UK government prepares for social unrest following no-deal Brexit

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Prime Minister Boris Johnson arrives in Germany today for talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel. Tomorrow he will meet French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris.

Johnson has pledged to take the UK out of the European Union on October 31, with or without a trade and customs deal with the EU. The flare-up of tensions ahead of his trip shows that no deal is increasingly likely. Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, and Irish Premier Leo Varadkar rejected out of hand Johnson's demand that the "backstop" aimed at preventing a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic must be abandoned or there would be no deal. Johnson has described the backstop as "anti-democratic and inconsistent with the sovereignty of the UK."

The crisis wracking the ruling elite over Brexit is the most severe since the Second World War. In response, Johnson's anti-EU government is preparing a ferocious assault on the working class to enforce its "Rule Britannia" agenda.

This week's *Sunday Times* published more details of Operation Yellowhammer, documents it described as revealing the "covert planning being carried out by the government to avert a catastrophic collapse in the nation's infrastructure" post-Brexit.

The *Sunday Times* has confirmed that they were compiled this month by the Cabinet Office. The documents marked "official sensitive" are understood to have been leaked by a senior Tory figure supportive of remaining in the EU, one of a group of ex-ministers led by former Chancellor Philip Hammond and David Gauke.

The newspaper emphasises, "The [Yellowhammer] documents… set out the most likely aftershocks of a no-deal Brexit *rather* than worst case scenarios…"

In a front-page article, "Operation Chaos", the *Sunday Times* warns, "Britain faces shortages of fuel, food and medicine, a three-month meltdown at its ports, a hard border with Ireland and rising costs in social care in the event of a no-deal Brexit…"

The existence of the Tory Brexit planning strategy was first revealed last September, when a press photographer was able to take a snapshot of a document revealing some "no-deal" plans and the codename. Details of its general contents then emerged over the last year.

Yellowhammer's "command and control" contingency plans for a no-deal outcome were first set to be enacted last March—the previous deadline set for the UK's exit before it was extended to October by then-Prime Minister Theresa May and Brussels. Under its provisions, the government's Cobra committee, which is usually only convened under conditions of national emergency, is empowered to deal with all no-deal preparations, including having a minimum of 3,500 troops on standby.

Yellowhammer's provisions have dire social implications, as they are premised on the clamping down of strikes and protests by workers and the evisceration of democratic rights. They include the rolling out of sweeping police-state powers embodied in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, introduced by the Labour government of Tony Blair.

In January, the *Times* revealed that scenarios for martial law were being considered and that "curfews, bans on travel, confiscation of property [and] deployment of the armed forces to quell rioting are among the measures available to ministers."

The picture that emerges from the latest documents is one in which every section of the economy faces turmoil in a small island nation that relies on imports for virtually all the necessities of everyday life, including basic foodstuffs and medicine.

There will be significant disruption at ports lasting up to three months before the flow of traffic supposedly "improves"—to 50 to 70 percent of the current rate. Yellowhammer warns that "Certain types of fresh food supply will …. decrease, which adds to the "risk that panic

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buying will disrupt food supplies."

"Low-income groups" and "vulnerable groups" will be "disproportionately affected by any price rises in food and fuel." Under these conditions, plans for rationing food are underway.

Yellowhammer notes that there will be "probably be marked price rises for electricity customers with associated wider economic and political effects."

Medicine supplies are predicted to be vulnerable to "severe extended delays," as three-quarters of the UK's medicines enter the country via the main Channel crossings.

Even the population's access to fresh water is threatened due to a possible failure in the purifying chemicals supply chain. This could "affect up to 100,000s of people."

Among the most detailed sections of Yellowhammer are those dealing with expected widespread social unrest. It states that "protests and counter protests" as a result of food, medicine and petrol shortages are expected to use up police resources and result in "a rise in public disorder and community tensions."

The impact of the crisis in Northern Ireland, with the document acknowledging that the current frictionless border will be unsustainable under the hard Brexit favoured by Johnson, could result in "disruption to key sectors and job losses are likely to result in protests and direct action with road blockades."

Central to the Tories' planning is the use of the repressive apparatus of the state to clamp down on the working class. This is outlined in the section dealing with the implications of the government's decision to set petrol import tariffs to zero percent. It warns that this will "inadvertently" lead to "significant financial losses" for the refinery operators, and the closure of two of Britain's six main oil refineries. This would see 2,000 job losses, "resulting strike action" and disruptions to fuel availability.

Faced with such threats the powers of the government under the Civil Contingencies Act are dictatorial and virtually unlimited. The Act allows "any provision which the person making the regulations is satisfied is appropriate" to protect human life, health and safety and to protect or restore property and supplies of money, food, water, energy or fuel.

Reporting on the planning for confronting social unrest in Yellowhammer, the *Sunday Times* drew attention to the fact that "Police chiefs have spent months drawing up contingency plans to deal with widespread civil disorder at the country's borders and ports in the event of a no-deal." It noted a document prepared by the National Police Coordination Centre last year that was also leaked to the newspaper. The NPCC declared that the "predominant" concern for the police was that food and goods shortages, including National Health Service supplies, will result in "civil disorder leading to widespread unrest." It warned the "necessity to call on military assistance is a real possibility" in the weeks around Britain's departure from the EU.

As far back as last January, May government ministers at a no-deal Brexit planning meeting were told by Junior Defence Minister Tobias Elwood that 30,000 regular troops and 20,000 reserves must be on standby for deployment as the UK departs the EU. These had to be in place "in case of civil unrest, to assist at Britain's airports and to ensure fuel and medical supplies."

In April, it was revealed that soldiers will be backed up by more than 10,000 riot police officers, who will be readied for mobilisation in whatever 24-hour period they are required. The first wave of 1,000 riot police will be made available for mobilisation anywhere in just one hour.

Given that the UK is already in a de facto recession, with economic and social tensions mounting internationally under conditions of escalated trade and military conflicts, any number of scenarios can break out into a major catastrophe.

The document notes that on Brexit day, "Up to 282 EU and European Economic Area nations' fishing vessels could enter illegally or are already fishing in UK waters. This is likely to cause anger and frustration in the UK catching sector, which could lead to clashes between fishing vessels and an increase in non-compliance in the domestic fleet."

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