

# Britain's crisis election and the tasks facing the working class

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7 June 2017

Britain goes to the polls tomorrow at the end of an election campaign like no other. In the space of a few weeks, a predicted Conservative landslide has given way to speculation about a reduced majority, a hung parliament or even a Labour victory.

Two brutal terror attacks have claimed dozens of lives and maimed many more. Armed police patrol the streets in large numbers. The army was despatched to key strategic locations under secretive emergency measures.

Prime Minister Theresa May called the snap poll because the financial oligarchy and the military-intelligence apparatus she serves decided they could not afford to wait two years until the next scheduled election, as they would be in the midst of major political and social convulsions. It has turned out that they could barely afford to wait two months.

May had hoped to utilise the internal warfare in the Labour Party and a savage media campaign against Jeremy Corbyn to secure a de facto parliamentary dictatorship and impose an agenda of stepped-up austerity and military intervention in Syria and elsewhere. Instead, the election campaign has seen an outpouring of hatred of the Tories and all they stand for from workers and young people, who have rallied in support of Corbyn and his promise to end austerity.

May's disgusting attempt to capitalise on the terror outrages has blown up in her face. Overwhelming evidence that MI5 and the police knew Manchester bomber Salman Abedi and at least two of the three London killers is proof that numerous Islamists are protected assets to be used as proxy forces in the wars waged by Britain alongside the United States in Libya, Iraq and Syria.

The "hard Brexit" threats on which she staked her future have instead alienated large sections of big

business and the City of London. Estimates that post-Brexit trade with the European Union may fall by 40 percent, and foreign investment by 20 percent, have led to warnings of a financial disaster.

Her plan to rely on the Trump administration to force the hand of Germany, France and other EU states has had the opposite effect. The response of Germany's Angela Merkel to Trump's "America First" threats was to declare that the US and post-Brexit Britain were no longer to be trusted as allies. In the face of the growing global tensions between the US and Europe, Britain's entire foreign policy strategy of resting on US military and economic power to magnify its own influence has collapsed.

However, the brutal truth is that a Corbyn-led Labour government offers no genuine alternative to the austerity, militarism and war policies of May.

Millions of workers want to see the back of the Tories and are ready to excuse Corbyn's constant retreats before the Blairites in his party, hoping that he will honour his commitments to defend the National Health Service, raise the minimum wage and build new homes. But his manifesto's efforts to marry minimal social reforms to an acceptance of the militarist agenda of British imperialism is a circle that cannot be squared.

Britain is being destabilised economically, politically and socially as world capitalism descends into its deepest crisis since the end of World War II—one that is reproducing all the horrors of fascism and war associated with the first half of the 20th century. The attempt to ensure Britain's "global competitiveness" under conditions of trade war and military conflict demands an escalation of the destruction of jobs, wages and essential services.

This is deepening the gulf between the working class and the super-rich to the point of a social explosion.

The clash of interests between the oligarchy and the working class is so acute that it cannot be reconciled through Corbyn's appeal for "fairness ... for the many not the few." Rather, Labour's nationalist policy of creating a form of "industrial patriotism" through government "working in partnership with business and trade unions" is a means of subordinating workers to the trade war agenda pursued by May at the cost of their own jobs and living standards.

It is now almost two years since Corbyn was elected party leader thanks to hundreds of thousands flooding into the Labour Party with the aim of pushing it leftwards. Instead, it is Corbyn who has shifted ever further to the right.

His opposition to driving out the right-wing MPs who sought his removal, agreeing to free votes on military action in Syria and the renewal of Trident nuclear weapons, and then incorporating these retreats into his manifesto, all point to the real role a Labour government under his leadership will play.

A stark warning must be taken from how Corbyn has reacted to the terror attacks in Manchester and London.

The Conservatives are seeking to use the attacks to win the election by reinforcing their efforts to portray Corbyn as soft on terrorism and a threat to national security, based on his previous statements criticising NATO and his refusal to state categorically that he will authorise the use of nuclear weapons. They are preparing a sharp turn to state repression after June 8.

May's four-point strategy for "fighting terrorism"—including Internet censorship and policing measures to eliminate "safe spaces" for "extremism" in the public sector—will be used to clamp down on political discontent, alongside existing measures to further limit the right to strike. Its authoritarian core was epitomised by her declaration: "And if human rights laws stop us from doing it, we will change those laws so we can do it."

She also used her speech on the London attacks to reaffirm her pledge of stepped-up military intervention in Iraq and Syria.

Corbyn remains silent on all of this. Instead of explaining that the terror attacks are blowback from British imperialism's criminal interventions in the Middle East, he has chosen to denounce May for cutting police numbers, while declaring his own readiness to do "whatever it takes" in the fight against

terrorism.

In this way, he is positioning himself as the candidate not of social change, but of law and order. His promissory note to the ruling elite that they have nothing to fear from his government means that his "left" rhetoric has barely survived an election campaign, let alone Labour taking office.

Britain's pseudo-left groups have all sought to overcome workers' deep mistrust of the Labour Party by exploiting popular illusions in Corbyn as an individual. The Socialist Workers Party writes, "We don't support those who have repeatedly tried to shift Labour rightwards. But the only way to show support for Corbyn is to vote for all the Labour candidates." The Socialist Party avoids all mention of Labour and simply calls "For a Corbyn-led government."

Events have confirmed the insistence of the Socialist Equality Party that the Labour Party cannot be changed by installing a new leader. Labour today is the same party it was under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

Whatever the outcome on June 8, the British working class, like its brothers and sisters throughout the world, faces a life and death struggle against the descent into social and political reaction and the ever-growing danger of war. The only way forward is through the adoption of a new, revolutionary socialist and internationalist perspective. The task placed before the most advanced workers and youth is to join the SEP and build it as the new leadership of the working class.



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