

Starmer: a man way out of his depth when dealing with t...

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I listened to what Keir Starmer had to say about the NHS with growing bewilderment yesterday. I really wish that he had not created in me a sense that he is almost totally incompetent, and yet that is exactly what he did.

There were a number of reasons for this. Each of them would be serious in itself. In combination, they are almost staggering.

The first and most serious issue of concern arose from the fact that Starmer spoke about the report that Lord Darzi has supposedly written during the first eight weeks that Labour has been in office. This, supposedly, sets out all the faults that he thinks exist within it.

The problem with this is that Starmer has been the leader of the party for four years now, and this report could have been commissioned at any time during that period, with there being very little difference in what Lord Darzi might have said.

Of course, Covid happened, and of course, it made some things in the NHS more difficult whilst exposing many of the inadequacies that were already apparent by 2020 as a consequence of Tory underfunding, but Darzi's diagnosis and the very limited range of solutions that he was allowed to offer can come as a shock to no one. Nor, to be candid, can they have risen as a consequence of any significant new research undertaken during this period.

There was, in other words, no reason why Labour could not have known exactly what Darzi had to say well before it came into office. As a consequence, they could not only have got this stage of their review process out of the way long before the election, but they could have also got on to the next stage, which apparently involves them working out how to react to Darzi's unsurprising conclusions, well before the July election as well.

As it is, because of the lack of preparedness of Labour for office, we now have to lose a year whilst they work out what everyone (except them, apparently) knew would be

required of them pre-July.

This failure to act in a timely manner is, in my opinion, the strongest possible indication of Starmer's incompetence, along with that of his Health Secretary, West Streeting. Fourteen years in opposition meant that they should have known exactly what they were going to do with the NHS after the election and have been able to announce precisely what it was the day after reaching office. As it is, the first year of Starmer's period in office will now be lost to dithering on this issue, and that is unforgivable.

What is also unforgivable is that what is being demanded of the NHS is that it apparently transform itself before the government might be willing to invest any further funds in it. This is quite extraordinary, but it is the only way I can interpret what Starmer said yesterday by using some very strange metaphors involving taps and plumbing.

What he implied is that everyone, including all those who work in the NHS, knows that fourteen years of Tory underfunding has left the NHS in crisis, but it is now, apparently, the job of those who work within our health service to transform the services that it supplies without any additional resources being provided to them to enable this to happen. Only when that transformation has happened will, apparently, those funds be given.

So, if the current problem that a part of the organisation faces is that it cannot meet demand because job vacancies are unfilled, it is apparently now required that the demand in question be met even though no additional people will be made available to help anyone do so.

Similarly, if the problem in a part of the organisation is outdated or inadequate technology, the problem that technology creates must be resolved by the existing staff of the NHS before they will apparently get any funding to improve the service.

These are impossible demands.

Whilst no one can pretend that everything that is happening within the NHS at present always functions to best effect, what we also know is that the majority of people working within it strive to deliver healthcare within the enormous constraints that have been imposed upon them. Starmer is apparently unappreciative of this. Instead, he seems to be saying that unless these staff can deliver the service that he and Wes Streeting require with existing resources, he will provide them with no more.

This is utterly crass people and organisation management: you simply cannot expect an organisation already at breaking point due to no fault of its own staff to respond in this way. It will not be able to do so. People cannot be treated in that way, and if they are, they will leave. I can only presume that this is what Starmer and Streeting want. No other interpretation is possible, but at least that way, the private sector alternative to

the NHS will have a good supply of recruits. Maybe this is their aim.

Then, there is Stamer's incompetence when it comes to economics. I can only presume that he believes that if he spends what is required to deliver a proper healthcare service for the UK he will, as a corollary, deny the resources to the private sector that will enable it to flourish. This is economically ignorant.

Firstly, it should be obvious to anyone that a workforce suffering from ill health, stress, uncertainty, delay, and inadequate healthcare is bound to function at well below any optimal level that can deliver the growth that Starmer so apparently craves.

Secondly, what he should understand, at a quite instinctive level, is that if only people can be sure that they can rely on the NHS they will not need to save for private healthcare - which saving removes demand from the economy and so denies him growth.

Third, he should understand the multiplier effects of having a healthy workforce - which pays returns well above the cost of any intervention in the NHS.

These issues were not mentioned in his speech - and I have read it.

So what we end up with is a view of a man unprepared for office who sends out incompetent messages to those who now work in the organisation he leads and who has no comprehension of the economic environment in which he must manage healthcare.

It's not surprising that now the UK public is seeing Starmer in action that his popularity is falling. They can now see what was always obvious, which is that he is incompetent and wholly unsuited to be prime minister.

We only have five more years of this to go.