

Funding the Future

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The political reality of Labour in government hit home yesterday.

Starmer was addressed as 'Prime Minister' by the re-elected Speaker.

His party sat on benches most in it have never visited before.

Sunak stood at the Opposition Dispatch Box, looking smaller than ever, but less smarmy than before.

Just about filling the benches behind him were a greatly diminished party, waiting to tear themselves rather than the government apart. They looked shell-shocked to be where they were.

Ed Davey enjoyed being on the front bench, below the aisle, the leader of the largest third party for generations. He, and his party, seemed considerably more focussed on the task in hand than the Tories did.

Stephen Flynn for the SNP looked embarrassed to be sitting so far back, so reduced is his grouping.

Adrian Ramsay for the Greens could not quite believe where he was, and called for cooperative working, which is not going to happen in a Parliament with a majority party as big as this one has.

Farage made a fool of himself, and forget he was meant to speak for his party and not just himself. It was a bad start. It might get worse if it becomes clear that the party he owns (not leads) put up fake people as candidates in the election, as seems possible at present. The consequences could be massive.

And then they all had to be sworn in, one after each other, to declare their allegiance to the King. Jeremy Corbyn was heard saying what a waste of time this was. He was right. What it made clear is how much of this is theatre, and how at the end of the day the government will do all it can to reinforce the power of the Establishment in maintaining the status quo, whatever these eager new members might want.

I want an effective parliament. This charade will not deliver that. By sometime in the autumn the normal process of very few members attending any debate will have become the norm. The illusion of parliamentary power will have been crushed by the power of the Labour whips. Starmer will get whatever Starmer wants even though only twenty per cent of the people eligible to vote in the country actually chose a Labour candidate. The brief appearance of choice that an election provides will have dissipated. We could do so much better than this.