

What Boris Did Next

*Gave out
ennoblements
and then got some
himself*

By Kevin Lalor Higgins

The media have almost consumed themselves over the last days and weeks with the unwholesome but compelling subject of Boris Johnson. Of course those who live in the real world have never doubted that 'Boris' is a complete shit, who would boil his grandmother down for glue if the end product would pay for a knees-up in a Five-Star resort in the Maldives. There are likely to be significant delights to come. They retain at least enough potency that the Speaker of the House of Lords, Lord McFall, is preparing himself to deliver, if necessary, an unprecedented 'Statement'.

His Lordship is not concerned with the inevitable tax-deductible pulp autobiography in one or more volumes that will be inflicted on the budget of every public library, the 'exclusive' television interviews or even the 'Tonight with Boris' TV show on some loony tunes channel that may well span the Atlantic. One thing remains certain, Boris will be available for the grand opening of an envelope, as long as it contains lots of lovely cash.

What is in play is the inevitable brouhaha when as retiring Prime Minister he produces, as is his prerogative, his Resignation Honours List. Make no mistake it will be a corker!

The going rate for a peerage over the last few years seems to have been a donation of three million quid to the Tory party (to be fair, instalment payments have been accepted).

But opportunities on this round are now only available in The Last Chance Saloon and not even a gold-plated tricycle for young Wilf will suffice. Traditionalists will be reassured to hear his name is safely and securely down for Eton and fees will not be an issue.

Lloyd George charged £10,000 for a knighthood, £30,000 for a baronetcy, and £50,000 upwards for a peerage. But that carry on was reduced by legislation in 1925. Those of us who have knocked about a bit will recall how the late Harold Wilson allowed his reputation to be

eviscerated by way of 'The Lavender List', when in 1976 after just two years of his third period as Prime Minister, he suddenly resigned in circumstances which still provoke speculation.

For many years Wilson and his closest political aide, Marcia Williams, whose mother was rumoured to be an illegitimate child of Edward VII, were joined at the hip and in later years she dominated the inner workings of Downing Street. Wilson appeared to be either unwilling or unable to rein her in and there were frequent shouting rows and tantrums.

The infamous 'Lavender List' which formed the basis of Wilson's Resignation Honours List, was so-called because it was drafted on the lavender-coloured notepaper used exclusively by Marcia within Wilson's private office. This rather notorious document was given its name by Wilson's Press Secretary, Joe Haines.

Like all such Lists, the finished article did include very many worthy recipients of the various Honours conferred. It also included to be quite clear, out and out crooks, and some who were simply very chummy with Wilson and had been of some use to him. The 'moral outrage' which went positively viral in the aftermath now seems, though less than half a century ago, to have had the fervour of the reign of Bloody Mary or the Spanish Inquisition. Wilson never recovered personally from the backlash. From 1974 Marcia Williams faced the world as Lady Falkender though she never made a speech in the House of Lords and Private Eye called her "Forkbender" (something to do with Yuri Geller if you're wondering).

Tony Blair's resignation honours list was the first that was submitted for approval by the House of Lords appointments commission but collapsed because the Crown Prosecution Service was still deciding whether charges should be brought against anyone after an earlier "cash for honours" investigation. It had highlighted a loophole whereby loans to political parties from subjects who were later ennobled, as opposed to donations, did not have to be declared. Blair was interviewed three times as Prime Minister, though only as a witness and not under caution.

A number of proposed recipients of David Cameron's resignation largesse were blocked on ethical grounds.

I draw attention to all of this in consideration of what 'The Boris List' may look like. Remember this is a man who, as a ludicrous Foreign Secretary, did a flit on his security detail to fly alone to a weekend bunga at the Tuscan Villa of a former senior KGB autocrat. And once installed in Downing Street and before you could say Boris Godunov, had put the KGB man's son in the House of Lords as Baron Lebedev of Siberia.

Will there be something for Carrie's decorator? How can Andrew Neil be overlooked? Nadine Dorries, so staunch?

And since he has already put his banker brother Jo in the House of Lords surely there must be something for Dad, Stanley?

And how long can it be before public (or at least future-prime-ministerial) forgiveness gives us Sir Boris and then Lord Johnson of Little England, or wherever, whether or not he gets another pot at PM. **L**

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