

When Ant & Dec turn on the Prime Minister he should rea...

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Few readers of this blog can be unaware of the video now circulating of Downing Street staff joking last December about the Christmas Party that very obviously took place there on 18 December last year.

For those who have not seen it though, this is it:

https://youtu.be/4Ofkm48nv_k

I think the inference abundantly clear: the party did take place, those present at this recording thought it a big joke, and rules were very clearly not followed.

Given the severity of Covid rules last Christmas the anger about this is palpable.

As importantly, this is going to cut through. If in doubt, this was broadcast to about 10 million people by Ant & Dec on I'm a Celebrity last night (and no, I did not watch it when first broadcast):

<https://twitter.com/bbclaurak/status/1468334572895150084?t=qONG27fwm9Gwr7vG6SaeWw&s=03>

I think that this is the third time in a week that they have referred to this issue, in a politicisation that is as surprising as it is welcome.

The key line was 'Evening Prime Minister, for now.'

When Ant & Dec come out against corruption and lying, and Laura Kuenssberg has the confidence to tweet them doing so, something is most definitely happening.

I could, of course, be wrong, but I suspect that Boris Johnson's days are now numbered. His credibility is now in tatters. So too is that of those who have defended him. The likelihood that his government will collapse now seems to be high. It is always the lies implicit in the cover-ups that get them.

The important questions to ask in that case are fourfold.

The first is whether this implies that there will be a general election? I think that very unlikely. The Tories are not going to let that happen. There will instead be a new prime minister sometime quite soon, I suspect.

The second question is, then, in whose interests was this leaked? That is harder to answer. The obvious one would be Rishi Sunak, but there is a problem in thinking that. Allegra Stratton, whose reputation is trashed by this, is a close friend of Sunak. She is godmother to his children and her husband was the best man at his wedding. That does not stop this being a pro-Sunak release, but it makes it less likely. So who else? It's hard to tell, but this smells like Gove. I do not think for one minute that he thinks he will be PM as a result. That chance is gone, thankfully, but he destroyed Johnson once before, and I am quite sure that he is willing to do so again.

So, third, is what happens now? I am not convinced that Johnson can make it to Christmas right now. That would most especially be true if Thursday's by-election result goes against the Tories, which interventions like that from Ant & Dec suggest might happen. But then?

This is the fourth issue. Who might succeed Johnson? The Tories love Liz Truss. I doubt that even they are daft enough to think that the country might. She really is not fit for the role.

Of the rest of the Cabinet, only Sunak stands out. But will the Tories have faith in a person so far seen as so close to Johnson, however carefully he has tried to create space between them? And could they overcome their racism? It's a question I hate having to ask, but this is not a party where the membership is known for their open-mindedness, which makes this a factor, however wrong that might be.

Or will they go outside the Cabinet? On backbenches almost as devoid of talent as the Cabinet, only Jeremy Hunt stands out there. He came second to Johnson in 2019. Has his time come? Personally, I think he would be better than Sunak, but that is a very, very low bar.

The reality is that we do not know, barring one thing that is. And that is that the credibility of this administration is now very likely lost for good. I doubt that anything can save Johnson now.

It would also take an exceptional new prime minister to save the Tories, who are now behind Labour in polls. But I am not holding my breath on that one. Labour's ability to keep the Tories in power is almost limitless. And that is part of this deeply depressing scenario that is symptomatic of the failure of politics in the UK.