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Britain

# Is Johnson losing his Teflon?

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**Fortunately there are some corners of the British press that still occasionally do their job and hold power to account. If the Daily Mirror, a pro-Labour tabloid newspaper, had not worked away at the Christmas Party story then we might today be saying that Johnson has got away with it again.**

The *Mirror* journalist told BBC TV Breakfast programme that they had heard stories, since January last year, about parties held in the Prime Ministers' offices during the 2020 Covid lockdown. Such parties were illegal under the pandemic rules of the time. A recent anonymous arrival of a brown envelope with more details allowed them to put proper resources into the story a few weeks ago. Other newspapers must have been aware of the rumours but had done nothing. Unsurprisingly this reflects their pro-Tory bias. They give Johnson a comfortable ride compared to the merciless smears and attacks on Jeremy Corbyn, the former leftwing leader of the Labour Party. Sources now suggest that some of their journalists or owners had been at one or two of these Christmas parties.

In any case Johnson, as a consequence of his inbred dishonesty and lying, has already had to change his story from a week ago. Previously in Parliament he denied any breaking of rules or even accepting that a proper party had taken place. Today he says that "he had been assured" no such event had happened and in any case he was asking the cabinet secretary to investigate. That is a bit like the police investigating the police or Yorkshire cricket club checking on racism. [1] The investigator-in-chief might well have gone to one of these events. Reports now point to perhaps six or seven parties held in government offices. At least three are now being officially investigated.

Real damage has been done by the Allegra Stratton video. She was the prime minister's press spokeswoman and the video showed her doing a practice question and answer session with other aides. She is seen struggling to answer a question about a Christmas party and breaking down into giggles about it. Anyone seeing it could deduce such a party had indeed taken place. Seeing Johnson's closest advisors with their upper class accents laughing out loud about the "cheese and wine" party takes a prize for the most politically self-destructive act of the year. For people who actually followed the rules and were not able to be close to their loved ones in their final moments this must have been bitter viewing. Experts in political communications know that most folk do not read serious newspapers, consume speeches or follow parliamentary questions but they do watch the news or follow social media and this is mostly visual. Striking images and sound bites trump thousands of finely crafted words. Johnson knows this better than anyone – remember the Brexit bus emblazoned with the £650 million a week for the NHS slogan (claiming that Brexit would release this extra money) or the campaign poster of the "Turkish" migrants queuing to get into Britain. What poetic justice if he is being skewered by another powerful image... of Stratton giggling at her entitlement!

Ingrained in the British ruling class is this sense of entitlement. There are rules for the little people and another set of more flexible ones for them. So delinquent actions in restaurants at the elite universities of Oxford and Cambridge get a soft glove treatment from the police compared to the way poorer black kids in Hackney are treated just for congregating together on the streets. It means if, like Boris Johnson when mayor of London, you are sleeping with businesswoman Jennifer Arcuri you can bung them some public money to help their business without any of the usual transparency procedures. It might be too much to hope for that the press might actually take up this case. You could write more than one book on Johnson's flouting of the normal rules of public or political life. One minor story is that he would just accumulate parking tickets rather than park properly like anybody else. More seriously he once admitted on the telephone that he would sort out somebody for his Eton elite private school buddy, Darius Guppy. He could arrange a "couple of black eyes". Of course police involvement was nil.

While the video has helped explode the story it is also being used cynically by Johnson. Basically he can point to

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these sneering advisors – whom he personally appointed – and say it was nothing to do with me. Sajiv Javid, the Health minister, adopted the same the line this morning after refusing to be interviewed yesterday. It takes a day to get a defence line organized. Johnson has already rushed to push Stratton under the bus and no doubt others will follow. She tearfully “resigned” outside her multi-million pound London house. We can only hope that somebody at one of these parties took a photo on their mobile. Even better if a selfie shows Johnson there. Organizing the scapegoats will surely involve some inducements to delete all photos. So far one photo showing Johnson leading a Christmas quiz has emerged but since it has him on a screen rather than socializing with a drink in his hand, it is not the knockout blow required.

Johnson is hoping that the hasty announcement of Covid plan B measures will squeeze the scandal off the front pages. He went on national TV to address the nation about the imposition of new Covid restrictive measures and was seen in various vaccination sites the day after. News media has been full of the million jobs a day target that he is championing and the Christmas party scandal has been squeezed off the front pages. This is classic Johnson booster, “man of the people” mode. He thinks this may pull him through the crisis.

His problem is that there is a direct link to Covid. How can you expect people to follow the rules now if the people making the rules are not following them? This morning, in my local supermarket, about 50 per cent were maskless. When I asked somebody on the till what the store was doing to encourage masks he mumbled something about not being given any instructions. What chance has a shop worker have of confronting shoppers if the Prime minister’s team do not give a damn? Labour, for once, has taken on a bolder opposition emphasizing “It is one rule for them and another rule for us.”

Starmer, Labour leader, at last, finally, went on the attack in Prime Minister’s questions on the House of Commons and did a decent job in exposing the cynical dishonesty and incompetence of Johnson. He skilfully contrasted the partying insiders with real stories of people who were not able to be with their loved ones at Xmas or as they were dying. Having said that, it would indeed have been like a striker missing a completely open goal, if he had failed to land any punches. How many points would Labour be ahead in the polls if this had been his approach from day one of the pandemic rather than his line of “constructive opposition” that he adopted until quite recently?

So far Johnson’s political career has been remarkable – he won London, the Brexit referendum and the 2019 election. His surfing of the shift to the right in society and politics over a number of years, as a consequence of the defeat of working-class communities and the failure of Labourism, has meant, like Trump, his personal lack of ethics has been ignored or tolerated. His bumbling, philandering and boosterism makes him appear more likeable for many people. Incompetent and immoral he may be, but he has a finely tuned political nose. He recognized that the reactionary Brexit project could bring him to power so he screwed up the position paper he had written arguing remain and never looked back (the story goes that he had written a Remain article and a Brexit article). His cuddling up to Nigel Farage’s far right United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and then swallowing them whole was skilfully done. Behind the hail-fellow-well-met demeanour of course there is a bit of steel and ruthlessness. Unlike Corbyn he cleared out his pro-EU opposition before the 2019 election and is capable of dumping people at the drop of a hat. People often do not take him seriously enough but his authoritarian attitude to parliament, democratic rights and legal safeguards is very dangerous for the labour movement and us all. Repressive legislation on protests, migrants and judicial review is all currently underway.

Up to now he has kept the Tory party and his Brexit-based electoral base together. Voters factor in his dishonesty and poor ethics and voted for him on transactional grounds – either to get Brexit done or to stop Corbyn winning. His MPs will put up with his serious failings if they think it will mean they will keep their seats. If there are signs that voters may become disaffected either in the “red wall” seats just won from Labour in its heartlands or “blue wall” seats in traditional Tory areas, then we may see moves to replace him. The Shropshire bye-election on 16 December may be an important indicator of the way the wind is blowing. Last week’s Bexley bye-election vote was not a knock-out blow although the low turnout and reduced majority showed things may be shifting. Labour benefited from

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a 10 point swing from the Tories but hardly mobilized its base either and the result still did not point to a majority Labour government.

Socialists need to shout about the scandals but also work to support struggles for wage increases, to defend the National Health Service/public spending and to oppose the bills attacking the NHS, migrants/asylum seekers and the rights to protest. A number of successful local wage struggles show that there is a new potential for fighting back. Any crises in the ruling party can boost the confidence of those looking for change.

We should support the resistance but also call on Labour not just to perform in parliament but to get behind every strike and every campaign. Starmer thinks the way to win the next election is to convince the establishment that Labour can be trusted not to threaten capitalist interests in any way or form. He is therefore unlikely to fully support migrant and asylum seekers or clearly defend the right to protest. Refusing to support his own conference's policy for a £15 minimum hourly wage is not going to help Labour mobilise its base.

Anti\*Capitalist Resistance exists to help group socialists who see the need for an alternative to both Johnson and Starmer's solutions to the social, economic and ecological crises.

9 December 2021

Source [Anti\\*Capitalist Resistance](#).

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[1] See ["Yorkshire Cricket – God's own white county"](#).