

COMMENT

THE CIRCUS RETURNS

As the USA cowers in shock ahead of January's presidential inauguration, words are being eaten around the world by politicians representing the country's customary allies. Australia's ambassador to the US, former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, hurriedly deleted a tweet from 2020 labelling Donald Trump "the most destructive president in history."

There was however no delete option for UK foreign secretary David Lammy. His 2018 letter to *Time* magazine, proudly explaining why he was joining protests against the once and future president's visit to London that year, remains a matter of record both online and in print. The Orange One, it declared, "is not only a woman-hating Neo-Nazi sympathising sociopath, he is also a profound threat to the international order". For good measure it also called him "a tyrant in a toupee".

All clearly true, and some would say quite mild, considering – but also a bit awkward given the unexpected change of circumstances. These pungent words are likely to be better remembered than Lammy's gritted-teeth official acknowledgement of the election result: "Congratulations on your victory. We look forward to working with you and JD Vance in the years ahead."

Far Left Labour?

It seems safe to say that despite Lammy and Starmer's hasty efforts to ingratiate themselves, their Government will not enjoy favoured status with the new US regime. During his campaign Trump contemptuously described the UK as led by "the far-left Labour party", a description which makes sense only from his own rarefied position at the extreme opposite end of the political spectrum.

Vice-president-elect Vance referred to the UK more colourfully as "the first Islamic republic with nuclear weapons". Oligarch-in-chief Elon Musk, who some are already calling the shadow vice president, gleefully joined in the racist muck-raking, pronouncing the UK a country in which "civil war is inevitable".

Trade and War

Trump's trade team will be well aware that the post-Brexit UK negotiates from a position of weakness. Keen to undercut regulation and increase US corporate profits, they are likely to impose steep tariffs, and then offer to lower them on signature of a take-it-or-leave-it deal involving full market

access for US agricultural products which do not meet UK standards. Expect a reprise of familiar controversies about chlorinated chicken, hormone-treated beef, and unlabelled GM foods (see *The Land* 26, p4). Increased access for US healthcare firms to UK markets, both within and beyond the NHS, will also be on the table.



In the Middle East, Trump will back and arm the Netanyahu regime's land grab of the ethnically cleansed Gaza Strip and West Bank. He will also be only too keen to join in with the humiliation and undermining of the United Nations. Will the UK remain in the tiny group of member states voting with Israel and the US to obstruct international law and justice? As the genocide intensifies, this choice will be tougher for Labour than it was for the Tories.

Conversely Trump may withdraw US military backing for Ukraine, potentially leaving the EU and UK to fight a proxy war with Russia without US support. This alarming possibility is already leading to steep increases in military spending.

Drill, Baby, Drill

Beholden to fossil fuel money, Trump will withdraw the US from the Paris climate agreement (again), increase oil and gas production, and pull out of efforts to reach global agreement on plastics pollution. More broadly his administration will work to weaken and unpick environmental regulations of all kinds.

The very wacky Robert Kennedy Junior will supposedly be let loose on health and food policy, though it could yet turn out that Trump was just after antivax voters, and gambling they would be gullible enough to believe he'd keep his word. Some of what RFK says about food does actually make sense, but since he won't be allowed to do anything that could reduce profits for Big Food (or indeed Big Pharma), or to depart from the broader deregulation agenda, he's unlikely to achieve anything meaningful.

Musk meanwhile has been rewarded for his loyalty and cash by being put in charge of cutting the 'red tape' that constrains profits at companies like his own. In addition, Starlink, SpaceX and Neuralink will probably be rewarded with juicy government contracts as the new president endorses Musk's transhumanist fantasies of Mars colonisation. Bond villains were a lot more fun when they were fictional.

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