After Johnson's resignation: Mobilize the working class against capitalism and war

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The resignation of Boris Johnson as leader of the Conservative Party is an event of global significance.

Johnson at this point remains prime minister and has not handed his resignation to the queen. A bitter row continues in the Tory Party. Johnson is insisting that he remain in office until a new party leader is elected in the face of demands that he give way immediately to a caretaker prime minister.

But whatever happens next, Johnson is the first leader of a major imperialist power to fall from power during NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. And the real reason for his downfall—concealed by endless pious references to his lies, lack of "integrity" and besmirching of the Tory Party—is that Britain's ruling elite has lost confidence in his ability to wage war on the working class at home and war against Russia that threatens to spiral into World War III.

US President Biden pointed to these fundamental concerns in his message pledging to continue "our close cooperation with the government of the United Kingdom, as well as our Allies and partners around the world." Biden pointed in particular to the necessity of "maintaining a strong and united approach to supporting the people of Ukraine as they defend themselves against Putin's brutal war on their democracy and holding Russia accountable for its actions."

In a rancorous resignation speech, Johnson cited among his supposed achievements "getting Brexit done," "the fastest exit from lockdown" and "in the last few months leading the West in standing up to Putin's aggression in Ukraine."

Before making a scathing attack on his own MPs for their "herd instinct," he continued, "And let me say now to the people of Ukraine that I know that we in the UK will continue to back your fight for freedom for as long as it takes." Johnson has repeatedly boasted of the UK's leading role in arming Ukraine and only last week pledged to increase defence spending to 2.5 percent of GDP.

His very next act was to make a personal phone call to Ukrainian President Zelensky in which he pledged that "the UK would continue to supply vital defensive aid" to Ukraine "for as long as needed." A spokesperson for Zelensky thanked Johnson "for his decisive action on Ukraine," concluding, "We have no doubt that Great Britain's support will be preserved, but your personal leadership and charisma made it special."

Johnson was forced from office by a revolt of his MPs, with an unprecedented 58 resignations, because despite his pledges to impose "Red Meat" Thatcherite economic and social policies, and his insistence that he must not be removed at a time of war, they saw him as a liability, unable to deliver either.

He came to office by exploiting the political confusion created over Brexit, cynically manipulating anti-European Union sentiment and social grievances in deprived working class areas. He sought to give a populist veneer to the Tory right's Thatcherite dreams of a UK free to conquer global markets and secure international speculative investment through a policy of wholesale deregulation and brutal exploitation of the working class.

His pursuit of that agenda has made Johnson the most despised and reviled figure in British political history. For millions of workers, he will forever be known as a political criminal whose "herd immunity" agenda of ending lockdowns led to close to 200,000 deaths and left millions to mourn or themselves suffer from long-term illness.

The man who claims a commitment to "levelling up" has presided over the biggest ever transfer of social wealth to the major corporations and the super-rich during the pandemic and deepened the misery and hardship facing millions in a cost-of-living crisis without precedent since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Aside from ad hominem criticisms of his politically inflammatory drinking parties during lockdowns, no participant in the sordid power struggle in Parliament disagrees with any crime Johnson has perpetrated since first elected three years ago. These are their policies.

The two cabinet members who precipitated Johnson's downfall, former Chancellor Rishi Sunak and former Health Secretary Sajid Javid, are both multi-millionaire investment bankers, who centred their pitch for leadership on calls for a stricter clampdown on wage rises and an end to government borrowing.

They have unleashed a leadership contest dominated by former military figures. These include the favourite to replace Johnson, former Captain of the Scots Guard, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace; Royal Navy reservist and former Defence Secretary Penny Mordaunt; Iraq and Afghan war veteran and

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chair of the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, Lieutenant Colonel Tom Tugendhat; along with various rabid warmongers such as Foreign Secretary Liz Truss.

The political fear animating a leadership challenge that almost led to the meltdown of the government is that Johnson is such a divisive and discredited figure that he could not be entrusted with the next stage of the ruling class offensive against the working class or with prosecuting NATO's war in Europe.

The British bourgeoisie is in the throes of a political crisis rooted in a global capitalist breakdown, a still raging pandemic, a worldwide inflationary spiral, trade war, the eruption of war and, above all, the resurgence of the class struggle.

The Tory leadership crisis has erupted less than a fortnight after national rail strikes, during which Johnson's ministers responded with plans for repressive legislation to mobilise scabs, ban strikes in essential services and denunciations of railworkers as "Putin's stooges." Much worse is threatened.

Strike ballots are underway involving train drivers and white collar railworkers threatening the first national rail strike since 1995. Thirty thousand BT workers have voted to strike, along with 2,400 managers across more than 1,000 postal delivery offices. A ballot is underway of 115,000 postal workers.

With hundreds of thousands of teachers demanding a pay increase and the threat of strikes across the National Health Service, this means strikes may take place involving three million workers. The British ruling class fears a "summer of discontent" can become a Hot Autumn and a Winter of Fury. Personal finance guru Martyn Lewis, who is an adviser to Sunak, noted on *Newsnight*, "we are getting close, as I've said before, to a position of civil disobedience. … We have a genuine catastrophic crisis hitting 10 million people potentially moving into severe levels of poverty. … You need to get this dealt with and get it sorted before winter comes."

Conditions exist for the emergence of a general strike to bring down the Tory government. Instead, Johnson continues to squat in Number 10 while his party discusses how best to organise a speedy transition to a new leader to continue the endless round of pay cuts and deepening social inequality.

All over the world hundreds of millions suffer under deeply unpopular governments, including those such as Macron's in France teetering on the brink of collapse and facing growing strikes and social unrest. Nevertheless, right-wing policies persist, and mass opposition does not produce the slightest change of course.

Political responsibility lies with the trade union bureaucracy, the old social democratic parties and their pseudo-left appendages.

Almost every trade union in the UK is now sitting on active strike ballots or delaying them from being held. No additional strike days have been organised by the Rail, Maritime and Transport union as it engages in fruitless talks over the plans of a collapsing government, while Unite the union announced yesterday that a planned strike at Heathrow Airport has been suspended.

In Parliament the Labour Party is indistinguishable from the Tories on all major issues, with Sir Keir Starmer threatening to discipline the handful of his MPs who visited rail workers' picket lines. Amid the present crisis, Labour has offered its services as a government in waiting to defend the "national interest," including waging war against Russia.

Starmer threatened to move a motion of no-confidence in the government that would not pass—and only if the Tories didn't themselves remove Johnson. And Starmer only heads the Labour Party because for five years Jeremy Corbyn used his own leadership to demobilise opposition to the Tories and the Blairites.

Yet once again the pseudo-left groups urge workers to place their fate in the hands of the bureaucracy. The Socialist Workers Party appeals to the "RMT rail union leadership" to "call a programme of strikes" and for "other union leaders" to "mount a massive fight over pay." The Socialist Party calls for a lobby of the Trades Union Congress in September to "bring together the growing number of disputes," and even for "the trade union leaders or potentially Jeremy Corbyn if he stands independently" to solve "the problem of working-class political representation."

Everything depends on the working class actively intervening against the government, breaking free of the stranglehold of the trade unions and the Labour Party and raising the demand for a general strike to bring down the Tories. This requires the building of an interconnected network of rank-and-file workplace and neighbourhood committees.

These committees, democratically controlled by workers, can unify the struggles of rail, health care, post, telecoms, education, civil servants and council workers in the fight for policies to address the pressing social needs of the working class.

Through the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), workers in the UK must ally themselves with their class brothers and sisters coming into struggle throughout Europe and internationally. The recent general strikes in Belgium, Greece and Italy, strikes by airline workers throughout Europe and railworkers in France, show the conditions exist now for a coordinated offensive. This would be an unstoppable force, able to defeat state attacks, depose governments, end their agenda of austerity and war, and implement socialist policies guaranteeing decent jobs, wages and essential services for all.

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