

We need an interim prime minister, and only Jeremy Hunt...

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I wrote a tweet last night in which I said:

Let's be serious tonight. There is no one who does not wish Boris Johnson well tonight, but once you've been on ITU it takes a long time to recover. What are the plans to make sure he has the chance to do just that? Someone needs to say now.

I admit that having been married to a doctor for some time means that I have acquired some insight into some of the human aspects of sickness. One of the things that I learned is how long recovery takes.

It was something strongly reinforced when I had the only operation I have had in my life, which took me much longer than I expected to get over. I would add that it's also taking me much longer to recover full strength after what, I am sure, was coronavirus than I also expected: it's not completely happened as yet, and I got away with a relatively mild dose of it.

And Boris Johnson is very ill right now. Sicker than anyone would ever wish to be. Which means he is going to need a long recovery. Literally, the best advice would have to be just that. And, in any event, his judgement will be reduced by having been sedated; that's just inevitable. He will not be fit to be prime minister, in a quite literal sense, when he comes out.

This has serious consequences. No one, including the Tory Party, which showed little enthusiasm for having Dominic Raab as its leader, seriously thinks he is a man fit to lead this country at present. Nor did they think much of Matt Hancock in that role, whilst Rishi Sunak's star is fading as quickly as it rose given the hopelessness of his support schemes for business that are going to condemn millions to unemployment on the most basic of benefits. As for Michael Gove, the Tories don't trust him not to stab himself in the back and nor does the country.

In a party that literally culled its internal opposition last year, and which built a government around unthinking allegiance to whatever Johnson and Cummings wanted,

there is now going to be a power void at the precise moment when the country is facing its biggest crisis for generations. That's the problem with populism; it closes down most options.

Importantly, this is, at least not yet, the moment for Labour to demand a national government. The Tories created the environment in which this crisis has happened and they have to take responsibility for it.

In desperation I can see only one person who might be able to deliver the required leadership now. Jeremy Hunt came second in the Tory leadership race, and then went to the back benches. But second best should do now. I suggest he would be the right choice of interim prime minister, holding office just until Johnson could return. And he needs to be accountable in any event: the NHS we have now is as much his creation as anyone's: he needs to be answerable for its lack of preparedness.

I never thought I would say Jeremy Hunt should be in Number 10: even temporarily, but right now I do think that would be appropriate. These are, indeed, strange days.