

Knocking the Tories about, as happened yesterday, is al...

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So, Johnson apologised with, he claimed, 'full humility.' The trouble was, no one really believed that, and for one good reason. That reason is that even if his confusion about attending an obviously illegal birthday party was genuine (even if the credibility of doing so depended upon our belief in his incompetence) there is no way that the same excuse can be rolled out when the next round of penalties are issued, with these relating to events where such excuses will be impossible. In reality then what Johnson did when offering inadvertent incompetence as his defence on this occasion was to dig a seemingly impossible hurdle for himself to climb when the next fines are imposed.

This will not, of course, prevent Tory MPs voting to support him in any vote on a referral to the Standards Committee on Thursday. They will be three line whipped. But there will be many more than Mark Harper MP, who was the only Tory to tell Johnson to go, who will have their doubts about supporting Johnson in that vote. Any in their number who wants to be in a future, non-Johnson, government will have to think very hard about voting to protect a Prime Minister who will seemingly inevitably, and soon, be found guilty of deliberate criminal acts for which no possible excuse can be found. Sunak has already sacrificed his career to support Johnson. How many others will note that, and hold back?

It is no wonder then that Johnson looked profoundly shaken by events yesterday. So too did his front bench. Starmer knocked him out, and as far as I could tell never really withdrew his accusation that Johnson was dishonest. The Speaker was, as usual, made to look stupid. Starmer's anger was obviously real.

The Tories knew it. Long after they gave up defending Johnson the opposition's combined questions were still coming, but most Tory MPs had indicated their lack of support by then by leaving the House.

Can Johnson survive this? In the House he looked shocked, broken and almost confused, knowing that none of his usual bombastic approaches would work. And the reality is that things can only get worse from here as more fines, the Sue Gray report and maybe a Standards Committee report replete with photographs (which is why the government

is so frightened of this) all head Johnson's way. 72% of the country think Johnson is a liar even though this still cannot be said in the Commons. The likelihood is that even this percentage will get worse.

I won't say Johnson will go. His ability to wriggle is extraordinary. But it looks as though it will get harder, and harder to stay. And the damage is done. We have a discredited Tory government. Priti Patel's shameless defence of the Rwanda extradition policy was another indication of that. Sajid Javid's lame defence of being a non-dom was another. It would take more than a miracle for this lot to survive.

But when Labour, and to some degree the SNP, only offer managerialism and not vision as alternatives what is it that is going to restore faith in parliament? Whilst all Labour can suggest to support those whose households are going to be in crisis this year is a windfall tax they are not the torch bearers for change. Those households do not understand a windfall tax. But they do instinctively know that such a charge will not keep them fed, warm and in their homes. And they are right, because it won't.

Labour has to get over its crushing fear of spending.

It has to show that it believes in the power of government to effect change in society.

It has to say what the change it wants is.

And it has to spell out what that will mean for people.

I want democracy restored, but not for its own sake, but for what it can do to redress the wrongs that otherwise exist in society. And the best way to achieve that goal is to start righting those wrongs.

I have laid out agendas for this, time and again. Knocking the Tories about, as happened yesterday, is all well and good. But knocking them out is what is required to save us from fascism. And that requires vision, confidence and a real promise of delivery. When will we get that?