

Boris Johnson asked me to do something that I wasn't prepared to do because I didn't think it was right. That was to either overrule the Holak committee or to make promises with people. Now, I wasn't prepared to do that. As I said, I didn't think it was right.

And if people don't like that, then tough. That was the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak hanging his predecessor Boris Johnson out to dry. He's come out fighting. He's telling us publicly that he rejected Boris Johnson's requests to bend the rules, break the rules for his resignation honours list. A few moments ago, we got the response from Boris Johnson, who said Rishi Sunak is talking rubbish. To honour these privileges, it wasn't necessary to overrule the Appointments Committee of the House of Lords, but simply to ask them to renew their vetting, a mere formality. This is what open warfare looks like between Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak.

And in a way, the framing for what is happening, not only in London, but in Edinburgh as well, with Nicola Sturgeon's arrest, is as we turn into this new political week. How, if you're a leader who has followed a titan in your politics, a predecessor from your own party who is causing you endless trouble, how do you deal with them? Do you keep them close? Do you put distance between

you and them? And what is the cost if you do so? Welcome to the News Agents.

The News Agents. This is Emily in News Agents HQ. And it's Lewis in Edinburgh in Holyrood, the Scottish Parliament. And we'll be talking about the SMP later. And indeed, another titan who has left us, Berlusconi. But we start in Westminster because of what happened between Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak, which paved the way for this battle. And we should reference Tim Shipman, because so much of this came from his account of a meeting between the two of them. In which the question of honours, as in the honours list, was never meant to come up.

But it did at Boris's insistence. And Rishi Sunak was able to say to Boris Johnson that he hadn't removed any of the names from Boris Johnson's honours list, given to him by the body we're going to call Holak. It's the House of Lords Appointment Committee.

And that, we understand, at least in the Rishi Sunak version, is technically true. Because the House of Lords Appointment Committee had all ready removed key names of those four sitting MPs that wanted to go into the Lords quite simply because they were still sitting MPs. It seems that Boris Johnson, the man of no detail, had once again failed to read the details, written down in the rules for everyone to see that sitting MPs could not ascend straight to the House of Lords. And by the time the House of Lords Appointment Committee had taken them off, and it had fed back to Boris Johnson, and he'd asked Rishi Sunak to step in, Rishi Sunak was able to say, sorry, I'm not going to overrule the House of Lords Appointment Committee because that's not what I do. That's not what a prime minister of integrity would do. Q. Boris Johnson's fury, his fury bleeding into Nadine Doris. We know that he also learned about the findings of the Privileges Committee, which was threatening to recommend a suspension of more than 10 days, recommending the key word, not insist upon. And that led to that, what I called on Friday, the longest howl of self-pity in history, a thousand words from Boris Johnson, where he stepped down,

and a couple of his friends stepped down as well, triggering what looks like three more by-election headaches for Rishi Sunak sometime at the end of July.

A. Isn't it extraordinary, Emily, that the thing which, or maybe it's not extraordinary, maybe it absolutely aligns with the way Boris Johnson does politics and the way the turn the politics within his bit with the Conservative Party has gone. The thing which has caused this

ultimate conflagration, leaving the Privileges Committee element to one side, is not some great point of principle, not some great ideological question. Johnson tried to pretend that some of this was about ideology, saying we needed a true Conservative government, low attacks and all this sort of stuff. It's none of that. It's about whether or not some of his mates, some of his allies, get a place in the legislature for life. Something they already have places in the legislature. They're already MPs. They haven't really, by the way, given neither Doris nor Adams, given any real explanation to their constituents. Why is that they have decided to leave Parliament having been elected in 2019, not finishing their term? Other than, apparently, it seems, a fit of pique that they were promised something, that they were assured something, these places in the legislature for life, and then don't get them for whatever reason, either because of the House of Lords Commission, because of Sunak. Whatever the reason is, whether Sunak portrayed what he said to Johnson, whatever it is, what an extraordinary kind of turn of events and an extraordinary set of events, that that is the thing that should make you walk away from your seat in the Commons, for which you were elected, and for which your constituents thought you were going to serve a full term. Totally in keeping, though. I mean, if you cast your mind back to the beginning, if you like, of the Johnson downfall, which was over Owen Patterson, why on earth would

you try and protect a man who'd once again fallen foul of parliamentary rules? Why would you come to the defence of Chris Pincher, whom he knew had been, on previous occasions, accused of sexual assault? Why would you keep running to defend people in these situations, which actually puts you, once again, in contempt of Parliament, where it's trying to overturn the Ethics Committee over Owen Patterson, whether it's trying to ignore the findings of colleagues over Chris Pincher, and now it's the House of Lords' Appointment Committee, we know that he has overwritten it himself in the past with the appointment of Peter Craxie, trying to put pressure on Rishi Sunak to do the same for him. And it's a really easy win for Rishi Sunak here. He doesn't have to do very much. He just has to say no. He just has to say no, because that breaks with precedent. And that's the thing. I mean, as ever with these people, we're always constantly told, and they constantly told us that what they cared about was restoring the honour of Parliament, the integrity of Parliament, parliamentary sovereignty. And yet, each and every turn, Johnson has abused Parliament, and its procedures, and its institutions, and its mechanisms, and has done so even in the manner of his departure, so have his allies. The weird thing is, in terms of where this leads Sunak, is it's, I think it's a potentially quite important moment for him stepping into the role of Prime Minister and stepping away and out of Johnson's shadow. Today, that clip is going to get played, and we've just played it, it's going to get played everywhere, it's going to get played on the news headlines, it's going to get played on the six and ten o'clock news. And it's potentially one of the most important things he said, because up to now, he and his allies have been performing this, this delicate dance, where they've always sort of paid homage to Johnson. They've always said yes, there were difficulties, but you know, I think he was a fantastic Prime Minister, you know, he had so many achievements to his name, etc. They were trying to have it both ways. Today, and we saw the glimmers of it with the Grant Shapps interview at the weekend as well, where he said the world has moved on. I think in the last 24-48 hours, we've seen the first real attempts by Team Sunak and the people around him to quite consciously put distance, political distance, between him and Johnson. Now, in a way, because of the turn of events, they probably didn't have much of a choice, they've kind of been forced

into it, they're making the best of a bad situation. One of the critiques that's often levelled at Sunak is this idea that he's brittle, or that he's weak, or that he's not his own man. This is the clearest attempt yet to try and move away from that. But nonetheless, it is, I think, important for him. The other thing in terms of the parliamentary kind of mechanics of it, this is a really weird attempt to destabilise Sunak, right? Because on the one hand, yes, they're destabilising him. These by-elections are going to potentially destabilise him in a significant way. But as plots go, it is deeply fitful, because all they can do with this is wound but not kill. By resigning, they are taking themselves out of the arena, where politics and the leader of the Conservative Party is decided. Sunak may well be exchanging three Conservative MPs for three Opposition MPs, but in reality, these three Conservative MPs, what Opposition MPs anyway?

So although it is going to destabilise him, yes, although it's potentially going to be a very, very difficult day if he loses two or three of these by-elections, and we're told they are going to be on the same day sooner rather than later, yes, he has also lost his principal opponent within the Commons, and at least two people who are now out of the picture cannot rally around an alternatives for candidate, cannot plot or scheme from within. So as attempts to destabilise an incumbent go, it is a novel one, and I suspect not an especially effective one.

Yeah, I think that's right, because actually, having real enemies as in from opposition parties are probably going to be less of a headache to Rishi Sunak than having enemies within your own party who you know would like to see you fail just as much as they would like the opposition leader to fail, maybe more in fact. Just in terms of the sequence of events this morning, we think that the Privileges Committee are right now looking over that final report before the rest of us get to see it in the next, I don't know, 24 or 48 hours. But one of the things that they are now considering on top of the whole question of whether Boris Johnson knowingly misled Parliament is actually his own statement on Friday in which he accused them of being a kangaroo court. They are likely to consider further sanctions for contempt of Parliament, not just of Boris Johnson, but also possibly for his supporters who we understand have been trying to petition the Privileges Committee to change their language. So this whole question of whether he had knowingly

misled Parliament has now turned into another dive into the whole question of whether he has had contempt for Parliament by calling to question the impartiality of the actual committee. This is the man who loved believing in the sovereignty of Parliament. Don't forget that was what it was all meant to be about. You know, the whole of Brexit was about waving goodbye to Brussels, waving goodbye to these undemocratic, unelected leaders that were lauding over it with their rules, giving the power back to Parliament. It just turns out that when Parliament says the wrong thing about you, you don't like it so much and suddenly Parliament's the kangaroo court. Joining us now is Lord Nicholas Some. Lord Some, what did you make first of all if we just take you back to Friday of that resignation letter by Boris Johnson? Well, I thought it was a bit over the top to tell you the honest truth, but obviously at the time Boris Johnson would have felt very, very, very strongly about what he had been told about the report. I have to tell you that I don't think it was a letter that carried a great deal of power or strength because of its mere hyperbole. You sound slightly sympathetic towards him. Well, I don't really ever like a big beast falling over in politics. I didn't like it when Margaret Thatcher fell over.

I don't like these very public occasions, which are quite often for good reasons, and it's not

that I'm sympathetic to him. I think I'm afraid he is entirely the architect of his own misfortunes, but I think it's a mistake to pretend that he won't be considered to have been for all his myriad failings, and we all have failings, but his were, his are written bigger than most. He will be marked as a prime minister of consequence. You're a committed parliamentarian.

It's run in the family. When you hear Boris Johnson calling the privileges committee a kangaroo court, I wonder what your sense is of his respect for that body? Well, I think it's a really stupid thing to say. It is not a kangaroo court. It's created by parliament to examine very, very serious, very serious matters, very serious allegations. It was the right place to do it. I mean, I think to call out the committee in the way he did was extremely foolish on his part, and I really wish he hadn't done it because it means that people will have a chance to believe that this isn't what it really is, which is a part of the high court of parliament rightfully assembled to deal with this matter. It really is. It's very, very important committee. Lotten, you always strike me as someone for whom honor matters in politics. Do you think that Boris Johnson has acted honorably in this affair? I think it's all run away from him, I'm afraid, and you read articles by people like Max Hastings and Matthew Said and Anthony Sheldon yesterday, brilliant article of people who have got to know him much better than I do, but who really do believe that he pushed all these things to the very limit. And all I can say is that you look at, I really do think that we've got to get away from this personality thing. I think the life of our country has to move on from Colonel Boris Manier and hyperbole as a time of the greatest economic, social, political, and indeed, possibly military difficulty. And I think you have a prime minister who is by common consent doing the very best he possibly can under very difficult circumstances. And I think that Boris needs to, if I was him, go quietly now. You know, I think this is genuinely no longer for further serious consideration. It is extraordinary to have heard a sitting Prime Minister Rishi Sunak today telling us publicly that his predecessor, this great beast, as you said, was basically asking him to do something really shady, really immoral, and change the contents of the list of the House of Commons Appointment Committee. I mean, doesn't that strike you as an appalling state of affairs for a party? It's not just for the party, it's an appalling state of affairs that, to be frank, that Boris feels that it's okay to ask for that. That is the appalling state of affairs, yes, unqualified, yes. And the Prime Minister refused to do it because, as he said, it was the wrong thing to do. So he didn't do it and quite right to him too. So I honestly think this thing is going to come to a, it has to come to a conclusion now. We must be allowed to get on with our government for Parliament, for the House of Commons, for the Cabinet, for ministers to get on with their jobs without worrying about this endless sort of psycho drama going off stage. Boris has decided to stand down from Parliament. He's made his decision, he is no longer part of this, and he needs, if I may say so respectfully, he really does need to, I think, moderate, very, very carefully what he says, and just give it a break and allow a Conservative government to get on with doing what it has to do. Would you like him to exit politics completely at this point? I mean, if he wanted to stand again, should Rishi Sunak say no? I don't know what the Prime Minister would feel about that, but I would just think it's a very bad idea. He is a brilliant journalist, no doubt a newspaper will offer him, will stuff his mouth with gold, and he'll be given, you know, very highly paid journalist jobs. He speaks all over the world. He's going to earn himself a great deal of money,

and it sounds to me as though in building his new family at home and getting himself organised, he's going to need to be able to earn money. And I think that Parliament, to be frank now, needs to get over the Boris Johnson saga and get on with being the government.

Lord Sames, your relationship with Boris Johnson was pretty complicated. You were suspended as an MP over the whole question of the Brexit debate, really. You were then reinstated. You were then made a peer last year. I wonder how you see this current honours list. I mean, do you feel that those people on it, sanctioned by Boris Johnson, who is being investigated, who may have been found of willfully misled Parliament, should go through? That is a matter of the House of Lords commission.

I'm very grateful to have been nominated as a peer every year ago. I did fall out with Boris. I mean, he withdrew the whip, and he was incidentally, as you and I discussed before, actually perfectly

entitled to draw the whip from me and 21 others, because we were not going to vote for his landmark

legislation. And you can't have people in your party who are not going to vote for the main piece of business. But we made it up. And I'm just so sad to see someone like Boris condemned to look like this now, really very, very shabby. And to talk of Parliament as being a kangaroo court is just absolute rubbish. And if I was him, I really would go a little bit quietly now, and let the government get on with it. Nicholas Sames, thank you so much for joining us.

Thank you. You know, what I think is really fascinating about that, and you can hear it in a lot of conservatives, and we've already talked about up to now the kind of ambivalence of Sunak and how this delicate dance that they've tried to perform. I think Boris Johnson does occupy a very unusual place in the psychology of the Conservative Party, right?

It truly is love hate, in the sense that this is a guy who everyone knows, he doesn't care about the Conservative Party very much in the way that, say, Theresa May did. It's sort of her family. It means so much to her. And other Conservative leaders are like that as well. It's always been a vehicle for him. It's always been a vehicle for him to achieve power. You can totally imagine if some other vehicle came along, sort of Berlusconi-like, and we can talk about that later, he would absolutely alight on it. If he thought that he and Farage could set up some outfit, particularly if we had Piase that would lead him somehow to be a kingmaker or prime minister again,

he'd do it. It's a means to an end. And they know that, and they know he's going to spend the next how many years in a telegraph column or a mail column or whatever, sending hand grenade after hand grenade into the government and into Sunak. And yet, they are strangely sort of grateful to him,

because they do look at that period of 2019 where the Conservative Party had been brought so low, he did break the Ampass, albeit highly imperfectly. We know with what happened with Northern Ireland

and so on. They are still sort of in awe of his political alchemy, even though, as we know, in reality, it's faded so much. But this is a guy who I think is going to forever occupy a very, very unusual place within the hearts and minds of the Conservative Party, much like Thatcher. They're going to be talking about him and comparing themselves to him for years, if not decades to come.

Yeah, I think it's really interesting to hear that tenor from Lord Soames, and it took me right back to 2019 when I interviewed him, he referred to it. And he was suspended. I mean, can you imagine taking the whip, the Conservative whip away from Winston Churchill's grandson? This is Boris Johnson, who always tried to pretend, you know, really weirdly that he was the incarnation, the re-embodiment of Churchill, couldn't be further from the truth. Taking the whip away from Nicholas Soames and 20 others purely because they believed in the integrity, the sovereignty, actually, of parliament at a time when Boris Johnson was involved in, you know, not least in trying to prorogue the whole body. And yet even then, Nicholas Soames told me he was quite phlegmatic. He was like, well, you know, he's the Prime Minister and if you can't get your people to do what you want, then you have to suspend them. And then, of course, he was brought back as a Lord, as a peer. And so there is this endless sense, I think, of forgiveness and a sense of sort of wanting it all to be fine. You know, they want these icons. They want Boris Johnson to be Thatcher, not an Andrew Johnson. They don't want him to be a Nixon. They don't want him to be even a shabby Trump. They want him to be someone whose picture hangs on the wall of 10 Downing Street. And they can all point to him and go, oh, you know, one of our brightest and best. Not, oh, my God, what a tawdry end to that awful little man. We should just explain Andrew Johnson was a failed president in the United States, not one of the many Johnson siblings who easily could. They're probably, there probably is an Andrew Johnson out there somewhere. I'll get sued. Anyway, we are going to leave one political psycho drama in London and just talk about another one. It just happens to be in Edinburgh, where I am, right after this. This is the news agents. Welcome back. So the news gods were smiling on journalists, if not crying on politicians over the weekend. I mean, Lenin once said, right, that there are years where decades happen. I'd like to see him, what his assessment is of a weekend in British politics in the early 2020s, because it was just extraordinary. If not one, three conservative MPs resigning over a 48 to 72 hour period. But then we find out yesterday afternoon that Nicola Sturgeon has been arrested as part of the ongoing Police Scotland investigation into the Scottish National Party's finances, which has already led to the arrest without charge, has to be said, of both her husband, Peter Murrell, former longstanding chief executive of the SNP, and the former SNP party treasurer as well. And the same pattern occurred yesterday, where Sturgeon presented herself in this case. She was with police for about seven hours, arrested at 10 o'clock, and then released at five o'clock without charge, pending further investigation. And this has shocked not only the Scottish political world, but the British political world as well. There was a sense that perhaps this investigation into the party's finances was in abeyance, that Sturgeon herself had not been arrested and perhaps was going to escape that. She had started to re-emerge on Twitter and within Scottish politics as well. Humza Yousaf talking about her only yesterday in a prerecorded interview on the BBC, saying that he'd been in close contact with her. And then lo and behold, this arrest comes. And of course,

it has been ever since Sturgeon resigned, and this scandal had exploded. It has been the introduction

to the nation from hell for Humza Yousaf, the Scottish First Minister, who was of course one of Sturgeon's protégés, who owed so much of his political rise to her, who was her preferred candidate. And again, we've been talking about a merry political dance for Rishi Sunak, and even finer dances had to be performed by Yousaf. And now the big question has been whether or not Yousaf

is going to suspend Sturgeon as long as this investigation is ongoing and this arrest has been made. And until such time, if they do, the police say that they're going to cease the inquiry. And Yousaf, of course, was asked about this today on a visit to Inverness, and he's not going to do it. This is what he said. No, I won't be suspending Nicholas Sturgeon. I'll be treating her exactly in the same way as I treated, for example, Colin Beattie, both released without charge, and therefore there's no reason for me to suspend them. It's been pretty personally painful, if I'm honest. I think people know and have heard me talk about my personal friendship, my mad admiration for Nicholas Sturgeon, so I know how difficult a day would have been, not just for her, but the entire party and for the SNP, and as I say for many of us personally. But I've got to separate out that personal, one of those personal feelings that may be a bit of a feeling, but the job is not just the SNP leader, but importantly, as First Minister. And that's why, of course, as you'd expect, I couldn't comment on a live police investigation. So there you are. And obviously, the cry of hypocrisy has already gone up from his political opponents, because Nicholas Sturgeon herself, when she was past the leader of First Ministers, suspended a whole array of different politicians for offences which were far less grave in nature. And one other thing, Emily, which is absolutely mind-blowing to consider, which is there have been three SNP First Ministers now, and two of them have ended up arrested at some point in their post First Minister career. Obviously, what happened with Alex Salmond, he eventually obviously went to trial and was acquitted. And now we have this situation with Nicholas Sturgeon, very different sorts of offences potentially involved. But my word, absolutely extraordinary, of course, the SNP are now reeling. So we're joined now by Douglas Ross, who is the Scottish Conservative leader. We're slightly in the wrong place, Douglas, I'm in Hollywood, you're in Westminster, you're still at MP though, of course, so I suppose that makes sense. Yeah, and the Scottish Fear Select Committee meets on a Monday, so I'm always down here for that. There you go, fair enough. You shouldn't tell us things like that, you'll be in here to write it. So we should kick off, shouldn't we, with everything that's going on in Edinburgh. The First Minister has said that he won't be suspending Nicholas Sturgeon. What do you make of that? What's your response to that? Well, he has to suspend Nicholas Sturgeon, and it's just weak if he refuses to do so. And quite frankly, Nicholas Sturgeon would have suspended Nicholas Sturgeon because when she was leader of the party, she suspended a number of MPs who were under

investigation by the police. And this is the exact same situation. So I really don't understand why it was good enough for her when she was leader of the party. And now her continuity candidate is refusing to do the same now that he's in charge. So I'm very clear that Nicholas Sturgeon should be suspended from the SNP, and it is a sign of great weakness that Hamza Yousef has now refused to do so. Do you think she should stand down from Parliament? Yeah, I mean, look, there is obviously innocent and total proven otherwise. But Nicholas Sturgeon, when she was leader of the SNP, took

a very clear approach that when her elected members were under police investigation, we know that Nicholas Sturgeon was arrested yesterday. She was released without charge after seven hours of interview by officers from Police Scotland. And therefore, as a very minimum, she should be suspended. It does seem extraordinary that given where the SNP is now, and obviously innocent until proven guilty, and we haven't seen anyone charged, and we have to remember that, that the Tories in Scotland still don't really have a leg to stand on, Douglas, that all the gains appear to be going to Stammer on the other side, and the independence actually in polling hasn't shifted at all. But neither of those things are true. Actually, the most recent opinion poll in Scotland had Labour down four points and the Conservatives up four points. So there is a change throughout the

political process in Scotland, and we are seeing a number of different areas where the Scottish Conservatives are the key challengers to the SNP. And indeed, we are the only party that

can stop the SNP. You don't really believe that. Well, I absolutely do. If you look at my seat, for example, Labour and the Liberal Democrats are so far behind, they could never win in Murray. So

if the Conservatives didn't win my Murray seat, then the gain would go to the SNP. Likewise, in many SNP held seats, Labour and the Lib Dems are far too far behind to actually defeat the SNP. So we've got a very sophisticated electorate in Scotland, and I think they understand that in many parts of the country, the best way of getting the SNP out of power, and certainly at the next Westminster election, out of their local seat is by supporting the Scottish Conservatives. And we've seen that in repeated elections. I was just going to say 2016, we defied all the polls and became the largest opposition party. And in 2021, we did the same again, had our best ever election result, when no disrespect journalists like yourself were saying, we didn't have a right to stand on, and we wouldn't be doing very well. Well, we've shown in the past that we can do that.

The electorate presumably sophisticated enough to look right now at the Conservatives and say, what a basket case of a party. Well, I think what they're seeing in Scotland, because, you know, I'm representing a Scottish constituency, and also serving the Scottish Parliament.

Just look more widely at the party, because I think that still plays into what you're standing for. And you're standing for a party that has just seen Boris Johnson resign, calling a privileges committee a kangaroo court, triggering by elections, and putting pressure, we understand, on the current Prime Minister, to change the House of Lords appointment committee's mind. And look at the contrast there. The current Prime Minister said, Boris Johnson asked him to do something that he thought would be totally wrong, and he refused to do so. And he said this morning,

if you disagree with that, tough. And I think that is a very strong message from Rishi Sunak, in comparison to Hamza Yusuf, who is so weak, he can't even continue with a precedent his predecessor said, and suspend Nicola Sturgeon, now that she's been arrested and questioned by the police. Douglas, do you think that there are lots of rumours that Boris Johnson might try and stand in another seat, whether it's a media or at some point in the future? Do you think if he tries, that given what he's tried to do, which is destabilise his leader, your leader, your national leader, anyway, do you think that Rishi Sunak and CCHQ should say no, that isn't allowed?

Well, I think definitely on the immediate question, I don't think that is a possibility,



because my understanding is the nominations to be candidates in these by elections closes at five o'clock tonight. So the time frame for that, there were some rumours over the weekend or Friday evening that he might stand down in his current seat and stand for Nadine Doris' seat, and it was also a master plan. I don't see how that is practically possible. I'm not going to look too far into the future, because one thing that none of us have seen discussing this at the moment is the report from the Privileges Committee. But I do believe that that is a report that we have to pay great attention to and respect, because of course it was Boris Johnson as Prime Minister who agreed, and his government agreed, there was no division in the House of Commons. Every MP agreed that we would hand this over to the Privileges Committee to investigate. Do you understand why Rishi Sunak has okayed the Honour's List without, as you say, any of us having seen the Privileges report?

Well, I think they are two separate things, because every Prime Minister has as a right to have this resignation honours list.

When they're being investigated by the police.

Well, he's not being investigated by the police.

Well, he is for further breaches of lockdown of party game.

Well, that is, I think, because of the Cabinet Office material that became available during the COVID-19 inquiry, and I'm not sure how far that's going to go, and it's fairly recent.

No, I'm just saying, you're having to remind yourself what he's actually being accused of now, whether it's potentially misleading Parliament willfully, or whether it's potentially contempt of Parliament for calling the whole Committee a kangaroo court, or whether it's potentially police investigations.

If you were the Prime Minister right now, wouldn't you pause for a moment and say, let's not just rush through this honours list?

Well, I don't think it has been rushed, because I think I saw in the documents that it was February that the House of Lords Commission...

Well, even weirder then.

No, well, the House of Commons Commission looked at this, and it's gone back to the Prime Minister,

and then it goes to the King.

But there is a precedent that is set that incoming Prime Ministers don't interfere with their predecessor's resignation list, but I think the strongest...

Even if they're being investigated, even if they've misled Parliament, are you happy with that, Douglas?

Seriously?

Can you imagine the precedent that would set that if a Labour Prime Minister leaves office, and a Conservative Prime Minister comes in in the future, should a Conservative Prime Minister get to manipulate what the previous Prime Minister from a different party had put forward?

Manipulate is quite a strong word.

Well, that's what you're asking for.

When you're looking at a predecessor who actually is standing accused at the moment of willfully misleading Parliament.

I'm just asking, whether you as Prime Minister would say, yeah, I know we've got that small issue of misleading Parliament,

but you crack on.

You get your honours anyway.

Well, I think the two are quite separate.

There is an investigation that's almost complete.

We will know, I think, later on today or tomorrow, the outcome of that.

I don't think that will be hidden or be put in a drawer just because Boris Johnson is no longer Prime Minister.

And I think the most important thing is that we look to what the committee came up with, the recommendations, and as I say, that was a committee that was tasked to do that by every single MP in the Parliament.

There was no division.

It was a government led by Boris Johnson at the time that agreed to it.

But Douglas, I assume that if what we assume is correct that the Privilegeist Committee are going to recommend suspension of more than 20 days,

I assume you would have voted for it, correct?

Yes, I was on record.

I said it just a few weeks ago actually,

particularly when the Margaret Ferrier situation came up.

We as a Parliament nominate people to go on these committees.

I'm nominated to go on the Scottish Fair Select Committee.

And I wouldn't expect MPs if we have significant recommendations like this to vote against it.

So I would have supported the recommendations of the committee.

So on that basis, you would agree with the committee that Johnson knowingly lied, misled Parliament?

Well, if that's their final outcome, and I'm just couching it because I haven't seen the report.

Of course, I understand that.

If you help me back on tomorrow and I've seen the report and I've read the report, presumably he wouldn't have resigned unless that was...

That's very likely, but we don't know if it's 10 days, 11 days, 20 days, etc. and the wording that they use.

And also, I think there are some discussions about, as you were saying, the most recent revelations as well.

I don't know if they're included or not in this Privileges Committee report.

But that's their conclusion and you would agree with that and then you would vote for it.

So you must see, you say they're separate,

but does it not make you feel uncomfortable or can you not see how the average member of the public

might feel about a man who his own peers have adjudged to have lied to them

and by extension of the country being allowed contemporaneously to appoint his friends to the House of Lords, his political operatives to the House of Lords for life.

You must see that that's a problem.

So you say, oh, we don't want to set a precedent.

This is an unprecedented situation.

We've never had a Prime Minister who's done this, not in recent history anyway.

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Sunak v Johnson: it's war

Yeah, but these nominations were made, of course, you know, before certainly he gave evidence to the committee and he gave it. Yeah, but he'd already lied.

The nominations were made after he lied.

No, but what I'm saying is there was still a due process to go through.

And there has been a process for these nominations to go through as well.

Again, I think you're happy with the Honours List.

No, no, look, what I'm saying is there is a precedent that Prime Ministers, when they leave absolutely uncharted times,

I'm just asking whether you are happy with the Boris Johnson resignation Honours List.

I accept that there is a precedent there that Prime Ministers, when they leave office, can nominate people in an Honours List.

And what I think is most important here is the current Prime Minister has been very clear today that he was asked to do something that would have been inappropriate in his mind, and he refused to do that.

And I think that is a very strong message from Rishi Sunak, in contrast to what we're seeing in Scotland,

which is a weak First Minister who is unable to and unwilling to stand up to his predecessor.

Do you think your colleagues tolerated Boris Johnson for too long, Douglas?

I mean, everyone know you all knew what he was like, didn't you?

Because you were one of the most skeptical people throughout.

So do you think your colleagues tolerated him for too long?

I think we've heard over the weekend,

even his harshest critics can also see there were, you know, points in his premiership where he led the country very well.

And indeed, actually much of the West, if you look at the response to Ukraine,

whatever people think about Boris Johnson or his individual politics,

we as a parliament united around his drive to support President Zelensky.

Again, others may argue this, but I think overseeing the vaccine rollout,

the speed at which we were able to do that here in the UK,

all parts of the UK, including Scotland,

is down to decisions he took as Prime Minister and his government.

You know, we're allowed to do that under the European Medicines Agency, don't you?

But we also know that the rollout was quicker here in the UK than the rest of Europe.

That's unquestioned.

By about 10 days.

Well, you know, that can save lives.

I'm not going to be particularly picky about that.

Others can be.

But I'm saying even his harshest critics can say there were elements of his time in office that you have to recognise,

but there are other points that were clearly not good enough.

And that's why he left office on the back of double figure resignations from within his own government.

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Sunak v Johnson: it's war

Douglas Ross, thank you.

Thank you.

You can hear in Douglas Ross the different ways he's being pulled, right?

On the one hand, he's got this tremendous potential political opportunity in Scotland.

He's got this difficulty in navigating what is happening in London,

because he can't really accuse the SMP of overseeing a complete psychodrama, right?

When this is going on in London,

just as Hums Yousef got in trouble for doing exactly the same thing,

the truth is both parties who were hegemonic until only very, very recently.

I mean, when I was last in this building, we were interviewing Nicola Sturgeon.

She was still completely imperial.

Now, here we are, barely six months later.

And not only is she out of office,

but she spent time in the company of his Majesty's police force

over the course of the last 24 hours.

I mean, they said politics was going to go back to normal.

There is clearly no sign of that whatsoever.

One silver lining, I think, for the SMP is this, we should say.

Although it's absolutely true to say this is hugely difficult for them to navigate,

they still remain despite everything, just about first in the polls.

Support for independence according to the polls has taken a bit of a knock,

but it's not a substantial, substantial knock,

which I think adverts to the fact that Scottish politics

over the course of the last 10 years has become so deeply polarised on the constitutional question

that even when the primary vehicle of Scottish independence, i.e. the SMP,

finds itself in such a mire, in such a deep set of political problems,

it doesn't necessarily yield, and we'll see what happens obviously,

but so far it hasn't necessarily yield in massive transference

on that primary constitutional question.

So although the prospect of independence anytime soon seems very distant,

the structural forces which have led to independence being such a dominant mode of thinking

within Scottish politics, that will probably endure,

which means it will be an ongoing structural problem for unionist parties

in Scotland in the years to come.

All I'd say Lewis is that our lot are novices, somebody who's been through 2500

court appearances at a cost of £200 million over 20 years,

been elected three times and fell guilty of multiple felonies.

We're marking the death of Silvio Berlusconi in all his bunga bunga glory.

His death was announced today at the age of 86.

This is The News Agents.

Welcome back, and before we go, I think it's fair to pay our due respect

to the man who made Partygate a thing long before we'd ever heard the term,

once Silvio Berlusconi, Italy's president, elected three times.

And the man who really paved the way in so many ways for the Donald Trumps,

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Sunak v Johnson: it's war

the Boris Johnson's, the Bolsonaro's that were to come.  
And I remember at the time seeing this, okay, I'm just going to say it,  
he was an Italian stallion.  
He was the man that Italian men wanted to be.  
He had the veneers, he had the tan, he had the hair transplants.  
He always refuted that he'd paid for prostitutes  
because he didn't like the idea of money changing hand,  
but he never denied that he'd actually slept with them.  
He was the one who told David Cameron that he needed to get himself a mistress  
to make meetings in Brussels less boring.  
He was the one who told Obama that he liked his tan.  
And I remember thinking at the time, just looking across at Italy,  
and it was in the Blair years, Blair and Berlusconi were weirdly quite close.  
And I remember thinking how incomprehensible it was  
that a country would ever elect somebody like that.  
You could sort of see why he might be a sort of fun person to have on a game show,  
but you couldn't imagine him as your leader.  
But clearly, Italy was just ahead of the fashion.  
They were ahead of us because he set down a pathway  
for the people like Donald Trump who were fearless  
in rejecting any kind of criticism of their way of life  
and Boris Johnson, who actually enacted so many of the Berlusconi traits in his own way,  
that fearlessness with the electorate and a real connection with the electorate  
that meant he could pretty much get away with anything.  
It is interesting that this man who made his money in construction  
and in media, who owned AC Milan, Italy's most popular football club,  
it is incredible in a way that a man was brought down not through any of the scandals  
or the zillion court cases or the multiple felonies,  
but because of the economy, because of the way that Italy at one point looked  
as if it would follow Greece in the Eurozone crisis.  
And he then retired as president, but came back as a senator,  
tried to help Giorgio Maloney, the populist president now on the right,  
but kept on going on about his friendship with Putin,  
which did not help her chances.  
Anyway, he was, I guess, the original party gate populist,  
Silvia Berlusconi, whose death was announced today.  
And we should remind you that tomorrow is a big day for us.  
It's the launch of news agents USA.  
And to help us along with that launch, Donald Trump has agreed to appear  
in a Miami courtroom on indictment charges of stolen documents.  
So we thought we'd send John.  
This is John and I'm not in news agents HQ.  
I'm at Heathrow Airport and about to board a flight to Miami.  
Now, you know how much Emily and I love US politics.

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Sunak v Johnson: it's war

And we were all set to launch news agents USA next week.

But there's this bloke who's appearing in court tomorrow called Donald Trump at the Miami federal courthouse downtown.

And we thought it will be a great idea to be there.

Now, the weekly podcast we're doing is where we unpack everything you need to know about the state of US politics.

And we were ready to launch next week until we got the news about the Donald having to appear in court on the most serious federal charges and the extraordinary position. I mean, extraordinary.

That in two years time, Donald Trump could either be in the White House, starting his second term, or in a federal prison cell, because the charges against him are that serious.

He faces 37 felony charges over squirreling away secret documents, not very well squirreled at Mar-a-Lago.

So I'm about to board the plane.

We're going to be doing a special news agents USA a week early with me in Miami, Emily in London, and we'll have all the bases covered.

We'll be back tomorrow in the usual feed.

And news agents USA will be marking every step of the way of that historic federal indictment of Donald Trump.

Bye for now.

This has been a Global Player original podcast and a Persephoneka production.