

Funding the Future

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Labour ministers admit that Downing Street is so controlling that they can do nothing to manage the country. How long can this government last in that case?

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This is the transcript:

Is the Labour government collapsing?

It's a question that needs to be asked because I have listened to Sam Coates, who is the deputy political editor of Sky News, say on his podcast that there isn't a single member of the Labour cabinet in the UK at present who believes that they have what he describes as agency to effect change in their own departments, or to act independently to deliver policy as part of a Labour government. And that appears to me to be a quite extraordinary position.

Let me explain this. What they are actually saying is that they are so controlled by what Downing Street wants that, as Labour ministers, they, frankly, have no autonomy whatsoever. They are simply told what they may and may not do by Downing Street, and they simply become functionaries whose task it is to communicate this into their

own departments with no discretion left to them.

Now nobody who becomes an MP with the desire to become a minister, let alone a cabinet minister, wants to believe that when they reach that point where they appear to have power and have all the trappings that go with it from the title, Right Honourable onwards, is then going to discover that in practice they have no power, influence, or control at all, and yet that is what these ministers are finding.

And as Sam Coates put it, when he introduced this piece, a lot of the time journalists like to claim they know what is going on in government when, frankly, they've had some hints. But in this case, he says this information is universal. No minister who will talk to him says anything else, and I suspect that a lot of ministers will talk to him.

He's also noticed something else. Every single Labour woman cabinet minister has been briefed against by Downing Street except Rachel Reeves. As he noted, Labour definitely has a problem with women.

I would go a little further. I would say Labour quite simply has a problem, and I think Sam Coates would agree.

The reason why is that Labour is actually out of control. So strong is the control fetish on the part of Morgan McSweeney, the Labour chief of staff, who seems to pull every single string that operates Keir Starmer, that he will not allow anyone in Labour to have any more autonomy than he actually allows the Labour leader, which is none at all.

Morgan McSweeney decides, and everyone does.

But Morgan McSweeney is an unelected person. He was not chosen by anyone. He was appointed by Keir Starmer as chief of staff at Labour on the basis of his supposed success in running local election campaigns. And as chief of staff, he has taken control of the entire Labour hierarchy of power.

And what we know about Morgan McSweeney is this. His one and only obsession in life is killing off left-wing politics.

He was the man who used Starmer to get rid of Jeremy Corbyn.

He was the man who set up Starmer to make a series of claims so that he might become Labour leader, including 10 pledges which endorsed the Corbyn strategy for Labour, and then made him abandon them all.

He's the person who has, since Keir Starmer has been in office, put in place all the ideas that have put Labour into the deep trouble, that it is now suffering with the electorate, from cutting the winter fuel allowance, to imposing benefit cuts, and to threatening austerity, and making Rachel Reeds talk all the time about the need to balance the books, and everything else that is making Labour so profoundly unpopular whilst

delivering literally nothing at all of any appeal to anyone in the country as whole.

Morgan McSweeney is an electoral disaster, but so powerful is he, because he has the backing of Keir Starmer, who frankly does not know what to do for himself at any point in time, and therefore is utterly dependent upon someone who might have an idea in the form of Morgan McSweeney - so powerful is he that he can now dictate to every minister as well.

This creates a situation where the Labour government is effectively entirely disabled.

It cannot make decisions.

It is not functioning.

There is no way in which a minister can sit before their own departmental team and say what they think and believe it might be implemented because they have to seek permission from Downing Street first.

There is no way in which they can instruct their senior civil servants on what position to take on an issue because they have to ask the permission of Downing Street, or maybe the Treasury, first.

This is totally dysfunctional, and we're seeing the consequences.

We are seeing Labour, first of all, beginning to fight with itself. And secondly, we have seen, of course, that Labour lost something like 198 seats in the local council elections that were held in the UK very recently. People are rejecting what it is all about, and they have good reason to do so.

And actually, what's really interesting is the new First Minister of Wales is rejecting what Kier Starmer and Morgan McSweeney are all about. That first minister, recently appointed, has now said that she's going to reset Labour in Wales so that it has a distinct Welsh tone to it.

She does not accept the national line being dictated by Downing Street.

She is not going to accept that she must impose the sorts of constraints that Labour is demanding, whether that be on benefit cuts or anything else.

She's going to try to use the budget of her government to tackle the problems that Labour itself is creating, and she's doing so because she knows that unless she does that, she has no chance of standing up against the Reform agenda in Wales or that of Plaid Cymru in Wales, who are her two main political opponents?

We are suddenly seeing the reality that in Labour there are people who will stand up and say 'enough'.

How long will it be before the back benches in the Labour party begin to do the same, because they must know already that their chance of being reelected in what is now four years' time is very low indeed, because Labour is destroying that by its own actions? Morgan McSweeney is undermining their career prospects as MPs. Why are they going to be loyal in that case?

How long is it before more cabinet ministers leave?

Louise Haigh, who was the transport secretary and one of the very first ministers that Keir Starmer got rid of - inevitably, a woman - is now standing up and saying Keir Starmer is wrong, and that a move to the right is wrong, and I'm quite certain that a very large number of Labour MPs will think that, despite which that move to the right is very likely because Wes Streeting, Rachel Reeves and Keir Starmer want it, because that's where Morgan McSweeney is politically.

There will be more defections.

There will be more rebellious votes.

There will even be MPs who will cross the House, who might either move to become independents or who will join other parties as a consequence.

Labour is collapsing because it cannot govern with the structure that it has put in place.

Labour is collapsing because it is moving to the far right, where nobody wants it, and people don't want it.

Labour is collapsing because its own ministers, including the First Minister of Wales, do not agree with it.

This is a crisis in the making. Labour looks like a government that is in the last gasp of its administration.

This is where the Tories were in 2023, but in fact, it's Labour less than a year into office.

Nothing will work for Labour unless it changes its fundamental way of working. It has to sack Morgan McSweeney. It has to run a cabinet government. It has to deliver policies that people actually believe in. It has to appease its own backbenchers. It has to appease its government in Wales. It has to deliver policies that challenge those of Reform and other parties who are opposed to it. It has to act as if it is Labour. At the moment, it's doing none of those things.

Labour has a choice. It has to decide to govern in the interest of the people of this country, or frankly, it should go to the country soon and admit it's game up for Labour.