

Has Starmer done his best to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory?

Published: January 12, 2026, 10:54 pm

Labour's continuing inability to manage candidate selection for forthcoming elections, despite Keir Starmer's seemingly fetishistic demand for control of this process, gives rise to an obvious question. Might it be that we have now witnessed peak Labour?

To put this another way, is it possible that the electorate, having seen that our official Opposition seems nearly as incompetent as the government that they wish to replace, might react by voting for anyone but the two usual culprits that most usually opt for? Alternatively, might they simply not vote at all?

Both possibilities have to be considered, although we cannot, of course, know the answer as yet, even if the results of by-elections being held today might provide some clues.

If peak Labour has happened, the welcome news might be that we will be saved the prospect of a landslide victory for Labour. If that genuinely awful prospect, given the policies that Rachel Reeves is promoting, is avoided, it might just be that we should all be truly grateful for Starmer's current displays of dithering incompetence. Whilst I am quite sure that this country cannot afford another Conservative government, I am equally sure that a substantial Labour majority would also be prejudicial to the well-being of a majority of people in the UK as a whole.

The potential beneficiaries of Labour's failure might be the LibDems in some of England and Wales, the SNP in Scotland, Plaid Cymru in parts of Wales and Reform, although I continue to believe that they will take most votes from the Conservatives. The result could be a complete electoral mess, with many candidates being returned in our first-past-the-post system with remarkably small proportions of the overall vote, discrediting the election as a whole as a consequence.

However, if that created the momentum for electoral reform this might deliver what has always been said to be the outcome of UK general elections, which is the government that we deserve, albeit that, in this case, that might be the one to sweep away our sham democracy.

Will mass abstention achieve the same outcome? It is hard to tell, not least because the Tories have already so significantly gerrymandered the electoral system in their favour. As a result, it is already hard to know what proportion of those who say that they might vote Labour will actually turn out to vote, or be allowed to vote when they arrive at a polling station. Overall, however, given Tory abstentions are already likely to be high because many hard-core party supporters might not be able to bring themselves to vote for anyone else but cannot face any more of the fiasco that the Party has delivered in recent years, the situation that I note above might well be replicated in this mass abstention situation. We just have to hope that is the case and that no party from the far-right succeeds in exploiting this situation for their gain.

If my analysis sounds uncertain as to its conclusions, that is appropriate. From seemingly having a general election win almost safely secured, Starmer now appears to be doing his best to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. That might put him alongside Neil Kinnock in the Labour pantheon of failure. For the rest of us, this might be good news. I can live in hope.