

It is time that Westminster looked up and noticed

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Kemi Badenoch reshuffled her Conservative Party shadow cabinet over the weekend. In the process, she sacked, amongst others, Mel Stride, who had been her Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. The most interesting thing is that almost everyone, as a result, shrugged their shoulders and said, 'So what?' They might also have added, 'Who was Mel Stride?'

It is an extraordinary fact that His Majesty's Official Opposition in the House of Commons is now so irrelevant. Almost nobody takes any note of anything that it does, and is even less aware of the supposed personalities who populate its front bench, so ineffective are they.

I do, however, suggest this is, in itself, significant. It indicates three things.

The first is that the long history of the Conservative Party, which always thought itself to be the natural party of power in this country, may be drawing to a close. In a country where finding anyone with political talent does now appear to be exceptionally difficult, attracting them into a party that appears to have not the slightest prospect of power at any time in the reasonably foreseeable future will make the likelihood of any revival near impossible.

Secondly, this opens up the prospect of, at the very least, a potential new Official Opposition in the House of Commons, even if Labour can cling on in quiet desperation as the government after any forthcoming general election. The real question is, who might that be? At present, the odds are still on it being Farage, but Burnham is a possibility, and do not rule out others. There is a long way to go before this race is run.

Thirdly, and vitally, this makes clear that an electoral system designed for two-party politics is now, more than ever, unsuited to deliver good, appropriate, or representative government for the UK, and the time for electoral reform has most definitely arrived. And Burnham has ruled that out before the next general election. By doing so, he might well have ruled his own party out.

The reality is that the Tories look to be facing extinction, but the possibility that Labour might also head that way cannot be ignored. Kemi Badenoch might have undertaken an almost irrelevant shadow cabinet reshuffle, but the truth is that she has indicated, as a consequence of its meaningless nature, the changing state of politics in Westminster, and it is time that even Westminster looked up and noticed.