

Minister Quits as Britain Boils Over With Rage Against Boris Johnson and His Lockdown-Breaking Aide

There has been an outpouring of public anger after Johnson's top aide admitted to traveling across the country while he thought he had the virus.



REUTERS / Hannah McKay

The most serious political crisis that Boris Johnson has faced as British prime minister is getting worse.

Johnson has become a lightning rod for the fury of the British public—frustrated and restless after nine weeks of lockdown restrictions—after his decision not to sack his top aide who was forced to admit that he traveled hundreds of miles during the pandemic, despite suspecting that both he and his wife had COVID-19.

After days of Johnson trying to excuse the actions of Dominic Cummings, as well as an extraordinary televised press conference where Cummings emerged from the shadows in an unsuccessful attempt to draw a line under the crisis, a government minister has now resigned with a furious letter which condemns both the prime minister and his mastermind.

The furious row began on Friday when two newspapers—the *Daily Mirror* and *The Guardian*—reported that Cummings drove 264 miles from London to his parents' estate in Durham, even though he feared that he and his wife had the coronavirus. He later admitted to a separate trip after his family's 14-day period of isolation to Barnard Castle, a beauty spot around 30 miles away from Durham.

Cummings and Johnson insist no law was broken—but that's not really the point. People in Britain have been told to stay at home as much as possible and, if displaying symptoms, to stay inside for two weeks. Those rules have forced people to stay away from their loved ones for months, even if they were seriously ill or dying, and to deal with incredibly difficult circumstances without help.

Cummings' excuse—that he had to drive to Durham because he thought he and his wife were getting sick and needed possible back-up childcare from his teenage niece—does not comfort anyone who was also struggling to look after their children while sick but thought they had no option but to stay home and help prevent further spread of the deadly virus.

There has been an outpouring of public anger, despite Johnson and Cummings's attempts to explain away the scandal. Cummings repeatedly refused to apologize for breaking lockdown rules during his highly unusual press conference Monday. He told the public: "I don't regret what I did ... reasonable people might disagree."

Cummings also provided a truly laughable excuse for his separate trip to Barnard Castle. He said that he wanted to test that his eyesight was good enough to allow him to drive back to London following his illness, so he packed his wife and child into the car and drove to the castle in an incredibly risky experiment.

The lack of contrition and flimsy excuses were, unsurprisingly, not effective. At least 20 lawmakers from Johnson's Conservative party have called on Cummings to quit and, on Tuesday, a junior minister resigned from the government in protest at the scandal.

Douglas Ross wrote: "While the intentions may have been well-meaning, the reaction to this news shows that Mr. Cummings interpretation of the government advice was not shared by the vast majority of people who have done as the government asked."

Ross added: "I have constituents who didn't get to say goodbye to loved ones; families who could not mourn together; people who didn't visit sick relatives because they followed the guidance of the government. I cannot in good faith tell them they were all wrong and one senior adviser to the government was right."

Ross was only a junior minister, but he's been strongly supportive of Johnson since he stood for party leader. That he decided to resign and breathe new life into a story that Johnson and Cummings hoped they had drawn a line under shows that the matter is far from over.

Meanwhile, Britain's Office for National Statistics reported Tuesday that there have been 60,000 excess deaths recorded across the U.K. since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Britons are grieving and angry but, for now, are still largely following the rules given to them by their government. But, the longer Cummings stays in his post, the more people will questions why there should be one rule for them and another for their leaders.

Source:

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/dominic-cummings-scandal-gets-worse-for-boris-johnson-as-douglas-ross-quits?ref=scroll>

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