

Badenoch apologises for neoliberalism, saying it has failed

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As [The Guardian noted](#) yesterday:

Kemi Badenoch has said the UK is getting poorer and people should be honest that it is failing to compete with the rest of the world.

In a speech billed as the Conservative leader confronting the party's mistakes in government, Badenoch failed to offer a specific apology but said that the party had offered policy without a plan, including on Brexit and net zero.

As they, and every other commentator, then seemed to note, she continued without actually giving any indication as to what her new plan might be. At best, she might be said to be in search of one that does not look too much like something written by Mark Littlewood, formerly of the Institute for Economic Affairs, for Liz Truss. And when I say 'too much', I mean not copied and pasted from Truss and her acolytes, with whom Badenoch appears to have a remarkable affinity.

The irrelevance of the Tories in current political debate is proved almost daily by Badenoch. It is as if her sole purpose is to make the stupidity of Reform look plausible. Both are crashing around, happy (as all on the far-right are) to trash anything that has gone before them, except those parts that would be so lunatic if replicated in the modern economy that they cling to them in the hope that they might just be the solution to the problems that little-Englanders pretend exist, when they are anything but that. Reform's promotion of the gold standard is a good example of that.

Why mention this speech in that case? There is only one good reason, and that is to note that, in effect ((although I am not sure she would acknowledge this), Badenoch apologised for neoliberalism. She did not, after all, apologise just for Tory failure, although that was obviously implied, which will have done nothing for her popularity in her Party. She apologised for successive failures. It was the ideology of neoliberalism that she apologised for because it was that ideology that had failed. [As she put it](#), because she dumbed this down:

We are a great country, but we've lost our way.

The truth is that Britain is failing to compete in a world that is changing.

And it is not working for its citizens, certainly not the way it used to.

Let's leave the greatness out of it. And let's not worry about competition, because that suggests she has not really moved on as yet. Let's just look at that third line. She says the ideology that her party, and all the other mainstream parties have followed, has failed.

And she's right. I am not convinced she knows why.

I am also quite sure she does not know what to do about it. If she did, she would not have said this:

So, we need change.

Change that actually sorts out our problems.

Change that we should have done more of.

Change that Keir Starmer is clearly not bringing.

Change has to be just about the most meaningless word in politics. From what? To what? How? To benefit who? At cost to who else? To deliver what goal? And why was that chosen over other options? All of those questions demand to be answered when change is promoted by any politician. Those questions were not, of course, answered by Badenoch unless her implied suggestion that going back to the 1950s and its social attitudes is the answer you are seeking, which is about as close as she got, and which was as delusional as anything said by her Tory predecessors, or Reform.

But let's still stop for a moment. There has been an acknowledgement that neoliberalism has failed. It is the first step to replacing it.

There is one thing I can guarantee, though, and that is that Badenoch is not part of any solution to any known problem. She will be long gone before the solutions to the problems we have are put into place, and I very much doubt her party will work out what those solutions are. But at least the acknowledgement of failure can be banked. Now, we need to build those ideas that replace neoliberalism.