

Who is going to represent the centre-left?

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I feel that I should acknowledge that the Tories are holding their conference.

I have tried hard to persuade myself that there must be things that they are saying that are relevant.

So, I read the reports and even watched the clips and can't help thinking that such a belief is mistaken.

Kemi Badenoch thinks being defined as the working class is determined by whether you worked in McDonald's for a week or two when you were sixteen.

She also wants to abolish maternity pay and the minimum wage, taking us back to dark days when the state would not intervene on behalf of those needing support against the power of rogue employers.

Robert Jenrick wants UK special forces to set out to kill terrorists. That's going to go down well with the population at large.

Tom Tugendhat has described the Iraq war as illegal, which definitely won't go down well with his audience, even if it reveals a surprising degree of self-awareness on his part, given he took part in the invasion.

James Cleverly is not, but he might well be the best of this appalling bunch.

And meanwhile, who are they speaking to? Business is not there. A few elderly people are, plus the usual very weird bunch of young Tories who have not yet got the memo that wearing ties is no longer required. But is anyone else listening? Not really.

In the [discussion that I took part in last night](#), one of the audience themes was the disappearance of the left-wing in politics. I suggested that was because we could not agree on a narrative, which I always think a matter of considerable regret. But, what is also apparent is that the Tories have totally run out of stories to tell. What is more, whatever stories those at the Tory conference wanted have, almost certainly, now been

stolen by Reform, whilst Labour and the LibDems are claiming the centre right from the Conservatives, and they have no means to reclaim it.

I have, in that case, to ask, yet again, what is the point for the Tories? I think we can be pretty confident none of the leadership candidates now will ever be prime minister, joining so many who served in that role in the decade after 1997 in not achieving that ambition. Indeed, as some wit commented recently, the next Tory prime minister might not only not be an MP as yet, they might still be at school right now, so dire is their situation.

But in that case, what is going to happen to politics, and how are those not on the centre-left going to get a voice? I still can't answer that as yet. And that is very frustrating.