

# Britain: Stop Brexit and get rid of the Tories

A million on the streets of London

Tuesday 19 March 2019, by [DAVIES Alan](#), [STOWE Andy](#) (Date first published: 24 March 2019).

**The Tory Brexit is hanging onto life by a thread writes Andy Stowe. The March 23<sup>rd</sup> demonstration called by the [People's Vote](#) campaign has the potential to land the killer punch on both Brexit and the Tory government.**

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It's irrelevant that many of its main organisers are Labour and Tory sworn enemies of the Corbyn leadership. When hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets, events run beyond the control of schemers like Peter Mandelson and Alistair Campbell. As with the demonstration on [October 20<sup>th</sup> last year](#) when 700 000 people protested against what they correctly understood to be a reactionary, anti-migrant Tory project, this week's demonstration will pull together hundreds of thousands who want to stand up for the freedom of movement of half a billion people inside the European Union. They reject the chauvinist nationalism of the vast majority of Brexiteers and are willing to travel from all over the British state to make their point.

Theresa May staggers from one parliamentary humiliation to the next. Her party is an alliance of hostile factions which agree on little more than continuing her austerity programme. She's only stayed as prime minister this long because they can't work out who the least bad alternative might be. Last Wednesday her own Brexit secretary Steve Barclay voted against the government motion he proposed. Under any previous prime minister this would have been grounds for immediate sacking or resignation. No longer. May's authority as Tory leader has completely evaporated.

## High profile Labour presence

If you are planning to go on the demonstration try to make sure that your Labour Party banner is there too. Almost [three quarters of the membership](#) want a chance to vote on the deal, as do the majority of Labour voters including in constituencies which voted for Brexit. Corbyn is undoubtedly coming under real pressure from his [Lexit supporting advisors](#). He and they need to see what the real will of the membership is next Saturday and one of the ways to do that is to have the maximum possible number of Labour Party banners on the streets of London. That's the surest possible way to put the nail in the coffin of the scabs in the Independent Group of MPs and to prevent a haemorrhage of young voters and opponents of Brexit.

Socialist Resistance is encouraging its readers to join the [left bloc](#) along with Another Europe is Possible, the TSSA, Open Labour, the Green Party and others to amplify the anti-Tory, anti-Brexit voices on the demonstration.

This government of millionaires, Islamophobes and English nationalists is teetering on the edge of

collapse. We can help give it a shove on Saturday and put pressure on Labour to take the leadership of the largest mass movement in the country, the movement against Brexit.

**Andy Stowe**, 17<sup>th</sup> March 2019

- <http://socialistresistance.org/stop-brexit-and-get-rid-of-the-tories/16562>
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## **Brexit on the ropes: Labour must back a second referendum**

**If you wondered what a profound constitutional crisis looks like, look no further than this week's events in Parliament. The Tories are falling apart, the cabinet has imploded, the government has lost control of Parliament, and May staggers from defeat to defeat repeating the same mindless mantra as if nothing has happened, writes Alan Davies.**

These events are extraordinary by any standards. On Tuesday, May proposed the same deal (shamelessly presented as different) that had been defeated in the first 'meaningful vote' by a record margin of 230. It was then defeated by 149 votes in what became known as the second meaningful vote.

On Wednesday, May put forward another entirely dishonest motion that purported to rule out a no-deal exit but in fact did nothing of the sort. She initially gave Tory MPs a free vote, but this was replaced by a three-line whip against when an amendment (the so-called Spellman amendment) was carried removing the ambiguity and along with the March 29<sup>th</sup> deadline. Cabinet ministers were told, however, that if they defied the whip they would not be sacked, and five did exactly that. The amended motion was then agreed by a majority of 43.

If MPs thought that this removed no deal from the agenda, however, they were in for a shock. May got straight up after the vote and announced that her deal remained the only deal on offer and she would bring it back next week for a third 'meaningful vote'. If she needed to, she implied, she would fit a fourth such vote in before March 29<sup>th</sup>. By then, she said, Tory MPs would have to face up to the fact that it would be her deal or staying in the EU - the so-called punishment beating option.

The key debate came on Thursday in the debate on whether or not to seek an extension to Article 50 around a government motion to delay Brexit for three months, if May's deal had been adopted, in order to complete the process. If her deal was not adopted, it was implied, the delay would have to be longer.

The house narrowly defeated amendments seeking to wrest control of the Parliamentary process away from the government - on the basis that a small number of Labour MPs defied the whip to vote with the government. May's motion on Article 50 was then adopted on the basis of Labour votes!

This vote took the situation inside the Tory Party to yet a new level of chaos. Remarkably, more than half of Tory MPs voted against the motion, preferring to keep the threat of no deal in place. Eight cabinet ministers, including the Brexit secretary Steve Barclay, and leader of the house, Andrea Leadsom, voted against the government's motion. These are staggering figures.

But there's more. Barclay, having wound up the debate for the government with the words: "It is

time for this house to act in the national interest, it's time to put forward an extension that is realistic", then trooped through the no lobby to reject the Government's motion. As Kier Starmer said afterwards 'that's the equivalent of the chancellor voting against his own budget. There is no sign that Barclay intends to resign.

## **Second referendum**

Problems came for Labour over the amendment, tabled by Sarah Wollaston of the Independent Group, and signed by around 30 MPs, calling for an extension of Article 50 in order to conduct a second referendum – which was defeated by 85 votes to 334.

Labour whipped its MPs to abstain on that basis that the time was not right, since the priority then was to get an extension to Article 50 agreed and a no-deal exit off the agenda. The official People's Vote campaign had urged MPs not to support the amendment, arguing it was not yet the time to press the case. 24 Labour MPs defied the whips to vote for it and 17 to vote against, including several frontbenchers. Stoke-on-Trent North MP Ruth Smeeth resigned as the parliamentary private secretary to Tom Watson, after voting against a referendum.

Labour's position is problematic. There is no doubt that a case can be made that this was not the optimum time to put the proposition. It will stand the best chance later when stark choices are posed between no-deal or an unacceptable deal. But why would a vote now prejudice that? If May can put her deal 4 times, why can a second referendum not be put twice?

The problem is that although Labour's position has long been that a second referendum would be supported once it had failed to get its own proposals agreed, it is hard to be confident that it will make an effective case given the palpable lack of enthusiasm from the front bench. And if you want to win at the final stage, you are unlikely to do so if the ground is not prepared and the arguments made.

There is further problem. Labour has done a good job in opposing May's deal and fighting to take a no deal exit off the agenda, but it has completely failed to present a real alternative. Brexit would be a disaster full stop – soft or hard – though hard would be worse.

Brexit, of any brand, is a part of a right-wing agenda. Any Brexit, at the present time, is much inferior to staying in the EU on present terms – something that will become ever clearer if any kind of Brexit takes place. In fact, a soft Brexit is the least popular in the population as a whole. Remainers are against it because it would be far worse than our current situation and Brexiteers are against it because it retains links to the EU that they oppose.

There is a mass movement against Brexit of any kind, hard or soft, and Labour should be leading it – not making a soft Brexit, in reality, its first priority. If Labour carries on this way it could end up becoming implicated in a form of Brexit – with very serious future consequences.

Nor is it a matter of having a more competent negotiating team, though competent negotiators are always a good thing. Exit from the EU simply was not and is not possible if a condition of it was no hard border in Ireland North and South – which would become an external border of the EU. This was a circle that could never be squared, and would have to be resolved in an advance of any Brexit process – for example by a united Ireland.

In any case, Labour's current demands for a customs union of some kind plus maximum access to the internal market would be unlikely to be accepted by the EU, Labour could then start looking towards something like Norway plus – which Stephen Kinnock has long been campaigning for. But Norway is a very small and very rich country and applying its deal to a country 12 times bigger

would be very expensive even if accepted and would still be inferior (for Britain) than our exiting arrangements. It would also oblige Britain to take all of the rules and regulations while having no say in the decision-making process.

The root of the problem is the Labour leaderships refusal to fully embrace the second referendum proposal embraced by the LP conference. It is true that it called on them to seek a better deal first, but Labour's proposal has already been rejected and still their priority remains finding an alternative Brexit.

It is true that there is not currently a majority for a second vote in Parliament. But the Labour leaderships ambivalence is a contributing factor. Strong arguments from the front bench would have made a difference. It is also true that a scenario could well arise over the next two weeks that could give Labour little alternative than to support a second referendum and win this in Parliament. But the fear is that the opportunity might arise but the vote be lost – because the groundwork had not been done.

For Labour, there is now only one clear option: that is to join and lead the mass movement that has been generated around staying in the EU and ensuring that it is successful.

All this is a very good reason to build the anti-Brexit demonstration on March 23<sup>rd</sup> into the biggest demonstration ever seen in Britain. Bigger than the previous demo in October, which was itself the biggest demo since the Iraq war and to work for massive participation in the Left Bloc [1] on the march. Brexit is not yet defeated but it is staggering on ropes.

**Alan Davies**, 16<sup>th</sup> March 2019

- <http://socialistresistance.org/brexit-on-the-ropes-labour-must-back-a-second-referendum/16552>
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## **A million on the streets of London**

**There's no doubt that some of the most high-profile people involved in organising and speaking at the March 23<sup>rd</sup> People's Vote demonstration comprise a real rogues' gallery writes Andy Stowe.**

Michael Heseltine, Alastair Campbell and Anna Soubry all have a lot more in common with each other than they do with the Corbyn leadership and the overwhelming majority of Labour members. Quite how many of the million people who filled central London to reject the racist Tory /UKIP Brexit were drawn by the prospect of hearing the likes of Jess Phillips or Vince Cable is open to question. Very few is the most probable answer.

A hint that the demonstration was going to be massive had been given in the days running up to it. Millions of people had signed an online petition to parliament calling for a debate on revoking Article 50 and remaining in the European Union (EU). At the time of writing more than four and a half million have signed it.

Most of the demonstrators were there with family and groups of friends. This wasn't the typical left protest with stewards shouting out the approved slogans. As is now standard at anti-Brexit events,

EU flags vastly outnumbered Union Jacks and this can only be understood as a conscious rejection of the British nationalism which drove the Tory / Ukip Brexit. We don't share this uncritical view of what the EU actually is and have said so repeatedly over many years, but in the given circumstances the gesture is intended as a progressive one.

Hostility to Corbyn was noticeable. The people carrying the main banner at the front of the march were happy to be filmed for TV news chanting "where's Jeremy Corbyn?" Several marchers had produced homemade placards holding him and Theresa May jointly responsible for the potential hard Brexit. They are certainly right to be frustrated. He should be loudly championing the call for a second referendum and arguing with voters who voted Leave last time to support Remain.

Saturday's demonstrators were almost all potential and actual Labour voters. They were socially liberal, pro-freedom of movement and anti-racist and if Corbyn had turned up on the day and announced he was going to do it he'd have put himself at the head of both the Labour Party and a progressive mass movement. Instead he's demoralising his own supporters.

It was left to Tom Watson, Labour's deputy leader to make the case for a new referendum. Under normal circumstances a deputy would be assumed to be speaking with the authority of the leader, but everyone understood Watson was conducting a hostile factional manoeuvre and aligning himself with the Labour right.

One sign that a left group of MPs has coalesced in favour of a second referendum was the participation of Kate Osamor, Clive Lewis, Marsha de Cordova, Rachel Gaskell, Lloyd Russell-Moyle and Chi Onwurah in the left bloc co-organised by Another Europe Is Possible. They all identified themselves as Corbyn supporters who disagree with him and want him to stop equivocating. Theirs are the voices he needs to listen to if he wants to be prime minister.

In the interests of balance, it should be pointed out that there was a march in favour of Brexit happening at the same time. Nigel Farage's tragi-comic version of the Jarrow crusade was continuing its 270 mile trudge from Sunderland to London. He orated to an audience of about 200 in a pub car park and you can be damned sure no one dared mention migrants' rights or defend freedom of movement.

Under a different leadership the London demonstration could have united the struggle against the Tory government with the campaign against Brexit. But it's obvious, whatever the intentions of the organisers, that having a million people on the streets protesting against the Tories' main project weakens them. Labour needs to press home that advantage.

**Andy Stowe**

• Posted on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2019:

<http://socialistresistance.org/a-million-on-the-streets-of-london/16605>

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## Footnotes

[1] <https://www.anothereurope.org/23march/>