

Labours has outlived its usefulness

Published: February 16, 2026, 7:39 am

There were articles in The Guardian over the weekend that explained a great deal about Labour.

First, [there were these comments by Andy Beckett](#):

The party's current crisis, while most directly caused by Keir Starmer's political shortcomings and the chillingly selective morality of Peter Mandelson, is really the result of one Labour tradition demonstrably failing in government to meet the needs of today's world. Often dominant in the party, especially over the past 40 years, you could call that tradition Labour minimalism.

Labour minimalists believe that England is a fundamentally conservative, right-leaning country, in which the party can only succeed electorally and in government by appearing as moderate and unthreatening to powerful interests as possible.

As he then noted:

In 1985, in his first act as a senior party figure, Mandelson commissioned a report by a fellow Labour minimalist, the [political analyst Philip Gould](#).

"Positive perceptions of the Labour party tend to be outweighed by negative concerns," wrote Gould, "particularly [about] unacceptable 'beyond the pale' figures."

Provocative leftwing MPs, bold-sounding leftwing policies, fierce leftwing rhetoric: all should be pared back, marginalised or dropped altogether, the two men agreed, so that Labour could reposition itself advantageously on the centre ground.

And as he added:

First under Neil Kinnock, then Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and finally Starmer, minimalism became the party's operating principle.

The aim? A politics rooted in anything but the interests of ordinary people, who were

treated as being both as expendable and irrelevant by Labour as they were by the financial elites to which the Party's leadership fawned. Is it any surprise there is a crisis?

John Harris [echoed similar themes](#) when writing about Labour's planned reform of special educational needs and disabilities support, saying:

All told, the government's underlying vision seems to be of a great rebalancing, away from personalised support towards the kind of top-down system in which families basically get what they're given. [A report](#) last week from Sky News held out exactly this prospect: ministers, it said, "ultimately want to restrict the number of children with specific per-pupil funding packages, and to curb the number of parents who end up taking their case to tribunal".

The message is, once more, of contempt, and as John Harris then noted:

What that might say about the Starmer government's basic instincts is both fascinating and depressing. In the midst of all its chaos, this sometimes looks like an old [Labour](#) administration, in the worst possible way. It has no modern versions of that tradition's good stuff: massed council-house building, or the creation of the NHS. But what remains is a familiar and very old-fashioned mistrust of redress, choice and accountability, a tendency to side with officials and penpushers, and an apparent belief we should all be grateful for whatever favours the state can give us. At a moment when Labour is being regularly warned of the dangers of retreating into an ideological comfort zone, that would be quite some safe space in which to take refuge. It would also test a lot of people's faith in a party they hitherto believed was on their side: in all likelihood, to breaking point.

Then note this, in a report on aid spending, [this time from the FT](#):

Cuts to overseas aid by the UK are set to go further and faster than those made by the Trump administration in the US, as Sir Keir Starmer's government wrestles with funding pressures. The UK will cut overseas aid spending by about 27 per cent in 2026-27 compared with 2024-25, while the US reductions are expected to be 23 per cent lower in 2026 than in 2024, as Congress has this month blunted parts of the steep cuts proposed by the President.

What's the message? It is threefold.

First, the decay within Labour has been happening for four decades, with Peter Mandelson being the perpetual link that explains the process. Its decline from being a party of principle to one of grubby managerialism has not happened by chance. It reflects deliberate policy choices. That it might be suffering its death throes as a result is not something we should be overly concerned about. In the form it has had throughout much of my lifetime, Labour has now outlived its usefulness.

Second, the consequences of this decay are evident all around us. By pursuing a politics of destruction, the Labour Party has, with the Tories, been the primary architect of the economics of failure that the far right now seeks to exploit to form the basis of their bid for power by seeking to undermine the state even further.

Third, Andy Beckett says this at the end of his article:

Labour appears to have belatedly realised that the era of small politics is over. But to prevent what may be an epic political disaster – Britain’s first government of the populist hard right – it will almost certainly need to make alliances and compromises with other parties. In politics as in life, sometimes the more control you seek, the less you ultimately get.

I do not agree. I do not think that Labour has realised that the era of small politics is over. Nor do I think it shows any signs at all of being willing to make alliances or compromises. Instead, the old tribalism that has so undermined its credibility for so long remains all too apparent. It has only been a week since its deputy leader, Lucy Powell, demanded that the Green stand down in the Gordon by-election, even though they are polling much higher than Labour. That arrogance is what has brought Labour to its knees and is why people no longer trust it. It's time to say good riddance and move on.