

UK government announces draconian Brexit immigration policy and deployment of troops

Robert Stevens
21 December 2018

The day after the government announced it was putting 3,500 troops on standby, amid business organisations saying they were “watching in horror” at the implications of a no-deal Brexit, proceedings in Parliament Wednesday descended into farce.

Rather than debating the crisis wracking Prime Minister Theresa May’s Conservative government, and an emergency motion to discuss the government’s plans to accelerate planning for a “no-deal” Brexit, priority was allotted to debating whether or not Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn had called May a “stupid woman” under his breath during Prime Minister’s Question time.

Instead of refusing to entertain an entirely choreographed debate on this, Corbyn returned to Parliament at the request of the Speaker to make a pathetic statement: “I did not use the words ‘stupid woman’ about the Prime Minister or anyone else and am completely opposed to the use of sexist or misogynist language in absolutely any form at all.”

The farcical events in Parliament were meant to conceal the extraordinarily dangerous and reactionary course being pursued by the government. The possibility of mobilising troops on the streets is justified by reference to the uncertainties posed by a no-deal Brexit and their remit is being kept deliberately vague. But this is a response to heightened political and social tensions in the UK that exist independently of whatever course is taken by Brexit negotiations. And the chief target of any such deployment is the working class, with the aim of quelling the social unrest provoked by worsening austerity.

Underscoring the contempt for any democratic accountability, the government said the Cabinet had agreed to ready the troops, with Defence Minister Gavin Williamson telling Parliament only that the

government “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 *Financial Times* noted that the 3,500 have been “set aside for no-deal contingencies under a plan codenamed ‘Operation Yellowhammer’” and are “in addition to 5,000 troops kept on standby to help cope with a UK terror attack...”

While the government have refused to divulge details as to what end the troops are to be used, senior figures within the police and military have acknowledged in recent months that industrial action by workers is specifically being targeted. In September, a leaked document from the National Police Co-ordination Centre warned that there was a “real possibility” that soldiers would be deployed and that police leave would have to be cancelled around the Brexit exit date next year. It warned that a shortage of medicine could “feed civil disorder” and a rise in the price of goods could see “widespread protest which could then escalate into disorder.”

Last month, head of the Armed Forces General Sir Nick Carter told the BBC’s Andrew Marr Show that plans were being developed to deploy the military, “Whether it’s a terrorist attack or whether it’s a tanker drivers’ dispute, industrial action or whatever else it might be.”

Corbyn, busy giving pathetic statements in Parliament refuting accusations that he was a misogynist, has said nothing about the plans to mobilise thousands of soldiers to be used against the working class.

It was left to pro-EU Blairite provocateur Ian Austin to respond to the government. While stating, “This is the reality of a no-deal Brexit: soldiers on the streets;

medicines being stockpiled in the NHS; and airports and ferry terminals grinding to a halt. This is scary tactics, pure and simple.” He did not oppose the mobilisation in any way.

Ever since the referendum vote, everything has been done by the contending pro- and anti-Brexit factions of the ruling class to exclude the interests of the working class, as they have fought out their opposing programmes as how best to further the strategic global interests of British imperialism.

With the working class unable to articulate its own independent interests, a crisis-ridden government is moving to rapidly enact its reactionary Brexit agenda.

On Wednesday, just 100 days from the date of Brexit, the government announced a white paper on an immigration policy to be enacted following the Brexit transition period, currently set as January 2021. However, the policies could be imposed as early as next April if May fails to get her EU exit deal agreed by Parliament.

Proposed is a permanent end to the free movement of people to the UK, as “Everyone will be required to obtain a permission if they want to come to the UK to work or study.” The UK will introduce a new temporary 12-month visa for EU nationals of all skill levels and a proposed minimum salary threshold of £30,000 for “highly skilled” migrants. To enter Britain they will also need to be sponsored by an employer.

Low-skilled workers will be banned from applying for visas and will only be able to enter the UK from a “low-risk country” for a maximum of 12 months. There will be a cooling-off period of a further 12 months, aimed at preventing these workers from having the opportunity of working in the UK permanently.

All migrants to the UK are to be refused access to free National Service Health care and social services. Home Secretary Sajid Javid said that no one allowed to enter the UK under the new system will have the “right to access public funds, or to settle permanently in the UK.”

EU citizens already settled in the UK and who wish to stay will be forced to register for a new “settled status.” EU nationals who wish to join family members in the UK post-Brexit “will need permission to do so, normally in the form of an electronic status, which must be obtained before coming to the UK.”

Sections of business are opposed to such a high pay

threshold, fearing it will deny them access to a vital low-paid workforce. Mike Cherry, the national chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses, said, “A £30,000 threshold for those coming to the UK could severely restrict access to the right skills in many sectors: construction, retail and care to name just a few.”

Labour, whose official immigration policy is opposing the free movement of labour and support for “managed migration” did not oppose the white paper in principle, but on the basis that it would damage an economy heavily reliant on millions of poorly paid workers.

Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott complained, “The Government has disgracefully labelled workers on less than £30,000 as low-skilled. Our economy and public services are kept ticking by this majority of workers.”

The government, she added, were not prioritising “our economy and our society,” but “using an income-based system which allows derivatives traders free movement but which excludes nurses, social care workers and other professions in which we have severe skills or labour shortages.”

Abbott saw no reason to be embarrassed by such an admission that vital sectors of the economy, including healthcare, would collapse without continued low pay. But it is the political responsibility of Labour and the trade unions that the employers and the state have been able to create a society in which social inequality and super-exploitation are the norm.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact