

The socialist answer to Brexit: For the United Socialist States of Europe

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27 September 2019

The Brexit conflict has provoked a crisis of rule for British imperialism that has few historic precedents. Increasingly the language of Brexit is framed in terms of violence and conflict, including references to the English Civil War. This situation is fraught with acute dangers, posing the burning necessity for the working class to intervene independently and in its own interests.

Brexit has served to expose the terminal decay of parliamentary rule. The unanimous Supreme Court ruling declared that Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson's five-week prorogation of parliament was "unlawful, void and of no effect and should be quashed," and that "The effect upon the fundamentals of our democracy was extreme". It was meant to halt plans for a no deal Brexit that would hit UK access to markets accounting for half of all trade, imperil the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland, risk the breakup of the UK and threaten economic dislocation that would inevitably provoke political and social conflict.

Instead, events since parliament reconvened Wednesday have only proved how ineffectual parliament is in opposing this blithering thug and political gangster. Johnson, acting like a mini-me of his role model, Donald Trump, was able to lord it over the opposition parties because he has their measure—especially that of the political coward-in-chief, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Declaring that the Supreme Court "was wrong to pronounce on what is essentially a political question," he insisted that nothing would deter him from leaving the European Union on October 31. He repeatedly challenged Corbyn and the smaller opposition parties in a "Zombie parliament" to call a vote of no confidence and precipitate a general election—knowing Corbyn

would not do so. Corbyn has agreed to the demand of his Blairite right wing not to move a no confidence vote in Johnson and focus instead, in alliance with pro-Remain Tories, the Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party and others, on preventing a no deal Brexit.

This provided Johnson with the opportunity to call for a campaign to "Free the Islington One!"—a reference to Corbyn's parliamentary constituency--describing him as a prisoner of his own party. Corbyn could not demand a general election, he added, because his own MPs feared him winning a general election even more than the possibility that he would lose one.

Corbyn was reduced to urging Johnson to do the "honourable thing" and resign, or at least to apologise to "queen and country."

It was left to Labour's female MPs to concoct a pathetic counterattack. Paula Sherriff criticised Johnson for using words such as "surrender" and "betrayal" regarding opponents of Brexit, stating that this has led to death threats against MPs. Responding to the invoking of Jo Cox MP, who was murdered by a fascist in the final days of the 2016 Brexit referendum, Johnson deliberately inflamed tensions by saying the best way to honour her memory would be to "get Brexit done."

Yesterday was dominated by a debate on what pro-remain Speaker of the House John Bercow described as language and "culture" that was "toxic." One MP after another lined up to make moral denunciations of Johnson, after which he made a pro-forma statement opposing threats to female MPs while insisting that he was correct to describe the Benn Bill—forcing the government to seek an extension of the Brexit deadline if no deal has been agreed—as "the surrender bill." He was hailed as a hero by far-right figures, including

Katie Hopkins, Tommy Robinson, who denounced the “traitors in parliament,” and Britain First’s Jayda Franzen. Jo Cox’s murderer, Thomas Mair, screamed “Britain First” as he stabbed and shot her to death.

Johnson’s jingoism, law-and-order rhetoric and claim to be mobilising the “people” against parliament and the judiciary are the most open expression of an escalating turn to authoritarian rule. But this threat does not originate with him. All over the world similar processes can be seen—including the fascistic rants of Donald Trump upon which Johnson models himself.

Only a fresh political turn based on the class struggle offers a way to fight back. Parliament is indeed a rotting corpse, with no faction of the ruling class having any genuine concern for democratic rights. The pro-Remain MPs posturing as defenders of parliamentary sovereignty and resort to the courts is determined solely by a bitter internecine factional dispute over how best to pursue a trade war and military conflict in furtherance of Britain’s predatory imperialist interests—either aligned with the Trump administration or by maintaining the UK’s position within a European bloc.

The reactionary nationalist agenda of Brexit cannot be opposed by a turn to the EU, which is developing its own military capacities and only this week signalled its support for US war preparations against Iran. It is at the same time building border walls and concentration camps for migrants and continuing with austerity measures just as savage as those planned by the Brexiteers. Whichever form the struggle for global domination takes demands a further assault on the working class that must entail police state measures.

On Wednesday, parliament turned its attention to the Operation Yellowhammer plan to deal with a no-deal Brexit, which factors in shortages of food, essential medicines, massive price hikes and economic dislocation of which the collapse of Thomas Cook provides a foretaste. Yet no one on the opposition benches said a word against plans to mobilise 50,000 troops backed by 10,000 riot police to deal with “public disorder” and strikes because they are in full agreement with preparations for repression.

No opposition to these plans will be forthcoming from Corbyn, whose sole function for the past four years has been to ensure that there is no organised political struggle against the ruling class. Today he

speaks openly as the prospective figurehead for a “caretaker” government and potential saviour of British imperialism. In doing so, Corbyn has made clear, before he ever sets foot in 10 Downing Street, that he will loyally serve the interests of the City of London.

What is now necessary is for the working class to begin the struggle to take state power, for a workers’ government and socialism. The answer to the Brexit crisis is not unity with the EU, but class unity in a continent-wide struggle against all of Europe’s governments for the United Socialist States of Europe.

The objective conditions for such a struggle are ripening daily. Workers in one country after another are coming into battle, through strikes and protests, seeking an end to the decades-long offensive of big business: The ongoing strike by General Motors workers in the US; the massive transport strike in France and in education against President Macron’s attack on pension rights; the eruption of anti-government movements in Sudan, Algeria, Hong Kong; global climate protests involving millions and the return of social and political protest against the military regime in Egypt after the bloody setbacks suffered since the “Arab Spring.”

This is now finding its echo in the UK, with strikes by British Airways pilots that hit 1,700 flights and ongoing strike ballots by 120,000 postal workers and over 100,000 academic staff. All these movements can be taken forward only in a conscious political rebellion against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, based on the socialist and internationalist perspective advanced by the Socialist Equality Party.



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