

# UK Tory government meltdown as Truss faces threat of removal

Thomas Scripps  
5 October 2022

No government in British history has been in such open disarray so early in its lifetime as that of Prime Minister Liz Truss. Within a month, a politician once christened “the human hand grenade” has gained a chancellor with the scathing nickname “Kamikaze” (Kwasi) Kwarteng.

The chaos at the Conservative Party conference is fundamentally an expression of the crisis wracking British and world capitalism. Large numbers of Tory MPs decided to stay away this year, amid the fallout from Truss and Kwarteng’s disastrous mini-budget, which sent markets tumbling. Its flagship policy of scrapping the 45 percent top rate of tax for the wealthy was abandoned mid-conference.

Those who did attend engaged in ferocious briefing wars for and against Truss and her policies, with senior Tories and cabinet ministers joining the fray. Off the record, Tory MPs have described the situation as a “house on fire” and “adrift and heading towards an iceberg.”

More damaging for Truss were the open criticisms of leading Tory Party figures. Former home secretary Priti Patel told a fringe event that the government was “spending today with no thought for tomorrow.” Former transport secretary Grant Shapps told journalists Truss had 10 days to save her premiership, saying he didn’t think Tory MPs were “going to sit on their hands.”

One senior figure even suggested a new election, with former culture secretary Nadine Dorries, a close ally of deposed leader Boris Johnson, tweeting that Truss needed a “fresh mandate” to pursue her policies.

Truss’s problems go beyond jilted ex-ministers. Home Secretary Suella Braverman, a right-wing ally of Truss, announced that she was “disappointed” in the U-turn on the top rate of tax, a comment Levelling Up

Secretary Simon Clarke praised for its “good sense.” Braverman denounced colleagues who had “staged a coup, effectively, and undermined the authority of the prime minister in an unprofessional way.”

Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch was left to bemoan a conference “marred” by Tory MPs “trying to lob grenades” at Truss, while criticising Braverman for her “inflammatory” comments. Welsh Secretary Robert Buckland told critics to just “be quiet.”

In her leader’s speech, Truss tried to put a brave face on the situation, wheeling out one Thatcherite platitude after another as red meat for congress delegates. In pursuit of “growth, growth, growth,” she tried to rally the party against the real enemy—the “anti-growth coalition” of the Labour Party, “militant unions,” the Scottish National Party and all “separatists” trying to destroy the UK, the “enemies of enterprise,” the “hard left” and environmental protesters.

She leant heavily on what the party’s right-wing would view as crowd-pleasing pledges to “realise the promise of Brexit” and “stand with Ukraine,” delivering a raft of Thatcherite soundbites—an “iron grip on the nation’s finances,” a “lean state,” a readiness to “do what it takes” and “make the hard choices.”

But Truss was unable to address the causes of the crisis rocking her premiership. She made only a limited reference to signs of a global economic breakdown, explaining that these external economic factors were responsible for any difficulty in implementing her tax-cutting agenda and promising that she had “listened” to those demanding an end to additional government borrowing. But this was schizophrenic, combined with a stress that her climbdown on the top tax rate had left most of her multi-billion corporate tax cuts intact.

There was no reference to the growing wave of

strikes and protests in Britain and internationally, forcing the *Daily Mail* to reiterate her plans for “new legal curbs [minimum service laws] on strikes by teachers, doctors, nurses and firefighters,” as well as transport workers.

Truss’s Tory opponents would never be satisfied with such an evasion, in the face of global investors’ demands for immediate austerity measures worse than anything announced so far.

The fact that the focus of the Tory infighting shifted to plans for a sharp real-terms cut in benefits shows the other major concern animating sections of the party. Truss and Kwarteng are reportedly planning to stop welfare benefits rising in line with inflation, as promised by Johnson, to help pay for their massive tax giveaways to the corporations and the rich. Multiple newspapers have cited sources claiming a major rebellion is brewing among her MPs.

Leader of the House of Commons Penny Mordaunt broke cabinet discipline Tuesday to say it “makes sense” to increase benefits with inflation. David Frost, normally a fierce critic of Mordaunt, commented, “I think she’s got this right.”

What worries the Tory party is that benefit cuts at this point would fuel rising social opposition. Truss is its second popularly despised prime minister in as many months and heading rapidly for a collision with a working class coming into action as part of a global resurgence of the class struggle. Speaking Wednesday morning, former Labour prime minister Gordon Brown warned of a “national uprising” if benefits cuts went ahead.

The Tories’ panicked shambles underscores the government’s absolute reliance on the Labour and trade union bureaucracy to police opposition in the working class. At this most opportune of moments, all prior talk of a general strike by the likes of Rail, Maritime and Transport union General Secretary Mick Lynch has disappeared. Instead, the leader of the most prominent strike in the UK has taken to making friendly noises about Truss’s new Transport Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan.

In her conference speech, Trevelyan said that she wanted to help “find a landing zone which we can all work with,” adding, “I can tell you there is a deal to be done between the unions and our train operators.”

The RMT has responded warmly, telling its members,

“Your determination has brought the employers around the negotiating table. The government, who are controlling the negotiations, has also started to meet your union.”

Lynch described those meetings as a “good start.”

Meanwhile the Labour Party continues its efforts to reassure big business that it is a safe pair of hands, ready to replace the Tories if needed but only when called on to do so. Its lead in the polls is unprecedented, sitting roughly 30 points ahead of the Tories, a 20-year high. It has a 38-point lead in the “Red Wall” seats in the north, large swathes of which were won by Johnson.

Yet leader Sir Keir Starmer will not even raise the issue of a general election. His appeal is directed entirely to Tory MPs and big business to work together to help steady the ship. He wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*, “Labour will work with anyone to ensure some semblance of economic sanity is restored.”

If saving the Tory government is beyond Starmer’s power, then he offers the chance of a government of national unity or a Labour government committed to the same pro-war, pro-austerity policies. In the same *Telegraph* article, he declared that Labour had taken up the mantle of “careful stewardship of the nation’s finances” that had been “forfeited” by the Tories.

The crossover between the Tories and Labour is becoming ever more open and complete. Truss’s “Growth, growth, growth” slogan in her speech was stolen from Starmer. One Tory MP commented tellingly at the conference, “I would rather see Keir Starmer in No 10 than this Conservative Party.”

After Braverman touted her policy of banning refugees who use “illegal” routes to reach the UK from applying for asylum, Labour’s Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves delivered a blistering right-wing attack on “12 years of Tory failure.” Reeves said, “The problem is the government are not deporting people today,” telling the Tories to “get a grip” and “get people out of the country.”



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**