

Boris Johnson has created a shibboleth: no one with any...

Published: January 13, 2026, 12:04 am

No one is going to be surprised by the outcome of last night's Leader's debate on green issues. Siân Barry Greens won, I think. Corbyn and Sturgeon both covered their ground without being completely convincing on some issues. Adam Price began well but failed on sheep and slipped up a bit from thereon. Jo Swinson struggled, again. But that said, they were all arguing for nuance: the substance was commonality, as it should be on this issue.

But that was possible because of the absence of Johnson and Farage. The latter is no surprise, or loss. Johnson's absence is much more revealing.

The stunt of sending Gove in his supposed place was pure contempt from Johnson: he wanted to belittle the others present. It was deliberate, right down to bringing their own camera team.

The refusal of Johnson to come shows that not only has he no desire to engage normal political processes but also with younger people. I hope those who vote recall this.

The contempt is also for the issue. Johnson is a climate denier. You can't refuse to engage with this issue and be anything else. No doubt he is so for all the reasons all those on the right who deny the reality of the climate crisis are. They believe the neoclassical economic assumption that nature is a free gift provided to us (presumably by a paternalistic god) to use without consequence, and that if there is any consequence then the market can in any case instantly correct it. Both assumptions are standard, and taught (albeit without reference to that god) on most economics courses, by implication, even now. Climate denial is hard wired into these people, however alien to reality it is.

And this is far from the only issue on which Johnson's behaviour is alien. His refusal to play this election by the normal rules of decency, fair play, mutual self-respect and integrity confirm that Johnson really is a man willing to cheat, lie and sabotage his way to power at any cost. We have not seen a politician so brazen before. I hope we do not

again.

Implicit in all this is one thing. It is Johnson's ego. What this election is about is whether or not people are foolish enough to believe that a man who has already proved himself so untrustworthy should run the country.

Apparently older people who tend to be men think he is.

Younger people, more likely to be women, don't.

But this time, after the event it will be possible to say that those who voted for him are worthy of our contempt. They knew they were voting for a contemptible person, who is indifferent to them, their families, their futures and that of this planet. Brexit created a shibboleth in our society. This election is confirming it. And on one side there are people who lack all self respect and decency. You could not vote for Johnson otherwise. I hate to say it, but the divide is now as blunt as that. And it needs to be said.