

UK parliament votes for snap June 8 general election

By Robert Stevens
20 April 2017

A June 8 snap general election will be held in the UK after parliament voted overwhelmingly to override the Fixed-term Parliaments Act. MPs voted following Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May's announcement Tuesday of her intention to call an election with just 50 days notice.

May's government presently has a slender 17-seat majority, under conditions where it has embarked on two years of negotiations with the European Union (EU) over the terms of the UK's exit.

Within the Tory Party, its dominant Brexit wing is demanding anti-migrant policies and measures that threaten future access to the Single European Market, while Germany, France and other EU governments are taking a hard line against the UK—creating the scenario for a so-called “hard Brexit”. In contrast, all the major opposition parties, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party (SNP), are threatening to block any deal that doesn't guarantee continued access to the Single Market—a position supported by a minority within the Tory party.

May took the decision to go for a snap election with the aim of strengthening the government's majority, largely by exploiting the crisis facing Labour, which is bitterly divided due to the opposition of a majority of its right-wing MPs to Jeremy Corbyn's nominally left leadership. She hopes that this will strengthen her position in Europe, within her own fractious party and in Britain, enabling her to push through the savage cuts in wages and essential services that are bound up with the drive to secure Britain's global trading position post-Brexit.

Given the extensive discussions that will have taken place with Washington, the need for a stable allied government in the UK at a time of mounting military tensions against Russia, China and North Korea will also have played a significant part in May's calculations.

Under the provision for fixed five-year governments, the next scheduled election was set for 2020. This coincided with the end of the Brexit process in a way that could have been highly damaging should a deal be rejected.

In the vote that required the support of two-thirds of the 650 MPs, May's decision was backed by 522 to just 13. Almost every Tory MP voted for the June 8 poll, as did 174 of 229 Labour MPs. The SNP's 54 MPs abstained, along with a few dozen Labourites.

Beginning a debate that lasted all of 90 minutes, May declared, “Waiting to hold the next election in 2020, as scheduled, would mean that the negotiations would reach their most difficult and sensitive stage just as an election was looming on the horizon.”

Later, during a speech in Bolton, May said the only alternative to a Tory government was a “coalition of chaos led by Jeremy Corbyn.”

The media was nearly unanimous in its response to the vote, crowing about May's supposedly unassailable position and pointing to polls showing an 18 to 21 percent lead for the Tories.

The *Daily Mail* led its front page with the headline that May would “Crush the Saboteurs”, while the *Sun* said the election would “kill off Labour” and “smash rebel Tories.”

The *Financial Times*, which supported Remain and is campaigning for the City of London to retain access to the Single Market, also endorsed May's move. It would secure a “strong mandate” for May's “pragmatic course” of seeking a “soft Brexit” from a position of strength, it wrote, and not being “held hostage at every stage of the negotiations by minority pressure groups.”

Behind all the talk of May's omnipotence, the election can only worsen an already profound crisis and intensify political instability.

May's “master-stroke” was forced upon her because

she leads a crisis government, within which divisions over strategic orientation run so deep they have paralysed the operations of British imperialism. More important still, such is the worsening international geo-political crisis that nothing can be predicted with any certainty, including a British election result.

Already the election call has spurred on an initial political realignment that cuts across existing party divisions.

Calls have escalated among the representatives of the Remain faction of the bourgeoisie for a “Progressive Alliance” against the Tories. Leading these demands are former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair and the leaders of the Liberal Democrats and Green Party, Tim Farron and Caroline Lucas.

On Tuesday, Blair wrote a statement on his newly formed Institute for Global Change web site, calling for voters to support any anti-Brexit party in the election, insisting that the task of “holding the Government properly to account in the interests of the country... should cross party lines.”

Blair is clearly identifying himself with the Liberal Democrats, the only party formally committed to reversing last year’s vote for Brexit.

A Liberal Democrats source told the *Telegraph*, “If any politicians from Tony Blair to [Labour MP] Chuka Umunna agree with us then we will welcome their support.”

Such realignment lays the basis for the emergence of a new right-wing, pro-EU formation based around the Blairites and Lib Dems and possibly some MPs from the Tory party.

Paralleling this is an intensification of the campaign by Blairite MPs to remove Corbyn, if not before the election then after, based on an anticipated electoral disaster for the party that will leave his position untenable. John Woodcock MP said he would stand for re-election, before warning, “But I will not countenance ever voting to make Jeremy Corbyn Britain’s prime minister. ... There is still of course time for Jeremy to stand down rather than lead Labour to defeat.”

The pro-Labour *New Statesmen* ratcheted up the pressure on Corbyn Tuesday, with columnist Sarah Ditum, a *Guardian* journalist, urging party members to only campaign for anti-leadership MPs, and declaring, “In the most serious possible way, it is morally intolerable to imagine Corbyn as Prime Minister.”

It should be recalled that in the purge of Corbyn-supporting party members during last year’s

leadership contest—provoked by the attempted coup against him—many were expelled for having supported other parties in previous elections. But no moves have been taken against Blair.

By Wednesday evening, at least six anti-Corbyn Labour MPs had resigned their seats. Divisions in the Tory Party are just as deep, if not as open. Stephen Dorrell, the former Conservative health secretary who chairs the pro-Remain European Movement, called on voters to elect only pro-EU candidates.

On Wednesday, the Tory leader in Scotland, Ruth Davidson, when asked if a large parliamentary majority in the June 8 election would prevent “Brexiters bastards” holding May to ransom, replied, “I’m not disagreeing with you.”

Nothing will be resolved by the June 8 poll, which will be played out during the build-up to a possible US war against North Korea and the continuing NATO encirclement of Russia in which the UK is playing a major role. Last week, six US-made F-35A stealth fighter jets arrived at RAF Lakenheath, England in preparation for “NATO training drills” across Europe.

Yet not a word was said about the imminent danger of war by Corbyn or any opposition MP either before or during the parliamentary debate Wednesday. This is after the US has bombed both Syria and Afghanistan in recent days, using the most destructive bomb ever used by the US since it obliterated the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

In similar fashion, no one has seriously addressed the devastating social crisis afflicting millions in the UK that feeds the growing alienation from the political establishment—that was the central factor in last year’s unexpected Brexit referendum vote. Instead, Corbyn offers only the most pathetic of palliatives, such as a £10 increase in the £60 carer’s allowance for those who look after vulnerable relatives.

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>