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How Boris Johnson Became a Footnote

Why the Brutal Tory Beat Will Roll On

BY CHRIS FLOYD



Boris Johnson, stuck on a zip line, during the 2012 London Olympics. Source: ITV.com.

“The mere monstrous embodiment of unprecedented and resounding noise.”

Henry James’ description of Theodore Roosevelt is a good fit for the blathering tub of bullshit who has just resigned as prime minister of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and a Few Bits and Bobs Here and There. Yes, clowntime is over, apparently, for Britain, with the defenestration of Boris Johnson. In a typically graceless, gurning, whining performance at the doors of No. 10, the uber-privileged man-baby surrendered, temporarily, to reality on Thursday, after mass resignations from his team brought the already-staggering machinery

of his dysfunctional government to a complete halt. A grateful nation, sick to death of the preening gasbag, breathed a sigh of relief.

But this relief is no liberation; it's just a momentary pause before the next shift of torturers come in. For, as with Donald Trump (another entitled idiot brought up in a noxious atmosphere of idle wealth and unaccountability), the lawless, stupid, deliberately destructive reign of BoJo was a symptom, not the disease itself. It was a particularly putrid suppuration of the moral rot of an entire system. Indeed, his removal (or *promised* removal; he ain't gone yet and is plotting to hang around and wreak havoc for as long as he can) gives the beneficiaries of the system the perfect cover to perpetuate the rot that feeds their power and privilege. "See, we have isolated the infection and removed it! All will be well now, back to normal."

But of course, the pre-Johnson "normal" was years and years of brutal and deadly "austerity": the relentless evisceration of vital public services and public amenities, the savage clear-cutting of anything that might conceivably contribute to the common good. This was also the "normal" *during* Johnson's term, before his premature ejaculation from power. And it will be the "normal" *after* whichever of the vicious crew of Koch-networked extremists or sniffy Oxbridge dimbulbs that constitute the Tory party takes the helm. Not a single one of them will change the direction or substance of a system fanatically devoted to the service of wealth and privilege. As the saying goes, "the beatings will continue until morale improves."

And if morale doesn't improve? Tough shit, sunshine; if you don't like it, we'll bash your bloody head in. For Boris and his Bojobs have already set the UK far down the road to Orbanite authoritarianism. The Tory majority has now given the government the power to quash any public protest it pleases. It has introduced GOP-style "voter ID" – citing not any existing problem with voter fraud (as in the US, there is none) but the "possibility" that someone might commit voter fraud in the future. The result, as in the US, is the effective disenfranchisement of millions. The Tories are pursuing, and in some cases already passed, a number of so-called "Henry VIII clauses" on a wide range of issues, which allow the government to impose drastic changes in policy without Parliament's approval, essentially ruling by decree. Again, none of Johnson's successors will change any of that. In fact, many of them are even more fervently committed to the Koch-backed, Orbanite bent of modern Conservatism than Johnson, who, like Trump, has no real ideology beyond the masturbatory aggrandizement of his own sweet self.

Johnson treated public office like one big joke, and was content to have himself portrayed the same way in the media: as a shambling, scruffy-haired scallywag, a buffoonish bumbler always ready with a jolly jape and a sheepish shrug when he was caught out in a bit of mischief. This carried him far in a system happy to hide its rapacious corruption behind his resounding noise. A system so sick with the murderous racism that underlies its imperial

history that it elevated a howling racist like Johnson, who wrote – in print, for big money, in national newspapers and magazines – about Black “picaninnies” and African tribesmen welcoming British bigwigs with “watermelon smiles.” He was fired from journalism jobs for lying and fabricating. He was fired from political jobs for lying. He was recorded on tape helping a crony to try to set up a mob beatdown for the crony’s enemy. He was well-known in British life, for decades, as a lying, racist, misogynist, corrupt, incompetent, back-stabbing doofus.

Of course, that didn’t matter to the powers-that-be, happy to hide their ruthless agenda behind his clownishness. And even his foes played into this dynamic, with countless memes and skits and jokes and tropes taking Johnson as a figure of fun – an image he actively cultivated, with a self-deprecating wink and a nod. But here’s the rub. Behind BoJo’s clown makeup – and the respectable suits of his predecessors and eventual successors – there’s a grinning, blood-flecked death’s-head. Like Trump, he’s not an aberration but a stark exemplification of the reality of the system, how it actually works, and has always worked: through lies, manipulations, boundless corruption (legalized and otherwise) and brutal contempt for human life and human dignity.

Several studies in 2021 showed that Tory cuts to health services, social care, child welfare and poverty programs killed almost 60,000 people over the previous decade of Conservative rule – almost as many British civilians as the Nazis killed during the Blitz. And that’s *before* the pandemic, when Johnson’s atrocious mishandling of the crisis resulted in tens of thousands of more needless, agonizing deaths, even as he was doling out billions of pounds in corrupt, no-bid, backdoor deals with cronies, crooks and spivs for vital medical supplies they never supplied – one of the most gargantuan corruption rings in modern history. Tory rule is no joke: it’s social murder. And there is more of it to come.

Of course, Johnson was not removed for any of this. Nor for his direct complicity, as foreign minister and prime minister, in the genocidal war of US/UK ally Saudi Arabia against Yemen. He was not even removed for the ostensible reason given for the cascading drama that led to his downfall: a series of transparent lies he told about appointing a man he knew to be a sexual abuser to an important party post. He had told far worse lies before this without his sycophantic ministers bestirring themselves to even protest, much less move to bring him down. No, he went down on Thursday because Tory poobahs seized on the latest lie to get rid of a man who had become an electoral liability. Every poll showed the Tories losing badly at the next election with Boris in charge. A recent by-election saw crushing defeats for the Tories, including a historic loss in one of the safest Conservative seats in Britain. His presence in No 10 now constituted a threat to the political fortunes and privileges of Tory MPs; that is the only reason he was removed.

In the end – the increasingly bitter end – Boris Johnson is a footnote, one of the pipsqueaks of history. His departure won't alter the accelerating rot of Britain's unsustainable power system – a centuries-old accretion of injustices and dripping contempt for the “lower orders.” And beyond the political fate of this diminished gaggle of islands on the outer edge of one corner of vast Eurasia, there looms the impending heat death of civilization itself, as elites across the world gobble the last of the loot and abandon their populations to the spasmodic ravages of climate chaos. Like so many of the monstrous embodiments of meaningless noise that plague our times, in nation after nation, Johnson is just a symptom of systems already so rotten that someone like him could rise to power within them.

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