

Theresa May's Conservative government survives no-confidence vote

Robert Stevens and Chris Marsden
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Theresa May's government survived a no-confidence vote Wednesday night brought by Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn. MPs voted by 325 to 306 with all 314 MPs of her divided Conservative Party voting to keep the government in office. They were joined by the 10 MPs of the Democratic Unionist Party and an independent unionist.

All the opposition parties—Labour, Scottish National Party, Liberal Democrats and Green voted against the government. But the most striking aspect of the evening is how May, her hard-Brexit Environment Secretary Michael Gove and other Tories were able to utilise the naked hostility of the Blairites to their own leader, and barely concealed opposition to a general election, to frame the debate as a vote of no confidence in Corbyn.

Corbyn called the no-confidence vote Tuesday evening, immediately after May suffered the biggest parliamentary defeat for a prime minister in history as her Brexit deal with the European Union (EU) was rejected by MPs by a 230-vote majority.

Corbyn tabled the vote only after months of prevarication during which he has demonstrated to the ruling elite that he will do nothing to destabilise British imperialism as it moves into uncharted territory, with the scheduled date for Brexit less than 80 days away.

Corbyn said he would only table a vote of no confidence at a time when it was most likely to be successful. But whereas the Tory hard Brexit wing and May's governing partners—the Democratic Unionist Party—were ready to join the opposition to spike May's deal, there was never any possibility they would trigger a general election that could bring Corbyn to Number 10.

Corbyn's motion was pro-forma—such that when his Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell was asked by the BBC's *Today* programme Wednesday morning whether

Labour would continue to “niggle” the government if it lost the vote, he replied, “No we're not doing that.”

The Blairites were only ever supportive of a no-confidence vote in May so that its defeat would clear the decks for pressuring Corbyn to openly support their demand for a second “People's Vote” referendum to reverse Brexit.

How eager they are to keep May in office was broadcast by DUP Parliamentary leader Nigel Dodds ahead of the vote, when he told parliament, “I've been struck by how many honourable members since yesterday evening have been fairly assiduous that I and my honourable friends should be present for this debate to speak and to vote later in the lobbies in support of the government and to prevent a general election... And indeed, some of these entreaties have even come from the Government's side of the House!”

On the morning of the vote, 71 Labour MPs, citing the support of another 26, issued a joint communique demanding that Labour back a People's vote. Dozens held a photo-op outside parliament behind a banner reading “The people should have the final say.”

May focused her address to parliament on denouncing Corbyn as a threat to national security, a dupe of Russian President Vladimir Putin, an opponent of the military and war in Syria, etc.

Corbyn replied by complaining pathetically that despite her talk of reaching out across parliament, “There has been no offer of all-party talks, there has been no communication on all-party talks—all the prime minister said was she might talk to some members of the House... That isn't reaching out, that isn't discussing it, that is not recognising the scale of the defeat they suffered last night.”

What should have been a day of reckoning for May therefore turned out to be a humiliating verdict on

every capitulation made by Corbyn to his party's right wing since he became leader in September 2015.

Summing up for the government, Gove praised speakers on the opposition benches, singling out Blairite John Woodcock, who quit Labour last year to sit as an independent, and who did not back the no-confidence vote in May, and praising Hilary Benn for supporting war against Syria. Woodcock said in his speech that Corbyn and McDonnell were "simply not fit to hold high office" and that "many" Labour MPs had privately encouraged him to attack Corbyn. Gove noted that Labour's deputy leader Tom Watson had failed to mention Corbyn in his speech because "we both recognise that... Corbyn is about the worst possible person to lead the Labour Party—him more so."

May ended the debate with an appeal for all opposition party leaders to engage in discussion with her on what type of Brexit deal would command a majority in the House. Corbyn did not have the courage to tell her where to get off. He replied merely that she would have to rule out a no-deal Brexit. He has since said he will not meet with May until this reassurance is given. Corbyn's demands, at least in the short-term, appear impotent given that May is more beholden than ever to the DUP and her hard-Brexit wing. In a televised address to the nation after the vote, May stressed that her aim was to deliver Brexit, after negotiations with other parties, above all "our confidence and supply partners," the DUP.

Corbyn and McDonnell have spent months seeking to convince big business that Labour offers a way out of the "Brexit impasse"—either by negotiating a Brexit deal guaranteeing tariff-free access to the EU Single Market, or by supporting a second referendum. McDonnell pre-empted the entire Brexit debate by issuing a blueprint for Labour's economic policy promising "no surprises" for taxpayers or business, "firm discipline" on budgets and an "unprecedented" level of openness to win the confidence of the City.

However, Corbyn does not command the loyalty of his MPs, many of whom are already in discussions with May, other sections of the Tories, or the Scottish National Party and the Liberal Democrats in what could lead to a political realignment including a split away from Labour.

Nor does he have the backing of the trade unions, who did not support his demand for a general election

and have showed themselves willing to negotiate directly with the government on Brexit.

Last week May spoke directly to Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey and Tim Roache, the GMB general secretary on the suggestion of a group of Labour MPs, including John Mann and Caroline Flint, who said at the time that they were considering backing her to prevent a hard-Brexit. Though neither union leader backed May's existing deal, Roache said he was "glad the prime minister finally picked up the phone" while allies of McCluskey said "he would be keen to keep channels open with Downing Street", the *Independent* reported.

The full implications of Corbyn's constant retreats before the Blairites as they frame Labour's real policy and programme according to the dictates of the ruling class are becoming clear for all to see.

Corbyn's pseudo-left apologists all portray him as a lone warrior, who must now mobilise the Labour Party and the trade unions to get rid of the Tories—with the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party both speaking of putting the sclerotic, pro-business bureaucracies on a "war-footing." But workers and young people who have backed Corbyn based on his promise of an anti-austerity, anti-war government face the reality of how his suppression of the class struggle is the key to enabling the Tories to continue in office.

This was acknowledged by none other than the ageing Thatcherite, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, who praised Tuesday's vote on May's Brexit deal as an example of "parliament taking control. No riots, no yellow vests, no water cannon, no 'call in the army'... You compare that to Paris in the last couple of weeks."



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