

In Brexit crisis, Corbyn lines up with Tories and Blairites

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The main political casualty of the Brexit crisis is the undeserved reputation as a “left” of Jeremy Corbyn.

In emerging as the leading figure for the anti-Brexit wing of the ruling class, Corbyn is making clear that he has no independent political alternative to offer the workers. Rather, he is tying workers opposed to Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s reactionary nationalist politics to the pro-EU faction of Johnson’s own party, to the hated Blairites, and to a European Union that has overseen a decade of disastrous social austerity.

Proceedings in Westminster descended into farce yesterday. Johnson declared last week that he would prorogue parliament before next Thursday in order to push through Brexit on October 31, even without a trade deal with the European Union (EU).

MPs responded to Johnson’s antidemocratic scheming by voting for a cross-party bill drawn up by right-wing Labour MP Hilary Benn, committing the government to requesting a delay of Brexit from the EU until January 31, 2020—unless MPs had approved a new deal or voted in favour of a no-deal exit by October 19. Having already lost his majority on Tuesday, Johnson faced a rebellion by 21 Conservative MPs. As expected, he responded by putting forward a motion for an early general election to be held on October 15.

Johnson calculates that, allied with Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party, he can win a larger parliamentary majority by whipping up pro-Brexit nationalism and then implement his agenda of tax cuts for big business and the rich and savage austerity for the working class. He also knows that any move he makes against the European Union will have the full backing of US President Donald Trump, who tweeted yesterday, “Boris knows how to win.”

Politically, none of this would be possible without the role played by Corbyn in preventing the working class from intervening politically in defence of its own interests

under conditions of the greatest crisis facing British imperialism for well over half a century. This reached a new low yesterday when Corbyn declared that Labour will vote against an election unless it is guaranteed that there is no chance of a no-deal Brexit.

Under the Fixed Term Parliaments Act, a two-thirds majority is needed to end a government early, meaning that Johnson’s motion fell. He responded by declaring, “This is the first time in history that the opposition has voted to show confidence in her majesty’s government.”

There is still no agreement on when Labour would shift to backing a general election, with leading Blairites, including Shadow Brexit Secretary Keir Starmer, as well as Corbyn’s key ally, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, indicating that a snap election will not be considered until the EU has agreed an extension to delay Brexit.

Whenever an election takes place, by advancing no independent perspective to the pro-Remain faction of the bourgeoisie, Corbyn is seeking to ensure that the outcome offers nothing for the working class.

A general election held under conditions where millions face growing social hardship and want an end to Tory austerity will be fought instead as a de facto referendum on Brexit, with Johnson posing as the defender of the “people’s will” against the Westminster elite. It will inevitably deepen the dangerous division within the working class opened by the torrent of lies by both sides of the Brexit conflict.

The exposure of Corbyn’s pretence of representing a left alternative has run in parallel with the deepening crisis over Brexit. Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron was already committed to hold a referendum on EU membership in an attempt to overcome bitter divisions within his party when Corbyn was elected Labour leader by a landslide in September 2015—pledged to ending the pro-business, pro-war era of Blair and

Brown.

Instead, Corbyn dedicated himself to preserving the domination of the Blairites as proof that the British ruling class had nothing to fear from his leadership of the party.

The majority of Britain's corporate elite supported Remain in the June 2016 referendum, viewing EU membership as essential to their ability to compete internationally. Remain was also supported by the Obama administration and all the major European powers, concerned that a British exit could provide the catalyst for the EU's unravelling and even jeopardise the NATO alliance. With the Tory party in a state of civil war, the Labour Party under Corbyn spearheaded the Remain campaign.

As the Socialist Equality Party explained, "Corbyn has come forward as a professional liar and apologist for the EU in an attempt to make it more palatable to those repelled by the noxious chauvinism of the Leave campaign."

"Corbyn claims that the EU is a source of wealth and jobs and can be reformed to become a 'Social Europe'," the SEP continued, passing "over in silence the social crimes the EU has committed in Greece, Ireland, Spain and Portugal..."

The referendum was lost because Cameron, Corbyn et al did not count on the massive alienation among working people from the political elite, including Brussels, that the Brexiteers were able to exploit.

The Blairites responded by seeking Corbyn's removal—only to see him re-elected in June 2016 by an even bigger majority by the hundreds of thousands of workers and youth who flooded into the party—divided on Brexit but united in their desire for social change.

Cameron was forced to resign after the referendum, giving way to Theresa May—and still Corbyn refused to wage a fight. In 2017, calculating that the one-sided civil war in the Labour Party would bring Tory gains, May called a snap general election that instead produced a surge in Labour support and reduced the Tories to a minority government. Corbyn responded with yet another retreat, opposing demands for the Blairites to be deselected even as his supporters were witch-hunted amid lying claims of "left anti-Semitism."

When May's government was brought to the brink of collapse over Brexit in April, Corbyn came to her rescue by abandoning calls for a general election and entering weeks of talks on how to defend the "national interest." May was brought down anyway, but by her hard-line Brexit faction who replaced her with Johnson as a second

unelected Tory prime minister.

Having facilitated the formation of the most right-wing government in post-war history, Corbyn took the next step in his abasement before big business by offering to lead a "caretaker government" to unite all the pro-Remain opposition parties, in alliance with pro-EU Tories, against Johnson, that would delay Brexit and then call a general election. When even this was rejected, he agreed to shelve his proposed no-confidence motion against Johnson in favour of supporting Benn's bill—earning him praise from Tony Blair for having "behaved responsibly" and "put country first."

The working class must break with Corbyn and Labour.

There is no possibility of a return to a reformist past as promised by Corbyn, based on national economic regulation, under conditions of globally organised capitalism. Any turn to nationalism as an answer to EU-dictated austerity, or calls for reform of the EU itself, will only mean still deeper social attacks, protectionist trade war measures and militarism—and will spur on anti-immigrant xenophobia and the growth of the far-right.

The national tensions that produced Brexit are only one manifestation of the global eruption of inter-imperialist antagonisms provoked by the bitter competition between rival powers for control of the world's markets. Left unchallenged, these tensions lead inevitably towards authoritarian rule, trade and military war.

But these same antagonisms provide the objective impulse for the development of a powerful oppositional movement in the working class. The efforts of the capitalist class and its governments to be globally competitive demand an assault on the jobs, wages and conditions of workers in every country.

The working class has responded with a wave of strikes and protests throughout Europe and internationally, in defiance of the ongoing efforts of the social democratic parties and trade unions to suppress the class struggle. These struggles must be now consciously brought together—across all national borders and against the common capitalist enemy, in a unified social and political movement of the British and European working class for the United Socialist States of Europe.



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