

# A land fit for apparatchiks

By Theodore Dalrymple

In its response to the petition calling for a new general election, which those who signed it must have known was of no constitutional force, the government wrote, inter alia: “The Prime Minister can call a general election at a time of their choosing ... ”



*Photo by Dan Kitwood/Getty Images*

Does the use of the plural possessive adjective with a singular subject mean that Sir Keir Starmer is uncertain about his sex and that one day in the near future he may appear in the House of Commons as Dame Keir Starmer?

I rather doubt it. I think it is more likely to indicate the deep moral cowardice of a government that is unable to face down a fanatical but small lobby group, a cowardice that is typical of ambitious mediocrity.

The technique of the response is that of *suppressio veri, suggestio falsi*, though I am afraid its framers might not themselves have been aware of it. For example, the response says: “The Government was elected by the British people on a

mandate of change ... “

The word mandate in this context has the connotation of popularity and enthusiasm, when the government had 34 per cent of the votes cast, and 20 per cent of the votes of the electorate as a whole. This is a mandate only in a technical or legalistic sense.

The response goes on to say that “the Government’s first budget freed up tens of billions of pounds to invest in Britain’s future ... ” This is like a mugger saying that he had freed up tens of pounds to invest in future purchases of cocaine.

In one partial sense, perhaps, the response told the truth. If the recent pay settlement with the train drivers is anything to go by, the government is “freeing up” (i.e. expropriating) billions of pounds to invest in the future of the Labour Party, by means of extending the numbers of people working in, or rather employed by, the public sector, at high and increasing rates of pay with generous pensions. It is creating a land fit for apparatchiks

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