Corbyn makes his pitch to head a “caretaker government” to stop no-deal Brexit

Chris Marsden
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Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn yesterday submitted a letter to opposition party leaders and backbench pro-Remain rebels offering to lead the struggle to oppose a no-deal Brexit.

His letter formalises plans outlined by Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell stressing that Corbyn is the only figure who can stop Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson from pushing the UK out of the European Union (EU) without a deal on customs-free access to the Single European Market on October 31.

Corbyn’s letter sees him bend over backward to reassure his political opponents, including the Blairites in his own party, as well as big business that he has only the “national interest” at heart:

“[O]ur priority should be to work together in Parliament to prevent a deeply damaging No Deal being imposed on the country, denying voters the final say.”

Corbyn promised that following “a successful vote of no confidence in the government,” moved in early September, “I would then, as Leader of the Opposition, seek the confidence of the House for a strictly time-limited temporary government with the aim of calling a general election, and securing the necessary extension of Article 50 to do so.”

He pledged, “In that general election, Labour will be committed to a public vote on the terms of leaving the European Union, including an option to Remain.”

On this basis he asked for discussions with the letter’s recipients, the Scottish National Party’s Commons leader Ian Blackford, Liberal Democrats leader Jo Swinson, Plaid Cymru’s Liz Saville Roberts, the Green Party’s Caroline Lucas and Tory pro-Remain rebels Dominic Grieve, Oliver Letwin, Nick Boles and Caroline Spelman.

Nothing is guaranteed, but there is every possibility that Corbyn might succeed in being nominated for his chosen role as the saviour of British capitalism.

The preferred option of the Blairites, Liberal Democrats, et al, is not to allow Corbyn even temporarily into Number 10. This is not out of fear of this political coward, but because they have always worried that the working class might see this as a signal to demand social and political change in ways that could get out of Corbyn’s control.

Swinson, whose party has only 13 seats in parliament, was openly hostile to Corbyn’s offer. “There is no way he can unite rebel Conservatives and Independents to stop Boris Johnson,” she said. “It is not even certain that he would secure all the votes of Labour MPs.”

She wanted parliament to take over the running of business and pass legislation seeking to extend EU membership and hold a second referendum. If this was not possible a no-confidence vote should be called, “installing an emergency government with an alternative prime minister who has the confidence of the house and will stop a no-deal Brexit.” Corbyn should give way to either veteran Remain Tory MP Ken Clarke or Labour’s Harriet Harman, both of whom she had been “in contact” with.

Swinson is in discussion with the leader of the Blairites, Tom Watson, who heads the “Future Britain” group of 160 MPs—a majority of Labour’s 247 legislators. His aim has long been to split and form a new party or “government of national unity” based on an anti-Brexit agenda.

Anna Soubry, the leader of Independent Group for Change formed by an alliance of Blairite and Tory splitters, also said, “I would not support a government of national unity that is led by Jeremy Corbyn…”

But even some Blairites suggested that, given the timeframe involved, it might be necessary to give

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temporary backing to Corbyn. Wes Streeting MP said the Lib Dems were "wrong to reject" Corbyn's offer, which should be "treated seriously."

A serious calculation will be that, if he failed to secure a majority, then Corbyn might yet be persuaded to go the extra mile and give way for a "unity leader." Others have made the same calculation as Streeting.

SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon signalled that her 35 MPs could support Corbyn's plan for him to become temporary prime minister, stating that Swinson "should rethink… Jeremy Corbyn's suggestion is not the only possible option—but given the circumstances, nothing should be ruled out at this stage."

The SNP's favourable response was almost assured after Corbyn echoed McDonnell in promising that Labour would not oppose the holding of another Scottish independence referendum.

Liz Saville for Plaid Cymru said "We are very much open to the idea of a Unity Government. It doesn't matter who leads it…"

Green MP Caroline Lucas urged Swinson, "Please join us in engaging with Corbyn to see if we can find a way forward." If Corbyn "fails to win the confidence of the House, even for a time-limited temporary government," he should then "commit to supporting an MP who can do that…"

Tories Grieve, Letwin, Spelman and the now Independent Nick Boles wrote to Corbyn stressing their "common priority" to work together to "prevent No Deal Brexit." This would not involve backing Corbyn as prime minister, but discussing "the different ways that this might be achieved."

Corbyn's response has been to offer further reassurances of his good intentions. Rebecca Long Bailey, the Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy who is being groomed as a possible "left" successor to the aging Corbyn, literally begged Swinson to change her mind. She told the BBC, "I know that Jo wants to avoid a no-deal situation as we do, and we think this is the simplest and most democratic way of doing that. This isn't about personalities and politics. It's not about implementing Labour policy."

Making clear just how far she was prepared to go, Long-Bailey added that it was "immaterial who the leader is… The question is, if not Jeremy who would it be? And how would that be determined?"

Corbyn's readiness to abase himself before his political enemies was endorsed by his most prominent backers, Momentum, the *Canary* and *Skwawkbox*, who portrayed his letter as a tactical masterstroke.

"Lib Dems who reject Corbyn's proposal to serve as temporary PM during this impasse should never again be taken seriously on their opposition to no-deal," tweeted Momentum.

"The response to Corbyn's proposal has been eye-opening. It's essentially forced parties to unmask," wrote Tracy Keeling for the *Canary*.

Skwawkbox declared, "Corbyn's chess move in sending the letter has exposed the gross hypocrisy of most centrists, including dire LibDem Jo Swinson—but it has also drawn out Tory MPs whose principles on stopping a no-deal Brexit might be genuine. Former Tory Nick Boles has already stated that he will support Corbyn's plan."

Major hurdles lay between Corbyn and his becoming a "caretaker prime minister." But after four years as Labour leader, with millions of workers looking to him to lead a fight against job losses, social cuts and militarism, Corbyn is now touting for political alliances with the very forces he promised to oppose. In the eyes of the most advanced workers and youth, he will never recover from this latest betrayal.

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