

After the debacle of last night, Labour look like grub...

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Let me summarise what I think happened in the House of Commons yesterday.

The SNP tabled an opposition day debate calling for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. It is the second time that it has done this. The sentiments that it expressed, I very strongly suspect, reflect those of the vast majority of people in the UK, leaving all politics aside.

Labour's leadership, who had enjoyed many opportunities to table their own motions on this issue at almost any time they chose, were horrified at the prospect of this motion being put before the House because they knew that many of their own MPs would wish to back it unless Labour could offer an alternative motion.

The problem for Labour was that it is exceptional for the Speaker of the House of Commons to allow an opposition party, like Labour, to have a motion amending an opposition day motion from another party, like the SNP, debated in the House of Commons. The convention has always been that the opposition party proposing a motion has that motion debated and voted upon, and then, even if that motion is accepted, the government might then propose an amendment to that it, which basically lets the government neuter whatever the opposition party has proposed.

For reasons that are not clear but which are not to its credit, the government chose not to table an amendment to the SNP motion until the Labour Party had already done so. When it did, there was little difference between its motion and that from Labour. Both called for a ceasefire that imposed considerable conditions on the Palestinians whilst permitting the continued collective punishment of the civilian Palestinian population by Israeli forces for issues that were beyond their control, contrary to the requirements of international law.

For reasons that again are not clear, but which do appear to be very heavily related to intense lobbying from the Labour Party, Lindsay Hoyle, the Speaker of the House of Commons, decided soon after lunch yesterday that contrary to convention, the Labour Party motion amending the SNP motion would be debated by parliament, and voted

upon.

Uproar then ensued for two reasons. First, this meant that the SNP motion would, inevitably, be replaced by the Labour motion before there was any chance for the SNP motion as tabled to be voted upon by the House of Commons. As a result, one of the rare opportunities that the SNP had to bring an issue before parliament was being totally taken over by Labour, which, unsurprisingly, the SNP found unacceptable.

There were also complaints from Conservative benches. Some were from the Tory MPs who actually wished to vote for the SNP motion. There may not have been many of them, but they existed, including Paul Bristow, the MP for Peterborough. They were not happy.

There was, however, another reason why the Tories panicked. Their whips realised that the government's own motion was so close to Labour's that it was highly likely That Tory MP would not vote down the Labour motion and replace it with the government's, granting Labour a victory on an SNP opposition day motion, which, which was the last thing that government whips wanted. This, it would seem, was the true reason why the leader of the House of Commons, Penny Mordaunt, withdrew the government motion shortly after 6 pm last night. She did not wish the government to suffer the ignominy of losing on a vote.

However, this disruption from the government simply heightened tension in the Commons, leading to an exceptional resolution being tabled moving that the House move into private session. There was no serious chance of this happening. It was tabled as a protest as tempers got heated.

Worse still though, when that motion was inevitably lost, the deputy speaker of the House of Commons, Rosie Winterton MP (who is, I should add, a Labour MP) then asked from the chair if there were any objections to the Labour amendment to the SNP motion, and declared that she heard none, and therefore declared it passed, unanimously by the House. She then moved immediately on to ask if there were then any objections to the revised SNP motion, which was now the Labour motion, being approved by the House. She again claimed that she heard no such objections, although the House was in tumult at this point, in anger at what had gone on beforehand. It would have been entirely reasonable to presume that such noise represented an objection to the motion being carried and that a vote was being called for, but she inexplicably declared the now Labour motion passed as well.

In all this, it has to be noted that the plight of the people of Gaza was terribly overlooked.

Labour, meanwhile, is now claiming that the SNP motion was only tabled to embarrass them. That is absurd. Of course the SNP tabled a motion that Labour did not like. As an opposition party in their own right, they are perfectly entitled to disagree with Labour

and present motions that it does not support. It is ludicrous that Labour object to that when that is precisely what the SNP is in parliament to do, and what those who vote for it expect. Nothing that Labour has said on this issue is edifying in any way, nor was its motion, as [I have made clear in previous comments on this blog](#).

Nor was anything that the government did yesterday edifying in any way. If anyone played politics, they did, and it was their panic when they realised that they had completely misunderstood the sentiments of their own members that led to the chaos that erupted in the House of Commons at around 7 pm last night. They might be angry with the Speaker, but if they are, it is only because his actions revealed their own inability to manage this situation properly. If they had tabled their motion before Labour did, there is little doubt that Labour's motion would never have been called.

Then there are the actions of the Speaker to consider. His own senior advisor, the clerk of the House of Commons, wrote to him to point out the folly of his decision very soon after he had made it. Lindsay Hoyle stuck with that decision. He got it very wrong, and admitted so after the votes, looking to be close to tears in the House when doing so. I have long felt him to be utterly incompetent. Just watch Prime Minister's Question Time and the number of stupid comments he has made suggesting that he will send members to the tea room to calm down, which has never, in fact, done, and his weakness is readily apparent. It was all too clear yesterday.

Hoyle disappearance from the house during the debate, leaving Rosie Winterton to take the flak, is also exceptionally hard to understand.

But then, so too, is her decision to force through the Labour amendment to the SNP motion whilst claiming that no one had opposed it when that suggestion is completely ludicrous.

Calls for Lindsey Hoyle to resign are clearly appropriate.

Rosie Winterton also needs to be sacked as a deputy speaker: her actions last night were disgraceful.

It should be no surprise to anyone that the government was unable to manage this situation. It seems incapable of managing anything, anymore.

As readers of my comments in the National newspaper in Scotland will know, I am not the biggest fan of the SNP. They have their merits, but also many faults, but whatever Labour likes to say about them and their actions yesterday, they acted wholly within their rights to present what I think was a genuine and honest statement of their desire to the House of Commons, seeking that it be voted upon, as was there right.

That, then, leaves the actions of Labour to be considered. Their denial that there was lobbying before Lindsay Hoyle made his decision is absurd. It would be extraordinary if

they had not lobbied him. Lindsay Hoyle said that he had not met with Sue Gray, Labour chief executive, but he did not deny meeting anyone else from Labour. I am sure that he did, and that undue pressure was brought to bear on him.

The impression that is left is of a Labour Party willing to bully in pursuit of its aims, and willing to demand changes to democratic conventions to achieve that goal to save itself the embarrassment of having many of its members support an SNP motion that clearly matched their own mood on the subject of Gaza. If anyone failed to understand the need of the day, and to appreciate the appropriate way in which this matter should have been discussed, it was the Labour leadership. It was them who played politics on an issue of ethical concern.

I have had increasing doubts about the Labour leadership's attitudes over the last two years. After the debacle of last night, it is hard to see them as anything but grubby power-grabbers intent on achieving their personal goal of office irrespective of who is harmed as a consequence.

What we can say is one thing. We have been put on notice of what a Labour Party government will look like when in office. It is not a welcome prospect.