

## When the truth cannot be told without fear of repercuss...

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The consensus amongst journalists is that Boris Johnson will survive yesterday's debacle following the publication of the interim Sue Gray report.

There was not a single ministerial resignation yesterday, although one private secretary did resign.

Although the Tory backbenchers were almost absent of those willing to support the prime minister, those ministers sitting alongside him looked as if they wished to hang their heads in shame and cover them with their hands, but they did not resign.

And those few Tory MPs who had the courage to make clear that they have had enough of this rotten prime minister are insufficient in number to tip the balance that requires him to face a vote of no confidence amongst his own MPs.

We got, as a consequence, what was the clearest possible evidence that our Parliamentary democracy is rotten.

Kier Starmer pointed this out, powerfully, in what was probably his best moment as Labour leader to date. His analysis was forensic and was delivered with obvious malice. It clearly rattled Johnson, as it should have done. He made blatantly false accusations in response, straight out of the far-right meme book.

Theresa May was scornful in the style of a headteacher and played her part in exposing his lies to perfection.

Caroline Lucas was appropriately passionate.

And I am sure that Ian Blackford staged his intervention, but if he did then it was well done. He was expelled from the House for making the suggestion that Boris Johnson had lied to it when it was glaringly obvious that he had. The relevant exchange in which the lie was proffered was recorded in [Hansard](#) on 8 December 2021 when this question and answer were exchanged:

In the [Sue Gray](#) report the following events were reported (with others):

5. In line with those terms of reference the following events were in scope:
  - 15 May 2020; a photograph showing a number of groups in the garden of No 10 Downing Street;
  - 20 May 2020: a gathering in the garden of No 10 Downing Street for No 10 staff;
  - 18 June 2020: a gathering in the Cabinet Office, 70 Whitehall on the departure of a No 10 private secretary;
  - 19 June 2020: a gathering in the Cabinet room in No 10 Downing Street on the Prime Minister's birthday;
  - 13 November 2020:
    - a gathering in the No 10 Downing Street flat;
    - a gathering in No 10 Downing Street on the departure of a special adviser;

It was also noted that in that report that:

10. The Metropolitan Police has now confirmed that as a result of information provided by the Cabinet Office investigation team, as well as assessments made by Metropolitan Police officers, they are investigating the events on the dates set out above with the exception of the gatherings on:

- 15 May 2020
- 27 November 2020
- 10 December 2020
- 15 December 2020

What this very clearly means is that the events of 13 November 2020 are now subject to a police investigation.

What were the regulations at the time? According to the Sue Gray report they were that:

5 November 2020: a second national lockdown is introduced which requires people to stay at home and which prohibits gatherings with people from other households except for permitted exceptions, including where the "gathering is reasonably necessary .... for work purposes"

Quite straightforwardly, in that case the event in the Downing Street flat was inevitably contrary to the regulations in force at the time. As Theresa May made very clear, it really was quite impossible for the prime minister to have believed otherwise presuming that, as we have to, he was aware of the regulations, or should have been, as the law deems to be the case.

We ended with the farce that a person who spoke the truth was expelled from the House of Commons for stating that the prime minister had lied to it, which he had, and for refusing to withdraw his allegation, which would have required him to perjure himself by telling a lie. [This was the key element in the exchange](#):

Blackford was then ordered from the chamber.

What this exposes is that we have a Parliamentary system no longer fit for purpose. When the truth cannot be told without fear of repercussion the possibility of holding power to account has ceased to exist. That is the sorry state that we have reached in the UK.