

Johnson's UK government forwards legislation flouting the rule of law

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The European Union (EU) launched legal action against Boris Johnson's Conservative government Thursday, after it pushed through an Internal Market Bill that breaks the Withdrawal Agreement negotiated with Brussels governing post-Brexit trade relations.

After the Tories published the legislation last month, the EU gave Johnson three weeks to withdraw the legislation and threatened to take his government to court if not. The European Commission said, "Violating the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement [from the EU] would break international law, undermine trust and put at risk the ongoing future relationship negotiations."

Parliament passed the third reading of the Bill Tuesday, with a majority of 84 votes. The Bill went forward to the House of Lords. MPs voted by 340 votes to 256, with a party rebellion failing to materialise. No Tory MPs voted against the Bill, with only around 20 abstaining after Johnson informed them that he would seek MPs approval if he wanted to change the Brexit departure deal.

With the three weeks up, EC President Ursula von der Leyen announced Thursday that Brussels had sent a "letter of formal notice" to Johnson to begin the process of "infringement proceedings". Action had been taken as "This draft bill is by its very nature a breach of the obligation of good faith laid down in the Withdrawal Agreement. Moreover, if adopted as is, it will be in full contradiction to the protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland."

Under the agreement's terms, Britain remains in a transition period and is subject to many of the same rules applied by Brussels until the end of 2020. London has been given until the end of October by the EU to respond to the legal action.

Johnson also met with almost no opposition

Wednesday, as Parliament renewed the draconian Coronavirus Act. The Act enables the government to use extraordinary powers to restrict or prohibit events and gatherings in England and Wales during the pandemic in any place, vehicle, train, vessel or aircraft, any movable structure and any offshore installation and, where necessary, to close premises. It provides a temporary power to close educational establishments or childcare providers, extended to cover Scotland and Northern Ireland, where there is no equivalent legislation.

The Act grants police forces the powers to arrest and isolate anyone suspecting of being able to spread COVID-19.

Utilising the rapid spread of the pandemic in Britain due to the Johnson government's declared herd immunity policy, the 321 page Act was passed within four days of being introduced before parliament on March 19. The legislation was enacted without any vote, as the Labour Party, then led by its nominally "left leader" Jeremy Corbyn, allowed its passage.

The forwarding of the two Bills without obstruction this week, which breach international law and threaten democratic rights at home, follows the pushing ahead last week of legislation representing an explicit repudiation of the Rule of Law. The Overseas Operations Bill protects British Armed Forces personnel who have committed war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan from prosecution and those committing atrocities in future. The Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) Bill allows confidential informants working for MI5 and the police to break the law. As it stands, the Bill does not explicitly rule out any crimes being committed, even torture and murder.

Parliament has become an arena for enshrining naked criminality within the highest echelons of the state. And

there is no constituency in ruling circles for opposing this.

The limited conflict that arose over the Withdrawal Agreement reflected divisions within the ruling elite over the orientation of British imperialism's foreign and trade policy. Johnson's move to abandon the Northern Ireland protocol threatens economic relations between Britain and Ireland post-Brexit and by extension with the EU, which is still Britain's biggest market. The five surviving prime ministers—Sir John Major, Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Theresa May—warned that, according to Brown, breaking the EU treaty would see Britain plunged into “battle with Europe for years ahead.”

On the Coronavirus Act, Johnson's opponents within the Tory Party endlessly cited their great concerns over the loss of freedoms for everyone that had taken place, even under the extremely limited national restrictions put in place by Johnson last week. But behind these cynical paeans to individual liberty, their barely disguised aim was to ensure that under no conditions would another national lockdown or any measure impinging on the profit drive of big business be enacted.

Leading the Tories threatening to oppose the Act's renewal were some of the parties' most frothing right-wing elements. In an interview last week with *The Post*, Sir Graham Brady laid out the motives of his rebels, who at that point numbered around 80. As early as April, “Many of us have been making the case for sensible, cautious opening [of the economy]... Certainly it was pretty obvious back then that you could allow open air markets to operate, and garden centres, all things that could have reduced the economic damage...”

“Some sectors like aviation and the events sector have been completely put out of business by the restrictions.”

Brady commended the Swedish government's refusal to impose a lockdown—which has made it the Nordic country with the highest infections and death toll, particularly among the elderly—claiming that as infections were lower now than at the height of the pandemic, people are no longer “dismissing the Swedish evidence.”

Asked “If there was a vote on a full second national lockdown tomorrow, what would happen?” Brady responded, “I would vote against a full national

lockdown... I think there would be a very significant number of Conservative members of parliament who would vote against a full national lockdown.”

Brady's opposition evaporated after Johnson promised that he would allow MPs a vote on any further coronavirus measures to be applied nationally.

A hated government whose policies have led to tens of thousands of deaths in the pandemic and pauperised millions more can only pursue its criminal agenda because it is kept in office by the Labour Party and the trade unions.

The Tories passed the Coronavirus Act by a majority of 306 votes after Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer instructed his MPs to abstain to allow it to remain on the statute books. Shadow Home Secretary Nick Thomas-Symonds commented, “Here in the UK, we have seen over 42,000 deaths, lives altered in ways unimaginable a year ago, and our economy facing one of the worst recessions on record.” Handing Johnson a free pass he declared, “We accept the challenge that presents, which is why we have recognised that, in a pandemic, any government needs extraordinary powers available... we will not block its passage.”

Only six Labour MPs (out of 201) voted against the draconian powers but Corbyn and his main allies John McDonnell and Diane Abbott were not among them as they lined up to abstain. Starmer reassured Johnson that in any future vote, he would have Labour's backing in allowing its renewal.

This was just days after Starmer sacked three MPs from Corbyn's Socialist Campaign Group from their frontbench roles after they voted against the Overseas Operations Bill, instead of abstaining. Neither Corbyn nor McDonnell uttered a murmur in protest.

At Labour's annual conference this week, Starmer declared that he was offering “A New Leadership”. As Labour's every move has demonstrated, this new leadership is one in which Labour operates a part of a de facto government of national unity.



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