

Britain: Is Johnson losing his Teflon?

Saturday 11 December 2021, by [KELLAWAY Dave](#) (Date first published: 9 December 2021).

Dave Kellaway reports on the latest scandal to hit the Tory government.

Thank god there are some corners of the British press that still occasionally do their job and hold power to account. If the *Daily Mirror* had not worked away at the Christmas Party story then we might today be saying that Johnson has got away with it again. The *Mirror* journalist told BBC Breakfast that they had heard stories about 2020 Downing Street parties during lockdown since January last year. The recent anonymous arrival of the proverbial brown envelope with more details allowed them to put proper resources into the story. Other newspapers must have been aware of the rumours but had done nothing which reflects the comfortable ride they give Johnson compared to the merciless attacks on Jeremy Corbyn. Perhaps their journalists or owners had been at one or two of these events.

In any case, Johnson, as a consequence of his inbred dishonesty and lying, has already had to change his story from a week ago. Previously in Parliament, he denied any breaking of rules or even accepting that a party had taken place. Today he says that 'he had been assured' no such event had happened and in any case, he had asked the cabinet secretary to investigate. That is a bit like the police investigating the police or Yorkshire cricket club checking on racism. The investigator-in-chief might well have gone to one of these events.

[Video]

Real damage has been done by the Allegra Stratton video. Seeing Johnson's closest advisors with their upper-class accents laughing out loud about the 'cheese and wine' party takes a prize for the most politically self-destructive act of the year. For people who actually followed the rules and were not able to be close to their loved ones in their final moments, this must have been bitter viewing. Experts in political communications know that most folks do not read serious newspapers, consume speeches or follow parliamentary questions but they do watch the news and/or follow social media as this is mostly visual. Striking images and sound bites trump thousands of finely crafted words. Johnson knows this better than anyone - remember the Brexit bus with the £650 a week for the NHS or the picture of the 'Turkish' migrants queuing to get into Britain. Poetic justice if he is being skewered by another powerful image of Stratton giggling at her entitlement.

Ingrained in the British ruling class is a sense of entitlement. There are rules for the little people and another set of more flexible ones for them. So Oxbridge delinquent actions in restaurants get a soft glove treatment from the police compared to the way black kids in Hackney are treated just for congregating together on the streets. It means if you are sleeping with somebody you can bung them some public money to help their business without any of the usual transparency procedures. It might be too much to hope for that the press might actually take up the Jennifer Arcuri case. You could write more than one book on Johnson's flouting of the normal rules of public or political life. One minor story is that he would just accumulate parking tickets rather than park properly like anybody else. More seriously he once admitted on the telephone that he would sort out somebody for Eton buddy, Darius Guppy. He could arrange a 'couple of black eyes'. Of course, police involvement was

nil.

While the video has helped explode the story it is also being used cynically by Johnson. Basically, he can point to these sneering advisors - whom he personally appointed - and say nothing to do with me gov. Health Secretary Sajid Javid adopted the same line this morning after refusing to be interviewed yesterday. It takes a day to get a defence line organised. Johnson had already rushed to push Stratton under the bus and no doubt others will follow. We can only hope that somebody at one of these parties took a photo on their mobile. Even better if a selfie shows Johnson there. Organising the scapegoats will surely involve some inducements to delete all photos if they exist!

Johnson is hoping that the hasty announcement of Covid plan B measures will squeeze the scandal off the front pages. His problem is that there is a direct link to Covid. How can you expect people to follow the rules now if the people making the rules are not following them? This morning, in my Tesco metro store, about 50% were maskless. When I asked somebody on the till what the store was doing to encourage masks he mumbled something about not being given any instructions. What chance has a shop worker have of confronting shoppers if the Prime minister's team do not give a damn?

Starmer finally went on the attack in Prime Minister's questions and did a decent job in exposing the cynical dishonesty and incompetence of Johnson. He skilfully contrasted the partying insiders with real stories of people who were not able to be with their loved ones at Xmas or as they were dying. Having said that, it would have been like a striker missing a completely open goal if he had failed to land any punches. How many points would Labour be ahead in the polls if this had been his approach from day one of the pandemic rather than his line of 'constructive opposition'?

So far Johnson's political career has been remarkable - he won London, the Brexit referendum and the 2019 election. His surfing of the shift to the right in society and politics over a number of years as a consequence of the defeat of working-class communities and the failure of Labourism has meant, like Trump, his personal lack of ethics has been ignored or tolerated. His bumbling, philandering and boosterism make him appear more likeable to many people. Incompetent and immoral he may be, but he has a finely tuned political nose. He recognised that the reactionary Brexit project could bring him to power so he screwed up the position paper he had written arguing remain and never looked back. His cuddling up to the Brexit Party and then swallowing them whole was skillfully done. Behind the hail-fellow-well-met demeanour of course there is a bit of steel and ruthlessness. Unlike Corbyn, he cleared out his opposition before the 2019 election and is capable of dumping people at the drop of a hat. People often do not take him seriously enough, but his authoritarian attitude to parliament, democratic rights and legal safeguards are very dangerous for the labour movement and us all. Legislation on protests, migrants and judicial review are all currently underway.

Up to now, he has kept the Tory party and his Brexit-based electoral base together. His MPs will put up with his serious failings if they think it will mean they will keep their seats. If there are signs that voters may become disaffected either in the 'red wall' or 'blue wall' seats then we may see moves to replace him. The Shropshire bye-election may be an important indicator of the way the wind is blowing. Last week's Bexley vote was not a knock-out blow although the low turnout and reduced majority showed things may be shifting. Labour benefited from a 10 point swing but hardly mobilised its base either and the result did not point to a Labour government.

Socialists need to shout about the scandals but also work to support struggles for wage increases, to defend the NHS/public spending and to oppose the bills attacking the NHS, migrants/asylum seekers and the rights to protest. A number of successful local wage struggles show that there is a new potential for fighting back. Any crisis in the ruling party can boost the confidence of those looking

for a change.

We should support the resistance but also call on Labour not just to perform in parliament but to get behind every strike and every campaign. Starmer thinks the way to win the next election is to convince the establishment that Labour can be trusted not to threaten capitalist interests in any way. He is therefore unlikely to fully support migrant and asylum seekers or clearly defend the right to protest. Refusing to support his own conference's policy for a £15 minimum wage is not going to help Labour mobilise its base.

Anti-Capitalist Resistance exists to help group socialists who see the need for an alternative to both Johnson and Starmer's solutions to the social, economic and ecological crises.

Dave Kellaway

Comment: Michael Picken

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Scotland was already showing 80% in polls saying Johnson was doing a bad job. In the next polls this is likely to go as near to 100% as any poll can show (a flash poll by Survation yesterday evening showed 75% in Scotland calling for Johnson to go).

Even the leader of the Scottish Tories Douglas Ross has been shamed to say that there "clearly" was a party and that Johnson should go once proof is established that he knew about it. His predecessor Ruth Davidson, appointed by Johnson to the House of Lords, called Johnson's statement yesterday "pathetic" and "none of this is remotely defensible".

The Scottish Tories are right to be worried about Johnson's impact on Scottish politics. The last IPSOS-MORI poll showed support for Scottish independence up at 55%. It was claimed that it was an 'outlier' ... but it could be the start of a new trend.

It is the SNP that are leading the calls for Johnson to go. Predictably Starmer doesn't support this demand - and doesn't realise he is playing with fire over this in Scotland. The Daily Record is traditionally the only Labour supporting paper and had the excellent front page headline this morning saying: "Party's Over - Now Get Out", against a picture of Johnson. Their editorial calls for Johnson be got rid of and pointedly states "he must not JUST be opposed, he must be replaced" (my emphasis added and no doubt with one finger pointing at how useless Starmer has been).

It has also not gone unnoticed in Scotland that the same day he made his gibbering statement to parliament, Johnson also introduced measures against Covid in England that are largely the same as those that have applied in Scotland for some time - and which were opposed by the Scottish Tories, and to their shame Scottish Labour, at the time.

Of course, the Tories will only replace Johnson with another mediocrity from their number but the genie has come out of the bottle and the ongoing crisis over the British state will accelerate.

Increasing numbers in Scotland want out of the Tory nightmare through the mechanism of independence from the UK state. The Scottish Parliament elections in May - held under proportional representation, with a higher turnout than three out of the last six general elections and the widest electoral franchise ever seen in Britain - produced a clear mandate for a referendum and the

election of a majority SNP and Scottish Green Party parliament. The SNP and Greens are now combined in a governmental agreement that includes urgent legislation for a referendum.

The SNP are at around 50%-55% in current polls, enough to remove every Scottish Tory from Westminster, especially if the declining band of Labour voters rightly see the benefit of that. However the crisis will accelerate well before the three years to the next UK election is up. A referendum before that, brought about by mass action if Westminster tries to block it legally, is a both a distinct possibility and could result in a vote to dissolve the "United Kingdom", remove nuclear weapons from Scotland and create a defeating blow against the Tories and imperialism.

P.S.

- Anti*Capitalist Resistance. 09 Dec 2021:

<https://anticapitalistresistance.org/is-johnson-losing-his-teflon/>

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