

Will the toxic Tories survive?

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The Tories face a dilemma. As [the FT notes today](#), no one from business is interested in going to their conference because the Tories are considered irrelevant and without influence. An official opposition with just 121 seats in Parliament is hardly going to land many blows on a government. Nor would it in more usual political times, be considered likely to have a chance of returning to office for at least a decade. So, busy people are asking, why spend the time, effort and money engaging with them?

The question in isolation is relevant. But there is more to it than the risk of time-wasting by attending. There is something much worse about the Tory party now than irrelevance. That is their toxicity.

The Tories, from the time Theresa May was at the Home Office creating 'hostile environments', have been dedicated to vilifying those seeking a legal right to live in the UK. In the process they have spread animosity towards people when that has been unjustified. They have stoked racial hatred. They have done so for their own political advantage. The consequences are all too clear now, with their toxicity now distorting debate on migration.

Worse, they appear incapable of reform. Their leadership campaigners are all associated with this brand of hate-filled politics, and they seemingly now know no other.

I am not denying that the Tories always knew they were playing to a base, and did so successfully. But, what is now apparent is that even that base wants to differentiate their supposed concern about migration from the hate-filled violence it has inspired, although relatively few seem to know how to do it. The rhetoric of 'we have legitimate concerns about migration that mean we want no asylum seekers in our area' now being heard on airwaves seems but a smidgeon apart from the disinforming anger of those who rioted. What I am sure of is that business, most donors and those with influence will want to steer well clear from anything to do with this agenda.

In that case, the Tories are outsiders not just because they failed dismally. They are

also outsiders because the division that they have so deliberately created is now seen as profoundly harmful by those who see stability, order and inclusion as vital to their well being, which is not just most people but the vast majority of the business community.

The so-called party of business, as the Tories once were, have driven the absolute opposite of what business desires as a result of their pursuit of their toxic, hate-filled agenda. No wonder business is wooing Labour in that case, albeit at cost to ordinary people, whose agenda and needs still remain far-removed from the priorities of those business people now influencing the Labour agenda for their own ends.

Can the Tories recover from this? If the problem was just worn out incompetence at the close of fourteen years in office the answer would very clearly be that of course they could recover. This is part of a recognised political cycle. They might face at least ten years in Opposition, but thereafter the assumption would be that they would be back.

But couple incompetence with toxicity that both leading leadership campaigners - Jenrick and Badenoch - are deeply associated with to the point that it is what their brand is - and the question of survival becomes a much more difficult one. When there is no real alternative on offer untainted by this issue, the question as to whether the Tories can survive as anything more than a rump around which Farage could walk at will in due course is most definitely on the table.

Sunak might have been the last Tory prime minister in that case. It would be ironic that the first person of colour to occupy Downing Street from any party, let alone the Tories, might also be the last Tory PM because their own toxic racism has made any return impossible, but that possibility exists, not least due to Sunak's own contribution to their demise for this reason.

This matters. We already have Labour in office assuming the mantle of the Single Transferable Party that the Establishment requires to run the neoliberal order on its behalf for as long as is required. But even that role requires that there be an Opposition eventually capable of taking on that task, and right now we have nothing remotely like that available. And if we were looking for an actual Opposition there is almost no possibility of that at present.

My suspicion is that this position is untenable in the sense that the vacuum within politics that now exists will have to be filled. I live in hope that the far-right will not succeed in taking this space. But the alternative has, in that case, to come from the left, which space Labour has so clearly rejected.

There is no sign at present as to how that might happen. But that need not be problematic: events will have to shape what happens next and they have yet to occur. What are, however, required are the ideas to help shape that possibility. That's where this blog and those who comment on it do have a role and something to offer.

Amongst the toxicity of this moment, the possibility of there being something different as the guiding principle of government has to exist. Amongst others, this space can help provide those ideas.