to reach voters.

Digging deeper, political commentators have offered several interpretations, claiming that the midterms came down to some core factor, such as abortion, immigration, the affirmation of democracy itself, the repudiation of MAGA Republicanism and elevated turnout among Gen Z voters.

These explanations have their merits. But the diversity of ideas, impulses and dispositions that voters bring to elections makes big-picture election analysis problematic.

Even when a majority claims in a poll that some specific issue is "very important," it isn't clear that people agree about anything beyond that description. People have different views about what makes an issue important. Similarly, two citizens who vote for the same candidate might not have much else in common. Consider that it's likely that voters who "somewhat disapprove" of Biden may have tipped many races in the Democrats' favor.

It's not that democracy falls short of discerning the people's will, but rather that there is no collective will to express. There's only a mess of inputs, a counting procedure and a result. Consequently, the idea that the result of a large-scale election could amount to an "endorsement" or "repudiation" of a candidate's or party's agenda is largely a myth.

This does not mean that midterm results are meaningless. Democracy remains government of, by and for the people. Elections are instruments by which citizens have an equal say in political decision-making.

Although electoral victories cannot plausibly be regarded as an endorsement of the victor's ideas, elections still play a crucial role in constraining and directing officeholders. In other words, elections serve simply as a popular check on government.

Partisan identity rules

That still leaves the question of the meaning of the midterms. Here's my single takeaway: As I've argued

50 previously, U.S. democracy today is driven by partisan identity rather than policy. Elections thus are won not by changing the minds of undecided voters, but by mobilizing the party's base. Robust data shows that negative emotions like anger and resentment are reliably potent motivators of political behavior. Candidates who can stoke the anxieties of the party's base are favored, while bridge-builders and cooperators are edged out.

55 These dynamics partly explain the success of MAGA candidates, aligned with former President Donald Trump, in GOP primaries. However, the strategy of playing to the base comes with a cost in a general election, especially when voters see the party's core as a significant threat to democracy.

60 In addition, hoping to placate their MAGA contingent, the mainstream GOP has declined to voice strong opposition to Trump's election lies and appears dismissive of the House Jan. 6 committee's work. The Republican Party itself hence is associated with MAGA extremism, and this association is a focus of non-Republican voters' anger and indignation. The Democrats' midterm success likely has less to do with President Biden's agenda and more to do with their willingness to stand up for familiar democratic values.

“All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind.”

So wrote Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto. They were talking about how what had previously been taken for granted could be swept away by capitalism. But they might as well have been talking about the way the contest for the leadership of the Scottish National Party has upended all our assumptions about that party – not least, that it was exceptionally united and had an impressively large and loyal rank-and-file membership.

That’s because, following Nicola Sturgeon’s shock resignation, the party has rapidly succumbed to the kind of bitter ideological infighting between ambitious rivals that many of us had begun to associate almost exclusively with the Conservative Party south of the border.

And not only that: in the course of the contest, the party has been forced, under pressure, to admit that it has nowhere near as many members as the rest of us had assumed – an admission that prompted the resignation of the SNP’s embattled chief-executive, Sturgeon’s husband Peter Murrell.

Quite why the latest figure of 72,186 members had to be dragged out of party HQ is, for the moment at least, anyone’s guess. But what is certain is that it constitutes a marked drop on the 100,000-plus that was widely quoted before this latest number was reluctantly released.

And it seems equally certain that we are seeing the end of a truly phenomenal period of grassroots growth for the Scottish nationalists which began after (and probably during) the 2014 independence referendum.

The SNP, of course, isn’t the only party in the UK to have experienced something of a membership growth spurt during the last decade. Lots more people were prompted to join the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn. And, although it escaped most people’s notice, the Liberal Democrats attracted a lot of new members when they returned to opposition after five pretty brutal years in coalition with the Conservatives between 2010 and 2015. Meanwhile, the Tories themselves issued just over 172,000 ballots to members in the summer 2022 leadership contest won by Liz Truss, compared with the 159,000 or so it had issued in 2019 when Boris Johnson replaced Theresa May.

Reasons for leaving

The question of why people join political parties has preoccupied academic observers since the pioneering survey research carried out by academics Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley in the late 1980s – a tradition built on more recently on by the Party Members Project run out of Queen Mary University of London and the University of Sussex.

What we’ve tended to pay far less attention to, however, is why members leave. This is the issue that should now be worrying the SNP, assuming that, like most political parties, it welcomes not just the legitimacy a thriving membership confers on its cause, but also the money and manpower members contribute.

That doesn’t mean that there’s been no research into this question. It is one we tried to answer in our book *Footsoldiers: Political Party Membership in the 21st Century*, and which we followed up more recently after Keir Starmer replaced Corbyn in 2020 – a development that caused much soul-searching last summer when the party was reported to have lost tens of thousands of members.

Although parties often fret (not without reason) about administrative failings or the cost of membership or even boring or conflictual meetings driving members away, our surveys of people who’ve quit parties show that none of these matter that much.

Instead, what prompts people to let their membership lapse or, more dramatically, to leave in high dudgeon is a sense that the party is going in the wrong direction, or adopting a particular policy or policies that they disagree with.

Our research also shows that this ideologically-motivated distancing and detachment is often bound up with dissatisfaction or plain disagreement with the leader of the party – whether that be the incumbent or their successor.

What is particularly interesting in this regard is that the SNP’s recent loss of members occurred on Nicola Sturgeon’s watch, not as a result of her resigning. This suggests that, for whatever reason, a fair few people had become disillusioned with her leadership and the direction in which the party was going.

Unfortunately for the SNP, it seems fairly likely – especially given the bitterness engendered by the contest to replace her – that whoever takes over from Sturgeon may well end up presiding over further losses, as those disappointed with the result quit too.

If that does happen, then we should also monitor what happens to membership of the Labour and Green parties north of the border, as well as of the alternative nationalist party, Alba. That’s because one thing we also know from our research is that a surprising number of people actually leave their party in order to join another one. So watch this space.

Sturgeon warned 'painful' independence move to come with 'significant economic costs'

Paul Withers, *The Daily Express*, Sunday, December 11, 2022

Nicola Sturgeon has suffered a fresh blow after being warned the transition to Scottish independence would be “difficult and painful”, bringing with it immediate “significant economic costs”. Last month, the First Minister and SNP suffered a damaging blow after the Supreme Court ruled Scotland cannot proceed with a planned independence referendum without the consent of the UK Government. Recently, the Scottish
5 Government released the third in a series of papers aimed at demonstrating how Scotland would function if it did indeed split from the rest of the UK.

The document, entitled ‘Building a New Scotland: A stronger economy with independence’ attempts to deal with elements such as currency, re-joining the European Union, trade and borders.

Jonathan Portes, Professor of Economics at King’s College London; Senior Fellow at UK in a Changing
10 Europe think tank, acknowledges the paper is a “serious attempt at setting out a prospectus for an independent Scotland”.

But the expert told Express.co.uk: “Overall, there is no reason that over the medium to long term Scotland could not be a well-run and prosperous country outside the UK. However, the transition is likely to be difficult and painful, and in the short run to involve significant economic costs.”

15 Professor Portes has identified “two big issues” from the recent Scottish Government paper on independence that could blow a huge hole in Ms Sturgeon’s blueprint and “damage” the country’s economy. He argued: “If, as the paper correctly states, Brexit has damaged the UK and Scottish economy by raising trade barriers with the EU, then it follows almost automatically that Scexit, by raising trade barriers between Scotland and England/Wales, will damage the Scottish economy.”

20 This will only partially be compensated by reduced barriers with the EU, just as UK trade deals with the rest of the world can only partially compensate for Brexit.

“So, while the paper is correct that Brexit is a negative economic consequence for Scotland of being part of the UK, it is not one that can be reversed by Scexit, which at least in the short term would make things even worse.”

25 The second major issue identified by the expert is around fiscal policy and specifically, the planned move to Scotland’s own currency following a split from the rest of the UK.

Professor Portes continued: “The paper sets out sensible principles for Scottish fiscal policy but largely dodges the issue of what tax rises/spending cuts would be required to deliver them over the medium to long term (in the short term, the huge rise in energy prices would be good for Scotland fiscally but that is not
30 expected to last long.).

“The currency issue is largely a political one. Economically, it would be perfectly logical and achievable for Scotland to use the pound as a transition and then to create a Scottish pound.

“However, that would be entirely dependent on a cooperative and consensual approach to independence from the UK and Scottish Governments. The experience of Brexit does not suggest that this is guaranteed.

35 “Similarly, whether the EU would or would not insist on Scotland joining the euro would depend on politics, not economics (I’d guess that they would not in fact insist on this).”

Last month, Ms Sturgeon’s independence plans suffered a huge blow when the Supreme Court ruled she does not have the power to hold the vote without the UK Government’s consent.

40 Court president Lord Reed rejected the argument from the Scottish Government that any referendum would simply be “advisory” and would have no legal effect on the union.

This would have seen people only being asked to give their opinion on whether or not Scotland should become an independent country.

Ms Sturgeon has stood firm and admitted that while she was disappointed but respected the court’s ruling, judges do not make the law and only interpret it.

45 The First Minister insisted a referendum remained her preferred option, but without an agreement in place, the SNP would use the next UK general election as a “de facto referendum” in an attempt to show that a majority of people in Scotland support independence.

However, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has followed the lead taken by his predecessors Boris Johnson and Liz Truss by insisting the UK Government will not allow a second independence referendum to take place anytime soon.

Charles's instincts are to be applauded – but 1,000 years of tradition are at stake. Is it wise for the Christianity of the Coronation to be so diluted in the name of diversity?

Catherine Pepinster, 8 April 2023, *Daily Mail*

5 It is now almost 30 years since the then Prince Charles sparked a veritable firestorm by signalling that as king, he wished to see a fundamental shift in the relationship between Church and Crown. In a famous television interview, he suggested that he would prefer to drop the time-honoured ‘Defender of the Faith’ title which as head of the Church of England, all monarchs since Henry VIII have held. Instead, mindful of the multi-faith nation the United Kingdom was already becoming, he would rather be known as ‘Defender
10 of Faith’ - a protector of all religious beliefs.

Understandably, many religious experts were alarmed at his modernising plans, warning that they would put him implacably at odds with centuries of tradition, with the Establishment and with the beliefs of his own mother.

Since his 1994 interview, Charles has retracted his ‘Defender of Faith’ ambitions – instead making clear
15 that although head of the Anglican church, he would still act to safeguard other beliefs.

It is testament to his very genuine desire to encourage religious harmony that barely four weeks away from his Coronation ceremony, he is still wrestling with exactly how to ensure his new role accords with his realm’s many non-Christian faiths.

But Charles, not only our King but also holding the title Defender of the Faith and being Supreme Governor
20 of the Church of England, has to ask himself a simple but profound question : is it wise for the Christianity of the Coronation – an ancient ceremony which dates back more than 1,000 years – to be diluted so that, in the name of diversity, other faiths are included?

His natural and generous instinct is to involve them actively in the May 6 coronation ceremony at Westminster Abbey. As he said in his TV interview three decades ago, ‘I happen to believe that the Catholic
25 subjects of the Sovereign are as important (as Protestants), not to mention the Islamic, Hindu and Zoroastrian.’

Of course, at the never before televised Accession Council and Proclamation last September, he was indeed formally announced as Defender of the Faith. However, a week after that, the new King put his own stamp on inter-faith dialogue when he told faith leaders at Buckingham Palace that he was ‘a committed Anglican’
30 but that he had ‘a personal duty to protect the diversity of our country’ and ‘protect the space for faith itself’.

However, a friendly speech at the Palace is one thing. Trying to express those sentiments in the context of an Anglican Coronation service is another.

The trouble is that Charles wishes to modernise but tradition matters too. You can’t just upend the
35 coronation service at the whim of a King, even if he is Supreme Governor of the Church of England. Anglican canon law effectively rules out representatives of other faiths being actively involved in Church of England services if those faiths do not accept the Holy Trinity of Christian doctrine – the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

[...] And with Justin Welby’s every move being scrutinised nowadays by his hard-line, traditional critics
40 in the worldwide Anglican Communion, the Archbishop is unlikely to warm to any moves to turn the Coronation into a multi-faith extravaganza rather than an religious service that reinforces the Church of England as the Established Church.

These grave tensions between modernisation and tradition explain why the coronation Order of Service has still not been made public, with so little time to go. But even if the non-Christian faith representatives do
45 no more than process – as they did at the late Queen’s funeral – or hold candles, the King can take comfort in the no-doubt diverse congregation, with so many places being given to representatives of charities linked to the Royal Family.

And the politicians present, such as new SNP leader, Humza Yousaf, a Muslim, and the Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, a Hindu, will represent how different a country Britain is from the last coronation in 1953.
50 There is speculation that the King will hold a distinct, separate ceremony at which other faith leaders would play an active role, which would be entirely appropriate.

However, what is extraordinary is that this debate over the Coronation service itself has been taken to the wire when planning for it began more than 10 years ago. Memo to Lambeth Palace and Buckingham Palace: start thinking about the next one, now.

55 It is entirely reasonable to want a service that reflects contemporary Britain, but don’t be tempted to turn the crowning of our monarch upside down and inside out, just for the sake of it. This is an occasion when even the most secular can be moved by sacred liturgy, beautiful music and fabulous ceremonial. It happened with the late Queen’s funeral. The tradition should continue.

Northern England hit hardest by decline in UK rail services

5 Jennifer Williams and Robert Wright, November 20 2022, *Financial Times*

When Ruth Ibegbuna moved to the pretty West Yorkshire town of Todmorden, on the railway line between Manchester and Leeds, she did so for its beautiful backdrop and what she was assured were solid transport links. But services have proven far from reliable and she is appalled by the chaos that has ensued as cancellations across much of the north of England hit record levels. “When friends from London visit me, they are uniformly stunned to hear the tannoy announce ‘no trains due to a lack of drivers’, or a silence with no information, or just a long list of cancellations,” she said. “They cannot believe we accept this.”

A combination of factors, ranging from a shortage of drivers, the worst industrial unrest since privatisation and infrastructure problems, has resulted in a marked decline in railway services in many parts of the UK this year. Some parts of the country have been hit harder than others, however, including the north of England, where central government has long pledged to invest billions to improve its poor rail services.

Operators Avanti West Coast and Transpennine Express (TPE), which serve major cities across the north and beyond, have both significantly cut their timetables in recent months in an attempt to improve reliability yet cancellations are at record levels.

Figures collated by transport body Transport for Greater Manchester show TPE is currently cancelling 37% more services than during the aftermath of a disastrous national timetable rollout in 2018, which crippled the northern network. Another operator, Northern Rail, has also been hit by fresh disruption, with one passenger fainting on Ibegbuna’s overcrowded commuter service last week.

The result had been a “ruinous” impact on “people’s lives, on people’s businesses and the economy as a whole”, said Andy Burnham, mayor of Greater Manchester, who like all northern leaders have long urged the government to invest more in the network in northern England.

[...] The ORR found operators were responsible for 53 per cent of delays over the past year, but also criticised Network Rail, the national infrastructure company, for “poor” performance, especially in Wales and the West Country.

In a bid to improve the railways, the Conservative government last year promised to set up a new state-owned body, Great British Railways, to oversee the network. But progress has stalled following the political turmoil that meant the country had three prime ministers in two months.

New transport secretary Mark Harper has yet to lay out his plans for the railways but one of his junior ministers, Huw Merriman, suggested before the Autumn Statement no new funding was available. He said that after a £16bn bail out during the pandemic the sector would have to “earn the right” to grow, by demonstrating a “higher return on investment”.

One of the issues affecting the industry is the uneven bounce back in passengers after the pandemic. London’s mainline stations were averaging traffic at 71 per cent of pre-Covid levels in October, while despite the disruption across the north rail use has bounced back more strongly, running at 87 per cent of 2019 levels.

In Leeds, passenger numbers are now above pre-pandemic levels.

Earlier this year, Rail North, the partnership between northern leaders and central government that oversees TPE and Northern Rail’s franchises, suggested there was a potential “sustained [post-pandemic] shift in working practices in the service-based economy of the London and south east”, arguing that this was in “contrast” to the north. It said last week that the continued rebound proved it was “essential” ministers “allow[ed] the north to grow the market,” estimating delays and cancellations were costing the northern economy more than £400mn a year in a crisis it said was “not fully understood by decision makers in London”. It urged Harper to help ease the driver shortage by allowing operators to negotiate new overtime arrangements. The government said Harper planned to meet regional mayors “soon”.

Former Tory transport secretary Patrick McLoughlin, who now chairs Transport for the North, the strategic transport body, warned last week that with many operators facing problems “all eyes” would be on whether plans to expand the national timetable from December 12 would be successful.

Labour’s shadow transport secretary Louise Haigh called on the government to act. “Ministers signed off on this shambles, and have rewarded the abject failure of operators time and again.”

A government spokesperson said it was “unacceptable that poor levels of service [were] preventing hard-working people from going about their daily lives,” adding it was “working closely with train operators to ensure long term solutions are put in place so passengers can travel confidently without disruption.”

Ibegbuna said the latest addition to the capital’s rail network — the £19bn Elizabeth line that opened earlier this year — reminded her what can be achieved when government invests in the railways, adding that the prospect of a functioning network near her felt like a “futuristic dream”. “As someone who often works in London I find myself waiting three minutes for a beautiful air-conditioned, clean train on the new Elizabeth Line, feeling fairly bitter.”

NHS pay is a risky issue for Rishi Sunak to get tough about

Pippa Crerar, *The Guardian*, Wednesday 21 December 2022

When Rishi Sunak appeared in front of parliament's powerful liaison committee this week he doubled down on NHS pay rises in what looked very much like an attempt to turn the winter of strikes into his Thatcher moment. Just like his political heroine before him, he faced down the unions, telling MPs the country could not afford bigger public sector pay rises, warning they risked making inflation worse – and that politicians should not “cut across” the independent pay review process.

The prime minister, who in recent weeks has been forced into U-turns on housebuilding targets and onshore windfarms by Tory party rebellions, appeared to see the strikes as an opportunity to prove wrong those who have accused him of being weak.

He has flatly denied reports that he is preparing to climb down in his trial of strength with union leaders, warning striking workers that he would hold out against their “unreasonable” pay demands for months if necessary.

His ministers have accused the unions of “holding the country to ransom”, just as Thatcher did in 1979 before a Tory landslide election victory. And he has challenged the Labour leader, Keir Starmer, to back anti-strike legislation, to be brought in next year, in the belief that the public will be on his side.

It is a risky strategy. More than 1.5 million workers have been balloted for strike action this winter – meaning that most people will know someone taking industrial action, and can see for themselves that they are, like everybody else, struggling with the cost of living.

Senior Downing Street figures privately acknowledge the differences in public sentiment towards health workers and other striking sectors – in particular on rail, although postal workers and border force staff are also walking out this week.

Sunak had hoped the debate would centre on nurses' pay, with the public viewing demands for a 19% rise as unreasonable. But the public has not forgotten that frontline NHS workers have had an effective real-terms pay freeze for a decade, while putting their lives at risk on a daily basis throughout the pandemic.

The focus of discussion has now shifted to the state of the NHS, with harrowing stories of the pressures faced by hospitals and ambulance crews while they struggle to get the health service through winter, which is much more difficult territory for the government.

Far from public support falling away as the winter goes on, support for nurses has risen by seven points since the strikes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were announced in late November, according to the pollster Savanta. More than half of people (54%) blame the government for the nurses taking action, 27% blame unions and just 11% blame the nurses.

Another pollster, YouGov, reports that most Britons support strikes by nurses (66% support to 28% oppose) and ambulance workers (63% support to 31% oppose).

There is also growing disquiet among Conservative MPs that Sunak's plan to face down striking NHS workers will not work, with Geoffrey Clifton-Brown the latest to publicly voice concerns. He said ministers “parroting” lines about sticking to the recommendations of pay review bodies as justification for rejecting rises was “unrealistic”.

Sunak has hinted that he could revisit the pay review bodies' remit for next year – which is set by the government despite suggestions that ministers have little control – with the prime minister saying “the door is always open” to discuss “these things in the future”. But some unions are considering withdrawing from the system entirely.

As the Scottish government has shown, strikes by ambulance and NHS workers can be averted through negotiation, although it remains in dispute with nurses in Scotland who on Wednesday voted down the latest pay offer. In contrast, the Westminster government looks inflexible and unyielding.

Sunak is also reported to have rejected a suggestion by the health secretary, Steve Barclay, for a one-off payment for NHS staff, leaving his department even less room for manoeuvre in the months ahead with more industrial action by NHS unions expected and teachers expected to join the fray.

Even a popular government would struggle to take on the health unions over pay – in particular nurses, who are walking out for the first time in their history. The Tory party remains at least 20 points behind Labour in the polls – with the divide on handling of the health service also wide – and public sympathy for NHS workers is still strong.

Sunak may be hoping that by emulating Thatcher's unflinching stance towards the unions, public support will eventually wane. But if the NHS is crumbling at the end of it all, who will the public blame? Voters can see for themselves that, strikes or not, public services are already on their knees.

The prime minister may also like to cast his mind back to 1989 when even Thatcher's government had to back down on pay during the last ambulance strike, with workers eventually winning a 16.9% pay rise over 18 months amid huge public support for NHS staff.

If you care about press freedom, make some noise about Julian Assange

Trevor Timm, 4 May 2023, *The Guardian*

Let's help the Biden administration celebrate this week's World Press Freedom Day by asking it about the one case officials don't want to talk about: the US justice department's dangerous prosecution of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

Now, I know Assange is a polarizing individual who millions of Americans, especially liberals, have incredibly strong and negative feelings about. I'm not here to change your mind about Assange the person, but if you care about press freedom, it's important you change your mind about Assange the legal case.

There are several facts that are critical to understand about the justice department's charges against Assange – whether you love or hate him. First, the charges have nothing to do with Trump v Clinton, Russia, or the 2016 election. Zero. Those phrases aren't even mentioned in the indictment. The crux of the case stems from the state department cables and Iraq and Afghanistan war logs that whistleblower Chelsea Manning gave to WikiLeaks in 2010 and were shared with news outlets around the world, including the Guardian.

Second, the justice department likes to pretend this case is only about hacking and not journalism. They are lying. Seventeen of the 18 charges against Julian Assange are under the Espionage Act, and have nothing to do with hacking. Then again, they have nothing to do with “espionage” either. The US government doesn't allege Assange sold any secrets to foreign governments, only that he received classified documents from a source inside the US military, spoke with that source, held on to the documents and eventually published some of them. In other words, things national security reporters at the nation's most mainstream outlets do every day.

Third, you don't consider Julian Assange a journalist? Doesn't matter. Whether or not Assange fits your – or anyone's – definition of “journalist” is irrelevant when we are talking about the first amendment's guarantee of press freedom. It's a right that's afforded to everyone. All that matters in this case is that Assange was engaging in acts of journalism indistinguishable from the acts carried out every day in the New York Times, the Guardian and elsewhere. If he can be prosecuted for those acts, so can they. It's why virtually every single civil liberties, press freedom and human rights organization in the world has repeatedly urged the justice department to drop these dangerous charges.

[...] We know the Biden administration is amenable to pressure from news outlets. At the beginning of the administration, the public learned that the New York Times, the Washington Post and CNN had been secretly spied on by Trump's justice department, and journalists were rightly outraged. It was not only countless social media posts, but repeated and pointed questioning at White House and justice department press conferences that forced the administration's hand. President Biden quickly responded, condemning what had happened and within a few days had ordered the justice department to cease spying on journalists under his administration.

Just last month, when the respected Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich was arrested in Russia on sham “espionage” charges, the Journal marshaled its resources to help its colleague, thousands of journalists expressed outrage on social media, and protests had sprung up everywhere. The White House and state department felt the pressure, and they were soon out in front, promising to do whatever they possibly could to bring Evan home.

And even if you trust Biden not to go after journalists, think about who might follow him. Donald Trump is on the campaign trail right now literally musing about throwing journalists in jail. Who would love to use Assange as precedent more than him?

This isn't some hypothetical, far-flung, slippery-slope argument. We already know officials in previous administrations – from Nixon to Ford to George W Bush – have wanted to use the Espionage Act to directly prosecute journalists. Each time, they were thwarted because it was assumed such a prosecution would violate the constitution.

Right now, Assange sits where he has for the last several years, behind bars at Belmarsh prison in the United Kingdom, waiting to see if he will be extradited to the United States. Assange's legal team currently has an appeal out to Britain's highest court. Many observers were expecting the court to rule more than five months ago, but there's been no word since 2022. While Assange can still appeal to the European Court of Human Rights if he loses, his chances may be running out.

If Assange is extradited, his case will go from being ignored in the United States to an absolute circus. The justice department will dig its heels in even further to avoid the embarrassment of dropping the charges during a media firestorm. By then it may be too late anyway. A new president may be in office, who would not only ignore pleas from journalists but may revel in them.

Ask yourself: do you trust Donald Trump not to turn around and use this precedent on the reporters he considers the “enemies of the people” and has previously wanted thrown in jail? If not, then now is the time to make your voice heard about the dangerous case against Julian Assange.

If you wait until next World Press Freedom Day, it may be too late.

The Buffalo Massacre Happened A Year Ago — And Racism Is Still Very Much Alive In The City

Phillip Jackson, *The Huffington Post*, May 14, 2023

One year ago, Brooklyn Hough was a cashier at Tops Friendly Market, located on Buffalo’s east side. She was 22 years old and working to support her two children. Hough was just going out for her lunch break on a typical, quiet Saturday.

5 Then Payton Gendron arrived at the store. He carried out a racist shooting spree that would shock the nation and traumatize the city.

Hough heard gunshots and then screaming. At first, she thought the store was getting robbed. She fled through the back of the store.

“I did not see the killing, but I did see the bodies,” Hough told HuffPost.

10 She tried to call her boyfriend but his phone was dead, so she called her mother. Her mother could hear other people screaming, too.

Gendron murdered 10 Black people and injured three others. In his 180-page manifesto, the 18-year-old said he was fighting back against the “Great Replacement,” a dangerous white supremacist ideology that claims the government and Democrats are deliberately replacing ethnic Europeans with non-Europeans to gain political and cultural advantage.

15 In February, a state judge gave Gendron 11 consecutive life sentences without the possibility of parole. Right before the judge handed down his sentence, a family member of one victim berated the shooter and another man lunged at him, which temporarily halted the proceedings.

For Hough and others in Buffalo, the shooter’s calculated acts of violence caused pain that will exist for generations in the community. The May 14 shooting is remembered by local activists as “514.”

20 The grocery store shut down after the killings, though it’s now open. Hough had to find other ways to pay her bills and support her young children, so she took another job working as a cashier elsewhere. Along the way, she became a part of a support group with local activist Myles Carter and others that discusses demands on behalf of the massacre survivors and help for their predominantly Black community.

25 Hough and Carter both remember when President Joe Biden came to town in the days after the tragedy. He talked with the family members who lost loved ones and the people who were injured, though Hough wishes he had met with other people who were in the store, too.

Ten days after the shooting, another 18-year-old went to Uvalde, Texas, and fatally shot 19 children and two teachers inside a school. Seventeen others were injured but survived the attack. National attention quickly turned to Texas.

30 Carter says that Black people and Black communities have been terrorized for years — and that locking up the killers, while necessary, isn’t enough.

“For us, Payton Gendron is the person who injured us. But Payton Gendron is a foot soldier in the sea of white supremacy. We don’t have any real justice here because he is one of many. And you can see it happening in history over and over again,” he said. [...]

35 Carter himself is suing the city’s police department after police tackled and arrested him while he was being interviewed by a local television station in June 2020 amid protests following the murder of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. The video went viral and Carter was charged with obstruction of governmental administration and disorderly conduct, though those charges were dropped the following month.

40 Carter does not believe there was any change in his city after the mass shooting. “The people who are dealing with the tragedy of 514 are still locked in their houses and not working,” he said.

Carter and Hough want financial and mental support for survivors, reimbursement for purchases made at Tops on the day of the shooting and support for self-defense training.

45 While Hough was working at Tops, the state increased the minimum wage to \$13.20, but it still was not enough to make ends meet. She would like Buffalo Public Schools, the school district from which she graduated, to get much more attention and money.

Five city schools were recently included on a list of underfunded and high-needs schools in the state, according to a report from the New York State Education Department. (In March 2021, Democratic New York Rep. Brian Higgins announced Buffalo schools would receive \$814 million plus an additional \$232 million from the American Rescue Plan.)

50 Meanwhile, Hough harbors a deep worry that more young white males are being influenced by racist mass

murders.

“These kids are getting these ideas that they don’t like Black people. There are evil people in this world waking up and wanting to kill people. Taking mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and uncles from their family. And it is happening too much,” Hough said.

55 She said that if people make it out of Buffalo, that is an accomplishment. She and other survivors and activists are calling for more work opportunities for Black people.

“If you get out of Buffalo and you are successful, kudos to you,” Hough said. “I feel like the state and government designed Buffalo to be like this; no one is motivated to try to make it.”

And she is still waiting for the government to do something about gun violence in the country.

60 “This is America, this is what they do. Before this, there was another one and another one. And it is the same cycle, nothing being done for people and nothing being done for gun violence.”

The age of greedflation

Will Dunn, *The New Statesman*, 31 May 2023

5 The month of May was supposed to bring good news for the government: a lower energy price cap from Ofgem, a more optimistic verdict on our economy from the International Monetary Fund and a return to single-digit inflation. These things were delivered, and Rishi Sunak announced: “The plan is working.” The bond markets, however, disagreed.

10 On 24 May, as the Chancellor Jeremy Hunt congratulated himself on having “acted decisively to tame inflation”, bond traders looked at the Office for National Statistics data and began a rapid sell-off of UK government debt. Gilt yields – which reflect the amount it costs the UK to borrow from financial markets – rose at a speed seen only twice in recent decades: following Liz Truss’s disastrous mini-Budget, and during the financial crisis of 2008.

15 Why the sudden panic, when inflation had fallen? Bond prices measure how optimistic investors are about the fortunes of the country or company issuing them. While the UK’s rate of inflation fell on 24 May, investors were concerned that it was higher than most predictions. By 26 May the UK’s biggest mortgage provider, Nationwide, had already hiked mortgage rates. Hunt was asked by Sky News if he was comfortable with the Bank of England raising rates further still - markets now expect a peak of 5.5%, which will double the mortgage payments of many homeowners - even if this precipitated recession. “Yes,” he answered.

20 Some force has gripped our economy, making it feverish, and even strong medicine (administered as 12 interest-rate rises in a row) doesn’t seem to be working. The truth is that while inflation is portrayed in headlines as one number, it is more diffuse. Like a pandemic, it arrives in waves as new types develop. The first wave was caused by an overdose of demand: in 2020 people saved money by not going anywhere, and spent it on tat from Amazon (“durable goods”, in economeses). Just as this demand had begun to ebb, a second
25 wave arrived, caused by a lack of supply: an energy shock sharply exacerbated by Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. That influence, too, has waned – wholesale energy prices are below pre-war levels – but at the end of 2022, a third wave arrived. This time, the force driving prices upwards is one many economists find difficult to model: greed.

30 Beyond the checkouts of every British supermarket, a row of boxes waits to take the items that the occasional shopper will drop in for the food banks. The number of donations has fallen in recent months as inflation erodes the spending power of even the more affluent customers, but they are more vital than ever: in the past year the Trussell Trust, Britain’s biggest food bank network, has distributed almost three million emergency food parcels. A million of them were for children.

35 The operating margins of British workers, meanwhile, have collapsed. According to the retail data analyst Kantar, groceries now cost the average household an extra £833 a year. For a low-income family, that is already unsustainable. A recent YouGov poll of 10,000 adults found that one in five people in the UK has recently reduced the amount they are eating or skipped at least one meal due to the high price of food.

[...] There is broad agreement, however, that the competition regulator should step in. The Liberal Democrat leader, Ed Davey, told me that if an investigation of the largest supermarkets and food companies by the
40 Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) was announced, it would have “an immediate impact” on prices: any board would want a “top to bottom review of how they set prices to make sure they are not caught out”. The government is also looking at the problem: on 23 May Hunt met with food companies and the CMA at Downing Street, and the MPs of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee have launched their own inquiry into fairness in food prices.

45 Urgent action is needed. The least-worst option, says Paul Donovan, is that consumer demand collapses. There is already evidence for this: own-brand products are more popular than ever (another win for the supermarkets), and people are buying less, even as they spend more. Albert Edwards warns that more pessimistic scenarios are not inconceivable: “We talk about Tiananmen Square being all about democracy; it was because they had runaway inflation. The French Revolution wasn’t about *liberté, fraternité, égalité*, it
50 was about rampant food price inflation.” No one should underestimate how serious the threat posed by high food prices is to the social fabric, Edwards said. “We generally accept the semi-free market system we’re working under. This is an existential threat to it.”

In his first speech as Chancellor last autumn, Hunt described our predicament as “a recession made in Russia”. It was a clumsy attempt to shift the blame for the UK’s economic woes from the Conservative Party
55 to Vladimir Putin, but it contained a grain of truth. The war in Ukraine had posed a challenge to the economies of the US, UK and Europe: who should pay? Our answer has exposed us, for all our social progress, as participants in a grasping and predatory system, in which the CEO of Tesco can be paid £4.4m to “rebuild” his company’s profits while millions of British people go hungry. In passing the bill on to those who can least afford it, our society shows itself at its worst.

Trump Angst Grips Republicans (Again) as 2024 Announcement Looms

Lisa Lerer and Reid J. Epstein, *The New York Times*, November 12, 2022

Before the votes are even fully counted in the 2022 midterm election, Republicans are starting to face a decision: Do they stick with Donald J. Trump into 2024 or leave him behind?

For seven years, in office and out, before and after his supporters overran the Capitol, Mr. Trump has exerted a gravitational pull on the party's base, and through it, the country's politics, no matter how hard lawmakers, strategists, officials and even his own vice president tried to escape his orbit.

Now, after a string of midterm losses by candidates Mr. Trump supported, there are signs of another Republican effort to inch the party away from the former president ahead of his expected announcement on Tuesday of another run for the White House — even as his allies on Capitol Hill demand new acts of fealty to him.

It has not escaped Republicans that this week represented the third consecutive political cycle in which Democrats ran with considerable success against the polarizing former president. While they rarely spoke his name, Mr. Trump formed the background music to their attacks asserting that the Republican Party had grown too extreme.

He was featured in their fund-raising solicitations and made cameos in their television ads. The party even meddled in Republican primaries to help Trump-aligned candidates Democratic leaders thought would be easier to beat. Democrats won each of those races.

The tactics helped Democrats cast the election not as a referendum on the current, unpopular president, President Biden, but on an even more unpopular ex-president and his allies. It is a strategy they will try again next month in Georgia, where Senator Raphael Warnock faces a runoff contest against Herschel Walker, a Republican plucked from pro-football retirement by Mr. Trump. Already, some are looking beyond that race, dreaming of a 2024 contest that could feature, once again, Mr. Trump at the top of the ticket.

“As an American, the idea of another Trump campaign and all of his lies and divisiveness and his efforts to undermine American democracy is an absolute horror show,” said Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont. “On the other hand, I got to say that as a politician who wants to see that no Republican is elected to the White House in 2024, from that perspective, his candidacy is probably a good thing.”

But if Mr. Trump remains a major motivator for Democrats, Republicans are starting to have to take sides, with his allies in Congress pressuring other Republicans to endorse his 2024 candidacy and a loyal band of senators looking for ways to undercut Senator Mitch McConnell, the party's leader in that chamber and the object of Mr. Trump's scorn.

The divisions were certain to consume the House as well, as Representative Kevin McCarthy is trying to rally support behind his bid to be speaker of the House. Jason Miller, a strategist assisting Mr. Trump with his campaign announcement, warned Friday, speaking on Steve Bannon's internet radio show, that Mr. McCarthy “must be much more declarative that he supports President Trump” in 2024.

Some of the Republicans speaking out now have previously enabled Mr. Trump and his policies, either through public support or silence. While they long privately claimed to disdain Mr. Trump's politics, they were fearful of crossing the party's base.

Now, the party is reaping political consequences. Trump-backed candidates lost key Senate races in Pennsylvania and Arizona, as well as several House races from Alaska to North Carolina. On Saturday, Democrats clinched control of the Senate with a hard-fought re-election victory for Catherine Cortez Masto in Nevada. In the House, despite predictions of a G.O.P. wave, neither party had secured a majority.

Since Tuesday's election, *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page and *The New York Post* — owned by the conservative media baron Rupert Murdoch — have called for Mr. Trump to be tossed aside. Lt. Gov. Winsome Sears of Virginia and Robin Vos, the powerful Assembly speaker in Wisconsin — both major Trump allies during and after his presidency — said Mr. Trump shouldn't be the party's presidential nominee in 2024.

The National Review summed up the message of the midterms as, “Republicans: Trump is your problem. Wake up.”

Republican moderates used the moment to bemoan the party's plunge into conspiracy theories and divisive

50 issues that light up the right-wing media. Senator Mitt Romney, a Republican from Utah, called for a return to classic fiscal conservatism. [...]

Discussions over Mr. Trump's role in the Georgia runoff on Dec. 6 are underway, as state and national Republicans try to find the best way to rally the party's most loyal voters behind Mr. Walker without turning off crucial swing voters in the Atlanta suburbs.

55 Adrienne Shropshire, who runs BlackPAC, an African American political organizing group, said that risk was real.

"Voters in Georgia rejected Trump in 2021," Ms. Shropshire said. "His presence now only reminds them of why."

60 Democratic strategists and leaders are looking well beyond December and can't hide their giddiness at the prospect of another election with Mr. Trump at the center.

"It's very good for Democrats," said former Gov. Terry McAuliffe of Virginia, who spent the final weeks of his losing campaign for governor in 2021 trying to tie his opponent to Mr. Trump.

Mr. McAuliffe quickly added, "I think it's horrible for the country — the divisiveness."

After Dobbs, Republicans Wrestle With What It Means to Be Anti-Abortion

Lisa Lerer and Katie Glueck, Jan. 20, 2023, *The New York Times*

5 For decades, opposition to abortion was a crucial but relatively clear-cut litmus test for Republican candidates: support overturning a constitutional right to an abortion, back anti-abortion judges and vote against taxpayer funding for the procedure.

10 But now, six months after the Supreme Court overturned federal abortion rights, the test has grown a whole lot harder —and potentially more politically treacherous. Even after a backlash in support of abortion rights cost Republicans key seats in the midterm elections, a restive socially conservative wing is pushing the party’s lawmakers to embrace deeper restrictions. That effort was on stark display on Friday in Washington, when anti-abortion activists gather for the first post-Roe v. Wade version of their annual march. “We don’t end as a response to Roe being overturned,” said Jeanne Mancini, the president of the March for Life Education and Defense Fund. “Why? Because we are not yet done. Let me say that again: We are not yet done.”

15 These activists and their allies are pressuring potential Republican presidential contenders to call for a national ban. Raising the stakes nearly two years before the 2024 contest, Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, one of the most powerful anti-abortion groups, said that any candidate who does not support federal restrictions should be “disqualified” from winning the party’s nomination.

20 But some Republican strategists worry that such a position could repel general-election swing voters, who polls show are turned off by the idea of a national ban.

25 Other conservative activists are pushing for a new series of litmus tests that include restrictions on medication abortion, protections for so-called crisis pregnancy centers that discourage women from having abortions, and promises of fiercely anti-abortion appointees to run the Justice Department and the Food and Drug Administration. For Republican politicians, these activists are forcing the question of what, exactly, it means to be “pro-life” now that Roe v. Wade has been overturned.

30 “This is coming. The pro-life movement is not going to be happy or thanking a candidate simply for saying they are pro-life,” said Kristan Hawkins, the president of Students for Life of America, an anti-abortion group. “We’re in a position where we’re going to get down to the various candidates on how far they are going to go to protect women and children.”

35 Some Republican officials and strategists argue that pitched debates over abortion rights in the midterms — and the party’s inability to quickly adopt a unified message on the issue — contributed to the G.O.P.’s weaker-than-expected performance in battleground states including Michigan, Pennsylvania and Arizona. This view is shared by former President Donald J. Trump, who distanced himself this month from a social conservative wing that has been a pillar of his base when he blamed the “abortion issue” for the party’s loss of “large numbers of voters” in November.

40 The comments set off an instant backlash from loyal supporters who once lauded him as the most anti-abortion president in history. Ms. Hawkins described Mr. Trump as “listening to swamp consultants.” The remarks also prompted ridicule from some Republican strategists who noted that Mr. Trump was often a liability in major races last year.

45 Some potential 2024 candidates have begun tussling over the issue as they try to position themselves as the conservative movement’s next standard-bearer. Mr. Trump’s comments drew a rebuke from his former vice president, Mike Pence, who retweeted a statement from Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America urging the former president and his possible rivals to embrace an “ambitious consensus pro-life position.” “Well said,” added Mr. Pence, who has cast himself as a true champion of the cause as he promotes the Supreme Court’s ruling in appearances at “crisis pregnancy centers” and movement galas.

50 A spokesman for Gov. Kristi Noem of South Dakota has accused Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida of “hiding” behind his state’s ban on abortion past 15 weeks of pregnancy, while Ms. Noem has promoted her “aggressive” record on abortion restrictions. “Talking about situations and making statements is incredibly important, but also taking action and governing and bringing policies that protect life are even more important,” she said recently on CBS News. And Mr. DeSantis, who shied away from addressing abortion for most of the fall campaign, has said he is “willing to sign great life legislation” and has not ruled out support for a six-week ban.

55 Still, it remains unclear what, exactly, is the new standard for being anti-abortion — even among those pushing for more restrictions. Is it enough to seek to ban abortions after 15 weeks? Or should the bar be roughly six weeks, like the measure that Gov. Brian Kemp of Georgia signed into law? Should Republicans support exceptions for rape, incest and health of the mother — which Mr. Trump backs — or none at all? And how do you define health anyhow? Do psychiatric crises count?

60 As some Republican-dominated statehouses prepare to further limit abortion, future presidential candidates are also likely to be asked about restrictive measures being proposed, including prosecuting those seeking abortion care in states where it is banned, targeting allies who help women travel across state lines for the procedure, criminalizing the mailing of abortion medication, and granting fetuses the same legal rights as people through fetal personhood bills. [...]

How the Wind Became Woke

Paul Krugman, May 30, 2023, *The New York Times*

5 The world is experiencing an energy revolution. Over the past 15 years or so, huge technological progress has, in many cases, made it cheaper to generate electricity from solar and wind power than by burning fossil fuels. The Inflation Reduction Act — which is, despite its name, mainly a climate bill — aims to accelerate the transition to renewables and also to electrify as much of the economy as possible; this effort, if it works quickly enough and is emulated by other countries, could help us avert climate catastrophe.

10 Even before the I.R.A. started to take effect, however, America was experiencing a renewable energy boom. And the boom has been led by a surprising place. Yes, Texas is in the lead. To be fair, California has more solar power, and a lot of geothermal electricity, too. But Texas dominates in wind power. And overall California is, even progressives have to admit, a state where NIMBYism sometimes seems to slide into BANANA territory — as in “build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone.” That’s why housing is so

15 scarce and expensive, and red tape has snarled green energy, too. Texas, whatever its flaws (which are many), is a place where things can get built, and that has included a lot of wind turbines. You might think, then, that Texas politicians would be celebrating the renewables boom, which is both good for the state’s economy and an advertisement for the state’s laissez-faire policies. But no. Republicans in the Texas legislature have turned hard against renewable energy, with a raft of proposed measures that

20 would subsidize fossil fuels, impose restrictions that might block many renewable energy projects and maybe even shut down many existing facilities. The worst of these measures don’t seem to have made it into the latest legislation, but even so, that legislation strongly favors fossil fuels over an industry that arguably reflects Texas’s energy future.

So what’s going on here? Why do Texas Republicans now see the wind as an enemy? You might think that

25 the answer is greed, and that’s surely part of it. But the bigger picture, I’d argue, is that renewable energy has become a victim of the anti-woke mind virus.

First, about greed. Yes, Texas is a state where what big business wants, big business gets. And the fossil fuel industry has a long history of doing what it can to block climate action, not just by lobbying against green energy policies but also by promoting climate denialism. Yet there are several reasons to doubt

30 whether Texas’s turn against renewables is a simple story of corporate greed. For one thing, renewable energy in Texas is already a big business itself, having attracted billions in investment and employing thousands of workers, which should act as a counterweight to fossil fuel interests.

Furthermore, a lot of Texas investment in green energy is actually coming from companies with roots in fossil fuels. So even some oil and gas companies have a financial stake in allowing the renewable boom to

35 continue.

Finally, oil and gas are traded on world markets. The prices producers receive, and hence their profits, are determined more by global events like Russia’s invasion of Ukraine than by where Texas gets its electricity (although this obviously matters for the owners of power plants).

So I don’t think Texas’s rejection of its own energy success is entirely, or even mainly, about greed. Instead,

40 renewables have been caught up in the culture wars. In a way, it’s a lot like Ron DeSantis’s confrontation with Disney, which looks just crazy from a policy point of view — why undermine tourism, one of the pillars of Florida’s economy? But these days it’s often important *not* to follow the money. [...]

Here’s how it works. A significant faction of Americans, which increasingly dominates the Republican Party, hates anything it considers woke — which in this faction’s eyes means both any acknowledgment of

45 social injustice and any suggestion that people should make sacrifices, or even accept mild inconvenience, in the name of the public good. So there’s rage against the idea that racism was and still is an evil for which society should make some amends; there’s also rage against the idea that people should, say, wear masks during a pandemic to protect others, or cut down on activities that harm the environment.

This rage is somewhat understandable, if not forgivable. But the weird thing is the way that it infects

50 attitudes on issues that don’t actually involve wokeism but are seen as woke-adjacent.

The now-classic example is the way hostility to mask mandates, which were mainly about protecting others, turned into highly partisan opposition to Covid vaccination, which is mainly about protecting yourself. Logically, this carry-over makes no sense; but it happened anyway.

The same thing, I’d argue, applies to energy policy. At this point, investing in renewable energy is simply

55 a good business proposition; Texas Republicans have had to abandon their own free-market, anti-regulation ideology in the effort to strangle wind and solar power. But renewable energy is something environmentalists favor; it’s being promoted by the Biden administration. So in the minds of Texas right-wingers the wind has become woke, and wind power has become something to be fought even if it hurts business and costs the state both money and jobs.

In 2020, America elected Joe Biden to be not-Trump—a role for which he seemed well-suited. In 2016, the country voted for burn-it-all-down upheaval. Trump was the tribune of those who felt betrayed and misled and mistreated. Four chaotic years later, alarmed voters fled into the arms of an aging former vice-president and senator—a man they had twice rejected as a presidential contender—who seemed the personification of the steady hand.

No one expected Biden to be transformational or extraordinary, but we did need him to be the anti-Trump in the most important ways. We needed him to be sober and responsible, to play by the rules, and to uphold the primacy of law and procedure. And he delivered. President Biden freed the country and the world from the tyranny of tweeted insults, conspiracies, threats, lies, fantasies, and reversals. And while naturally some will criticize his policies, Biden has conducted the presidency with dignity. He has gone some way toward restoring a sense that the system, whatever its flaws, is basically sound.

But the revelation that, like Trump, Biden mishandled classified documents, including storing them in his garage next to his Corvette, drags us back to precisely the world in which Trump is most comfortable. Like all reprobates, Trump's default justification when caught out is "everybody does it." Last summer, when the FBI executed a search of Mar-a-Lago for purloined classified documents, Trump demanded, on his social media platform Truth Social, "What happened to the 30 million pages of documents taken from the White House to Chicago by Barack Hussein Obama? He refused to give them back! What is going on? This act was strongly at odds with NARA. Will they be breaking into Obama's 'mansion' in Martha's Vineyard?" It was rubbish, as the National Archives confirmed in a statement. Obama had turned everything over to the proper authorities. But now, Biden has offered an enormous gift to Trump and his truth-optional allies. Biden really did do something similar.

The TV analysts who are rushing to explain that what Trump did was orders of magnitude worse than what Biden did are correct, but it will not alter the political calculus. What Biden did (so far as we know or have reason to suspect) was negligent but not intentional. And yet, it's still way too close to Trump's transgressions for comfort. Millions of Republicans, marinated in grievance, are primed to believe that Trump is the victim of a double standard and they won't delve too deeply into the distinction between purposely absconding with classified material, lying about it, and defying a subpoena, and simply leaving classified documents in an office closet and in a garage.

The great loss here is not that this makes it more challenging to bring criminal charges against Trump for his contempt of the law regarding classified materials, the tragedy is that this is a victory for the kind of cynicism that Trump has popularized. "Drain the swamp." "Lock Her Up." "Stop the Steal." "Defund the FBI." Trump's message has been consistent. Everyone is corrupt. The system is rigged. No one is honest. No one really plays by the rules.

Until now, it seemed that President Biden was defying that theme. His administration has been staffed by grown ups. There have been no scandals. The Department of Justice has been methodical and fair in its prosecutions.

In an appearance on 60 Minutes in September of 2022, Biden was asked: "When you saw the photograph of the top secret documents laid out on the floor at Mar-a-Lago, what did you think to yourself looking at that image?" Scott Pelley was really asking how a respectable government official, a rule upholder, regards those who trash those standards. It was an invitation to express censoriousness on behalf of everyone who would never consider treating national security so cavalierly. Biden replied, "How that could possibly happen, how anyone could be that irresponsible?" At the time, that moment seemed a ratification of normality in American politics. Now, the clip is an arrow in the quiver of the truth-denying nihilists.

Worse, the Biden administration's post-revelation conduct has been less than inspiring. We now know that Mr. Biden's lawyers discovered the documents in the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement in Washington, D.C. on November 2. When news leaked on January 9, the White House issued a statement stressing that as soon as these documents were discovered, their existence was reported to the National Archives and they were recovered the following morning. The message: It was an oversight, but as soon as it was discovered, we did things by the book.

Except that a few days later, the White House was obliged to acknowledge that the Penn Biden Center documents were not, in fact, the only ones they found. [...] That looks, in these early days, like the kind of dodgy, hide-the-ball behavior that Biden should have been above. The man who was dismayed by the spectacle of classified documents splayed out on the floor of Mar-a-Lago has been transformed into the tetchy pol explaining that documents locked next to a Corvette were hardly "sitting out on the street." That is demoralizing for those who believe that Biden's chief accomplishment—and purpose—as president has been to restore a modicum of trust to a nation that has been sunk in suspicion and bitterness for too long. Being not-Trump demands better.