

# Brexit crisis intensifies as “Remain” Tories reject bogus compromise on parliament having “meaningful vote”

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A supposed “ compromise ” amendment to the European Union Withdrawal Bill proposed by the Conservative government of Prime Minister Theresa May to head off a potential rebellion by around 15 pro-Remain Tory MPs unravelled yesterday.

May is beholden to her hard-Brexit wing, led by Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson , and Jacob-Rees Mogg. But even a small rebellion by Remain Tories would endanger her minority government reliant on the votes of 10 Democratic Unionist Party MPs. Therefore, the first day of voting on Tuesday concerning 15 amendments to the Withdrawal Bill by the House of Lords centred on the most potentially damaging—agreeing that parliament must have a “ meaningful vote ” on any Brexit deal concluded.

A group of backbenchers intended to back an alternative amendment drafted by former Tory attorney general Dominic Grieve. This would also give MPs a greater say over Brexit—including the House of Commons having to approve any government action in Brexit talks if there is no exit deal agreed.

Brexit Minister David Davis and May both warned that the UK’s negotiations with the EU risks being undermined if it passes. But with Justice Minister Phillip Lee resigning, averting the rebellion necessitated May promising the draft law would be changed to meet the concerns of rebel MPs. The motion was won by the government 324 to 298, though Remainers Anna Soubry and Kenneth Clark voted for the Lords amendment.

However, the government’s compromise, when a draft was presented late Thursday, was rejected as “unacceptable” by Grieve and his allies.

Grieve told BBC News, “At the end of the process

something was inexplicably changed, which had not been agreed. The government has made the motion unamendable, contrary to the usual methods of the House of Commons. And therefore it cannot be accepted.”

The government’s amendment states that if May announces, before January 21, 2019, that no deal has been reached with the EU, parliament must be given a right to vote. This, however, is only on a non-binding “motion in neutral terms”, indicating solely that parliament had considered the statement.

A fresh conflict will now take place in the House of Commons, after the bill returns to the Lords next week where both amendments will be considered.

The government also faces a showdown with the Scottish National Party that threatens the existing devolution arrangements and the unity of the UK.

On Wednesday, an amendment from the Lords to keep the UK in the European Economic Area (EEA) after Brexit was defeated amid chaotic scenes.

The six SNP MPs had walked out from Prime Minister’s Questions after their Westminster leader Ian Blackford was thrown out for refusing to sit down when ordered by Speaker John Bercow. Blackford had protested the lack of debate on the EU Withdrawal Bill’s impact on Scotland, describing the bill as a “power grab” and that it was a “democratic outrage” that MPs had not been given enough time to debate the bill’s measures.

The EU Withdrawal Bill transfers 24 devolved legislative areas, including agriculture, fisheries and public procurement, temporarily to Westminster and has angered the nationalists—who say it will impact on Holyrood for up to seven years.

Labour has sought to advance itself to business circles as an alternative government, able to maintain access to the vital Single European Market and some form of customs union through a “soft Brexit” agreement. But Wednesday’s vote saw a three-way split in the Labour Party as MPs rejected retaining the UK’s EEA links after Brexit by 327 votes to 126.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn had urged his MPs to abstain on the proposal. But 75 of his MPs voted for the motion and 15 against, with six quitting their frontbench roles—the biggest revolt suffered by Corbyn to date.

The EEA motion was endorsed by the Blairites within the Labour Party, led by Chuka Umunna and Stephen Kinnock, as providing full access to the Single European Market without EU membership. Called the “Norway option,” EEA covers non-EU countries Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, who secure market access by agreeing to a financial contribution and to accepting most EU laws. Corbyn opposed it, insisting that the UK would have to adhere to EU rules without having a say in them while pledging not to back any agreement that did not guarantee single market access in a bespoke agreement.

Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell made clear that the main problem was that the EEA includes a commitment to the free movement of European labour. Accepting that “We campaigned for remain but many of our MPs, including myself, now represent seats which voted heavily leave”, he called for “a traditional British compromise.”

The 75 Blairites wanted no such compromise and neither did the 15 MPs who voted against. Prior to the vote, Laura Smith, MP for Crewe and Nantwich, quit her job as shadow defence minister to vote against EEA. (Ged Killen, Tonia Antoniazzi, Anna McMorris, Ellie Reeves and Rosie Duffield all stepped down as parliamentary private secretaries to vote for EEA membership.)

Making clear the main concerns of the 15 “no” voters, John Spellar MP said, “It involves free movement—that’s the crucial issue...” Caroline Flint MP also said EEA membership would mean there would be no restriction on free movement. Her constituents “want to have a sense that we can turn the tap on and off when we choose.”

Whatever the twists and turns to come, Britain’s

ruling class is in a crisis of historic proportions.

Paul Drechsler, outgoing president of the Confederation of British Industry, warned that several industries, including the auto industry and its 800,000 employees, “risk becoming extinct” without a customs union. Even Somerset Capital Management, the investment firm co-founded by Rees-Mogg, has established an investment fund in EU member state Ireland that warns of the dangers of a hard Brexit to attract its clients.

Of greater import still is the *Financial Times* editorial, “Brexit and the Trump factor”—warning that Brexit risks endangering not only the global position of British imperialism but that of Europe as a whole.

“[T]he domestic drama should not divert us from the most significant event affecting Brexit this week: the clash between US president Donald Trump and ‘the rest of the west’ at the G7 summit in Canada.”

The G7 clash “raises more doubts over whether it would be remotely possible to sign a trade deal with a figure as mercurial and unpredictable as the US president,” warns the *FT*, but it also “poses a difficult question” for the EU: “Can the EU really afford—at a time when it needs allies—a long period of conflict with post-Brexit Britain?”

The *FT*’s intervention makes clear that all sides in the Brexit dispute are basing their calculations on how best to pursue British capitalism’s predatory designs, in the context of an escalating global trade war and the attendant military dangers.

Whichever option wins out, workers and young people will be made to pay in the form of escalating austerity measures to ensure Britain remains “globally competitive.”

The only answer to this nightmare scenario is for the working class to reject all the reactionary proposals offered by the ruling class and its parties and unify its struggles with its European, American and international brothers and sisters for socialism.



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