

Funding the Future

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It is depressing to know that the left-wing of UK politics continues to be in a complete mess.

To make clear that my comments are not party political, just look at [what I noted about the SNP a few days ago](#), and read the comments below the line there. It is apparent that under its current leadership SNP is now a decidedly right of centre party.

The Liberal Democrats did, of course, disappear in the same direction a long time ago.

One nation Tories are now just a slogan.

And just when the country is in real need of an effective opposition Labour is descending into further infighting that can only be of benefit to a profoundly populist government whose every instinct is to abuse the people of this country, about whose fates, and even their deaths, it would appear to be entirely indifferent.

In this discussion I am taking the EHRC Report on anti-Semitism in the Labour Party as read: they have had much better opportunity than anybody else to form an opinion on this issue. I am presuming they are right.

That said, from my brief experience of working with Jeremy Corbyn, and having met him and his family, I seriously doubt that he is personally anti-Semitic. I believe him when he says he is not.

At the same time, it took me very little time to appreciate that he was out of his depth as Labour leader. That's not a criticism, as such. I do not think he ever planned to have the role, or expected to win it. His whole career was focused on a series of single issue campaigns that he tirelessly pursued, being opportunistic to advance his cause in ways that, at least in retrospect, suggest he was insufficiently cautious about those he worked with. But, within the framework in which he expected to pursue his career he could probably have got away with that.

What was impossible was for him to bring to that role the same naive belief that he had previously held that those who professed broadly common objectives could not also hold views that he probably did find repugnant. I think Corbyn found it almost

impossible to believe that there were those on the left who could be both apparently anti-racist and anti-Semitic. And so the obvious fact that this is true was something he did not, and still cannot, comprehend.

This hardly stands to his credit. It most certainly made him unsuitable as leader of the Labour Party, for which task a considerably greater degree of worldliness is required. All leadership requires an acknowledgement of ugly truths, and it seems that what the EHRC is saying is that there was a serious failure to appreciate this at the highest echelons within Labour, which means the buck stops with Corbyn.

But was Starmer right to suspend him in that case? Was Corbyn saying that the issue has been overplayed by those who wished to oppose him so wrong when glaringly obviously this is true? I doubt it. This has all the feeling of being a trap waiting to be sprung, just as was that set for Rebecca Long-Bailey. She too was unsuited for leadership, in my opinion. Corbyn could have been more contrite. He could have been more accepting of responsibility. But the Starmer response was heavy-handed. And that is also worrying, because this is clearly an attempt to shift Labour very markedly to the right.

And the reality is that so far we know little of the Starmer agenda. But it fair to say that it is not that impressive on COVID. Even his call for lockdown was too late, especially if he gets high-level briefings, as I presume he does.

The position on the economy is timid, at best, as yet.

The demands for long-term economic reform to support those losing jobs are tepid. It was clear Corbyn's team got the Green New Deal. It is not clear that Starmer's do.

On Brexit, Scotland, Northern Ireland (a major failing), electoral reform, localisation, immigration, and so much else there is as yet little to really say about Labour's current stance that offers much hope. Calling the Tories scum may be justified when it comes to school meals, but anger is not enough.

Worse, in a turbulent political environment Labour cannot presume it has four years to wait for office and naively believe it can produce a winning platform that will gain support in the last few weeks before an election. This government it is now facing across the Dispatch Box is chaotic, unstable and despite its majority quite capable of imploding next year. If Starmer can't read that he is at least as naive as Corbyn.

But where does that leave those of us who wish to see social and economic justice advanced in this country but do not do so through party affiliation? There are, after all millions of us. In quiet despair might be the best description.

No one who really seeks to deliver anything but a centre ground neoliberal alternative to Johnson can take much delight in Labour's positioning at present. With it standing

only neck-and-neck with the Tories at present even that limited appeal can hardly be said to be working that well. And that delivers those with real aspiration for reform little hope at all.

In fact, I feel much like the person in the US who was interviewed by Lindsey Hilsum for Channel 4 News in the last week. When asked whether she thought the US political system had any solutions to offer to the issues that impacted on her life as a black woman she was almost mocking, and simultaneously despairing in her response. And, I am sure, rightly so.

The simple fact is that our political system is similarly constructed to ensure it cannot deliver solutions to the issues that we face. Labour's dedication to maintaining the duality of politics to its desired exclusion of all others is, of course, a key part in that. On this there is no difference between Corbyn and Starmer. Both worked and are working their hardest to ensure that that views of as many people as possible are denied representation in the UK. Both have sought to make Labour representative of decidedly minority views. Each set out to alienate as a consequence, just as the SNP are doing right now, and as the LibDems once did when they had chance to do so.

I want to frame the current crisis for Labour in this context as a result. This is not just a crisis for Labour, although it will do its upmost to make it that. This is an existential crisis for British politics where, as we have already seen with the Conservatives, capture of one of our two mainstream parties by a faction is a threat to us all. This is now also being replicated in Scotland. And let's not pretend otherwise; Starmer is a faction leader just like anyone else.

In other countries this is overcome with a comprehensive system of proportional representation and by having politicians who appreciate the need for compromise to create effective government. Of course, it does not always work: no system ever does. But, it is most certainly more effective than the system that we now have, and that the USA has. In this context Labour's problem is much bigger than that which many will represent. Its problem is that it is standing out against real democracy.

The question, then, is how can this be resolved? Clearly the endpoint has to be a new constitutional settlement fit for the 21st-century, able to supply us with government that is capable of allowing a variety of views to be represented but working, necessarily, in pursuit of common goals. That's the easy bit to define.

Getting there is harder, but Scotland indicates the way. The SNP would have a singular ultimate goal of independence, although I know some doubt whether the existing leadership share that. But presume it does. Then the goal is to use the existing system to achieve that aim and then write a new constitutional settlement that does not let the SNP keep the power it now has, and which actively encourages wider political participation and representation. In other words, the existing structure has to be used wisely to achieve something better. I can live in hope.

And so too do I in the rest of the UK. Labour has to recognise it has a duty to end this in-fighting. It has to recognise that it can't keep the system as it is. It has to work with others to propose that new constitutional settlement that is required. It has to accept that this might then see it split. And by then, almost certainly rightly so. It is life expired. But so too is the system it is in.

Then and only then might we have hope for democracy in this country. But right now Starmer is as much an opponent of that as Johnson is. It is to neither's credit but I could hope more of one of them. Is that a reasonable thing to have? I wish I knew, because if this does not happen we are in even deeper trouble than I thought, and the last day's troubles are clear sign of that in very many ways.