

Britain's Conservatives are in trouble – their only chance now is to sack Rishi Sunak and return to Thatcherite values. If they don't, the Party is doomed



by Conrad Black

The Conservative government in the United Kingdom shows every likelihood of being decisively defeated in the next election, later this year. It requires a bold and thick-skinned partisan to say that such a fate is undeserved.

Not since before the first Reform Act of 1832 has Britain presented such a spectacle of ephemeral government as it has in the last eight years.

Between 1827 and 1830, Great Britain had five prime ministers but one of them left office after 15 years (Liverpool), one died in office (Canning), and one enjoyed a term of four years (Gray); only Goderich, known as Prosperity Robinson, and Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington, had truncated terms. This wasn't exactly instability.

In the last eight years, David Cameron resigned after losing the Brexit referendum and Theresa May fumbled a majority into a minority and spent three years trying to interpret the electorate's desire to leave Europe into a formula for remaining in Europe while calling it departure. She ended up with no support from her own parliamentary party.

Boris Johnson won a resounding majority to “get Brexit done”. He did so, and handled the Ukraine war very well. But by defying his own government’s ban on partying during the Covid pandemic, he severely affronted Britain’s sense of fair play. This is as imperishable as the puritanical spirit of America – no matter how overgrown both of them often are with hypocrisy and humbug.

In addition, he developed a pattern of economy with the truth which is not permissible under parliamentary rules and customs, and for good measure, he lost his domestic policy compass.

He went cock-a-hoop for an absurdly ambitious and rigid campaign against fossil fuel, and he committed the unpardonable post-Thatcher Conservative error of raising income taxes. Out he went, the most rapid and spectacular political self-vaporisation of political capital since the disappearance of Anthony Eden in the Suez fiasco of 1956.

Liz Truss followed and produced an outstanding Thatcherite budget, but was unable to answer the pettifogging questions about revenue replacement for reduced taxes from the Dickensian, zero-sum, hair-shirted dodos on the Tory back benches. Out she went after a record for evanescence – 49 days.

Rishi Sunak has taken her place and is unsteadily conducting a red Tory Butskillite Edward Heath revival (of a government that only lasted for one term – 1970-1974).

Other than in extreme national emergencies, British Conservative governments cannot raise income taxes: that is the threshold where those who wish higher taxes on middle and upper income groups will vote for real social democrats or even extreme leftists ahead of Red pseudo-Tories who lack all conviction.

The Conservatives have regained some ground in the recent

revelations of rampant anti-Semitism in the ranks of the Labour Party, a repulsive trait that was much in evidence under its former leader, Jeremy Corbyn.

But the recent Conservative budget was completely unimaginative, and effectively over-taxes the country to pay for public-sector expenses that successive governments of both parties have falsely promised to cut.

In order to bolster the staggering regime, the current prime minister brought back one of his predecessors, David Cameron, as foreign secretary. It must be said that Mr Cameron's performance to date has been quite plausible, but he is chiefly remembered as the champion of Euro-integration, a rejected policy.

Cameron promised "full-on treaty change," and brought back from Brussels less than Neville Chamberlain did from Munich in 1938.

Boris Johnson won a sizeable majority in the last election promising to take advantage of the greater liberalities afforded by Britain's secession from the European Union. The fact that he failed to take any serious steps to do that does not justify or indicate any public desire to revisit the decision of the Brexit referendum.

Capitalisation on Brexit is what the current condition of the United Kingdom and of the immobilised British Conservative Party requires. Firstly, this means the implementation of Fast Track negotiations for closer trade relations with the United States and Canada.

And, secondly, it requires a tax reform that incentivises economic growth and believably promises increased revenue from accelerated economic activity, rather than scruffing after trivial and annoying revenue increases by raising taxes.

The last British Conservative Party leader to leave the

leadership of that party altogether voluntarily and in good physical and political condition was Stanley Baldwin in 1937.

Eight British Conservative leaders since then – Neville Chamberlain, Anthony Eden, Edward Heath, Margaret Thatcher (the first British leader to win three consecutive full-term since before the first Reform Act), Iain Duncan Smith, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, and Liz Truss – were all ejected by their colleagues.

Even Winston Churchill, as well as Harold Macmillan, were eased out, full of years. Five others – Alec Douglas Home, John Major, William Hague, Michael Howard, and David Cameron (in the Brexit referendum) – all retired after being defeated at the polls, before they could be evicted.

In the current circumstances, the course for the Conservative government is clear: it should do the one thing the British Conservative Party can still do well and stab its leader in the back as it has so many who have preceded him.

The Conservatives must make a sharp turn toward the Thatcherite enterprise state in ever closer cooperation with its closest natural allies – the old Commonwealth (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore), and the United States.

This is the natural and traditional vocation of the United Kingdom, and it is the road to prosperity and resuscitated national self-interest.

As Mr Churchill famously cited, in a world broadcast responding to President Roosevelt's quote from Longfellow "Sail on o ship of state," from Arthur Clough:

"While in front the sun climbs slow, how slowly, westward look, the land is bright!" It is almost, but not quite, too late.

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