

Downing Street flat scandal used to cover up Johnson's "bodies pile high" outburst

Thomas Scripps
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Days after UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson was revealed to have said he would rather “let the bodies pile high in their thousands” than implement a lockdown, the focus of the media and the Labour Party has shifted to questions over the renovation of his Downing Street flat. A campaign against “sleaze” is being used to cover up crimes of social murder.

Johnson is now at the centre of a corruption scandal swirling in the Conservative Party. Earlier this month, former Tory Prime Minister David Cameron was exposed for having extensively lobbied the government on behalf of Greensill Capital, in which Cameron held shares. Health Secretary Matt Hancock was quickly implicated and separately revealed to have been gifted shares in a company in February 2019, with the firm winning a National Health Service contract the next month.

A few weeks later, texts between Johnson and British billionaire Sir James Dyson were leaked showing Johnson promising to “fix” a tax issue for Dyson’s employees.

More details were leaked about the refurbishment of the Downing Street flat Johnson shares with his partner Carrie Symonds. The prime minister is given £30,000 a year by the state to renovate the flat, but usually adds their personal funds to the budget. Johnson and Symonds reportedly spent £200,000, creating a “high society haven” to replace a “John Lewis furniture nightmare,” according to super-rich lifestyle magazine *Tatler*—referring to the upmarket department store. Tory donor Lord Brownlow was revealed to have contributed £58,000, a donation Johnson failed to declare and only now claims to have covered with his own money.

Downing Street responded by accusing Johnson’s former chief adviser Dominic Cummings, ousted last November, of being the “prime suspect” behind the leaks—and also of leaking plans for a national lockdown last October—leading to front-page splashes in the *Times*, the *Telegraph* and the *Sun*. Johnson reportedly phoned

newspaper editors personally to make the accusations.

This prompted a counterattack by Cummings, who published a blog post denying responsibility and attacking Johnson and his office for falling “far below the standards of competence and integrity the country deserves.” He accused the prime minister of having sought to prevent an internal inquiry into who leaked the lockdown plans because it looked likely to point the finger at a close friend of Symonds. Cummings claimed he had stopped discussing Johnson’s plans for the flat renovation with him because they were “unethical, foolish, possibly illegal and almost certainly broke the rules on proper disclosure of political donations”.

The Cummings blog post and denials by various government ministers have dominated the newspaper front pages for the last week. On Wednesday, the Electoral Commission launched an investigation into the refurbishment, stating there were “reasonable grounds to suspect that an offence or offences may have occurred”.

Johnson is already under scrutiny for other indiscretions. An ethics investigation into a £15,000 ten-day holiday he and Symonds took to the Caribbean island of Mustique is ongoing. Johnson registered the trip as coming courtesy of Carphone Warehouse founder David Ross, who owns a villa on the island. It is unclear who, if anyone, paid an additional “island levy” to the Mustique Company which owns the private island.

Meanwhile, the High Court has agreed to look into Johnson’s decision last year not to hold Home Secretary Priti Patel responsible for breaking the ministerial code. An inquiry had found that Patel “unintentionally” broke the code with “behaviour that can be described as bullying”. The FDA, the senior civil servants’ union, is bringing a case against Johnson for refusing to take action against her.

These events are a window into the routine corruption and entitlement that prevails in the ruling class. But they

are dwarfed in political significance by the revelation that Johnson was so bitterly opposed to closing sections of the economy last October that he loudly swore “no more f***ing lockdowns” and said he was prepared to see “bodies piled high” instead. This is precisely what happened. The disputed November lockdown was entirely inadequate and ended prematurely to make way for Christmas trading, leading to a second surge of the virus more deadly than the first.

Cummings is due to appear before a joint parliamentary committee inquiry on coronavirus on May 26, where he is expected to give an insider’s account of the support in the government for a herd immunity strategy during the first days of the pandemic. This is a policy he is reported to have initially backed—at a behind closed doors February 2020 meeting—with the words, “Herd immunity, protect the economy, and if that means some pensioners die, too bad.”

Johnson’s murderous comments were reported on Sunday to mass popular outrage, with #Boristhebutcher and #BodiesPiledHigh trending on Twitter. After a day of frontpage coverage, however, the media relegated the story to a supporting role in the Downing Street flat scandal. Headlines a day later read, in the *Guardian*, “PM urged to come clean about cash for No 10 revamp”, in the *Mirror*, “Cash for Curtains”, and in the *Daily Mail*, “Boris Painted into a Corner”.

The Labour Party is playing the same diversionary game. At Prime Minister’s Questions this Wednesday, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer devoted just one of his questions to Johnson’s “bodies piled high” outburst, asking “did he make those remarks or remarks to that effect?” When Johnson claimed he did not, Starmer moved on to ask four questions on the refurbishment of his flat and one on “sleaze, cronyism and scandal”.

In any genuinely democratic society, Johnson’s comments, corroborated by multiple sources, would have meant the downfall of his government. They are an outright confession of the policy of social murder favoured by the ruling class that is now essentially official policy. But the Labour Party, fully complicit in these crimes as a de facto coalition partner of the government, is acting to suppress all social opposition by restricting political discussion to curtains and wallpaper.

If this campaign has any impact, which is unlikely, it will be to lend a hand to a faction fight in the Tory party and oust Johnson in favour of one of his colleagues, most likely the too-rich-to-be-bribed Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak or the endlessly scheming

Michael Gove, a long-time ally of Cummings. None of the problems facing the working class—above all the pandemic and its economic fallout, will be the altered one iota.

The inability and refusal of any section of the ruling class to even nominally oppose the avowed mass murderer in Downing Street is a mark of the highly advanced collapse of democracy in the UK. When the pandemic began, the *World Socialist Web Site* drew a parallel between the coronavirus crisis and World War One. At that time, the Labour, Conservative and Liberal parties joined forces to enforce four years of bloody slaughter, in which the working class gave their lives in their thousands every day to advance the geopolitical interests of the ruling elite. The same brutalisation of society is taking place today.

The lives of the working class are considered so cheap that the British prime minister can openly endorse squandering “thousands” and have the worst criticism he faces that week be an admonishment of his personal finances. The affluent middle class, whose interests define the vast bulk of political life, were more incensed by the snobbish denigration of John Lewis than the desire to sacrifice lives on the altar of corporate profit.

If there is a difference between the two periods, it is that the ruling class today feels even more at liberty to announce its own savagery. This is thanks above all to the unprecedented suppression of the class struggle by the Labour Party and the trade unions.

A reckoning with Johnson’s murderous government demands the organisation of the working class independently of these rotten organisations, in their own interests, and on an international basis. At its online May Day Rally today, the International Committee of the Fourth International will call for an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to carry forward this struggle.



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