

Funding the Future

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Keir Starmer delivers his speech to the Labour Party conference today. It might be an absolute barnstormer. Even if it is it would be hard to imagine it would change the perception of the Labour conference as a whole. That perception is of a party still heavily divided and not yet ready for power.

In fairness, Labour is opposing a party that managed its divisions by sacking around twenty MPs in 2019 and by effectively alienating anyone who was either a Conservative or Unionist within it. But it did manage to package its own failings better than Labour and that won it the right to deliver mayhem to the country.

In the absence of proportional representation - which might bring the accountability neither of these parties desires - they represent the choice of next government, three things apart.

The first is that by some chance a great many Tories are ejected by their constituents in those seats where the LibDems are second and the rule of ABC - anything but Conservative - is followed even though there is no agreement by politicians to work in alliance. I am not wildly excited by a LibDem in the seat where I live, but that would be better than a Tory by far, so long as we never again get a Conservative / LibDem government, which is a risk to be accepted.

Second, I am assuming we get free elections. Given the Tory attempts to rig the electoral system by removing large numbers from the electoral role there are real doubts about that. Like the Republicans in the USA, the Tories appear to be dedicated to taking the choice out of democracy. The possibility of an alternative to their rule is something they no longer appear willing to countenance, and the chance that every abuse under the sun, including litigious challenges to election results that they do not like, now seems a very real possibility here, just as we have already seen in the US.

Third? We actually do get a progressive alliance. In other words, we see the non-Tory parties align for the purpose of saving democracy itself. The price may be independence referenda. It could be the UK itself as a result. It might also be the end for House of Lords and first past the post. But the aim would be that people actually get a say, and have a chance of being represented by those they might want in office in

governments that represent the place where they live. Democracy remains a possibility in other words.

Will that happen? Keir Starmer has shown he has no desire for it this week, although his membership is overwhelmingly in favour. It would seem that those currently in parliament might be the greatest obstacles to parliamentary democracy. And that is a toxic situation that feels profoundly unstable in the long term.

We have a choice. Keir Starmer probably won't mention it today. But the choice is about the threats to democracy within our society. That it may not be his priority is what is really worrying.