

# There are pivotal moments in politics when credibility ...

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I share my house with two teenage sons. For reasons that may not be wholly surprising, I suspect that they have an above average political awareness for people of their age. Mealtimes (and we sit down together very day) involve lively exchanges of views (and a lot of, usually dark, humour).

On Thursday evening we were discussing the success, or otherwise, of British prime ministers from Macmillan onwards. Some time was spent on Major, not least because of his problems with his own party. I explained those he described as '[the Bastards](#)'. And then I hardly need to point out that those very same Bastards, and their heirs, are those now ruining this country. We have moved from those seeking to undermine the credibility of the government from the sidelines bringing down their own party, to those with the same views now seeking to run government.

The conclusion was, perhaps, inevitable. They destroyed Major, and the Tory party in the 90s. And now their own inability to respect rules is destroying the country that they are supposedly seeking to govern.

And that was before the Cummings scandal broke, and yet it is, so very obviously, a part of this larger narrative. [Leona Helmsley](#) once said that taxes were only for 'the little people'. It is now very obvious that the members of this government think that the laws, rules and guidance that they provide are for those very same 'little people', who are anyone but themselves, and those that they know.

It is a deeply unfortunate fact requiring acknowledgement that modern conservative politics is based on contempt. The range of those who suffer that contempt is wide: from immigrants, to those on lower pay, to anyone in government employment, to the disabled, to those who care in any way about others; all are the subject of disdain. They are 'the little people'.

Cummings has very clearly revealed that.

But the whole Brexit campaign he ran was based on that as well.

As were his campaigns to make himself leader of the Conservatives, with Johnson his glove puppet with notional power.

There is, though a problem for these Tories. And that is that whatever people feel about 'them' (as in 'us and them') in authority they do not like to be treated with contempt. So 'them' have to appear to treat 'us' with respect, even if they very clearly don't actually hold such opinion.

And Cummings has transgressed that rule.

So too have all those deeply obsequious ministers who have queued up to defend him done the same thing, and made profound fools of themselves in the process.

A competent government might recover from such a debacle. But we have not got a competent government. We have what is, I have no doubt, the most incompetent government of my lifetime. It is one that I would genuinely worry about if left in charge of a town council.

The Major years indicate what happens next. His government did not fall even though Major called 'the Bastards' out in 1993. He struggled on to 1997, ever more ineffectively. But a new Labour leader used that period to prepare the policy that swept a corrupt, broken and deeply disliked Tory party from office for thirteen years.

In that period Major won a party leadership election. I suspect Johnson will not: long before he has to face the ignominy of that he will have quit, having proven beyond doubt that he never was fit for the office that he craved since childhood. But I see no chance of his successor, whoever that might be changing his party's fortunes. There are pivotal moments in politics when credibility is lost. I suspect we're living through one this weekend.

Johnson's government has lost whatever authority it had, despite his majority. Those who have stood by him have lost theirs in the process. There is so little talent in their party that there is no chance of them all being replaced in another government. The stain will last in that case. And eventual demise looks to be inevitable. But we must suffer the agony of waiting until that happens.

And in the meantime another question arises, which is will Labour use this time wisely to have what Blair was never in position of, which is a plan for the truly radical transformation this country now needs?