

Keir Starmer does not know what he believes – but has...

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The morning media coverage suggests that Keir Starmer now has only one way to survive as leader of the Labour Party. He must, apparently, finally explain what he believes in and what he intends to do. Without that clarity, the argument runs, he will be unable to persuade either his cabinet or his MPs that he should remain in office.

There is, however, one fundamental problem with this analysis. Starmer has never known what he stands for. That is why he has always relied on others to tell him what to think and what to do. He is not a strategist. He is not a thinker. He has no political instinct. At best, he is a middle manager: someone who waits to be given instructions and then carries them out with minimal reflection or grumbling. Politics, for him, has been, at best, a career move, and not a calling.

The vacuum this creates is revealing. Starmer's absence of conviction points to three deeper truths.

First, he does not believe in the government's real role. He has never articulated a positive case for what government is for. That is because he has never wanted to govern in any meaningful sense. Politics has been about personal advancement, not public purpose. As such, he typifies the modern political apparatchik. He is not the exception right now: he is the norm.

Second, he does not believe in democracy. His treatment of dissent within Labour is the clearest possible evidence. A democratic politician tolerates difference, argument and pluralism. Starmer has instead enforced conformity and silence. That is not an accident. It reflects a man who does not believe in the democratic system he now nominally leads.

Third, he is the embodiment of the political type I described in *The Courageous State* in 2011: the cowardly politician who, when confronted with a problem, instinctively retreats from addressing it, clinging to the neoliberal dogma that markets will always solve problems better than governments, and so government must step aside. The result is perpetual abdication.

Starmer, therefore, cannot deliver a positive account of Labour's purpose under his leadership to his parliamentary party because he does not believe the party has a purpose. He cannot lead a movement he does not understand or trust.

And yet, and I cannot stress this enough, this does make him the politician of the moment. Neoliberalism, when properly understood as the politics of destruction (a theme I will develop in greater depth here, very soon), has always aimed to hollow out the state, degrade government, and destroy confidence in democracy itself. Starmer is not resisting that process. He is completing it.

He has served his purpose. He has destroyed value. He has undermined democratic credibility. He has left a void where politics should be. In that sense, the long project of Blair, Mandelson and their successors has succeeded, just as Thatcher intended.

The question now is stark. Will the Labour Party recognise that its historic task is to restore democracy and rebuild the capacity of government? Or will it acquiesce in its managed decline, and the authoritarian future that follows?