

Casting Malevolent Shadows: Liz Truss Wins the Tory Leadership

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10 Downing Street is set to be bathed in social media guff with the victory of Liz Truss. Confirmed as Boris Johnson’s successor, the new British Prime Minister won by a slimmer margin over rival contender Rishi Sunak than anticipated. Nonetheless, 81,326 votes to 60,399 was sufficient to guarantee her a secure margin – for the moment. (The turnout had been 83 per cent.)

There is little doubt that the Tory selectorate – a good deal of it – seem to adore her. That hardly makes them, or her, representative of a broader constituency, and certainly the same constituency that voted for Johnson in 2019. Certain conservative voices [have even warned](#) that the Tory party now resembles, in part, the Labour Party of Jeremy Corbyn. Corbyn stormed through the ranks with an adoring base of party supporters and ideological brio. The broader electorate were not quite so enamoured.

The challenges the new prime minister faces are biting. The country is facing energy bills Truss has herself described as “eye-watering”. But despite this, she is [willing to deliver](#) £30 billion in tax cuts via an emergency budget and a reversal of April’s rise in National Insurance. Betraying a characteristically woolly understanding of economics, notably on progressive taxation, she sees no problem about the accrued benefits to higher-income earners. “The people at the top of the income distribution pay more tax – so inevitably, when you cut taxes you tend to benefit the people who are more likely to pay tax.” That’s sorted then.

Over the weekend, a [promise was given](#) of some emergency plan that would emerge within a week of her taking office, with a specific focus on targeting the sharp spike of energy bills. This would go “hand in hand” with a plan to increase domestic energy supplies. All of this was vague compared to Sunak’s promises to provide relief to pensioners and the low-paid from rising energy costs while also cutting Value Added Tax on energy bills.

BBC’s *Newsnight*, in an effort to get a sense of what the UK is in for, trotted out a few

Conservative views favourable to Truss as the flexible, adjustable figure. Baroness Morgan of Coates [predicts](#) “a combination of approaches” that would make it hard to “pigeonhole” Truss. The editor of the Conservative Home website, Paul Goodman, [noted](#) her “adaptability” over the course of her political life. “So although she has this reputation as an ideologue and she has very clear ideological roots – originally as a Liberal Democrat – she is somehow the darling of the Leavers who in the [Brexit] referendum was a Remainer.”

What was striking, and utterly deceptive, was the effort by Truss to show herself as a changeling of sorts, rather than a figure of a dying status quo. This, despite being a Cabinet member for ten years. Sunak, despite being comparatively new, was given the touch-up of status quo inflexibility, one padded by expensive suits and tastes. It did not matter that he seemed, at least relatively speaking, less inscrutable and more focused on the immediate crisis.

In her speech of uneven quality and many fictions, Truss doffed her cap to Johnson in a tribute that can only trouble those who wished him gone for good. “Boris, you got Brexit done. You crushed Jeremy Corbyn. You rolled out the vaccine. And you stood up to Vladimir Putin. You are admired from Kyiv to Carlisle.”

Hardly agreed upon history, but it seemed to be an infection coursing through the ranks. Thanks were also given to Johnson by the Tory party co-chair, Andrew Stephenson, suggesting an outbreak of masochism.

Through this, both the disgraced Johnson and his opponents in the Labour Party will be holding out hope. Truss was critical of those who removed him for the number of calamities he inflicted upon himself, his party and the British public. And then there was that bitter distinctly non-concessional speech by Johnson, taking aim at the vicious, knife-bearing “herd instinct” that had robbed him of office.

Johnson’s supporters are promising to be a disruptive bunch. Many have already put out teasing feelers suggesting a return when the time is right. Johnson’s former chief of staff, Lord Udney-Lister, is one [willing](#) to wager that Johnson “is going to be watching all of this and if something happens in the future [...] the ball comes loose in the scrum, then anything can happen.”

The *Sunday Mirror* [has reported](#) that 12 Tory MPs are willing to submit letters to the 1922 Committee to express no confidence in the incoming prime minister – and this, even before Truss sets foot in 10 Downing Street. For Jake Berry, MP for Rossendale and Darwen in Lancashire, such a move was “certainly suicidal”, while former Conservative chancellor Lord Hammond [warned](#) Johnson not to linger like a “malevolent shadow”.

The Truss factor has also given British Labour a boost of seven percentage points. Party strategists, as part of this bounce, have already [readied a campaign](#) in the so-called Red Wall seats, using previous, leaked remarks from Truss about how British workers produced “less per hour” than their foreign equivalents, “and that’s a combination of, kind of, skill and application.” But opinion polls do not deliver election victories. The Tory party machine, cunning, ruthless and mendacious, does at least know something about that.

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