

Labour tribalism and the illogical belief that Star...

Published: January 13, 2026, 3:07 pm

I got an interesting insight into the mindset of a surviving Labour Party member yesterday.

My old friend, as that is what the person I was talking to is, might be described as tribally loyal to Labour, come what may.

Starmer is, in his opinion, putting on an impressive display. Given that the election is always held on the middle ground, and the middle ground has moved substantially towards the right over the last 40 years, that is the arena in which Starmer must win, he claimed. But, he assured me, that provided no indication at all of how a Starmer government would behave.

His claim was that once this new government had spent a couple of years following Tory economic policy, as Brown and Blair did from 1997 to 99, then the true spirit of Starmer, which he admitted is akin to that of new Labour, would be unleashed for all to see.

Despite my best efforts, it was very hard to work out what he thought that this true spirit would be, apart from the fact that there would be more spending on the NHS, as there was under Blair and Brown.

There would certainly not be electoral reform, or if there was, it would only allow an alternative vote, which we all know does not produce anything approximating to proportional representation. It was suggested that voters could not handle any greater complexity than that.

When it came to the economy, there was no response to my suggestion that Rachel Reeves is hard-core neoliberal and will follow the Bank of England line and demand austerity.

As for Europe, it was a matter of little by little, and wait and see.

The attitude towards Scotland was that it might, once again, be a useful source of

Labour seats in the Commons.

And when it came down to it, everything was about the fact that Labour deserves support even though there was no obvious reason given for anyone to do so.

My suggestion that the current stance that Starmer has adopted is to the right of where Cameron and Osborne were in 2010 (which I think is true) was rejected, subject to the caveat that if this is what the population required, then, so be it that Labour adopts that approach as a condition of getting elected, which was the only thing that matters.

My reluctance to vote for a party that claims to be socialist when it is now anything but that, let alone the social democratic alternative that I think this country craves, was condemned because I should vote for the idea of what the party was, rather than what it is.

The evidence that people very clearly want more government spending, a better NHS, enhanced education, better social services, an improved justice system, and so on were all dismissed. These things, plus nationalisation of core services, are what people say they want, it was said. But when they face the reality of the ballot box they apparently think something entirely different, and all those aspirations disappear and the austerity required to reinforce financial stability - which counts above all else - is their true desire, I was told.

Old friends, we might be, but we had to agree to differ. Even though my friend agreed that he preferred the 2019 manifesto to anything that Starmer might offer, he was immovable.

In one sense I admire his loyalty.

I, however, have never been able to do politics in the tribal way that he does. I like to look at the facts, which contradict his claims.

We agreed to differ and headed out birdwatching.