

Mandelson's legacy

Published: January 12, 2026, 9:56 pm

A day off gives time to think.

Yesterday was not exactly a day off. Quite a lot was done, but some thinking took place as well. That will be apparent in this and another post or two today.

One person I thought about was Peter Mandelson, or at least his consequence for politics.

I made the presumption that Mandelson, now in his 70s, is unlikely to return to front-line politics. He has departed after the third political scandal of his career. I also made, perhaps hopefully, the assumption that neoliberal Labour will soon cease to exist, denying him any further chance of high office.

But in that case, what might his legacy be? The answer seems fairly obvious. If Mandelson has ever been credited with anything - apart from his ability to commit serious, serial errors of judgement - it was as the creator of spin. He was the original spin doctor. He thought style was more important than substance, the message more important than the content, and the manipulation of the media more important than telling the truth.

In this sense, Mandelson, even more than Saatchi & Saatchi and Tim Bell - who created Thatcher's messaging - was the archetype of the modern political PR agent.

His politics were not about substance but about theatre.

He turned messaging into a substitute for political content.

The aim was always persuasion, never truth.

The goal was to make the public align their interests with those of the rich and powerful, who were the people he belonged to, and the people whose affection he craved, as did Tony Blair and as does Keir Starmer now.

There are many people to blame for the rise of neoliberalism and the destruction of real democratic choice in the UK. But Mandelson's role in creating what is called the single transferable party on this blog must be recognised.

That party's existence is now fuelling the rise of fascism in the UK, as people have had enough of the meaningless drivel and dire gruel which it delivers.

By seeking to remove the idea that people had a genuine political choice, Peter Mandelson played a special role in creating extremism in this country. And that is very hard to forgive.