

Conservative Party implodes amid rise of Brexit Party

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The leadership contest provoked by the imminent resignation of Theresa May threatens the implosion of the Conservative Party.

On Sunday, Samuel Gyimah threw his hat into the ring as the 13th candidate. But aside from the number of challengers, which could yet rise, the central division between them all is how to respond to the crisis wracking British imperialism over exiting the European Union (EU).

Boris Johnson, a hard Brexiteer and former foreign secretary, is favourite to win, standing on a platform for the UK's withdrawal from the European Union (EU) by the latest deadline of October 31, with or without a deal. The latest survey by the ConservativeHome website has him winning 34 percent of the membership vote. Under Tory rules, the candidates are whittled down to a final two, with the 160,000 members voting for the new leader to be in place by the end of July.

Although most Tory MPs backed staying in the EU in 2016, Johnson and at least five other leadership contenders—Dominic Raab, Andrea Leadsom, Jeremy Hunt, Sajid Javid and Esther McVey—have declared they could support leaving without a deal.

Foreign Secretary Hunt, while also declaring that the option of a no-deal Brexit was a necessary bargaining chip, said that it would be suicidal policy.

He warned that a no-deal policy would lead to a vote of confidence in parliament and a new Tory leader losing it—opening the door to a general election in which they would be “annihilated.” This would “probably put [Labour leader] Jeremy Corbyn in No. 10 [Downing Street] by Christmas.”

However, such is Johnson's appeal among the Tory membership that “Stop Boris” moves by pro-EU Tories to keep him from making the leadership shortlist failed miserably. Over the weekend, Johnson secured

endorsements from more senior Tories, including his first Cabinet member—the fanatical Thatcherite Liz Truss who is the chief secretary to the Treasury.

The *Financial Times* cited a senior Tory who commented, “Everyone is flipping away from Jeremy [Hunt]. He's blown it.”

The most serious challenger to Johnson, who might secure backing from Remainers, is the Eurosceptic Environment Secretary Michael Gove. According to a pro-Brexit *Sunday Telegraph* source, Gove is “prepared to delay Brexit until the end of next year rather than leave without a deal on 31 October.” The source said, “Simply trying to go for no deal before the UK is properly prepared will lead to a general election with Jeremy Corbyn in Downing Street and risks Brexit being cancelled altogether.”

Contender Andrea Leadsom said the deal May agreed with the EU “is dead... we can't reopen the withdrawal agreement bill and the UK parliament won't vote for it.” She proposed, “making an offer to the EU for things that were already agreed in the withdrawal agreement, that will enable us to leave with a managed exit.”

Amber Rudd, the former Home Secretary and current Work and Pensions secretary, is described by the *Guardian* as “the leading pro-European voice in the cabinet.”

Rudd co-leads the 60 strong One Nation Caucus of Conservative MPs and wrote Sunday in the pro-Remain *Observer* of her leadership bid that “we need to start being honest. We are not leaving on 31 October with a deal—parliament will block a no-deal Brexit, and there isn't time to do a revised deal.”

Fearing a general election that “would risk bringing in a Labour leader whose damaging policies make [former Labour leader] Ed Miliband look moderate,”

she called for a new prime minister to make compromises with pro-EU Labour backbenchers and a renegotiation of the deal with the EU.

Mike Hancock, warned in a letter to fellow Tory MPs, “a no-deal Brexit is not a policy choice available to the next prime minister.”

However, the ability of such pro-Remain forces to even influence the contest, let alone win it, is close to zero after European elections that virtually wiped out the Tories.

The Conservative vote was grabbed almost entirely by Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party, reducing the Tories to a rump on nine percent. With Farage also taking a much smaller 13 percent of Labour’s vote, but including in its northern heartlands, and Labour losing even more votes to the pro-Remain Liberal Democrats and Greens, a Corbyn election victory is not the only threat faced by the Tories.

Polling by Lord Ashcroft following the European election showed that more than half (53 percent) of 2017 Conservative voters who took part voted for the Brexit Party. A majority of Tory switchers are set to stay with Farage, with Ashcroft noting, “52% currently say they will stay with the Brexit Party.”

A new poll commissioned by the *Observer* showed that the Brexit Party would come first in a general election for the first time, after a poll last week showed a victory for the Liberal Democrats.

Brexit Party support increased by two points to 26 percent, with Labour down seven points to 22 percent, the Tories third on 17 percent, down five points, and the Lib Dems up five points on 16 percent.

This would leave the Brexit Party just 20 seats short of an overall majority, with the Tories reduced to a rump of just 26 MPs. The Brexit Party could secure its first MP in Thursday’s Peterborough by-election.

Speculation is already widespread regarding a possible Tory Party/Brexit Party alliance during or following any future general election, with Farage as the dominant partner.

The Brexit Party has yet to announce any policies beyond those around Brexit, but Farage’s anti-working class agenda has centred for decades on tearing up whatever EU legislation hinders the unfettered operation of big business and on anti-immigrant rhetoric that unites him with similar far-right forces across Europe such as Marine Le Pen’s National Rally

in France and Matteo Salvini’s Lega in Italy.

US President Donald Trump, who arrives in the UK today to begin a three-day state visit, looms large over the Tory’s leadership contest.

Trump has intervened strongly in support of Johnson becoming Tory leader and for the Tories to strike an alliance with Farage. He told the pro-Brexit *Sun* newspaper, “I think Boris would do a very good job.”

Before leaving for the UK, he told White House reporters, “Nigel’s had a big victory, he’s picked up 32 percent of the vote starting from nothing.” He doubled down to promote Farage in the *Sunday Times*, proposing that he be brought in to negotiate a withdrawal deal with the EU.

Whoever takes the Tory leadership will intensify the now decade-long austerity onslaught against the working class, in order to ramp up the competitiveness and profit margins of the major corporations and banks post-Brexit. On Sunday, leadership contender Home Secretary Sajid Javid announced he would consider scrapping the top rate of income tax of 45 percent for good. Hunt is floating slashing corporation tax from its current 19 percent to just 12.5 percent.

Labour has proved itself incapable of offering a viable alternative to the Tories, even as they are disintegrating. Instead, the party is being torn by factional warfare on the same lines as the government, except for the dominance of pro-Remain forces.

The only viable alternative to the conflict between two equally right-wing factions of Britain’s ruling elite and its parties is for the working class to reject all efforts to dragoon them behind an imperialist alliance with Trump following Brexit, or remaining within the EU in order to pursue a more effective trade war agenda. It means waging the class struggle against the entire ruling elite, in alliance with workers throughout Europe and internationally for the United Socialist States of Europe.



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