

# Johnson's defence against Partygate allegations is ab...

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I have struggled to make sense of the claims issued by Boris Johnson overnight that, in his opinion, show that he is innocent of misleading parliament about parties at No 10 during lock downs.

His claim appears to be in two parts. The first part is that the committee only thinks there were parties because Sue Gray told them this was the case and provided the only evidence that there were parties, and she is unreliable because she has now joined Labour.

This ignores three facts. The first is that the Committee trying him says they did not use her report. The second is that no one has suggested she was talking to Labour about a job when she reported. The third, and most important is that she was asked to report because there was prima facie evidence in existence that parties took place before she reported and that was why she was asked to investigate. That evidence was not invalidated, as Johnson implies, because she reviewed it. The claim is, then, utterly inconsequential. The Committee has already said so.

Second, Johnson says no one ever told him he was attending parties so it never occurred to him that he was so he could not have misled Parliament because he did not think he was. This might be called the insanity offence. That is because it assumes he did not know the law, even though he made it, and unlike everyone else who had personal responsibility for complying with it he was only required to do so if an official told him he was at risk of breaking it and if they did not he was innocent. That, politely, is insane. It suggests he thinks he is a stage removed from responsibility when he very clearly was not. The law said he wasn't. As he claimed at Eton, the logic is that rules apply to everyone but him.

After this the defence assumes he does not know what a party is when attending one. That is also a plea to insanity. He apparently does not share the sanity (in the sense of common understanding) of other people, apparently, so it need not apply to him.

Then this claim requires that we believe that when it was pointed out that he might

have attended an illegal party he did not think it appropriate to reconsider his opinion. He therefore could maintain his innocence even when others had suggested that unlikely to be credible. That is also insane. It requires that we believe he is unable to reflect on his actions after they have taken place, unlike everyone else.

What is the chance that Johnson believes any of this? I am sure he has persuaded himself of it, so I suspect that he does. In that case the question before the Committee is not whether he thought he misled the House, but whether a reasonable person might have thought he had done so.

It's not a legally novel thing to have to consider. A person appears before a court every sitting day in this country having entirely persuaded themselves that they did not commit a crime of which they are accused. They will swear blind they did not. A jury is tasked with appraising the evidence that they did, and not their unevidenced claim that they did not. That is what the Committee will have to do.

I admit my bias: I think Johnson lied throughout this and many other episodes and has, at best, a loose relationship with reality. I think he did mislead the House, on several occasions. I cannot see how anyone could think otherwise.

More worrying though is the fact that he is not alone in denying responsibility for decision making. Johnson made this into an art form, but it is commonplace. Time and again ministers need to decide on an issue and instead refer the matter to a third party when they already have the power to take action. The inability to accept responsibility is chronic in government. I suspect Labour will be no better at it if they get into office. Cowardly politicians seek office so that they might then evade the responsibility that comes with the post. Johnson's claim that he could only know an event was a party if an official told him it was is just an extreme example of that mindset. In parliament alone this might resonate.

Will the Committee find Johnson guilty? Without corruption being in play I cannot see how they can avoid doing so. The evidence appears strong. The defence is absurd.

Will the whole House then take action? I also think that likely: Sunak has every reason to want him gone. He is a nuisance he would well be rid of. Ignore everything else: that is enough.

I hope that happens. We can do without Johnson and his ilk.

What do you think?

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