

Metropolitan Police “partygate” investigation ends with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson unscathed

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London’s Metropolitan Police closed its investigation into the “partygate” scandal Thursday, announcing that 126 fines, mainly of £50, would be issued to 83 people.

Over the course of 2020 and 2021, while Britain was in lockdown, Prime Minister Boris Johnson and other senior government figures held drinks parties in defiance of rules and guidance they enacted.

But of the many fines issued, only two top government figures, Johnson and Chancellor Rishi Sunak, had to pay one fixed penalty notice of just £50. Those were issued in April among the 50 fines levelled at that stage of the Met’s investigation, which has concluded that staff in the prime minister’s residence, 10 Downing Street, broke lockdown rules on eight separate occasions.

Johnson’s sole fine was for attending a surprise birthday party held for him in Downing Street in June 2020, despite his presence at other parties and gatherings where others have been fined.

Johnson responded Friday, “I am very grateful to the Met for their work. I am very grateful for the work they have done.” Of the upcoming publication of the investigation by senior civil servant Sue Gray, at the instigation of the government’s Cabinet Office, Johnson smugly declared, “I just think that we need to wait for Sue Gray to report and... fingers crossed... that will be very soon.”

The publication of Gray’s report was dependent on the conclusions of the Met’s investigation, with speculation that it may be available by the middle of next week.

The Met’s findings prompted a timid response from the Labour Party, questioning why Johnson had evaded further fines, and intimating that the police had taken a political decision in their kid gloves treatment. Len Duvall, leader of the Labour group on the London Assembly, told the *Guardian*, “I think the

police and crime committee will want to ask questions and understand how the Met have reached their conclusions about the prime minister only getting one fine.”

As tools of the ruling elite, Labour could not do more than allude to the obviously political character of the Met’s conclusions. The Met never wanted to investigate the government’s breaches of COVID safety measures but were forced to act by rising public revulsion at Downing Street openly flouting necessary public health measures which tens of millions of people, seriously concerned about the spread of a deadly virus, upheld at great personal cost.

Partygate originated from leaks from Johnson’s embittered former leading adviser Dominic Cummings, who the prime minister sacked in November 2020. They rapidly became the focus for toothless criticism by Labour, not of the Conservative government imposing a criminal herd immunity agenda but of Johnson as an individual, who was declared unfit to serve in office.

Much of this was faux outrage, given Labour’s declaration that they would back Johnson with “constructive criticism” during the pandemic on the basis of a shared “national interest”.

Johnson and his government were responsible for far greater crimes. By the time of Johnson’s June 19, 2020 birthday party event, tens of thousands were already dead from COVID because of the belated and flawed imposition of a lockdown. Less than one week later, Johnson made a speech declaring that the first lockdown would be ended the following month. This was supported by the Labour Party, backed by the trade unions, with Sir Keir Starmer then making his infamous August 2020 statement that schools must be reopened, “no ifs, no buts.”

Labour's campaign to remove Johnson, as an individual unfit to hold office, was designed to ensure that there would be no mobilisation of the working class to end the 12 years in office of a hated Tory government. Its campaign was centred on demanding the police act and backing the investigation conducted by the civil service. Labour's allies in removing Johnson were to be disaffected Tories, almost invariably on the right-wing of that extremely right-wing party, not the working class, with Starmer calling on "decent, honourable" Tory MPs to oust him.

This campaign enabled the Tory right to dictate events. Their opposition to Johnson was centred on an assessment that he was not up to the task, as both too populist and too discredited, of successfully reopening the economy, imposing savage austerity, deepening the assault on democratic rights and, what became the dominant issue in the partygate scandal, waging aggressive warmongering against Russia over Ukraine.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted, "There can be only one outcome to any removal of Johnson by his own party, if they decide on such a course to safeguard their electoral fortunes: his replacement by an even more right-wing figure such as Foreign Secretary Liz Truss or those leadership candidates closest to the military, including Tom Tugendhat, Tobias Ellwood or Defence Secretary Ben Wallace."

The outpouring of anger from millions of workers over the near 200,000 pandemic deaths could find no expression in this rotten campaign of the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. Rather, those most animated by partygate in ruling circles were Tory MPs and their media backers angered that any virus containment measures had ever been implemented—whose focus was always on complaining of "hypocrisy", not mass illness and deaths.

Six months later, notwithstanding any political damage he may suffer with the publication of Gray's report, Johnson's position is secure for the immediate future and the Tory right more firmly in the saddle than at any time since they came to office in 2019 on the back of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn's demobilisation of mass opposition to the Tories and the Blairites.

Johnson, Sunak and their fellow political criminals are free to play a leading role in NATO's proxy war against Russia and to wage a ferocious war against the working class at home.

The strengthening of the Tory right is evident in the raft of legislation that has been imposed in the months since the partygate crisis began. On just one day, April 28, three

viciously reactionary government bills were enacted into law—the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act; the Nationality and Borders Act; and the Health and Care Act. Each represents a deepening of the assault on living standards and escalates the offensive against democratic rights.

Further attacks are being prepared, with the Public Order Bill, which hands virtually limitless stop and search powers to the police, due its second reading in Parliament May 24. Last week Johnson bragged that the government was about to deport the first 50 "illegal entrants" into Britain, of a planned tens of thousands, to detention camps in the African state of Rwanda.

The Socialist Equality Party (UK) statement, "The working class must mobilise to bring down the Johnson government!", published February 4, explained, "Amid a torrent of official hypocrisy over Johnson's lying, no one should confuse popular sentiment with the political considerations animating the anti-Johnson 'partygate' plotters now seeking his ouster... The crisis is being seized on by powerful sections of the Tory Party to engineer the most right-wing policy lurch ever carried out by a British government, with the Labour opposition marching in lockstep."

The statement continued, "The most dangerous manifestation of the government's rightward turn is the escalating war drive against Russia. Johnson and his ministers are positioning the UK as the leading ally of the United States in NATO's warmongering over Ukraine."

The central issue was how the working class could advance its own interests during this political crisis. The statement concluded, "The fight of the working class against the Johnson government will raise ever more urgently the necessity of a political mass movement, independent of and opposed to both the Tories and Labour, and against the capitalist system and its state."

The political response of the working class "must be based on an anti-capitalist, internationalist, anti-imperialist and socialist perspective to mobilise the working class, especially its younger generations, to take state power and reorganise economic life to meet social need instead of private profit."



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