

Funding the Future

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Regular reader Ian Lovegrove [read the article I wrote](#) on 3 January about Labour's apparent plans to deliver tax cuts, in which I attacked DSyarmmer's vision for this party and this country, and sent me an email in response. With his permission, I share it here:

I completely agree with Richard's observations. I never supported Starmer as Labour Leader from the outset and everything I have read or heard about him since then has reinforced my original negative view of him.

It is obvious that Starmer is an economics ignoramus. (He shares this in common with many British politicians, including several who have been Chancellors.) That is a criticism but need not necessarily be a damning one. That depends on whom he listens to. Franklin Roosevelt believed in balanced federal budgets, before the theoretical basis of activist macroeconomic management had been formally articulated. But he knew that there had to be a radical change and he listened to Keynes and corresponded with him.

Starmer's economics ignorance is damning because he listens to Rachel Reeves who is a committed neoliberal and may believe that neoliberalism is economic science when it is nothing more than an ideology which supports untrammelled capitalism, which, unless it is overthrown, will make planet earth uninhabitable. This cannot but end in tears. Jeremy Corbyn's economics understanding was somewhat lacking but at least he had as Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell, who understands economics and especially macroeconomics well enough, although he was not the best communicator to the general public.

Starmer's economic ignorance is not his only shortcoming as a politician; it's the central failing. The whole Starmer programme lacks positivity. Noel Coward thought that Britain's religion was Mediocrity and he felt antagonised and disenchanted accordingly. Nye Bevan said "the religion of socialism is the language of priorities". Unfortunately, Labour has almost nothing to do with socialism, and its religion is Mediocrity. In this respect, it is a microcosm of British society in general.

The Labour Party has no real ideology. Clause IV gave it at least a formal commitment to public ownership, which it no longer has. Clause I of Labour's constitution states that Labour's objective is to elect Labour MPs to Parliament. That confuses ends with means. But it does mean that in essence the pursuit of power is the be-all and end-all. Nothing else matters. That is one sufficient reason why Starmer and his ilk, which now dominates the Labour Party will never countenance PR.

In this Labour resembles the Conservative Party. But there is one crucial difference. At least the Conservative Party wants power to serve the interests of the rich and powerful. Neoliberalism is a fitting ideology for it. But the Labour Party is supposed to serve the interests of ordinary working people. Neoliberalism is manifestly ill-suited to that purpose. (One is reminded of Einstein's definition of insanity!) Starmer in one sense is worse even than the insufferable pipsqueak fascist Sunak. At least Sunak is not a traitor to his class. But Starmer is. The Labour Party led by him is nothing more than the Continuity Conservative Party.

Nowhere in Labour's constitution is an actual purpose - other than Clause I - stated. Without such a purpose, is it any wonder that Labour cannot present a consistent and convincing vision embodied in an integrated and thematically coherent program and that its policy is typically characterised by muddling through? That was the case with its Brexit policy. If Labour's purpose had been "To protect and advance the interests of British working people", then it could have asked itself the question: "Is Brexit in the interests of British working people?", to which on any reasonable appraisal, the answer would have been "No"! The policy was also confounded because Labour has no clear definition of what it means by democracy. It clearly (and rightly) stands for representative democracy but so irresolutely that it allowed itself to be deflected in 2016 into support for a narrow plebiscitary outcome, representing no more than 37 per cent of the electorate. Thereafter, it floundered predictably and unconvincingly from one Brexit iteration after another, only contriving to legitimize Brexit in the eyes of the electorate. This sort of equivocation and endless trimming, doubtless reflecting the latest focus grouping of swing voters, typifies every policy area, as it's bound to do with a party devoid of any meaningful purpose - one that can rally the positive support and hopes of ordinary working people.

It has been easy for Starmer and Reeves to take over the Labour Party, ridding it of any vestige of Corbynism, and implanting - or more accurately re-implanting - neoliberalism as its de facto ideology, *faute de mieux*, as nature abhors a vacuum and chastened and timorous Labour MPs could not resist with a coherent alternative narrative.

Once Labour is elected wedded to neoliberalism and yet more austerity, the ruinous policies that entails will be permanently fixed. Leopards do not change their spots and reactionary governments do not become progressive ones. (And the Labour Party does not defenestrate Labour prime ministers.) At the next general election but one a Starmer-led Labour Party would be offering more of the same austerity/mediocrity/neoliberalism that it proposes now.

There is little doubt that democracy is under threat in the western world. The USA is the most obvious and critical case, where the threat of a second Trump presidency and the advent of an authoritarian or fascist, score-settling regime is v real and would embolden other western parties to emulate it, including the Conservatives in the UK.

I am too old to worry personally about the baleful prospects for the world that seem all too likely. I have no family to worry about. ("Après moi, le deluge!") But from a humanitarian perspective and as a member of the human race and knowing that there is a viable alternative, not articulated or proselytised, that would lead to a sustainable and harmonious world, I despair.