

## Western Europe

ANDREW MORAVCSIK

*Get In: The Inside Story of Labour  
Under Starmer*

BY PATRICK MAGUIRE AND  
GABRIEL POGRUND. Bodley Head,  
2025, 480 pp.

This engaging book offers a journalistic view of how the Labour Party under Keir Starmer won the 2024 election. It focuses not on the leader himself but on the successful campaign manager (now chief of staff) Morgan McSweeney, who appears as the power behind a prime minister not blessed with acute political instincts. In the pursuit of culturally conservative but economically left-wing policies, McSweeney helped Starmer become party leader, banish the leftist Jeremy Corbyn from the party, and win the election in a landslide. Governing, however, takes more than conducting ruthless purges, waging slick marketing campaigns, and heaping opprobrium on the former government. Like center-left parties elsewhere, Labour now must knit together a durable coalition that includes working-class and middle-class moderate voters and bridge a divide between culturally radical and conservative factions within the party. In office, faced with issues such as the war in Gaza, negotiations with the EU, and various domestic problems, Starmer remains caught between a constrained fiscal base and pressures to spend more, and the tensions between universal human rights and traditional patriotism.

*Rot: An Imperial History  
of the Irish Famine*

BY PADRAIC X. SCANLAN. Basic  
Books, 2025, 352 pp.

In Ireland from 1845 to 1852, a blight that caused potatoes to rot in the ground led to the “Great Hunger.” The result was the highest recorded percentage of fatalities from famine in modern history: of a pre-famine population of around eight million, at least a million people died, and nearly two million fled the island. (The island has yet to return to its nineteenth-century population level.) This displacement and suffering occurred in the most economically advanced country in the world, the United Kingdom. The underlying problem, this book argues convincingly, was that the rich land of Ireland was monopolized by a tiny and wealthy Anglophone Protestant elite, which used it to produce cheap grain and livestock for export. Even in good times, this aristocracy exploited small tenant farmers who in turn exploited still smaller farmers, who raised just enough potatoes to keep their families alive. Although politicians in London did not deliberately cause the famine, their belief in small government, the sanctity of free markets, and the indolence of the undeserving Irish poor—a perception stoked by the British landed elite—turned the blight into a catastrophe and undermined potential remedies. The disaster holds lessons for a modern era of extreme pro-market ideology and rising inequality.

*A Calculated Restraint: What Allied Leaders Said About the Holocaust*

BY RICHARD BREITMAN. Harvard University Press, 2025, 352 pp.

Foreign governments were aware of Hitler's persecution and extermination of Jews, yet they strictly limited the number of Jewish refugees who could immigrate, and after war broke out, failed to bomb the infrastructure that facilitated mass murder. Breitman, a historian who has dedicated his career to understanding why others did not act more resolutely to help Jews during the Holocaust, concludes that pragmatic considerations explain—and, to an extent, excuse—inaction. During the 1930s, foreign leaders calculated that acting more resolutely would expend scarce domestic political capital and military means required to combat Nazi Germany in other ways. Publicizing the threat to Jews might have invited criticism from nationalists within their countries who supported restrictive immigration policies, or perhaps even seemed to confirm anti-Semitic charges from Hitler and others that Jews controlled Allied governments. From late 1941 through early 1944, moreover, Allied governments possessed “no military or diplomatic leverage” that could have ended the murder of millions. Only a swifter end to the war could have done that. This troubling book challenges the claim that evil prevails mainly because “good men do nothing.”

*Plato and the Tyrant: The Fall of Greece's Greatest Dynasty and the Making of a Philosophic Masterpiece*

BY JAMES ROMM. Norton, 2025, 368 pp.

History remembers Plato as a scholar secluded in his Athenian Academy, debating political philosophy. Yet he was also a man of the world who traveled widely and participated in civic life. This book is based on 13 letters, most or all likely penned by Plato, that describe his little-known engagement in politics. It reconstructs his interactions with Dionysius and his son of the same name, the tyrants who ruled Syracuse, the dominant Greek city-state of Plato's time. The philosopher was particularly intimate with Dion, the uncle of the younger Dionysius, who challenged his nephew for the throne. Yet Plato's interventions into Syracusan politics—most notably his effort to educate these tyrants into civility—proved childishy naive. Philosophical tutoring failed to produce wise rulers. Plato fled Syracuse, humiliated by the tyrants' taunts. Fearing that his abject failure in Syracuse might cast doubt on his philosophical insight, however, he continued, unconvincingly, to defend their actions. Whereas Plato's *Republic* presumed that a philosophical education can combat tyranny, this book suggests that applying ideal principles to real-world dictators can lead philosophers into tragic contradictions.

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*Pivotal Poland: Europe's Rising Power*  
BY JANUSZ BUGAJSKI. The  
Jamestown Foundation, 2025, 396 pp.

Over the last decade, Poland has emerged as a major player in European military security strategy. Although the country is polarized, all its parties are resolutely opposed to Russian aggression in Ukraine and Moscow's broader effort to reassert regional power. Unlike its central European neighbors, Poland is large enough to matter; unlike some of its western European neighbors, it has carried out a robust military buildup. In a time of transatlantic discord, the country is emerging as an essential transatlantic link. This book, more think-tank report than scholarly monograph, provides a useful factual compendium of background material about Polish defense policy—although the absence of an index or a digital version remains a major obstacle to its efficient use. The volume's concluding policy recommendations, only loosely connected to the empirical analysis, are more problematic. Some suggestions will raise eyebrows, as when the author counsels Poland to address democratic backsliding with a public relations campaign, urges that Ukraine be allowed to join NATO, and advocates a serious Western effort to promote regime change in Russia.

## Western Hemisphere

RICHARD FEINBERG

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*The Collapse of Venezuela: Scorched Earth Politics and Economic Decline, 2012–2020*

BY FRANCISCO RODRÍGUEZ.  
University of Notre Dame Press,  
2025, 538 pp.

In charting the catastrophic economic collapse of his native Venezuela, Rodríguez, a political economist, combines technical expertise with insider insights from his years in public service. During the 2010s, Venezuela's per capita income plummeted by over 70 percent, propelling millions of citizens to emigrate. Bad economic policy and corruption played a role in this tragedy, but contrary to talking points advanced by many critics of President Hugo Chávez and his successor, Nicolás Maduro, those were not the main factors. According to Rodríguez, two other variables explain this unprecedented tragedy: the country's excessively powerful executive branch (and winner-take-all politics) and the maximalist economic sanctions imposed by the first Trump administration. Rodríguez is particularly critical of radical elements within the Venezuelan opposition and diaspora for drawing the United States into "scorched earth" sanctions against Venezuela's oil exports, which impoverished the country but failed to trigger regime change. To overcome the country's seemingly intractable political deadlock, Rodríguez advocates