

Oh dear, Keir

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I had few hopes for Keir Starmer's speech at Labour Party conference, and he managed to match none of them. That is how bad it was. Let me run through some of his failings.....

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And this is the transcript:

Oh dear, Keir. What a flop.

All that time, all that effort, all that ambition that was put into beating Jeremy Corbyn, and that was the best that you could do in your first speech as a Labour Prime Minister.

It really was very bad. I sat through the whole of what Keir Starmer had to say in Liverpool with two of my family as company just to make sure that I missed nothing important, and I've got to tell you; we were all groaning in agony at the sheer boredom of what he had to say.

It started well, let's be honest. The opening round of applause was great; he should have enjoyed it.

He then started to talk about a new Act of Parliament he's going to introduce that will create a duty of candour on the part of politicians and public servants. He really didn't see the current irony in that.

He didn't see a great deal, in fact.

We were all particularly bored about hearing how, time and again, he has transformed his party. So, he apparently claims, it is now one that serves the interest of the working person. Nobody else, mind you. It doesn't serve the interest of the carer, or the unemployed person, or the child, or the pensioner, or anybody else who does require support in society, like the person who is on long-term sick leave. No. It doesn't matter for them. It's just for the working person.

He talked very little about economics. The pockets were not full, he said. The books will eventually balance, he said. But apart from that, frankly, there was little to discuss.

What were we going to see as change? There were going to be prisons near some towns, apparently. And we'd have to put up with it.

We'd also have to put up with pylons. Well, there have been worse fates in life.

These were his symbols of change.

Was there actually any real discussion of climate change, the biggest threat that we face? No.

There was discussion about the fact that GB Energy is going to be located in Aberdeen, but as far as I knew, everybody was aware of that already. So, that really wasn't an announcement at all.

And let's be clear about GB Energy. That is not going to generate a single unit of renewable energy. Nor is it going to sell a single unit of that energy to anyone through the wires into their homes. GB Energy is not going to do that. It is basically a hedge fund. It will invest in other companies. It's just a way to provide a backdoor boost to the City of London and its transition, we hope, into a climate change economy.

There was much less about the NHS. Did we hear very much about it? No. Apparently, it's going to be reformed by West Streeting. But that was as far as we got. Although we did hear that patients will have more choice. We didn't get told whether that required them to open their chequebook or not, but I have a sneaking suspicion it might.

There was mention of the merits of the private sector, and an awful lot of digs at public servants, as if they have failed us, which, frankly, I found pretty insulting on their part, because I don't think they have failed us. I think 14 years of Tory rule has left them demoralised, and as far as I can see, Labour is going to do nothing about that, which means I have enormous difficulty in understanding precisely how he is going to actually

improve the quality of public services. You can't do so by abusing the people who are going to deliver them, but it appeared he was intent on just that.

There was also, of course, an obligatory mention of economic growth, but not a hint of where it will come from. But, to reinforce Rachel Reeves' point, it was obvious that he thinks that nothing that he talks about is going to be possible, unless that growth happens. So, all of this was pie-in-the-sky thinking.

And along the way, there was a great deal of blather. Actually, there was a great deal of difficulty in hearing him. Our television had to be turned up to one and a half times its normal volume just to be able to discern the words that he was using. Now I don't know whether that was the fault of the sound engineers that Labour has employed at its conference centre, or whether that was the fault of the BBC, or the fact that he mumbled. But I'm tending towards the last. This was a deeply uninspiring delivery to match the fact that there really was nothing to say in its almost hour-long duration.

He repeated himself too often. He talked about beating Corbyn time and again as if that was the only big idea he ever had because certainly there was no evidence of others.

Yes, he mentioned his five missions, four of which I have already forgotten, but I do recall that one of them is to recruit six and a half thousand new teachers. That's one for every three schools in the UK. What the other two are meant to do to improve the supply of education, I don't know. And why one teacher will make a difference in the schools where they're located, again, I don't know. It's left to your imagination to work that one out. If that's how big his missions are, they are deeply disappointing.

And that is really how I have to summarise this whole presentation, and why I started by saying, Oh dear, Keir. Because, frankly, that's how I felt about him. He has not got a clue why he is there.

I thought it very poignant that he said he would like his sister, who is a care worker, to be treated with the same respect that he gets as Prime Minister. And I actually thought, well, put her up on the stage and let's hear what she's got to say, because it could be a lot more interesting than what you're talking about, Keir. She might actually have some front-line experience and some suggestions for change that could be worth talking about, because he hadn't.

He didn't, admittedly, talk about his father being a toolmaker.

He did talk about the fact that he played a flute, and we all wondered, why did you do that? Except that he did so to emphasise the fact that he had travelled abroad for the first time in his life when he went with the Croydon Youth Orchestra to Malta. But that made something resonate with me. This is the man who is talking about opportunity for young people, but who is denying every person under the age of 30 the chance of free movement in Europe, which has been offered to them by Europe, but which he will not

let them have.

I'm sorry, Keir, but your talk does not match your actions.

And when it came to migration, and he spent a long time talking about migration, I had this horrible feeling that he was saying, "I'm not a racist, but....", and then proceeded to talk about all the problems that migration brought, particularly with regard to the fact that apparently migrants undermine the job opportunities of people in the UK.

But actually, the migration which people are upset about in this country is not that which is legitimately allowed, where people have visas to come here to work and where we want them to work. The migration that is upsetting people is the small boat traffic across the English Channel, which is only happening because of the actions of politicians who will not set up legal routes for refugees to come here.

And refugees are not, despite what Keir Starmer implied, economic migrants. They are fleeing from their countries where they face risk, and it is on that basis that they are allowed asylum in this country. He was horribly confused on this issue, and he really should not have been.

He was as confused when it came to Israel. Yes, he talked about the need for a two-state solution, with Palestine eventually being recognised by implication. But he certainly didn't say that he was going to do that now. And he called for a ceasefire yet again. But what does that mean when we have seen the destruction of most of the infrastructure of Gaza and most of its population now living as internal refugees within their own country? Just tell us how a ceasefire makes sense in that situation, Keir Starmer.

Oh, and also, you might like to add, what are you going to do about the war crimes that have been committed? Yes, by Hamas, but also by the leaders of Israel itself.

So, I still was left with this feeling at the end of all this that here is a man who's got a job that he has literally no idea what to do with.

He talked about the fact that Labour was the party of ideas now, the party of big delivery, the party of working people, yet again. I'll repeat it because he did often. But there was no clue what he was really going to do.

Running through the 40 or so bills that were included in the King's speech, which he did during the course of this speech, did not set out a plan for how he is going to change the country, because most of them are petty, let's be blunt.

So, Keir Starmer, I have a message for you. Think out why you really wanted this job, what you're going to do with it, and how you're going to deliver for this country now. Because as it stands, you told us nothing that will change anything.

But I promise you something, if you are watching this to the end. I will be offering an alternative speech that Keir Starmer should, in my opinion, have offered today. I will be doing so later this week. I will be finishing it, now I've heard what he had to say, and we'll be recording it in the next day or so.

It will be worth watching, because I have been deeply critical of Labour, I know. And some people don't like me for that fact, but I have been for a reason.

I believe Labour has to tell a story, has to have an overriding narrative, has to have an explanation of what it's going to do, has to have an explanation as to how it's going to fund the process of change, and has to explain what it is going to deliver.

I will set out such a plan.

Today, Keir Starmer failed to do so.

And for that, he really, really deserves no applause at all.