

Thoughts amid the wreckage

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There is a rule in our house that phones do not come to the table. Three of us ate together last evening, all pretty avid absorbers of the news agenda. By the time the meal was over two Cabinet ministers had resigned.

Later in the evening I tweeted:



This morning there is only the Solicitor General to add to the Chancellor and Health Secretary, plus a few almost unknown PPSs and trade envoys. I suspect the story has not finished as yet though.

What to think? In policy terms I see no reason to draw conclusions. Sunak implied in his resignation later that it was because of differences of economic opinion that he quit. His desire for a small state run for the benefit of bankers was clearly something Johnson could not agree with. But frankly, that is largely irrelevant except to show that the Tory coalition is collapsing. There is no policy now, barring Johnson's survival.

In any case, I do not expect the new ministers to be in office for long. For once Andrew Bridgen MP was one of the few reliable Tory sources last night. To be polite, he is off the bonkers scale, but was seething when interviewed. His suggestion was that he and others would take control of the 1922 committee now. Rumour has it that maybe 180 letters demanding another poll on Johnson's future are already in. If Bridgen and his allies take control of that Committee this week that vote will happen, and very soon. Johnson will then lose the Tory leadership.

But, so what? Will he go then? I doubt it. Convention says he should acknowledge a caretaker role at that moment but Johnson does not do convention. Someone on television last night suggested it might take the SAS to get him out of Downing Street. I hope not. But unless more of his ministers went I cannot see him leaving. Only they can now really show he cannot command the Commons.

It's either that or a vote of no confidence in the Commons worded so carefully that Tory MPs could vote for it but leave the path open for another Tory Prime Minister. And why would Labour cooperate with that? I think it unlikely.

So we struggle on. We are a wreck of a country. We have a wreckage of a government. Our democracy feels as though it is wrecked. The Tories are clinging to the wreckage, and I am sure they think they are going down with it.

But there is no Labour lifeboat. I am not convinced they even know how to put it to sea, let alone navigate their way through what might be left from the disaster.

Enough of metaphors. What we must appreciate is that this is unprecedented. It was also inevitable. In the era when selfishness was the only quality that was praised on the right as being of virtue it was inevitable that we would get an egotist in office utterly convinced of their own entitlement, willing to ignore all rules in pursuit of their belief in their own self worth. And so we have.

The aim now must be to restore what is of value. So great is the disaster only cooperation can deliver what is required. Labour is set against it.

I worry greatly this morning. I am not sure where we are headed. And to return to the metaphors, there appear to be rocks all around with no apparent pilot available. This is not a good place to be.