

UK: Johnson prepares to pass on his premiership as Conservative Party candidates reduced to final two

Thomas Scripps
20 July 2022

Britain's next prime minister will be either the multi-hundred millionaire former Chancellor Rishi Sunak or the leading NATO war hawk Foreign Secretary Liz Truss.

In the final ballot of Conservative Party MPs Wednesday afternoon, Sunak received 137 votes and Truss 113. Penny Mordaunt was eliminated with 105. The final two will now spend the next month and half campaigning for the votes of 160,000 of the most right-wing people in the country currently holding membership of the Tory Party. The winner will be declared on September 5, in time for parliament's return after summer recess.

A few hours before the results of the MPs' ballot was announced, Prime Minister Boris Johnson set out the warmongering, pro-austerity, pro-COVID infection agenda to be taken up by his successor in his final Prime Minister's Questions.

Johnson celebrated the "anniversary of the exit from lockdown last year," the scrapping of all public health measures on behalf of the big corporations at the loss of thousands of lives.

His government had "led the world on the international stage" in "sticking up for Ukraine," waging a proxy war against nuclear-armed Russia.

And he cheered, "we are now bringing forward measures, in the face of strikes, to outlaw wildcat strikes," referencing plans to enable mass scabbing operations and ban industrial action on essential services.

In his final words to parliament as prime minister, he gave "some words of advice to my successor." These were "Stay close to the Americans, stick up for the Ukrainians" and "cut taxes and deregulate wherever

you can."

Sunak and Truss need no encouraging.

Truss has helped to spearhead the US-led NATO war against Russia over Ukraine, demanding that Russia be driven out of Crimea and encouraging British citizens to fight as mercenaries for Ukraine.

If elected leader, she will lift defence spending to 3 percent of GDP by the end of the decade, an additional £22 billion a year, over a fifth of the entire education budget. In a comment for the *Daily Telegraph* on the day of the vote, Truss pledged to "take a tougher approach to defence and security."

The foreign secretary also pledges tax cuts to the tune of £30 billion a year, including cancelling a planned 6 percent rise in the UK's rock-bottom rate of corporation tax. She wrote in her *Telegraph* piece that she would implement the "biggest economic change we have seen in 30 years", by "ripping up red tape" and "accelerating our regulatory divergence from the European Union," with "tax cuts, deregulation and tough reform."

Sunak's record and campaign pledges are just as reactionary. As chancellor during the pandemic, he oversaw hundreds of billions of pounds of handouts to big business and the super-rich, swelling the fortunes of Britain's billionaires. He carried out the biggest overnight cut in social welfare since the Second World War by removing a vital £20-a-week uplift to Universal Credit.

In his campaign for the leadership, he has promised a "return to traditional Conservative economic values," stating, "Once we have gripped inflation, I will get the tax burden down. It is a question of 'when,' not 'if'." Within his first 100 days as prime minister he will be

“ditching the mass of unnecessary regulations and low-growth mentality we’ve inherited from the EU.”

Sunak’s pitch for yet more giveaways to the super-rich is tempered only by the insistence that the government not put the cart before the horse and instead get its massive spending and wage cuts in first.

For the next six weeks, these two will fight over who can best invoke the mantle of Margaret Thatcher before a tiny Tory audience of mainly wealthy pensioners. Sunak has touted his “common sense Thatcherism” while Truss has organised too many Thatcher-imitating photo ops and wardrobe throwbacks to count.

So filthy is the debate that each has denounced the other as a “socialist” by their own ragingly right-wing standards.

The situation is an indictment of the Labour Party and the trade unions. Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer has handed the Tories a free pass since the crisis over Johnson’s leadership began, first appealing to the “many decent, honourable members on the bench opposite” to remove him, then refusing to call a vote of no confidence in the Tory government—only a government led by Johnson—and today wishing “him, his wife and his family the best for the future.”

Prime Minister “let the bodies pile high in their thousands” Johnson was able to take his place at the head of the House of Commons for the last time Wednesday to the praise of Speaker of the House, and former Labour MP, Sir Lindsey Hoyle for the way he “conducted [his] duties” during the “dark times” of the pandemic. He left to a standing ovation of his “honourable” MPs, who then elevated the richest man in Parliament and husband of the tax-dodging daughter of a billionaire, Sunak, and the maniac darling of the Tory right Truss.

In Johnson’s words, “Mission largely accomplished—for now.”

Even with Labour’s unflagging support, this horror show could not continue a moment longer if not for the unions’ suppression of the class struggle.

The same day as the Tory leadership vote, millions of public sector workers already itching for strike action were told they would be receiving well-below-inflation pay awards this year, to be funded in large parts by spending cuts in their sectors. The unions reacted to these expected announcements with faux outrage, but not a single practical plan for any action in opposition.

They are working furiously to keep a lid on workers’ struggles and suppress any idea of a much-desired fight among millions of workers to bring down the Johnson government.

Between them, Labour and the unions are conspiring to present the working class with a new Tory prime minister, pursuing even more ferociously the same agenda as Johnson, as a fait accompli. Any real dissent from the policies of the last three years has been excluded from parliament, and any serious threat to government by the struggles of the working class shut down. With parliament in recess and the government still in the saddle, public political debate will now be restricted to the even narrower confines of a Tory leadership contest!

Enough is enough. Not one MP has the right to rule. Forced to watch the ruling class solve its crisis of leadership, the working class must intervene by forging its own. The Socialist Equality Party is calling for a general election to stop in their tracks the plans of the ruling elite for war, mass infection and savage assaults on the living standards and democratic rights of the working class.

Our statement explains, “The SEP is initiating the call for a general election as a means for the working class to break through the conspiracy of both major parties, oppose their policies, and assert its independent social interests...

“We will use the general election to make the case for strikes, mass protests and the organisation of a general strike to stop the war, force the adoption of a zero-COVID policy, and build support for a socialist alternative to capitalism. This is essential under conditions in which the trade unions are suppressing a growing strike movement and preventing any political challenge to the Tory government and to Labour’s right-wing policies.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact