

Corbyn props up May government after more Brexit vote defeats

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At the conclusion of a series of votes this week, MPs in the deeply divided British parliament supported the Conservative government requesting an extension to Article 50, by 413 votes to 202.

Article 50 governs the UK's scheduled exit from the European Union (EU) set to take place on March 29. If the extension is accepted by EU member states, this will delay Britain's exit from the bloc for a duration yet to be fixed.

The deal Prime Minister Theresa May agreed with the EU was massively rejected in January, including by her government partners, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the Tories hard Brexit wing. However, May was unable to secure any more concessions from the EU, meaning that her plan was defeated again Tuesday evening by 391 votes to 242.

On Wednesday, a government motion that included a caveat that a "no-deal" Brexit would still be on the table if no final deal is reached with the EU by March 29, was passed by a margin of 321 votes to 278. However, MPs then voted to reject a no-deal Brexit outright, backing a cross party amendment by just 312 votes to 308.

With May's deal and a no-deal Brexit opposed by MPs, Thursday still saw a large defeat of an amendment demanding a second referendum on EU membership—backed by the newly formed The Independent Group (TIG), a right-wing split off from Labour.

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn called on MPs to abstain on the vote, but 25 of the parties pro-EU wing rebelled and backed it. However, aware that there is nowhere near a majority in parliament for a second referendum, even the cross-party People's Vote campaign, led by the Blairites, called on MPs not to support the TIG motion.

Indicative of the divisions in all parties, another 18 Labour MPs, supportive of Brexit, also voted against. In the end the motion was defeated by 334-85.

Labour's own amendment called for a delay under Article 50 to "provide parliamentary time for this House to find a majority for a different approach." It was defeated by 318 votes to 302.

With parliament in stalemate and no agreement reached with the EU, the final vote on Thursday saw MPs backing a government motion by 413 votes to 202 requesting an extension to Article 50.

May was forced to allow Tory MPs a free vote on the motion, with most voting against extension including seven members of her Cabinet. Her motion relied on the support of Labour and other opposition parties.

Following the vote, May said she would put her deal to the vote again next Tuesday, ahead of an EU decision on Article 50 on Thursday. She warned that another defeat would likely mean a long Brexit delay.

May has stressed repeatedly that her deal agreed with the EU is the only genuine alternative to either a no-deal Brexit (with no trade arrangements with the EU) or Brexit being abandoned altogether. Her aim is to secure the backing of both wings of her party for a "soft-Brexit" compromise.

With the DUP and Tories hard Brexit wing fearing that Brexit could be delayed to a point where the UK would be legally obliged to participate in May's European election, or even longer, it is understood that they are getting closer to backing May's deal. This is contingent on the Attorney General, Geoffrey Cox, giving further assurances that Northern Ireland and therefore the entire UK will not be held a customs union indefinitely with the EU post-Brexit, under the so-called "backstop."

What is truly remarkable in this bizarre pantomime is

that the Tories are still in power, despite being virtually paralysed by Brexit divisions and that political debate in Britain is dominated by government infighting over competing strategies to secure the geostrategic interest of a sclerotic British imperialism.

This is entirely the responsibility of Corbyn.

Ever since May took office as a minority dependent on the DUP, she has headed a government of permanent crisis. Her survival has depended on Corbyn's suppression of the class struggle amid a rising tide of anti-Tory sentiment. Despite being elected leader in a landslide defeat of his Blairite opponents in the 2015 Labour leadership contest, Corbyn has refused to wage any struggle against them in the name of the preserving the "unity" of the party, in order to take on the Tories.

But without a struggle against his party's right-wing, no struggle against the government is possible. Corbyn is maintaining the political grip of right-wing forces who will do whatever it takes to keep May in office. The Independent Group of splitters state openly that they would back May in any vote of confidence in her. Their co-thinkers still in the Labour Party have the same aim.

Had Corbyn supported the fight the party's rank-and-file was desperate to wage, the Blairites would have been deselected and driven out. The political situation would have been transformed, with any call to wage a struggle against austerity, militarism and war winning mass support in the working class.

Corbyn wanted none of this. All he has to offer is further bootlicking.

In a message read out at a meeting organised by various pseudo-left parties this week in London, ostensibly to oppose the Blairites bogus attacks on Corbyn for being an anti-Semite, the Labour leader called once again for unity with the right. "The only thing that could hold us back would be if we were to turn on each other rather than on the Tory government and wealthy establishment interests they represent," he pleaded.

To portray himself as a safer pair of hands than the Tories in the ruling elite's greatest hour of need, Corbyn has tried to transform himself from a non-descript backbencher of 30 years—who would vote against the most rotten of his party's policies—to a statesman-in-waiting. When May first agreed her deal

with Brussels, Corbyn denounced it as "an unparalleled and unacceptable loss of sovereignty, which Labour will not accept on behalf of our country."

At the conclusion of this week's events, Corbyn, said, "After the last few days of government chaos and some defeats, all of us now have the opportunity and the responsibility to work together to find a solution to the crisis facing this country, where the government has so dramatically failed to do so... We have begun to hold meetings with members across the house to find a consensus and a compromise that meets the needs of our country."

Corbyn will still be able to count on the unwavering support of the pseudo-left groups such as the Socialist Workers Party and Socialist Party. The more Corbyn refuses to fight and is exposed before his supporters, the more shrilly do their newspapers beg him to deal with the Blairites and fight for a "workers Brexit".

The author recommends:

For an active boycott of the Brexit referendum!
[29 February 2016]

The Brexit crisis and the struggle for socialism
[23 January 2019]



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