

Troops to be deployed in case of no-deal Brexit

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Theresa May's Conservative government announced yesterday that 3,500 soldiers were on standby to deal with economic disruption and to confront social unrest in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

The UK faces crashing out of the European Union (EU) if no agreement can be reached by Parliament before a January 21, 2019 deadline. May refused to put the agreement reached with the EU to a vote in Parliament on December 11, knowing that it would have been voted down. The UK is scheduled to exit the EU on March 29, 2019.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson told Parliament that his department "will have 3,500 service personnel held at readiness, including regulars and reserves, in order to support any government department on any contingencies they may need."

The announcement that ministers were to "ramp up" preparations for a no deal came after the Cabinet met Tuesday morning. The *Guardian* reported, "Downing Street said delivering the prime minister's deal 'remains the top priority,' but when presented with three options on whether to increase, maintain or wind down preparations, there was unanimity in cabinet to implement all no-deal contingency planning across departments."

The decision was made after Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn once again refused to move a motion of no confidence in the government, after a day in which Corbyn's political prevarication descended into farce.

At just after 3:00 p.m. yesterday, Labour's central office let it be known that Corbyn would move a motion of no confidence on the prime minister, not the government, just ahead of May addressing Parliament at 3:30 p.m., if she did not announce a parliamentary date for a debate on her proposed deal with the EU.

The circulated text read: "That this house has no confidence in the prime minister due to her failure to allow the House of Commons to have a meaningful vote

straight away on the withdrawal agreement and framework for the future relationship between the UK and the EU."

The media immediately declared that Corbyn had "bottled out." His was a non-binding motion committing neither Labour nor Parliament to anything.

He specifically avoided putting through a Vote of Confidence *in the government as a whole*, which under the Fixed-Term Parliaments Act of 2011 would have to be acted on and debated once the leader of the opposition demands it. Had Corbyn tabled a motion with the specific wording, "That this house has no confidence in her majesty's government," a motion of confidence would have to be passed in the government within 14 days, or a general election would be called.

The Democratic Unionist Party, on which May depends for a majority, and the hard-Brexit Tory European Research Group both immediately made clear that they would not support Corbyn's toothless resolution anyway.

When May spoke, she announced that she intended to seek concessions from the EU and would then present them to MPs to vote on during the week of January 14, i.e., on the eve of the voting deadline. Her intention was clearly to present MPs with an ultimatum—vote for her deal or face a hard Brexit—in order to minimise any rebellion by Tories and the DUP and hopefully to also secure the reluctant backing of pro-Remain Blairite Labour MPs.

To make matters worse, Corbyn followed May without putting his motion! It was only after three hours of debate—and after Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell had said Labour had got what it wanted when May set a date and would not proceed with the motion—that Corbyn then put his motion, stating that a January vote was unacceptable.

So pathetic was Corbyn's move that May walked out of the parliamentary chamber immediately, with Downing

Street describing his motion as a “stunt” that will not be granted any parliamentary time for debate.

Once again Corbyn has been instrumental in allowing two unaccountable cliques, the Tory Brexiters on one side and Remain in the EU-supporting Blairites on the other, to dominate political events—including planning the use of troops against the working class.

Corbyn’s politics are an example of parliamentary cretinism on steroids. He justifies not acting on principle, of demanding an end to a Tory government that has imposed savage austerity on millions and which is up to its neck in deadly military adventures in the Middle East and internationally, with calculations that waiting a little longer—and allowing May’s plan to be rejected—will open up the possibility of cross-party support for a general election so that Labour can renegotiate a soft Brexit, or, failing that, the second referendum urged by the Blairites.

As is now the norm, this left his right-wing opponents free to denounce him for not calling for the government to be brought down: Not because they want this to happen, but because this would finally get the issue of a general election off the agenda and clear the path for a second referendum with the option of remaining in the EU.

Former Labour minister Chris Leslie commented, “This feels like a pantomime on the [EU/UK Brexit deal] vote: in then out, on then off. It seems the [Labour] leadership will do anything including pulling its punches against the Government to avoid a People’s Vote.”

Labour MP Chuka Umunna added, “We need to settle the issue of whether there can be a general election to resolve the chaos so this confidence motion is overdue. If it fails we can then move straight on to holding a People’s Vote on Brexit and let the electorate decide—the only way of breaking the deadlock in Westminster.”

The differences between Corbyn and his critics are largely of a tactical rather than a principled character. Corbyn is opposed to the mad gambol of the Blairites and their allies in the pro-Remain Scottish National Party and Liberal Democrats towards a second referendum on the basis that this could further destabilise a country that is already deeply divided politically over Brexit and, more importantly still, socially polarised after a decade of unrelenting austerity and a collapse in the living standards of the working class.

He wants to make an attempt to negotiate a soft Brexit, focused on maintaining access to the Single European Market with some form of customs union, while still allowing UK business to strike the independent trade deals with the US and other non-EU countries that is the

central concern of the Brexiteers. He also wants to appease anti-immigrant sentiment by ending free movement of EU labour in favour of “managed migration.” However, he has made clear that if this pro-capitalist wish list fails, then he will back a referendum on Remain.

No one needs to wait to see what a Corbyn government would look like in office. Its political essence is revealed in the Brexit crisis. Nothing he says or does is based on an appeal to the working class to act against the government and the employers, to oppose austerity and militarism and avert the growing danger of military and police repression. Otherwise he could never have moved a resolution calling for May to be replaced while leaving the Tories in government!

His speech made clear his class loyalties by being peppered with references to the demands of big business. In finally tabling his non-vote of no-confidence, Corbyn again took the opportunity to present himself and Labour to the ruling elite as the only political force that can avoid further instability. In response to May’s announcement, he said, “We face an unprecedented situation, the Prime Minister has led us into a national crisis.”

“The country, workers and businesses are increasingly anxious,” he added. Outlining the concerns of big business, he declared, “The [Confederation of British Industry] said yesterday: ‘Uncertainty is throttling firms and threatening jobs not in the future but right now. ... The British Chamber of Commerce has said: ‘There is no time to waste.’”



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