

The country cannot affirm the Johnson and Cummings deb.

Published: January 13, 2026, 2:02 am

The accusation against Nero was that he supposedly fiddled whilst Rome burned. It's not certain that he was guilty of the offence, but the story has stuck and he us, forever, tainted by it. That's unsurprising. It is a tale of indifference motivated by personal ambition, with a desire for gain.

Johnson fiddled whilst Cummings prevaricated in the Downing Street rose garden yesterday. I suspect that he too will be tainted forever by this, except that on this occasion the impression is of a weak leader in hock to a paranoid man of limited decision making capacity with a persecution complex seeking to run away from responsibility.

Johnson's support for Cummings defines who he is now. The reasons for the dependence are open to even more doubt after yesterday's extraordinary performance, of which the 'eye test trip to Barnards Castle' was simple the most absurd claim.

In the minds of reasonable people Cummings resolved nothing and opened more reasons for doubting his judgement yesterday.

It is just a step further to doubting the judgement of the prime minister in that case.

And this morning's papers offer no comfort: the issue is not going away.

We face quite astonishing issues as a country. The reality that we have no idea how to now make the economy work again is clear: the government's awareness that without its support large parts of industry are at risk is at least realistic, even if the resulting policy looks misguided. And in the midst of this necessary dependence on the government we have a crisis of confidence developing because it is clear that the judgement of the prime minister and his senior adviser cannot be trusted.

I admit to having never thought Johnson fit to hold the office that he does. But I never imagined he would be as bad as this. I suspect many Tory MPs feel the same way, and quite probably much of the Cabinet too, despite being picked for the sole reason of being loyal. The Tory instinct for retaining power always overcomes all else in the end.

How and when this ends is not clear, but it must. The last thing that is needed now is this distraction and the complete collapse in confidence in the government that breaches of lockdown clearly represent, but which are themselves indicative of something much deeper.

There are no good answers to this situation. But the worst is perpetuation of the current farce. I very strongly suspect that something will have to break, and that it will soon. The degree of hostility towards Johnson and Cummings from within the media, fuelled by its perception of, for once being on the side of the people, is extraordinary.

One or both cannot survive this. There is no precedent for that happening and I suspect the pattern will not be broken this time.