Johnson’s days are numbered, but the Tory government must be brought down

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Prime Minister Boris Johnson has refused to stand down, after being told “time’s up” by a delegation from his own cabinet.

Johnson had come from a grilling by prominent backbench MPs on the Liaison Committee, having faced mass resignations that began Tuesday with former Chancellor Rishi Sunak and Health Secretary Sajid Javid that became a torrent Wednesday, reaching 43.

Johnson’s government suffered more resignations in 24 hours than any in British political history. The previous record was set in 1932 when 11 ministers resigned from the National Government led by Ramsay MacDonald in the midst of the Great Depression.

With reports that around 70 percent of the electorate and half of Tory voters wanted Johnson gone, yesterday evening Nadhim Zahawi, only just appointed chancellor, joined a group of senior ministers led by Chief Whip Chris Heaton-Harris and including Transport Secretary Grant Shapps, Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis, and Welsh Secretary Simon Hart at Number 10. Hart has since resigned.

The *Times* reported that Home Secretary Priti Patel was one of this group widely reported as urging Johnson’s resignation. Secretary for Levelling Up and Housing and prominent Brexiteer rival Michael Gove, who earlier said Johnson must go, was not present. The leader of the Scottish Tories, Douglas Ross, also publicly told Johnson to quit.

Johnson’s precarious position was underscored by Sir Graham Brady, chair of the backbench 1922 Committee, who was reportedly at Number 10 to tell Johnson that he would lose a second confidence vote should one be held next week, with enough previous loyalists on public record as saying they no longer supported him. Elections to its 18 MP executive have been moved from Wednesday to Monday to hasten changes allowing a second leadership contest within a year of that narrowly won by Johnson in June. That means a second no confidence vote could be held Tuesday.

Johnson’s response was to come out fighting. His sources leaked to the BBC an opposed account of events at Downing Street, denying that cabinet members had called on him to resign and warning that the party was risking losing a general election to Labour. A personal private secretary told Sky News that Johnson would present a statement on the economy with Zahawi.

Johnson sacked Gove, with a source telling the BBC’s Chris Mason, “You cannot have a snake who is not with you on any of the big arguments who then gleefully briefs the press that he has called for the leader to go.”

However, Johnson is living on borrowed time, his support and authority evaporating, unable to even fill the posts of those who have resigned. Speculation is already raging over who will successfully stand in a leadership contest that would be held as swiftly as possible.

The rogue’s gallery of right-wing ideologues in the running underscores the underlying issues in a conflict shrouded in hypocritical denunciations of Johnson for having lied to his MPs—Javid delivered a resignation speech explaining how he had repeatedly given him the “benefit of the doubt” and walked a “fine line” between “loyalty and integrity”—as well as truly sickening invocations of the good name of the Conservative Party.

Sunak, a multimillionaire with a tax dodging wife, gave one indication of Tory concerns, beyond their facing electoral oblivion.

His resignation letter cited Johnson’s plan for a joint speech to show the government was taking control of the cost-of-living crisis. Sunak complained that Johnson was reluctant to make the necessary “hard decisions” to take on the working class. The BBC reported, “Public sector pay review bodies have begun to report back. The Treasury believes it is irresponsible even to be talking

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about pay claims matching the 9% inflation rate. And yet, a 10% rise in pensions is pencilled in for next year." A separate piece noted that Sunak and Javid are "ideological soulmates, seeing themselves as being part of the low tax and spending Thatcherite wing of the Conservative Party."

The *Daily Mail* demanded Tuesday that any government, whether led by Johnson or not, must work "to true Tory principles – low taxes, free markets and exploiting Brexit to the full." *The Sun* insisted that the Tories must slash duty and VAT on fuel and energy, "set about cutting other taxes too" and "cut the size of the State." In the *Telegraph*, former Brexit Minister David Frost wrote that Johnson's government had "drifted far too much to the Left on economic matters" and was incapable of driving "low taxation, low spending, attractiveness to investment, and deregulation on the scale needed."

Many of the rest of the front runners point to the other great issue the Tories must address—the belief that the massively discredited Johnson cannot lead the UK in NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Potential leadership challengers include the most prominent Tory warmongers, Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, and Tom Tugendhat, a former Green Jacket who chairs the foreign affairs committee.

Priti Patel, another favourite, combines fervent Thatcherite orthodoxy and military fervour with a record of authoritarian measures that will be needed to confront mounting working class opposition to austerity and the emergence of mass opposition to war.

Removing Johnson from office is only the beginning of the political struggle that now faces the working class. This is a government that must be brought down if the destruction of jobs, wages and essential services, the decimation of democratic rights and the war now raging in Ukraine is to be ended.

Workers must also confront the fact that the Tories have been totally reliant on the Labour Party and the trade unions to carry out their criminal policies. For five years, Jeremy Corbyn used his leadership of Labour to demobilise mass sentiment for a struggle against the Tories and his own party's Blairite right wing. He then handed the party to Sir Keir Starmer, who has no real differences with the government and now offers himself as a safe pair of hands for big business at a moment of acute crisis.

The trade unions, having suppressed industrial action for decades, are trying desperately to prevent a threatened "summer of discontent" from becoming a summer of resistance involving strike action by millions of workers.

The Socialist Equality Party in its statement issued on February 4, "The working class must mobilise to bring down the Johnson government!" explained, "What is unfolding in parliament over 'partygate' is the modern-day equivalent of a palace coup—a change at the top to preserve the existing order…. 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."

It noted, "The most dangerous manifestation of the government's rightward turn is the escalating wardrive against Russia," before explaining, "Militarism abroad is coupled with class war at home."

The working class must respond by seizing advantage of the government's raging crisis by expanding and unifying disputes involving rail, health, post, telecoms, education, civil servants and council workers as the basis for a general strike to bring down the Tories.

As we insisted, "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.

"An interconnected network of rank-and-file workplace and neighbourhood committees must be built to wrest control of the class struggle out of the hands of the pro-capitalist labour bureaucracy and take the fight to the ruling class. Politically it 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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