

[Transcript] The News Agents / The many lies of Boris Johnson

Well, choose your word, eviscerating, excoriating, damning, scathing.

One of them may be all four.

If this report is to be believed, Boris Johnson is in contempt and contemptible.

The Privileges Committee of the House of Commons.

The body, which the House of Commons itself asked to investigate the question of whether or not Boris Johnson knowingly misled MPs over Partigate, has found that he did, and then some, that he did so on multiple occasions, that he did so again after he stopped being Prime Minister to the committee's investigation, and has also found him in contempt of Parliament for the way he's described that committee and its work, condemning it as a so-called kangaroo court.

This has never happened before.

A Prime Minister has never been found to have knowingly misled Parliament, judged by his own peers.

One senior Conservative told me today, no one survives contact with Boris Johnson, including we now see Boris Johnson.

Welcome to the Newsagents.

The Newsagents.

It's Lewis in London.

It's John in London.

It's Emily at a tech conference just outside London.

Can we just labour over that just slightly, Emily?

I mean, you are, I think it's fair to say, one of the less techy people that I know, and they've got you there, haven't they?

That's nice.

I've been asking where the printer is and why it's broken.

So that's my contribution to technology in the digital age, yeah.

And John's just in from Miami, of course.

Well, let me give you two lyrics of a song.

Fluent from Miami Beach, BOAC, didn't get to bed last night.

And then they wrote it for you.

Clearly.

Clearly.

The clear people always have me.

I thought that was pitiful.

The fifth people, the little known fifth people, John Sobel.

Right.

OK, anyway, we've got to get on with this.

An absolutely amazing, extraordinary day.

We sort of knew that it was coming.

But I think what this report, the Privileges Committee report, has taken everybody by surprise in terms of the tone, but also in terms of the punishment.

Had Boris Johnson not resigned as an MP on Friday, and of course he knew this was coming and that's why he did it, they would have suspended him.

The committee has said for 90 days for knowingly misleading Parliament and being in contempt

of Parliament.

And the reason that they've said that this is the case is because they have looked at all of the things that he told MPs at the time.

They have examined what Johnson said before the committee back in March, I think it was. And they have judged that there is simply no way that Boris Johnson, as the Prime Minister at that time, fully knowledgeable of, cognizant of, conversant in, the rules and guidelines as they existed for the public at large, could possibly have thought that the things that he saw and knew about in Downing Street were adhering to the rules.

And therefore, when he said in the Commons, things like guidance was followed in Downing Street at all times, that there were no parties, et cetera, et cetera, that he wasn't telling the truth and that therefore he knowingly misled MPs.

And the crucial thing to remember here, this was a seven-person committee of MPs, it was majority conservative, there were four conservatives, all Brexiters, and the committee's conclusions were unanimous.

And that has been very important because there was a suggestion that this could have split, you know, 4-3 or whatever, and that that would have damaged the legitimacy and credibility of the report.

The fact that it is unanimous means that its legitimacy and credibility is augmented and is all the more powerful.

And also, this committee was set up, Boris Johnson was fully cognizant, no one said, oh, this shouldn't happen and this is going to be a kangaroo call, everyone was behind it.

Not a single MP voted against it.

When they, the Commons, asked the Provincial Justice Committee to investigate Johnson, while Johnson was Prime Minister, not a single MP, they didn't even have to vote because no one objected.

Yes.

And so the problem comes is, oh, but you've reached the conclusion that I don't like.

And so therefore, you suddenly start saying, this committee that I was fully acquiescent in establishing, I now declare is a kangaroo court because you've ruled against me.

And I think that sticks in the craw of an awful lot of people.

The other thing that we've seen today in this report, and maybe it's not surprising because we knew what went on in Downing Street and what the culture was when Boris was Prime Minister, but reading about the four o'clock drinks parties on Friday, how well organized they were, where they would meet in the vestibule, people had it on their calendars that this was going to be happening, that there were no rules except to say, if you're going to be caught on camera, please behave well.

And that was the culture.

I think it's also worth putting this into a historic context because for all this talk of it being a kangaroo court, this sort of stuff is so rare.

He is one of two MPs since 1931 to have faced suspension for more than 30 days.

We now know the recommendation would have been 90 if he hadn't already quit.

And if you think back to somebody like Dawn Butler or Ian Blackford, they were suspended just for calling somebody a liar in the Commons.

So this committee and the way that parliament takes it seriously is pretty profound.

So this is not something that a privileges committee would have done likely.

The other thing I think we should mention is that the committee also found Boris Johnson complicit in a campaign of abuse and attempted intimidation of the committee.

That was on page 224, further significant contempt.

Now look, if you break that down and you look at what they're doing now, because the privileges committee said it will also publish soon a separate special report on this seemingly coordinated attempt to undermine the committee's credibility and more worrying that of the member serving on it, they were looking for security around this time once Boris Johnson had outed, if you like, what he'd found.

That is a prime minister who is being accused of potentially inciting violence against other MPs. It is insane.

And I think the other thing to bear in mind as well is that some people, as we say, have been surprised by the extent of the sanction 90 days.

I think the thing to remember is, is it's pretty clear, I can't know for sure, but it's pretty clear looking at the language that that sanction was extended because of the way Johnson behaved and the way that Johnson has tried to impugn in their words, the workings of the committee.

He wasn't just saying, look, I will accept whatever you say.

And he even said at the time back in March, when they said, will you accept the outcome of this committee? And he just said, well, I can't imagine that you would find against me. So there will be no problem. And they said that they suspended him or would have suspended him because of his repeated contempt and seeking to undermine the parliamentary process.

And the thing to remember is, it isn't just the initial misleading of the house.

Their point is the way to break it down. There are three problems. There's the initial misleading of the house when he was prime minister. Then they say that the way he justified himself in front of the committee back in March was so disingenuous, i.e. he was trying to retrofit rules in retrospect, basically saying, oh, no, that's not how actually they were understood. It's not how they were applied and so on. So he was being disingenuous and misleading the committee itself. And then on top of that, the way he's been describing the committee is itself a contempt of parliament. So you've got three charges essentially against him, each of which unprecedented for a prime minister and of the utmost severity.

Boris Johnson has issued a statement. I just want to kind of read you some highlights of it because for me, having just as you said, Lewis flown in from Miami and Donald Trump's court appearance. I mean, just listen to this and just imagine Donald Trump saying it. This report is a charade. This is a dreadful day for MPs and for democracy. This is beneath contempt. What we're seeing is intended to be the final knife thrust in a protracted political assassination. This is exactly the playbook of people who are caught. And Donald Trump has been saying exactly the same thing. In bedmints, they're at his golf club the night after he appeared in court on 37 charges, rejecting the legitimacy of the case put to him. And here we have Boris Johnson, maybe a little more articulate, maybe with a bit more rhetorical flourish saying exactly the same things. What you keep hearing is the committee exposing in their actual writing the sort of stuff that Boris Johnson has said. So they say in the report, he made his support for the committee conditional on a favorable report. I mean, we kind of get that, but they actually wrote it down. That is the sort of language that is the sort of position that we see Trump in so often. You

believe in something until it doesn't quite suit your own narrative or your own story. And then suddenly you turn against it. And I was talking to a conservative here who told me that he thinks it is totally terminal for Boris. And it was really odd the language that he used because he said when he used to bounce around being clever and being funny, he took people with him. But now he's nasty and bitter. Everyone's lost sympathy. Where's the humor? And he has turned into that most unfortunate thing, which is the unpopular populist. And it's this sense that when Boris isn't being funny or isn't being optimistic, he actually loses for many of his colleagues, his parliamentary colleagues, his identity. It's sort of like the stag party that all seems hilarious when you're tying people naked to a lamp post and then something goes wrong. And then no one wants to be a part of that adventure anymore. Everyone leaves.

Well, let's just remind ourselves of some of the exchanges back during that committee. And I think it gave a flavor of what was to come. I am here to say to you hand on heart that I did not lie to the House, but it never occurred to me, or I think the current Prime Minister at the time, that the event was not in compliance with the rules that the press conferences over this period you regularly repeated the phrase, hands, face, space. So there could be no doubt that you understood

what the guidance and rules meant and were intended to achieve. Yes or no? Yes. Thank you.

The question is whether what you said about this particular way of thanking your staff in the House of Commons was strictly accurate. The guidance does not say you can have a thank you party.

I believed that this event was not only reasonably necessary, but it was essential for work purposes. But another witness stated that they couldn't get through the room to leave

because people were standing four to five people deep. Is there any reason why we should disbelieve that? People who say that we were partying in lockdown simply do not know what they are talking about. So why did you tell the House all guidance was followed completely in number 10?

Nobody came to me and said we've got a problem with this one. Did any government law officer or any member of the government legal department, did any one of those give you the assurance?

The short answer is no, they didn't. We would be entitled to be a bit dismayed about the flimsy nature of this assurance when we took it at face value that these assurances amounted to something and it looks from what you've told us in answer to Mr. Koss's questions that they did not amount to much at all. So you can hear there the skepticism from the committee. I think we should just analyse what Johnson's defence is and it was at the time and it remains and how to be honest how hollow it is. His defence and that of his supporters continues to be the committee cannot know what was in my mind. They cannot know that I was going to the House of Commons think right I'm going to lie about this because there's no and he keeps saying there's not a shred of evidence there's not a piece of evidence anywhere well of course there isn't you know of course there isn't a piece of paper which says I'm going to lie about this now I mean that would be absurd. The committee's point is there is more than enough evidence from the time there is more than enough ability to link what he was saying at the time what we can assume that he knew at the time from his own statements at the time to draw enough dots to get to the point where like any court this isn't a court it's a political procedure but like any court the key phrase is beyond reasonable doubt it is really beyond as we all know reasonable doubt that Johnson wasn't aware of what was going

on and something that the report highlights again and again which I think he's absolutely crucial and they return to is had and they said it at the time at the committee had a member of the public

phoned into one of those Downing Street press conferences and said I'm a boss I'm responsible for key workers I think it's really important that I keep the morale up by having leaving parties and so on and so forth is that okay was it ever credible that Boris Johnson at that podium would have turned around and said absolutely that's fine I'm doing it myself no not a chance not a chance and so it's simply stretch credulity and logic beyond breaking point that he could not have known and then you add all sorts of other things into the mix for example advice that he received from his one of his civil servants at the time saying don't say that all guidance has been followed and he goes to the Commons and blow him down blow everybody down he does it anyway yes but we don't know what was exactly in his mind in that short car journey from number 10 Downing Street to the entrance to the House of Commons yeah yeah I spoke to a friend of

his actually on that exact line and he said he just thinks he can't actually help himself that he mishandles the truth that was the phrase he used he's just got a difficulty managing the truth and it would have been I mean this was the friend talking it would have been in his mind that he should take out the line following advice from his advisor but 10 minutes later half an hour later pop it goes back in it just comes out of his mouth and I think that is a sort of entry into the Boris Johnson psyche that if he thinks it feels right he will say it even if he's been told otherwise there is another point in all of this one is about the damage this does to the reputation of parliament and the faith that we voters have in our institutions where you start banding around phrases like kangaroo court and the like but it's just one other thing to remember while we are talking about the lies and the dissembling and the falsehood if everything was so clean and transparent why did Downing Street go to such strenuous arduous lengths to lie to journalists when they started to investigate what might have happened inside Downing Street and but for the tenacity of a couple of journalists one in particular we may never have found out about anything the journalist in question is Pippa Creera who was then the political editor of The Daily Mirror now the political editor of The Guardian newspaper and she was the one who badgered away who wouldn't give up who kept on pressing and eventually blew

open the story with the consequences that we've had and Pippa it's great to have you with us can you believe where we've ended up it actually feels very bizarre I mean I reflected back on the end of November 2021 when I was trying to get a story over the line about Downing Street parties and how difficult that was in the face of obfuscation and denials and in fact lies from number 10 at the time and then eventually we reached a position we were able to publish and even that very first day the first revelation that became the party gate scandal I was bumping into MPs and colleagues around Parliament who were sort of saying oh you know great story but you know

I don't think it's really going to cut through with the public or where does it go from here what's the impact going to be and then we fast forward all this time and so much has happened as a result of it it kind of like because the reports themselves kept coming for myself and indeed from others Johnson was on the ropes it's astonishing really sort of reflect now on how it all started and actually what the impact of it all has been. Pippa I think that's a really important point that we've got to keep reminding people of right which is that yes the committee today is affirming that Boris Johnson misled knowing the misled Parliament that he lied he misled Parliament as well even when he was asked about it as part of the committee hearing but this is

part of a pattern right number 10 consistently lied about what happened to you to lots of other journalists I remember working on stories asking them about stuff they categorically denied it later turned out to be true this was part of a pattern of Johnson's number 10. Yeah and the tone is set from the top isn't it both in terms of the approach to the rules in Downing Street at that time and also in their response to them and it is very much Johnson's modus operandi when faced with the difficult story and I think it's well we've all seen this over years of covering him in various different political roles it's very much his response when we faced with the difficult story to kind of like to double down to deny to deflect to try and kind of wriggle his way out of it because he had successfully managed to wriggle his way out of so many difficult situations up until that point it was quite clear he thought that he could do the same again and we saw that with very early responses which came out in the earlier batch of evidence from the Privileges Committee in March but when first faced with our allegations from Bennett the Daily Mirror he was kind of like oh you know it's trivial and the response was you know just sort of let's let's try and reason it out and the journalists will get bored and go away well clearly that didn't happen I mean it's a series of miscalculations on Johnson's part I wonder whether there'll be a feeling that the committee's findings are so harsh 90-day suspension if he'd been there that actually it will kind of have a counterproductive effect well people will say well I didn't think we should go that far I think to us of what the committee's getting at though is that he was given countless opportunities to clarify what has gone on and to show a degree of remorse for you know if he had unintentionally misled the house to do so and even I think at the moment where he corrected the record they felt that he wasn't being genuine in that and in fact misled the house further and you know I really feel that talking to people out of the real world that if Boris Johnson that very first stage stood up and said look yeah this stuff was happening in Downing Street but you know we're so sorry it was really difficult time everyone was under intense pressure it could have turned out very differently and there was multiple opportunities most recently in his response to getting the findings last week where he could have responded differently and instead he repeatedly made the situation worse for himself and you know further breaches and that's why the committee's reached the point of such a serious sanction now there is of course a body of opinion in the Tory party and no doubt beyond in the country that thinks that this has been too harsh a punishment for him but you know let's not forget him that actually quit with him that decided to stand down as an MP rather than waiting for the judgment of his peers or indeed his own electorate in his former constituency and it's so far and this may change with time seems to be the same old Boris Johnson allies sticking their heads above the parapet to argue that he's been hard done by rather than the vast majority of Tory MPs that frankly just want to enter this saga. Pippa thanks so much. Thanks very much for having me. I don't want to be hyperbolic and I don't want to blow bubbles in Pippa Krera's direction but in American journalism they talk about Woodward and Bernstein the people who brought down a president

Pippa Krera and her journalism started a ball rolling that has brought down a prime minister. Yeah it's astonishing as you say just as Woodward and Bernstein brought down Nixon over Watergate.

I think this in the end will be remembered in some of the terms and studied in the same way and it is an astonishing achievement but I think as ever and I've talked to Pippa about this because I know a bit I think that there is always that tension within journalism and that sort of incredibly

fine journalism right which is that on the one hand yes this would not have happened had you not uncovered it but on the other hand I think she says this and I think Woodward and Bernstein sort of said similar things ultimately it's not the journalist who brings you down as a politician it's the politician who brings the politician down it's their actions and that's still something to this day Johnson unlike Nixon actually and maybe Johnson will get to this point as Nixon did Johnson clearly has not in any way even begun that process of self-analysis. Nixon to some extent did it with the famous Frost Nixon interviews where he just alluded to that he didn't apologize for Watergate but he said yep I let people down that took some years but Johnson as we see from his reaction on Friday his reaction today his reaction and his words at the committee hearings themselves he's not even begun that process and maybe he never will. A difference though between Nixon, Watergate and what Pippa has done is that with Nixon and Watergate on the Washington Post

Woodward and Bernstein had deep throat you know they would meet deep throat this source in a car park in Arlington just across the Potomac from Washington DC. Pippa didn't seem to have a deep throat she just ferreted and dug and persisted and carried on and was being fobbed off but she got the story over the line and from that so much has cascaded. And coming up in a few moments we're

going to be hearing from one of those defenders of Boris Johnson David Campbell Bannerman. They're

still out there. This is The News Agents. Welcome back and just looking at the reaction to what's happened today Labour's deputy leader won't surprise you Angela Raynor calling Boris Johnson a lawbreaker and a liar a pound shop trump and raising the whole question of why the public were paying for his legal defence when she says he's a lawbreaker and a liar. Caroline Lucas a slightly more nuanced response this one green MP and she says I feel oddly emotional reading this report overwhelming relief and gratitude that at least the goddamn truth's being told the collective gaslighting of a nation is over and I think that's really interesting because I'm not saying that the privileges committee did anything but their impartial best on the facts they had we have to believe that if we believe in the power and the integrity of parliament this is if you like the highest court of the highest court in the land parliament. But I do think if you look at the reception to this report there is something more widely felt which is not just about parties or the lies he told in December of 21 but of all the other misdemeanours if you like which people have laid at Boris Johnson's door over the past decades the way he's been careless with the truth careless of people around him dissembling over the Brexit campaign even his reasons for backing the leaf campaign his handling of Covid and his sense that the parties didn't matter that it wasn't really important whether or not they had taken place because he was doing bigger things not actually at one with the people that he represented and it does feel more generally like the national psyche is going through this deep exhalation of a held breath from many who felt he had long had this coming and I think that that is not particularly comfortable if we're honest but it is very tangible today. He also engenders still tremendous power over people who are supporters and although his supporters in parliament are fewer in number than they were they're still there. I mentioned Jacob Rees-Mogg so Jacob Rees-Mogg I

suppose if the honest list is still going through and he had something to say about this earlier as well. I'm in touch with Boris. And how is he? I mean is he furious? He's not defeated but he's

definitely not defeated no. Is this not the knockout blow? Of course it's not okay you know the worst thing that happened with this if it fell on your foot it might give you a bruise but no more than that. I mean so Jacob you're saying just to be clear that you don't think that this signals the end of Boris Johnson the end of his political career that he has been so compromised. Oh no no no I'm afraid this has the effect of making those people who don't like Boris Johnson dislike him a bit more and those who do like him think that the privileged committee has made mistakes. Do you think he'll be back or attempt to come back to parliament before the next general election? Not before the next election. That's Jacob Rees-Mogg talking to Beth Rigby. What I would say is that actually this is a good day good day for parliament and actually for the Conservative party as well. It's a good day for parliament because what has happened is parliament has reaffirmed its cardinal principle which is you do not lie you do not mislead to the House of Commons and future ministers future prime ministers will be very cognizant and aware of what has happened today in the future so it will be good for parliamentary standards in the future and it's good for the Conservative party too because you know what this reaffirms the wisdom of Conservative MPs this time last year not even 12 months ago when they got rid of Boris Johnson because just imagine the nightmare scenario that there would be now if Boris Johnson was still prime minister the privileged committee had found what it found and he tried to fight it not from outside parliament not from wherever the hell he's going now but from inside the walls and power centre that is 10 Downing Street. Yeah it's hard to imagine how things could be much worse really for the Conservative party at the moment with so many different people pulling in different directions and so many factions at each other's throats but as you say Lewis if this had come to a head now it would have been just mayhem and relatively close to a general election well let's hear some of the voices now of conservatives who've been in the front line of politics who have taken very sharp views on this Gavin Barwell was an MP he then lost his seat and became chief of staff to Theresa May so Gavin what do you make of it all? No I mean the report is absolutely damning I haven't been able to read the whole document yet but it feels to me Lewis that the punishment that they've come up with has been increased as a result of his behaviour on Friday and over the weekend the sort of campaign of intimidation they refer to against members of the committee so I they said that if it hadn't been for Friday the punishment would still have been over 20 days suspension or over 10 days sorry suspension but they didn't give the explicit figure and then the implication was they'd increased it as a result of his behaviour on Friday. Do you think there is a danger that sympathy starts flowing in Boris's direction that his accusations of a kangaroo court and this isn't just this will be heightened by the severity of the punishment that the Privileges Committee has recommended? I hope not I mean I said I haven't had a chance to go through all the paper yet but if you look at some of the first-hand evidence that's been published and some of the redacted statements from number 10 officials it confirms all of our worst fears about the culture in number 10 during that period and you know I think Monday's vote is a huge test for the Conservative Party how many of its MPs are actually going to stand up for proprietary in public life and back their colleagues on the committee this week you know I know both of you know this but it does bear repeating that a majority of the members of the Privileges Committee were conserved to MPs so Boris Johnson is alleging not only his political opponents but also his own MPs have all got it in for him. I just think that this is so extraordinary the situation

we found ourselves in that there is no roadmap there are no precedents that one can go back on and say well yeah I mean but this is what's always happened this is a totally unique set of circumstances and I just wonder whether there are other things as well I mean you know Boris's pension you can keep cascading down this day in the Conservative Party should he be kicked out of the Conservative Party you know what should happen about the legal fees that have been paid for by us the taxpayers for him overall of this there are a lot of questions. Yeah I think the questions about his own personal position are those the ones that I think are right to pursue because ultimately the report is a judgment on him and the way that he has behaved. The committee itself makes the point very powerfully as you say John that there's no precedent for this we've never before had a prime minister of this country found to have deliberately misled the house and you know if you go on Twitter there's a whole lot of people saying oh this was just all about eating a bit of birthday cake you know actually this is a very very serious thing it cuts to the absolute core of our democracy about whether we can trust what ministers say at the dispatch box and you will both know that virtually every minister that has stood there and answered questions has from time to time said something inadvertently that was wrong and there is a very well known process by which you address that you come back you apologize to the house you correct the record so the seriousness of what's happened you're quite right should not be underestimated. One final thing Gavin do you think you talk about his the questions around him personally. Keir Starmer took action against former leader Jeremy Corbyn because he brought the Labour party into disrepute over anti-Semitism clearly Boris Johnson is bringing not only Parliament but the Conservative Party into disrepute. I mean do you think that Rishi Sunak ought to look at his membership of the Conservative Party and the question and all the question about whether he should ever be allowed to stand for Parliament again. I think that latter question is the key one if the House of Commons confirms the judgment of the privileges committee on Monday you know that it's really difficult I think to see how the Conservative Party could allow him to be a candidate again at least until Lewis there's some contrition and that he recognizes what he's done wrong what I think makes this even worse is that he is continuing to deny the facts and to very aggressively you know criticize them some of his own colleagues and other members of the House that have made this judgment and until he at least recognizes he's done wrong and accepts that then I think it's very difficult to see how he could be a candidate for the Conservative Party again. Well Gavin Barwell thanks so much. Pleasure. So Gavin Barwell one Boris Johnson shouldn't be allowed to stand as an MP again and two people should not be paying his legal fees you know this is everyone polarizes you don't get the person in the street who goes yeah Boris yeah I'm not sure really. Barwell used to be a fan of Johnson as well but when he was mayor of London he was a Croydon MP so it's not like he's a big sort of long-time nemesis as he would always say himself used to be a fan of the mayor of London Boris not so much a fan of this Boris. The person that Boris Johnson is a big fan of as we all know is Winston Churchill his idol and the best line I read on Twitter today was that Churchill returned to lead the country in a national emergency and Boris Johnson misled the country in a national emergency if that is widespread then it is really kind of the end. But there are still friends and there are still friends who wish to be vocal in their support of Boris Johnson and one of them is David Campbell Bannerman a former conservative MEP and he's now head of something called the CDO the

Conservative Democratic Organization a new grouping that's causing trouble for Sunak. David Campbell Bannerman first of all your reaction to the Privileges Committee report. Well I'm absolutely appalled to be honest I mean you know the sanction of 90 days against Boris is 10 times what Margaret Ferrier got for imperiling hundreds of lives on a train going up to Glasgow it's disproportionate it's very unprofessional I mean any court the law would not allow a judge to be tweeting well the defendant's guilty three times as Harriet Harman did in this committee

so there are real problems with the way this whole thing is being conducted.

Are you saying this is a kangaroo court are you saying this is a stitch up put it in your words?

Yeah I think I came up with the phrase actually as the first to use kangaroo court I think it's worse than that now John with this this punishment I think it's actually Stalinist this is about trying to destroy a democratically elected prime minister in a very popular figure through extreme penalties and sanctions on what basis well you know they never prove as Lord Panik who advised Gina Miller against Boris by the way you know his lawyer is that there's no evidence of this there's no evidence that he willfully misled there's evidence he misled but he was badly advised and you know he took the advice and the lines to take of his advisors you know that's not the question the question is did he do it deliberately or recklessly which they made up there's another allegation they made up or charge there's no legal basis to that.

Your contention I think isn't it and Boris Johnson and other supporters is this is an attempt to undermine him and an attempt to undermine the Brexit project is that right?

Yes I do that was in his statement and I do believe that ever since he won that referendum you know they've been out to get him and bring him down and I've got some evidence of that.

Sure okay but then given that all of the conservative MPs on it remember that it's a conservative majority committee our supporters of Brexit why would they be trying to do that?

I'm not sure they are all supporters of Brexit I mean Bernard Jenkins but you know he's according to Guido Fawkes he was involved in a allegedly in a lockdown drinks party during that.

That's where but that's separate Bernard Jenkins is one of the most avowed supporters of Brexit for 30 years he was championing it long before it was fashionable long before Boris Johnson did by the way. He was a bit of a critical on the Maastricht rebellion I seem to think but

but actually no I like Bernard. Oh hang on I was a political correspondent then

he was very much part of the Maastricht rebellion he was a young MP then and he was very much involved. Yeah well he did he did in the end do the right thing Bernard but it but look the point is when it comes to this he's got a personal animus it seems against Boris which is deeply regretful and I don't know what the basis is but he's known to dislike him. Okay when they say like four conservatives well how many are pro-Boris of these people honestly you know they're all seem to be pretty anti-Boris but you can't you can't have a jury selection panel where you swear people into that be the judge of this and say are you pro or anti-Boris you listen to the evidence. You're saying because they're tourists they should automatically be on the side of Boris. When not a single conservative MP when back in to in April 2022 when Boris Johnson was still prime minister when the House voted or divided on whether or not this committee should be set up and the composition of it and so on not a single Boris Johnson supporting MP de Maas the House didn't even divide so if there were such concerns and such problems about this process why didn't anyone say so at the time the fact is people like you and his supporters don't like it because they've come to a conclusion that you don't approve of. No it's the conduct of it I mean

you know having the privileged committee is an established procedure of the parliament fair enough but you know having a chair that allegedly was talking to Sue Gray before the inquiry who who's now been exposed as actually being very close put it that way to the leader of the opposition. She's not closely to the opposition but there's a separate question here are you aware of moves you'll be aware of this you know your chair of the CDO the conservative democratic organization are you aware of any moves against these MPs on the committee the conservative MPs to possibly look at deselecting them? Well I've heard rumors of Bernard Jenkins yeah a vote of no confidence in Harwich and North Essex I'm hearing that I don't know that sounds pretty Stalinist what would you think of that? Well he's responsible he represents the members of that constituency it's up to them and I'm not saying I don't know if they are or not to be honest but I mean let's if people read so I just want to say so you've complained of Stalinism and yet you seem to be kind of quietly supporting a Stalinist purge of the members of the committee. It's not Stalinist the purge them though it's not right to be helped by the members you know I'm not saying it's going to happen but I've heard rumors of it and every member has the right to bring deselectional vote of no confidence. Would you support it would you support it? Yes I would actually the point about a vote of no confidence is is to hold the MP to account it may not go through it but it's only you will shake them up a bit and they'll have to answer some very tough questions like were you in a lockdown drinks party and then go on to be high and mighty in the privileges committee. So you use the very interesting sentence there it is not Stalinist to purge people. Yes I mean well I'm saying I didn't I think I quite said that it's not Stalinist. I think you did. No I mean look they're responsible to the members and the members I can say CDO has been inundated today with members absolutely furious about what's happened to Boris. These are Tory party members most of them card carrying you know and this is big trouble for Rishi Sunak you know he's losing the party big time now he was losing before the local elections haven't helped so I think it's Sunak that is under the spotlight here and needs to act appropriately. Should Sunak lead the Conservatives into the next election? No I don't think he should I mean I don't want to lose the next election he's we finally go with him he's actually had more time than Boris had when he took over the disaster of the party after Theresa May in June 2019 and Boris actually won the general election in December 2019 with as we know the best results of 1987. Sunak's had more time to do that and I'm afraid we're minor 15 16 percent in the polls we're looking at a worse result than 1997 which I remember rather painfully from my own political experience. Do you think that Boris Johnson will try and stand again do you think he should stand again and do you think it should be for the Conservative Party or perhaps a different political force? Well that's an interesting question Lewis you know it depends if central office block him if he as I understand it he's on the Conservative candidate list as a former MP he could put his name in for Henley where he's got a house now I don't know I'm in beds I think it's passed but I mean the point is he can be resurrected through a by-election in another seat and come back as a Conservative but I think in that scenario it's extremely interesting what happens next who rallies around him or not and we'll go from there. Do you think there could be a split there should be a split? Well I don't welcome

a certain Conservative Party but I certainly want to win the next election I think the consequences for Brexit I think Starmer despite all his vague assurances would try and reverse Brexit you know getting close to the EU whatever that means Brexit is in danger and you know taxes are already high enough under Rishi Sunak's budgets the highs in 70 years we don't want them going any higher thanks to Starmer and their miracle cures so there's a real threat to the Conservative Party yes and I do think though that Boris would turn things around I mean it's a remarkable campaigner the red wall is already like 20% down the latest poll show. David do you never worry do you never worry and your supporters or fellow supporters of Boris Johnson I mean it's not as if the guys are saints is it the guy has got a track record of lying we all know that everybody knew that when he became

Prime Minister has he ever occurred has he ever occurred to you I mean are you 100% certain that he's not lying now look a lot of people allege he's lied about certain things I think the thing with Boris he's actually a nice guy if you know him well he might be nice but he's definitely a record of his he's a rogue isn't he he tries to please people he doesn't like to upset them all confront them so much so they assume that he said something he hasn't I think so when he lied to Michael Howard

for example that that was definitely true we know that well I think that was that was a journalist but you know Jake has raised Mark I asked this question he's never lied to Jacob jakes are very straight how does he know how does he know I mean it's what I say are you 100% certain he's not lying

now no I don't think he is lying now I mean there is a willfully misleading he did but you know thanks to bad advice he did end up misleading parliament about the reality but he didn't know the reality and that came later and he has apologized for that but you know the criteria has to be greater than that for this committee and they failed in that criteria and that is why it's such an unjust verdict so just sketch to me what you think the future of the conservative party is what needs to happen what are the steps that need to be made well I mean what members cry

through CDO and by the way CDO does not bring back Boris there are people that don't want Boris back in CDO but we're about party democracy but what they want is recognisable conservative policies you know putting up corporation tax six percent in one go is not a conservative policy Jeremy Hunt and that was that was going to happen under Boris Johnson by the way I mean a lot of these policies were Boris Johnson's policies whenever she stood up as chancellor well he was Johnson wasn't he uh Sunak yeah and Johnson was brown continually for three years or more versus Sunak so he carries a lot of responsibility for this I mean actually a lot of these disclosures recently have shown that Boris was pushing for more conservative policies such as lower taxes and there was resistance from the treasury which again get the trails going back to Sunak so never Boris's fault hey David no nothing ever no look don't you feel that a lot of excuses made for this guy look everyone knows Boris has got flaws he's the lovable character the public know he's got flaws they're not stupid but they know what they're getting and you know I helped him in London when he was mayor and I was talking only my whole team was only talking to Lib Dem and Labour backers and I thought is it we got this wrong but no we were actually tasked to speak to them and they said oh we don't normally vote conservatives but we do vote for Boris and that's what happened in the red wall and that's why the red wall is minus 20% polling for the conservatives now it's because of the lack of Boris sorry let me just ask you this finally

do you think Boris is dead and done or he can come back oh he can come back there's no question how he comes back is a moot point but I think a by-election in what capacity a conservative hopefully they've not if he's blocked an independent conservative and with the support of many members

right around the country I think you will find extraordinary support for him so he's still very much in play and I think it will emerge from this a lot stronger actually David thank you so much nice talking to you both so Emily's back with us and I think she listened to pretty much all of that interview what I would say about that is this just shows how fractured the conservative party is what deep trouble they're in there will be a lot of willingness within the parliamentary party to try and draw a line under this and move on the appeal of Johnson among the conservative grassroots is to some extent overestimate we know that from the conservative members polling but there is still a significant portion who do back in and Campbell Bannerman who's a perfectly amiable kind of guy but he reminds me so much of a kind of posh version even posh version arguably of so much of the old hard left and some of the arguments that we even saw from elements in the Corbyn years where everything is always about being an authentic conservative in their case authentically a socialist that there is a sort of actually ironically enough there is a witch hunt in the other direction against people who don't conform to this imaginary version of being what a true conservative is and in this case it's even worse than that because what you can say about the old hard left and the debates in the Labour Party is at least generally speaking that was about genuine ideology and it was about ideas this isn't about that this is about one man and one man's cult of personality and a shadow that the conservative party cannot escape look go back to Tony Ben it's about the issues not the personalities and that was his mantra all the way through this is Campbell Bannerman saying on the one hand Rishi Sunak has got to go and on the other side we've heard from Gavin Barwell in this episode saying Boris Johnson must never be allowed to stand as a Tory MP again the divisions are absolutely stark and the toxic division among about personality they all loathe each other and that is what comes through in these kind of two interviews that we've just done now and that is really dangerous they've started hating each other more than they hate the opposition and that is always the most dangerous moment for any party I would just say I don't think genuinely there are that many David Campbell Bannerman's left I was talking to a former minister who was sort of talking about the kind of support he thought the vote would get on Monday and he said remember last time Boris tried to vote against the government

and that was over something of policy of substance this the Windsor framework he only got 20 and he

thinks it could be fewer than half that this time round now obviously we don't know there might just be abstentions there might be people who don't feel they can go against Boris Johnson but actually don't want to vote against him but even Jacob Rees-Mogg just now in a radio interview was saying he would probably vote against the report probably now if that is the strongest you're getting from somebody who you would have thought was always constantly at Boris Johnson's side with Nadine Doris I'm not sure that we're talking about a massive split anymore yes in the wider conservative party in the membership in the grassroots in the local conservative quarters around the country maybe you're feeling that but in parliamentary terms I feel it's much much smaller than that now I mean in terms of what this means for Sunak and obviously that there is a going to be a big day on Monday now I think as we were hearing from Gavin Barwell there are real questions about whether

or not Johnson should be allowed to stand again at least for the duration of of this parliament there are questions for the wider conservative party I mean let's never forget I mean Sunak was his chancellor they all knew what this guy was like everyone knew as we were saying to David Campbell Bannon there are a lot of enablers a lot of people saying today oh my word how could any of this happened I mean come on we know how it happened we knew that to some extent it was always going to end like this and again in terms of the political consequences it is just yet another day when instead of Sunak getting to set the agenda instead of the government getting to set the agenda the big advantage the big trump card you have when you're the government is you get to set the agenda you have tremendous power over the conversation when was the last time Sunak was able to exercise that when was the last time the government had a day when they got to say something when they set the political terms instead it is still being set for them by Sunak's predecessor but one and you know we all know what's going to happen next Johnson is going to get a column whether it's in the telegraph or in the mail he's going to I mean he's right it might be in parliamentary terms he doesn't have big numbers but the pull he has on conservative media the right-wing media the wider conservative family and conversation he will throw bomb after bomb after bomb at number 10 Downing Street and again it will just be difficult for Sunak to consistently set those terms. Lewis on that point there is a rumour going on here and don't forget it's a very rarefied environment it's basically a tech conference a founders conference but there is the spark of a rumour that maybe Boris Johnson will leap in and buy the telegraph so you know start with a column buy the whole thing it's up for grabs it's not impossible one thing I would just say is and I'm sure we have made over the weeks and months these trumpite comparisons one very unfortunately one is that we wished Donald Trump happy birthday on yesterday's episode because he just got back from his indictment in Miami. We didn't sing it though we didn't sing it I think we missed an opportunity he'll be very angry about that but here is the parallel Monday the day of the vote is you've guessed it Boris Johnson's birthday. You know what's a tragedy for Johnson assuming let's just imagine for a moment this is the end of his political career at least within the conservative party mainstream conservative party the tragedy for Johnson the conservative party is that Johnson could have been a Macmillan he could have been the sort of person who was genuinely able to change the conservative party's ideological direction he had a moment in 2019 where he won all these different seats there was a different version of political economy there was a truly post-thatcherite vision of conservatism one of the ironies of the right coming to his defense the whole time is this guy is not particularly right on loads and loads of things he's pretty wet in the old drive versus wet conservative analogy the guy is you know in conservative party terms in lots of ways pretty centrist as he described himself he was a kind of brexity hezza referring to Michael Heseltine he had a genuine opportunity to transform the conservative party for the long term and he blew it he didn't end up as Macmillan he ended up as Eden the guy who lied to the commons okay well i'm going to make a different political comparison because

what Tories have clung to in the present circumstances and all the upheavals that there have been over the past you know year and a half is that actually this could be a rerun of 1992 when they got rid of Thatcher John Major comes in and John Major against all the odds

wins with a small majority against Neil Kinnock it won't be 97 when Blair won with an absolute landslide to me this is feeling like John Major circa 1996 when people think he is hapless he is helpless he is not able to control the agenda initiatives that he starts go wrong Rishi Sunak has come up with his five pledges are they going to meet them on getting rid of the backlog of asylum seekers are they going to get inflation down by a half all these things and the party tearing itself to pieces and you don't need huge numbers to have the perception that the Tory party is tearing itself to pieces and then you had the right-wing press turning on John Major in a really dramatic way and you know you've just described the situation Emily the possibility of Boris buying the telegraph and it could easily become the situation where Boris becomes our leader abroad Rishi is this hopeless prime minister that we've got we're going to turn our fire on him and for Keir Starmer you sit back and enjoy the show I do think there is that sense the 96 97 and I'm not talking about electoral numbers now but I'm talking about national mood a sense of end of days that every day every week another story breaks it's another scandal remember

this was sort of back to basics age where all that had to happen was you'd catch another you know conservative with their pants down or whatever people cared about in those days and it just felt like another nail in the same coffin banging endlessly on John Major's head and I think there is that feel at the moment that people are exhausted you know they're frankly exhausted they've run out of road and there is a sense that if you are in government but not in power i.e Rishi Sunak is still on the back foot as Lewis said that he is chasing he's having to chase stuff instead of setting an agenda then there comes a point at which actually you just run out of breath yeah exactly that exactly that sense of exhaustion frustration we're going to be back in a moment and I'll Lewis will tell me

for whom the headline was written from toe job to no job we'll be back in a second

this is the news agents

welcome back and the answer to the quiz question before the break is David Mellor wasn't it yeah it was it was yeah and the Chelsea what a headline the Chelsea strip and I know from toe job to no job yeah it was kind of those were the crazy times of back to basics and it was just you've sensed that there was just this decay and kind of listening to it today and the anger and the exhaustion it just feels very similar on top of all of that I mean John Major did not have a controversial honours list to contend with and I don't think that goes away you know and I raised it the other day about this woman Charlotte Ernest who's you know having spent a barely any time as a parliamentary assistant is now a life peer and the point is as we were saying to Gavin Bowell is that yes Sunak can cling to this idea that this honours list is just procedure that is just obeying precedent and in a way he's trying to set himself up as the contrast with Johnson this guy who never obeyed procedure or never obeyed precedence but the situation is that this is unprecedented we've never had a situation like this before so there is no convention no procedure we've never had a prime minister found to be in contempt of parliament by his peers and this is the same guy who at the same time in the same week is nominating people to be in that parliament and give an honours to some of whom are part of the lie that he himself has been judged about

and they're going to be in parliament for life that for many people not only makes no sense and will make no sense but it will be appalling. All I would say is that anyone in favour of House of Lords reform right now could not ask ironically for a better advocate than one Boris Johnson because what he's done with this honours list is basically expose the whole sham system to the nth degree I think what happened in previous times with these the resignation honours lists was always a degree of fudge there was a sort of quiet tip-off oh well you know don't ask too many questions but they were quite helpful and they were in my office and they were my back staff and yes they were quite helpful as donors we kind of knew that went on but the shamelessness about this particular list and the outcry from people like Nadine Doris basically put this right in your eye line you cannot miss it now and so I think it becomes quite hard to carry on saying oh yes the House of Lords is fine the resignation honours list is fine it asks a much bigger question thanks in no small part to the way Boris Johnson has played this. You mentioned Nadine Emily there was a thing overnight we've talked about her all week right about this never-ending resignation this resignation that never ever is going to come despite the fact that last week last Friday she said she was resigning with immediate effect she's still there and you've got to wonder I mean she tweeted last night that the reason is she wants all these documents from the cabinet office about what was said about her and about her nomination to the Lords I mean you've got to wonder whether she might be thinking and Johnson might be thinking that the longer that she can hold on and just allow more time to pass and maybe some of this to calm down that it would be harder in those circumstances let's imagine it's in a month's time or two months time harder in those circumstances for soon act to turn around and say Boris you can't stand for that mid bed seat I mean who knows the whole thing is very very weird you do look back at her time in the jungle and think oh actually those were the sane days don't you the thing the thing that struck us at that time was oh my god an mp going off to be a celebrity in the jungle and now you're like oh yeah no that actually in retrospect made so much more sense we'll be back tomorrow in the meantime Lewis Emily and I are going to go off from scour London and the countryside in search of Nadine's missing peerage right for now bye bye this has been a global player original podcast and a Persephoneka production