

Tories could fail again, part of a grim political season in the West

By Conrad Black

Anyone reasonably conversant with British history knows not to underestimate that redoubtable country that has made such an immense contribution to civilisation: the language and literature, the common law, the parliamentary system, always in the vanguard of science and of the advance of human rights. But the embarrassing and in fact unprecedented shambles of British government in the last fifteen years has been very distressing. Never before has that country had five consecutive failed prime ministers in nine years and certainly it has never had five consecutive failed prime ministers from the same party. And it must be said that with the possible exception of Liz Truss, none of those five failed prime ministers got off to so rocky a start as Keir Starmer.



Conservatives, wet, lonely, are they heading Right or just looking for a way out? (Photo by Ian Forsyth/Getty Images)

He was a thoroughly unimpressive leader of the opposition and while he has won a huge parliamentary majority, the percentage of the national vote gained by his Labour Party this summer only rose by one per cent and the proportions of his victory are attributable to very large desertions from the Conservative Party to the Reform Party and even to the ancient catchment of protest votes, the third-party reliquary of the Liberal Democrats. The country had to expel the Conservatives from office and severely punish them, not only for their chronic misgovernment and a decade of floundering, and for ceasing to be in any serious sense a conservative party, but to send them the message that they are circling the drain and if they don't produce a serious leader this time, they will disintegrate and fall to the second echelon of British politics with the Liberal Democrats.

However, Starmer has stumbled so badly out of the starting blocks and fallen on his face with the absurdly stupid Lord Alli scandal, in which a rich Labour peer gave thousands of pounds of gifts to Starmer and others at the top of the party, and his assault upon his own supporters for objecting to unassimilable immigration in the midst of economic stagnation as if the British national motive was racism rather than legitimate concern for the prosperity of British citizens, that the Labour Party should not imagine that it is immune from a meltdown, either.

The Labour Party displaced the Liberal Party, the successor to the Whigs and the great national political operation of Walpole, the Pelhams, Palmerston, Gladstone, and Lloyd George. This happened over the decade of the 1920s in response to the terrible problems of World War I and the interwar period. The Conservatives held relatively firm, sufficiently so that Winston Churchill returned to them, claiming the distinction of being the only British politician who having "ratted," was so bold as to "re-rat."

The government is already beginning to fray at the edges

because of the maladroitness of its leader, as usual with the British Left, full of sanctimony but unfeasibly inept, and if Starmer does not raise his game he will get the high jump in midterm as the Tories gave May, Johnson, and Truss. The Labour front bench is not an inexhaustible storehouse of great reformers pawing the ground to get on with their march to predestined greatness. It is a very job lot whose hackneyed and dreary implausibility is exemplified by the Foreign Secretary David Lammy, who professed to be sufficiently alarmed by the possibility that Israel would use nonlethal imports from the United Kingdom to commit atrocities in Gaza that he embargoed nine per cent of Britain's military shipments to Israel (which are completely inconsequential and if there were any truth to his allegations he would presumably have embargoed all of it).

It is a grim political season in the major Western countries. French President Macron has made a terrible mistake in hurling himself into the arms of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who is a dangerous Marxist lunatic, while continuing to contend that Marine Le Pen is a fascist. The German Social Democratic Party (SPD) is no longer an important party but is still more concerned about the semi-house trained Alternative for Germany (AfD) than by the relatively glamorous socialist Sarah Wagenknecht (by the standards of Walther Ulbricht's DDR, East Germany, her political origins), who wants to scrap NATO and revive the Russo-German alliance of Bismarck and Hitler.

The United States is limping to the end of its most incompetent administration since before the Civil War, but at least the terrible vacuum that has been created by its experiment as a weak superpower is likely to end in the next few months. Canada has had a terribly insipid regime but it is almost certain to elect a very capable and radically different government next year.

As if from the Book of Matthew, the last are first and the West is being led out of the tenebrous wilderness of its mass

political dementia by the long-lost causes of Argentina and Italy. What is seriously worrisome in this process is that our three politically most stable countries, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, have all flirted with political suicide contemporaneously.

And what is completely shocking is that venerable Britain, so long accustomed to looking down its nose at the antics of the North Americans with all the confected self-importance of the chairman of the membership committee of one of the famous London clubs, appears to have lost the capacity for self-government. This must be an illusion, but if the British Conservative Party does not elect a serious leader this time, the West should prepare itself for the evaporation of the geopolitical relevance and credibility of the British for the first time since their Civil War nearly 400 years ago. It doesn't bear thinking about.

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