

The lull before the storm

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It feels like we are in the lull before the storm.

Tomorrow is budget day, and I really cannot be bothered to spend time speculating on the nonsense that is being written about what Jeremy Hunt might, or might not, do when waiting until tomorrow to find out seems a lot more sensible thing to do, particularly when very little of what it is suggested that he might offer meets the criteria of being sensible.

That though, is an issue of the immediate moment. That feeling of an impending storm is much stronger.

We know that we have a general election campaign waiting to start this year. What we also know is that whilst such campaigns are normally run on the basis of differing economic policy, on this occasion that will not be possible.

It is very clear that the Tories have run out of any ideas on how to run the economy, and that Labour is in complete agreement with them in every possible way, including by having a total lack of ideas on how to tackle the issues that we face. As a result, there will be almost no basis for disagreement between them on issues relating to economics.

They are combined in their agreed that all that they can offer is low, or no, growth in earnings coupled with higher taxes on those with lower earnings both in absolute terms and as a proportion of GDP, as GDP itself stagnates and demand for public services rise. They will also agree that there can be no significant investment in any aspect of our economy.

Given that is the case, this election campaign is going to be brutal and ugly, because it will inevitably focus on what are described as culture wars.

These have every chance of becoming unseemly. Far too many in the Tories appear intent on pandering to a small Christian evangelical minority. Labour now appears intent on pandering to one part of the Jewish community. The majority of people in this

country who are happy to live in a multicultural society, and know all the benefits of doing so, including many Christians and Jews, will feel deeply alienated by all of this.

Meanwhile, anyone who has concern for any minority group will live in fear during the campaign, partly because of the Draconian election laws that mean that they will have to almost continually tread on eggshells for fear of breaking election law over the next twelve months. That fear will be combined with the anticipation of a Labour government that has shown absolutely no interest in supporting any return towards proper balances within human and civil rights legislation in this country, or elsewhere.

The lull is, in that case, all about waiting for the fight to come, which will be with a Labour government that will bear no comparison with any previous administration of that name. Even Blair at his worst was nothing like the current Labour leadership because he had nothing like the control of the party that Starmer has managed to create for himself. This is, then, a time to reflect on the campaigns that are likely to be needed.

There will clearly be fights to come over austerity, to which Labour is dedicated.

There will also be fights over environmental causes, about which issue Labour appears to be in complete denial.

There will also be concerns over human rights, civil rights, freedom of speech, the right to protest, and, of course, international issues related to all these themes that are very likely to focus upon Gaza for a long time to come.

On top of that, there will be a very obvious economic fight, which will continue within the public services but also elsewhere, as those who work for a living seek to maintain their incomes in a to battle to meet the demand made upon them for excessive payments from the financial services sector, whether for insurance or interest payments, or from utility suppliers, or the hegemonic rental and housing markets . I suspect there will be no support for working people from Labour on these issues. Stress will, therefore, be very high.

That also suggests that the likelihood of significant stress over the future of public services will not in anyway abate as a consequence of the election of a Labour government, contrary to any past expectation.

Most people now realise that the current Tory government is in no position to resolve any of these issues, and has not really got the power to do so. Everything is in abeyance as a result. But, any relief at the election of a Labour government is going to give away, very quickly, to disbelief at what it will plan to do in practice.

I strongly suspect that disbelief will not only give rise to massive disquiet about that party very soon after its election, but also to disquiet about the whole political system

when the obvious absence of choice within it becomes very apparent to millions of people who still believe that there is some fundamental difference between the options with which they are presented at

this moment. When it becomes clear to most people that Labour is absolutely no alternative to the Tories stress might reach previously unknown levels, and that is why I suggest that we are in the lull before a storm.

Worryingly, I have no idea in which direction that storm might eventually blow. I blame Labour for that. I can also live in hope. But only a fool would not worry about what is to come.