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By Robert Stevens
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UK Prime Minister Johnson outlines Brexit proposals and Thatcherite agenda at Tory conference

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has doubled down on his pledge that the UK would leave the European Union (EU) on October 31, “come what may.”

Announcing to the Conservative Party’s annual conference that the government was sending its proposals to Brussels outlining the terms, Johnson said, “We will allow the UK—entire and whole—to withdraw from the EU, with control of our own trade policy from the start.”

The proposals were outlined in a seven-page letter from Johnson to EU Commission head Jean-Claude Juncker. In contrast to the proposal agreed with Brussels by his predecessor Theresa May, at the insistence of his party’s majority hard-Brexit wing and the Tory’s Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) coalition partners, the Irish backstop—designed to prevent the return to a hard border in Ireland—is removed.

The plan proposes instead that Northern Ireland—which is part of the UK—remains under EU single-market regulations covering agriculture, food and manufactured goods to reduce the need for checks at the Irish border. But the plans specify that Northern Ireland leaves the customs union.

The *Financial Times* noted, “That would mean new regulatory checks on trade between Great Britain—which might diverge from EU rules—and Northern Ireland. British officials say the checks could be carried out on ferries but it means ‘two borders’ have been created. But while this concession reduces the needs for product safety and health

checks on the Irish border, it does not address the bigger question of customs controls—including tariffs and rules of origin checks—on trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.”

Given the EU’s longstanding insistence on a backstop arrangement, Juncker declared that the document had “some problematic points” and that discussions were required on the “governance of the backstop.” Republic of Ireland Premier Leo Varadkar described the proposal, which Johnson agreed with the DUP, as “not promising.” But Johnson hopes that Germany, fearing the economic impact of a no-deal Brexit on the EU, will be prepared to push for agreement, even if this involves modifications.

Just weeks after his authoritarian move to shut down parliament, a move overturned by the Supreme Court, Johnson played up to his party’s hard-Brexit ranks by denouncing a parliament that was “on the blink.” Posturing as the great democrat being frustrated by anti-Brexit opposition MPs, he said that “if parliament were a reality TV show the whole lot of us would have been voted out of the jungle by now.”

An election could not take place yet because opposition MPs were “chlorinated chickens” and he was waiting for them to “waddle from the hencoop where they are hiding” and allow the country to go to the polls. The Liberal Democrats were undemocratic and had to “respect the trades descriptions act.”

Millions of people “are beginning to suspect that there are forces in this country that simply don’t want Brexit delivered at all ... and if they turn out to be right in that suspicion then I believe there will be grave consequences for trust in democracy.”

Such language is geared towards Johnson campaigning in an upcoming general election as the representative of the “will of the people” against an undemocratic parliament and judges. Without clarifying his intended course, his insistence that the UK was leaving the EU on October 31 suggest that he will defy the Benn Act, passed into law last month, instructing him to request an extension until at least January next year if parliament reject his proposals.

Johnson’s speech, framed around his pledge to “Get Brexit Done,” was dedicated to outlining what Sky News described as his “election manifesto.”

It was a paean to Thatcherism, centred on rampant nationalism and framed as a series of deranged attacks on “socialism” and the bogeymen of “fratricidal anti-Semitic Marxists” represented by Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn.

A government led by Corbyn “would whack up your taxes, he would foul up the economy, he would rip up the alliance between Britain and the USA, and he would break up the UK.” Corbyn was a “communist cosmonaut,” who should be coaxed “into the cockpit” of new geostationary satellites being trialled in the UK and sent “into orbit where he belongs.”

He would raise the productivity of the whole of the UK, “Not with socialism, not with deranged and ruinous plans borrowed from the playbook of Bolivarian revolutionary Venezuela, but by creating the economic platform for dynamic free market capitalism ... Yes, you heard it right capitalism—and when did you last hear a Tory leader talk about capitalism?”

Speaking about Thatcher’s 1979-1991 government, he said, “when the whole world had succumbed to a different fashion, this country and this party pioneered ideas of free markets and privatisation that spread across the planet.”

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In her footsteps, “We are about to take another giant step,” he said, by which he means transforming the UK into a Singapore on Thames low-wage, low-tax haven for big business. Brexit is an “opportunity in itself,” he said, after which a “tax-cutting Tory government ... can do free ports and enterprise zones.” It would “allow UK businesses to have bigger tax breaks for investment in capital.”

He would, in addition, introduce an “Australian-style points-based system for immigration.” Declaring “we will be tough on crime” he pledged to recruit another 20,000 new police officers and to “make sure that the police have the legal powers and the political backing to use stop and search.”

The Tories are backing down on nothing, announcing that parliament will be prorogued from next Tuesday ahead of a planned Queen’s Speech, outlining Johnson’s programme for office, to be held on October 14.

Johnson’s speech closed the Tory’s conference in an upbeat mood, but any confidence they have over implementing their anti-working-class agenda rests entirely on the political impotence and cowardice of Corbyn.

Johnson was able to make hay over the fact that Corbyn was forced to pull a section of his own conference speech last week, apparently on his personal support for an immediate

general election: “the only trouble is that the paragraph was censored by [shadow chancellor] John McDonnell or possibly [Blairite Shadow Brexit Secretary] Keir Starmer.”

Corbyn has agreed to drop calls for a general election to prioritise preventing Johnson from imposing a no-deal Brexit that would damage big business.

Over the last four years, Corbyn has worked, in alliance with the trade unions, to suppress every major struggle against the Tory government. Twice elected in landslides on the back of his pledges to oppose the Labour right’s policies of austerity and militarism, he has capitulated to his Blairite wing on everything, including the UK remaining in NATO, supporting Trident nuclear weapons and giving a free vote on bombing Syria.

His lining up to head the campaign to remain in the EU ranks as one of his worst political crimes in terms of its devastatingly negative impact on the political consciousness of the working class.

For the previous 40 years, Corbyn was an opponent of the EU, not based on a socialist and internationalist struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe, but the national-reformist perspective he adopted from the Stalinist Communist Party, Labour’s Bennite left and the trade union bureaucracy.

In the 2016 referendum, he reversed himself to back the ruling elite’s Remain faction. This served to legitimise the pro-EU wing of British imperialism among one section of the working class, while leaving the field clear for the Tory right and Nigel Farage’s UK Independence Party to channel anti-EU sentiment and social and political discontent against “the establishment” in a nationalist direction.

The net result has been the continued and dangerous divisions within the working class now being exploited by a government that could never have taken power at all had Corbyn mobilised the working class to bring down either of its predecessors, David Cameron and Theresa May.

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