

New UK Prime Minister Theresa May to head austerity government

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The tenor of newly anointed UK Prime Minister Theresa May's first speech yesterday was dictated by a desperate attempt to restore some popular support for a widely-despised Conservative government.

The ruling establishment is deeply divided and faces the existential crisis provoked by the impact of the referendum vote to leave the European Union (EU). There has been a dramatic fall of the pound and of share prices, and even the UK itself is threatened with break-up. The major problem hanging over May's head is how to deal with an acute polarisation between rich and poor that threatens violent social and political convulsions.

Only this can account for the torrent of rhetoric she issued, pledging to lead a "one nation" government representing not just the "privileged few." May would not only defend the "Union" of nations that make up the UK, but that "between all of our citizens." She would fight against "the burning injustice" of poverty and deprivation, of racism, sexism and for the "ordinary working-class family." Hers would be a government "driven, not by the interests of the privileged few but by yours."

Arguably not since Margaret Thatcher stood in Downing Street and quoted St. Francis of Assisi—"Where there is discord, may we bring harmony"—has there been such a brazen display of political cynicism. May's will be a government of class warfare, of savage austerity, attacks on democratic rights, of militarism and war.

May has come to office without being elected, through the deliberate sabotage of a Tory leadership contest in which her leading rival, Andrea Leadsom, was told by the media, her peers and no doubt the state that her challenge was unacceptable. An inexperienced pro-Brexit campaigner, Leadsom had no chance of

either uniting the party or securing the backing of big business. In contrast, May has years of cabinet experience and, while she campaigned for Britain to Remain in the EU, has pledged to the Eurosceptic wing of the party that "Brexit is Brexit."

Her job, she said, would be to conduct the best negotiations with the EU to make this work in the UK's national interests. She has also said that official talks on leaving, triggered when she invokes Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, will not begin until at least the end of 2016. This is meant to provide the possibility of stabilising Britain economically and politically.

She chose her top cabinet positions with the same end in mind, together with efforts to heal the rift in the party. May's chancellor of the exchequer is Philip Hammond, the former foreign secretary, who campaigned for Remain. On Tuesday, he said that it could take as long as six years for the UK to extricate itself from the EU, due to the long process of agreeing bilateral trade deals. However, the most prominent Leave campaigner, Boris Johnson, was named as foreign secretary, and Eurosceptic David Davis as the "secretary of state for Leaving the EU." They were among several prominent "Brexiters" named.

Even so, if there was the slightest genuine substance to her professions of social concern and promises to curb bosses' pay, then May would not be walking into Number 10. She is expected to hold the line against any demands for a let-up in social attacks.

The agenda of her government is set by the deepening crisis of British and world capitalism. UK growth has slowed to 0.2 percent in the second quarter of this year and the UK has a record current account deficit. Writing on the influential *Conservative Home* web site, Ryan Bourne, head of public policy at the Institute of Economic Affairs, urged, "Our new prime minister

must resist the temptation of Keynesianism and maintain fiscal sanity.”

May is a hard-line Thatcherite, who is considered capable not merely of political spin designed to paper over the Tories’ reputation as the “nasty party,” but of ruthlessly defending the interests of the ruling class. Her political record includes opposing a minimum wage as an unacceptable burden on business and declaring that tax credits for poorer workers “disincentivise[s] people from working more hours or finding better-paid jobs.” Ending poverty, she added, was about ending “idleness.”

That is why the ruling class understands very well the difference between spin and reality. The *Financial Times*, for example, headlined one article, “Expect Theresa May to favour social order over freedom” and another, “Austerity not yet off government agenda.”

“May has given no indication of rowing back on planned spending cuts,” it stated, and has “said the government should ‘continue with its intention to reduce public spending and cut the budget deficit.’”

Billions more planned cuts will remain in place, including cuts to Universal Credit, costing some families as much as £3,000 a year, a four-year freeze in benefit rates, and actual cuts of £30 a week for people found too sick to work. On top of this, the National Health Service is facing a record deficit of £2.45 billion in 2015-16.

May’s other recommendation for the UK’s highest office is her record of imposing authoritarian measures. She is the architect of the Draft Communications Data Bill, or “Snoopers’ Charter,” which requires Internet service providers and mobile phone companies to maintain records of each user’s internet and phone activity for 12 months—to be made available to the police and security services. During the referendum campaign, she argued that the UK should pull out of the European Convention on Human Rights regardless of the result, complaining that it “can bind the hands of parliament” and “adds nothing to our prosperity...” She abandoned this only upon becoming a leadership candidate because dissent in her own party would deny her a parliamentary majority in any vote.

Her record in attacking migrants is particularly sinister. The *Guardian* listed “seven bills and 45,000 changes to the [immigration] rules since she became home secretary.” She is the author of the Immigration

Act 2016, which mandates that employers who hire illegal migrants as well as the workers face criminal sanctions; allows for illegal migrants’ bank accounts to be frozen and their driver’s licenses seized; makes it a criminal offence for a landlord to knowingly rent premises to an illegal migrant, punishable by five years in prison; and extends the government’s “deport first, appeal later” policy to all illegal migrants rather than just convicted criminals.

She infamously introduced “Go Home vans,” which drove around areas with large immigrant populations urging illegal immigrants to leave the UK.

May can rely on a pliant media to uncritically repeat her lies and claim that the election of a woman as prime minister is somehow progressive—even after Thatcher! But the main advantage she enjoys is the fact that she faces no opposition from the Labour Party and the trade unions.

As the Tory leadership contest was unfolding, the right wing of the Labour Party was busy mounting a political coup with the intention of removing Jeremy Corbyn as party leader. Speculation is rife over whether May will hold onto office until the end of the government’s five-year fixed term in 2020, or possibly seize advantage of the wrecking operation mounted by the Blairites to call a snap election. In either case, the working class will continue to pay a bitter price for not only the role played by the Blairite fifth column, but also the inevitable abject failure of Corbyn’s perspective of transforming the Labour Party into a political mechanism for opposing austerity and militarism.



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