

Johnson and Sunak are in trouble. They are not only def...

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For the second morning in a row I have watched a leading Tory politician being given a hard time by a BBC television journalist. Yesterday it was Marr questioning Boris Johnson. This morning it was Rishi Sunak, who as I write this has just concluded an interview with on BBC breakfast television.

Both interviews were car crashes. Neither politician was obviously expecting to be held to account by the BBC. Both were. Johnson failed on supply chains, jobs and met his nemesis on pigs - where his responses were infantile.

Sunak simply could not handle a line of questioning from an excellent BBC journalist (whose name I do not know as I am not a regular breakfast television watcher) who would not let him off questions on universal credit, tax rises hitting the poorest disproportionately, unemployment and government naivete on that issue and the failure to deliver new jobs.

Both were visibly rattled by the line of questioning they suffered. From starting all smiling and confident both were forced onto the defensive, and into irrationality. Current stock lines ('we will not pull the lever of migration appears to be the latest) failed miserably to cut through. Neither could either explain or justify the government's position.

Unsurprisingly I welcome this. For far too long the BBC has accepted ministers' answers without seeking to explore what they mean. Neither interviewer here was willing to do that. They went back to the question. They called out nonsense when they heard it. Both asked for answers and left Johnson and Sunak dangling when they would not provide them.

This is good news. Firstly that's because democracy depends on ministers being held to account. Second, it is time ministers realised that they cannot talk nonsense and get away with it. Third, it shows that the BBC has had enough and has realised that being compliant is no longer the way to keep its licence and that it might as well fight to keep its form of television journalism alive, which I welcome.

Fourth, I think this says that the country has had enough. There is a palpable sense that the Tories are failing. My conversations with those who I do not expect to be critics are suggesting that. The sense that Sunak and Johnson cannot pass off the current situation with a 'don't blame us, this is the market transitioning to a new equilibrium' claim is very real. People neither understand that (which is justifiable, since it is nonsense) or think it passes muster - because they do think the government is responsible for keeping the economy going.

The sense of weariness with Johnson may be increasing rapidly. I note Max Hastings having a go at home in the FT, telling him it is time to go. But his chosen successor, Rishi Sunak, has just done very badly. What he managed to look like was a man who did not care. He claimed £12 billion could only be raised in tax by increasing the taxes due by the lowest paid whilst leaving the taxes paid by the wealthiest untouched.

And that is simply not true. I could find most if not all of the £12 billion he wanted by simply cutting the tax relief due on the pension contributions of the wealthiest in the UK from 40% to 20% and not one extra penny would have been due by those on low pay as a result. So what he was really saying was that he could not find £12 billion whilst leaving the wealthy with their funds intact, which is something very different.

I think the BBC sense this and they are right to do so. Johnson and Sunak are in trouble. They are not only defending the indefensible. They are being called out for doing so. And that is good news.