

UK: May government pins its hopes on Trump presidency

Robert Stevens
16 November 2016

Formed as a result of the deepening crisis in British ruling circles following June's unexpected referendum vote to leave the European Union (EU), the Conservative government of Prime Minister Theresa May is looking to secure its global interests through developing the closest possible relations with US President-elect Donald Trump.

In response to the November 8 election, May issued a statement effusively welcoming Trump's victory, as opposed to the more cautious statement issued by German Chancellor Angela Merkel. "Britain and the United States have an enduring and special relationship based on the values of freedom, democracy and enterprise," she wrote. "We are, and will remain, strong and close partners on trade, security and defence. I look forward to working with President-elect Donald Trump."

In remarks that left no room for a misinterpretation of the trajectory of the British government toward a transatlantic alliance with Trump—at the expense of Europe—last Thursday Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson aimed his fire at Merkel and other EU leaders who expressed concern and even opposition to Trump's election.

"It's time that we were overwhelmingly positive about the possibilities here and I may respectfully say to some of my beloved European friends and colleagues that I think it's time we snapped out of the doom and gloom about the result of this election and the collective whinge-orama that seems to be going on in some places," Johnson said. "In our country, I think we should recognise that this is an opportunity. I think we should take what the president-elect has had to say about his feelings for our country at face value."

Johnson followed up his attack on other EU states by boycotting an "emergency" meeting of European

Foreign Ministers Sunday, called at the instigation of Berlin. The meeting was also snubbed by the French foreign minister. May government sources dismissed the meeting as "huffing and puffing" designed to allow EU officials to posture as opponents of Trump.

In rushing to endorse Trump, Johnson and the anti-EU wing of the Tories have amplified Trump's statements—made during the US election campaign—supporting Brexit and pledging that under his presidency the UK would receive a favourable trade agreement with the US. This is contrasted to the statement by outgoing Democratic President Barack Obama, who said, during his trip to the UK last April, that if the UK voted to leave the EU it would go to the "back of the queue" in terms of trade agreements.

Placing its fortunes in the hands of a reviled and unstable figure such as Trump is a measure of the government's political desperation. It does so under conditions of ongoing protests in the US against the validity of his victory and an unprecedented political and constitutional crisis in the UK, with the government forced to appeal to the Supreme Court in an attempt to reverse a High Court ruling that May cannot trigger Article 50—the formal means to exit the EU—without Parliament voting on it first.

The court case and the judicial decision was shaped by powerful sections of Britain's ruling elite who have demanded above all a "soft-Brexit" deal preserving access to the Single European Market. May and Johnson might calculate that Trump's backing will strengthen their negotiating position, but it is a high-risk strategy. Even former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair, while slavishly backing the US to the hilt as the junior partner in the illegal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the "war on terror," portrayed himself as a "bridge" between the US and Europe due to the

importance of continental trade with Europe.

Moreover, even as May mortgages her future to the Eurosceptic wing of her party, she undermines her own dwindling authority. This week Nigel Farage, the interim leader of the far-right UK Independence Party (UKIP), along with the party's financial backer Aaron Banks, became the first leaders of a European political party to meet Trump at his Trump Tower penthouse in New York.

As leader of UKIP, Farage spearheaded the successful "Leave" campaign in the referendum, focusing on anti-immigrant xenophobia. The then Tory Prime Minister David Cameron was forced to call the referendum to assuage his party, which was split on the issue of remaining in the EU. Much of the Tories wider base was supportive of UKIP's anti-EU stance, with Cameron hemorrhaging support to Farage's party. Farage has since developed close ties with his fascistic co-thinker Trump, who invited Farage to speak alongside him at an election campaign rally in Mississippi in August.

May's government was thrown onto the back foot by Farage's latest meeting with Trump. Her official spokeswoman stated, "We have established routes of engagement with the president-elect and his team. Our diplomatic staff have been building those contacts and links in the run-up to the election."

The spokeswoman claimed, "The president-elect talked [to May] about enjoying the same relationship Reagan and Thatcher did," adding in a pointed reference to Farage, "I don't remember there being any third person in that relationship."

The *Guardian* reported Monday, "There have been reports of a cabinet split in which some ministers urged May to use Farage's links to Trump."

In reality, while May bends over backwards to insist that the much vaunted "special relationship" between the US and the UK remains intact, there is no indication that Trump views the UK as a critical ally. According to media reports, May was forced to wait until Trump had called a host of other countries before he deigned to speak to the British prime minister following his election victory. Trump spoke to the leaders of India, Japan, Australia, Egypt, South Korea, Mexico, Israel and Turkey first. Ireland's leader Enda Kenny also received a 10-minute call before May.

In her speech to the annual Guildhall banquet

Monday night, May glowingly referred to the "new president-elect in the US who defied the polls and the pundits all the way up to election day itself."

She added that the UK's departure from the EU would not see "Britain stepping back from the world, but an example of how a free, flexible, ambitious country can step up to a new global role in which, alongside the traditional trading blocs, agile nation states like Britain can trade freely with others according to what's in their own best interests."

"We will also use the strength and size of our economy to lead the way in getting out into the world and doing new business with old allies and new partners alike," she added.

In reality, the Brexit vote has severely undermined the UK's use-value to Washington and therefore its continued ability to punch above its weight on the world arena. That is why May sought to portray Britain's role within the US-led NATO military alliance as the pivotal issue. Britain, said May, "is the only country in the G20 to meet its commitment to spend 2 percent of GDP on defence and 0.7 percent of gross national income on overseas development ..."

The UK "is a leading member of the coalition supporting Iraq to defeat the scourge of Daesh [ISIS]; that has agreed to send 800 troops to Estonia as part of NATO's presence in eastern Europe." The UK is also involved in "Nigeria in the fight against Boko Haram; and ... reinforcing its commitment to peacekeeping forces in South Sudan, Somalia and Kosovo."

The UK has pitched itself as the main opponent of German plans for the creation of a European Army and guarantor of the hegemony of NATO. Alongside its trailing after Trump, it is a stance that will only sharpen political antagonisms with the EU's economic and political powerhouse, Berlin.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact