Johnson wins majority in UK election after collapse of Labour vote

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Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson has secured the biggest majority since Margaret Thatcher's 1987 victory, on the back of the worst result for the Labour Party since 1935.

The Tories, previously reduced to a minority government, now have an 80-seat majority, with 365 MPs, compared to Labour's 203, the Scottish National Party's 48, the Liberal Democrats 12, Plaid Cymru's 4 and one Green.

The Tory vote only rose by one percent, but Labour's fell by 8 percent on the 2017 general election.

Johnson's return consolidates the most right-wing government in post-war British history, with devastating consequences for the working class.

He has pledged to move swiftly to "get Brexit done" and to complete the "Thatcher revolution." The Withdrawal Agreement Bill, paving the way for Brexit on January 31, will have its second Commons reading on Friday, December 20.

Brexit is bound up with an ever-sharper lurch towards trade war and the forging of an ever deeper military alliance with the Trump administration, targeting Russia and China. These plans to secure Britain's imperialist interests must be paid for through an ever more savage attack on jobs, wages and working conditions.

During the election, Britain's courts twice ruled against a planned strike by Royal Mail postal workers, while Johnson threatened to ban all strikes on public transport in response to the action taken by workers against South Western Railway. Operation Yellowhammer included plans to deploy 50,000 regular and reserve troops and 10,000 riot police in the event of civil unrest provoked by a no-deal Brexit. It will now be revealed as a response to the civil unrest resulting from the frontal assault on working people being planned by the government.

The scenes now unfolding in France, of riot police brutally attacking strikers and Yellow Vest protesters are a foretaste of what is to come. So too is the venal and anti-democratic character of the election campaign itself.

The media, including the BBC, has spewed out a multi-million-pound torrent of lies directed against Corbyn, centred on warnings of economic ruin, claims that he represents a threat to national security and is an anti-Semite. It was a campaign openly encompassing leading representatives of the armed forces, security services and even the chief rabbi and archbishop of Canterbury.

In the process the entire structure of parliamentary politics has been exposed as rotten. "Democracy" has been revealed, as it was in the 1930s, as a cynical and criminal sham.

Millions of workers will be appalled by the election's conduct and outcome, especially those who had looked to Corbyn to provide an alternative against such a widely despised figure as Johnson. Above all the reason for such a defeat must be understood.

Speaking after securing a reduced majority in his Islington constituency, Corbyn said that "Brexit has so polarised and divided debate in this country, it has overridden so much of the normal political debate and contributed to the result for the Labour Party across the country," overriding Labour's popular manifesto policies.

He noted in addition the "attacks that take place against family and loved ones of politicians" that "are disgraceful and frankly they are disgusting."

There is truth in both statements.

Brexit played a major role in losses in Labour's working-class heartlands, many of which voted leave. The Tories won an increase of between 4 and 6 percent in leave areas and fell by 3 percent in remain seats. In contrast, Labour's vote fell by 12 to 13 percent in the North East and Yorkshire, compared with 6 to 7 percent in London and the South of England. Labour seats were lost in Ashfield, Bishop Auckland, and Workington that have never previously elected a Tory MP.

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Labour lost its longest serving MP, Dennis Skinner, when the Tories took the Bolsover seat he has held since 1970.

In Wales, the Tories won Vale of Clwyd, Wrexham, Clwyd South, Delyn and Ynys Mon from Labour.

In Scotland, Labour lost six of its seven seats, deepening the ascendency of the Scottish National Party established by the betrayals of the Blair Labour government.

But the ability of the Tories to win ground in former Labour strongholds, together with the Brexit Party which did not stand in Tory seats but won significant swings against Labour, was made possible by Corbyn himself. It is he, and the pseudo-left groups such as the Socialist Party and Socialist Workers Party who claimed he was leading a left renewal of the Labour Party, who bear political responsibility for Johnson's victory.

On Brexit, Corbyn adapted himself fully to the pro-EU agenda of the City of London, from the 2016 referendum onwards, ending up with a policy of renegotiating a deal with the EU followed by a second referendum in which he would remain neutral that convinced no one and made unifying the working class against the Tories impossible.

But this was only one element of a constant series of political adaptations—to the Blairites and big business alike—that meant ever fewer numbers were convinced that the thin gruel of minor reforms he advanced offered a genuine alternative to the Tories or that, given his refusal to drive out the Blairites, that Corbyn would ever fight for the workers who looked to him since 2015 to oppose austerity, militarism and war.

Even now, Corbyn is attempting to continue his role of keeping Labour united while holding out the threadbare prospect of a "left" succession. He has pledged to his Blairite critics that he would not lead Labour into the next election but would stay on to preside over a "process of reflection" and ensure that "we move on into the future."

Further retreats must be expected. The pro-Corbyn group Momentum's national coordinator Laura Parker declared, "There is absolutely no appetite to go back to the centrist policies of old… We will keep the Labour party socialist." But Momentum's founder, Jon Lansman, gave only half-hearted support, saying the decision on who should replace Corbyn did not need to be taken "until the new year."

The Blairites, for their part, have already declared war. Shadow Brexit Secretary Keir Starmer said, "[W]e have a duty to rebuild, starting now." Labour peer Andrew Adonis tweeted, "I think the 'period of reflection' required to assess the need for new leadership of the Labour Party should be about ten minutes."

The real period of reflection required is for the working class to fundamentally reassess its attitude to Labour.

The election outcome is the result not only of the political cowardice of Corbyn. It is, in a more fundamental sense, the inevitable product of decades in which the supposed "left" of the Labour Party and its periphery pursued the middle-class politics of identity, while working with the trade union bureaucracy to suppress the class struggle and ridicule and denigrate the class-based politics of socialism. That is why Corbyn could never represent a genuine alternative to the Labour right and worked instead to subordinate workers and youth to a party and a trade union apparatus that is a political instrument of big business.

To wage the struggle necessary against the Tory government, the working class must now draw the most fundamental conclusions from the political shipwreck suffered by Labour.

The Socialist Equality Party rejected all claims that Corbyn's leadership would lead to a renewal of the Labour Party. Events have now confirmed that there is no national reformist, parliamentary path on which jobs, wages and social services can be defended, democratic rights preserved and the drive to militarism and war halted.

The SEP opposed all attempts to divide workers and to dragoon the entire working class behind one or other reactionary capitalist faction in the Brexit dispute. We warned of the political dangers of the divisions created and urged a unified struggle by workers across the continent for the United Socialist States of Europe.

The SEP has been vindicated in these warnings, at a time when workers all over the world are being driven into struggle against the brutal imposition of austerity by governments of the financial oligarchy. The leftward sentiment exploited and suppressed by Corbyn must now be directed towards a conscious struggle for a unified movement of the British, European and international working class for socialism, through the building of the SEP.

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