Blair congratulates Corbyn for “sensible and skillful” opposition to no-deal Brexit

Thomas Scripps
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The most despised man in British politics, former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair, has praised Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn’s statecraft for the second time in as many weeks.

Writing in the *Mirror on Sunday*, the war criminal Blair stated that his “disagreements” with Corbyn are well-known. “But he has cooperated with other parties in the last weeks sensibly and skillfully to stop a No Deal Brexit.”

Corbyn has earned this praise by twice refusing to accept Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s offer of a general election. Corbyn has ditched his previous demand for an election in favor of working with the Blairites, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish National Party and pro-European Union (EU) Conservatives to pass a law committing the government to calling for delay in Brexit.

The Remain forces Corbyn is co-operating with are also using the courts in order to prevent a no-deal exit from the EU. Today the Supreme Court begins a three-day hearing to rule on cases brought by the Remain campaign against Johnson’s undemocratic proroguing of Parliament.

Corbyn is following the course of action demanded by Blair and his protégés in the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) at the start of September. In a speech at the Institute of Government, Blair said, “It is counter-intuitive for opposition parties to refuse an election. But in this exceptional case, it is vital they do so as a matter of principle, until Brexit is resolved.”

The rest of Blair’s comments in the *Mirror* spell out what else is expected of Corbyn: “Johnson wants to go back to the people in a General Election. This is crazy. We decided Brexit by a referendum. If we’re to reconsider it, do it the same way.

“An election is about masses of different things and is to elect a government. Don’t muddle it up with the very specific issue of Brexit, because if we end up with another hung Parliament then nothing is resolved.

“The Tories want an election because they’re afraid to consult the people on No Deal. And with an election, they believe that a split opposition vote will give them victory. Labour should say: ‘Sure, have an election—but not on Brexit. Do that directly. … Labour, working with other parties, including rebel Tories, has control of this situation now. Don’t give it up!”

The instructions are clear: Avoid a general election at all costs and find a mechanism to secure a second referendum on Brexit, in which Blair expects Labour to campaign for Remain. Under this plan, Labour positions itself as the saviour of dominant sections of the ruling class who fear losing out on access to, in Blair’s words, “the biggest commercial market and political alliance in the world right on our doorstep.”

The reference to “control of this situation” is significant. It is not Johnson’s Tories whom Blair most fears control slipping to. Every strategy of the pro-Remain ruling elite is predicated upon the twin principles of maintaining EU membership and preventing any political intervention by the working class.

Plans are already in motion to put Blair’s directives into practice. Labour shadow ministers have drawn up a blueprint for a “caretaker government” that would sit for six months in order to hold a second referendum on EU membership, prior to any general election.

In such a government, Corbyn as an interim prime minister has been put on notice that nothing can be done to impinge on the austerity agenda of big business. As *Guardian* columnist Polly Toynbee wrote on September 9, “Corbyn would only have permission to call an election or do whatever parliament required.

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He would be as powerless as Johnson to promote his party's policies without majority backing: a no-confidence vote could remove him instantly."

Pro-EU Tory Ken Clarke, who is the favoured candidate of the Blairites to head any national unity government, said earlier this month that he would reluctantly back Corbyn as a caretaker, "So long as it were absolutely certain we could keep Jeremy under control and he wouldn't have the slightest chance of implementing any bits of his Labour manifesto. …"

The manifesto being denounced is the thin gruel of a few watered-down reforms drawn up by Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, but even this is declared impermissible. And if Corbyn balks at the demands made on him, then someone else will take his place.

Shadow Brexit Secretary Keir Starmer is reported to be establishing himself as an alternative. A senior Labour MP told the *Daily Mail*, "Keir has a very tightly controlled operation to approach like-minded fellow MPs who are anti-No Deal or anti-Brexit full stop.

"It's about building enough of a base within the party by saying only he can appeal to the Lib Dems and the Tory rebels as the head of a post-Boris unity government. It doesn't actually involve ousting Jeremy as leader—just establishing Keir as the best choice for PM."

Pressure is also being applied on Corbyn to commit Labour to campaigning for Remain in any new Brexit referendum and any general election. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) adopted a statement two weeks ago declaring, "A no-deal Brexit must be taken off the table. … Any deal that is negotiated by a new government must meet the TUC's tests and the people must have their say on any deal with the option to remain on the ballot paper."

Last Sunday over a hundred local Labour councillors sent a letter to the National Executive Committee (NEC) calling on the party "to campaign unambiguously and energetically for a public vote on Brexit and to endorse a 'remain and transform' position in all circumstances." They "support revoking article 50, if necessary to prevent no deal, and a commitment to a remain and transform position in a general election Labour manifesto."

Deputy Labour Leader Tom Watson, the leader of the Blairite majority of the PLP, has repeatedly demanded that Labour push for a referendum before an election and "unambiguously and unequivocally back remain."

Several members of Corbyn's own shadow cabinet, including Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, Shadow Foreign Secretary Emily Thornberry, McDonnell, and chief whip Nick Brown, have said that they will support Remain whatever the options.

These are the advanced preparations for a change of line at the Labour conference, which Corbyn will be forced to endorse. A review of motions submitted to the conference reveals that 81 of the 90 relating to Brexit call for the party to explicitly support staying in the EU. None are opposed to a second referendum including a remain option.

While Corbyn has not yet formally accepted delaying an election until after a referendum, or campaigning for Remain—preferring a "renegotiated deal" with the EU—this is his direction of travel.

As Blair's praise indicates, Corbyn has done everything asked of him. In a recent speech in Scotland, Corbyn said that "Opposition parties have worked very closely on this. We will do all we can to prevent that No Deal. …"

After four years of Corbyn's leadership, the same venal right-wing forces—whom hundreds of thousands of Labour members and supporters gave Corbyn a mandate to kick out—remain firmly in control of the party. The hated architects of New Labour—Blair, Alastair Campbell and Peter Mandelson—continue to direct policy.

According to sources in the Remain camp speaking to the *Daily Telegraph*, Mandelson routinely sends representatives to Tuesday meetings of the Remain alliance at the EU Commission building in Westminster. Blair's former special advisor Lance Price is reportedly holding meetings with Liberal Democrat leader Jo Swinson's staff.

The author recommends:

The Brexit crisis and the struggle for the unity and political independence of the working class
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