

The Life of [Boris] Johnson

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Since the early hours of Tuesday 10th September, Parliament has been suspended (officially known as “proroguing”). This decision, requiring Monarchical agreement, is currently being reviewed in the Supreme Court following rejection of a case brought in the High Court by former Conservative Prime Minister Sir John Major acting with anti-Brexit campaigner Gina Miller.

The decision to suspend Parliament was always going to be controversial. During the contest for leadership of the Conservative Party, many contenders stated it would be seen as undemocratic. Matt Hancock, current Secretary of State for Health, was forthright in his opposition to prorogation on 6th June that such a suspension would “explicitly to pursue a course of action against its wishes” and “mean the end of the Conservative party as a serious party of government.”

Hancock’s stance was echoed by other leadership hopefuls Sajid Javid and Michael Gove, both of whom are now in the cabinet. Javid stated in June that “You don’t deliver on democracy by trashing democracy ... we are not selecting a dictator of our country” Gove also thought it would be wrong for a number of reasons and would not be “true to the best traditions of British democracy.”

Opposition to prorogation, as far as Hancock, Javid and Gove were concerned, it seems, was temporary. On being offered a job in Johnson’s cabinet it seems that they were expected to comply with whatever means he, or more likely, his chief adviser Dominic Cummings, believes is necessary.

When appointing his cabinet, Johnson surprisingly included ‘remainer’ Nicky Morgan and Amber Rudd who both expressed their opposition to the use of prorogation. Both would be presumed to have been happy to support his vigorous pledge to achieve Brexit on 31st October, with or without a deal. Morgan’s willingness to serve in Johnson’s cabinet was questioned by many who, given she openly

stated her belief that leaving the EU was not in the country's best interests, suggested this was career over conscience.

However, former Work and Pensions Secretary Amber Rudd who'd described prorogation of Parliament as "absolutely outrageous" has resigned having expressed concern that it would draw the Queen into what would be seen as a cynical attempt to silence Parliament in their opposition to leaving the EU with no-deal.

This is precisely the argument being made in the Supreme Court concerning by the barrister acting on behalf of Gina Miller. Lord Pannick QC, argued that prorogation was for an "improper purpose" so as to silence" MPs with an "exceptionally long" suspension and that *"He [Johnson] sees Parliament as an obstacle to the furtherance of his political aims."*

If the Supreme Court finds in favour of those who have brought the case, it will effectively find that Boris Johnson lied about the purpose of prorogation to the Queen. It begs the question of how the person currently in charge of the country can carry on as PM. We would truly be in unprecedented territory.

In the meantime, it's business as 'unusual' elsewhere and PM Johnson operates in what seems a peculiar and erratic fashion that some believe to be part of a grand strategy devised by 'evil genius', as some describe him, Dominic Cummings.

Writing in *The Observer* on Sunday, Matthew d'Ancona contends that the way Johnson is engaging in "monstrous behaviour" that will, as has been shown in recent weeks, is dividing the party he leads and forcing many talented individuals to desert.

Writing in *The Daily Mail* at the weekend, columnist Peter Osborne believes that Johnson increasingly "embattled and isolated", recognises the phenomenal difficulties that Theresa May faced and why she fought so hard to achieve agreement for the withdrawal deal she negotiated with the EU, including the infamous backstop.

Osborne concludes that Johnson will "fall back on his crowd-pleasing instincts and fight to get some sort of deal." If this is the case, he'll incur the wrath of those who put him in place as PM and vehemently

supported his proclamations of leaving the EU on 31st October, “do or die”.

For such supporters, departure without a deal, causing the economic and social chaos predicted by documents produced by Operation Yellowhammer, apparently causes no concern; they simply refuse to believe.

As many warned before he became PM, Johnson’s tenure as Mayor of London was not preparation for what is an incredibly complex and draining role even in normal times without having to face what is almost universally recognised as the greatest political challenge since the second-world-war.

What former PM David Cameron writes about Johnson in his book *For The Record*, is utterly damning. The current PM, Cameron contends, is a liar who backed leaving the EU campaign merely for the sake of his career. Equally, former leader of the Scottish Conservative Party, Ruth Davidson, who resigned because of her poor relationship with the current PM, believes that Johnson is conflicted in his views on Europe.

Monday’s farce of the ‘empty chair’ press conference in Luxembourg perhaps sums up the increasing confusion and farcical behaviour exhibited by Johnson. According to reports, he was unwilling to subject himself to the jeers of protesters against Brexit during a joint press conference with alongside Luxembourg’s Prime Minister, Xavier Bettel, with whom he’d just had a working lunch also attended by current European commission president, Jean-Claude Juncker.

Johnson’s no show at the press conference has led some to describe him not as the Incredible Hulk that he’s compared himself to over the weekend, but, instead, ‘The Incredible Sulk’. Contrary to his narrative that talks are progressing well, behaviour that appears petulant suggests otherwise.

Progress won’t be helped by some of those who vehemently advocate a no-deal departure – and were instrumental in his achievement of his lifetime goal of becoming PM – making claims that what happened in Luxembourg on Monday was a continuance of the humiliation that Johnson’s immediate predecessor as PM, Theresa May, suffered at

the hands of the EU. The fact that some Tories were willing to invoke the second-world-war would be amusing if such tropes were not as risible as they're pathetic.

BBC Europe Editor, Katya Adler, writing on its website after the Luxembourg visit included a quote from a "high-level EU contact" who told her that despite Bettel's "effervescent irritation with the Brexit process" being common among most EU leaders behind closed doors, believed that "As long as there is a chance of a deal, it's in our own interest to engage. However frustrating negotiations are."

The Life of Samuel Johnson, (published in 1791) written by James Boswell, includes the familiar Latin quotation, *Quos Deus vult perdere prius dementat* which means, "Those whom God wishes to destroy he first drives mad".

Boris Johnson's behaviour suggests that he is finding life as a PM much tougher than he might have expected. In the past it has been noted that his peripatetic upbringing and his mother's mental ill-health, when she was hospitalised, deeply affected him. Many contend that the personality he exudes is a caricature to hide the real, and deeply-sensitive person who wants to be loved.

Whatever the reality of Johnson's personality, let's hope that whatever stress he may be under, he achieves a deal with the EU that fully protects the future prosperity of this country and the rights of citizens.

Absolutely crucially, its paramount Johnson does not allow himself to be influenced by those within his own Party who believe in the madness that is no-deal. This outcome will inevitably result in economic chaos and social disorder, particularly in regions where deprivation is already deeply embedded.

No-deal is not in anyone's interest and will undermine the prospects of the current and future generations.