

Will Boris Johnson Become a 'Brexit Martyr'?

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The UK Conservative party kicked off last weekend amid allegations of inappropriate behaviour against Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Despite the government's attempt to woo potential voters with what they refer to as a 'dynamic domestic agenda', journalists and commentators are far more interested at present in the allegations set out by writer Charlotte Edwards in her [Sunday Times column](#) that Johnson had 'groped' her while she worked for him at the Spectator magazine back in the late 90s. The party line on this is quite clear, Johnson denies the claims, and his cabinet are all on board with this, stressing that they trust their leader and that it is all mere distraction from the bigger issues, i.e. the proposal to raise the national minimum wage to £10.50 an hour if they were to win at the next election.

The proposed wage increase, together with millions of pounds pledged towards road improvements, buses, hospital and youth projects, is a clear attempt to lure voters, who in the midst of Brexit chaos could be persuaded to vote for a Labour government. However questions remain as to where the money will come from for such an investment, and given the fact that we could see the continued devaluation of the pound after Brexit, £10.50 an hour may not be quite as promising in future as it sounds today.

In terms of progress on Brexit, the government faced another obstacle to its plans this week as yet another document was leaked, this time detailing proposals on the question of the Irish border. The proposals, although not officially released, have already been rejected by both party leaders in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, whose foreign minister has termed them as a 'non-starter'. According to RTE news, they would involve customs posts being erected on either side of the Northern Ireland border, located perhaps around five to ten miles 'back' from the actual land frontier. Despite the way it is being presented by the UK government, such infrastructure is seen to be the equivalent of a hard border on the island of Ireland, which, even if approved in deal by the EU, would unlikely get through the Westminster parliament.

This latest development casts further doubt on the possibility of the UK securing a withdrawal agreement with the EU before it is due to leave on October 31st. And despite the passing of the 'Benn Act' in parliament which is supposed to prevent the government from taking Britain out of the EU without a deal, Boris Johnson has maintained his stance that the UK will leave at the end of October, 'come what may'. This has left many journalists and politicians with the task of trying to predict just what it is that Johnson has up his sleeve - what tactic could he possibly use to bypass parliament and engineer a No Deal Brexit?

Speculation is rife, with everything being suggested from finding a possible 'loophole' to the idea that the government is trying to hoodwink people into thinking they have an alternative

path to leaving on October 31st in order to persuade opposition parties to call a vote of no confidence, which with no Brexit extension could increase the chances of a No Deal Brexit. Top aide to Boris Johnson, strategist Dominic Cummings acknowledged that there were loopholes in the Benn Act in a recent [interview](#). However the consequences of exploiting any loophole and undermining parliament in this way could have dire consequences for the PM. Last week former Prime Minister John Major gave a stark warning to Boris Johnson about what could happen if he were to, for example, get an Order of Council passed by Privy Councillors. He obviously has concerns that such an order, which would not need to involve the Queen, could be passed by government ministers alone, superseding the Benn Act. In a speech given last Thursday, John Major said

“I should warn the Prime Minister that – if this route is taken – it will be in flagrant defiance of Parliament and utterly disrespectful to the Supreme Court... It would be a piece of political chicanery that no-one should ever forgive or forget.”

The stakes for Johnson could not be higher. A case is to be brought to Scotland’s highest civil court by none other than the SNP’s Joanna Cherry who won her case against the government last month, which will decide if Boris Johnson could be jailed if he insists on a No Deal Brexit. The plan is to get the court to grant an interdict which would stop Johnson from not complying with the terms of the Benn Act. In the same court action, Cherry and her team are asking the court to sign a letter to EU leaders requesting a Brexit extension even if Johnson refuses one. They are asking the court to ‘impose such other conditions and penalties including fine and imprisonment, where consistent with the European Union (Withdrawal) no.2 Act 2019.’

The next few weeks will be a real test for Britain’s constitution and for the dedication of Boris Johnson to the Brexit cause. With the suggestion – from none other than ex-cabinet minister Iain Duncan Smith – that the Prime Minister could become a Brexit martyr and go to jail in a bid to take Britain out of the EU on October 31st, we could be witness to events of historic proportions in the near future, which will have a long lasting impact on the future of the United Kingdom and its parliamentary democracy.

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