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BRITAIN'S BREXIT NIGHTMARE NOT LEAVE OR REMAIN BUT CLASS STRUGGLE

The turmoil in the British legislature is a reflection of the decay of bourgeois democracy and Britain's further decline as an imperialist power. Boris Johnson has lost every vote in parliament since becoming prime minister and no longer has a majority. Top-ranking Tory dissidents, Labour and other opposition parties have collaborated in efforts to prevent Johnson forcing Brexit through without a deal establishing trade, legal and other arrangements after the country's departure from the European Union. A general election seems imminent.

Brexit is a matter of dispute within the ruling class in which working people have no stake. Johnson's move to prorogue parliament was undoubtedly anti-democratic,

intended to circumvent attempts to prevent a "no-deal" Brexit. Revolutionaries defend bourgeois democracy against undemocratic use of prorogation, and we favour a new general election and the removal of the Conservative government. But Brexit is really beside the point. A no-deal withdrawal from the EU would certainly be accompanied by economic shocks, but a negotiated departure – or, for that matter, remaining in the EU – would change nothing fundamental about the decrepit social system that has generated this fiasco in the first place. Capitalism is in a state of crisis, and the consequences of the crisis can be seen in unemployment, austerity and the continuing degradation of the natural environment.



Meanwhile, fascists and the far-right grow ever bolder, inside and outside the establishment.

We called for a spoilt ballot in the 2016 referendum, noting that “this intra-ruling class squabble over how best to align the interests of British imperialism has no relation to any serious struggle against homelessness, unemployment, poverty and growing social inequality” (see “The Devil or the Deep Blue Sea? Neither the EU nor Nationalist Poison”). Events since then have only confirmed this perspective, as xenophobic “little England” supporters compete with the liberal smugness of those with an interest in defending the status quo, from “Her Majesty’s parliament” to the imperialist EU, and ostensible socialists struggle to put a left spin on whichever side they have adopted.

The most class-conscious elements of the working class understand that unless something fundamental changes, Brexit or no Brexit, the rich will still win. These workers want to fight austerity, defend the NHS, create jobs, build houses, end privatisation of education, welcome migrants and oppose racism and fascism – and they see the Brexit debate as a massive distraction, a race in which the working class has no horse.

Many of those workers have illusions that a Labour government under Jeremy Corbyn will be able to solve these problems. Corbyn himself has attempted to steer the conversation away from Brexit towards these issues, but his entire framework is parliamentary. As Marxists, we do not share the popular illusions that his social-democratic programme can fundamentally turn the tide in favour of the working class, but as we seek to help break the masses from those illusions, neither can we ignore them. Drawing a class line is the minimal requirement for moving towards an alternative to the disaster of 21st century capitalism. We gave critical support to the Corbyn-led Labour Party in 2017 (see “Election 2017: Vote Labour! Build a Revolutionary Party”), and expect to do so again in the coming election. Of course, should Corbyn indicate willingness to form a coalition with bourgeois parties such as the Lib Dems, Greens and SNP, which he is under significant pressure to do despite personal opposition, then the class line is no longer drawn

and critical support not an option. Such a popular front government is the logic of the Remain movement in the Labour right, putting loyalty to capital before loyalty to the working class.

If Corbyn is successful in gaining power and implementing even the mild adjustments to capitalist rule that he proposes, he would face significant opposition from the forces of capitalism – in the media, in the financial markets, in the military and police. Current divisions within the Tories and the wider establishment will not prevent them joining forces to prevent reforms that make life easier for the working class. In this situation, it would be necessary for workers to defend any gains through mass protests and strikes and ultimately more – a struggle for vast increases in funding of health, welfare, education, transport and other infrastructure, taking them all into public ownership. It would be necessary to go much further than Corbyn the loyal parliamentarian could countenance, and he is likely at this point to bend to pressure to water down his programme. That is why workers need a new, revolutionary socialist party to defend their interests.

As we concluded our 2016 statement:

“Workers cannot rely on bourgeois legislation – whether national or European – to defend gains won through previous rounds of class struggle. Wages, working conditions and everything else about life under capitalism will be shaped by the ability of the working class to organise and fight. This will remain true regardless of Britain’s membership in the EU.

“Workers have no country. European trade unions must join forces across borders to defend wages and win new gains, while paying particular attention to fighting for equal rights for immigrants. Ultimately the interests of the working class and oppressed can only be advanced through the construction of revolutionary workers’ parties in Britain and beyond, rooted in the proletariat and committed to a genuinely Marxist programme. This is the only way to turn the tide on the current capitalist offensive and go forward to expropriate the expropriators and smash up their state machines, whatever the particular configuration of the mechanisms of capitalist rule.”