

Can Starmer stop the stench from rising?

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Will Keir Starmer ever get anything right?

Having made a complete mess of Labour's reputation for both honesty and integrity within weeks of getting into office as prime minister because of the sheer scale of the freebies he has received, he then tried to bluster it out.

The claim was that he had done nothing wrong and that all the rules had been complied with. But, legal or regulatory compliance has nothing whatsoever to do with the politics of influence, and everyone knows that. None of the justifications claimed by Starmer and his unfortunate spokespeople did, in that case, prevent the stench rising.

Now Starmer has decided to repay £6,000 of those gifts. So, apparently, the Taylor Swift tickets and some dress hire for his wife will now be paid for, after all.

But if that's the case was the judgement to accept them wrong in the first place? We must presume it was.

And was the legalistic defence offered inappropriate, after all? Perhaps someone has realised that was the case.

But what of the remaining £100,000 or more of gifts? Are they still covered by the 'justified by the rules' defence, or is Sir Keir simply unable to afford to pay for his suits and glasses after all, since he's obviously been living beyond his means, as anyone spending £32,000 on clothes on his salary would be?

Who knows? No explanation is being offered. All we do know is that Starmer has dug another pit and jumped into it, giving anyone with remaining interest in his already discredited premiership yet more reason to despair about his total lack of judgement and utter incompetence.

And when this is the person currently deciding on our response to war in the Middle East, his lack of judgement matters.

And, to add to all this, the internet is awash with rumours that there is much worse to come about Starmer. I have no idea if any of this is true, and so have nothing to say, except to note that once he had exposed himself

to both political ridicule and justified criticism on the issue of expenses and the use of second properties, then some in the media were bound to go looking for more, whether there is anything to find or not. What this is, then, is an indication of a loss of faith.

People, quite reasonably, lost faith in Boris Johnson. He ended up being forced out of his premiership, party and parliament. Few would doubt that was appropriate.

We are not there yet with Starmer. It does, however, seem that with every move that he makes we get ever closer to this situation arising. I cannot see how, on current form, he can survive in office for five years. It might be considerably less.

The trouble is that so effective has his operation to shut down opinion that is associated with talent, flair and ability in Labour been that there is no-one left to succeed him. What a total mess we have in that case when we also have no hint of a functioning opposition at present in this country.

There is only one upside to all this. Might this be the moment when people realise that the two-party system and first-past-the-post finally failed them? I can hope so, but that is the only comfort there might just be to be found in this debacle.