

Boris Johnson resigns from parliament after being found to have lied about COVID pandemic parties

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Former Prime Minister Boris Johnson's resignation from parliament on June 9 is a milestone in the vicious factional warfare within a hated Conservative government.

The immediate cause of Johnson's resignation was the conclusion reached by an investigation of the seven-MP parliamentary privileges committee into the holding of illegal social events in parliament, and, as the scandal developed, also at Johnson's country residence, Chequers, during COVID lockdowns.

The committee, led by Labour's Harriet Harman but with a majority of four Tory MPs, concluded that Johnson had made recklessly inaccurate statements and deliberately lied to MPs during the "Partygate" scandal, compounded by inaccurate claims made under oath when questioned by the committee. Deliberate contempt of parliament meant the committee would recommend more than the 10 days suspension required for a recall vote in Johnson's marginal seat that could force a by-election.

Johnson was given advance access to the report through his lawyers Thursday. He was told separately that the government would not whip Tory MPs to vote down the committee's recommended sanctions. Johnson had also assumed an agreement with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to nod through his resignation honours list, rewarding allies in the Partygate scandal and more than 40 of his closest aides.

The list included peerages elevating MPs Nadine Dorries, Alok Sharma and Nigel Adams to the House of Lords. But when Johnson saw the list on Friday, the three peerages and awards for Tory donors David Ross and Stuart Marks were not on it, adding to his personal bitterness. Dorries resigned her seat immediately prior to Johnson. Adams did so Saturday—leaving Sunak to fight three-by elections.

In his resignation statement, Johnson accused Sunak and his supporters of working with Labour and others to remove him in order to thwart Brexit, and of betraying Tory values. He described the privileges committee as a kangaroo court, "determined to use the proceedings against me to drive me

out of parliament," without "a shred of evidence that I knowingly or recklessly misled the Commons."

"It was expected that the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, and the Scottish National Party [SNP] would do whatever they can to remove me from parliament," he wrote, but "there are currently some Tory MPs" who wanted "to take revenge for Brexit and ultimately to reverse the 2016 referendum result. My removal is the necessary first step, and I believe there has been a concerted attempt to bring it about."

Sunak was not "making the most of Brexit", including cutting "business and personal taxes" and was "passively" abandoning "the prospect of a free trade deal with the US", forcing Johnson's resignation "at least for now".

Speculation within Tory circles is swinging towards the conclusion that this may be the high point of any revolt by Johnson loyalists, despite initial predictions of a half dozen other resignations. The *Sunday Times* wrote of the rebellion having "fizzled out", as had happened with his earlier threatened revolt in March seeking to block Sunak's Windsor framework agreement on Northern Ireland, which only mobilised 21 MPs.

Others predicted that Johnson had no stomach for a speedy fight to return to Westminster, not by standing for Dorries' safe Mid-Bedfordshire seat or even at the next general election. The *Guardian* cited a close friend of Johnson saying, "He is making lots of money. He needs money. He likes money."

But this will do nothing to resolve the crisis facing the government. As the WSWWS explained on Johnson's resignation as prime minister in July last year, "The British bourgeoisie is in the throes of a political crisis rooted in a global capitalist breakdown, a still raging pandemic, a worldwide inflationary spiral, trade war, the eruption of war and, above all, the resurgence of the class struggle" in Britain and internationally.

The aim of Tory central office, ever since the palace coup

beginning with mass resignations by 58 MPs that succeeded in removing Johnson as prime minister, has been to distance the party from a deeply divisive figure that threatened their ability to wage war against the working class and against Russia in Ukraine.

Johnson became the first leader of a major imperialist country to fall from power during NATO's war against Russia, because, as the WSWS explained, "despite his pledges to impose 'Red Meat' Thatcherite economic and social policies, and his insistence that he must not be removed at a time of war," many Tory MPs and prominent figures within Washington "saw him as a liability, unable to deliver either."

This immediately went badly wrong when the hardline Brexiteers within the party membership chose the walking disaster Liz Truss as his replacement, before she was driven from office and replaced by Sunak for trying to hand billions to the super-rich without first imposing the savage cuts demanded by global investors.

Johnson's belated departure from parliament as he moves onto the lecture circuit and possibly into television only leaves behind a festering political sore as far as millions of workers are concerned.

No one believes that he was alone in imposing a murderous COVID policy that claimed more than 200,000 lives and left hundreds of thousands more bereaved or suffering long-term illness. Moreover, his initial downfall came as mass opposition in the working class to decades of austerity was precipitating a strike wave that has involved rail workers, postal workers, nurses, doctors, ambulance personnel, educators, local authority workers and civil servants and which was only deepened by Sunak's attacks.

This developed under conditions where millions of workers internationally were also coming into struggle, including the protests in France against the Macron government's pension reform that saw the largest mobilisation of the working class since the May-June general strike in 1968.

The most crucial factor in ensuring that there will be no return to political stability is the escalation in NATO's undeclared war against Russia. The Sunak government is marching in lockstep with the Biden administration in preparing the way for a direct confrontation between NATO forces and Russia, for which Ukraine's counter-offensive including direct attacks on Russian territory and in the Black Sea—is an anticipation.

Divisions within the ruling elite are inevitable under these conditions.

Johnson's resignation came on the same day former US President Donald Trump was indicted for retaining top secret military documents for personal use, including high-

level discussions on war. Sunday saw the arrest and subsequent release without charge—pending further investigation—of former SNP leader and Scottish First Minister Nicola Surgeon, amid an internal factional struggle centred on the party's finances.

Such divisions are only the harbinger and an accelerant of the more fundamental conflict between the working class and capitalist regimes promoting austerity and war internationally.

The Tories have only been able to remain in office because the working class was systematically demobilised and prevented from intervening. Jeremy Corbyn used his leadership of the Labour Party from 2015 to 2019 to oppose any struggle against the party's right-wing or against Tory governments led by David Cameron, Theresa May and then Johnson.

His successor Sir Keir Starmer's belated tweet at 10.15pm Saturday, demanding Sunak "finally find a backbone" and "call an election", is made by someone who has spent three years preparing Labour as a replacement party of austerity and war for the likelihood of a Tory defeat.

The trade union bureaucracy has played the central role in systematically stifling and whenever possible betraying the rising tide of strike struggles, even as the Tories have prepared the legislative framework to criminalise strikes and protests. But in doing so, the Labour and trade union bureaucracy have massively discredited themselves in the eyes of millions of workers. This creates the conditions for the working class to break free of their stranglehold, provided it is armed with a socialist programme of struggle.



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