

TORIES IN TATTERS! CORBYN MUST SEIZE THE TIME



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- **TUC must name the day for a mass demonstration - and prepare for generalised action to bring this government down, end austerity, and elect a Corbyn-led government**
- **No to a Tory Brexit - for a socialist, internationalist alternative to the bosses' EU, which fights for the interests of workers and the environment**

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The Conservatives, once among the most successful capitalist parties on the planet, are shattering into pieces before our eyes. Under the leadership of Boris Johnson, the relatively slow inglorious decline of the Tories has become an unprecedented collapse.

In two days Johnson has become the first prime minister since 1894 to lose his first parliamentary vote, and has transformed his majority of one into minus 43 by sacking 21 rebels – including the grandson of Winston Churchill and a host of other Tory grandees. He is left suspended

in mid-air unable to govern, with a general election as his only option.

For the millions who have suffered a relentless diet of Tory austerity for over a decade the implosion of the government is a reason to cheer. At this stage this is not the reaction of many, however. No wonder. While there is a huge crisis of political representation for the capitalist elite – with no major party reliably representing their interests – there also remains a crisis of political representation for the working class.

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Many workers trying to follow the chaotic machinations at Westminster over recent days will have concluded that no one is speaking for them. Among some there is even the hope that the Tory toff Johnson – who is cynically posing as standing with people against parliament – could represent a means to hit back against the establishment. Nothing could be further from the truth, but the only way to cut across his right-wing populist rhetoric is to put a clear programme in the interests of the working class.

In the last snap election Jeremy Corbyn was able to enthuse millions of workers and young people. Labour gained 3.5m votes, including 1m who had previously voted UKIP. The potential still exists for him to win the next election, perhaps even by a landslide, provided that he stands on a socialist platform that offers the working and middle class a real alternative to austerity.

Unfortunately, however, Labour is not a workers' party, but what we have described as 'two parties in one' – a potential workers' party around Jeremy Corbyn, alongside a pro-capitalist wing which dominates the parliamentary Labour Party and local council chambers. At every stage the Corbyn wing has been prepared to make concessions to the pro-capitalists in the vain hope of pacifying them. The inevitable result is the – at best – muffling of Corbyn's anti-austerity programme and, at worst, workers seeing Labour as no different to the major parties of the capitalist establishment.

Now, as the parliamentary crisis has reached boiling point, the weaknesses of the approach taken by the Corbyn wing are being shown in high relief. The capitalist class are in panic. Johnson's preparedness to risk a chaotic Brexit, with the economic disruption it would create, horrifies most of the elite. As does his willingness to further undermine the institutions of British capitalism, leaving them with less authority to act against more serious threats to their interests – most importantly a socialist government with mass support.

Faced with this crisis, more far-sighted representatives of capitalism have made impassioned appeals to MPs to defend their system. In the course of this week MPs from every party have responded. This has been done under the banner of the 'national interest' of preventing a no-deal Brexit. Of course, many working and middle-class people will welcome attempts to avoid a no-deal Brexit, fearing the potential consequences for jobs and economic security.

Nonetheless, it is a serious mistake by the Labour leadership to foster the idea that there is a common national interest between representatives of the capitalist elite and the working class majority.

They are, of course, right to describe Johnson as a liar that can't be trusted, but it is outrageous – as numerous Labour MPs have done – to contrast him to 'trustworthy' Tories. The Liberal Democrats, now being joined by various ex-Labour and ex-Tory MPs, took part in the Con-Dem coalition government, and the most savage austerity since WW2.

The ongoing implosion of the Tory Party is not an accident. It flows from the crisis-ridden, rotten character of capitalism today, which ultimately results in the undermining of the social basis of all parties that act in its interests. With capitalism offering a diet of stagnating or worsening living standards, politicians like Johnson attempt to use right-wing populist rhetoric in order to mobilise popular support.

The only force that can effectively counter this is an independent workers' movement, armed with a socialist programme. The road to disaster is for leaders of the workers' movement, under the banner of stopping right-wing populism, to unite with representatives of the capitalist establishment.

And, of course, much of the so-called rebel alliance has two goals, not only stopping Johnson, but also stopping Corbyn. The week's parliamentary manoeuvres have centred on the relationship between stopping a no-deal Brexit and having a general election.

Terrified of giving Corbyn any authority, pro-remain pro-capitalist MPs in all parties dismissed Corbyn's proposal that would have guaranteed both – backing a vote of no-confidence and allowing him to lead a minority government that would then extend article 50 while an election took place. Instead they took the route of trying to implement legislation, not to remove Johnson but to tie his hands.

Now the pro-capitalist wing of the Labour Party is arguing that even once the legislation is passed, Labour should not support an early general election. Having spent a week enacting legislation to try and control Johnson's options on Brexit, they then want to refuse the chance to get him out of power in time for Labour to take control of Brexit negotiations. Lying behind these contortions are two factors – from some on the left a fear that they could not win an election, and from the right, continuing attempts to prevent a Jeremy Corbyn-led government coming to power.

The only way to prevent a general election in the near future would be for the formation of some kind of 'national government', probably posed as a temporary measure to 'resolve Brexit'. Such an attempt would be very dangerous for the capitalist class. The working-class vote for Brexit in 2016 represented, at base, an elemental revolt against capitalist austerity.

An unelected national government trying to reverse the 2016 result would enormously fuel that anger. Provided the Corbyn-wing of the Labour Party stood firm against such a move, it would also mean that the right of the Labour Party splitting to join such a national government would then leave Labour in the hands of the left, standing in opposition to a deeply unpopular government.

A general election is, therefore, the most likely outcome of the current situation whatever happens in the next few days of parliamentary drama. Corbyn, however, needs to urgently make sure his manoeuvres in parliament are to get a quick general election and, vitally, to start to put a clear position in the interests of the working class, attacking the policies of all the pro-capitalist politicians in Westminster, both those in the rebel alliance and in the government. On that basis he can win a general election decisively.

That includes making it clear that Labour should not be the 'remain' party, but the party of the working class – both those who voted remain and leave. Corbyn should be putting forward a confident position that he would renegotiate Brexit from an entirely different standpoint to that of the Tories. His 'red lines' would be the removal of all legislation that undermines workers' rights and blocks state aid and nationalisation. The rights of people in Britain from other EU countries would be guaranteed. On this basis Corbyn could make an appeal for solidarity, over the heads of the EU's governments, to working class people across the EU putting a Corbyn-led government in a far more powerful position to negotiate than the Tories.

Such an approach would be one aspect of a socialist programme. Other aspects would include insisting that all companies threatening redundancies or closures – whether on the grounds of Brexit or otherwise – immediately open their books to workers' inspection and, where necessary, nationalisation under democratic working-class control and management. Immediate measures like mass council house building, a £10 an hour minimum wage and free education would need to be combined with a programme for the nationalisation of the major corporations and banks to really take the levers of power out of the hands of the capitalist saboteurs that would otherwise do all in their power to prevent the implementation of pro-working class policies.

The political situation in Britain is highly unstable and unpredictable. The tasks of the workers' movement are urgent. The TUC is meeting this weekend. Left unions should demand it sets the date for a mass demonstration as the first step to getting the Tories out and the coming to power of a Corbyn-led government with a socialist programme.