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BoJo has served his purpose

Boris Johnson's days in office may be numbered. But the Tories don't need him to continue advancing anti-social, anti-democratic policies

For almost 200 years, the constituency of North Shropshire, an rural county in the West Midlands, had been a safe seat for the Tories. It had voted reliably for Brexit and had sent Tory candidate Owen Paterson to the House of Commons seven times since 1997. Only a corruption scandal involving part-time jobs for MPs put an end to this traditional loyalty in 2021.

Back then, Prime Minister Boris Johnson had defended Paterson and, almost at breakneck speed, wanted to subsequently change Parliament's lobbying rules in his favour. Paterson eventually resigned, and the December 2021 by-election resulted in a political earthquake. With a gain of 37 per cent, Helen Morgan, the Liberal Democrat candidate, humiliated the Tories, whose vote share fell by one third compared to the 2019 election. Even Labour voters admitted in polls that they voted tactically to teach the Tories a lesson.

That defeat was the beginning of the end for Boris Johnson – not the silly Christmas parties at No 10's official residence, and not his personal assistant's invitation to Downing Street staff for a merry toast in the midst of lockdown. Boris Johnson, the guarantor of reliable election victories, the go-getter and the Brexit deliverer, is suddenly becoming a problem for his own party.

The Tories have supplied 15 prime ministers with 66 years of government since 1900. Now, however, Labour is ten points ahead in polls. Meanwhile, its leader Keir Starmer polls higher than Johnson on the question who would make the better prime minister. But does this put the entire government at risk?

The Tories' unfulfilled promises

The Conservative and Unionist Party, or Tories for short, is considered

one of the most adaptable parties in the world. What is a Boris Johnson compared to a glorious history dating back to the 17th century? They survived Cromwell's dictatorship, survived the Glorious Revolution and won World War II with Winston Churchill. What's the problem? Someone else will take the baton. The current term only ends in 2024.

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And yet Johnson's impending defeat also marks a turning point. It could herald the end of clown politics, the failure of pop culture in statecraft. In the midst of crisis there is no place for eccentricity and rascality. It is true that 'BoJo' – as his fans call him – has rejuvenated his party and programmatically played Labour up against the wall. In 2019, entire swaths of former Labour strongholds went to the Tories for the first time just because of Johnson. But in the end, what remains of his promises? For example, what about the promise to finally improve the living conditions in the north of the country?

The last government statement by Queen Elizabeth II was interspersed with the catchphrase 'levelling up'. From equipping the police to the new non-smoking strategy – everything was supposedly aimed at eliminating inequality.

A new bill on lifelong learning (the new Skills and Post-16 Education Bill) relies on people's creditworthiness, who are supposed to go into debt. Another draft law intends to counter the rise in real estate prices by giving more planning freedom for investors. New jobs are to be created by setting up eight freeports: a project that critics fear will lead to money laundering and tax avoidance. On the other hand, bills on workers' rights after Brexit and on pension reform were postponed. In April a hefty, socially unbalanced tax hike is due, a highly controversial measure even among Tories.

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At the same time, inflation and, above all, energy prices are rising, while the furlough scheme after Covid-19 is being phased out. The risk of further delivery bottlenecks and associated supply crises in individual sectors has still not been averted. While economic output contracted by 4.6 per cent in Germany because of the pandemic, it fell by 9.7 per cent in the United Kingdom – partly due to Brexit.

The Tories' authoritarian streak

In short, Boris's record is poor, but in the slipstream of all his scandals and eccentric appearances, political observers note a completely different danger: the reorganisation of British democracy by an almost autocratic majority party. Important institutions of democracy are being regularly and systematically attacked: the BBC, the Electoral Commission, the Committee on Standards in Public Life, Parliament itself, the right to demonstrate, the judicial system as a whole and even the Supreme Court.

It is no coincidence that the new draft law on Electoral Integrity is reminiscent of the US Republicans' attempts at voter suppression. Over 11 million people do not have the required photo ID or driving license. Not surprisingly, these people disproportionately belong to poor, disadvantaged and non-white populations that are not part of the Tory electorate. According to Home Secretary Priti Patel's plan, local elections should in future be held by the first-past-the-post system. This, too, would benefit the Conservative Party.

Human rights activists decry the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill as an attack on fundamental civil rights. The bill restricts the right to demonstrate, criminalises the homeless and subjects itinerant sections of the population – like Gypsy and Traveller communities – to arbitrary authority and policing.

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The Higher Education Bill, on the other hand, could be an attempt to impose a conservative agenda on universities. According to the most vocal critics of the government, the levelling-up agenda has a completely different function, namely to suppress political dissent. And under the current majority voting system, this strategy could be very effective.

Johnson's party isn't even bothering to keep this a secret. Johnson's party isn't even bothering to keep this a secret. Its last very successful electoral manifesto included an action plan to set up a 'Commission on the Constitution, Citizens' Rights and Democracy' with — as Professor of Public Law Adam Tomkins put it — a mandate to 'restore the balance of power between the executive, legislature and the courts' by reducing the powers of the judiciary whilst restoring or strengthening those of ministers and parliament.

Will BoJo have to go?

In the local elections in May, the ruling party will again suffer electoral defeats. After North Shropshire, they might also have to do without Uxbridge, Boris Johnson's constituency. But that would only mean losing a battle, not the war. And the longer the prime minister's 'BoJo the Clown' show continues, the better it is for those forces inside the party who want to keep acting amid the all the scandal and tomfoolery, thereby securing their hold on power in the long term. On the day of the prime minister's famous 'Peppa Pig' speech, the passage of his controversial Health and Care Bill went down silently in the press. Shame be to him who thinks evil of it.

And so the Tories will not give Labour a chance for a general election before 2024. A crisis manager will be brought in and to restore to the office of prime minister what many Britons have sorely missed of late: a measure of dignity. Brexit is done. The game is over. Boris can go.



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