

This is a very long way from over

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There are issues arising from last night's confidence vote in Boris Johnson worth considering this morning. A number stand out.

One is to anticipate the immediate aftermath. What we know is that Johnson does not take criticism well. The withdrawal of the Tory whip from key opponents would now seem likely. Hunt, Baker, Norman, May, Harper, Penrose, Davis and Gale might all find themselves outside the party soon, with Johnson relying on the fact that they do not share political philosophies to prevent them forming a new grouping.

The second is to presume that there will also be a cull of ministers seen less than sufficiently supportive. It will be a good day for the sycophants but government will fall into even greater discredit as a result.

Third, the excuses for the imminent by-election losses will be lined up. They will all be the fault of those dropped from office and the party. They will be now be described as those stopping Johnson 'getting things done' and with them gone it will be claimed that all will now be well.

Fourth, there will be a lurch to the right, because they are the true believers. The Northern Ireland protocol is in trouble in that case. I give it weeks for the death penalty to be back on the agenda. Watch out for abortion too. Where the Republicans go, so too do these Tories. But free access to guns may, even for them, be a step too far.

Fifth, there will be no discussion at all on what needs to actually be done for the country. As Jesse Norman MP has noted, all Johnson's government is about is the day to day, hour by hour survival of Johnson. Nothing else matters. In that case anything that might require real attention, or provoke real change, or which has a planning horizon beyond a fortnight, or is not capable of being described in a three word slogan, will be ignored. Government neglect of duty will just grow.

And in all this none of the reasonable disquiet of people will dissipate, because the economy will shrink, people will face poverty, jobs will be lost, queues for everything

will get longer as cuts are made, and as a result anger will rise.

Johnson's acolytes claim the country can now move on. He himself did much the same during an interview in which he had a curious and persistent sniff last night, leading to speculation as to its cause. But the reality is that this moving on will not happen. Political, economic, social and environmental paralysis will happen instead.

I would like to say the country can survive this stress until democracy can take its required path. But if that is the case the cost may be very high due to what might happen, and not happen, in the meantime. Last night's result proved Johnson's day needs to be over and most non-payroll Tories realise it. But achieving that goal will be hard, and the cost high. This story is far from over.

And the real question remains, which is will Labour work with others to prevent this ever happening again, or will it just work in its own self-interest? The signs from Starmer last night were not good. Add that to the list of concerns.