

## The absence of vision is the massive hole in the middle...

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There is a difference between Boris Johnson and Joe Biden that can be summarised in one word, which is vision.

Like many, I am surprised by Biden. After decades of public service no one saw him as a radical. The idea that he might be about to spend \$6 trillion to tackle core issues of equity and sustainability within the US economy was not at the forefront of most people's minds when he was inaugurated. 100 days in, and that is what he is doing.

At around the same time post Johnson's election he was missing Cobra meetings on Covid to find the time to buy wallpaper.

The jest is not for effect. I suggest that the difference is very real. As, of course, it is between Biden and Trump. Or between Biden, Johnson and Modi, who is another politician who appears to have discovered that populist form is no substitute for real action, let alone appropriate action.

So what is happening here? Bringing it back to Johnson, has he run out of road, remarkably quickly in an administration where but for Covid his absence of ideas might have become apparent even sooner? I think so. Yesterday's bluster (for outraged bluster of no substance was exactly what it was: I watched it live whilst having my lunch and could not quite believe it) was a desperate attempt at a diversionary tactic. But immediately following it was Ian Blackford's question.

He asked, as leader of the SNP in Westminster, whether the Prime Minister was a liar. The Speaker ruled the question admissible, if (apparently) distasteful. Blackford knew he could not call Johnson a liar, although he very obviously is, so he turned the accusation into a question instead. Doing so, he got away with it. Johnson, of course, did not provide an answer, but in the process he admitted the truth.

That truth is now plain to see. It is that Johnson does not know why he is Prime Minister. He does not know what being Prime Minister demands of him. He does not know what to do as a result. And that would be fine if he had arrived in office with a vision to fulfil

that required that he swept aside the impediments that Whitehall can present, just as Biden is doing in the US. But the destruction of Brexit apart - which was just a Tory game - there was no such vision.

Instead we have got the best indication of what populism is all about. Substitute cronyism for vision and the one-word contrast between the two is apparent. Biden is working for the common good. He referred to the opening line of the US constitution - 'We the people' - in his speech last night, making clear that the people of the US are his motivation. Johnson is doing the exact opposite. If he was to find a similar line in the UK's unwritten constitution it would be 'You, the exploited'. The comma, as a separator, is deliberate in my version.

This is populism laid bare. Biden has lived beyond his Gorman moment. Instead he is working on delivering the promise implicit in Amanda Gorman's poem.

<https://youtu.be/LZ055illiN4>

This in itself is quite extraordinary.

But Johnson has no vision. There is just greed and a desire to deplete the public purse for private gain, that found an unexpected chance in Covid, but the opportunity for which was already laid bare in the Henry VIII powers that had been enacted to make Brexit possible (within the limits of possibility that exist with regard to that objective).

The question is, how long is it before Wallpapergate, or Cash for Cushions, or whatever else the media like to call this, will spill over? Will Kerr Starmer's new line of calling Johnson 'Major Sleaze' (itself a riposte to Johnson's claim that Starmer is Captain Hindsight) cut through?

My suspicion is that, [corruption fatigue or not](#), this one will drip feed into the consciousness of the UK. There will always be 30% of England that will vote Tory, because they think it would be to betray their grannies not to do so. But the swing voter will get over their Covid euphoria when the good times don't return (as they won't), but Covid might. And they will then ask what all this was for? And there will be no answer.

I offer just one caveat to my optimism. Labour also lacks a vision right now. Not being Tory is not a vision. Starmer needs to look at Biden and take note. He needs a plan. Right now he has not got one. And he might need it sooner than expected. I am not aware that he is talking to anyone about creating one. And that is my concern.

The absence of vision is the massive hole in the middle of English politics right now. It has to be filled.