

The Tories are hooked on populist divide-and-rule tacti...

Published: January 13, 2026, 7:05 am

In amongst the political meltdown of yesterday, one thing became apparent, and that is that the Tories are using populism as their weapon of choice.

No one can be surprised that the UK government lost its case on Rwanda. That country has a terrible track record in processing asylum claims, including rejecting every claim for asylum status from a person from Afghanistan in the last year, and yet that was the task that the UK government wished to entrust them with. It was always, very clearly, an untenable suggestion.

Perhaps the reaction is no more surprising.

The Law Lords and the Courts will be vilified. No doubt we will be hearing much about 'enemies of the people'. That is a direct threat to the rule of law in this country.

Then we heard Tory Deputy Chair, Lee Anderson MP, demand that Rwanda flights take place anyway, whatever the courts said. That is beyond extraordinary: it is political madness on open display.

As if to cap that, Rishi Sunak then joined in. He suggested three things. One was a new treaty with Rwanda, which would change nothing about the situation on the ground on which the court made its decision. Then he suggested a new law would deem Rwanda to be a safe country, regardless of the evidence, meaning that the Court could no longer consider the issue. And third, he said a review of international obligations would be undertaken to prevent the Courts from considering them as well. These will be the so-called 'notwithstanding' clauses that Suella Braverman demanded before she was sacked. That we might be forced out of the European Court of Human Rights and that the Good Friday Agreement might collapse as collateral damage from that appears a matter of no concern to him.

To put it another way, what Sunak proposed was that reality be suspended; that parliament pass a law proclaiming nonsense (next on the list will be that the world is flat); and that the courts be so constrained that they cannot do their job in protecting

people in this country from abuse by their government.

All of this is populism - which is the gateway drug for fascism - gone mad.

So why do this? The reasons are obvious.

The first is to appease the far-right in the Tories.

The second is to distract from the glaringly obvious failures of this government.

The third is to create yet more division in society by dividing it around the rights of refugees - who are the most vulnerable of people.

It is classic populist divide-and-rule policy in action.

What troubles me is that I am not hearing Labour call this out.

Why not?

We really are in trouble.