

Harry Mount and Tonya Gold | Challenging Conversations: The Rise and Fall of Boris Johnson

– So hello and welcome everyone to Lockdown University and thank you so much for having us on, and thank you so much for watching and listening to us. Today we're going to be talking about the rise and fall of Boris Johnson. And today, for those who don't know, has been a momentous day in British politics. Boris has stood down as a leader of the Conservative and Unionist Party, but actually only stops being prime minister tomorrow. And Liz Truss won the leadership election today at lunchtime beating Rishi Sunak. And so tomorrow you all have the extraordinary spectacle of both Boris and Liz Truss flying to Balmoral, the Queen's Scottish home in separate planes. And the Queen will say goodbye to the Boris and hello to Liz Truss and she'll start as prime minister tomorrow. Just to introduce ourselves, my name's Harry Mount, editor of the Oldie. I also wrote a book called "The Wit Wisdom of Boris Johnson" and I worked with him for five years on the Daily Telegraph where I edit his column. And my distinguished friend and guest is Tanya Gold who has written for the New York Times and Harper's Magazine and for many newspapers and magazines across the world. And she is the restaurant critic of The Spectator, the popular Conservative political magazine which Boris edited before he came prime minister. So Tanya, my first question, it's less than three years ago when Boris won this absolutely spectacular election majority, the biggest majority for 30 years since Margaret Thatcher was in power. And now he's had to resign and he's leaving tomorrow. How do you explain this spectacular fall.

– Partygate, just Partygate. When it became clear and they didn't want to tell us, it had to be eked out of them by the media when it became clear that under lockdown and restrictions, staff at Downing Street were having these continual parties while people were dying alone in the most terrible circumstances, denied their loved ones, their loved ones weren't allowed to go in during the pandemic to hospital to be with them. And when this sort of disconnect between the lives of the people who were being governed and the people who were running the country and the sort of the levity and the silliness and the carelessness of it, when that became apparent, he was going to have to go because he lost the trust of the country. And as soon as it became clear to the Tory MPs who are the only people who can get rid of him, that he had lost the trust of the country and his polls were in free fall and he was losing by-election after by-election. They decided that he had to go. And I remember that there was a very particular moment when I realised it's over. He's not going to get out of this this time. It was, do you remember Harry the night before the Duke of Edinburgh's funeral?

– Yes, of course. Yep.

- And they had a party in Downing Street and when that came out, the optics as people like to say were dreadful because we had her majesty the Queen, you know, a beloved figure, 75% approval rating sitting at her husband's funeral because it all came out afterwards. Sitting alone at her husband's funeral is very famous photograph. Nowhere near any members of her family, all on her own. And yet the young people in Downing Street and also major legislators were partying the night away. Trivial and glib and unserious and that's when they lost the trust of the country and then the MPs.

- I think you're right. I think that's the biggest sin. It fits in a pattern I think with two other incidents. Firstly last autumn, Owen Patterson who had been a cabinet minister, it turned out that he'd been lobbying for a medical company in the Commons when he shouldn't have. And Boris should have sacked him and didn't and tried to keep him. And that showed again, a fatal lack of grasp of what the electorate thought and what his party thought as well. And then I'd say the third incident in that series which created a pattern of behaviour, was earlier this summer when his deputy chief whip Christopher Pincher got very drunk at the Colton Club, the British kind of club head borders the Conservative Party and groped a young man. And Boris claimed he had forgotten that he'd been told that Chris Pincher got up to this sort of thing. Actually, he had been told this. And as I think you know as well as I do Tanya, he's actually got an extremely good memory. So I think there are three occasions where he really let things slide.

- Yeah, well absolutely. It's the disconnect. The perception that they believe that they can do whatever they want and normal rules don't apply to them. I mean, certain people were fined thousands of pounds that they couldn't afford for breaches of the restrictions. And it's the same again with Owen Paterson and Chris Pincher, the idea that normal boundaries of behaviour don't apply to the political class. And that makes people very, very angry. And it should.

- And you and I know a bit, how do you think you'll be feeling there he is, this man who famously when he was asked by his sister, the journalist Rachel Johnson, what he wanted to do when he grew up and he thought for a second, age five and said world king. And he came pretty close within the possibilities of human life becoming world king. And he's messed it up in three years. So how do you think he'll be feeling?

- I mean, I have to be honest and say I have absolutely no idea how he's feeling because despite the sort of the bottom me and the jokes and the hail fellow well met stuff, he's actually a very, very closed man. I mean, if you read his writing closely, it doesn't tell you anything about him. It seems to me to be, you know, a sort of weird performance. So I have no idea how he's feeling, but I interviewed Dominic Cummings, who was his defacto chief of staff and the architect

of the breadth of success in the Brexit referendum in January. And he probably knows him better than anyone. And I think in retrospect, firing Dominic was a huge mistake because from talking to Dominic, I got the impression that the idea was that Boris would be like the kernel of a regiment. You know, he would keep people's spirits up and he would be essentially a figurehead and other people who were interested in policy like Dominic would actually run the country. And so when Dominic lost the power struggle with Carrie, Boris Johnson's third wife and left. He was adrift. And he tends to only promote people based on whether or not they're loyal to him. So there's sort of been a bonfire of all the talent in the Tory Party, and he's surrounded by the most terrible mediocrities. If I had to guess, I would say his self knowledge is very limited, I would say. And I would like to think that he's bewildered and ashamed, but I think it's highly unlikely. But you might have better insights into this than I because as you said, you worked with him for five years, what do you think?

- Yes, I saw him relatively recently as well. And as you say there are so many layers to his character and the most powerful one is humour. So when I saw him, it was clear he was going to go and he was still very, he's always very friendly which is nice, jolly making jokes, no sign at all that he had made this disastrous attempt at his dream. And you are right about the Dominic Cummings aspect that for many years in his previous jobs, he was actually really good at employing left tenants who could run the show when he wasn't around and could tell him what to do. So at the spectator where we both worked and you'd still have a brilliant column, he had a wonderful deputy called Stuart Reed, quite a bit older than him. It's terrific journalist. And Boris is a very good natural editor. But when he wasn't there, Stuart took over. When he was mayor of London, he had, Kit Malthouse is a very good quasi deputy. And as you say, Dominic Cummings is extremely clever and he's one of the few people that Boris listens to and Dominic could tell him what to do. It's quite strange that when he was in office, Boris as you say, needed to have in his cabinet loyalists who on the whole weren't much good. When in the flesh he's got extremely used to people disagreeing with him and shouting at him. I once had an occasion, bike route home from work used to coincide. And I once overtook him on his bike. He was as he often was, mobile phone in one hand, bicycling, zigzagging up a hill in Islington where we both lived at the time. And a drunk man stepped out of a local pub. And I won't use rude words on Lockdown University, but he said, "Boris, you are a . And you really, the worst words you can imagine. And Boris with the phone in one hair just went, "All right, you're quite right." And actually I looked on, I thought that was rather a clever way of dealing with things. If someone had said that to me on my bike, I'd have been angry and might have said similar words back. 'Cause I thought that was very impressive. But it was strange that he didn't want any criticism in his cabinet. So I imagine now deep down he must be feeling incredibly upset. And as I think his misguided

resignation statement a couple of weeks ago implied angry with the press and with various politicians rather than blaming himself for his fall. Would you agree?

- I think that the reason why he gave the thumbs up to the man who was abusive to him is he'll do anything for attention. And any kind of attention is better than none.

- You might be right. Now there's talk that he might make a comeback as prime minister. There's even a suggestion that there'll be an immediate vote of confidence in Liz Truss' government once she takes over tomorrow. And if she were to lose that, they'd bring back Boris. What do you think the chances are earlier when a comeback being launched, but be if Boris getting back into Downing Street?

- I don't want to be a hostage to fortune, but I think zero. And I think the reason that those rumours are going around is because we have an incredibly irresponsible section of the British press. His cheerleaders and friends at the Telegraph where he used to earn a quarter a million pounds a year for a column. Also some people at the Spectator, they're flying kites in the air. And I'm bewildered by how partisan our colleagues in the media are about this man. Just genuinely stunned. And again, I'm talking about the disconnection. I think one of the saddest things about Boris Johnson's rise, because I don't believe that he's a fit prime minister. I don't believe that he was competent to do the job. I just think you need a sort of boring technocrat who like Dominic Cummings, not that Dominic is boring, is interested in policy. And I look back on it and I think this is all our fault Harry. You know, he was a media darling. We invented him. I've been at Tory Party conferences where all anybody could talk about was Boris and we would chase him around and we would look for stories. He's prime minister because of us. And that wouldn't have happened in the 1980s. I think I wrote somewhere that in the 1980s he would've been a fat Alan Clark rotting in some bee list castle. And I think that that part of his story, you can't tell his story without talking about how increasingly and no one is sadder to say this than I. The British press is simply not doing its job. Instead of exercising power as we should, which is by telling people the truth, and so hopefully they will buy our newspapers because we tell them the truth. We're becoming cheerleaders, you know, and I can be guilty of this too, you know, we'll maybe come out later that I am a little bit past, that I am a Labour Party supporter and I'll make no apology and I won't hide it. But we seem to have become sort of cheerleaders and attackers rather than doing our job which is telling the truth. And one of the things that have come out of this is that we elevated one of our own, one of our own journalists, one of our own people to a position of enormous power, which he was not then suited for. His own MPs had to kick him out.

- Yes, I think you're right. I'm guilty of that because I was a

supporter of his 'cause having worked with him for years, I do think he's clever and funny and in lots of his speeches. We're also used to political speeches being rather dull. He was something entirely new when he came along. Here was a, you may disagree, but I thought the clever, funny speaker and he had a sort of great charm and we can't resist the obvious parallels with Donald Trump. I think Boris is more intelligent than him. But I do think Trump is an engaging, funny speaker and it is extraordinary parallels these blonde men with zipper problems who appeal very strongly now to a quite sizeable minority of the American and British populations. And I think that's again as you say, why this talk of a comeback 'cause I'd say, I dunno what you think the figure would be, but there's, it's said about 40% of the Tory Party who've just voted Liz Truss into power, still prefer Boris to any other candidate. And I'd say roughly I dunno, 10 or 15% of the country adore Boris. Now that amounts to a huge amount of people, but not enough to get him back into power. So I agree comeback I don't think will ever, ever come off, but there will be calls for it as there are in America where I think Trump has probably got a large percentage behind than here from those people. And those voices are quite loud, aren't they?

- Well I've covered almost every by-election in the last 12 months and there have been a large number of them. And I'm just not hearing that from Conservatives, you know, traditional respectable Conservatives, you know, are appalled and it's coming back to Partygate again. You know, they want leaders who they consider to be respectable. And I think another rubi con he crossed was repeatedly lying to parliament and to the Partygate, over the Partygate scandal initially saying that, you know, there were no parties and no rules were broken and on and on and on. And he was lying. And it quickly became very obvious that he was lying. And we live in a liberal democracy. And I think the vast majority of people, not all, there was some, you know, depressing idiots, really value that we live in a liberal democracy. And in a liberal democracy there has to be, we have to have leaders who have a certain amount of integrity. And I think when it became transparently obvious that he would carry over the dishonesty of his personal life. And I'm sorry to bring it up, but it is absolutely essential.

- No. He must, yeah. Explain to viewers who don't know about his personal life. It would give a pot of history 'cause we haven't got all night.

- Oh me. Well, should we start at the beginning?

- Yeah.

- Because his character is fascinating. And the first person to write a full length biography of him was Sonya Pinel. And her story is absolutely fascinating. Sonya Pinel is a working class journalist, the daughter of a war hero. And she got her first big break working with

Boris in Brussels, covering the EU. And she told me this story and she told it in her book. She goes out with her bags desperate to get to this meeting just off the train. She goes into the office goes, "Hello Boris, I've got to go to a meeting, they're expecting the copy. This is the address, where is it?" And he goes, "Oh, it's that way." It wasn't that way. The Eaton and Oxford educated, you know, wealthy privileged man sends a woman who is entirely self-made with none of those privileges the wrong way to her first meeting. Very jolly jeps you might say. And her revenge was writing a very, very fair book about him which exposed the most fascinating personal history. His father, Stanley Johnson is a compulsive adulterer. His mother Charlotte who was by all accounts a very sensitive woman and a brilliant artist was made so desolate by this. They had four children that she was hospitalised for six months with depression when Boris was about 11. And the children were scattered. They were sent to school. It recently came out in Tom Bower's biography and it hasn't been gainsaid, which makes me think it's true for sure that Stanley even broke his wife's nose in a fight. I'm not a psychologist, but any psychologist would tell you or anyone who even reads novels that to come from a background like that, you will develop a very, very hard shell. And I think you were talking a little bit about that shell earlier about the jollity of Boris. And actually I think he's, I suspect that in private he's quite morose. People often say about him, he has, you know, many supporters but no actual real friends. He's very close to his siblings, I understand. And then he went to Eaton, Eaton College where, you know, you better stand up and have a big booming voice or you'll be destroyed by it. And then Oxford where he became very successful in the union. And he, I mean, there's no polite way to say this, he's never stayed faithful to anyone for long. And I think that one of the reasons that he was initially so successful with the voters and then he fell so fast, it's because he treated the voters like you would treat a girlfriend, you know, the barrage of love, the seduction and then the betrayal. He's a fascinating character. But I think if anything comes out of the Boris Johnson, you know, premiership, it's that maybe we need fewer fascinating characters and maybe American viewers will agree that I'm sort of tired of broken charismatics trying to prove to their fathers, you know, how brilliant they are and they haven't been broken. So Sonya wrote this book and it was all true. And he was so angry by it, angered by it that he tried to get her banned from the BBC. He tried to destroy her career for the second time. So he does have a vindictive streak for sure.

- Yeah. I often think about the great Johnny Cash song "A Boy Named Sue." You know that song about a man who names his son Sue, really the son having a rough time 'cause he's called Sue and they eventually meet and have a fight. And the son saying to the father, "Why did you gimme this awful name?" And the father says, "I gave you that name 'cause I knew you'd have to get tough or die." And I think it's the same with Boris. He had, as you said, this incredibly fractured

childhood that could have destroyed anyone or turned them into a gibbering wreck in the corner. Instead it made him extremely tough with this sense of humour on top, which meant he could get out of anything. I mean my time when I worked with him for five years, I was the deputy comment editor at the Telegraph. And every other columnist had to get their piece in by four o'clock in the afternoon. Boris 'cause he is always a special case was allowed an extension to seven in the evening every Wednesday night for five years. And most Wednesday nights for five years, there'd be no column there at seven. So I'd ring him up and he is always very apologetic. Very nice, ah, Harry, God, I'm so sorry. That copy is picking its way down those dreadful copper wires of the internet as we speak by claiming he just sent it. And in the background on the phone, you could hear him tapping away, just lying. But he was very charming about it and he was good company. And then whenever I saw him at parties, in fact, ever since I've seen him at parties, I stopped being his quasi eye editor and he didn't need much editing except me waiting there till past seven every night when I saw him at various gatherings. He'd say in front of other people when he had become very powerful mayor, possibly prime minister, he said, "Oh God, oh no," looking at me, "here's my boss." Now he knows I wasn't his boss, wasn't really ever his boss. I know I wasn't, but the people there didn't know. So they thought, "God, who's the bold guy in the corner? He must have tremendous power." And so he's very flattering and charming. He is capable of incredible charm, which goes with all the things you've said. And it was enough to propel him to Downing Street. But you're right, he didn't have the facilities to be prime minister. I talked to my father who's called Ferdinand Mount, he's a journalist and writer and was the head of Margaret Thatcher's policy unit long before Boris became prime minister. And I said, "What will he be like?" And dad said, "Well, I don't think he'll be very good because being prime minister is an extremely difficult and boring job. You're having to spend your whole time doing very boring things, having to do all your red boxes, sign off huge amounts of legislation and administration. And it's wrong to say Boris is lazy, he's not lazy. Packs in an awful lot in the day, but he doesn't like doing things he finds boring. So I do still think he's very clever, but he wasn't up to the extremely difficult job of being prime minister and doing the boring things that go with being prime minister.

- Dominic Cummings told me that despite the fact that they had an 80-seat majority, he spent all his time sitting in meetings wondering if the Sun headline the next day will be Big Ben will bong for Brexit. And the other thing that he spent all his time doing was looking at maps and wondering where monuments to himself could be erected at places like Birmingham, Birmingham Station. There's an amazing line about an American politician and the way that things are going to the sort of fantasy politics, the politics you want rather the politics that are. That if the people say they can see a fantasy river, you don't tell them the river's not there, you build them a fantasy

bridge. And I love this because it's particularly true of Boris because he's obsessed with bridges. He tried to get the Garden Bridge built over the River Thames. And then he had this insane idea for a bridge all the way across the Irish Sea. And we don't need a bridge across the Irish Sea. And it cost 335 billion pounds to build it, even if it could be built, which I suspect it can't. So that's what Cummings says. He wants monuments in the manner of a room emperor. I think the thing that shocked me the most when he became prime minister because as you said, he's always been so sort of friendly and jolly and sort of charming and easy with people. And socially liberal in his own personal life. Is how authoritarian he is. You know, how as you say, he couldn't tolerate anyone clever or nearly as clever in the room and so promoted these dreadful people like Andrea Jenkins, the new education minister, she's probably fired now.

- Brilliant Gavin Williamson, his education secretary.

- Do you remember that when Andrea Jenkins went into Downing Street this summer, I remember she was wearing a yellow dress, there was some protestors standing outside shouting at her and she stuck a finger in the air. And I dunno if that's a rude gesture in America, but it's very rude, rude in England. And we've had Jacob Bruce's morgue lying on a bench in the houses of parliament during a vote. We've had Dean Doris, you know, who's an ultra loyalist saying that what Tory MPs did to Johnson is a coup. A coup is an illegal transfer of power. That's simply not true. So he's elevated all these goals and he's been, you know, sort of horribly authoritarian. I think that's been the biggest surprise because with an 80-seat majority, you can be a one nation Tory. You can govern in the centre. And I think one of the saddest things that's come out of this is that the Tory Party seems to have been pulled so far to the right. And it's absolutely not where the country is.

- And moving on to his future, I think we're agreed, he won't be a prime minister again. What will he do do you think?

- I think he'll write mad journalism. He's finally going to finish his book on Shakespeare. I hope he won't write any more novels because I've read his novel, "Seventy-Two Virgins" which features a sort of fantasy version of himself. And I think I read, it was barely more than a collection of racist epithets and sexual fantasies. And he'll go on the speaker circuit and he'll learn a lot of money. I think one of his supporters was briefing the newspapers the other day saying the most terrible metaphor he wants to put, hay in the barn, which I think means he wants to earn some money because he wants money and he needs money because he's got, was it seven children?

- Seven question mark. Yeah.

- Seven on the record children. So I think he'll go off and on and

raise a lot of money and as you said, he will plot a comeback. But I don't think that's going to happen. I hope that doesn't happen. Because it will mean that our great country, I don't want to quote Liz Truss, she called it a great country. Anyway, it's still potentially a great country. It's going to get sucked into yet more of the Boris Johnson psychodrama rather than doing what we're actually supposed to do which is live.

- And you may not want to talk about it, but I think you did have some successes. First of all, completely understandable that remainers, those who want to stay in Europe hate him for being successful and getting Brexit done, but looking upon it objectively as a task he had to do and one that won him the 2019 election. Within those terms, wouldn't you call that a success?

- I think that leaving the European Union was absolutely the right thing to do after the vote had gone. I mean, what else are you going to do? You know, you can't just ignore the result of a referendum. If anything, that's even more disastrous. So I mean think that there were lies told during the campaign and that's by the by. But once the result was in, it had to be respected. I have no problem with him doing that. That was his job. Though I sort of wish David Cameron had stayed to sort of see it through, but he ran away to his shepherd's hut. My problem was Brexit is in no way being done. We had no plan. I cannot believe that six years after we voted to leave the EU, we still got all these ridiculous teething problems that because Boris Johnson and his cabal would rather talk to the base of the Tory Party, who it seems to me just crazy and hate all foreigners and don't even want to live in a functioning country. Instead of talking to our partners in Europe and saying, okay, we're out of the EU, but let's be on good terms, let's make this work, as far as I can see that simply hasn't happened. Because as you say, he's not into details. It's too boring for him.

- And another thing that people put for a success is his treatment of the COVID vaccine in Britain. So rather than following the European programme, he decided to go it alone and set up this very capable person, Kate Bingham in charge of a British programme, gave her a lot of money. And to begin with anyway, the world, thank God caught up. But there were a very high amount of effective vaccinations here at an accelerated rate. Would you rate that as a success?

- Yeah, absolutely. It was a great success for British scientist and he did the right thing. And I also think he absolutely did the right thing in Ukraine.

- That's what I was going to say. That's the third thing. And I'm sure 'cause he's supposed to be giving his farewell talk on the sets of Downing Street quite early between eight and 9:00 AM British time tomorrow. And I'm sure Ukraine will feature largely. In fact he talked

to President Zelensky today. But he was good on that I think and actually as well as being the sort of grandstanding stage that he likes being on a world stage, you know, wanted to be world king. Lots of cameras. He did do the right thing there, don't you think?

– I do. And I also think foreign policy is the ideal place for prime ministers who are floundering at home. I think both the vaccine and Ukraine were successes for him. But what I can't forgive him for is the damage that he has done to our democracy by making lying to parliament a little less surprising. And as I said, by filling the cabinet with a load of nonentities and mediocrities who aren't fit to do their job. You know, democracy is a precious thing. And one of the things I think, I may have actually said this last time I was on Lockdown University. I cannot believe that we do not, it really saddens me that we don't treasure our liberal democracy which is the font of all our freedom and all our success in the same way that we do seem to cherish our monarchy. And I just think no matter what good you do, if you treat it with contempt, if you treat the sacred, I would call it sacred office, that you hold with such contempt, you failed.

– Yeah. I think at least tomorrow it is still a remarkable thing, isn't it? When somebody gets kicked out of power, there is a peaceful transfer of power. And I imagine even Boris will ruefully get on his jets to Balmoral tomorrow and hand over power.

– Very early, isn't it? Do you think the queen's punishing him?

– Oh yes, exactly.

– Mr. Johnson.

– Because his life, in fact, there's going to be a series I think coming out this week with Kenneth Brenners, Boris Johnson 'cause it is the most extraordinary life and the most extraordinary premiership in a very short time, just over three years. He nearly died of COVID. He's had two children, he's got married. And his beloved mother who you referred to who was extremely clever figure who was allergic to publicity strangely died. So it's been an enormous amount to pack in. I mean, what do you think people will be saying about him in 50 years time?

– Well, I think what Conservatives are saying about him now, God, I sound like Liz Truss, I'm not going to answer that question. I'm going to answer the question I made up in my head. I think it's really important to say that for Conservatives who aren't insane, which is most of them, decent and respectable Conservatives. They just see it as the most terrible opportunity squandered an 80-seat majority. We could have solved so many problems and it's all gone now. In 50 years, I don't know if we were going to be here in 50 years if you talk to the climate scientists, probably that he had a great opportunity and

he screwed it up because he told lies.

- And so he'll be going tomorrow and into his shoes, will step Liz Truss. Now I believe Tanya, you know Liz and we're in fact at the same college, one of Oxford's oldest most beautiful colleges with the best food Merton in Oxford. And you were in her year. What was she like?

- I quite liked her at the time. She seemed friendly and quite jolly. She seemed funny. She was a Liberal Democrat then. Just the first of her many reincarnations. And I've seen her only a couple of times since then. I should be a better journalist really, but I find it impossible to sort of seal my disapproval of her policies. And the last time I saw her, we had lunch in a restaurant and I left a tip of 15 pounds for the waitress and she told me off and she told me that was much too much. Much too much money to leave. But I think the interesting thing, one of the interesting things about Liz Truss becoming prime minister today is that she was not the first choice of the parliamentary party. She was, however, Boris Johnson's first choice. He couldn't endorse her of course, but his most loyal lieutenants did endorse her. So his reach goes on, she was his choice. And in fact some of the people that you have been talking about, you know, people saying, oh, maybe he can come back, have been saying that he has chosen with his custom narcissism the worst possible person to succeed him. So he will seem better, better by comparison. I have no idea if that is true. I really hope it isn't.

- I'll tell you, sorry, the light's gone in my office. After I ask my next question to you Tanya, I'll just run over 'cause I've got to do some motion signalling to turn the light on. But I'll do that once I've asked you this.

- They go out 'cause you mentioned Liz Truss.

- It probably did, yeah. But it's interesting, I've been talking to senior Conservatives recently and they said both Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak, her main contender were all manoeuvres to become prime minister as early. In Rishi Sunak's cases last December when he patented the name of his election campaign. And in January, so it is alleged her, Liz Truss' left tenants were ringing around cabinet ministers and senior tourists asking for their support for this latest election. So they've been up to this game for quite a while. I mean, my theory is she's allowed to clinging on for just over a couple of years. So because of the Tory election victory in 2019, which gives a five-year term. I can ask this question then go and turn the light on. Do you think she'll last those remaining two and a bit years?

- I would imagine so. I don't think that the Tory Party is getting into a really bad habit of ousting it's prime minister's in or while they're still in office. And I would be amazed if they didn't give her a chance. I mean, what would it be for except to demonstrate to the

electorate that they can't even choose a new leader despite having two months during what I like to call a summer of crises to do it. So yes, I think they'll keep her to fight the next election.

- And impossible to say. But given your knowledge of her, do you think there's any chance she might blossom into a good prime minister? I mean, people wrote off Maggie Thatcher and turned out to be the most successful peacetime British prime minister in history. Do you think there's a chance she could pull off something miraculous at a time when as you say we're facing terrible crises on every front?

- Well, anything is possible if you offer the right deal to the right people, you know, at the same time. I mean being a successful Conservative prime minister and being a successful prime minister is not necessarily, you know, the same thing. And we don't know yet what she's going to do. She was very, very guarded during the campaign which I didn't particularly like. I'm old fashioned. I think people should tell you what they're going to do. But it does seem that she's very interested in a red tape bonfire which will mean, you know, cutting environmental protections and protection for workers and tax cuts for the rate. It's just impossible to say. I mean she's no orator. But that doesn't mean that she's stupid.

- And it's quite extraordinary statistic that Liz Truss will be the fourth Oxford educated Tory prime minister in a row. So Cameron, May, Boris, now her. And since the war, the vast majority of Tory prime ministers and a lot of the Labour prime ministers, the vast majority of Tory prime ministers have been two Oxford, two of them, John Major and James Callaghan didn't go to university at all. And I think not a single one has been to Cambridge. Now both you and I went to that university. How do you explain this? It can't just be coincidence, can it?

- Well, I think there are two main reasons. I mean, the first one is you need come back to one of my favourite subject is class. It costs a lot of money to become an MP. You have to take a lot of time off work that you won't be paid for. That's why our MPs are from the comfortable middle classes or above. And I also think that because the political class is so insular in this country. That if you turn up at central office in your early 20s and say, you know, hello, I've done politics, philosophy and economics at Oxford, they think, oh, you know, great. It's confirmation bias. The more people who have PPEs from Oxford who become prime ministers, the more seemingly you want. And I think that's part of the reason we have such a disconnect, use my favourite word, between the political class and the voters. And I mean, if you travel around the country to cover by-elections as I do, you really see it. And that's part of the reason no one saw the result of the referendum coming because these people, you know, never get out of Westminster. So I think it's a failure of imagination and also the sort of ever powerful British class system.

- Yeah, there's another aspect.

- You get to be a politician.

- Yeah. There's another aspect. There's a book on exactly this subject, about the Oxford strangled Holden Power by Simon Cooper and FT journalist who'd been to Oxford himself. And he interviewed Daniel Hannon, the former MEP who'd been at Oxford. He said, well, he thought it was as simple that if you are an aspiring politician aged 16 or 17, you'd see those stats, which I've just recounted about all these Tory prime ministers going to offices. You go, oh, I'll go to the place where they all go to. And I'm sure that's part of it. On another front, it's now been the case that the Tories have been in power if you include the time that David Cameron was in coalition with the Lib Dems for 12 years. And one of the, I think quite good things about this country which goes with the democracy, is that we quite like people being in power for a while. We give them a chance. So the Tories were in power from '79 to '97, Labour from '97 to 2010. And now the Tories from 2010 until 2022. So presumably don't you think their time is pretty much over and I would've thought that Keir Starmer, the Labour Party would win the next election to Labour, wouldn't you? With an outright majority?

- Well, I follow a lot of pollsters on Twitter and the only thing that pollsters say really is that the political situation in this country since Brexit has never been so combustible, literally anything could happen. In the last year, we've seen Conservative majorities of 25,000, you know, being overturned overnight. So I don't think that a Labour victory is certain by any means.

- That would imply it was if they're losing these majorities of 25,000.

- Well, Labor's got two problems. One is its own left flank, which still insists on considering itself part of the Labour Party, though it isn't because they seem so desperately invested in keeping the Labour Party out of power as long as possible. And the other, you know, to return to my other bog bear is the British media. I was on the campaign trail with Gordon Brown in 2010 and whatever you will or will not say about Gordon Brown. He was a serious man. And I was there the day. Do you remember Jillian Duffy incident?

- Of course, yeah. If you explain to the viewers, yeah.

- Yes, Brown was walking through a counsellor stage. And this woman called Jillian Duffy came up to him and started complaining about immigration and how it was damaging public services. And he listened to and he talked to and it was no big deal. And then he went into the car and he was still miced up and he called her a bigoted woman. And I

was standing in the press huddle and I actually followed Mrs. Duffy and the press could hear all this. And I followed Mrs. Duffy down the street because she kept saying, one of the things she said is, Has David Cameron never had a proper job? 'Cause he ever had a proper job before this. And I wanted to answer a question, which is yes, he was in charge of PR, it's a television company. And as I was imparting this information for her, a Sky Television producer came up to her and said, "Mrs. Duffy, Mr. Brown has said something about you on audio that I really think that you should hear. And for the next 48 hours, maybe even longer, why we should have been talking about, you know, the different offers that Labour and the Conservatives were making for the country. All we were talking about was, you know, Gordon Brown's appalling character defects. And labour has got a real problem because most of the media in this country is absolutely anti, is absolutely anti-Labor because they like Conservative policies, they want low taxation, you know, it's really as simple as that. That's a real problem for Starmer. And so although I like to hope as a Labour supporter that he will win the next election because I think he's a responsible man who will govern in the interest of the majority of people in this country. You just can't see. And the other thing there's a problem is so many people think it's not worth voting. Political obsessives vote. And one of the saddest things I see when I cover the by-elections is people who don't vote, who think there's no point. There's no difference between Labour and Tory. I met a woman in Batley in Yorkshire who's never been in a polling booth in her life. She's 71. So I really fear this tendency to say they're all the same and it's all corrupt and what's the point? So we're not going to vote. So I was certainly not bet the house on Keir Starmer winning the next election. You know, a chance anything could happen.

– We go to some of the extremely good questions that have come in or statements.

Q & A and Comments

Q – So on this matter, Jeremy Brown says that Boris only won a spectacular victory in 2019 because he's up against Jeremy Corbyn. Would you agree with that?

A – Absolutely right. Conservatives like to talk about how Boris, they call him the Heineken politician. It's based on an advertising phrase about a bear reaching the voters other people can't. He has only ever been tested in elections against far leftists. You know, Ken Livingston, you know, sort of maniac and then Jeremy Corbyn, a man so dreadful that working class minors, former minors went out in the reign to vote Conservative. I think that's absolutely right. Completely right.

– And we're getting a lot of comments. We touched on the comparison

between Boris Johnson and Donald Trump. We've got, forgive me if I've mispronounced your name, Diane Pumish who says, Partygate is what you termed Johnson's end. But no matter what Trump does, there's no end insight for him. He gets away with everything. Do you think that's the case even more than Boris? I mean they obviously both lost, didn't they?

- Well, I'm not an expert on American politics, so I probably know less about it than the person who asked the question.

- Yes, yeah.

- Pose as an expert. I sort of look at it.

- Sure. No, fair enough. I think probably our American viewers of course know much more bad American politicians than we do. But I think having spent some time in America I was new or close one to the Telegraph. It strikes me that I think I'm right with the figures that Trump remains more popular than Boris in America. And certainly has more fire power having been in charge of the most powerful country in the world. But I'd have thought again, come back, president Boris unlikely, but that's, our American viewers would know much better than us.

- Tell us.

Q - Yeah, exactly. Do tell us. Well, the question from Nemy Phillips. She thinks integrity is the fundamental word sadly missing from politics in general. How can us voters influence politicians regarding the importance of statesmanship? And another viewer says we need to get more women into politics. That's certainly true, although it is good. But the Tory Party has just elected the third Tory female prime minister. But how do we go about getting better politicians, Tanya?

A - I think you have to get involved. I think that one of the reasons that both in America and Britain that we've started electing these people who are demonstrably unfit is because we're looking away. There's a very famous film that I'm sure everyone watching has seen called "Network" as absolutely brilliant. If you haven't seen it, I suggest you watch it. It's from 1976 by a brilliant Jewish writer called Paddy Chayefsky. And it's essentially about what happens to our democracy when we look away, when we turn away. I think that we've got lazy. I think it's so easy to just say, well, I live in, you know, in an affluent liberal democracy. We've had peace in Europe until Ukraine since 1945 and everything is being done for me, I didn't have to engage myself in this. And I think we had a much healthier democracy when the thing to do was not to sit at home and watch Netflix, but to go to the pub. We've lost pub culture. And to be a member of a political party, I mean, representative democracy, you have to participate in it. And I know that seems, you know, sort of really,

really woolly. But if you want better candidates, you have have to go out. In my experience, you know, political psychopaths will take everything away from you if you let them. But there is one day every five years when British people are sovereign. I think we have to keep a closer eye on them. And I'd like to see more responsible journalism, but the only thing to do is to get involved. And as for women, yes, not always, but sometimes. I mean the female politicians I admire, they're just problem solvers. They're not interested in ideology, they're not interested in having a fight about whether Germany's horrible and we hate Macaron, none of this. They're interested in how long is the GP surgery going to stay open. Is there going to be food for the kids in school? You know, it's not that complicated, problem solving.

– And quite understandable. We've got some Boris fans writing as well. James Patterson says that history will be kind of a Boris than detractors might say that as we discussed that the big calls defeating Corbyn, getting Brexit done, successful vaccine rollout and leaving the world and supporting Zelensky. Mr. Patterson also says that actually contrary to being authoritarian, Boris is the least authoritarian politically that we've ever had. If anything, he's far too soft and let's say fair. I know you disagree with that tenure, but there is an aspect of Boris which is really wanting to be liked. I think that fed into not disciplining Chris Pincher, the deputy whip who was caught groping somebody in the Carlton Club and becoming down hard on Owen Patterson for lobbying in parliament for a private company. But as I say, with Boris, there are these so many layers that he can be both at the same time in a way, he can be authoritarian sometimes and let's say fair and weak at other times.

Q – But a question from Barry Epstein asking whether Boris was good for Israel, do you think Tanya?

A – God, I'm just going to throw that one back at you. I've got absolutely no idea. I mean, he supports the state of Israel is every Conservative.

Q – On a question just so I can get through as many as possible. So Jonathan Matthews talks about the North London Jewish antics Boris performed. I'm not quite sure what those were. Was the Jewish vote worth so much or was any of it, of Boris' antics genuine?

A – I believe this is a question about a actually very moving video campaign video. It was made of him in, I think it was the Grodzinski Bakery when he went in and he was being served and Jewish people in North London were sort of crowding around him. And I think one man said, you know, you're going to save us from that terrible man, Jeremy Corbyn. And as a Jew, I found it incredibly moving to watch. And I won't deny that I was hugely grateful that he defeated Corbyn. And you know what? I'm just going to tell you that I voted Conservative, I

voted for Boris Johnson in 2019. I voted for him for the first time in my life because I believed that my family and my people were made demonstrably less safe in their own homes by Corbyn. And I don't know if you know this Harry, but at the last campaign rally, Corbyn's last campaign rally in 2019, a Jew was actually beaten and it's on camera. So I voted Conservative because I thought I had to choose and had to have clean hands and I thought the Jews were unsafe. And I'll always be grateful to him for that. But I wish he'd done more with it. As I said, you know what a wasted opportunity. So I think it's the Grodzinski thing and it was very moving and it was very sad to watch.

Q – Yeah. Unbelievable. You think things have got better on that front among the Jewish community in Britain?

A – Yes, and I think one thing that 2019, the election victory proved is real credit to the British people actually that in rejecting Corbyn as they did, I think they were also rejecting antisemitism. I really believe that and I know that it lurks on the far left and if you look on Twitter and if you look in certain places and I do this far too much, you'll always find it and you'll find 'em doubling down. And it's as poisonous and anti-intellectual and vile and they have no self knowledge and they have no knowledge as it ever was. But I think that for the majority of the country, and I've heard people say that they didn't, I think the British are proud of not having frightened Jews. You know, that's part of the British exceptionalism I can get on board with.

Q – Yeah. I had a question from Ron Bornstein who refers to famous incident in 2016 after the Brexit referendum when Boris stood for the first time being a prime minister, and he was famously knifed by his old Oxford friend, Michael Gove. Do you have any insights on why he did that? That that paved way for Teresa May a to become MP and the end of her premiership and then Boris coming back the second time?

A – Oh, well, my understanding was that it was a personal sort of personal wobble of Gove that he was all up for it. And then his former wife, I don't think divorced yet. Sarah Vine sort of wound him up and said, you know, you can do better. You can't trust Boris. And he sort of pulled out and it all looked a bit chaotic and a little bit ridiculous. And he did the right thing pulling out because he would have lost. But he came back.

Q – And a question from Gabriel and Kitty Banenticarty saying, how much influence do you think Carrie Johnson, his wife had on Boris?

A – That's a fascinating question actually because, you know, it's almost depressing that we have to make these narratives, you know, so personal as if we don't have a democracy, and we still have kings. But there's an entire plausible school of thought that if Boris Johnson and actually I mustn't forget to say that's not even his real name.

His friends and his family don't call him Boris, they call him Al, it's his power name.

– The full name is Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson. But he realised early on that Boris is a more memorable name.

– It's a plausible theory that if he was still with his second wife, Marina, even as I said it's depressing to sort of, you know, talk about them as if there are royal or imperial family, that if they were still together, none of this would've happened because she was a calming influence on him and she would not have allowed him to throw out the people who could actually seriously run the country for him. And Dominic Cummings told me that Carrie Johnson ran a sort of parallel briefing operation out of 11 Downing Street. And the chaos, you know, largely came from her. And I dunno if that's true or not and I don't like the idea that, you know, that it's the demonic woman. The witch who brings our beautiful blonde prince to misery. But, you know, you live by chaos and you're going to die by it I guess.

Q – We got time for one last statement by a lady who just calls herself Jillian, no surname, who says the Conservatives are only in power now due to that huge election majority of 80 that Boris got in 2019. And Jillian says she thinks the undemocratic removal of her prime minister via an in cabal is appalling and very bad for the Tory Party in time will prove this point. Do you think there is a terrible chasm within the Tory Party between the Borisites and the non-Borisites?

A – Well, I think the party split again. I think the party's been split for years over Europe. And if they don't get that act together, I'm not sure what will happen to them. I just want to say she wasn't out, it wasn't anti-democratic. It's not a presidential mandate. You know, he governs because he's the leader of the Tory Party. He has the mandate from the MPs for whom people vote. And once the Tory MPs decide to get rid of him, he has to go. That's not anti-democratic. I didn't vote for Boris Johnson. I voted for my local MPs, get it. Not a presidential system. I think they did the right thing.

– Well thank you very much Tanya. I'll finish on a brilliant point by Jonathan Matthews that Boris is in fact American by birth. He was born in New York in 1964 when his father was working there. He gave up his American citizenship because he was paying double tax, both British and American tax here. But he can re-qualify if it goes back to America and lives there for a certain amount of years. So I've got news for our American viewers maybe having another famous outspoken blonde in power in about 15 years' time.

Thank you so much Tanya for joining us and thank you so much to the wonderful Lockdown University and its fantastic viewers.