# Reform UK makes surprising gains in traditional Labour strongholds amid union unrest



In the aftermath of last week's English local elections, a concerning shift has emerged in the political landscape, with Reform UK making striking inroads into traditionally left-leaning areas that have long been the stronghold of labour movements. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) recently attempted to downplay these changes with an Instagram video targeting working-class voters, revealing their fears about the rising influence of the opposition party.

The video features a worker from a Merseyside electric car plant questioning the motivations behind the new political dynamic, stating, “Why does the leadership want me to lose my job?” After a crowd responds negatively to the questioning of electric car viability, the worker adds with sarcasm, “Thanks, mate.” This moment captures the intense anxiety within Labour and TUC circles as they grapple with their diminishing hold on their traditional voter base.

The local election results are alarming, with Reform making significant gains in historically union-heavy regions such as County Durham. This area, notable for hosting the annual Durham Miners’ Gala, has now fallen under Reform's control as they secured more than half of the council seats. Among the newly elected councillors is Howard Brown, a local official from the National Education Union, which has hastily labelled Reform as “far right,” in an attempt to discredit the party's authenticity.

In the lead-up to the elections, the Unite union revealed a troubling trend through an internal poll indicating rising support for Reform among its members. “It was extremely concerning,” noted a senior union figure, stressing the urgent need for a counter-narrative to defend a narrative being scrutinised by workers increasingly disillusioned with Labour.

The strategy employed by Reform is astutely targeting these workers, adopting stances previously aligned with Labour and trade unions. By supporting striking workers in Birmingham, advocating for the nationalisation of British Steel, and opposing investor interests at Thames Water, Reform has managed to co-opt significant elements of traditional Labour rhetoric. Deputy leader Richard Tice even made headlines by appearing with a trade union badge, signalling a deliberate recalibration of the party's outreach strategy.

Matthew McGregor, head of the campaign group 38 Degrees, acknowledged that the rising clout of the opposition party is indicative of profound economic anxieties among older, working-class voters. “The irony of a low-tax, regulatory-light leader now calling for the nationalisation of key industries is telling,” he observed, revealing the contradictions in the political landscape.

As Reform gains traction in former mining regions, their voter base increasingly comprises individuals identifying closely with union issues. Georgie Laming, campaigns director at Hope Not Hate, noted extensive research indicating a subgroup of voters attracted to Reform for its immigration stance and purported pro-worker policies.

Despite these alarming developments, no prominent union leaders have openly endorsed the new opposition party. TUC General Secretary Paul Nowak has called Farage a “Putin apologist fraud,” illustrating the strong resistance to the party's expanding influence. Yet, he also admitted that segments of union members may be swayed towards Reform, revealing potential vulnerabilities in Labour's messaging.

Under the leadership of Sir Keir Starmer, Labour's pivot to more centrist positions on strikes and public services is likely contributing to its declining appeal among core supporters. With tensions rising between the unions and newly elected Reform councils, Christina McAnea, general secretary of Unison, has urged non-unionised workers to join unions to protect their rights as the political landscape shifts beneath them.

As this new political narrative unfolds, the conflict between unions and opposition parties will undoubtedly remain a crucial battleground in future electoral contests and public discussions. The political landscape is changing, and with it, the voice of the working class is being reshaped—creating challenges that the current governing factions seem ill-prepared to address.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/a52fae13-7bbf-432e-bb74-4ec5618cb3a3> - This article discusses Reform UK's rising momentum in the North, particularly in areas like Durham, highlighting their targeted campaigns in traditional Labour strongholds.
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/05/05/local-election-results-reform-uk-party-flop/> - This piece reports on Reform UK's performance in the 2023 local elections, noting they secured six seats despite fielding candidates in nearly 500 seats, indicating limited success in traditionally Labour areas.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Greater_Lincolnshire_mayoral_election> - This entry details the 2025 Greater Lincolnshire mayoral election, where Reform UK's candidate, Andrea Jenkyns, won with 42% of the vote, marking a significant gain in a traditionally Labour-leaning region.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Lichfield_District_Council_election> - This article outlines the 2023 Lichfield District Council election results, where Reform UK contested seats but did not secure any, reflecting challenges in penetrating traditional Labour strongholds.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Staffordshire_County_Council_election> - This page describes the 2025 Staffordshire County Council election, where Reform UK achieved an overall majority, taking control from the Conservative Party, indicating a shift in voter dynamics.
6. <https://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/111151/10-05-2023/tusc-stand-a-modest-but-important-step-towards-a-mass-workers-electoral-alternative/> - This article discusses the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's (TUSC) policies for the local elections, emphasizing their opposition to cuts and support for workers' struggles, highlighting the TUC's concerns about rising opposition parties.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/99f22666-c2f0-4485-aa86-317b7fd9575c> - Please view link - unable to able to access data