

Those who want to fell the Prime Minister

The conventional media, the Labour opposition and a handful of Conservative MPs are out to topple the Prime Minister. The method is well known, as it was used extensively against Mrs May and took a long time to get rid of her. That was animated by a major battle over policy, where those who wished to see her replaced were shocked by her close working with the civil service establishment and opposition parties to dilute or thwart Brexit. We felt this was against the clear wish of the public in the referendum and against the spirit of the Conservative Manifesto. The way the civil service negotiated, surrendering our position with the approval of the PM, was in conflict with the strategy the Brexit Secretary was trying to pursue and was unacceptable.

The current rebels do not seem to be united in fundamental criticism of policy or in defence of the Manifesto. They are trying to get to 54 Conservative MPs who want a vote of No Confidence based on the strong feeling shared by many that senior officials in Downing Street who devised elaborate rules for the rest of should have led by example. The PM has apologised and claims most of this happened without his presence or initiation. The facts and gloss placed on this by Sue Gray who is investigating will shape how many more Conservative MPs seek a change at the top as a result.

It is difficult to buy into the idea that whips could credibly threaten to remove grants from constituencies of MPs who were disloyal. Money is distributed on the decision of Ministers, not whips. Ministers are guided and supervised by officials when allocating money to ensure the law and budget rules are followed. A Minister cannot make a decision based on favouritism or spite.

The rebels need to recall that they need 180 Conservative MPs to get rid of the PM. They have to win the confidence vote as well as securing it. They may be holding back some letters pending the Gray Report or because they judge they are a long way off having a majority. They may simply have failed to persuade more than a handful that now is a good time to change Prime Ministers.

For me what matters most is how the PM now develops a post lockdown agenda. There needs to be an early move to take control of GB/ NI trade. There needs to be a change of energy policy. We need tax cuts. If the PM can complete Brexit and tackle the cost of living crisis he can ride out party gate. If he does not use the majority to help people be better off then partygate and the poor organisation of Downing Street will weigh ever more heavily on the minds of MPs already cross about recent news coverage.